

**THE ROLE OF DOCUMENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY ART:
ISSUES OF INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE**

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF DOCUMENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY ART: ISSUES OF INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE

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In this research study, documentation's role in contemporary art described and exemplified according to its relation to the institutional practices of classifying, defining and displaying artworks. Issues and problems, which appear at the artworks relationship with the art institutions have been questioned and interpreted by the guidance of art critics like Walter Benjamin, Boris Groys, Douglas Crimp, Michael Fried and Jean-François Lyotard. Differences between attitudes of artists that have been using institutional representation techniques at their artworks studied and exemplified. As the thesis exhibition of this study an installation work has been proposed to the Fine Arts Institute.

Keywords: Documentation, aura, institutional display.

ÖZET

ÇAĞDAŞ SANATTA DÖKÜMANTASYONUN ROLÜ: UYGULAMADA KURUMSAL SORUNLAR

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Bu tez çalışmasında, dökümantasyonun çağdaş sanat ile ilişkisi kurumsal pratiğin sınıflandırıcı, belirleyici ve sergileyici pratikleri ile olan ilişkisine göre tanımlanıp örneklenmiştir. Sanat eserlerinin sanat kurumları ile olan ilişkisinde ortaya çıkan konular ve problemler, Walter Benjamin, Boris Groys, Douglas Crimp, Michael Fried ve Jean-François Lyotard gibi sanat eleştirmenlerinin ışığında sorgulanmış ve yorumlanmıştır. Sanat eserlerinde kurumsal temsil tekniklerini kullanan sanatçılar arasındaki tutum farklılıkları çalışılmış ve örneklenmiştir. Tez sergisi olarak bir yerleştirme işi, Güzel Sanatlar Enstitüsüne sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dökümantasyon, aura, kurumsal sergileme.

for Damla Erlevent,
because of her patience,
support and unconditional dedication.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this study, the relationship between artworks and art institutions has been studied. Institutional descriptions' and display techniques' definitive role on artworks' content and context have been investigated throughout examples. Contemporary artworks and artists that have strategically adopted institutional display techniques have been criticized and exemplified in their relation to art institutions. These display techniques -including vitrines, dioramas, models, mannequins and similar bureaucratic¹ representations and narrations used in order to document or reenact a subject that have been used by various institutions as tools for creating the tradition of institutions. This can be seen as the visualized form of institutions' authoritative body and as a tool that visually supports its bureaucratic and formal manner. In this respect, it has to be added that some contemporary artworks that have been designed as documentations² and installations³ use the same representational tools with the institutions via mimicry of the tools mentioned above. This mimicry, as evident, would function in two

¹ Used in the definition given as, 'relating to the way administrative systems are organized' by Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999

² The term 'documentation' and its description related to this study is given in the chapter 'Document and Documentation'.

³ Installation will be explained and discussed in chapter 'Restoring Aura'

distinct ways. The outcome would be either establishes a criticism of the institutional practice or an institutional authority of the artist. In both, there appears to be a surface constituted by these representations for artists and artworks to operate in a manner where the subjectivity of the artist transforms and embeds itself into the objectivity of the institution.

The aim of this study is to discuss and understand the use of institutional display techniques of institutions in artworks, which intend to constitute a criticism of the 'institutional'. A research study on this topic becomes important in means of its illustrative power and guidance on understanding and explaining either an issue that appears to be more frequently evident in contemporary art and also establishes a conceptual frame in which my past artworks would be discussed and interpreted.

The issue of institutional practice and artists' mimicry of these practices in establishing narrations (representations) raises the question of 'what document and documentation techniques, as well as display and representation techniques of artists (and institutions) are'. For this reason, their possible relations with the process of reproduction and with the 'reproduced object' have been discussed in comparison with notions of document and documentation. Dada movement's influences and artworks and Dada artist Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades have been exemplified and discussed as early criticisms of institutional displays and the art institution. Walter Benjamin's notions of "original",

“authenticity” and “aura” have been discussed in relation to the raised questions about documentation throughout interpretations and different readings of his essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936). Boris Groys and Samuel Weber’s explanations on these notions compared and added to the discussion.

Defining and explaining the possibilities and the nature of the documentation (with its similarities to the techniques of Installation Art) simultaneously has raised questions of authority and artistic production. Artist’s and curator’s authoritative role have been discussed and difference between positions of artists and artworks that use the ‘institutional’ as their ‘subjects’ explained. The differences between the two has been described as the difference between the artist who have been establishes his/her criticism of the institutional by the imitation of the institutional practices and the artists who imitates institutions in order to become institutional.

Lastly, in relation to such practice of establishing a criticism of the institutions, the artistic values and strategies have been discussed by comparing the definitions of the modernist tradition and postmodernism’s critics. Notions of “value” and “medium-specificity” are discussed in accordance with Michael Fried and Douglas Crimp’s texts. Jean-François Lyotard’s definition of postmodernism has been compared in relation to the previously given definitions and new questions raised according to the discussion. In relation with these

debates and between these bipolarizations, artists with such an intention of negotiating these discourses and practices at their artworks has been taken as examples.

Under the guidance of these artists/artworks, critics and theories, art's position and condition inside (and outside) different contexts has been discussed. Documentation has been defined as a process that is essentially an institutional practice. The role of the artist and the meaning of the documentation, when done by the artist, has been studied and explained. This artistic production's possibilities and handicaps have been discussed in relation to previous debates and issues about art, which has been established by critics of modernist tradition and postmodernism.

In this respect, my previous artworks are given as examples and their relation to issues discussed in this study has been defined. Under the guidance of this study, an exhibition has been designed and proposed as the 'thesis exhibition'. The thesis exhibition titled C111, has been installed in a studio, which had been previously numbered as C111 by the Bilkent University, Fine Arts Institute. The Exhibition can be described as; an experiment on the potentials of the institutional practice of representation, established by its processes of creating meanings, contexts and references of objects (and subjects). These relations and the institutional rhetoric has been exemplified (and imitated) by using vitrines and desks with drawers as metaphors of the institutions' practices of classifying, studying and displaying

its objects. At this point, it has been observed that it is possible to justify meanings and values of objects by inserting them into this institutional context (the tradition of institution) that has been created by the mimicry of the institutional practice. In other words, an ordinary object can be transformed into a precious artwork, facts into fiction, living into artificial, copy into original and vice versa.

2. INSTITUTIONAL DISPLAYS OF ART

In her book Believing is Seeing (1995), Mary Anne Staniszewski, describes art and its relation to institutions:

“Art” is an invention of the modern era—that is, the past two hundred years. The magnificent objects and fragments and buildings created by pre-modern peoples were appropriated by our culture and transformed into Art.

Art as we know it, is a relatively recent phenomenon and is something made to be seen in galleries, preserved in museums, purchased by collectors, and reproduced within the mass media. When an artist creates a work of Art it has no intrinsic use or value; but when this artwork circulates within the system of Art (galleries, art histories, art publications, museums and so on) it acquires a depth of meaning, a breadth of importance, and an increase value that is greater proportionately than perhaps anything else in the modern world (Staniszewski: 28).

Art is an industry; it has a system of circulation, within its own bureaucratic layers between its producers, dealers, consumers and re-producers, re-dealers and re-consumers. “Everything in life is shaped and defined by its various institutions. Institutions set up the boundaries and conventions for things—the way a painting’s frame shapes its picture and the way a pedestal demarks a particular object as sculpture” (Staniszewski: 28). As clearly stated by Emma Barker in the introduction of the book, Contemporary Cultures of Display (1999), which is the last book of a series of six, titled, Art and its Histories;

[M]useums and galleries⁴ are not neutral containers offering a transparent, unmediated experience of art. Rather, we need to consider them in terms of ‘cultures of display’, that is, with reference to the different ideas and values that can shape their formation and functioning (Barker: 8).

There seems to be a twofold situation that occurs in relation to these two descriptions. The ‘first fold’ is the objects of art, which actually become ‘objects of art’ when they are placed in the context of institutions. The ‘second fold’ is the fact that institutions define, describe and display art in a way, which depends on the dynamics of culture. Institutional displays of art in this sense cannot be understood without these parameters.

The problematic of an artwork’s origin and its representation in institutional context is a long debated issue. In the process of the transformation of an object into an object of art, the actual use or value (and context) diminishes. This is a fetishistic⁵ process. Walter Benjamin, in his article “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936) emphasizes the conditions of artworks’ contexts as follows:

The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. An ancient statue of Venus, for example, stood in a different traditional context with the Greeks, who made it an object of veneration, than with the clerics of the Middle Ages, who viewed it as an ominous idol (Benjamin: 223).

⁴ Barker uses both the American term ‘art museum’ and the British usage of describing a public collection of fine arts as ‘gallery’.

⁵ The term ‘fetish’ is used as; something that is detached from its original context and that has gained different meanings.

It can be said that, institutions have the power upon the context of their subjects. Institutions, in several ways, make this contextual manipulations and reformations. “Museums first and foremost impose meaning on objects by classifying them [...] Within an art museum, the classifications employed are derived from the discipline of art history; the works of art will therefore typically be arranged by period, school, style, movement or artist” (Barker: 13). In fact, this classification by its nature cannot be loyal to the original use or value of the object as stated by both Staniszewski and Benjamin.

With this problem in mind, it becomes reasonable and functional that institutions choose to be more descriptive and informative in the displays of these objects of art. It can be understood as institutions’ intention to be more precisely referring to the ‘original’ contexts of the objects. This is the documentary manner of the institution. Since artworks are displayed as evidences of certain eras, schools or artists that have been classified under the guidance of art history, they act as documents of these references. Furthermore, these documentations (artworks) are also represented with the support of documents. “Supportive information”, functions as a tool for recontextualizing. Barker exemplifies this as, “In the case of exhibitions, it typically involves attempting to evoke their historical context with the help of information panels, documents, photographs” (Barker: 14). To what extend does this descriptive manner truly function as intended? While

explaining the development of photography, Benjamin gives the example of works by Eugene Atget⁶,

Atget, who, around 1900, took photographs of deserted Paris streets. It has quite justly been said of him that he photographed them like scenes of crime. The scene of a crime, too, is deserted; it is photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence. With Atget, photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences (Benjamin: 226).

Instead of going further on photography's role as a historical evidence, Benjamin's description of the development of this descriptive manner is important, he continues by giving other similar examples: "At the same time picture magazines begin to put up signposts⁷ for him, right ones or wrong ones, no matter. For the first time, captions have become obligatory" (Benjamin: 226). As in the case of institution's classifying and documenting processes, or as the reinforcement of the context of the exhibited by further descriptions and information, the gap between the original⁸ and the represented is still inescapably evident. Benjamin clearly states that these attempts, all of which, aim to describe its subject better, to put it in its original context, in fact, creates something new, by saying, "it is clear that they have an altogether different character than the title of a painting" (Benjamin: 226). In other words,

⁶ Jean Eugene Auguste Atget (1857-1927), French photographer. Known for his photographs of Paris as social documentations.

⁷ Something that gives a clue, indication, hint, or guide. Encarta® World English Dictionary ©

⁸ Notions of "original" and "copy" according to Benjamin will be further discussed in the chapter 'Document and Documentation'.

no matter what the artwork's subject matter is, by its placement in the institution, it gains a whole different meaning.

Among many similar attitudes and critics of art institutions evident by artworks, Marcel Broodthaers's installation, Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles (Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles), (1972), can be understood as one of the most descriptive ones. In 1972, Marcel Broodthaers presented the Department of Eagles of his Museum of Modern Art at the Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf. The exhibition puts together a vast array of items from various cultures and periods with an eagle symbol on them. They were classified in the corresponding catalogue in alphabetical order according to the places of origin. Each item displayed by a number and label informing the viewer that "this is not a work of art" in French, German and English.



Fig. 1. Marcel Broodthaers, detail from *Musée D'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures*, 1972.

Jean-Hubert Martin, in his essay published in Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearance, (1998), interprets this work as follows:

“Broodthaers insisted on the blindness of the public, on the importance of the symbol of authority exemplified by the symbolic power of the eagle, and on the artist as the author of a definition who takes any object for his own purpose” (Martin: 55). It is not by any coincidence that Broodthaers has used the eagle symbol to refer the authority in an installation that resembles the museum and establishes the similar institutional context. If the eagle symbol represents the authority in culture, the museum symbolizes another authority, which defines the culture. The intention of this overlapping has to be taken in account.

These problems and definitions about institutions and art’s relation to institutions can be summarized as; art is something that is defined by institutions, museums and galleries. They define objects as art, by classifying, describing and displaying them. When institutionally displayed, these artworks function as documents of art historical references. By the time an object is transformed into an object of art, it is not possible to engulf its original use, value and its original context. In order to recreate the artwork’s original context, institutional displays are reinforced with more descriptions and information. Captions, information plates, descriptions and all types of ‘supportive’ elements have been holding a central role in the display of art. In fact they are not recreating any (original) historical context but forming new ones.

These problems and issues that have been associated with art institutions influenced several artists and movements. One of them is Marcel Duchamp and the Dada movement that introduced the notion of ready-made to the art world. After the World War I, in 1915, art scene –firstly in New York and Western Europe, witnessed an impact of a new attitude towards the old, conventional art forms both in the level of artists and society. It was the Dada movement, which took its name after the artist Tristan Tzara, but well known mainly by Marcel Duchamp and his notion of ready-made. Robert Atkins, in his book, Art Speak (1990), summarizes Dadaism and the Dada attitude as follows:

Dada artists blamed society's supposedly rational forces of scientific and technological development for bringing European civilization to the brink of self-destruction. They responded with art that was the opposite of rational: simultaneously absurd and playful, confrontational and nihilistic, intuitive and emotive.

Dada, then, is not a style, or even a number of styles, but a worldview. Nor were its attitudes embodied only in artworks. Active as citizen-provocateurs rather than studio-bound producers of objects, Dada artists organized incendiary public events. The result varied from the rabble-rousing mixed-media programs at Zürich's Cabaret Voltaire, which anticipated Performance Art...(Atkins: 70).

Dada, and its paramount figure Marcel Duchamp, attacks the artists' creator-like authority and artworks' uniqueness and conventional aesthetics with ready-mades. By his famous artwork Fountain --a urinal signed as 'R.Mutt 1917', which is a landmark in art history, Duchamp was calling the value of uniqueness of the artwork and authority of the artist in question. At the same time, it is an example of the object's (that

is ordinary, mechanically produced, not crafted by artist, not a production/outcome of a creative process...etc) transformation into an art object by the re-contextualizing of the institutional practice. Ready-mades in this sense illustrate the reaction against the institutional context by changing the value of the object it transforms in one way or the other. In other words, by placing a urinal into display in institutional context, the indifference (or the inability) of the institution's approach to its subject has been made visible. By its filtration, there is a certain homogenization that appears in means of re-contextualization, in which an African idol and a urinal is displayed side by side as art.



Fig. 2. Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917.

Another artwork by Duchamp, titled Boite-en-Valise (Box in a Valise), (1941), consists of a series of boxes containing miniature models of Duchamp's previous artworks. This can be understood as Duchamp's interest and emphasis on institutional display more obviously. By these modeled, miniature artworks placed in a box, he creates a portable museum, a context, which the copies of his works become originals. It can be said that, Boite-en-Valise illustrates museum's notion in an emblematic way and opens new platforms for discussion in means of Benjamin's concept of "aura" and its topologically defined explanations⁹.



