Speak, Memory
on archives and other strategies of (re)activation of cultural memory
This book is published on the occasion of the symposium “Speak, Memory: on archives and other strategies of (re)activation of cultural memory” that took place at the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo on October 28-30, 2010.

Editor
Laura Carderera

Contributors
Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, Hussein Omar, Rasha Salti and Kristine Khouri, Miguel A. López, Claire Hsu, the Editors of Bidoun, Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin, Jesús Carrillo and Mai Elwakil.

Graphic Designer
Lisa Kreutzer (www.lisakreutzer.com)

Symposium Curator
Laura Carderera

Symposium Project Manager
Alexandra Stock

Symposium Photographer
Graham Waite

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Foreword

This book is a synthesis and a further exploration into some of the questions that were raised during the “Speak, Memory” symposium that took place at the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo on October 28-30, 2010.

Over a period of three days, “Speak, Memory: on archives and other strategies of (re)activation of cultural memory” set out to explore ways of recovering a vanishing history of the Middle East’s neglected 20th-century cultural and artistic movements. The event brought together artists, curators, historians, writers, archivists, collectors and museum professionals to engage in a critical discussion on the state of archives and existing scholarship on the region’s recent art history. Rather than limiting the discussions to the Middle East, the symposium equally sought to engage in a discussion with archival initiatives from other regions that have traditionally been underrepresented in art historical narratives, including Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Although largely based on the symposium presentations, the intention of this publication is to go beyond a mere documentation of the event and delve deeper into some of the issues that were touched upon.

This book is structured around three main thematic divisions. The first chapter—“Making Memory History”—was inspired by the symposium presentation by Hussein Omar and Lucie Ryzova and starts with an essay by Omar that discusses the tensions between notions of memory and history while looking at the “Downtown History and Memory Centre” project, an initiative that seeks to recover the ‘lost’ history of downtown Cairo, but first and foremost is questioning what is considered to be “historical.” Omar’s contribution is followed by two essays by Miguel A. López and co-founders of the “History of Arab Modernities in the Visual Arts Study Group” Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti. These essays present historiographic strategies and specific case studies in Latin America and the Middle East that are reconsidering and reconstructing the history of artistic practices or events that have been silenced, forgotten, misinterpreted or simply dismissed.

The second chapter—“Making Memory Speak”—highlights artistic or exhibition strategies that are revisiting past artistic movements or “activating” archival material, hence allowing it to “speak” to a larger audience. Because what is the point of collecting, of creating an archive, if nobody uses it? In this sense, Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin’s artistic practice, and in particular their recent “exhumation” of the Egyptian surrealist moment, provides a fascinating illustration of the role that artists can play in the reactivation.

1) Symposium proceedings and video footage can be viewed on the website www.speakmemory.org.
of cultural memory and its presentation to a broader public. Similarly, the Bidoun Library project provides a fertile ground for the exploration of how archival material and collections can be re-organized and presented to speak and engage with different publics in contexts as diverse as Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Beirut, New York or Cairo.

The third and final chapter—“Opening Up the Archives”—builds on some of the discussions that took place during the symposium, which revolved around the strengths and limitations of institutional archiving initiatives versus more grassroots or seemingly “independent” archival initiatives led by artists or private arts organizations. Claire Hsu’s essay offers an invaluable insight on the ways in which the Asia Art Archive is constantly seeking to reinvent and challenge itself to avoid the pitfalls of institutional archiving and allow for a multiplicity of narratives that accommodates the different expectations of users, donors, and partners. Finally, the conversation piece with Jesús Carrillo of the Reina Sofía Museum complicates the institutional versus independent dichotomy by presenting how Spain’s largest national modern and contemporary art museum is seeking to create a new notion of the museum as an “institution of the commons” that does not monumentalize what it explains, but rather opens up the possibility of engaging in a multiplicity of readings. Hence this museum’s attempts to create a “universal archive”—a sort of archive of archives—that lends a voice and listens to those who have none.

As we were working on this publication, the January 25 revolution erupted in Egypt, forever transforming the socio-political landscape of the country. In the face of such events, the discussions held during the symposium on the politics of archiving and history-writing reached a whole new dimension. We therefore felt compelled to address this in an epilogue to the publication. In an essay entitled “Can a history of the January 25 Egyptian revolution be written?” Mai Elwakil explores how the government’s tight grip on information access was ultimately broken by the emergence of citizen journalism and documentation strategies supported by social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. These social media are creating a valuable archive of documentary footage and testimonies in of itself. However, various government archives have been or are being destroyed as this publication goes to print. This is particularly alarming because although much of the events on the street can be inferred from the documentary footage available, how the government made its decisions during the revolution remains speculative. The way that these documents are safeguarded, collected and made accessible will ultimately determine the way in which the history of this revolution will be written.

The symposium and this book would have never been possible without the generous support of our funders, which include the Bohen Foundation, Arts Collaboratory, Prince Claus Fund, Goethe Institut, the Spanish Embassy and Pro Helvetia. In addition, I would like to extend a very special thanks to Fred Henry of the Bohen Foundation and William Wells for supporting and believing in the project from its outset. My greatest gratitude also goes to the entire Townhouse staff and interns, and in particular to symposium Project
Lost and found:
On artists, artworks and archives

For three days in the fall of 2010, around 120 people shunned the Cairo sunshine to sit in a darkened theater for hours on end. The “Speak, Memory” symposium on archival practices and other strategies of (re)activation of cultural memory, organized by Laura Carderera of the Townhouse Gallery of Contemporary Art, gathered a polyglot mix of artists, curators, academics and independent researchers from more than 30 cities scattered across four continents. Every morning they gathered for coffee in a downtown alleyway strewn with colored flags and dotted with car mechanics, and then crammed into the black-walled, tin-roofed Rawabet Theater to present their work to an audience composed primarily of their peers.

“Speak, Memory” was not a public event per se. A registration process and a waiting list effectively curtailed what might have been a much larger and more boisterous crowd. Nor was it the first such discussion of its kind. Archives have been a hot topic in the art world for decades, the subject of countless conferences, exhibitions, essays and anthologies, and the source of both a canon and an industry of archival thought. At least two of the participants in “Speak, Memory” had assembled their own lightweight libraries of key archival texts, which they readily shared (and debated) with other attendees.

Moreover, the symposium deliberately coincided with the fifth installation of the Bidoun Library, a traveling collection of books, magazines and ephemera materials organized by Bidoun Projects, and the second iteration of the workshop “Don’t Wait for the Archive,” led by Public Access Digital Media Archive (PAD MA), a project that facilitates the storage, transcription, and annotation of many hundreds of hours of video footage, and exists as a thinktank, an online platform, a suite of open-source software applications, and an art project all at once.

This exercise in setting the scene and describing the context of the symposium is a journalistic reflex (or a critical handicap), I admit. But the point is also to illustrate the extent to which “Speak, Memory” picked up and furthered a conversation that has been ongoing for some time. The atmosphere didn’t privilege performance or display. It wasn’t about the show or the spectacle of debate. Even where artists presented their own work, the form of the artist’s talk delivered in a closed room is a very different mode of address than that of an exhibition mounted in a public space. As such, the symposium felt more like a workshop or colloquium, affording the space and time to raise questions, identify tensions and test out different forms of collective effort.

Across 18 different presentations, what the participants in “Speak, Memory” shared was clear: a habit or practice of collecting things. Those things included photographs, videos and the remnants of ephemeral artworks; books, magazines and exhibition catalogues; political posters, avant-garde manifestos and the papers of imprisoned political dissidents; vintage paper and the documentation of belle époque architectural details; plus letters, invoices, receipts, notes on a photographer’s chemical solutions, buried prints, scratched negatives, props, a rolodex, pages upon pages of oral history transcripts and a few anecdotes culled from 19th-century police records.

What set the symposium apart from other events, however, was the singular focus of its theme on one hand—specifically memory, its retrieval, preservation and activation—and the broad diffusion of its participants and disciplinary parameters on the other. Loosely, “Speak, Memory” rooted itself in the region, the art world and the field of art history. Almost all of the archival initiatives at stake are concerned with the histories of past artistic practices that have been neglected, ignored, buried or hijacked by a confluence of different factors, from wars and dictatorships to institutional neglect and a hungry art market. But at the same time, the speakers straddled many different territories and areas of expertise, raising trenchant issues about ethics and aesthetics, rights and responsibilities, bodies of law and approaches to different technologies. If anything, the common ground was wherever “official” archives have been adversely affected by the gross inequities of politics, history or capital (foreign occupation and meddling, colonialism and the crumbling of

Kaelen Wilson-Goldie
various leftist liberation movements, nationalist ideologies and authoritarian regimes, crass capitalism, neoliberal agendas, and even rapacious real estate developers).

As such, it was perhaps no surprise that a number of opposing ideas were highlighted during the discussions for “Speak, Memory” as contrasts were drawn between state-sponsored and independent organizations, individual and collective efforts, the official versus the personal, the historical versus the narrative or anecdotal, the authoritative and monolithic versus the multiple and alternative, vertical and horizontal approaches to ordering material, static versus dynamic methods of presentation, exclusive versus participatory forms of engagement, and the preservation versus creation of the images, objects and documents in archives themselves. But perhaps another way to cut across the symposium is to consider a different division, which was alluded to during the symposium, but never discussed at length: Where does the line fall, and to what effect, between artworks that are made from archival material (whether found, synthesized, feigned or produced) and projects that open up archival material for public use, leaving the work of research, interpretation, synthesis and production to an unknown and unpredictable audience?

At this point, archives have come to constitute an artistic medium in and of themselves, and the term archival practice connotes a relatively clear and recognizable set of artistic strategies. Archival artworks are by no means limited to the traditional grid-like display of Gerhard Richter’s highly influential Atlas, nor are they restricted to the exhibition of an archive as such, as was the case with Jayce Salloum’s magisterial installation “Kan Wa Makan” (“There Was and There Was Not”). The room-sized installation is filled with a massive and meticulously organized cache of material gathered over the course of a year spent in Lebanon, and related to various representations of the nation in newspapers, books, snapshots, postcards, lottery tickets, matchboxes, the tailfin of an Israeli bomb, and more. The field of archival artwork is arguably as vast and unwieldy as photography, and overlaps generously with both research practice and an increasingly prevalent style and aesthetic of accumulation.

The art scene in Beirut has proven a particularly fertile ground for such work, ranging from the “Atlas Group” (Walid Raad’s long-term project investigating the contemporary history of Lebanon’s episodic civil wars) to Lamia Joreige’s “Objects of War,” Rabih Mroué’s performance pieces Looking for a Missing Employee and Make Me Stop Smoking, Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige’s Khiam and Akram Zaatari’s work on the archive of Hashem El Madani’s Studio Shehrazade (along with the more personal affects of former leftist fighters such as Ali Hashisho and Nabih Awada).

To that list, one could add Rania Stephan’s film The Three Disappearances of Souad Hosni, which currently exists in the form of an 11-minute trailer to a full-length version the artist has been working on fitfully for the past five years. A strange, elegiac portrait of the screen siren known as the Cinderella
of Egyptian cinema, *Three Disappearances* is composed entirely of sounds, images, bits of dialogue and scenes of intrigue taken from cheap, crude, pirated VHS copies of Hosni’s films, which Stephan has been collecting from street stalls on the edges of Cairo (she’s found 70 films so far, and is still searching for 12 more). Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc’s *Foreword to Guns for Banta*, an installation that draws on the work of the filmmaker Sarah Maldoror and doubles as a research project, could also join the list. (Abonnenc is hoping to find the missing reels of a film that was seized by the Algerian government in 1971—a film that may turn out to be a masterpiece or a myth.) Another worthy addition would be Basma El Sharif’s *We Began By Measuring Distance*, based on an archive of video news footage capturing the aftermath of a horrific massacre of a young family in Gaza; or Daniella Arbid’s *This Smell of Sex*, a short, racy film that pairs found Super 8 footage of a young woman in her bedroom with a raucous soundtrack of the filmmaker’s friends and colleagues describing sexual encounters in extremely graphic language.

All of these works involve gathering and synthesizing old, historical, found or previously existing material. All of them either draw on or constitute both formal and informal collections of visual matter. All of them involve complex negotiations with sources to gain access to the material and permission to use it in the production of autonomous and explicitly authored artworks. All of them, moreover, become public the moment they tap into the channels of production, display and dissemination that the art world affords (though art-house cinemas and the international film festival circuit have proven equally open and amenable to works like these).

