

- 1 Sigmund Freud, *Books*, 1967) 176
- 2 *Ibid.*, 117.
- 3 Yosef Haim Yer..., University Pres
- 4 Jacques Derrid..., of Chicago Pre
- 5 *Ibid.*, 94.
- 6 Giorgio Agan..., (Stanford: Sta
- 7 *Ibid.*, 176.
- 8 Jacques Derr..., 57.
- 9 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz...* (New York: Zone Books, 1999) 164.
- 10 Leonard Lawlor, 'Memory Becomes Electra' (review of Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*), *The Review of Politics*, No. 60 (Fall 1998) 796-8.
- 11 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, *op. cit.*, 100.

Dragan Kujundzic, 'Archigraphia: On the Future of Testimony and the Archive to Come', *Discourse*, vol. 25 (Michigan: Detroit, Winter 2002) 175-7; 181-3.

## The Atlas Group Archive The Secrets File//2002

### File title: *Secrets in the Open Sea*

*Secrets in the Open Sea* consists of 6 large photographic prints that were found buried 32 metres under the rubble during the 1992 demolition of Beirut's war-ravaged commercial districts. The prints were different shades of blue and each measured 110 x 183 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 represented in the small black-and-white prints, and it turned out that they were all individuals who had been found dead in the Mediterranean between 1975 and 1990.

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 nor about their colour.

The Atlas Group Archive. File title: *Secrets in the Open Sea*. By and/or attributed to: Anonymous. Number of plates in file: 6. Date of production: 2002. Dimensions of plates: 110 x 183 cm. Format: digital colour prints. [www.theatlasgroup.org](http://www.theatlasgroup.org)

**Document Title: *I Think It Would Be Better If I Could Weep***

The Corniche, Beirut's seaside walkway, is renowned these days as a pleasant place to walk, talk and jog. It is also known as the favourite meeting place of political pundits, spies, double agents, fortune tellers and phrenologists.

To keep an eye on all this activity, Lebanese security agents set up cameras in 1992 along the strip. The cameras were manned and were placed inside the mini-van cafés that lined the strip at 18-metre intervals. Every afternoon, the operator of camera # 17 diverted his camera's focus away from the designated target and focused it on the sunset. The operator was dismissed in 1996 but he was permitted to keep the sunset video footage.

The Atlas Group was able to find and interview the operator who had sent the videotape to The Atlas Group. He stated that he focused his camera on the sun when he thought it was about to set and that he returned to his duties once he thought the sun had set. Moreover, he stated that having grown up in East Beirut during the war years, he always yearned to watch the sunset from the Corniche located in West Beirut.

The Atlas Group Archive. Document title: *I Think It Would Be Better If I Could Weep*. By and/or attributed to: Operator # 17. Duration: 00:06:28:00. Date of production: 2000. Screening format: DVD. Colour: yes. Sound: no. [www.theatlasgroup.org](http://www.theatlasgroup.org)

The truth of the documents we archive/collect does not depend for us on their factual accuracy. In other words, it does not matter to us whether blue prints were found buried 32 metres under the rubble in downtown Beirut. We are not concerned with facts if facts are considered to be self-evident objects always already present in the world. Furthermore, we hold that this common-sense definition of facts, this theoretical primacy of facts, must be challenged. Facts have to be treated as processes. One of the questions we find ourselves asking is: How do we approach facts not in their crude facticity but through the complicated mediations by which facts acquire their immediacy?

What we have are objects and stories that should not be examined through the conventional but reductive binary, fiction and non-fiction. We proceed from the consideration that this distinction is a false one and does not do justice to the rich and complex stories that circulate widely and that capture our attention and belief. We must also say that it remains unclear to us what we mean by this proposition, but we are working on clarifying it. [...]

We do not consider 'The Lebanese Civil War' to be a settled chronology of events, dates, personalities, massacres, invasions, but rather we also want to consider it as an abstraction constituted by various discourses and, more importantly, by various modes of assimilating the data of the world.

We proceed then from the hypothesis that 'The Lebanese Civil War' is not a self-evident episode, an inert fact of nature. This war is not constituted by a unified and coherent object situated in the world. On the contrary, for us 'The Lebanese Civil War' is constituted by and through various actions, situations, people and accounts, some of which are manifest in the documents we presented. Not attempting to situate the war in this or that event, person, space and time, we ask and proffer answers to the following questions: How does one write a history of the civil wars in Lebanon? How are the objects, thoughts and emotions of the wars apprehended? [...]