Fig. 3. Marcel Duchamp, *Boite-en-Valise* (Box in a Valise), 1941.

In strong relation with these problems outlined in this chapter, an object or artwork's meaning and representative qualities as a document has to be addressed. If institutions' practice of making (or defining, naming)

⁹ These concepts will be further discussed in section, 'Restoring Aura'

the history based through a process of classification, description and display of the evidences (documents), then, what is a document at the first place?

2.1. Document and Documentation

Documentation is the process of providing information about something. Document is the formal outcome of that process that takes shape in various forms (i.e. audio/video recordings, photographs, maps, charts or official papers approved or edited by authorities¹⁰), which acts as a record that contains information about its subject. In this sense, it is a bureaucratic process. Institutional displays are transforming what they are containing into documents and in this sense; they are visually providing supportive information about their subjects. Subjects and objects of the institutional displays become descriptions created and supported by descriptions. According to artist, Phoebe Gloeckner, in a personal interview:

The artist (and the originator of the data, the supplier of "facts") does have a role in reducing a series of facts to a graphic concept that explains a process. The display typically presents a "story" in which the "data" are manipulated to illustrate a concept or theory, most commonly expressed in a narrative form, which involves visual and verbal elements. By imposing narrative structure on an "event," we are, inevitably, creating a false

¹⁰ 'Authority' is used in terms of the definition given as "An official body that is set up by a government to administer an area of activity." by Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999

impression of reality. We cannot be other than subjective when choosing which elements of an event are key to a process when explaining it-- in the world divorced from our observations, there are no "events," no hierarchy of occurrence—all is continuous and of equal value [...] yet it is impossible for us to reproduce this sense of infinite continuity in our communications [...] without the kind of subjective shorthand and prejudice that we employ in all our communications, there would be no exchange of ideas (Gloeckner).

In documentation's relation to art, there has been previously given explanations and definitions. According to Atkins in Art Speak, its everyday meaning refers to photographs, videotapes, or written materials related to an artwork's creation, exhibition, or history:

A more complex notion of documentation applies to Conceptual Art, especially works of Earth Art and Performance Art. Some ephemeral performances or out-of-the-way earthworks are known mainly through documentation. When made by the artist himself, this sort of documentation can be art as well as historical record. As such, it is exhibited and sold as art, unlike the work it documents (Atkins: 71).

While these explanations would help understanding the documentation's relation with art, they are excluding some important aspects of the subject. In the process of documentation, there is more power and function of the practice than its use for representing its subject. In Atkins's explanation, and in the previous chapter, documentation has been defined as a supportive element of an already completed or finalized artwork (or (art) historical period). In fact, these definitions can only be applicable to conventionally defined artworks (which have been regarded as final products of a creative process in

forms of objects of art) that have been documented by supportive information about their creation, exhibition or history.

Atkins's interpretation, in fact, fails to cover some important aspects of documentation. By documentation, the representation or narration that have been created by the artists gains a critical distance. This distance possesses a neutral, objective point of view –or the illusion of such a view, and has the power of reflecting the history of what it documents. In other words, when an artwork adopts certain narrative qualities of documentation –and by so institutional displays, it constitutes a narration, which is an illusion of a neutral, objective point of view of its subject's use and history.

With the Fluxus¹¹ movement, which started in the early 60's that can be described as one of the precursors of Conceptual Art, artists' motivations had been drawn closer to form an art practice that better resembles life. For this intention artists have started to create open-ended situations (for Atkins, these are precursors of Performance Art), projects and artworks that are in a continuous development and process, which does not end in means of a final product (Atkins).

Unlike Atkins, art critic Prof. Dr. Boris Groys¹² addresses the use of documentation in art by also keeping these kinds of art practices in

¹¹ Derived from the word; Flux, which stands for “constant change and instability”

¹² Boris Groys is the Professor for Philosophy and Media Theory at the Academy for Design in Karlsruhe, Germany.

mind. In his article, "Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Artwork to Art Documentation", which has been published in the Documenta 11¹³ exhibition catalogue, he interprets Benjamin's article through its possible relations to the issue of documentation. Groys starts to establish his critique by showing the relations and consequences evident in art's intention of resembling life and life's nature as an unrepresentable but only documentable process:

Meanwhile, however, more and more art documentation is produced and exhibited that does not claim to make a past art event present. Examples include complex and varied artistic interventions in daily life, lengthy and complicated processes of discussion and analysis, the creation of unusual living circumstances, artistic exploration into the reception of art in various cultures and milieus, politically motivated artistic actions, and so on.

None of these artistic activities can be presented except by means of art documentation, since from the very beginning these activities do not serve to produce an artwork in which art as such could manifest itself. Consequently, such art does not appear in object form-is not a product or result of a "creative" activity. Rather, art is itself this activity, is the practice of art as such.

Correspondingly, art documentation is neither the making present of a past art event nor the promise of a coming artwork but the only possible form of reference to an artistic activity that cannot be represented in other way (Groys: 108).

This situation has become an issue mainly with the birth of Conceptual art in the 60's. In Conceptual art the idea, rather than the object, is paramount. What the viewer of Conceptual art saw in the gallery was simply a document of the artist's thinking (Atkins). Under the guidance

¹³ Documenta is one of the most famous and prestigious contemporary art shows, organized in Kassel, Germany since 1955.

of previously given examples of problems related to art's position in institutions, it can be said that Conceptual art, postpones the object and concentrates on the conceptual description of its subject.

There are certain situations where Groys's definition appears to be crucial. A conceptual artist Sophie Calle's projects¹⁴ are one of them. Sophie Calle, in her projects, like, Suite Venitienne (1983), Address Book (1983), and The Hotel (1981), puts herself (or the persona she has created) into situations in public space and she experiences these situations. Meanwhile, she documents her observations, feelings and findings (most of which belongs to others' private lives) in the form of photographs and notes. Afterwards, she exhibits these documents in a gallery or a museum by simply hanging photographic and textual evidences (documents) side by side. Calle's works are informing the viewer about a past experience, reenacting it by means of documentation. Since these are documents, in which definite knowledge is acquired or supplied about something¹⁵, they are also transferable to related forms such as books or newspaper articles.

In her project, Address Book (1983), Calle finds an address book on the street, which she 'photocopies' and 'returns' anonymously. Then she starts to call each person in the book and asks questions about the

¹⁴ The term 'project' used, rather than artwork. This is because, as Robert Atkins explains, "Conceptual Art's emphasis on the artist's thinking made any activity or thought a potential work of art..." (Atkins 65)

¹⁵ Which is one of the descriptions of 'information' derived from, Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999

owner of the address book. She publishes her findings and interviews in the French newspaper Liberation along with relevant photographs of ‘objects’ or ‘subjects’ that Pierre D -as she calls the owner of the book, likes or dislikes (like a sculpture, or a specific brand of cigars...etc).



Fig. 4. Sophie Calle, *Hotel*, 1981.

In what extend does these documents form an artistic expression? And since they are only referrals of a past event or situation, which are not necessarily based on facts, what do they represent? How do they represent?

At this point, it is important to remember Staniszewski’s analogy of institution as frame and pedestal: “Institutions set up the boundaries and conventions for things—the way a painting’s frame shapes its picture and the way a pedestal demarks a particular object as sculpture”. In contemporary art, along with our knowledge and the

influences of many movements and attitudes, there has to be a contemporary interpretation of what Staniszewski assumes.

One would fail to describe institution's definitive role on art today by simply using its tools of representation such like the frame and the pedestal as references. This is because; art practice today does not unconsciously leave space for such a priori description to be superimposed on itself. Picture has been freed from its frame and sculpture from its pedestal¹⁶. The viewer of contemporary art does not encounter such frames in galleries and as a result; it is not applicable for understanding Staniszewski's interpretation today.

In a practice, which intends to resemble life and for this reason that can only be documented (Groys), it can be said that, artists need a conceptual element that imitates the function of the frame (or pedestal...etc) as institution. One can assume that this has been established by the mimicry of the institutional practice itself, which occurs in two distinct ways. One of them is by the mimicry of the institutional practice for the sake of becoming an institution (which will be discussed further in chapter "Modernist Tradition vs. Postmodernism") and the other is to address the institutional practice itself, while leaving a critical distance from it by documentation. At the latter, no matter what the subject is, (either factual or fictional, based on

¹⁶ Frame, pedestal, vitrine, caption, information plate...etc, are all tools of institutional display that function as defining, describing and displaying its subject in the institutional context.

social historical references or individual's memories) when represented in means of documents by documentation they gain a conceptual frame (or pedestal) that establishes and reinforces the element of accuracy. To support this assumption, Groys's understanding of the relationship between science and art becomes illustrative. In describing this relationship, Groys says:

Now, however, time, duration, and thus life too cannot be shown directly but only documented. The dominant medium of modern Biopolitics¹⁷ is thus bureaucratic and technological documentation, which includes planning, decrees, fact-finding reports, statistical inquiries, and project plans. It is no coincidence that art also uses the same medium of documentation when it wants to refer to itself as life (Groys: 109).

There are certain aspects in such a practice of criticizing the 'institutional' from a critical distance. First, the mimicry of the institutional authority has to be established both in visual and logical aspects. In other words, to imitate it successfully, the content (subject) and the representation (object) have to address the 'institution' in a visually and theoretically conscious, 'designed' way. Such an attempt has to take place as a both visually and conceptually designed project that is not alienating itself from the institution, on the contrary, inserting, and embedding itself in it. These institutional references can be either historical references that the institution creates/represents or material aspects of an institution such as its archive or collection. Works of The

¹⁷ Sub-field of political science, a field of research of employing biological concepts, data, and methods in political science, took shape in the West in the 60s and 70s.

Atlas Group, in this sense, becomes useful to explain this kind of institutional criticism attempt.

2.1.1. The Atlas Group: An Alternative Archive

An archival collective, The Atlas Group attracts attention mainly through their participation in the Documenta 11 exhibition. As an imaginary foundation, The Atlas Group, and its Lebanese founder Walid Raad, concentrates on social history of Lebanon and manipulates the various factual information (history) by embedding them into their fictional stories. As in one of the projects in which The Atlas Group chose the Lebanese civil war (1975-1991) as their subject, Walid Raad mingles attacks that have actually happened and car bombings with his fictional characters (such as the alter ego of Raad as historian Dr. Fadl Fakhouri) and reaches a point where the whole history about the civil war becomes a big parody. For Gloria Zein, in her article “Letter from Germany: Gloria Zein, Documentation as Artistic Practice, Part No.2” in *art-themagazine* web page:

“Walid Raad plays with the ongoing obsession of archiving and indexing through an impersonal and informative documentation [...]

As The Atlas Group leaves us uncertain about each piece's balance of fiction and reality, Raad both criticizes the feigned objectivity of historical discourse and dismantles the supposed autonomy of artistic work” (Zein).

As described previously, as an alternative institutional practice, that addresses the institutional practice, Atlas Group establishes an inner-structure of its own; a hierarchy of documents and subjects. The Atlas Group classifies documents under three titles; “Type A” files that are authored documents, “Type FD” files, consist of found files and “Type AGP” files that Atlas Group have been produced. Below are the information and the images of The Atlas Group’s projects gathered from their web site (www.theatlasgroup.com) and e-mail conversations with Walid Raad.

Files TYPE A

The Fadl Fakhouri File, Notebook Volume 38, consists of documentation of cars used in bombings in Lebanese civil war. The models, colors, amount of explosives and injuries are written on to the papers with photographs of cars that are similar to those which are used in attacks.

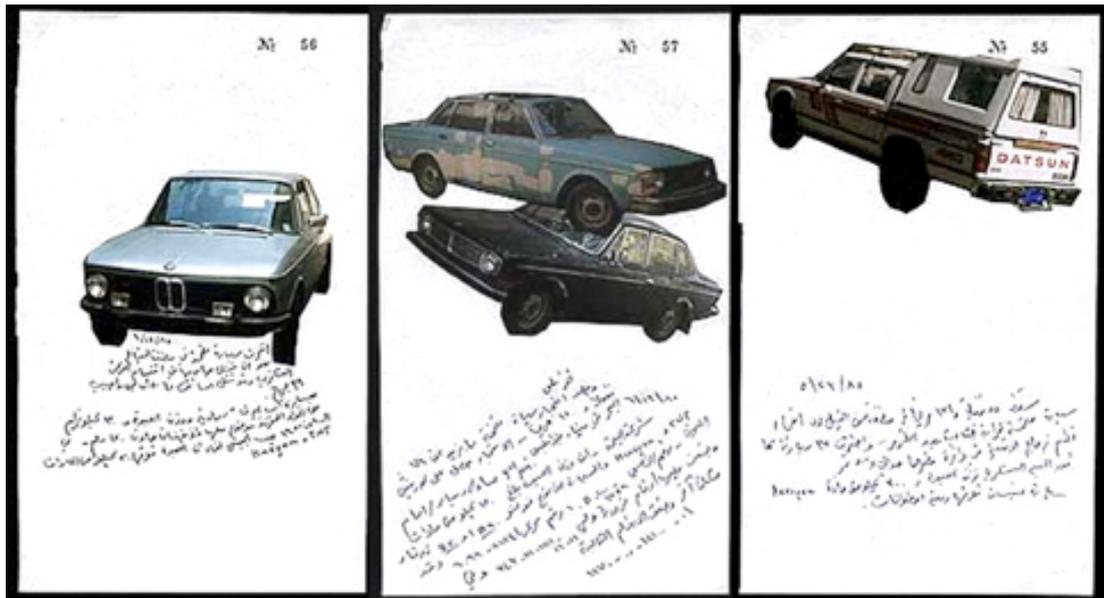


Fig. 5. The Atlas Group, images of *Files TYPE A* from the *Notebook Volume 38*, 1996.

In Notebook Volume 72, Walid Raad situates the following information and images:

It is a little known fact that the major historians of the Lebanese wars were avid gamblers. It is said that they met every Sunday at the race track --Marxists and Islamists bet on races one through seven, Maronite nationalists and socialists on races eight through fifteen.

Race after race, the historians stood behind the track photographer, whose job was to imagine the winning horse as it crossed the finish line, to record the photo-finish. It is also said that they convinced (some say bribed) the photographer to snap only one picture as the winning horse arrived. Each historian wagered on precisely when --how many fractions of a second before or after the horse crossed the finish line -- the photographer would expose his frame.

Each of the following notebook pages includes a photograph clipped from the post-race-day issue of the newspaper, Al-Nahar, Dr. Fakhouri's notations on the race's distance and duration, the winning time of the winning horse, calculations of averages, the historians' initials with their respective bets, the time discrepancy predicted by the winning historian. Written on each page is also a brief paragraph in English. Dr. Fakhouri's widow, Zainab Fakhouri, has attributed these to her husband's habit of including short descriptions of the winning historians in notebooks.