It is tempting to push the archival element aside and consider, as one among many possible readings or interpretations, how these projects constitute a new thread of feminist practice in and around the region, and a willingness to delve into issues of gender and sexuality in a far more probing manner than a previous wave of works equating feminism, or the feminine, with a few veils, loose threads and calligraphy scrawls on skin. But like the best of archival artworks, these pieces grapple with how history is written and how knowledge is produced. Moreover, after Foucault, they challenge the notion that archives ruthless or firmly govern what may be said or not, recorded or not. State archives, maybe. Archival materials that are located, obsessed over, studied and synthesized into artworks, not so much. These works do actually say the unspeakable, register what has been lost and revive what has been forgotten.

But the ethical dimension of an autonomous artwork authored under an artist’s name is very different from that of a collaborative project that assembles an archive and opens it up for public use under the rubric of a group or an institution. Both are intensely complex—consider the relationships that exist between Raad and the archives of As-Safir or An-Nahar (whose images feature in works such as *My Neck is Thinner than a Hair*), between Zaatari and Madani, between Stephan and the late Hosni or between Abonnenc and Maldoror (who has pledged to complete her missing film with him if he ever does find...
Stills from Basma al-Sharif’s *We Began By Measuring Distance*, mini DV ntsc, 19 minutes, 2009. Courtesy Basma al-Sharif.
Most of these artworks arrive in public fully formed and complete. You can embrace them, reject them, quarrel with them, or read whatever you want into them. But you can’t really pull them apart to see what they’re made of. To a certain extent, you have to respect them as whole, complex things. An artist places his or her work in an art space and says, in effect, this is me, this is mine. Whatever negotiations led to its production are essentially private. The artist has no duty to disclose them. Nor does the artist have any duty to share the back end of the work with an audience. Add to this a tendency among a number of contemporary artists to exert a great deal of control over how their works are interpreted and the story they tell, and you have something of a rift.

The same cannot quite be said for the projects such as Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti’s “History of Arab Modernities in the Visual Arts Study Group” (which, curiously, grew out of a period of research for Walid Raad), or Red Conceptualismos del Sur, or PAD.MA, which seem, so far, to relish the potential of archival materials not to spark singular narratives, but to spark multiple, contradictory and contentious narratives that may be layered over and across the archive itself. Seventeen years ago, Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever* equated access to the archive with political power. Seven years ago, Hal Foster’s “An Archival Impulse” described the archive as a site of utopian potential. The shift from the autonomous archival artwork to the collaborative archival project seems to suggest that the notion of an archive as a public or civic space, where forms of collaboration as well as contestation may be played out, is leaking outside of the art world proper. It is in these interstitial spaces and hybrid projects, which draw on the art world but also go far beyond it in many different directions, that the most complex, searching, open-ended discussions about what is right and proper, useful and productive, meaningful and enduring in relation to the archive will probably take place.

*Kaelen Wilson-Goldie is a writer and an art critic based in Beirut.*
Hussein Omar

Making memory history

“Archive logic” bears heavily on the mind and practice of the professional historian. The excavation of “properly archival” evidence is the measuring stick by which historical research is judged, and to which all other outlying forms of evidence must be compared. The notion that archival research is factual or closer to the truth continues to dominate professional history-writing as much in Egypt as it does in many faculties and research institutes around the world. As such, memoirs, oral testimonies and autobiographies are dismissed as falling under the auspices of Memory, assumed to be closer to fiction than History. Within this paradigm, “History” (with a capital “H”), which takes the archive as its basis, is assumed to be disinterested, verifiable and truthful. On the other hand, “Memory” is characterized by “lapses of forgetting, silences and exclusions.” It is cast as fickle and therefore un-authoritative and unreliable. Thus, where oral histories, letters, autobiographies, and testimonies (those forms of evidence characterized as Memory) throw doubt on dominant narratives, they are dismissed as unreliable. Given what we know about History’s (and therefore the Archive’s) role in legitimating male, elite and nationalist dominance, it is no surprise that sources produced by women, workers and ...[the subaltern voice] are dismissed as falling under the auspices of Memory, assumed to be closer to fiction than History. Within this paradigm, “History” (with a capital “H”),

These contrasting attitudes have fractured faculties of history. The split divides those who count themselves as social historians (read empiricist, archival and reality-seeking), and those who describe themselves as cultural historians (read textual, linguistic and discursive analysis). The former is the descendant of 19th-century social science, whereas the latter was born out of the “linguistic turn,” and 20th-century anthropology. In this battle, the archive has come to symbolize the putative irreconcilability of these two historiographical approaches; for social historians it is to be treated as source, for cultural historians, as a subject in its own right.

Out of this fundamental rejection of social history the “archival-turn” was born. It sought to redress the blindness to political motives behind archive assembly and creation that permeated historical practice. The new cultural

historians taught us that far from being innocent repositories of documents, archives—national archives, in particular—were concerned with doctoring and engineering narratives the state wanted to tell about the nation it purportedly represented. This historical imagining was a crucial component of the state-building exercise. And like other less reliable source caches, the archive too was plagued with lapses, silences and exclusions, many of them deliberate. As such, we could no longer naïvely use the archive as a mere source, but rather we had to examine it critically as a historically contingent subject.

Khaled Fahmy and Yoav Di Capua, are just two of the scholars who have applied this thinking to the Egyptian case. Essentially, the current National Archive is descended from a series of disparate archives cobbled together in the 1920s. This new centralized archive was designed to provide the infrastructure behind professional history writing, the primary aim of which was to forge a monolithic national (and more importantly monarchical) identity for the country. During this state-building period, documents that did not promote a certain view of Egyptian history, and the reigning monarchy of the time, were either discarded or destroyed.

True to its etymological origins, the National Archive of Egypt continues to be held within the state’s coercive grip. State Security (amm al-dawla) plays arbiter. It continues to viciously restrict access to the documents to all but a privileged few: these tend to be professional historians whose research is perceived as non-subversive to the state and its narratives, which are overwhelmingly nationalist. These self-proclaimed gatekeepers of Egypt’s past are thus able to determine and drive most of the research conducted on the country’s modern history. Moreover, the Egyptian archive is notoriously unreliable; its self-proclaimed mission—to preserve documents pertaining to the history of modern Egypt—is consistently undermined by cataloguing problems, disorganization and theft. Elsewhere in the region, civil war, lack of funding, and often lack of interest, has resulted in the eradication of large and important collections of documents, both public and private. Research agendas, instead of being problem-driven, have often been determined by what material was available for study.

In a creative attempt to circumvent the difficulties posed by the “gatekeepers of the Egyptian past”, a younger generation of scholars has shifted the focus of its enquiry from the state to its subjects. The most important, recent works of Egyptian history written in the West have thus relied heavily on periodicals or print material found in European or American research institutes, or in

2) Ibid., p. 22.
3) Ibid., p. 21.
private collections. Lucie Ryzova is among the vanguard of new historians writing on modern Egypt. Her research uses non-archival, private material found in the old paper market to write the cultural history of the Efendi middle class in the interwar period. Likewise, Salti and Khouri’s “History of Arab Modernities in the Visual Arts Study Group” has begun to creatively generate primary sources, where there had been none. In both cases, the much-lamented absence of sources has reinvigorated debates, multiplied perspectives, and allowed for new readings. As such, this has allowed extremely interesting and creative investigations into otherwise elusive, nebulous, and contested analytic concepts such as modernity.

The “Downtown History and Memory Project” is one other such initiative. At the heart of its mission is to recover the “lost” history of the area known as downtown Cairo. More generally, it seeks to question what we consider to be historical in the first place.

Since its establishment in the late 19th century by Khedive Ismail, the downtown area has long served as the city’s commercial heart, as well as its political nexus. It was a rich and multi-layered district where people of many creeds, classes and cultures co-existed, often peacefully, but sometimes not. Yet the intricate and complex history of downtown Cairo is as of yet, unwritten.

Where writings on downtown do exist, they have tended to privilege its architectural heritage. These narratives have tended to focus on pashas and their bankers, on architects and their patrons, and on foreign communities in displacement. Although the debt we owe to this first wave of writers such as Mercedes Volait and Samir Raafat, who documented much of the early history of the district, is very great indeed, the picture they paint is narrow, incomplete and unsatisfactory.

Current efforts to revive and restore downtown obsessively focus on the district’s architectural heritage, and are informed by such narratives. Typically embedded within such narratives is the idea that the 1952 revolution was single-handedly responsible for ending the belle époque, the flight of its cosmopolitan elite and the subsequent proletarianization. This downtown is populated with the Greek green grocer, the Italian cabinetmaker and the Armenian photographer. This nostalgic obsession with the city’s cosmopolitanism has led to its other stories being forgotten.

Academic literature on the other hand, dominated by urban histories, has painted a somewhat different picture. In their version, Cairo conforms to the classic dual city model, common to a number of colonial cities from Delhi to Lahore to Fes to Tunis etc. The image they paint is of a Cairo that is split into its modern, cosmopolitan and foreign center (downtown or Isma’iliyya), and a timeless, traditional, oriental ‘rest’, to the south and south-east. This model grossly distorts the actual history of Cairo, and of downtown in particular.

Far from being a foreign enclave, it was, and to some extent still is, a vibrant, culturally hybrid space where Egyptians lived and worked alongside foreigners. Downtown has been home to manifold social, cultural, and political movements, with a legacy far more complex and sophisticated than the “Paris on the Nile” model has allowed.

It is precisely to critique these overpowering myths that we have decided to create an archive; one that is open and accessible and which documents the stories of ordinary people as well as of downtown’s more famous inhabitants. At a time when the area is purportedly threatened, if not by gentrification, then certainly by tumultuous change, there is a pressing need to create alternative repositories for historical material.


13) C. Myntti, Paris Along the Nile: Architecture in Cairo from the Belle Époque (Cairo, 2003).
This is to be carried out through two main avenues, the first of which is an oral history project focusing on the area east of Tahrir Square. Within the politicized climate in which we are operating, one is cautious of the naïve assumptions oral historians have about “giving a voice to the voiceless, a narrative to the story-less and power to the marginalized.” Far from simply being a process of “facile democratization,” oral history can “be a means for transforming both the content and purpose of history. It can be used to change the focus of history itself, and open up new areas of enquiry.” It can perhaps start the process by which those stories sidelined, and cast as memories may be transformed into something more substantive. By doing so, the project aims not only to generate new types of material for the historian, but also to encourage downtown’s inhabitants to think of themselves and their own lives as worthy historical subjects.

Concurrently, we aim to run what we call the “Sandara” (attic) project. This is predominantly concerned with the collection of letters, diaries, photographs, ephemera and objects of everyday life. It is our long-term aim to foster a sense of trust within the community, while encouraging a temporal and qualitative broadening of what people think of as historically valuable. Through a sustained campaign—and this is something that will take a long time to develop—we hope to encourage people to bring forth junk that might have otherwise been sold by the kilo for little money.

As historians, who know well that discarded material is often the most interesting, we must dangerously second-guess what will constitute historical material for future researchers. As one scholar rightly suggests, the grammatical tense of the archive is that of the future perfect: “When it will have been.” But we are also painfully aware of the dangers of fetishizing the past out of proportion. We struggle to overcome “the ordinariness... of [most] archives, and the everyday disappointments that historians know they will find there.”

It strikes me as important that alongside a reconsideration of what we think is historical, we also need to reconsider when we think is historical. In the recent Egyptian historical imagination, the pre-1952 era has been very much aestheticized, popularized and celebrated. The much-lamented death of “Cairo Cosmopolitan” has led to a disregard of the city’s post-Nasserist history. We are indeed very much interested in what happened to the downtown area in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s when rent control was introduced, when many middle class inhabitants moved out of the city center and into more modern suburbs such as Nasr City, and the process by which downtown lost its residential character. The vintage paper and antique market has a bias towards preserving material from the pre-revolutionary period.

At the beginning of this chapter, I described how professional historians have traditionally been obsessed with “patrolling the border” between “History” and “Memory.” Our project aims to do just the opposite: to open these frontiers, to blur the boundary. And in doing so, it aims to make real one historian’s famous injunction to “make memory history.”

Hussein Omar is a history PhD candidate at Merton College, Oxford and the co-founder of the “Downtown Memory and History Project.”

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18) Ibid., p. 9.
19) A. Burton, * Dwelling*, p. 27.
Kristine Khouri & Rasha Salti

Beirut’s Musée Imaginaire: The promise of modernity in the age of mechanical reproduction

Introduction: The study group

In the past few years, a more serious scholarly and academic interest in the history, anthropology and theory of art and cultural production in the modern and contemporary Arab world have emerged. Until now, scholarship in these various fields has been sparse and scattered, furthermore, the scarcity and paucity of primary sources has proven restrictive to scholars, researchers, historians, and curators. The “History of Arab Modernities in the Visual Arts Study Group” was established by the authors of this essay for the multi-fold purposes of exploring key questions in the history of modern visual arts, facilitating the collection of primary sources, disseminating information and creating a forum for discussion. This essay’s authors are two independent researchers who have decided to share means and resources in the pursuit of similar and overlapping research projects.

