

# Storytelling and Ethics

Literature, Visual Arts and  
the Power of Narrative

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## 5 The Decline of Narrative and the Rise of the Archive

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The role of narrative in Western cultures has been, and still is, fundamental. During thousands of years mythical and religious stories have provided frameworks that enabled human subjects to understand their lives and to direct those lives. Narrative can be seen as an existential response to the world and to the experience of that world. This response is based on the temporal dimension of life; it assumes continuity between events, most of them in the past or the present, but usually future oriented. Although future events still must happen, narrative frameworks often provide clear-cut expectations of them. It is from the perspective of a closure that will take place in the future that past and present events are understood and represented. Narratives that end with a life beyond the life we are living, but also apocalyptic narratives are prime examples of how narrativity has been and still is a necessary mode of signification for making human existence livable (see Kermode 2000). When, with the rise of modernity, mythical and religious stories lost their credibility, it has not at all eroded the crucial role of narrativity. Mythical and religious stories were replaced by, or translated into, stories that reflected more modern political, moral, or scientific points of view. Narratives of liberation, emancipation or progression (or their apocalyptic opposites) became the new versions of old stories. Different as they were in their worldview, their functioning as narrative frameworks providing sense to the world and to human existence remained the same.

In this chapter I argue that narrative has not only provided frameworks to human subjects to understand their lives and to direct those lives, narrative has also functioned as the medium of identity, as the symbolic mode that substantiates identity. In the wake of Paul Ricoeur, I will call this notion of identity 'narrative identity'.<sup>1</sup> But before discussing the idea of narrative identity I will begin with an account of identity that is almost its opposite, and what I will call 'archival identity'. This detour is necessary because I will contend that narrative identity is at the moment under siege, whereas the role of archival identity is increasing. I will address this increasing importance of archival identity in the second part of my chapter by discussing artworks of South African artist Santu Mofokeng and Lebanese artist Walid Raad.

### Identity without the Person

In his essay "Identity without the Person" Giorgio Agamben notes a fundamental transformation in the concept of identity in the second half of the nineteenth century. He argues that from this point identity has no longer anything to do with recognition and the person's social prestige. Identity is from then on based on another kind of recognition, namely that of the recidivist criminal recognized by the police officer. The police officer can identify criminals by using techniques that had undergone a radical development in the nineteenth century. It is by using files and databases that police officers can determine the identity of a criminal.

To exemplify this fundamental transformation Agamben describes the system of criminal identification developed by Alphonse Bertillon, an obscure bureaucrat in the police department of Paris. Towards the end of the 1870s he develops a method for identifying criminals that is based on anthropometric measurements and mug shots:

Whoever happened to be detained or arrested for whatever reason would immediately be subjected to a series of measurements of the skull, arms, fingers, toes, ears, and face. Once the suspect had been photographed both in profile and frontally, the two photos would be attached to the "Bertillon card", which contained all the useful identification data, according to the system that its inventor had christened *portrait parlé*.

(Agamben 2013, 48)

The success of Bertillon's archival classification system is proven by the fact that worldwide similar systems were developed. In the UK Francis Galton developed a fingerprinting classification system, which enabled the identification of recidivist criminals without the possibility of error. He claimed that the statistical survey of fingerprinting was particularly suited to natives from the colonies. Whereas their physical characteristics tended to be confusing and appeared indistinguishable to the European eye, identifying their fingerprints was a solution for this problem.

Agamben draws ominous conclusions from this transformation in establishing the identity of a person. For the first time in the history of humanity, identity was no longer a function of the social "persona" and its recognition by others but rather a function of biological data, which could bear no relation to it:

What now defines my identity and recognizability are the senseless arabesques that my linked-up thumb leaves on a card in some police station. This is something with which I have absolutely nothing to do, something with which and by which I cannot in any way identify myself or take distance from: naked life, a pure biological datum.