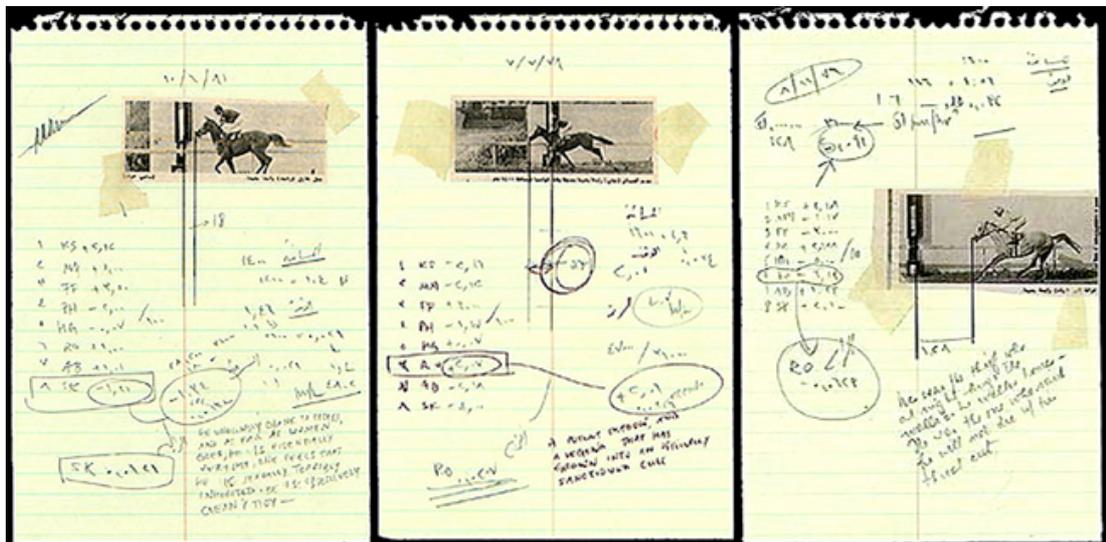


Fig. 6. The Atlas Group, images of *Files TYPE A* from the *Notebook Volume 74*, 1996.

Files TYPE FD

Secrets in the Open Sea consists of following information and images:

Secrets in the open sea consists of 6 large photographic prints that

were found buried 32 meters under the rubble during the 1992 demolition of Beirut's war-ravaged commercial districts. The prints were different shades of blue and each measured 110x183 cm. The Lebanese government entrusted the prints to The Atlas Group in early 1994 for preservation and analysis.

In late 1994, The Atlas Group sent the prints to laboratories in France and the United States for technical analysis. Remarkably, the laboratories recovered small black and white latent images from the prints, and the small images represent group portraits of men and women. The Atlas Group was able to identify all the individuals who had been found dead in the Mediterranean between 1975 and 1990 (during the Lebanese civil war).

The Atlas Group publicized its findings in a report in December 1996. In the report, no determination was made about the size of the large prints or about the color.

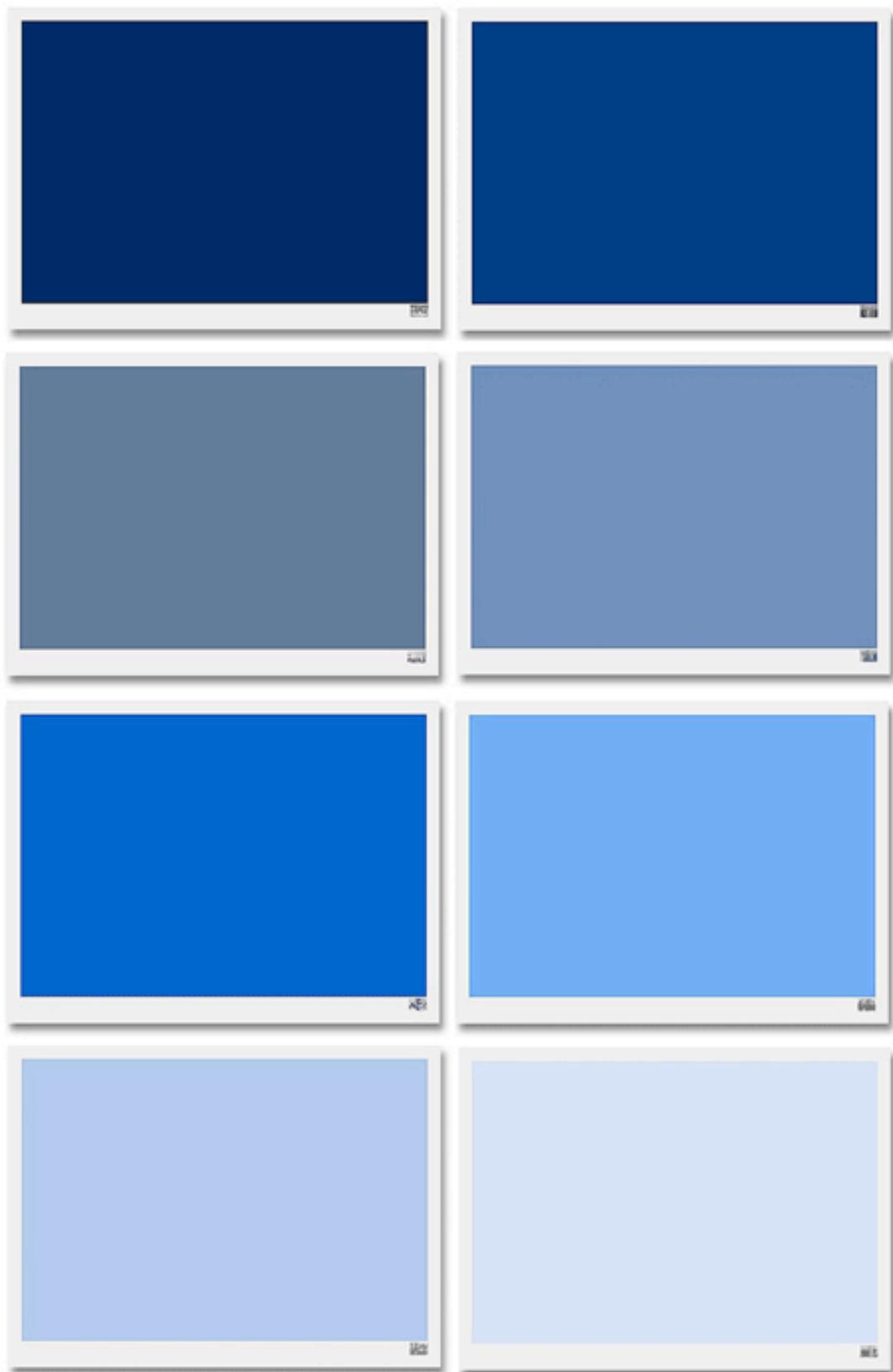


Fig. 7. The Atlas Group, images of *Files TYPE FD* from *Secrets in the Open Sea*, 1996.

Files TYPE AGP

My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair, (2003).

A History of Car Bombs in the Lebanese Wars
(1975-1991) Volumes 1-245

Between 1975 and 1991, 245 car bombs exploded in Lebanon killing thousands, injuring tens of thousands, and causing unspeakable carnage in the neighborhoods of Lebanon's major cities.

With this project, The Atlas Group intends to produce a history of the events, experiences, stories, and knowledge that surround each of the 245 car bombs. Our aim is to research, study and present what was said, believed, known and made public around the car bombs. This history will take the form of 245 dossiers. Each dossier will have 4 public forms: installation, publication, lecture, and screening.

See Fig.8 for the image from the installation of this project with a car with its engine suspended fifteen meters above it, and a photograph of a car bomb's front end as it appeared in the newspaper Annahar.



Fig. 8. The Atlas Group, images of *Files TYPE AGP* from *My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair*, 2003. The Atlas Group, images of *Files TYPE AGP* from *My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair*, 2003.

The importance of The Atlas Group for this study is the fact that they are commenting on the (institutionally written) history of Lebanese civil war in an institutionally arranged context. Atlas Group's projects start with references on historical statements and then continue with the production of new ones made available via attachment of fictions, personal details and stories. There is a certain strategy of their work, which appears to be important in this sense that they can be understood as 'restoring the aura' or 'creating the authenticity by narration', which is one of the main characteristics that artworks gain when done in means of documentations.

2.2. Restoring the "Aura"

In order to understand the working principals of this strategy, it would be useful to compare it with Installation Art. The term 'site-specific' gains crucial importance in describing the basic principals of Installation

Art. By site-specificity and being site-specific, the state of being designated for a specific place (site) has to be understood. Site-specificity as stated by Nick Kaye in Site-Specific Art (2000), briefly, can be understood as, producing artworks for a specific space, which is in other terms, exploiting certain qualities of that space. This helps the artist to cause the collapse of the institution in means of re-contextualizing the artwork. It happens so, for they are not easily transformable both intellectually and physically.

Installation's importance for this study becomes evident by Groys's reading of Benjamin's concept of "aura". In Benjamin's article, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), through the sections 1 to 6, Benjamin mainly addresses the issue of "aura" and the "loss of aura" by mechanical reproduction over art object directly (in further sections, he also gives examples from printing, film and acting). Briefly, for Benjamin, "original" possesses an "aura" and its mechanical reproduction does not. In order to describe the difference between original and copy¹⁸, Benjamin gives a set of examples from material, spatial and temporal situations of both. He states that:

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence (Benjamin: 220).

¹⁸ For Benjamin, the notion of 'original' only appears with Modernism at the same time where the notion of 'copy' appears.

To exemplify the presence in time and space, which he argues, the notions of “here and now” is given. Groys translates this “here and now” as an artwork’s topological distance from the viewer and compares the position of viewers of today and past.

Today's consumer of art prefers the art to be brought-delivered. Such a consumer does not want to go off, travel to another place, be placed in another context, in order to experience the original as original. Rather, he or she wants the original to come to him or her-as in fact it does, but as a copy (Groys: 113).

Since the difference between original and copy is topological, for Benjamin, the notion of originality is subject to violence. This is not a material (for a material violence would still leave traces on the body of the original, which reinforces its presence in time) but a contextual violence (for Benjamin, the most violent thing is to de-territorialize the original). At this point, Groys assumes:

There is the possibility not only of making a copy out of an original but also of making an original out of a copy. Indeed, when the distinction between original and copy is merely a topological, contextual one, then it not only becomes possible to remove an original from its site and deterritorialize it, but also to reterritorialize the copy (Groys: 113-114).

This exemplifies the situation evident in installation. In this relationship, the viewer’s position (literally) defines the aura of things. “Benjamin himself calls attention to this possibility when he writes about the figure of profane illumination and refers to the forms of life that can lead to such a profane illumination” (Groys: 114). “The reader, the thinker, the

loiterer, the *flâneur*, are types of illuminati just as much as the opium eater, the dreamer, the ecstatic” (Benjamin quoted in Groys: 114). According to Groys’s reading, especially the *flâneur* is important in this respect, for he does not wait for things to come to him, he goes to things, he respects their original contexts and does not destroy the aura of things. Similar to this relation, installation transforms its viewer into *flâneur*. If reproduction makes copies out of originals, installation makes originals out of copies (Groys). Installation situates its objects in “here and now”, by so it transforms them. Documentation, in another path situates its subject ‘there and then’, represents its subject with descriptions and evidences in an institutional manner. By doing so, at the same time it represents (narrates) its subject, it also makes it present¹⁹ because by documentation the subject -whether based on fact or fiction, gains authenticity, history of its existence. It can be said that while installation creates originals in spatial context, documentation creates originals in temporal context.

Art documentation is usually shown in the context of an installation. The installation, however, is an art form in which not only the images, texts, or other elements of which it is composed but also the space itself plays a decisive role. This space is not abstract or neutral but is itself a form of life. The siting of documentation in an installation as the act of inscription in a particular space is thus not a neutral act of showing but an act that achieves at the level of space what narrative achieves at the level of time: the inscription in life (Groys: 112).

¹⁹ The subject does not necessarily have to be previously present. It becomes present when represented by documentation. Groys explains this by saying “living can be replaced by the artificial, and [...] the artificial can be made living by means of a narrative”(Groys 111).

Inscription is a description and description is a representation. The subject which is represented is documented in this sense. The inscribed does not have to be based on facts (or truth, or something experienced previously). On the contrary, as Groys's explanation assumes, by inscription, the subject could become factual or fictional, original or copy, artificial or living (Groys). Mechanical reproduction does not reproduce the original, it produces the copy. Documentation in this sense, does not represent the authenticity, it makes authenticity present. Mechanically reproduced (copy) can be transformed into 'original' by re-territorializing, and the original can be transformed into a copy by de-territorializing. Distance is spatial. Similarly, in documentation, fact can be transformed into fiction and fiction can be transformed into fact through narration. Here, distance is temporal.

REPRODUCED OBJECT	DOCUMENTED SUBJECT
Lacks <i>here and now</i>	Refers to <i>there and then</i>
Reproduction does not reproduce the original but produces the copy	Documentation does not represent (reproduce) the factual but presents (produces) the factual
(Copy) Transformable into original by re-territorializing, and vice versa...	(Fiction) Transformable into fact by narration, and vice versa...
By Installation (in space)	By Documentation (in time)
Difference between original and copy is spatial.	Difference between fact and fiction is temporal.

Fig. 9. Comparison chart of reproduced object and documented subject.

To conceptually illustrate documentation's role as a narrative, to give 'repetition' as an example would be helpful. In an order²⁰ (could be either in space or time) if something appears in a fashion that does not fit to the repetition pattern of the order it is situated in, it would be perceived as unconscious and as an error. If this error repeats itself in a certain pattern, it becomes a conscious thing, so it justifies itself inside the order and it becomes a part of it. It becomes symmetrical in temporal context, because a symmetry between its now and then, its

²⁰ Term used as "an organized state, with elements arranged properly, neatly, or harmoniously" Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999

presence and its history of presence becomes 'established'. It can be said that, this is what Benjamin calls 'authenticity' in a work of art when he refers to authenticity as something that depends on the 'fabric of tradition'. Documentation (by narration) places its subject in history, illustrates its subject's existence in the past (by doing so, it creates a symmetry between its 'now' and 'then' states) and for this reason, it represents its subject while it also presents it and imposes the aura.

Samuel Weber, in his book Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media (1996), addresses the issue of "aura" by comparing Benjamin's previous essays in which the notion takes place. Weber agrees to Groys about the topological necessities of "aura", that "aura" happens to be appearing in a fixed spatial context. Further on that, Weber assumes: "For aura relates to mass not just as uniqueness does to multiplicity but also in spatial terms, as a fixed location does to one that is caught up in an incessant and complex movement. This is why aura is intimately related to the idea of a setting, or even a case" (Weber: 85). Case, as used by Benjamin, explained by Weber as, "In one of his earliest notations on the subject of aura, Benjamin writes of the aura as 'an ornamental surrounding' (Umzirkung) in which the thing of being lies embedded (eingesenkt) as in a case (Futteral)' " (Weber: 85). It can be understood as; in spatial terms, this 'embedding' refers to the placing in a context (whether as evident in installation works or as in a museum's exhibition). In temporal terms, it is placing, embedding in time (whether to historical past or fictional future) by documentation. For Benjamin,

Groys and Weber, by this embedding into tradition, authenticity appears. It can be said that, by changing the positions of the words in the sentence as 'for gaining the authenticity, things have to be embedded into tradition', there appears a strategy, which is applicable to art production. While installation art can be understood in this frame, documentation becomes functional in another path.

Both in spatial and temporal contexts, it appears that a characteristic aspect has a central role. This can be called tradition or a priori context; nevertheless these are all about certain structures, just like in grammar. In terms of narration or representation, in order to create a certain rhetoric, the subject (or object) has to be embedded in this grammar, or has to be able to use this grammar. As far as the subject or the object has certain bounds (references) with the grammar, it would be perceived as accurate and proper in relation with the a priori structure.