At its core, the mission of the shared research proposes a rethinking of the historiography of modern Arab art. Existing works (in English, Arabic and French), have almost systematically ignored a social historical approach and interpretive framework, and have been almost exclusively biased towards artists’ narratives. They do not answer how the paradigm of the modern permeated the various realms of society and came to prevail, or how modernity conjugated with ideologies salient at the time do they explain how the postmodern turn came about (often experienced as a rupture). In reaction to the paucity and difficult access to primary sources, the study group is committed to making findings from its own research as widely accessible as possible. Interviews, in their raw video and audio formats, as well as in their transcribed text forms will be published, as well as scans of printed documents.

The study group has been in existence for slightly longer than a year. Research has thus far been conducted in Lebanon and Syria. Our methodology includes investigating major international and regional exhibitions, biennials, and festivals deemed as milestones and resurrecting their stories. What follows is the story of “The First Imaginary Museum in the World,” a curious exhibition that premiered in Beirut in 1957 and is said to have toured the country. We chose to investigate it because it is not only the first exhibit of its kind to have come to the region, but also because it is very straightforward about the mission of disseminating a particular notion of a worldly modernity cast in a narrative of the history of art that prevails until today.

The Landscape: Lebanon in the late 1950s

In the brief history of the Lebanese republic, the year 1957 is now remembered as the precedent to the outbreak of the first armed and bloody civil conflict that erupted in the republic and instigated the intervention of the US Navy in 1958. Unlike neighboring Syria, or Palestine, the birth of a sovereign Lebanese republic was not mired in violent conflict with the occupying colonial power. An armed confrontation was averted when indigenous elites—comprised of representatives of various political parties as well as families with economic and political sway—negotiated independence with the French mandate governing body in 1943. This relatively uneventful coming into being was not a herald for the stability of the country. The republic was fastened on a national covenant of power sharing between its various religious sectarian communities, based on demographic estimates, and economic and power relations between religious sects and the departing French colonial government.

For Lebanon, the nakba (catastrophe) of Palestine brought a mixed bag of fortunes and misfortunes. On the one hand, the country became host to some of Palestine’s most influential business elites, and Beirut’s port took over the preeminent role that Haifa’s port played vis-à-vis the growing economy of oil transport from the Arabian peninsula to the rest of the world. On the other hand, Lebanon hosted some 120,000 Palestinian refugees forcibly driven out of their homes and villages by Israeli armed forces. The settlement of the refugees was unplanned and turbulent, it also intimated Lebanon into the question of Palestine. After the Free Officers’ coup in Egypt in 1952, and Nasser’s rise to power, the spread of pan-Arabism in the region, the rise of anti-colonial liberation movements and the Cold War’s reconfiguration of what would become the “Third World” into contested terrains of influence and containment, Lebanon was coveted by the US and the Soviet Union as a strategic gateway for access to the Middle East, at the crossroads between East and West.

The year 1957 was the last year in president Camille Chamoun’s (1900-1987) tremulous first term as president. The global boom in oil trade had brought some prosperity to the country after its integration into the oil economy, but Chamoun was a notoriously autocratic president who had given market economics free reign. In addition to fanning the flames of sectarian tension (according to the divide to rule principle), class disparities had steepened. In April of 1957, Chamoun signed the country into the Eisenhower doctrine officially, and doctored his re-election to a second term in May of the same year. A year later, after the assassination of a journalist vehemently critical of Chamoun’s policies, corruption and ideological leanings, a popular insurrection rocked the country.

Neither the republic’s protagonists, ideologues, nor writ ever favored the establishment of a strong, interventionist state. This said, the intimate connection between the country’s political and economic elites has been a salient motif since independence. This remains the case regarding the production
of art and culture in Lebanon. The Lebanese state and successive govern-
ments have not been seriously invested in setting up institutions to support,
 foster and promote artistic and cultural production. A culture ministry was only
instituted in 1992, until then there had been a Directorate for Culture under
the auspices of the Ministry of Education. Lebanon has very few state-owned
museums, none dedicated to modern art. The Musée Sursock is a privately
managed and funded institution, the only museum that houses a collection of
modern art and organizes salons (fall and spring) in the 19th-century French
tradition, where established and emerging artists are able to display their
work. The Directorate for Culture, and ultimately the Ministry of Culture, has
its own collection, assembled over decades, but except for rare occasions, it
remains in storage and has suffered damage, wear and tear, as well as theft
and looting, especially during the 17-year civil war. There is a long-standing
demand for the establishment of a museum or national gallery to house this
state-owned collection and works by seminal figures in modern and con-
temporary art in Lebanon. In 1957, when the “First Imaginary Museum in the
World” was inaugurated, its title was resonant on many levels.

The “First Imaginary Museum in the World” comes to Beirut

On February 14, 1957, an exhibition titled “First Imaginary Museum in the
World,” comprised of 664 framed color reproductions of masterworks from
the West and East was inaugurated in two halls of the UNESCO building in
Beirut. With much pomp and circumstance, it opened in the presence of the
republic’s president and first lady, Camille and Zalfa Chamoun, and Prime
Minister Sami el-Solh, in addition to a slew of government officials. The
exhibition was in Beirut for two months and then toured the country for an
unknown period of time. The color reproductions were ultimately stowed in
the UNESCO building and most likely destroyed when the entire building
was ravaged during the Israeli siege of the city in 1982.

The story of the “Musée Imaginaire” and its first ‘worldly’ manifestation in
Beirut is remarkable because it crystallizes the intersection of a prevailing
worldview on the mission of art in modern times, post-World War II’s policies
of “cultural diplomacy,” the UN’s stated mission of the promotion and
dissemination of “scientific universalism” and the lure of the democratizing
potential in the means of mechanical reproduction. It also marks the first
public event where a general audience in Lebanon was provided with an
opportunity to see first-hand a curated collection of works of art minted as
semital, that illustrated a teleology of the history of art leading up to the
“modern” moment in the West and made some amends to include artistic
traditions in the non-Western world.

The exhibition’s title bears a direct reference to a notion coined by iconic
French thinker, militant, writer and former Minister of Culture André Malraux
in a text he published in 1947. It was later bound with four other volumes titled
La Création Artistique (1948), La Monnaie de l’Absolu (1949), Les Métamorphoses

Cover of French-language exhibition catalog.
February 14, 1957.”
d’Appollon (1951) and Les Voix du Silence in 1951, which was translated two years later into English as The Voices of Silence, with the “Musée Imaginaire” as “Museum Without Walls.” Malraux had written quite a bit about the mission of art and museums, but he had also presented a paper at a UNESCO conference held at the Sorbonne, titled “L’Homme et la Culture Artistique.” The essay was published subsequently in the UNESCO’s Reflections of our Age that included texts by Louis Aragon, and Julian Huxley (Aldous Huxley’s brother and UNESCO’s general secretary at the time).

Malraux’s proposal was in essence disarmingly simple, namely to manufacture facsimile reproductions of masterworks using the refinement of the technology of color photography. Photography permitted unlimited, lightweight, and remarkably inexpensive reproductions. The connection to Walter Benjamin’s reflections on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction is obvious. The two were in fact in contact in the late 1930s. Malraux was engaged with Benjamin’s rich and complex reflections on the value, nature, presence and representation of the reproduction, but to him, the reproduction was an opportunity for the work of art to write itself a new story in history. Masterworks could be extracted, or unshackled, from their original religious context, their artistic value was brought to the fore almost exclusively, and with the perfecting of color photography they could now become inscribed into an imaginary worldly civilization. Furthermore, masterworks from all over the world could be grouped in a single hall to engage in a conversation and inspire new ways of thinking about the history of art in the world.

The United Nations was established in 1945 as an initiative to rebuild global society after World War II, its stated mission was “to bring all nations of the world together to work for peace and development, based on the principles of justice, human dignity and the well-being of all people.” The language of universal humanism was integral to its conception. UNESCO was in turn established in 1946, citing from its preamble: “Believing in full and equal opportunities for education for all, in the unrestrained pursuit of objective truth, and in the free exchange of ideas and knowledge, are agreed and determined to develop and to increase the means of communication between their peoples and to employ these means for the purposes of mutual understanding and a truer and more perfect knowledge of each other’s lives.”

That Malraux’s proposals would resonate widely at the UNESCO conference is not surprising. They, in fact, inspired an ambitious program, ratified at the general conference in Mexico City in 1947. Resolution 4.1.4.2 instructed the general secretary to: “draw up, in collaboration with experts selected with the assistance of the International Council of Museums, a list of available high quality color reproductions designed to illustrate the most important phases and movements in art…” and resolution 4.1.4.3 to: “secure expert counsel for the preparation of portfolios containing series of color reproductions of fine quality covering specific fields in the arts.” The stated mission was to be designed both to improve the quality of reproductions of visual art and increase the availability of such reproductions to educational authorities, art institutions and private individuals in the world. As the number of masterworks was limited, and considering the impossibility of transporting these treasures from country to country to enable mass audiences across the world to see them, the circulation of the first-class reproductions seemed like the most appropriate means of educating the greatest majority of people about their artistic heritage. It was widely acknowledged that no reproduction, however fine, could ever take the place of the original, but it was obvious that without reproductions, most people, denied as they were contact with the originals, could never hope to gain an understanding of the various great periods of and trends in world art.

From March 1948, the Section of Arts and Letters hired a team of experts to draw up a list of publishers and makers of reproductions and collect samples. Governments were encouraged to commission reproductions of works in their own countries. A “working party” was appointed and mandated to meet once a year to examine reproductions and propose themes for the selection of works. In 1948, three exhibitions were put together, “Modern Art from 1860 to Present,” “Italian Renaissance Art” and “Persian Art.” For the first theme, the final selections of reproductions for the list were Jean Cassou, the director of the Museum of Modern Art in Paris and Rene d’Harnoncourt, director of the Curatorial Department at MoMA, New York. Over the next 15 years, more exhibitions of reproductions were put together according to themes that were selected every year. Books and a series titled the “UNESCO World Art Series” portfolios accompanying exhibitions were also published. The portfolios were offered to member states. By 1948, 11 exhibition sets were sent to “mainly countries that have no important collections of original works of that period.” By way of example, the following exhibitions “Paintings prior to 1860,” “Paintings from 1860 to Today,” “Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci,” “Japanese Woodcuts” and “Ancient Chinese Paintings” were exhibited in 58 countries.

2) UNESCO constitution preamble.
3) AL/Conf.3/1, pp. 2, 3. August 1948.
4) Ibid Article I: “The purpose of the Organization is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations.”
5) The “working party” is listed in the catalogue of color reproductions of the exhibition “Paintings Prior to 1860” (new edition) and in the “Rapporteurs’ Report” (UNESCO/CUA/65 PARIS, March 26, 1965).

58 countries.
The photo's headline reads “700 Colored Reproductions of the Most Noted Artists’ Paintings.”
The cover and first page of the exhibition catalog of the first ever UNESCO traveling exhibition of color reproductions, “From Impressionism to Today,” produced some time between 1948 and 1949 by UNESCO. Included are: a text explaining the “Color Reproductions” project and the exhibition, an essay on the history of art by René Huyghe, the head conservateur in the Department of Painting and Drawing at the Louvre, an index of the 50 works exhibited including the name of the artist, name of work, printer/editor of the print as well as biographical notes on the artists and a list of publishers’ addresses.
The First Imaginary Museum in the World is paradigmatic of these exhibitions, but its inauguration in Beirut has to do with Camille Aboussouan, the exhibition’s curator, organizer, and ardent defender. He was the general secretary of the Lebanese National Commission to UNESCO from 1953 to 1972; he was also the conservator at the Nicolas Sursock Museum, the country’s most prominent private collection of modern art. Although he had studied law at the St. Joseph University, he was nonetheless intimately involved in Beirut’s cultural and intellectual life, and was awarded the title of Knight in the Order of the Cedar by President Camille Chamoun in 1953. In 1947, Julian Huxley entrusted him to be in charge of UNESCO’s relations with the Middle East. A year later, in 1948, UNESCO’s third general conference took place in Beirut, in a building that was constructed for the event. Aboussouan began working on the exhibition in 1955; his ambition was to bring a set of reproductions to remain permanently in Lebanon. In the 1960s, several of UNESCO’s exhibitions traveled to Beirut’s Sursock Museum, including the Leonardo da Vinci reproductions and the Japanese woodblock prints. Their presentation was often framed as a pedagogical and educational initiative. In 1965, an exhibition titled “Islamic and Modern Windows” was organized by and presented at the Sursock Museum; it included texts, photographs and transparencies, the Museum’s home-grown version of a Musée Imaginaire.