This difficulty [of thinking about and representing the various experiences that are constituted by and that constitute the Lebanese civil war] derives not simply from the 'plurality' of experience, as determined by manifold class, sexual, gender, religious, ideological and political locations; more fundamentally, it remains difficult to describe specifically what we mean when we speak of 'the experience of' the civil war. [...] How do we represent traumatic events of collective historical dimensions when the very notion of experience is

itself in question? [...]

We have never referred to The Atlas Group as a fictional foundation. In most instances, we refer to The Atlas Group simply as a foundation. It is a foundation in the sense that with this project we are founding, building, setting on foot an operation and giving form to a project that is concentrated on the contemporary history of Lebanon. But if you are going to refer to The Atlas Group as a 'fictional foundation' then it is important to be precise about the definitions of the words 'fictional' and 'foundation' in order to avoid the definition of The Atlas Group as a product of the imagination with no material presence. We would refer to The Atlas Group as a fictional foundation if the word 'fictional' connoted 'forming' and 'fashioning' and not 'arbitrary invention'. We do not mind other definitions of 'fictional' as 'feigning', 'counterfeit', 'dissimulation' and 'pretence'.

Our aim with this project has never been to fool viewers and listeners by presenting stories and documents about anything and anyone in order to see what we can 'get away with'. Our interest is in how certain stories and situations capture the attention and belief of viewers and listeners. But we are not investigating this phenomenon in the abstract but specifically in relation to the history of Lebanon. We have always maintained that part of our interest with this project is to examine what has, is and can be said, believed and known about Lebanon, its residents, history, culture, economy and politics. This project operates between what is sayable, believable and known (as true or false). And we do not mean to imply that these terms have a negative relation to each other, that belief is the negative of knowledge, for example. Nor that belief is a flawed cognitive relation to the world and knowledge a correct one. If we proceed from the understanding that belief is the fundamental attitude that a person has when he or she holds that a proposition is true, and that knowledge is certified true belief (by virtue of evidence), then clearly we need to ask about how any proposition becomes true or false and what constitutes evidence. In this regard, and as has been argued, it is clear that what we hold to be true is not necessarily consistent with what is true at the level of the senses, reason, consciousness and discourse but also with what holds to be true at the level of the unconscious. Hence we would urge you to approach these documents we present as we do, as 'hysterical symptoms' based not on any one person's actual memories but on cultural fantasies erected from the material of collective memories.

The Atlas Group (Walid Ra'ad), excerpts from 'Let's Be Honest, the Rain Helped: Excerpts from an Interview with the Atlas Group', in *Review of Photographic Memory*, ed. Jalal Toufic (Beirut: Arab Image Foundation, 2004) 44-5.

From 1997 my work became more and more centred on collecting existing documents. While doing fieldwork for works such *All is Well at the Border* (1997) and *Crazy of You* I found documents that helped me study and assess complex situations which provided me with keys to understanding the complex society to its image(s). I ended up incorporating some of the videos but there remained significant material that was not included.

In *All is Well at the Border*, I worked on video operations led by members of the Lebanese resistance during the occupation in south Lebanon, and while researching the conditions in Israeli-controlled prisons, I gained access to Nabih's letters. Nabih was caught during a resistance operation in a military court in Israel and sentenced to fifteen years in prison until 1998, when he was released as part of a political prisoner exchange with the Lebanese government. His letters showed a sixteen year old boy in prison, maturing, trying to convince his mother and family that he was doing well, he had friends, and that he was learning like anyone else could be learning in school. His attitude was 'all is well'. For me the letters were about distance, which was the distance that separated the occupied zone in south Lebanon from the rest of the country, mentally and geographically. It was precisely this distance that I tried to communicate in my video. I ended up using only excerpts from the letters and kept the rest in my archive.<sup>1</sup>

In my video *This Day* (2000-03), I tried to focus on the collection of all sorts of documents, photographs, notebooks, and attachments of pictures and testimonies from areas of conflict in Lebanon and Palestine. In the context of this work, these documents