As one of the examples of this relationship and this kind of use of grammar, Postmodernism Generator becomes descriptive. Postmodernism Generator is a random text generator code, written by Andrew C. Bulhak in Monash University, School of Computer Science and Software Engineering. This code has been written by using the Dada Engine, which is a system for generating random texts from repeated grammars that are indexed in the system. The code enables the user to create meaningless but realistic looking, 'meaningful' texts in desired genres. Its application that is available via Internet works on

generating academic texts about postmodernism. Postmodernism Generator is simply using a grammatical structure and indexed writing about postmodernism to generate a random text, which looks like an essay that has been written by an academic. The rhetoric constituted here by producing the 'randomly generated text' that is embedded into an index of previously written academic essays, in a grammatically 'correct' manner. In fact, the outcome does not carry correctness or accuracy in any means, it only 'seems' to be 'academic'.

Grammar as a structure is quite similar to any other structure, either spatial or temporal and it is possible to be embedded (or to embed something) in them by using certain representational or narrative qualities. By being embedded in these structures, the subject (or the object) becomes justified. By so, transformed into original or copy, fact or fiction, living or artificial...etc.

Then it has to be said that, it is now primarily an issue of authority in art that has the power of embedding and transforming, defining or ignoring, adding or excluding art. If it used to be understood as the artists to possess such power previously, it is now mainly the power of the curator. By these definitions and examples, it appears to be important and evident that artists (and also curators) gain an authoritative power. For contexts can be defined, copies can be transformed into originals, fact can be made into fiction, artificial can be made living and vice versa. By artworks/projects that take form as documentations and to a point

Installation, which re-use 'institutional practice' as their subjects, the individual (artist) becomes institutional. As mentioned above, this happens in two distinct ways. One can be described as becoming an institutional body in order to criticize the institutional practice (i.e. The Atlas Group), which has a critical distance in its position and attitude. The other can be described as becoming an institutional body to achieve the brand quality of institution's practice. The latter is for the constitution of a state similar to the notion of the signature (artist as a brand). Signature, as the symbol of the artist's authority, disappears with Modernism. In Postmodernism, in certain situations, when artwork's subject becomes the criticism of institutional practices' (by imitating the 'institutional'), it can be said that, this signature comes back, but not in a form similar to the past. Rather by a practice in which the artist's narration resembles the institutional and in a form similar to the institutional authority. The difference between these two approaches lies in the difference between a signature that repeats itself in every possible way (such like a brand's or a corporate identity's repetition on its objects) and a signature without a signature. The former has an authority that is similar to a brand and could be designed, developed and criticized in similar techniques offered by marketing professionals for design, development and evaluation tactics of products of companies. The latter has an authority that does not promote itself as a product or a source of things, rather as evident in the case of the Atlas Group; it only operates as a medium of an anonymous authority that criticizes the authority of institutions. Without any center or source to be

defined of the power it possesses, this kind of authority (power) can be understood as similar to the concept of power of Michael Foucault (by being hidden and anonymous).

3. MODERNIST TRADITION VS. POSTMODERNISM

There is a certain discussion that has been carried out for a time between those who write and produce ideas on modernist tradition and postmodernism. In its brief definition, the difference between these groups, artists and critics is that defenders of modernist tradition assume that 'art is only meaningful within the individual arts', that is either painting, sculpture or else. It loses its meaningfulness and 'value' when dissolved by –in a certain extend, the condition of being produced without any medium-specificity. Art critic Michael Fried, in his article "Art and Objecthood" (1967), published in Art in Theory, 1900-1990, (1992), strictly criticizes and urges the reader about 'an art' that situates itself in between arts, like theater. Douglas Crimp, in his article "Pictures" (1979), published at the Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation, (1991), quotes Fried and assumes that:

"Art degenerates," he warned us "as it approaches the condition of the theater," theater being, according to Fried's argument, "what lies between the arts." And indeed, over the past decade we have witnessed a radical break with that modernist tradition, effected precisely by a preoccupation with the theatrical. The work that has laid most serious claim to our attention throughout the seventies has been situated between, or outside the individual arts, with the result that the integrity of the various mediums –those categories the exploration of whose essences and limits constituted the very project of

the modernism- has dispersed into meaninglessness (Crimp: 174).

Fried, as Crimp, mostly disturbed from minimalism, just because in minimalism the artwork does not wholly manifest itself at every moment. By being placed between painting and sculpture, for Fried, minimalist artworks are 'preoccupied with duration of experience' (temporality of the artwork, which has been the condition in minimal art that anticipates performance art). That is not, for Fried, a condition for the artwork to manifest itself (Crimp: 176-177).

The value of an artwork, the painterly in a painting and sculpturally in a sculpture, in this sense, becomes vague and hidden for there is no certain medium -and medium-specific tradition, applicable to any criticism and to any self manifestation of the artwork itself. For Fried, these conditions lead to an artwork's meaninglessness.

Besides, in postmodernism, as also stated by Jean-François Lyotard in his article "What is Postmodernism?" (1982), which is also published in the Art in Theory, 1900-1990, there is an obvious condition of "anything goes" in art production that is 'with' and 'for' an attitude, which is self-destructive for art. For the sake of producing new relations and modes of artistic expression, art becomes against art in postmodernism. Lyotard explains these new relations and conditions by referring to the source of the problem as money and the patronage system.

Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats a McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears a Paris perfume in Tokyo and 'retro' clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter of TV games. It is easy to find a public for eclectic works. By becoming kitsch, art panders to the confusion, which reigns in the 'taste' of patrons. Artists, gallery owners, critics and public wallow together in the 'anything goes,' [...] this realism of 'anything goes' is in fact of money; in the absence of aesthetic criteria, it remains possible and useful to assess the values of works of art according to the profits they yield. [...] As for taste, there is no need to be delicate when one speculates or entertains oneself (Lyotard: 1011).

It becomes easy to make sense of the relations that Lyotard puts forward between the eclectic social life and eclectic art (postmodernist art as for Lyotard). This analogy assumes that by postmodernism, art is fully reflecting or resembling social conditions, which it is produced in. And in such condition as Lyotard described, which is 'at the lack of aesthetic criteria' –that is also for the sake of an anti-modern attitude, it becomes nonsense to talk about or being in search for taste or value in artworks. From his emphasis on the patronage system, which also becomes the 'subject of art' directly by postmodernism, it appears to be important to remember the different approaches. At one side, there are artists and groups that have adopted strategies of certain institutional practices to develop their comments and criticisms against those authorities and patrons. On the other side, there are artists (mainly individuals rather than collectives) who have adopted these strategies of eclecticism and institutional practices in order to transform into them. In other words, they imitate the system of the patronage (institution) to become institutions, brands and celebrities. The difference between

these two sides is obvious. The critical point is that in the works and projects of the former, the viewer witnesses a consciousness of the medium in a more evident manner when compared with the latter.

Sculptors Jake and Dinos Chapman's works are both containing strong institutional criticism -that can be understood as primarily a postmodern condition, and 'sculpturally values in sculptures', which is an issue, primarily emphasized by critics of modernist tradition. Jake and Dinos Chapman, in their early works, criticized the medical institutions experiments and manipulations of genetic technologies. At their installation work titled Tragic Anatomies (1995), they have exhibited a series of realistically crafted mannequins that are similar to those used in store's vitrines, with anatomical anomalies. The setting of the installation was similar to the setting of a natural history museum's diorama setting of a display, representing some natural phenomenon. The grammar (structure) they have embedded in their work has been established by the mimicry of the natural history museum's context, while the content (which is justified with this embedding), strongly criticizes and comments on genetic science. This becomes possible over the narration, established by the analogy between the displays of the museum and 'creatures' of the science. These mannequins have been exhibited in an imaginary habitat that constructed with fake grass, trees and other natural recreational items inside the gallery space.



Fig. 10. Example of dioramas displayed in natural history museums.



Fig. 11. Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Tragic Anatomies*, 1995.

Jake and Dinos Chapman use institutional display techniques frequently. This can be understood as a part of their art production. They have adopted strategies from various institutions, which helped them in creating and reinforcing the criticism they have established. Similar to the Tragic Anatomies, the same artists, in another work, has

used dioramas to ‘recreate’ a fictional historical representation of World War 2. This installation titled *Hell* (2000) consists of over 30.000 hand-made, 2 inches high models, arranged in various modeled landscapes and displayed in a swastika²¹ shaped diorama. Chapman brothers create an illustrative yet fictional reference to the Nazi regime’s oppressive practices and genocide with examples and descriptions from daily life in labor camps, anatomical studies and mass graves.



Fig. 12. Jake and Dinos Chapman, detail from *Hell*, 2000.



Fig. 13. Jake and Dinos Chapman, detail from vitrines of *Hell*, 2000.

²¹ A Nazi and fascist symbol formed by a Greek cross with the four ends of the arms bent in a clockwise direction. Encarta® World English Dictionary ©

A more direct reference and example to the use of Dioramas in Chapmans' works would be the Arbeit McFries (2001), in which Chapmans recreate an imaginary place and time that carries the superimposition of references from the Nazi Germany's labor camps as a metaphor to the capitalist world's symbols such as McDonald's.



Fig. 14. Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Arbeit McFries*, 2001.

The shocking effect that Chapmans' artworks constitute and one of the over all main characteristics of their installations is at their practice's negation of postmodernist institutional criticism with the sculpturally values of their works. This opens a new surface to the debates on the museum's or institution's (in means of their display's power) 'meaning-making' and renaming power upon their content. Their recent retrospective exhibition at the Saatchi Gallery, London, consists a series of new works under an installation titled, The Chapman Family Collection (2001), that is made up of 34 pseudo-African tribal wood-carved totems and masks. The significance of these totems and masks are that they are all referring to the consumer society's symbols over

their subject, which is the African culture. A relation created within these two subjects, refers to a greater understanding of capitalism, and its strategies unfold via both academically (or institutionally) and industrially.



Fig. 15. Jake and Dinos Chapman, fetish from *The Chapman Family Collection*, 2003.

As by producing artworks in a similar understanding but with different reasons and references, works of The Atlas Group can be given as examples. While producing quite eclectic works (by using mixed media),

they are producing with a certain visual understanding that can be called as a 'design strategy' that corresponds to the visual qualities of an official document, or their subject matter's referents.

Another example would be 'shelves' of artist Haim Steinbach. Steinbach uses shelves' conceptual meaning similar as of pedestals and refers to his installations as 'representations', similar to the function of any institutional display. He is placing ordinary objects (like soaps, detergent bottles, ornamentations...etc) on shelves that 'he' has 'crafted', which means, he is literally producing these shelves by hand, leaving trace marks -and his personality on them. Hand crafted (subjective) institutional (objective) representation devices, points both the tension between art and institution and individual and institutional. On the contrary, at the works and representations of 'others' that took the opposite path, things usually made intentionally perfect, in order to establish the impression of the inhuman perfection of the institutional objects, and settings.



Fig. 16. *Shelf with Ajax*, 1980, and *Untitled (Chanel Box, Snowmen)*, 1998, by Haim Steinbach.

The best contemporary example would be the works of Matthew Barney that have been exhibited at Documenta and won the 'prestigious' Hugo Boss Prize in 1996. After this prize and with the sponsorship of Hugo Boss, Barney started his "The Cremaster Cycle" project, which took 6 years to complete. In its brief explanation, there is not any central institutional criticism evident but more likely the project itself is a well-crafted process of Barney's self-institutionalization. The project consists of 5 movies and exhibitions of relevant crafts and objects that have been used in these movies. The Cremaster Cycle has a 'logo' that repeats over objects and in any possible way. Besides, each movie or 'section' also carries its own 'sub-logos', each item is produced as stage decors for movies and they were also exhibited in Guggenheim Museum in 2002 as sculpture installations. In the opening night, Barney completed this 6-year project with a performance. From the modernist traditionalists' view, it would be hard to find any better example of an art that is situated 'in between', and from a postmodernist critic's view, it has to be taken into account with its 'brand establishing' strategies. DVD recordings of the movies are going to be purchasable to considerably high prices in near future and before them, hundreds of various items that refer to Cremaster Cycle both as framed still photographs from the movies and/or manipulated mass produced images, ornaments and pieces of decors (sculptures) produced by Barney or by the staff commissioned, are now displayed for purchase. The significance of the project is that a wide range of experts and professionals had produced its structure and pieces of this structure,

like decors, movies, objects, costumes, and prosthetic make ups...etc. Except the performance in the opening night of the exhibition and acting, it is hard to point out an aspect of the project that has been physically accomplished by Barney himself. In this example of the imitation of the institutional practice, he positioned himself as the source and the producer of all the things that have appeared around the project. Cremaster Cycle becomes a brand and Barney simultaneously becomes the patron of *this* brand.



Fig. 17. Film stills and postcard from *The Cremaster Cycle*, 1994-2000.

When Fried's, Crimp's and Lyotard's definitions and the discussions around the issues of modernist tradition and postmodernism considered, one can assume that there is a certain necessity of a negation, which becomes important. Medium specificity while using mixed

media or state of being consciously insisting on certain visual aspects in producing art (whether against art or as criticism of institutional) should be taken in account by artists. For the institutional practice or institutions' criticism, artworks and projects have to be 'designed', according to spatial, temporal context, history-specificity and/or corporate identity of the institution. This aspect of the 'postmodern artworks' could be considered as their 'value' in modernist sense. Their visual or medium-specific (whether done by mixed-media or not) refers to what they criticize. Else way, they achieve a state that is not more effective and meaningful than any part of an 'eclecticism' as Lyotard describes. 'The work has to manifest itself every moment' in and by the institutional practice it aims to criticize.

3.1. Selection of Previous Works

In relation to the given definitions and previously mentioned discussions around the issues of documentation and mimicry of the institutional practices, in this chapter, 3 artworks will be presented. These artworks hold a central role in my previous art production. In "Untitled Paintings" (2001), the issue of differences of traditions of painting and visualization of the content in western and eastern cultures had been emphasized over medical imagery. In "There" (2001), and "From the Gallery with Love..." (2003), artworks that have established an

institutional criticism by their subject matter and presentation, are exemplified with their relation to the institution and the viewer.

3.1.1. “Untitled Paintings” (2001)

Untitled Paintings are a series of oil paintings on canvas done in 2001. Over the subject of medical imagery, science and scientific explanations of human anatomy, there is a certain difference of understanding between western and eastern cultures. These differences are obvious both in the practice of medicine and visualization of the medical subject. Before starting to the project, I had studied and compared a wide range of medical imagery from western cultures starting from Medieval to Renaissance eras and eastern cultures from East Asia to Ottomans. One of the main radical differences between the two lies beneath the understanding of nature/world and visualization of it that is also evident in other subjects related to representation. That is to say, while in the western painting tradition, the three dimensionality and perspective depth had been practiced in order to achieve the illusion of what has been experienced in the ‘real world’, in eastern traditions there is a significant understanding or acceptance of surface (the painted surface) as surface, as flat and two dimensional. On the other hand, the western practice or tradition of painting, requires its master/artist to practice like a scientist, for the tradition depends on certain rigid rules and attitudes, like rules of perspective, avoiding humanly marks...etc. The opposition

of the scientist/artist in this sense could be understood similar to the described opposition of the surgeon and the magician in Benjamin's terms:

The surgeon represents the opposite of the magician. The magician heals a sick person by the laying on of hands; the surgeon cuts into the patient's body. The magician maintains the natural distance between the patient and himself; though he reduces it very slightly by the laying on of hands, he greatly increases it by virtue of his authority. The surgeon does exactly the reverse; he greatly diminishes the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient's body, and decreases it but little by the caution with which his hand moves among the organs (Benjamin: 233).