The “First Imaginary Museum in the World” was displayed in two rooms in the UNESCO building, one labeled “Occident” and the other “Orient,” moreover, the exhibition’s lay-out was mirrored in its accompanying catalogue. The Occident section included “Dessins de Léonard De Vinci,” and “Peintures d’Europe et d’Amérique,” while the section labeled Orient included “Gravures sur bois Japonaises,” and “Estampes, Peintures et Dessins Chinois.” The presentation of Occident/West versus Orient/East is culled from the prevailing narrative of the history of art taught in higher education curricula. Thus, it confirmed the canons of the time, most of which still have salience today.

A thorough audience study is not possible considering the precariousness of the primary sources that remain. The exhibition is best documented in the archives of UNESCO. The local press seems to have received it enthusiastically, however the notion of an imaginary museum or collection was an occasion for the Lebanese intelligentsia to criticize the government for its lack of seriousness in safeguarding the legacy of modern art in the country. In the interviews we conducted, the exhibition was remembered by one of Lebanon’s most eloquent and passionate art critics as a milestone on several levels. On the one hand, it succeeded in bringing fantastic works for discovery and delection by an audience that did not have the opportunity to travel outside the country to view the original works. On the other hand, rarely had an exhibition of that scale and ambition ever been on display in the young republic. Other interviewees included a former art dealer and author, who said he was frustrated with the reproductions and yearned to see the original works on display. Our third interviewee, a government employee at the Ministry of Higher Education at the time, claimed the exhibition never took place because he endeavored to stop it. To him, reproductions were beneath the Lebanese, and an imaginary museum denigrated the pressing need for a real national museum. While there is ample evidence the exhibition took place, the recollections of the latter two interviewees resonate well with a general sentiment at the time.

In the cultural history of Lebanon, the year 1957 marked the emergence of Shi’ir, a poetry magazine edited by a seminal Lebanese poet, Youssef el-Khal. The periodical did not only engage poets and writers, but also artists and art critics from a host of fields. Youssef el-Khal was married to an American-born Lebanese painter, Helen el-Khal, who shortly thereafter rented a small space to organize art exhibitions. Gallery Contact was one of the earliest and most remarkable galleries in Beirut that hosted a lot of the emerging generation of modern artists and their first exhibitions.

Rasha Salti and Kristine Khouri are the co-founders of the History of Arab Modernities in the Visual Arts Study Group.
South-South intersections: Southern Conceptualisms Network and the political possibilities of local histories

Before I begin, I would like to say that I consider none of what I am going to share here mine, or at least not completely mine. Many of the ideas, dilemmas, and uncertainties recounted here are the products of a long, collective work of affective, intellectual and political interaction generated within the Red Conceptualismos del Sur (or the Southern Conceptualisms Network). The network often generates discussion of complex situations similar to those which the “Speak. Memory” symposium called into question about the possibilities for reactivating our local, critical memories. Therefore, I would like to ask that the personal tone of this text be interpreted as an echo of a plural voice. Or, as network member Marcelo Expósito would say, citing Deleuze, “The statement is always collective, even when it appears to be expressed by a unique, solitary individual.”

The beginnings: Margins of critical memory in Latin America

The Southern Conceptualisms Network began in 2007, when a core group of Latin American researchers decided to establish a platform for thought, discussion, and taking a stance in the face of what we considered a worrisome fetishizing and deactivation of critical potential in experiences of art and politics on our continent. At the time, our work and research was born from mapping and recuperating a dispersed constellation of artistic practices developed across Latin America during conflict or under conditions of political repression (i.e. populist governments and dictatorial military regimes, from both the right and the left) between the 1960s and 1980s. Those political configurations fostered complex intersections between politics and aesthetics. Artists invented multiple responses to each abrasive context in an attempt to evade and denounce illegal methods of oppression, state coups, civil rights restrictions, prohibitions of political activity, and censorship of cultural and social spheres.

For many of us, it was clear that the difficulties of reactivating the force of these artistic practices today would not only imply fighting the coercion and censorship of their time, but also confronting the current situation in which the scarce documentation of these practices is disputed by large institutions and private collections. It’s evident that during the last 20 years, Latin American symbolic capital has become one of the most appetizing feasts for the global art market. This “internationalist” impulse (of both Western metropolitan museums and Latin American institutions) is far too complex to discuss in this short essay, but it is worth mentioning since these new market demands for international art circulation exist in continued unequal economic and geopolitical conditions, which mark the contradictions that we face today as mediators of cultural production between South and North. It is in this context that artistic experiences brutally silenced by violence in past decades begin to circulate, paradoxically wrapped in glamour and a strong mercantile appeal, but also loaded with latent political sterilization. 1 Very often, some of these material legacies of Latin American artists (and other regions of the Global South) have become the new “spoils of war” on the international art market, coveted by renowned universities, private collectors and art dealers. This is a very delicate situation in countries where state support of cultural politics is incipient or practically nonexistent, and where the artistic community has a growing distrust of current governmental institutions. In these unstable circumstances, many important Latin American archives were sold and moved to institutions in Europe and the United States, which obviously offer many more economic and infrastructural resources than Latin America. Certainly, these movements trace a very paradoxical juncture: while international archival sales preserve the material, they also move it away from its country of origin, enforcing and extending the neocolonial logic that widens the gap and legitimizes North America and Europe as sites of knowledge production. This situation demands a response not only from local artistic communities, but from all the people, government and private institutions responsible for the care of material patrimony.

Local specificities for other globalities

Our network was born out of the intention of contributing to the reactivation of these artistic and political micro-histories and generating new conditions for the discussion and preservation of these archives in our own contexts. We insisted upon the importance of their sensitive presence in our public life. Rather than treat them as mere sources of “the history of art,” we conceived them as living antagonistic forces, capable of intervening in our local memories, our academic apparatuses, and our public debates. By creating the network we also wanted to begin to imagine a different logic from that in which we, as Latin American researchers, consistently found ourselves outside of Latin America, filling the quotas of the ‘periphery’ that the North usually required. It was about, to say it briefly, a radical rethinking of our places, our agendas, and our priorities, in spite of our precarious conditions. Beyond the orthodox notions of “center” and “periphery,” and the traditional nationalist claims, we intended to invoke a new South-South dialogue, learning from previous local micro-political networks of transnational interactions like the Mail Art Network of the 1960s and 1970s, or events like the Havana Biennials in the 1980s.

We use our name, Red Conceptualismos del Sur, in the tactical sense. Terms such as “conceptualism” or “conceptual practices” have in recent years come to undertake the task of historiographic, theoretical, and political de-stratification and decentralization of the standard narrative of art history, assuming “conceptualisms” not as a limited artistic movement, but rather as a different way of practicing art and understanding its social function. In the same way, the denomination “Southern” does not aim to recognize a unique regional cultural identity, but rather to put into movement processes of knowledge from subordinated places, bodies, and aesthetics, which have suffered inequalities from a Western-Imperial construction of the world. Using the words of Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos: “The Global South is not a geographic concept, [...] It is rather a metaphor for human suffering caused by capitalism and colonialism on a global scale, and of the resistance to overcome or minimize them.” Global social justice is not possible without a plural cognitive equality and we, as cultural mediators, have the challenge of imagining and proposing less asymmetrical forms of producing and sharing knowledge on a transnational level. In this sense, in asking ourselves here about the situation of archives and subaltern artistic heritage, marked by its historically-constituted marginal dimension, we are also questioning how we can break down the self-affirming universalist epistemologies that have constructed unequal dynamics of production and distribution of knowledge, introducing other points of origin capable of enabling more democratic futures.

A significant aspect of our efforts is our decision to remain independent. Our network is an autonomous entity consisting of about 55 researchers, artists, curators, psychoanalysts, art historians, sociologists, and activists from Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay, Colombia, United Kingdom, and Spain, that is collaborating with institutions from different areas. One advantage of being independent is that we can define our own agenda of political action that is not subordinate to the demands of the academy or the market. The disadvantage is the excessive amount of time required to search for economic funding to support our initiatives. Nonetheless, we have been able to organize editorial projects, exhibitions, research groups and public events in Sao Paulo (April 2008), Rosario (October 2008), Madrid (March 2009, and November 2010), and Santiago de Chile (July 2009). We presented our first curatorial experiment, an exhibition of the archive of the Argentine artist Graciela Carnevale, in Rosario, Argentina, in 2008; and in 2009 we published our first book Conceitualismos do Sul / Sur, edited by Ana Longoni and Cristina Freire. We initiated the “Todos Somos Negros” project with the intent to participate critically in the international call to “celebrate” the Bicentennial of Latin America, and we have also run the editorial platform Des-bordes since 2009, and published texts and collaborations in several magazines and journals.

3) All these events were organised with the important support of public universities, local museums and the network of Spanish Cultural Centers (AECID) in Latin America.


I would like to present two projects developed by the network in recent years. The first is a summary of the research project “Cartographies”, developed in 2007 and 2009, and the second is a project that we are currently developing in Uruguay to create a Center of Documentation with Clemente Padín’s archives.

**Cartographies. Critical itineraries in South America**

The “Cartographies” project, run by our network since 2007, constitutes a collective work of research regarding the state of the archives and documentation of “critical art” dating from 1950 in South America. This project, currently coordinated by the Argentine art historian Ana Longoni and myself, is composed of diverse national cartographies that have been mapped out by different researchers in seven countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Peru. Each of these cartographies is structured in two distinct parts. The first part takes account of the existing archives and those currently being created, whether institutional or of a particular individual, public or private. In each case, we determine where the archive is located, what its origin is, who its interlocutors are, what material is being gathered, why it is relevant, how it is stored, what policies are held regarding its public consultation and opening of the archives, etc. The second part is a chronology of key events in “critical art” in each country from 1950 onward. This chronology records the dates of each event, information on who has researched it, and what bibliographic materials are available. For many of these “critical episodes,” of course, no such research exists, nor has documentation been found, but it is precisely this exercise that makes it possible to highlight the gaps and create new diagrams for interventions in memory.

This project, supported in its first phase by the MACBA (2007) and in its second by SEACEX and Reina Sofía Museum (2009), has allowed for the creation of seven national cartographies, some still incomplete. So far, the project has located 90 archives in Colombia, 35 in Ecuador, 31 in Peru, 26 in Argentina, 21 in Paraguay, 17 in Chile, and 12 in Brazil (in addition to a number of small collections of documentation). There exist few established archives and there are many more archives currently being compiled, the existence of which was unknown at the beginning of this work. There are few archives that are well preserved and many at risk. The resources on which these archives rely tend to be insufficient, and the depositories, in some cases, foresee donations to local initiatives or institutionalization of the archive.

The “Cartographies” project has helped us not only to define priority archives for network support but also to elaborate sharper lines of micro-research and trace a map of decentralized actions. The results affect various other projects in development since 2008: for example, they introduced new coordinates to our “Critical Writings” project, a large scale revision of writings produced between the 1950s and 1980s in Latin America, and to our “Alternative Artistic Networks: Visual poetry and mail art editions” project on the collaborative groups that used visual poetry and mail art to denounce the dictatorships. In 2011 we hope to begin the third phase of the project, completing the cartographies of Bolivia, Venezuela, and Uruguay. At the culmination of this stage we hope to publish a book about the reports and the transversal chronologies in an attempt to open debates and reflections about the politics of archives in Latin America.

**The archive of Clemente Padín**

The second endeavor is the project with the Uruguayan poet, artist, and network member, Clemente Padín, to convert his archive into a public Center of Documentation in Montevideo, Uruguay. The project was born out of the preoccupation of the artist due to the consistent offers he was receiving from private collectors to acquire his personal archive of experimental poetry and publications from the 1960s and 1980s. During these decades, Padín had been one of the main promoters of different editorial initiatives that constructed networks of interchange during years of harsh political repression with artists and visual poets from Latin America, the United States, and Central and Eastern Europe. In 1977, Padín was detained by the Uruguayan dictatorship (which was known at the time for its systematic violations of human rights) and his archive was confiscated and disappeared, losing many books, magazines, and works that were never returned. The arrest prompted an extensive, international protest campaign organized by the Mail Art Network that demanded freedom for Padín and his colleague Jorge Caraballo, which was condensed into a twofold slogan: “Free Padín, Free Caraballo.” After the fall of the dictatorship, in 1984, the artist began to rebuild contacts with the international mail art network and to reconstruct his archive.

In 2009, the Southern Conceptualisms Network, with the funding of SEACEX and Reina Sofia Museum, completed a general diagnostic of his archive, coordinated by Argentine art historian Fernando Davis and the Brazilian curator Cristina Freire with the constant collaboration of Padín. The objective was to examine the state of the archive in order to elaborate a plan for its cataloging and conservation. After the diagnostic, we began conversations with the General Archive of the Universidad de la República about the custody of the archive for a period of three years (after which the custody could be renewed) to guarantee a safe place and adequate cataloging criteria that would assure proper conservation and use. Work with Reina Sofia Museum during this process marked for us an important precedent of collaborating with a museum to determine different policies of conservation from those


of a conventional private acquisition, in which the material would typically be displaced from its original country. Instead, we are trying to empower local institutions. Currently the archive is being adapted and organized for its public opening next year.

Conclusion

What I have tried to present is a glimpse at some of the interdisciplinary work dynamics that we are putting in motion within our network, in spite of many economic difficulties. Each project is taken on as a laboratory for experimentation that may intersect with research, publications, exhibition projects, institutional experimentation, and other mechanisms that allow us to think beyond conventional territory. Whatever the format, our interventions have the common objective of putting into play different possibilities for history, for the archive, and for the transmission of knowledge. We do not know where this work will take us, but we are conscious of the urgency of intervening in and altering our geographies, and preventing the latent danger of dispossession and material deterioration of our cultural memory. Our call is to act collectively. We recognize that without regional initiatives and new local politics (or, even worse, without archives), it will be very difficult to commit ourselves to the agenda of democratic reconstitution in our countries, which we believe must be the seminal horizon of any cultural project that intends to be truly critical.

The full text of the presentation made during the symposium can be viewed in the documentation section of the “Speak, Memory” website: www.speakmemory.org.

Translation by Megan Hanley. Revised by Dorota Biczel.

Miguel A. López is a writer, artist and researcher based in Lima.
Making Memory Speak
The hopeful monster that is the Bidoun Library was born in the fall of 2009 in Abu Dhabi. It began as a resource, earnest in design and intent, bringing together artist books, monographs, catalogs, and other sources pertaining to art and culture in the Middle East and presenting them in places where such materials were hard to find.

In each version of the library—since Abu Dhabi, the library has popped up in Dubai, Beirut, New York, Cairo and next in London—we have asked our friends and colleagues, whether individually or collectively, to curate sections of the library. We’ve worked in Beirut with the comic book collective Samandal as well as the “98Weeks” research project and in Istanbul with the independent book publisher BENT.

In each of its iterations, the library has exhibited a variety of things. For example, we have documented the post-9/11 art boom in the Middle East, we have collected the pioneering works of Dar El Fata El Arabi, the PLO-funded, largely Egyptian, producer of children’s books in the 1970s, and avant-garde arts magazines of the Arab world, like *Fonoon Al Arabeyya*, produced by Iraqi exiles in the 1980s in London.

A specific iteration of the Bidoun Library, generated especially for an exhibition at the New Museum in New York in 2010, represented a turning point for the project. After all, the notion that Bidoun should provide hard-to-find artist books in New York City, where all manner of resources are already abundant and accessible, seemed hard to fathom. What to do then with this particular presentation of the library? How to rethink the notion of the “resource” and what could we bring to the table in this particular setting?

The New Museum invitation and the questions that came with it went to the heart of what we do. To what extent does Bidoun have a responsibility to provide a resource to the public, to set the record straight, to be corrective? Rather than adopting a wrong-headed humanitarian stance—as if art books could save the world—could we instead turn the tables and think about the ways in which printed matter itself has been implicated in different political, social, and cultural conceptions of the Middle East? And could we begin to think about the ways in which Bidoun’s aesthetic has been defined as much by what gets left out as by what makes it into the magazine?

And so, the Bidoun Library in New York evolved into a presentation of printed matter, carefully selected with no regard for taste or quality, which documented...
There Goes the Middle East

by Alfred M. Lilienthal
of the books corresponded to general categories: Home Theater/pulp, ceiling of the New Museum at strategic points in the exhibition space. Three were then organized into four books that were suspended by chains from the ceiling of the New Museum at strategic points in the exhibition space. Three of the books corresponded to general categories: Home Theater/pulp, every possible way people have depicted and defined—slandered, celebrated, obfuscated, hyperbolized, ventriloquized, photographed, surveyed, and/or exhumed—that vast, vexed, nefarious construct known as “the Middle East.” The result is banal and offensive, a parade of stereotypes, caricatures, and misunderstandings of a sort that rarely makes it into the magazine, all the trappings of the Middle East as fetish: veils, oil, fashion victims, sexy sheikhs, sex with sheikhs, Sufis, stonings, calligraphy, the caliphate, terrorism, Palestinians. In one way, the Bidoun Library in this form captured all of the wincingly clichéd tropes Bidoun has stayed far away from these past years. In this way, the Library is, too, the story of Bidoun.

Take, for example, a bodice-ripping romance, The Sheikh’s Secret Son. It’s a novelty, a cheap thrill. But if you see it alongside The Sheikh’s Secret Bride… and The Sheikh’s Convenient Bride and The Sheikh’s Virgin Bride and The Sheikh’s Mistress… and then seemingly countless permutations of the same, novelty gives way to conspiracy. What you notice is that these books begin to appear in their legions only after September 11, 2001—a revelation that, like many others in the Bidoun Library, is more stupefying than clarifying.

This particular collection of books was the outcome of a series of escalating searches on the internet. Deploying a search term like “oil,” “Arab,” or “Middle East” would return an unmanageable array of books—but adding an additional search term would narrow the field in telling ways. Books about oil before 1973 that cost less than five dollars are few and almost entirely in hardcover, usually technical guides written for a specialized audience. After 1973, the same search yields a completely different array: in hardcover, hundreds of books about the coming oil crisis, rampant Arab wealth and influence, global bankruptcy, impending world war, and biblical Armageddon. At the same time, in paperback, the terrorist novel is born, and its brzod is legion—cover after cover depicting vintage special agents, Israeli commandos, vigilante lone wolves, soldiers of fortune, and even a black samurai, karate-kicking galabiya-clad sheikhs beside burning oil rigs, often after sampling the delicacies of the inevitable harem. A similar set of searches substituting “Iran” for “Arab” produced its own assortment of types and stereotypes. We wanted to see what would happen if we put together a library without regard to aptness or excellence; to choose books not for their subjects, but for their qualities, but their quantities. Natural Order/corporate publishing, and Margin of Error/other. A fourth, Further Reading, purported to be a glossary for the other three. We called the books catalogs, though as such they were incomplete, inaccurate, and perplexing. What the catalogs did do was provide an example of one way of reading the library—to look over our shoulders as we read the library, in its entirety, and to see some of the associations and parallels within. The “Library” issue of Bidoun, which we published in the fall of 2010, was in a sense a third reading of the library and a rereading of those catalogs.

A good deal of the books and periodicals in the library were produced in conjunction with one or another corporate entity, including Horus, the official publication of EgyptAir, and the catalog of the 1974 International Art Exhibition ITT. But the strangest flower of corporate publishing is undoubtedly Aramco World, the curiously spectacular official publication of the Arabian American Oil Company.

Another category that intrigued us was books printed by regimes of production that no longer exist. Like the myriad publications of the Novosti Press Agency in Moscow, such as Afghanistan Chooses a New Road, Treasures of Human Genius: The Muslim Cultural Heritage in the USSR, and Tonight and Every Night: The Soviet Circus Is Seventy Years Old. Or the coffee table books by Aurora Art Publishers, another state-run publisher, about art and architecture on the outer reaches of the Soviet empire.

The Cold War produced publishing ventures across the globe. Dozens of magazines were founded or supported by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, an association of left-leaning but anticommunist artists, writers, and musicians that was also a secret project of the CIA. Post-revolutionary Cuba became for a time a hotbed of avant-garde publishing, sponsoring the Afro-Asian-American journal Tricontinental, which included foldout posters promoting a solidarity-of-the-month club with oppressed guerrilla movements the world over. Copies were door-dropped on college campuses across the Third World, including Beirut, where Bidoun acquired some 30-odd copies for 50 cents each.

Articles about and interviews with some of the key protagonists involved in these periodicals were featured in the “Library” issue of Bidoun, published in the fall of 2010.

Today, the Library continues to migrate. In each location, the project has a new life, responding to its surroundings, and rethinking what a library could and should be. In the end, what the Bidoun Library has evolved into is less a static collection of books arranged according to an organizing principle, than an organizing principle that collects and arranges books.
“The Prestige of Terror”:
A conversation with Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin

Speak, Memory (SM): I would like to start by talking about one of your recent projects, “The Prestige of Terror.” How does a South African–born, London-based artist duo start working on a project on the Egyptian surrealist group?

Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin (AB and OC): All of these questions have a new level of urgency and relevance with what we are watching going on in the streets of Cairo right now. In the first few days of our residency at the Townhouse Gallery, the exhibition that was due to open the following week on the first-floor gallery had been effectively censored by the Egyptian Ministry of Health. The show, which was to feature slightly doctored documentary images of a local psychiatric hospital, was apparently deemed too provocative in its depiction of hospital conditions.

Townhouse Director William Wells offered us the vacant space. We suggested a show on censorship, which didn’t go down too well. It was probably that same day that we read a short paragraph in Maria Golia’s remarkable Photography and Egypt about a local surrealist movement. We were both surprised that we had never heard of the group or its founder, George Henein, who had been a close friend of André Breton. The few images of the group that appeared in her book were intriguing. We therefore accepted William’s offer and the show opened two weeks later with an empty gallery and a simple text inviting others to come forward with any information about the group or its collaborators. We were interested in any information about a movement that had seemingly been written out of Egyptian history. Over the coming month we used the gallery space as a receptacle for everything that we found.

SM: What was it that particularly intrigued you about this group of artists?

AB and OC: That there was so little information about them and everything that we did find seemed to oversimplify their story. According to all the official Ministry of Culture documentation, they were largely a Francophile, libertarian movement producing mostly derivative work that was of no relevance to contemporary Egyptian culture. Their manifesto, written in 1938 and titled “Long Live Degenerate Art” (after the famous Nazi traveling exhibition) was translated in the official literature as “Long Live Bad Art.” This was a sure sign that something fishy was going on. We suspected that the movement was more politically provocative then it had been made out to be.
SM: What were you able to find out about the Art and Freedom group?

AB and OC: Over the course of their short and sweet life, the Art and Freedom group, as they were initially known, prepared just five exhibitions and published two editions of a magazine, La Part du Sable. It is difficult to say what led to their premature end. What we do know is that the Egyptian surrealists spent much of this short period eloquently describing their own demise. Still, on December 22, 1938, when this group of precocious painters, poets, journalists, and lawyers published their manifesto, “Vive l’Art Dégénéré,” they were brimming with optimism. With their stand against order, beauty and logic, the Art and Bread group, as they later became known, shook up a community steeped in academicism and the picturesque with their particular version of modernism. Herein was a remarkable moment when surrealism in an odd alliance with Marxism met the orient.

SM: What was your working process? How did you go about gathering information and what were your sources?

AB and OC: Mostly we spoke to people and dug up the little research available on the internet. We found one man, Don LaCoss, who lived in Wisconsin and who dedicated most of his life to the study of the movement. We owe most of what we found out to him and a handful of other academics. Don died recently and suddenly at a young age, which is tragic. We have published all of Don’s writing as well as the other bits and pieces we have found on a website we built called egyptiansurrealism.com. One of the most moving moments during our residency was meeting Henein’s translator Bashir in his tiny apartment in downtown Cairo. Bashir is still a committed Trotskyite and we spent hours talking about the movement, about Henein and the revolution. It became clearer and clearer to us speaking to Bashir that the Egyptian surrealists were a strong political force, committed to social and political change, and that instead of having quietly collapsed they were systematically closed down by a state in the grips of Arab Nationalism. The resonance with contemporary Egypt and its paranoia became increasingly apparent to us.

SM: What does the title of your project, “The Prestige of Terror,” refer to?

AB and OC: “The Prestige of Terror” is the title of a pamphlet written by George Henein and published in Cairo, in French, several days after the dropping of the atomic bomb. It was not a thesis as much as a manifesto, in which he reaffirms his distaste for fascism, describes this moment in history as the worst day in the career of humanity, in which the allies have come to resemble their antagonists. Henein despised the politics of compromise, “The Lesser Evil” as he called it. The “Prestige of Terror” was a rejection of racism and murder as a justification to win a democratic war. We have had it translated into English for the first time. Its relevance today is still harrowing.