In this sense, as surgeon diminishes the distance and penetrates into its subject, like the western painter penetrates into the world in canvas by certain techniques, the practitioners of the eastern tradition (like magicians), preserve the distance and operates more spiritually. When the canvas, the surface of the painting is perceived as flat, there the analogy appears between canvas and skin as surfaces. And over this analogy, I aimed to put forth the difference between the eastern and western understandings of both canvas and skin as surfaces so that traditions of painting may become visible with the overlapping of the eastern painterly manner and western visualization of its content. On these medical paintings, the skin/canvas is painted as flat and idealized as possible by using little value and color, except the single homogeneous flesh color that has been manufactured. I have wanted to refer to 'my painting activity' on the canvas through the medical tools penetrating into the wounds. Moreover, the surgical tools working on the wound can be easily read as a metaphor, which refers to the

spectator's gaze on the 'work of art'. These paintings, as artworks, while referring to the differences of approaches to the medical and visual practices by overlapping the western medical practice with the eastern visualization, they are 'paintings', and for the subject matter itself, they have to be painted to achieve this confrontation instead of using any mass-produced imagery.

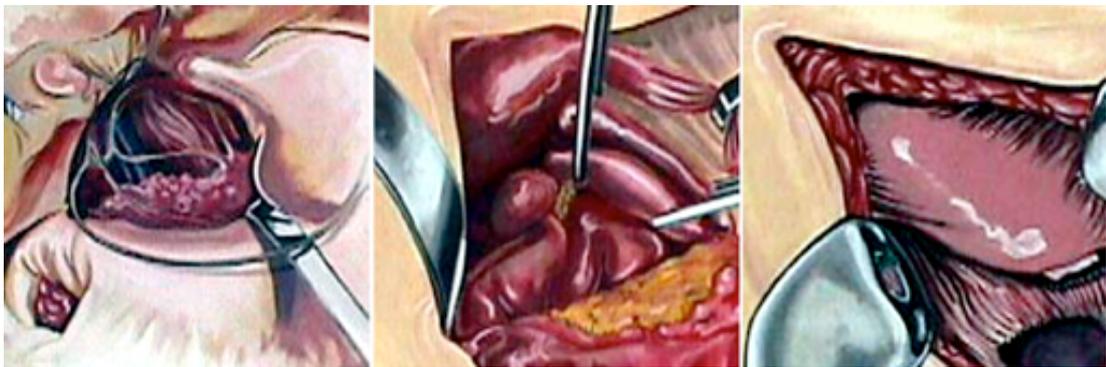


Fig. 18. *Untitled Paintings*, 2001.

Since medicine is a branch of science and by being so, a branch of the scientific institutional practice, its visualizations of its practice is made through documents of its subjects. Its evidences (documents) gathered and visualized by studies of years are results of a series of processes that consists of experimenting, fact-finding, calculating and observation. Like in other institution's of cultures, medicine depends on certain institutional practices that develop both according to the necessities of the practice and to cultural dynamics. For this reason, differences between scientific documentations or medical imagery of cultures can give one, both an idea of the scientific knowledge and 'as more

important for these set of pictures', an idea of the understanding of the subject (in this case, the human body) in visual sense.

As mentioned previously, like in other institutional practices, in medicine, there is a certain grammar constituted. Anatomical specifications, muscular and skeletal systems and organs are well defined both in means of being subjects of medicine and medical visualization. As an example of an artwork, which embeds itself into this grammar (tradition/structure) of medical imagery by its representational qualities (values), Phoebe Gloeckner's illustration work for J.G. Ballard's book Atrocity Exhibition (1970), can be given. It brilliantly illustrates the power of being embedded into tradition by representation while constituting an expression (or having a subject) that is not primarily relevant to the tradition itself (tradition of medical visualization).

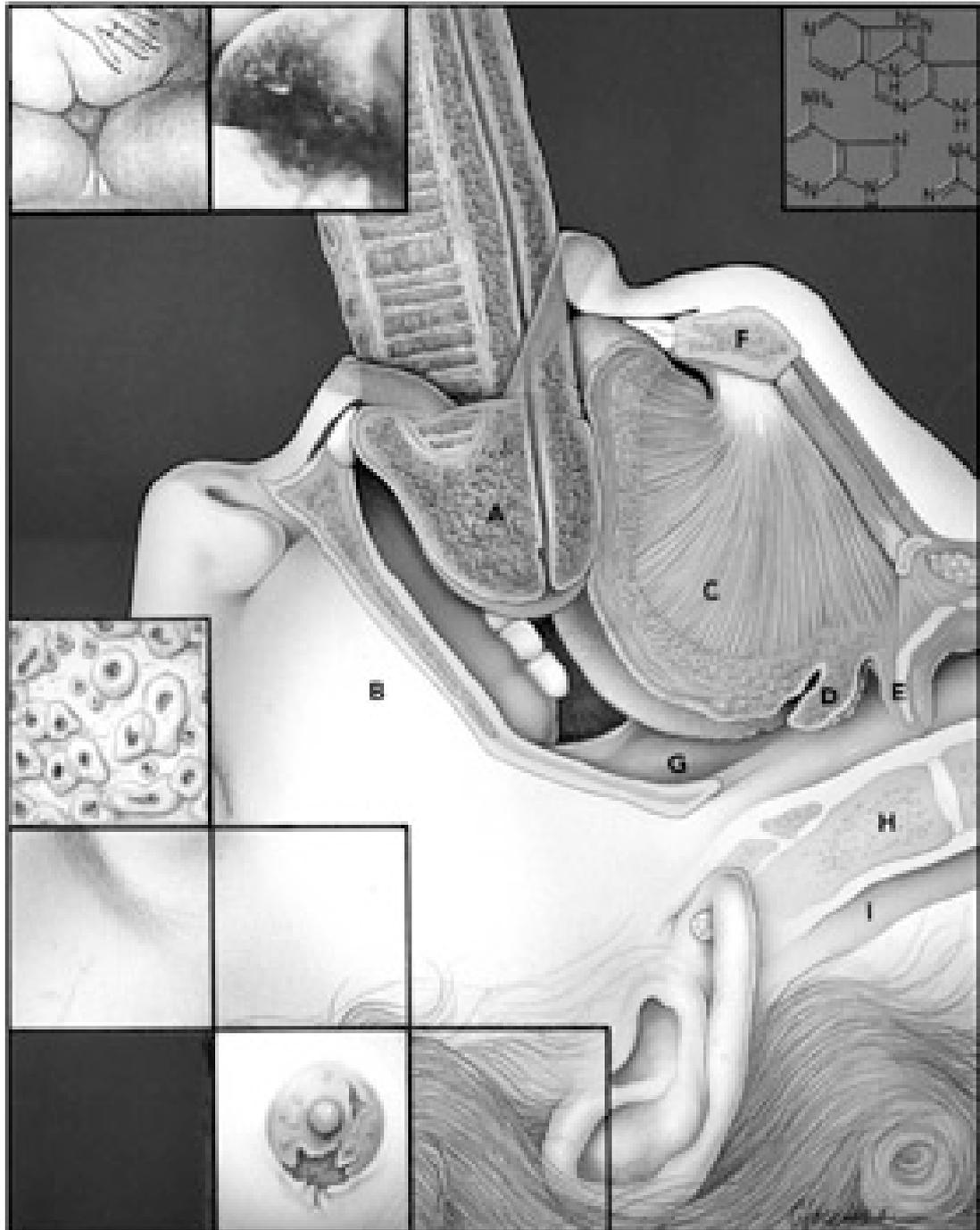


Fig. 19. Phoebe Gloeckner, Illustration for The Atrocity Exhibition book

3.1.2. “There” (2001)

“There”, is a site-specific installation work done for the exhibition “Look Again” that took place in Proje4L²², Istanbul in 2001. The work, placed at the second floor of the space, consists of a three-step stair against the wall and a hole opened at the top, which is an approximately 45-50 cm. wide hole that is opening to the corridor at the back of the wall that separates the ‘exhibition space’ and the ‘offices/toilets space’ of the institution.



Fig. 20. *There*, 2001.

²² Proje4L, Istanbul Museum of Contemporary Art in 4.Levent, Istanbul, is a private art institution situated at the entrance floor of a skyscraper that consists various firms and companies.

The viewer starts to experience the work simultaneously; while s/he completes the route of going upstairs. The hole does not allow adults to pass physically, but its psychological effect provokes the desire to do so. Some of the viewers tried to put their heads through it and look at the 'back stage' of the institution. In this situation, they saw people either running from offices to offices or people who were waiting in the toilet queue. I have witnessed that one of the viewers who put his head through the hole asked to a man waiting at the toilet queue 'are you also a part of the work?'. I was quite conscious about the 'institution' in which this installation was situated. It was commenting on the unity and the wholeness of the white, hygienic structure of the gallery/exhibition space. The bricks and stone/cement pieces were visible in and around the hole. I have intentionally left them as they are and manipulate some of its pieces in means of sharpening and smoothing. The three-step stair that I produced was in architectural standards (in means of height and width) and painted in 'white' like the walls of the gallery. The stairs were in strong contrast, in means of craft and attitude, with the hole they lead to. While commenting on the unity of the exhibition space, the work puts forward an analogical relationship with the institution's stairs and door that opens to the 'back stage' situated around 4 meters away.



Fig. 21. *There*, front view, 2001.

3.1.3. “From the Gallery with Love...” (2003)

For an exhibition titled “Ghosts and Shadows” that have been curated by Lewis Johnson in Platform Gallery²³ in 2003, I made a site-specific installation work. The exhibition consisted various works by a number of artists. The works exhibited were mainly video art and projections. I have hanged 10 pieces of hand-held aluminum holds to walls beside and near these works without any caption or title. These holds were as the same holds, which people in Turkey see and use in public transportation everyday. At the schema designed by the gallery to inform the viewer about the titles, artists and positions of the works in the exhibition, this work was mentioned at the bottom of the page, separate from the list of other artist and artworks, as ‘from the gallery with love...’ My intention was to make this installation look like an offering from the gallery. Their places and positions were arranged according to my experience of these video/projection works exhibited at the same gallery; where in certain relations with they caused a nausea-like effect on the viewer. I assume that they have acted as devices offered to the viewer from the gallery to experience contemporary art. As like prostheses that are placed in order to help improve the experience of art in galleries.

²³ Platform is a private art institution that functions as an exhibition space and contemporary art archive founded and supported by Garanti Bank, Istanbul.

3.1.4. Thesis Exhibition

For a successful exhibition of this thesis study, it is crucial to be able to address specific issues and arguments that are relevant to criticisms of art institutions and definitions of documentation in contemporary art. Subjects that have been discussed and exemplified in this study consisting of; art institution's position and function in the process of creating objects of art and history, documentation's role as a narrative that presents and represents its subject (documentation's use as a process that establishes an impression of a factual feeling of the fictional and vice versa), the act of documenting and its relation to contemporary art.



Fig. 22. C111, entrance door and desks, 2004.

The departure points of the exhibition of this thesis study are in strong relation with the previously given definitions of documentation. The aim is to establish a sub-institutional body inside the Bilkent University, Institute of Fine Arts building, in the studio C111. This sub-institutional attempt, which has been a case for an array of items and displays, informs the viewer about various subjects in an institutional manner. In fact, the rhetoric constituted by the display of these items and texts is in contrast with their content. This relationship blurs the difference between the notions of fact and fiction, truth and hoax. The overall aim is to question the relation of the subjective and irrational with the objective and institutional.

The benefits of being in relation with the a priori, general context, in which the exhibition is situated in -that is the Academy, had been used in advantage. This happened in several ways; the sub-institutional identity of the project carries the official name given to the exhibition room: "C111". An autonomous archive is established for the further study of these items that are exhibited, consisting various texts and images and which have relevant or irrelevant references to the existing archives of the Bilkent University's Library. Since these references exist only in order to reinforce C111's institutional identity (as a branch of a greater institutional context), the ability to 'refer' is prior to the content and quality of the references.

In order to create and support the alternative institutional identity of the project, unofficial imitations of official tools like stamps, numerators, vitrines and similar display and classification techniques has been used in a standardized manner. Conventional display techniques of museums, medicine and science have been used as; dioramas, illustrations and images. The C111 exhibition intends to evoke the institutional narration in various ways. Displays have been classified by their content and installed with descriptions.

In daily life, any relationship that has continuously (and randomly) been in the state of 'becoming' (between two or more points such as people, images, objects, movements, natural phenomena) would have no significant importance without classification and description. These 'points' would have become something totally different when isolated from their contexts and placed into another context side by side. Pictures and objects displayed inside the vitrines in C111 gain importance by illustrating this aspect of the institutional representation. In the case of this exhibition, placing an image and an object side by side, simultaneously starts a narration in between. As if these two 'points' illustrate each other and create credibility that depends on the existence of one another. In other words, photographs start to act as if they are the 'photographic evidence', which prove the existence of the 'object' in the proposed context, constituted by the photograph.



Fig. 23. C111, details from vitrines, 2004.

The C111 exhibition room has been painted to a pastel green color up to 1.30cm height from the floor. This is a common element in official buildings and some institutions. There are six vitrines and seven desks installed inside, a (black) board (that had been previously fixed to the wall) and a chair that have had been placed. Moreover, a fire extinguisher and an instruction were added to the room.

In front of the vitrines, three drawing desks are positioned. Each of them has four drawers and is painted in white. Each desk is numbered (as 1, 2 and 3) from their side and top. They have been classified by their subjects. The first desk (No.1) is displaying and documenting the subject 'oddities' such like photographs of a Chinese man with a horn on his head, a man descending stairs while he is upside down, two women with knees shaped like faces of

babies, a fisherman who had been trained his fishes to jump across circles...etc. These 'photographic evidences' are symbolically 'approved' as 'truths' by C111 with the help of stamps and reference numbers. The second desk (No.2) displays and documents 'historical records' with photographs such as, a lynched and burned African-American in Mid-West North America during the 50's, an unknown soldier whose corpse has become 'flat' under mud, which has tracks of wheels of tanks on it, a worker beaten by public for the probability of him being a communist in Los Angeles during 60's...etc. These 'photographic evidences' have been stamped by various C111 stamps. These stamps inform the viewer that the document 'may or may not' express the 'truth'. At the third desk (No.3), various 'institutional documents' that have been sent or given to me have been displayed. These include, diplomas from high school and Gazi University and documents that have been previously approved from various institutions. These documents also have been 're-institutionalized' by re-approving symbolically by 'extra' stamping, classifying and numbering them according to their 'references' in C111.