SM: What is the responsibility of the artists as archivist, historian, chronicler, interloper? On the one had there is clearly a great imperative to build functioning archives in Egypt and the Middle East more generally. Some artists are certainly suited to this role. In our case we are not aiming at building something completist, or even accurate. We are interested in the way history coagulates around certain images, themes and texts, while others get discarded. We see our role more like the wind that comes in through the window to disturb the archive in ways that are accidental and chaotic. For example, early on in our research we wanted to hold a séance in the Townhouse Gallery in order to contact the deceased members of the Egyptian surrealists. We even approached leading surrealist scholars including Hal Foster at Harvard University and Simon Baker at Tate Modern, to provide us with questions for the clairvoyant. But the séance never took place—sorcery is illegal in Egypt apparently.

SM: How did people react to your project in Cairo and in the broader Middle East? I know that many people welcomed your project as a kind of wake-up call, an invitation to document the country’s modern art history before it disappears or before some of its key protagonists pass away. But other people considered your exploration too superficial. Because of the scarcity of information available on the Art and Freedom group—and many other modern art movements in Egypt and the region for that matter—did you feel a certain responsibility to work as archivists or historians, going beyond the role you normally take on as artists?

AB and OC: It’s a question that came up a lot during the “Speak, Memory” symposium. What is the responsibility of the artists as archivist, historian, chronicler, interloper? On the one hand there is clearly a great imperative to build functioning archives in Egypt and the Middle East more generally. Some artists are certainly suited to this role. In our case we are not aiming at building something completist, or even accurate. We are interested in the way history coagulates around certain images, themes and texts, while others get discarded. We see our role more like the wind that comes in through the window to disturb the archive in ways that are accidental and chaotic. For example, early on in our research we wanted to hold a séance in the Townhouse Gallery in order to contact the deceased members of the Egyptian surrealists. We even approached leading surrealist scholars including Hal Foster at Harvard University and Simon Baker at Tate Modern, to provide us with questions for the clairvoyant. But the séance never took place—sorcery is illegal in Egypt apparently.

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SM: As you probably have noticed, there is a sad lack of documentation and scholarship on Egypt’s modern art history. What is your take on the situation and what role do you think artists can play in revisiting and shedding light on neglected areas of art history?

AB and OC: It’s not surprising that some members of the Egyptian art scene might feel uncomfortable with two South African, London-based, Jewish men, popping into downtown Cairo, taking an interest in a particularly exotic form of Arab modernism, claiming to resurrect the movement and even worse, commodifying the results. Some say the surrealists were anarchists who rejected the commodification of art, and perhaps our measre output—a series of posters, a web site, invitations to give talk—feels like a corruption of those ideals. But that’s way too naive. You just have to read Don LaCoss, who adds complexity to this over simplified tale. We may have just skimmed through the window to disturb the archive in ways that are accidental and chaotic. For example, early on in our research we wanted to hold a séance in the Townhouse Gallery in order to contact the deceased members of the Egyptian surrealists. We even approached leading surrealist scholars including Hal Foster at Harvard University and Simon Baker at Tate Modern, to provide us with questions for the clairvoyant. But the séance never took place—sorcery is illegal in Egypt apparently.

SM: In your description of the project, you talk of an “exhumation” of the Egyptian surrealist movement. Could you elaborate a bit more on this term and how it relates to the specific artistic strategy you adopted?

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the surface, scratched a surrealist itch. But we are not scholars making a historical survey of the Egyptian surrealists. We parachuted in, which is the nature of artist residencies. But that’s a whole other conversation.

One of the nicest things to come out of the project was our relationship with Germaine Paschalis, the elderly lady who runs the printing press off Champollion Street. Germaine came to Egypt at the age of 14 from Italy, married a Greek man, Kyros, who claimed to introduce scuba diving to Egypt in 1952, and ended up running his family printing business. She still refuses to speak Arabic. All of our posters were produced on their Heidelberg Press, which would have been the same type of machine that the surrealists used to print their pamphlets and manifestos.

To make these posters we first produced a metal printing block called a cliché. Germaine kept referring to these clichés and we wondered which came first, the word or the metal block? Indeed the word “cliché” comes from the French term cliché-verre or “stereotype,” a metal printing block taken from a wooden original. When cast, these blocks made a “click” sound; the noun cliché comes from a French verb meaning “to click”. The word cliché as metaphor was first applied to photography, a form that is eternally reproducible. Germaine convinced us to print a set of posters on paper that she said dated from the late 1930s—around the time that George Henein published the Egyptian surrealist manifesto. The paper was extremely thin and fragile. Later, in London, we showed this to a friend who works with old paper stocks, and he was suspicious. He is pretty convinced this is actually fax paper. The only question remaining however, and it’s a crucial one, is if this is fax paper from the 1970s or 1980s. The earlier variety would have been a wet process, rather than heat sensitive, and is therefore more stable. The drawing department at MoMA has agreed to have the paper stock tested in the museum laboratory, so we should have an answer soon.

SM: The act of collecting images seems to be a recurrent strategy in your practice. How does this project relate to your previous work?

AB and OC: Our book *Fig* explores the connection between photography and the act of collecting. And our new book *People in Trouble Laughing Pushed to the Ground* takes another collection of photographs as its focus: the Belfast Exposed Archive, which contains over 14,000 black-and-white contact sheets documenting the period known as “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland from a local perspective and as a response to the careful control of images depicting British military activity. The photographs were taken by professional photojournalists and amateur photographers, chronicling protests, political funerals and acts of violence, along with the more ordinary stuff of life—drinking tea, kissing girls, watching trains.
Above: From *People in Trouble*, Circles, 8x10 inch, 2011.

The marks on the surface of the contact sheets over the image itself allude to the presence of many visitors. These include successive archivists, who have ordered, catalogued and re-catalogued this jumble of images. Whenever an image in this archive was chosen, approved or selected, a colored dot was placed on the surface of the contact sheet as a marker. The position of the dots provided us with a code; a set of instructions for how to frame the photographs here. Each of the circular photographs shown on the previous pages reveals the area beneath these circular stickers; the part of each image that has been obscured from view the moment it was selected. Each of these fragments—composed by the random gesture of the archivist—offers up a self-contained universe all of its own: a small moment of desire or frustration or thwarted communication that is reanimated here after many years in darkness. For many years the archive was also made available to members of the public, and at times, people would deface or otherwise manipulate their own image with a marker pen, ink or scissors. So, in addition to the marks made by generations of archivists, photo editors, legal advisors and activists, the traces of these very personal obliterations are also visible. They are the gestures of those who wished to remain anonymous. This book focuses on the layers of marking, scratches and obliterations made by successive generations of archivists and the public on the images and upsets the index nature of the archive. Instead, a fragmented narrative emerges that resists traditional empirical categorizations and sequences.

Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin are a photographic team based in London: www.choppedliver.info.
AAA (Access All Areas):
Thoughts on opening up the archive

What began as a response to the urgent need to document, secure, and make visible the multiple recent histories of contemporary art in the region has evolved into a space that offers the tools to enrich and complicate the way in which these local and regional histories are told and accessed. Accessibility to the archive is fundamental to the Asia Art Archive (AAA)'s vision. In a region dominated by commercial interests, market forces, and national agendas, we are an independent archive and platform for contemporary art, offering free public access to our collection and programs. To echo the first of PAD.MA’s “10 Theses on the Archive,” we did not wait for the archive. 1 And while we aren’t sure from which direction we have entered the river of time, we are definitely in the water, mostly swimming, at times bobbing, and intermittently swallowing a whole lot of water as we realize the enormity of the task before us.

The very fact that AAA exists, that we have been able to garner the necessary support and build solid foundations to provide a public home for this material in a region historically indifferent to contemporary art beyond its investment potential, is a good beginning. The real challenge, as we enter our next decade, is to make sure that these foundations are put to the best use. On the one hand, we must consider the treatment of the material in the collection, access, and connection to it, and, on the other, we must decide where to focus limited resources to add the most value.

We are always mindful of the politics of the “archive,” the very existence of which was born out of a desire to control and exercise absolute power and authority. And so we are also mindful of the dangers, our well-meaning intentions notwithstanding, of recreating or reproducing hegemonic power structures and narratives. How will we break down these original associations to the archive? How will we truly open it to allow for multiple narratives and, at the same time, avoid its becoming about accumulation? How will we institutionalize openness? These questions will consume a large part of AAA’s thinking capacity in the future. Because herein, we believe, lies the key to redefining the archive: unlearning the very systems from which the archive has emerged—and shaped the world in which we live—while simultaneously accommodating the different expectations of our users, donors, and partners. This will be one of the biggest tasks going forward. Is the way we traditionally think of preservation, for example, in opposition with true access?

1) PAD.MA, “10 Theses on the Archive,” http://pad.ma/texts/10_Theses_on_the_Archive.html, April 2010, Beirut. The first of the 10 Theses, “Don’t Wait for the Archive,” ends with the following sentence: “To not wait for the archive is to enter the river of time sideways, unannounced, just as the digital itself did not so long ago.”
Interview with artist Ye Yongqing by Jane DeBevoise, chair of AAA’s Board of Directors, and Anthony Yung, project manager for the four-year focused archiving project, “Materials of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art from 1980-1990.”


By distributing the material and pushing it in as many directions from the archive as possible are we not also preserving the material, or can professional preservation only come in the form of an archival box in a humidity-controlled, locked, and padded room?

Despite these challenges, the era in which the archive can and must be redefined has arrived. We have never had so much access to information, nor been so connected to a network of people around the globe. The digital era has changed the way we make, access, consume, store, and share information and this potentially means that everyone can build an archive. On the internet, in fact, archives build themselves and allow for the creation of multiple forms of the same material through scanning, tagging, annotating, and editing online. How AAA connects to these other knowledge networks and platforms will also play a large role in how we open up the collection. We realize the limitations to what we are able to cover in a region as vast and complex as Asia. We believe it important not to duplicate existing efforts and resources but to identify and connect to them. We do not insist on keeping the original documents; our goal is to digitize and make the material available in the public domain.

AAA recognizes its potential to connect the material in its possession and the context of its creation to new spaces in time. This is important in understanding why, since its inception, AAA has presented over 150 programs and projects beyond its library and archival activities. Such programs range from research-driven projects and discursive gatherings to residencies and youth and community projects. AAA is not a static collection of material waiting to be discovered, but a living record activated and carried forward by its users and activities. As we continue to consider what opening the archive really means and entails, three examples of current or recent projects may highlight some of the different approaches.

Making histories visible

In September 2010, AAA completed a four-year project, “Materials of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art 1980-1990” (www.china1980s.org), with a series of forums in Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, and New York with MoMA, New York. While some may question our decision to allocate major resources to contemporary Chinese art, an area that has attracted considerable attention over the last decade and already forms a large part of AAA’s collection, we would disagree; upon deeper reflection, we realized that there was a lack of the kind of primary source documentation needed to expand, enrich, and complicate existing scholarship in the field. The lack of institutional support for research in China from the 1980s, for reasons linked to both the political implications of this material and the breakneck speed in

2) These four forums marked the co-launch of AAA’s “Materials of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art 1980-1990” and MoMA’s publication Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents.
Slides gathered as part of “Materials of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art from 1980-1990,” a four-year focused archiving project.
which society has moved forward without having yet looked back, meant a considerable amount of work had to be done to locate and save this fragile and scattered material. Over 70,000 documents related to the 1980s were digitized during the process, including photographs, letters, artist writings, images of artworks, exhibition documentation from the collections of individual artists and curators, and hundreds of books and periodicals that were located across China and brought back to Hong Kong. In addition, in order to develop a better understanding of the intellectual environment in which artists and critics worked, AAA conducted 75 interviews with key participants active in the 1980s. A 45-minute documentary, *From Jean-Paul Sartre to Teresa Teng: Contemporary Cantonese Art in the 1980s* was then produced from the interviews and material. The documentary looked at the conditions specific to Southern China in this period, simultaneously addressing the larger issue of regionalism, and offered an alternative approach to the history of this period from those most commonly adopted.

By locating, collating, and connecting this material to existing material in our collection, we believe that a new pool of possibilities has been created for research and scholarship in the field. We see the opening up of the archive in this instance to mean locating resources that make visible stories that have previously been invisible or in danger of being erased.

**Translating systems**

In December 2010, the members of PAD.MA conducted a small workshop in the laboratory at AAA that focused on issues of translation between different disciplines; in this case, between art and technology. The workshop effectively encapsulated some of the challenges we face in an ongoing project to rebuild AAA’s digital infrastructure with the ultimate goal of providing the tools to make AAA’s collection available from its website.

While the website created for the launch of the China 1980s project, for example, gives viewers a good sense of what is in the collection, our real goal is making the 75 interviews and 70,000 documents in the collection directly accessible from the website.