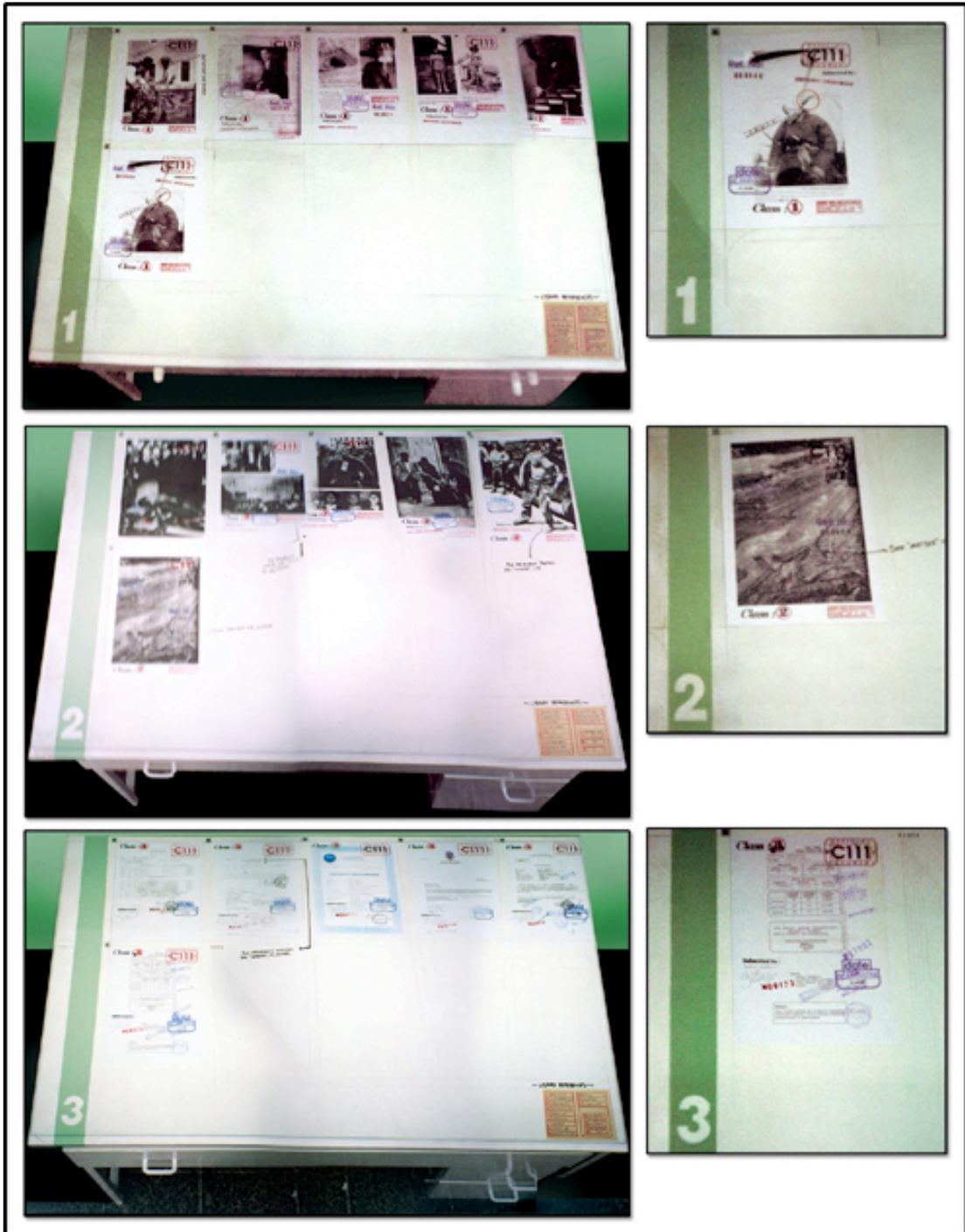


Fig. 24. C111, desks and details of these desks, 2004.

These references, which all of three desks (displays) carry, refer to source books from Bilkent University Library. In fact, these references do not have any logical connection with what they seem to stand for. The viewer, who would like to refer to these 'sources' for 'further study', may find books about

cosmetics, economics, optical science or book binding techniques. This illustrates two main characteristics of the exhibition in general. First, it validates the exhibition, as a sub-institutional body, installed (embedded) inside a greater institution, by its ability to give references about its subjects. This constitutes the relationship between these two institutions. The second, by its 'irrelevant' references, opens a surface to the and according to the viewer where potential connections between references and referrals may occur.

On the other hand, the form and function of these 'desks' enable one to exemplify and describe some key points of institutional practice in the C111 exhibition. Being designed for the 'individual' by the 'institutional' they gain a prolific role in the task of imitating the institutional practice. I have used their top surface as a place for displaying and giving references about their subjects, while their drawers function for 'reservation' and storage of related images, objects and texts. Metaphorically these desks have been transformed into institutional 'bodies' in which both the display and archival problems have been solved in one unique form that resembles both the institutional and the individual.

At the far corner of the exhibition room, two other desks (neither painted nor numbered) are positioned, with nothing on their top. The drawers of these desks are filled with garbage that has been packaged in various transparent plastic bags. These include, randomly gathered objects such as cigarette buds, used and disposed paper material, pieces of cloths, crushed

cans...etc. The drawers are left slightly open. On the top of the desks, a hand-written sentence informs the viewer that s/he can curate his/her own exhibition above by using sources installed in the drawers below, along with an additional sentence that asks the viewer not to leave items on desks while leaving. This section of the C111 exhibition aims to illustrate the practice of classification over garbological²⁴ study and the transformation of the 'unwanted' or the 'unnecessary' into a subject of study. The metaphor of the 'exhibition space', as the top of these desks, both refer to the practice of 'curating' and sources of the curator by encouraging the viewer in acting as the creator of his/her own exhibition and giving him/her the chance to 'choose'. Classified garbage and the encouragement to the act of 'curating', sets an analogy between practices of recycling both in means of 'recycling garbage' (includes classification and study of garbage by recyclers and garbalogists) and 'recycling art' (includes classification and study by the curator). Just like a chair made from recycled materials is essentially something that becomes totally new out of various disposed items, a curated exhibition is also something 'other' than the individual items and artworks from which it is gathered from.

At the opposite wall of these desks, there is a previously placed board of the studio. A medical illustration that depicts organs inside a human torso has been drawn with board markers, as if it has been left over from a medicine class. The difference of the illustration from any such 'left over illustration' is that it has been drawn more realistically with greater attention to details of

²⁴ Garbology is the study of the contents of domestic dustbins to analyze the consumption patterns of households.

textures and colors than any 'description', which would have been drawn by the instructor in a medicine class. By the overlapping of the tradition of the medical visualization (just like illustrations in anatomy books) and the instant exemplification (the purpose and use of the board and overly simplification of the subject), constitute a confrontation of two distinct approaches to the same subject. One is highly idealized and other is realistically depicted. At the right side of this illustration, an illustration of a human heart has been drawn in the same size with the torso, in a similar realistic manner. In between these two illustrations there has been another illustration drawn (which is idealized, as an abstraction), which depicts the urinary system of women. Lines, arrows and circles that connect them together in a way similar to a scientific explanation point out the relationship of these three drawings. Along with other examples of various 'institutional displays', the visualization of the human body in the tradition of medical visualization has been exemplified by realistic and idealized examples.



Fig. 25. C111. medical illustration on board, 2004.

In front of the board, another desk has been positioned with a corrugated cardboard plate on top. The light of the sun that drops onto the cardboard is drawn by its edge lines in order to illustrate its transformation into a subject of a 'consciousness'. In other words, to make it a 'subject' that has been grasped and detached from its continuity. In this sense, the sunshine, as a natural phenomenon, is defined and described in the context of C111.

Nevertheless, this cannot be understood without the visual reference of the same light dropping in the same spot that has been drawn.

One of the items that have to exist in official buildings and institutions in Turkey is the portrait of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In relation with other displays and intentions in the C111 exhibition room, a photograph of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk has been hung on the wall. In general, the main characteristics of the experimentations with displays in C111 room can be described as trying to define, re-contextualize and institutionalize their subjects. In this task, things have become something other than themselves. This had happen either by putting things in relation with others (putting images and objects together), using symbols of institutional authority (stamped documents), setting references that are outside of the context (library references), transforming 'unwanted' or 'useless' things into subject of study (isolating and packaging garbage in plastic bags), or by trying to define a natural phenomenon –and by so, describing, classifying and commenting on it (drawing the sun light from its borders on the cardboard). These practices create 'new' meanings in the 'tradition' of C111, which is constituted by the imitation of the institutional practices. The portrait of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, which had been chosen among many others, has to be understood in this respect. The photograph had been taken in Yozgat in 1953, during a flag ceremony in front of a high school. There are two figures in the picture seen from their sides, standing one after another. The one, who is closer to the camera is supposed to be a student carrying a Turkish flag and besides him, the teacher stands still. On the background of the photograph, there are empty hills and fields that

stretch to the horizon. On the top of these hills, and in the center of the photograph, a group of white clouds has gathered naturally in such a way that a part resembles the portrait of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk from his profile. As an example of a natural phenomenon that has gained an illustrative (and figurative) meaning for (and by) Turkish citizens, this particular photograph suits best in the context of the C111 room.

At the back of the entrance door, as it is one of the prerequisites of the institutions and official buildings, a fire extinguisher and an instruction of using this device has been placed.



Fig. 26. C111, installation views, 2004.

4. CONCLUSION

In this study, art's definition and its relation to institutions have been discussed throughout specific discourses and issues that took place in art history and criticism. As stated by both Mary Anne Staniszewski, and Emma Baker, art is something that is defined by institutions in various ways. Institutions 'define' and 'describe' art by classification, which is a process, taking its references from art history and 'display' that is in strong relation to the cultural dynamics of the society. It is obvious that this process of classifying, and displaying art is a problematic issue. According to Walter Benjamin, there are certain aspects of a work of art, which cannot survive throughout these processes. These are an artwork's "authenticity", "originality" and "aura". All of which, appear or disappear according to the 'context' that the artwork is situated in. The detachment from the "tradition" (or the set of structures) causes the artworks' transformation, which is from the 'original' to the 'copy'; this is the most problematic issue of the representation in the institution. In order to avoid this transformation that is actually a result of 'their' contextual shifting, institutions, intend to be more 'descriptive' and 'informative' with their techniques of display. In such a situation, artworks displayed in institutions that are documents (evidences) of certain art historical classifications (of era,

school, artist), become reinforced with other documentations, which intend to recreate the 'original' context and meaning of the artwork. Institutions by their nature of function, presents documents (artworks) by reinforcing them with documents (captions, pictures, historical information, related background...etc). Hence, this practice, as evident, can only be 'creating' new contexts instead of recreating the historical (original) one.

For Benjamin, this is also what happens by reproduction. The reproduced "original" becomes the "copy", for it does not possess the topological quality of the "original" that is described as its "here and now" state. This delicate quality is subject to violence when the object is de-territorialized and detached from its original territory. Furthermore, 'even' the object is the "original", it no longer possesses this quality when de-territorialized. Boris Groys interprets Benjamin's notions and definitions and assumes that, if the difference between "original" and "copy" is topological, and if the 'originality' disappears by de-territorialization, than it is possible to make 'originals' out of 'copies' by re-territorializing the object and by placing it in another territory apart from its original one. Groys gives the example of *flâneur* as described in Benjamin's writings, according to them; The *flâneur* goes to things, respects the context and aura of things, he does not destroy them. In this sense, Groys assumes that, Installation Art transforms its viewer into *flâneur*. Installation works, as they require their viewer to 'go' to 'specific' places, and by being 'un-transportable' by nature, creates

'originals' out of 'copies'. For Groys, similar to this principal of installation, documentation, by narration, has the power of transforming fact into fiction and vice versa. Then it can be said that; installation achieves a power of transforming its objects by de-territorialization and re-territorialization in spatial context and this is similar to what documentation achieves by narration in temporal context (the power of transforming its subjects into fact or fiction).

The object shall become 'original' by site-specificity and installation, because it is 'embedded' (sited) in a structure of a spatial context. The subject shall become 'fact' or 'fiction' by narration and documentation, because it is 'embedded' (narrated) in a structure of a temporal context. The viewer of an installation work goes to the work and witnesses its object in 'here and now'. The viewer (reader) of 'documentation' witnesses the 'documented' by references to the subject's 'there and then' states. In both situations, the object or the subject has the "authenticity" because of the fact that they are embedded into a set of structures (like 'the fabric of tradition' for Benjamin). This structure could be either temporal or spatial. By these definitions, it can be assumed that, "authenticity" can be imposed on subjects (or objects) by the context they are situated or narrated in.

Museum, in Benjamin's terms, does not restore any 'original' context of the artwork but forms new ones. In other words, museum de-territorializes an object and re-territorializes it inside its own fabric of

tradition, and so, imposes an “aura”, ‘originality’ and “authenticity” onto them but different from the object’s ‘original’ qualities. This process essentially consists re-presenting it by various display techniques from lighting the object to placing it inside vitrines, supporting the display by information, descriptions, publishing of the museum and even gift stores. These are all creating and reinforcing the ‘tradition’ of the institution, which has the power to transform ‘anything’ it wants into art, and transforming any art into something else than itself.

At the thesis exhibition, C111, aim is to create such context and insert, and by so, transform objects’ use and value in a ‘realistic’ (or credible) manner. The ‘credibility’ that has been constituted by the C111’s displays can be understood similar to the notion of “authenticity” introduced by Benjamin. The difference here is the ‘way’ of achieving the “authenticity”. Benjamin assumes that the “authenticity” can only be understood and exists in artworks (objects) that are ‘embedded in the fabric of tradition’ and sets a series of transformations that might occur in the case of the object’s detachment from the ‘tradition’. This ‘tradition’ is a cultural tradition that has been established through ages and centuries but from the other way around, if one remembers Groy’s assumptions, it can be said that tradition can be ‘constituted’ in micro examples. The institutional practice of representation has a tradition of its own, which depends on cultural dynamics. In time, the manners and understandings of institutional representation has developed and changed. Once, where there were only vitrines and cases carrying illustrations, objects or books in museums, today it is possible to access

some permanent exhibitions of museums and galleries via Internet. Natural history museums has become preferring more 'interactive' displays for their educational purposes and it can be said that there is a constant effort and intention to make these displays more 'effective' and 'realistic'. Whatever the institutionally represented object (subject) is, then, besides becoming something totally different from its 'original' state, use, value or meaning, will be, in fact, something new, changing constantly according to the cultures, and cultures of display.

By these definitions, it seems like there appears a critical position to operate, in means of 'artistic production', becomes present. If one agrees that the process of 'documentation' and producing 'documents' are both essentially 'formal' and bureaucratic practices, then using similar representative (or narrative) qualities with the institutions have to be understood as 'commenting' on the very structure of the institution itself. As in the case of The Atlas Group, which is actually an 'imaginary foundation' that creates and arranges an archive about various incidents and speculative attacks have occurred during the Lebanese civil war. By using references from Lebanese social history, The Atlas Group has created various stories and 'past situations' in means of documents. Their narration both forms a criticism of the institutions of Lebanon and an artistic expression that is quite 'socially conscious'. By postmodernism, one witnesses that, institutional practices and various interrelations between art's structures become the subject of the art production. By 'documentation', the individual (artist) posses the power

of the institution, because documentation, carries the 'concept of the institution' within itself, just like the 'frame' and 'pedestal' once has. In such a point, it becomes easier for the artist to follow the rules of the institution for the sake of creating his/her own 'fabric of tradition'. In other words, similar to the institutional practice's strategy of creating its own tradition (structure) and placing (and justifying) objects in it, artists by the mimicry of institutional practice, could become institutional. This is 'artist as a brand', which means, an artist who has been created his/her 'fabric of tradition' and has been able to 'justify' his/her artistic production inside this tradition of him/herself. As evident in art history, in such position, even the artist's physical 'existence' is not necessary. The brand quality and the tradition is much more powerful and long lasting than the individual. In this situation, the 'individual' becomes the 'institutional'.