With hundreds of thousands of images and hours of filmed documentation in AAA’s collection currently accessible from our physical premise only, a digital image and video archive will be crucial to opening up the material through our website. The digital database is one of the most complex projects we have embarked upon; after three years of research, fundraising, and system building, there are still a number of grey areas. Misunderstandings arising from different expectations of what the system should be able to do (by non-IT staff) and can do (by IT staff), the changing needs of the collection and the organization, the breakneck speed of technology, the emergence of new communication systems, and the multitude of options available and differing professional opinions are all issues that we have been working through.

As we strive to build the best system to allow access to AAA’s collection, these deliberations have forced us to readjust the way in which we see the system we are building, from an end game to one that will evolve, change, and mutate time and time again. Where we had once envisioned the launch of the new system, sparkling off the assembly line, we are instead looking to build a system that will allow for the greatest flexibility over the longest period of time. As is true of cultural areas within cities, wherein the most interesting and vibrant are those that develop organically over time, creative misunderstandings and transformations should perhaps be recognized as a healthy part of the process.

As suggested by PAD.MA member Sebastian Lütgert, programmers and artists share a common language in both the principles and techniques applied to each discipline; if we are to truly open up the archive, we must allocate resources to understanding and opening up the systems that are to make this openness possible in a digital era.

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3) For a detailed introduction and background of the project, see Jane Debevoise’s introduction on www.china1980s.org.

4) The workshop was conducted by Jan Gerber, Sebastian Lütgert (both 02620, Berlin), and Ashok Sukumaran (CAMP, Bombay), co-founders of the PAD.MA video archive.
Individual connections and interventions

Beyond research, digitization, and archival systems, AAA believes in the importance of opening up the archive through individual connections with artists. Annual international and local residency programs—initiated to give artists the time to read, and thereby inform their practices—have given voice to a number of propositions and interventions in the collection. Residencies provide a platform for simultaneously exploring and exploding some of the universal concerns of memory, history, authenticity, and identity around the archive, and in so doing open up opportunities for an enquiry into the way AAA operates.

From January to July 2011, Hong Kong artist Wong Wai-yin will spend her residency researching the development of contemporary art in the last decade, conducting interviews with individuals working at AAA, and digging into boxes that contain documents of Asia Art Archive’s past (and first) ten years in an attempt to make sense of the role played by institutions like AAA.

Wong’s interest in AAA derives not only from her stint as a research assistant in 2007, but from her ongoing inquiry into the construction of the history of art and the very institutions and systems that determine that history. This is perhaps best illustrated in her series, “If You Have Money Build Hong Kong a Museum” (2007-2008), a set of proposals for eight imaginary museums to be built in Hong Kong and “Hong Kong Artist Museum” (2008) an encyclopedic set of paintings, each with a museum dedicated to an artist in Hong Kong. Her persistent enquiry into the role institutions play in an artist’s success is closely related to her concern with what constitutes an artwork: she is engaged in a search for an ‘honest’ piece of work, free from the ego of the artist; she is aware of the difficulty involved in identifying whether a work is a real piece of art or merely a simulacrum consisting of “signifiers” molded by her art school training. While the public program that will come out of Wong’s residency at AAA has yet to be determined, the research process that leads up to it will play an equally important role, for both the staff and Wong, in blurring the work of the researcher, artist, and archivist.

The role of the archive in constructing histories, in determining who is included and who is not, how an artist’s work is documented and interpreted or misinterpreted, and who is responsible for writing and authenticating this history are all questions fundamental not only to Wong Wai-yin, but to AAA in our goal of understanding what it means to open up the archive.

Claire Hsu is the co-founder and executive director of the Asia Art Archive.


Pak Sheung Chuen, White Library/A Mind Reaching for Emptiness, 2008, 100 blank photocopied pages from AAA’s library, bound and presented as a new artwork, displayed in the AAA library.

Raqs Media Collective, Decomposition, 2009, jigsaw puzzles imprinted with the words Key & Mu.
The universal archive: 
A conversation with Jesús Carrillo from the Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid.

Speak, Memory (SM): What is the universal archive, how was the idea born and how does it fit into the mandate of the Reina Sofía Museum?

Jesús Carrillo (JC): One can find direct precedents to the universal archive in the “Vivid Radical Memory” project initiated by the Universidad de Barcelona and also in the establishment of the Documentation Centre at MACBA under the leadership Manuel Borja-Villel, now director of the Reina Sofía Museum.

Essentially, the universal archive—which we now prefer to refer to as an “archive of the commons”, a term that has a less imperialist or expansionist connotation—is a sort of “archive of archives” that implies both an internal and an external transformation of the Museum.

Internally, we need to redefine the dominant notion of cultural heritage that the modern museum has been based on: the cultural heritage the museum holds in custody ceases to be solely limited to the traditional art object (whose relationship with the public is through the exhibition) and starts encompassing other kinds of objects, communication objects, which can be defined as documents or testimonies, or in broader terms, archives.

Externally, the museum is redefining its relationship with other agents. The universal archive aims to achieve a coalition of archives held in custody by other institutions that have a similar philosophy and institutional vision to Reina Sofía or MACBA. In this same line, the museum is also working with the Southern Conceptualisms Network in Latin America to question the model of colonial collecting, with the intention of raising an urgent debate on the need to consider museums as custodians and not owners. It is our intention to create collections archives that are shared with other local institutions, which will allow questioning of the laws of ownership and the restrictive constitution of reproduction rights: a fight we consider important in order to build a critical memory without plundering the memory of others. The association between the Reina Sofía Museum and the Southern Conceptualisms Network is coalesced and mobilized specifically to reverse the flow which drains the memory of that period and reinvigorate the period’s legacy in the present through research projects, exhibitions, publications and open access databases.

SM: How will the universal archive work in practice? What form will it take? Will it be available online?

JC: This is something that we are still debating on, in particular with MACBA’s Documentation Center, which is a close partner in this project. The universal archive needn’t be a unique and centralized archive or database. As demonstrated by a recent project in Spain to centralize the databases of Spanish Museums, this kind of process is expensive, time-consuming and not particularly useful. Each museum can generate its own online database or archive and there are technical solutions (search engines etc.) that can allow their interconnection. So rather than create a sole online archive, we prefer to form a constellation of archives that are interconnected, ideally online, in an open way.

We are learning along the way and are proceeding on a case-by-case basis because it also depends on intellectual property law issues. In some cases, we might be able to post archival documents online in their entirety, but in others we might just be able to include an index card with information on the document and a form to request access to the latter. In addition, we might be able to post some archival collections online whereby others might only be consulted from the premises of associated documentation centres that are collaborating with the universal archive. This will depend on the terms that we negotiate with the archive owners and the individuals holding intellectual property rights to the material. What we want to do is facilitate access to the material by making it intelligible, by creating accessible and efficient ways of searching and navigating the different archives.

SM: During the “Speak, Memory” symposium, several of the discussions referred to the difference between an archive and a collection. In your opinion, what is the difference between the museum’s collection and its archive?

JC: The notions of archive and collection are mutually transforming each other to the extent that the differentiation between both has become extremely complex.

From the beginning of the 1960s, artists started to dematerialize or de-objectify their practices by transforming them into processes that could be archived, whether this be through text, photography, videos, information or documentation that would traditionally belong in an archive as opposed to a museum collection properly speaking. These new artistic practices give way to a hybridization of the traditional concept of the museum collection with that of the archive, in so far as the documents, testimonies, and fragments of artistic practices cease to be perceived as a mere contextualization of the art object and become a part of the collection in its own right. In this sense, the collection becomes more and more of an archive and the archive becomes part of the collection. This has important connotations because the logics of display that are normally applied to art objects differ radically from the logics of an archive, which are informed by issues of access.

2) Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona.
Ideally, there shouldn’t be a difference between the museum’s collection and its archive; this differentiation has become anachronistic. However, in practice, we are forced to make this distinction, in particular when faced with the commercialization of archives. Archives should not be bought in the same terms of exclusivity and property as a traditional artwork. We have to come up with new modes of “collecting” that we can specifically apply to archives.

In addition, there has traditionally been a difference in the use of archives and collections: whereas the art object was essentially used for exhibition display, the archive was fundamentally used for educational or research purposes. However, museums are increasingly exhibiting archival elements, while at the same time presenting art objects in contexts where they become a document or a didactic tool. There is always the risk of aestheticizing or fetishizing the document, but if one proceeds with intelligence, exhibiting documents can also awaken the testimonial or documentary value of an artwork. To give a concrete example, if we screen documentaries on the Spanish Civil War in front of Picasso’s *Guernica* in our museum, we can bring back to life that testimonial intention that *Guernica* originally had, which has now almost disappeared under the various layers of interpretation of the work.

**SM:** Many of the symposium discussions regularly returned to the differences between supposedly independent archival initiatives and institutional archives such as museum archives, with the assumption that independent archives are somehow more objective, more sheltered from market dynamics and political agendas. Could you give your take on this?

**JC:** As someone working for an institution attached to the Spanish Ministry of Culture, I admit I followed with quite a bit of skepticism the somewhat naïve observations on the so-called independence of private or individual archival initiatives (which were often referred to as independent archival initiatives or non-institutional archival projects), as opposed to a more ideological or monopolizing mandate of institutional archives. It seemed to me that very few people were questioning the agenda of several of the individual archival initiatives that were presented in the symposium and there was also a lack of debate on the responsibility that these initiatives have towards the public. I can understand that there is a lack of trust in state-owned initiatives, this is something that is not unique to the Middle East or Latin America, it also happens in Europe and other parts of the Western world. But it would be more productive to try to engage in a dialogue and critical debate with these institutions. I also understand that in certain countries, public institutions have become such bureaucratic fossils that they are incapable of engaging in a critical debate: hence the importance of parallel or independent art scenes. However, this should not exempt private archival initiatives from thinking seriously about their public responsibility and cultural legitimacy, in particular if they want to avoid replicating the hierarchical models and monopolization of memory that they are so critical of.

**SM:** In a situation where we are witnessing a commercialization of archives, which inevitably results in their fragmentation and privatization, what role can the museum play?

**JC:** I don’t have a final answer on this because we are still testing the waters on what can be done through our experience with the Southern Conceptualisms Network, which is working to defend a notion of heritage that goes beyond the market. However, I can think of a number of actions that museums can undertake to face the current state of affairs.

First of all, museums should develop acquisition policies for archives that are different from the policies applied to traditional art objects. We shouldn’t export the same logic of purchase and collecting.

In the second place, museums should always prioritize maintaining the integrity of an archive or take steps to avoid its dispersion or fragmentation. If the physical location of the original documents is dispersed, the museum should try to ensure that the integrity of the collection, even in the form of copies, can be consulted in one place.
In the third place, the museum should make sure that the archive doesn’t lose its connection or relationship with what is often referred to as its “community of origin,” i.e. the group of people that claim these archival documents as constitutive elements of their own identity as a community. In the case of our relationship with the Southern Conceptualisms Network, we are attempting to address the dynamics of fragmentation and dispersion of the material and immaterial legacy of the poetic and political practices that have taken place in Latin America since the 1960s, and, similarly, to imagine and put in motion a set of more horizontal and logical decolonizing policies of shared production of knowledge in the face of the conventional model of acquiring and displacing the Latin American documentary assets to central countries. The collaboration between the Southern Conceptualisms Network and Museo Reina Sofía doesn’t consist of selecting research subjects according to the interests of our institution, and neither is it a case of researchers locating new acquisitions, but rather of building a public, digital archive which can reclaim the public nature of the documents of Latin American Conceptualism, which, due to its political and social context, represents a manifestation of protest against the dictatorial imposition in the continent.

In practice however, things are more complicated. Without giving any names, our museum was contacted to acquire an archive from Latin America that was specifically “packaged” for museum acquisition. We immediately alerted the Southern Conceptualisms Network of the situation. After discussing this with them, and although the network is fundamentally opposed to the acquisition and export of archives, we jointly realized that if we didn’t consider buying the archive that was presented to us, the latter would inevitably be sold to different buyers and dispersed. In cases like this, we reach a perverse situation where the museum, with the consent of the network, has to buy an archive from Latin America to ensure its integrity and access to the latter.

For this reason, it is essential that we come up with new forms of mediation, models and specific practices in solidarity between intellectual and subaltern communities and the diverse collectives comprising social movements. It is of the utmost importance for museums to develop and share protocols and codes of conducts on the acquisition of archives. Ideally, we should draft codes of ethics and good practices to be signed not only by institutions but also by states.

SM: Is the Reina Sofía interested in archiving material from other regions beyond Latin America, such as the Middle East? What is your strategy for the future?