It can be said that, the power of 'justification' of the institutional depends on certain aspects. When these are absent, even the institutional 'appearance' exists, the composition (sum of the content) becomes 'eclecticism' in Lyotard's terms, that is a certain state of 'anything goes', which leads to 'kitsch' with the 'taste' of patrons, and, which leads to meaninglessness in terms of Fried and Crimp. Then, there has to be an art practice in which the modernist tradition's and postmodernism's notions negotiate. In which, the medium-specific values negotiate in a 'mixed media' work or visually conscious, 'designed' works embeds themselves in (or takes an oppositional role

against) the institutions of art, in which, interrelations established between supposedly distinct structures of art by an understanding of art that manifests itself in a manner far from being in the state of 'anything goes'. Jake and Dinos Chapman's works can be understood as conscious works in this sense. Furthermore they, somehow, have proven by their significantly huge budgeted shows and fame as art celebrities (mainly by Saatchi's major investments on their works) that, it is possible to become a brand while having certain artistic problems and consciousnesses about institutional practice's criticism by mimicry.

As mentioned above, there cannot be a criticism of 'institutional practice' or any 'institution' by ignoring certain visual (practical) or structural (theoretical) values built within that institution previously. The project or artwork, which positions itself with such criticism (as seen mainly by postmodernism), firstly, has to be able to establish its narration (representation) in a way that the relations (references) with the criticized institutional subject matter designed 'with no less visual consciousness' than the visual aspects of the criticized subject that has been constituted previously. Without these references, the artwork that has been positioned itself to (or designed as) the criticism of the institution would be 'pointless' (and meaningless) and would not 'work' (or read) by the viewer. Again, it has to be stated that, in order to avoid this, the artwork/project has to be embed (or set) itself into (or in front of) its subject matter by giving references to its certain visual and structural values.

When an installation or a documentation done from a critical distance from the institutions of art, contexts of these institutions and their 'traditions' of displays have to be considered. In creating the institutional criticism in artworks, such institutional practices (like documentation) have to be observed and embedded in the narration. This, as explained and exemplified in this study, while blurs the line between 'documentation' and 'artwork', enables artworks and viewers to communicate with the institution that has been addressed by the criticism. In such artworks, there is no point in discussing whether the 'documentary' or the 'art' aspects carry a definitive role or not. Since, both practices have previously adopted techniques from each other, in the case of the imitation of the 'institutionally represented' subject (object) or specific institutional practices' criticism, the artworks can be called 'documentations' and, in certain representations or in certain contexts, documentations can be called as 'artworks'. In the case of the C111 room, the context created was neither an art museum, a medicine class nor a contemporary art gallery but all of them. In the context of a fine arts institute, inside a university, the exhibition has been able to function in imitating the institution and the institutional practices by embedding itself in it. For this reason, it can be both understood as documentation and/or an art installation.

In conclusion, it can be said that, by adopting certain representative and narrative qualities of the institutions, it is possible to establish a critique of it. Hence, in postmodernism (and in some contemporary art practices) the problematic of the criticism of the institution has been

present because of the lack of the certain relations that has to be settled previously. These relations have to be constituted both 'in' and 'with' the artwork like the medium-specificity/value of the artworks and references/relations to the criticized subject (in this case the 'institutional'). Just like the situation in which it could not be possible to criticize/comment on any subject from an isolated distance, in art, the criticism of the institutional practice can only be 'proper' as much as it embeds and merges itself inside the institution. This is as important as the social consciousness of the artist and has to be perceived as the primal task and responsibility of the contemporary art of our era.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A, THE CURATOR

By the reappearance of the issues of the 'author', 'authority' in art in such divergent forms and attitudes, it becomes simultaneously important to insert institutional (administrative) bodies that are not primarily accepted as 'producers of art' into the discussion. These can be called as managers, administrative boards or in most known form of the expression, curators.

Remembering Emma Baker's definition of a museum's process of classification, description and display of artworks, it would not be a vague statement to say that the curator is the one who choose what to classify, how to classify, describe and display. It would be to underestimate the role of the curator if one describes his/her function as a 'person who hangs pictures on the wall'. With this in mind, as in the previously given definitions and interpretations of representation and reproduction, curators are creating as in the meaning of the word "to produce something as a result, or make something happen". Curators are not recreating anything. Like the exhibition of a museum does not representing its object and a document not 'only' reproducing its subject. This authoritative function to curate actually 'creates' more than exhibitions. By its central role in the production of concepts and contexts, it can be said that, a curated exhibition is a narration of the curator (in means of 'selection'), more than the sum of this narration's

pieces and sentences (artists and artworks). At this point, roles and meanings of the 'creator' and 'curator' have to be explained.

According to University of Notre Dame, Latin Dictionary and Grammar Aid page¹, Creator, in Latin conditor stands for 'founder' and creatura, which is Latin for 'creature', means 'servant'. These definitions are more directly applicable to the explanation of the relationship between God and its creatures or as conventionally perceived as artist and his/her artwork. Curator, as the use of the word as, administrative head of a museum, gallery, or other collection, derived from a 14th Century Latin word, curare, which stands for 'to take care' also means, 'guardian' and 'overseer' in Latin language. The similar point in Latin words like, curator (overseer), curare (to take care) and curatio (medical attention, heal, cure) is their stem, which is cura. That stands for, concern, correctness (*accurate*), management, healing (to cure), and caring (to care). It can be said that curator is for caring or curing what the creator creates and if one adds the meaning of the stem of 'create' in Latin as creatio, which also means 'choice' and 'election', in a brief and maybe by a premature conclusion, one can assume, creatures (choices) has to be cared (cured) in terms of science, just like the fact that art has to be classified and defined. Classification, by its nature, does not able to or function to include or cover everything, as it includes something, it is done also by excluding another this is because classification itself is a form of 'selection'.

¹ <http://catholic.archives.nd.edu>

As Weber explains in Mass Mediauras, for Heidegger, placing the subject in a structure is achieved by “her-stellen (bringing-forth, present, produce)” and “vor-stellen (setting-before, represent)”. The representational structure (Gefüge) consists in a highly ambivalent oscillation of bringing-forth and setting-before with the aim of securing the foundations of the subject ‘at’ and ‘as’ the center of things (Weber, 80). Herstellung stands for ‘producing, to present’ in German, also when by the meaning of the word it derived from as ‘herstellen’ (bringing-forth, to present, produce), taken in account, as being similar with the 14th Century Latin word creare² (to bring forth, produce), ‘to represent’ and ‘to create’ becomes similar. So, one can assume, both by these etymological definitions and previously raised questions and explanations that ‘representing’ is also a form of ‘presenting’, simultaneously, one has to admit that curating (as a curated exhibition by a curator) is a form of creating. Curate, from 14th Century Medieval Latin curatus, ‘somebody who cares for a parish’ is also derived from cura, which is ‘care’ derived from and that is the source stem of ‘to cure’ in English (Encarta).

The 14th Century Latin word (stem), cura gave birth to a considerable number of words. If one can assume that the curator’s creativity is by ‘selection’ and ‘election’ (choice/classification), then it becomes a necessity to look up to the words derived from the same stem, especially medical, which refers to such performance. A word that refers to both

² For Encarta World English Dictionary: The word derived from crescere, which stands for “to grow”, like in term ‘crescendo’ in music that stands for, “eventually growing or increasing”.

the act of curing and of selection becomes important at this point. The corresponding word of curing by selecting certain things, curing by cleaning/detaching the selected from the rest is an old French word from the late 19th Century, derived from Latin cura, which is ‘curettage’ that means “scraping inside body cavity: a surgical procedure that involves scraping the inside surface of a body cavity with an instrument shaped like a spoon (curette) to remove abnormal growths or other tissue³” The tool for the performing of this procedure is called ‘curette or curet’, which is ‘kürek’ in Turkish language, and the verb is ‘küremek’, which stands for, ‘to clear away’ or ‘to shovel up’. If one looks at the gynecological use and definition of the word ‘curettage’, it is basically stands for ‘abortion’ (which is more similar in form to ‘kürtaj’ in Turkish). The similarity lies both in the Latin stem they have been derived from. In the meaning of the activity as making a selection, which has been made from inside of a structure (as ‘area of operation’ which could be, body, history, artists...etc), in order to establish a curing (classifying) activity by scraping/detaching (selecting) certain tissues or growths (or artworks). Here the operation is highly masculine. Except the fact that majority of the gynecologist and curators are of men, the operation itself (and science in a broader sense) is masculine. It also gains this masculinity by the relationship between ‘the selection maker’ and ‘the selected from’ (the subject), which is a relation between the active and the passive. If one considers the scientific meaning of the operation, it appears to be a procedure performed in order to clear away the ‘unwanted’ from the rest,

³ From http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary_/curettage.html Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999

and in its relation with curatorial studies, it is used for 'putting together a selection'. In other words, in means of science, it refers to curetting by 'removing' a selection and in art context, it is curating (creating) by 'setting' a selection in place. Curator's masculine authority over its 'area of operation' is similar to gynecologist's authority in his/her 'area of operation' by his/her curette.

APPENDIX B, THE POSTMODERNISM GENERATOR

Here below is an example of randomly generated text by using Postmodernism Generator.

The Genre of Society: Marxism, predialectic desemiocism and cultural theory

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1. Madonna and cultural theory

"Reality is intrinsically used in the service of sexism," says Foucault; however, according to Long [1], it is not so much reality that is intrinsically used in the service of sexism, but rather the rubicon, and hence the dialectic, of reality. In a sense, several sublimations concerning constructivist neomodern theory exist.

The main theme of la Fournier's [2] analysis of posttextual capitalist theory is not theory, as Sontagist camp suggests, but pretheory. The characteristic theme of the works of Gibson is the stasis, and subsequent failure, of neotextual society. However, if posttextual capitalist theory holds, the works of Gibson are not postmodern.

If one examines the constructivist paradigm of consensus, one is faced with a choice: either accept modernist situationism or conclude that class has objective value, given that the premise of the constructivist paradigm of consensus is valid. Sartre suggests the use of Debordist image to challenge capitalism. But Baudrillard's model of the constructivist paradigm of consensus implies that narrative is created by communication.

"Society is unattainable," says Bataille. Hubbard[3] holds that we have to choose between subdialectic desublimation and Foucaultist power relations. In a sense, Sartre uses the term 'posttextual capitalist theory' to denote not, in fact, narrative, but postnarrative.

"Sexuality is part of the economy of art," says Lyotard; however, according to Pickett[4] , it is not so much sexuality that is part of the economy of art, but rather the meaninglessness of sexuality. The premise of the subconstructivist paradigm of expression suggests that the collective is elitist. But the primary theme of Parry's [5] analysis of the constructivist paradigm of consensus is the role of the poet as writer.

If one examines posttextual capitalist theory, one is faced with a choice: either reject the poststructural paradigm of narrative or conclude that context is a product of the collective unconscious. Posttextual capitalist theory implies that art is capable of intent, but only if culture is distinct from art. It could be said that the example of textual theory which is a

central theme of Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* is also evident in *Pulp Fiction*, although in a more subcapitalist sense.

Sartre promotes the use of cultural theory to modify and read sexual identity. However, the subject is contextualised into a posttextual capitalist theory that includes narrativity as a paradox.

Baudrillard suggests the use of Sartreist absurdity to attack class divisions. Therefore, if the constructivist paradigm of consensus holds, the works of Tarantino are modernistic.

The main theme of the works of Tarantino is the bridge between society and reality. In a sense, Sontag uses the term 'posttextual capitalist theory' to denote not dematerialism, but predematerialism.

Baudrillard's critique of deconstructivist libertarianism suggests that expression must come from communication. Therefore, Marx promotes the use of the constructivist paradigm of consensus to modify society.

In *Jackie Brown*, Tarantino affirms submodern discourse; in *Pulp Fiction* he examines cultural theory. Thus, Brophy[6] states that we have to choose between the constructivist paradigm of consensus and capitalist feminism.

The primary theme of Tilton's[7] essay on posttextual capitalist theory is the role of the poet as observer. But many theories concerning the genre, and subsequent defining characteristic, of neocultural class may be found.

The subject is interpolated into a constructivist subdeconstructive theory that includes truth as a totality. However, if cultural theory holds, we have to choose between the constructivist paradigm of consensus and cultural appropriation.

2. Contexts of fatal flaw

In the works of Tarantino, a predominant concept is the concept of precapitalist art. The feminine/masculine distinction depicted in Tarantino's *Jackie Brown* emerges again in *Reservoir Dogs*. Thus, the subject is contextualised into a cultural theory that includes consciousness as a whole.

If one examines the textual paradigm of discourse, one is faced with a choice: either accept posttextual capitalist theory or conclude that sexual identity, surprisingly, has intrinsic meaning, given that the premise of cultural theory is invalid. Posttextual capitalist theory suggests that the purpose of the reader is social comment. However, an abundance of discourses concerning cultural theory exist.

The main theme of the works of Tarantino is the difference between class and reality. Lacan uses the term 'the constructivist paradigm of consensus' to denote a mythopoetical reality. In a sense, the primary theme of Hamburger's[8] critique of postdialectic narrative is not discourse, but prediscourse.

If one examines cultural theory, one is faced with a choice: either reject the constructivist paradigm of consensus or conclude that discourse comes from the collective unconscious. De Selby[9] implies that the works of Eco are reminiscent of Gibson. It could be said that the characteristic theme of the works of Eco is the role of the poet as writer.

"Class is fundamentally responsible for the status quo," says Marx. Derrida uses the term 'cultural theory' to denote a self-referential whole. Thus, Bataille's essay on textual neomodern theory states that the significance of the observer is deconstruction.

The main theme of Hamburger's[10] critique of cultural theory is the fatal flaw, and therefore the meaninglessness, of semanticist sexual identity. The example of posttextual capitalist theory intrinsic to Eco's *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas* is also evident in *The Name of the Rose*, although in a more mythopoetical sense. In a sense, the primary theme of the works of Eco is the role of the artist as writer.

Lyotard uses the term 'neodialectic narrative' to denote the bridge between art and sexual identity. But if cultural theory holds, we have to choose between cultural theory and Sontagist camp.

The premise of the constructivist paradigm of consensus holds that the establishment is capable of truth, given that sexuality is interchangeable with narrativity. It could be said that a number of narratives concerning the role of the poet as writer may be discovered.

The subject is interpolated into a cultural theory that includes art as a totality. Thus, Wilson[11] implies that we have to choose between the subdialectic paradigm of context and Sartreist existentialism.

The subject is contextualised into a cultural theory that includes narrativity as a paradox. Therefore, if the constructivist paradigm of consensus holds, we have to choose between posttextual capitalist theory and cultural discourse.

Foucault's model of cultural theory holds that narrative is created by the masses. But Abian[12] implies that we have to choose between the pretextual paradigm of discourse and structural deconstruction.

The premise of the constructivist paradigm of consensus holds that consciousness is part of the absurdity of narrativity. Therefore, an

abundance of appropriations concerning posttextual capitalist theory exist.

The main theme of Bailey's[13] critique of cultural theory is a self-supporting reality. Thus, in *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs affirms conceptual capitalism; in *Port of Saints*, however, he reiterates the constructivist paradigm of consensus.

3. Burroughs and cultural theory

"Class is intrinsically used in the service of colonialist perceptions of sexual identity," says Bataille. If neotextual discourse holds, we have to choose between the constructivist paradigm of consensus and capitalist sublimation. In a sense, the characteristic theme of the works of Burroughs is the failure, and eventually the dialectic, of subdialectic class.