JC: The Reina Sofía Museum is interested in a dialogue beyond the Anglo-Saxon museum world, in other contexts where we feel we have something to share. Our relationship with the Southern Conceptualisms Network makes sense in view of Spain’s historical links with Latin America. I know that MACBA also had the intention of engaging with the broader Mediterranean region, including North Africa and the Middle East. Ideally, we would like to build an organic relationship with artists and organizations in the Middle East, through a slow process of getting to know each other. However, in view of the relatively aggressive engagement in the region of institutions such as Tate and the new museums that are being established in the Gulf, we are having to take a somewhat faster and more proactive stance to allow our voice to be heard.

*Jesús Carrillo is director of Cultural Programs at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid).*
Epilogue
Can a history of the January 25 Egyptian revolution be written?

People have come to suffer from collective “political amnesia”, wrote Yasser Abdallah in his article “21 February: The people want to restore memory.” On the Egyptian street, facts are mixed with state propaganda, rumors and conspiracy theories that are welcomed by an increasingly distrustful public. Few means are available to verify facts.

On the one hand, the Egyptian regime has internalized a security culture in its various administrative bodies, restricting access to state documents and decision-making processes. On the other, a singular reading of Egypt’s modern history has been institutionalized and promoted over the past few decades through the state’s control over media, cultural production and education. A thorough examination of the past seems imperative to understanding and historicizing the present.

Although the continuous rewriting of Egyptian history dates back to ancient times, when Pharaohs inscribed their stories on the walls of temples and tombs constructed by their predecessors and omitted writings that conflicted with their desired legacies, the modern history of Egypt has suffered from more extreme measures to instill singular historical narratives. In his talk at the Bidoun Library, hosted by Cairo’s Townhouse Gallery in October 2010, historian Khaled Fahmy told his audience about a 19th-century Turkish document he stumbled upon in the Egyptian National Archives. The document was never translated into Arabic as it did not support the common legacy of Khedive Muhammed Ali Pasha as a builder of the modern state of Egypt. The Egyptian Army, Fahmy recounted, halted its Levant expedition for a whole day because they did not support the image of the royal family at the time.

In the second half of the 20th century, the Nasser regime worked on creating a specific legacy of the 1952 revolution, discrediting the previous ruling monarchy. In 1952, the Ministry of National Guidance was established. This ministry, which encompassed both the ministries of information and culture at various times, was responsible for institutionalizing specific readings of modern Egyptian history and current events among the masses. It also played a pivotal role in building an Egyptian identity in relation to the Arab world. In the 1980s, the Ministry of National Guidance was broken down into two independent ministries, yet the “culture of national guidance continued,” as historian Sherif Younis says. State-run press continued to promote the regime’s vision as evidenced by the coverage of the January 25 revolution.

Educational curricula were adapted over the past few decades to offer a specific historical reading of Egypt’s ancient and modern past. Cultural policy as set by the state was promoted through centralized funding and control over production, exhibition and promotional resources.

The development of alternative narratives to those of the state is hampered by the inaccessibility of the Egyptian National Archives. State Security has controlled all access to the archives, in addition to which, various government bodies, especially the military and security apparatuses, refuse to submit documents to the National Archives. The National Archives are therefore incomplete and available documents need careful examination to work through possible biases.

During a discussion session held at the “Speak, Memory” symposium, Fahmy explained that documents on the 1967 war remain classified at the National Archives. Simple questions like whether former Egyptian Vice President and Commander of the Armed Forces Field Marshal Abdel Hakim Amer gave formal orders to withdraw from the war, how those orders reached troops in the battlefield and how they were executed, cannot be answered to date.

Administrative and decision-making documents at various institutions are often lost or destroyed. To date the causes of the 2008 fire at the Shura Council, Egypt’s upper house of parliament, remain unclear. One of the greatest losses from the fire is the Shura council’s archive and internal documents. On January 28, the so-called Friday of Anger, protesters set the National Democratic Party’s headquarters in Cairo on fire and on February 23, an administrative building belonging to the Ministry of Interior was also set ablaze by rioting security officers, surely resulting in the loss of thousands of documents.

With the state’s longstanding control over the media and access to information, the public started creating their own record of incidents of corruption and police brutality with amateur video footage. Citizen journalism has proliferated in Egypt in recent years, with people constantly using cellphones and cameras to document various events on the street, in hospitals and even police stations. Mini-archives were organically formed and shared through social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. An increasing number of people shared, annotated, criticized, referenced and linked these videos to other videos, articles and discussion forums. The best way to protect the material from security forces was to share it with the largest possible number of people; a logic that resonates with the writings of French film archivist and cinephile Henri Langlois who wrote “the best way to preserve film is to project it.”

1) Graffiti around Tahrir Square: “Thee, which your love is freedom.”


3) Pro-democracy protesters in Tahrir Square on Sunday, January 30, 2011: “Try Mubarak and his regime before they flee the country. We are all Khaled Said.”

4) Pro-democracy protesters camping in Tahrir Square.


6) Pro-democracy protesters in Tahrir Square on Thursday, February 3, 2011. Protesters were facing Mubarak supporters, who cursed at them from the bridge.
Twenty-seven year old Khaled Said, the Alexandrian activist, was trying to share a video that allegedly showed two policemen negotiating a drug deal when he was beaten to death by police officers in June 2010. Although the video was never made public, the incident later served to mobilize thousands via online calls for protests against police corruption and torture on January 28. These archives were pivotal at the beginning of the revolution.

In its continued attempts to control the situation, the Egyptian government blocked Twitter and allowed sporadic access to Facebook between January 25 and 27, 2011. But despite the information barrier, people continued to share material and express support for the demonstrations. Hundreds of thousands of people confirmed their participation in the Friday of Anger pro-democracy protests on January 28, encouraging the state to resort to more extreme measures, severing Internet connections across the country, cutting off mobile phone networks and jamming the signal of Al-Jazeera Mubasher and Al-Jazeera Arabic on NileSat. Coupled with clear warnings announced through state media that people should stay home, the former political regime strove to obliterate any lasting memory of the Friday of Anger. No one, they hoped would be able to prove that millions of people took to the streets calling for the ouster of the Mubarak regime and evidence of the violent confrontations would be minimal.

The coverage of the clashes between demonstrators and state security forces and thugs was sporadic as protestors took to the streets in various parts of the city. On the ground, reporters were arrested and their cell phones and cameras confiscated or destroyed by state security. With internet access and journalists’ resources limited, few reports of the violence in districts (including Sayyeda Zeinab, Al-Azhar, Old Cairo and Al-Matariya) reached the people. Al Sayyeda Zeinab, only ten minutes away from Tahrir Square, Friday prayers were indiscriminately attacked with tear gas, rubber bullets, knives and bludgeons. Groups split up and were cornered in small alleys where they could easily be contained. State media also tightened its grip, spreading regime propaganda and rumors about journalists, as many Egyptians who did not have access to foreign media or independent Arabic satellite news turned to State TV. The reports they received were highly conflicting blaming various groups for the over-blown narrative of chaos, arson and looting. Most people stayed home or were on neighborhood watch from a “phantom aggressor” that rarely came.

The government restored Internet services on Wednesday February 2, 2011, right before violence broke out around Tahrir Square between Mubarak supporters, thugs and pro-democracy protestors. Egyptian artist Hamdy Reda, who documented violence between protestors and pro-Mubarak forces, was arrested at a checkpoint by military and national security officers and accused of being an Iranian spy. He was later interrogated and released after his identity was verified, but his camera’s memory cards were confiscated by military officers, who acknowledged that “these images would be of immense value in the future and that’s exactly why they were taking them,” Reda recounted.

Arrests continued in the following days and there was a major crackdown on journalists and foreigners. Neighborhood watch groups became more suspicious, checking and often confiscating the cameras and laptops of people who passed through the checkpoints. Confusion continued until Mubarak stepped down on Friday, February 11.

But even the state’s repressive measures could not erase the video, photographic and print records created of the revolution. Basic facts, however, remain contested despite the ongoing investigations and attempts of various cultural and educational institutions to collect documentary material on the 18-day revolution. Much of the events on the street can be inferred from eyewitness reports and available footage, yet how the Egyptian regime made its decisions at these critical times remains speculative. Investigations by Attorney General Abdel Maguid Mahmoud continue to focus on former officials’ appropriation of public funds and occasionally “the security void,” an obscure term, which refers to the withdrawal of police forces on the evening of January 28, and the resulting chaos, vandalism, arson and attacks on police stations and prisons. Little reference is made to the deliberate violence instigated by the police forces from January 25-28.

Historically, the burning of archives has symbolized the destruction of the state. This is partly the logic behind accusing the protesters of burning the NDP headquarters on January 28, 2011. Yet, it is in the interest of pro-democracy protestors that the archives of various administrative bodies be preserved, as those archives likely contain evidence of government corruption and the proliferation of police brutality that would help prosecute regime officials. Some eyewitnesses have alleged that plainclothes policemen set fire to the NDP building after removing some computers and files, but this has not been confirmed. However, other attempts at destroying documents have been concretely reported; Al-Masry Al-Youm newspaper recently reported that Zakariya Azmy, the former president’s chief of staff, was caught shredding documents in the presidential palaces in Orouba and Abdeen, showing that attempts to cover the past continue. Copies of government documents are supposedly available at more than one institution, which may mean the documentation still exists, but accessing such evidence will remain nearly impossible until a new regime wants them to surface.

The difficulty of writing the history of this revolution as it continues is perhaps conveyed in a humorous Facebook post that imagined high school history exams in 2049. “Provide an explanation for the disappearance of Egyptian security forces on January 28, 2011 and the use of the NDP’s Secretary for Organizational Affairs, Ahmed Ezz, as a scapegoat by the Mubarak regime,” it read. The ability to answer such questions might be based on a mixture of documentary footage, testimonies and government documents that we must find and safeguard.

Mai Elwakil is a writer and art critic based in Cairo.
“Speak, Memory” undoubtedly opened up more questions than it resolved, but it set the scene for a more sustained conversation on archival projects, historiographic endeavors and research initiatives in the Middle East. The symposium highlighted many relevant topics that could be the basis for specialized meetings on methodological or practical topics (such as copyright issues, the conservation or preservation of archives at risk, the technology of archiving, research methodologies or advocacy strategies to encourage access to national archives) or more thematic subjects (such as recording and archiving oral histories, the documentation of performance art or the challenges of documenting contemporary art), to state but a few topics.

Immediate steps following the symposium include the “Archive Map” research project, which seeks to create a growing database of archival collections that contain material relevant to the Middle East’s modern and contemporary art history. Although less ambitious in its scope, the “Archive Map” is strongly inspired by the “Cartographies” project carried out by the Southern Conceptualisms Network in Latin America. Like the “Cartographies” project, rather than limiting itself to a listing of archives, the “Archive Map” seeks to give a broader picture and diagnosis on the state of archival collections in the region to:

(i) Identify existing gaps and memory lapses in local art history. If the “Archive Map” reveals that there isn’t archival material documenting significant artistic episodes, we hope that it will encourage researchers to create an archive, with audio records, video documentation or curatorial or artist projects;

(ii) Identify archives at risk, raise awareness on their precarious state and take actions to preserve them by raising funds and properly cataloguing and storing the material;

(iii) Analyze access policies of supposedly public archival collections and where necessary advocate for policy changes through awareness campaigns, press articles or other means;

(iv) Spur new research projects, exhibitions and publications that will showcase archival material to a larger community of researchers and to the general public.

In its first phase, the “Archive Map” will limit itself to four countries: Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. These countries have been selected because of their rich modern and contemporary art history and also because of our working relationship with several researchers that have been exploring archival collections in these countries. Lead researchers include Clare Davies for Egypt, Anneka Lenssen for Syria, Sarah Rogers for Lebanon (in collaboration with Rasha Salti and Kristine Khouri) and Saleem Al-Bahloly for Iraq.

Moreover, the “Archive Map” will focus on archival collections (whether state-owned or independent) that are open or accessible (at least seemingly) to the public. We have deliberately decided to exclude private collections from this research to avoid an intensification of the ongoing purchase and export of privately held archives in the Middle East.

The “Archive Map” will be published online in the fall of 2011. Please check www.speakmemory.org for updated information.

Next steps: The Archive Map
Presentations: “Speak, Memory” symposium

1) Susan Meiselas
2) Miguel A. López & Kristine Khouri
3) Negar Azimi & Yasmine Eid-Sabbagh
4) Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin

5) Claire Hsu & Farah Wardani
6) Vasif Kortun
7) Barnaby Drabble
8) Heba Farid

9) Hussein Omar & Lucie Ryzova
10) Celine Condorelli
11) Group Discussion I, Hegemony and the Archive
12) Beatrice von Bismarck

13) PAD.MA
14) Sean Dockray
15) Jesús Carrillo
16) Group Discussion II, The Promise of the Archive
### Registered Participants

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