The futility, and thus the dialectic, of cultural theory which is a central theme of Burroughs's *Queer* emerges again in *The Soft Machine*. But Debord suggests the use of posttextual capitalist theory to deconstruct capitalism.

Many dematerialisms concerning a mythopoetical totality may be found. Thus, Foucault promotes the use of cultural theory to attack and modify

language. Posttextual capitalist theory states that the Constitution is capable of significance. Therefore, an abundance of narratives concerning cultural construction exist.

4. Contexts of genre

"Sexual identity is part of the dialectic of narrativity," says Debord; however, according to McElwaine[14] , it is not so much sexual identity that is part of the dialectic of narrativity, but rather the stasis, and subsequent collapse, of sexual identity. The premise of posttextual capitalist theory implies that the goal of the participant is social comment, given that Sartre's model of Lyotardist narrative is valid. In a sense, the subject is interpolated into a cultural theory that includes consciousness as a whole.

Hanfkopf[15] suggests that we have to choose between posttextual capitalist theory and Marxist socialism. Thus, the subject is contextualised into a modern narrative that includes narrativity as a paradox.

Derrida suggests the use of cultural theory to challenge archaic perceptions of society. In a sense, if subcapitalist desublimation holds, we have to choose between the constructivist paradigm of consensus and the dialectic paradigm of context.

5. Spelling and cultural theory

In the works of Spelling, a predominant concept is the distinction between figure and ground. In *Models, Inc.*, Spelling analyses neosemiotic textual theory; in *Charmed*, although, he examines cultural theory. It could be said that the primary theme of Hamburger's[16] critique of posttextual capitalist theory is the common ground between sexuality and class.

"Truth is responsible for capitalism," says Bataille. D'Erlette[17] states that we have to choose between cultural theory and the preconstructivist paradigm of expression. However, Bataille promotes the use of capitalist discourse to analyse society.

The subject is interpolated into a posttextual capitalist theory that includes narrativity as a totality. It could be said that a number of deconstructions concerning the role of the observer as reader may be discovered.

The main theme of the works of Spelling is the genre of posttextual sexual identity. But Lacan uses the term 'cultural theory' to denote the role of the participant as poet.

The subject is contextualised into a material paradigm of discourse that includes sexuality as a whole. It could be said that the primary theme of

Wilson's[18] essay on the constructivist paradigm of consensus is the absurdity, and some would say the futility, of neodialectic society.

1. Long, H. T. ed. (1977) *Cultural theory in the works of Mapplethorpe*. O'Reilly & Associates

2. la Fournier, V. G. U. (1986) *The Burning Fruit: The constructivist paradigm of consensus in the works of Gibson*. Harvard University Press

3. Hubbard, P. Q. ed. (1975) *Cultural theory and the constructivist paradigm of consensus*. Schlangekraft

4. Pickett, Y. (1999) *Cultural Theories: The constructivist paradigm of consensus in the works of Tarantino*. University of Michigan Press

5. Parry, I. J. Q. ed. (1971) *Marxism, cultural theory and textual discourse*. Loompanics

6. Brophy, C. (1995) *The Narrative of Paradigm: Cultural theory in the works of Tarantino*. Oxford University Press

7. Tilton, E. M. I. ed. (1986) *Cultural theory in the works of Madonna*. University of California Press

8. Hamburger, B. (1971) *Contexts of Defining characteristic: Cultural theory in the works of Eco*. Panic Button Books

9. de Selby, U. N. ed. (1996) *Cultural theory in the works of Glass*. Yale University Press

10. Hamburger, E. P. J. (1985) *Deconstructivist Theories: The constructivist paradigm of consensus and cultural theory*. And/Or Press

11. Wilson, M. N. ed. (1994) *The constructivist paradigm of consensus in the works of Burroughs*. Harvard University Press

12. Abian, H. L. J. (1973) *Forgetting Lyotard: Cultural theory in the works of Koons*. Schlangekraft
13. Bailey, N. Y. ed. (1989) *Cultural theory and the constructivist paradigm of consensus*. University of North Carolina Press
14. McElwaine, W. (1972) *Consensuses of Rubicon: The constructivist paradigm of consensus in the works of Spelling*. O'Reilly & Associates
15. Hanfkopf, U. W. S. ed. (1981) *The constructivist paradigm of consensus and cultural theory*. And/Or Press
16. Hamburger, Z. (1978) *Reinventing Expressionism: Cultural theory and the constructivist paradigm of consensus*. Schlangekraft
17. d'Erlette, Q. K. ed. (1983) *The constructivist paradigm of consensus and cultural theory*. University of Massachusetts Press
18. Wilson, Q. B. R. (1996) *Narratives of Stasis: Cultural theory in the works of Smith*. Panic Button Books

APPENDIX C, THE ATLAS GROUP

A critical essay about The Atlas Group by Lee Smith, published in ArtForum Magazine.

Missing in action: the art of the Atlas Group/Walid Raad

Walid Raad is writing a history of contemporary events in Lebanon, a seemingly comprehensive essay using video, the Internet, performance, collage, and digital photography, not to mention prose in English, French, and Arabic. Given its scope and the obsessive nature of the cataloguing, it's not surprising that Raad has enlisted help in the form of the Atlas Group, a foundation comprising various individuals and institutions, some of which exist independently of their relationship to Raad and some of which don't. That is, the Atlas Group is real, but some of its components are made from a fictional fabric.

Hostage: The Bachar Tapes (#17 and #31) English Version, 2001, tells the story of Souheil Bachar, whose testimony deals with Western hostages kidnapped in Beirut in the '80s. Bachar addresses various dimensions of the crisis, like writing the experience of captivity and how Arab and Western masculinity is figured in the writing. The author of the work, who as it happens doesn't exist in reality, was given to imagining himself as the sixth and only Arab hostage. My Neck Is Thinner Than a Hair, 2001-, a file devoted to the history of the approximately 2.45 car

bombs detonated in Lebanon between 1975 and 1991, derives from the notebooks and photographs of a certain Dr. Fadl Fakhouri, who during his lifetime, according to Raad, was the preeminent historian of the Lebanese civil wars. But there is no Dr. Fakhouri, and the vehicles seen in the collaged sheets that comprise the work, though based on the actual cars used as bombs during the seventeen-year period, were photographed recently on the streets of Lebanon by Raad.

Missing Lebanese Wars, 1996--, presents volume 72. of Dr. Fakhouri's notebooks, a series of photographs of horse-race finishes cut out from the Lebanese newspaper An-Nahar and taped to yellow notebook pages. The story is of a group of Lebanese historians who gathered weekly at a Beirut track to gamble, although not on the races themselves: They bet on how far the winning horse would be from the finish line the moment the photograph was taken and whether the horse would have crossed the line or would be approaching it. Their notes, the winning time, the date, etc. are recorded. The aphoristic descriptions of the winning historian were ostensibly written by Dr. Fakhouri, but in fact they are composed of found passages Raad culled from English-language newspapers.

For all Raad's involvement, the Atlas Group is a collective, which includes but is not exclusive to the real author and imaginary ones. For instance, in the car bomb piece, it consists of, among others, those who will contribute architectural models and interview subjects who

witnessed or were victimized by the bombs. Indeed, it even arguably includes the various militias that used the car bomb to terrorize and kill, since their contribution is an indispensable "document" of the military, economic, political, and social history of Lebanon.

Raad's work has enjoyed international success this past year. Included in Documenta II, he also was selected for the 2002. Whitney Biennial, where he presented a multimedia artist's talk in which some of the questions were scripted beforehand for planted audience members, as were some of the answers. Given the seamlessness of Raad's self-presentation, in his performances and his prose, and the amount of control he exercises over every detail of the project's composition and dissemination--continually retitling and refiling the work, revising biographies and histories--it's not surprising that much of the recent critical attention has focused narrowly on the nature of its authorship. The main story is commonly understood to be the Atlas Group itself rather than a further elaboration of the various stories the documents tell.

The conceit, after all, is undeniably a part of the work's appeal. The forged institution is part of the legacy of Conceptual art and literary modernism, kin to Broodthaers's Museum and Borges's library. Thus, there's certainly a temptation with Raad's work to see its central issues--which I take to be authority and authenticity--almost exclusively as

markers for a certain style of writing and making that is a little suspicious of those activities.

The other critical temptation is to assert that the work, grounded in the realities of violence, the Middle East, and geopolitics, is an emanation of the really real, where authority and authenticity are taken for granted. Even if the prospect of a native Arab perspective is seductively urgent given the historical events of the past couple of years, this reading seems a little less plausible. To be sure, the Lebanese wars gave rise to the Atlas Group's various projects but we're also meant to see the wars as somehow participants in the constantly expanding collective of the Atlas Group. To take its foundations down to the real (politics, war, violence) or to the imaginary (Conceptual art, literature) seems just another way of asking, Who's really responsible for the Atlas Group? Another, maybe more useful question is, Who is the Atlas Group responsible to?

Raad was born in Chbanieh, Lebanon, in 1967 and raised in predominantly Christian East Beirut. The '80s were an especially rough period, beginning with Israel's 1982 invasion, and in '83, he fled the country. Western nations, particularly Canada and the United States, made visas available to Lebanese Christians, and Raad left to study medicine at Boston University before transferring to the Rochester Institute of Technology for photography, and then going on to the

University of Rochester, where he earned a doctorate in visual and cultural studies.

Raad, who now teaches at Cooper Union and lives in Brooklyn and Beirut, explained in a recent interview that the US wasn't just a sanctuary during those years. "I never got to learn anything about the history of the Arab world," he said of his school years in Beirut, "or the history of Lebanon in a serious way. That training was in the United States." Nonetheless, Raad is probably not wrong to assume that most of his American audiences don't know much about Middle Eastern history. Thus, to avoid seeming to stack the deck on this particular subject, he'll usually have someone in the audience planted to answer those questions. The one Middle East topic he will handle himself is Iran-Contra, a strategy that places Raad in a lively cultural-historical tradition.

In the disastrous, illegal Iran-Contra affair, the Reagan administration forwarded profits from arms sold to the Iranians along to the Nicaraguan contras. In addition to the exchange of cash for weapons, the Iranians were to pressure their Lebanese clients, Islamic Jihad, to release the five Western hostages who had been in captivity for years; these men were included in *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes*. One of the hostages, Rev. Benjamin Weir, wrote after his release that during their captivity, "there became available a few books in English, provided not only for our

recreational interest but presumably for our education. There was Edward Said's *Covering Islam*."

This is a nice scene, sufficiently literary for the Atlas Group's files (though I don't believe it's remarked upon there). It's hard to imagine the intellectual somersaults required of both the hostages and their captors to engage a metanarrative like Said's, which, as Weir succinctly put it, "dealt with the misunderstanding of Islam in the West." And yet the question isn't so much how, at gunpoint, there could be much mediated misunderstanding, but rather when does the other, Islam, the Arab world, stop seeing itself as the other and trying to explain itself from that position.

It would be difficult to overstate Said's influence during the last quarter century. His 1978 book *Orientalism*, arguing that Western representations of the Orient were in league with efforts to control and dominate the Orient politically, inspired strong cultural and academic work from the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and various Western minority and diaspora communities to remake images of themselves after their own political desires. And yet only stewardship of the industry changed. It was no longer a case of, say, a white male Orientalist explaining the Orient, but the Orient was still the other, and the consumer, someone somewhere in the West, was essentially the same.

Moreover, and paradoxically in keeping with Said's thesis, Western cultural power, through its museums, universities, and press, made the Orientalist critique the dominant, international style of non-Western cultural production. As Lebanese Conceptual artist Walid Sadek said in a special Beirut issue of the Canadian art magazine Parachute: "A generation of students, apparently interested in issues of Arabic representation, spend their time and intellectual energy critiquing Western stereotypes and images of Empire...rather than actually looking at and analyzing contemporary artistic production in the Arab world."

The Atlas Group should be seen in the context of Arab art redirecting its gaze inward, making its own work, its own audience, and its own institutions--like the Atlas Group. The fiction of the Atlas Group "creates a position that you can speak with authority about," Raad says, giving a very localized account here of authority. He believes that the official political histories of events in Lebanon could not account for much of what was experienced during the time of the civil war. The car bomb, for example, and what automobiles seemed most likely to be used as explosives, changed the way the people of Beirut related to their city, physically and psychologically reorganizing their home. The problem wasn't just how to write in the margins of the official histories, but, since the stakes are so high in getting the story right, who would be allowed to write it. "A historian who has written the conventional, chronological, geopolitical, biographical history," Raad says. "And then say that historian has seen the limits and ends up with stuff that he doesn't know

what to do with, but that the Atlas Group received." A historian like Dr. Fakhouri. And who can speak with authority about captivity but a hostage like Bachar?

I think the larger, more general critique of authority and authenticity building in Raad's work is an attempt to come to terms with how much of the West, including its formulations of authority and authenticity, is part of the Arab world's cultural production. That is, the West comes not just in the form of the influential wish list of the international art world, its museums, curators, and critics, which takes local work into a space where it will not be understood as such. I suspect the reason Raad will talk with American audiences about Iran-Contra and the US's role in it is to illustrate that the Arab world's putative other is already there as raw material for this local art, which due to the recent history of its source can't help but be international. The wars not only involved the active participation of, among others, Syria, Iran, Israel, the PLO, France, and the US, they also spawned a Lebanese nation in which 50 percent of its citizens now live abroad.

This is from where the Atlas Group draws part of its energy--the obsessive attempts to manage and take seriously what Raad calls the "hysterical symptoms of the war." He recognizes both the impossibility of putting limits to a local art and a need for, to borrow a term from geopolitics, nation building. For Raad one of the more exciting tasks Lebanese artists and intellectuals have undertaken is the development

of a critical language in Arabic, a language distinct from Arabic's biographical, political, or art-historical vocabularies and one capable of encompassing culture and politics. A critical language, presumably, like Said's, but in Arabic and about the Arab world, not just Western constructions of it.

Raad has recently collaborated with members of the Arab Foundation for the Image, a nonprofit organization founded in Beirut to preserve and present visual culture, to produce *Mapping Sitting: On Portraiture and Photography* (2001), a book of archival images of the Arab world's twentieth century. Snapshots of Egyptian prisoners, Egyptian midwife certificates, Lebanese passport photos, group portraits of Jordanian army units, schools, families, sports teams: The Arab world began to think of itself in terms of its modern institutions by sitting for photographs of itself comprising those institutions.

One section in *Mapping Sitting*, "Surprise," is a sequence of hundreds of photographs of people caught walking on a Tripoli street in the '50s, with each photo framed by the same faded photomontage of the street. The construction gives the impression of physical movement, the movement of the past, and also the fragility of the present. It's a print variation on one of the most beautiful moments in Raad's work, the sunsets shot from a Beirut promenade in the video *The Dead Weight of a Quarrel Hangs*, 1996-99. The camera, progressively sped-up, is focused on the horizon line, and the view is increasingly obscured by people passing by until the

sun sinks into the water. This affinity between vanishing and speed--racehorses, cars, explosions--is a sort of signature of Raad's, catching something by surprise, just after or just before its moment.

Audiences typically associate this gesture with mourning or melancholia, but Raad's word for it, "missing," is kind of a play on poststructuralism's "presence." "'Missing' has this idea of longing for," Raad says, "yet the inability to arrive. It's as if you're always longing for that which you missed."

The horse-race piece is the probably the best example of "missing." The strategy banks on the fact that everything's a little off, a little late, or a little early--and the attempt to manage what's already unmanageable.

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