(Agamben 2013, 50)

His somber, ominous conclusion is the result of contrasting the second half of the nineteenth century with classical Roman times, a period which is strongly idealized by Agamben. The notion of identity which was dominant then is supposed to be the result of the "desire to be recognized by others". This desire is inseparable from being human, for it is only through recognition by others that man can constitute himself as a person (46). More concretely this means that in Rome every individual was identified by a name that expressed his belonging to a *gens*, that is, to a lineage. This lineage was defined by the ancestor's mask of wax that every patrician family kept in the atrium of the home. *Persona* came to signify the juridical capacity and political dignity of the free man, that is, not of every individual in the Roman world. A slave, inasmuch as he or she had neither ancestors, nor a mask, nor a name, could not have a "persona". So, a slave had no juridical capacity.

Agamben contrasts the Roman notion of identity to the one which came about in the late nineteenth century by the idea that recognition by others, playing a role in Roman times, has no function anymore since the nineteenth century. Although familial lineage had to be recognized by others, that is by identification of the ancestor's mask, and was not considered as just a biological given, this notion of identity has a lot in common with the more recent nineteenth-century one. In principal, both notions of identity consider identity as something you are born with. You are born as a free man, because of the family you are part of (not seen as biological DNA but as a social structure within which you are born); or, alternatively, biological, physical features determine your criminal or other kind of identity. By contrasting the Roman *persona* to the late-nineteenth-century notion of identity Agamben leaves out a crucial part of history. He can do that because although he takes Roman identity as an example, he deals with the desire, or necessity, to be recognized by others in order to constitute oneself as a person as a universal phenomenon; the biological identity that came about in the late nineteenth century seems to be a historical intrusion and deviation in a universal structure, at least for Agamben.

The historical period that remains undiscussed in Agamben's account is, however, the period in which the self gets a temporal dimension and identity becomes a narrative issue. When since the Renaissance the bourgeoisie becomes the upcoming social and political class, social mobility transforms the notion of self that has been prevalent so far. The French Revolution is the symbolic summit in this socio-political development. It is also the period in which the literary genre of the novel becomes the most important genre. The rise of the novel is at the same time the rise of a narrative notion of identity. The question "What am I?", for example: a free man, a slave, a nobleman, a lower-class farmer, is being reformulated and becomes "Who am I?" This formula questions the immutable status of selfhood and, in the case of the novel, of character. Character

becomes a set of acquired dispositions. This also explains the ambiguity of the term "character", not only referring to a human being, the subject that plays a role in the narrative, but also to the selfhood or personality in which the mediations performed by plot result. This ambiguity enables paradoxical constructions of "the character of a character".

The answer to the quest for narrative identity looks for sameness in what is by definition diverse, variable, discontinuous, or unstable. This "sameness" is not essentialist, but is defined by temporality, "processuality" and change and results in a notion of identity which considers the self as a process of becoming. In the novel characters are themselves a kind of plot, because there is usually a correlation between action and character. Narrative is the path of a character, or better of the character of the character. Although a search for permanence in time is attached to the notion of identity, narrative identity allows for permanence or sameness as the result of a process or development. Whereas in narrative genres like fairytales characters operate in the function of plot, in the novel the plot is in the service of character. In that respect, the novel of apprenticeship or *Bildungsroman* is the literary genre in which narrative identity is not only enacted but also thematized. The German notion of *Bildung* articulates extremely well the nature of narrative identity.

However, although narrative identity became increasingly important during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the late nineteenth century shows the first symptoms of its decline. This decline seems to have accelerated at the end of the next century. Let me elaborate some arguments that indicate the problematization of narrative as the most important symbolic mode, and as a result of narrative, identity as well.

Postmodern French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard has argued that the contemporary culture defined by the postmodern condition is characterized by the decline of grand narratives (Lyotard 1984). It is, however, not narrative as such, or in general, that is under siege. Postmodernity manifests itself through skepticism toward what he calls meta-narratives. In fact, the mythical, religious, political and scientific narratives to which I just referred are nothing other than such meta-narratives. Meta-narratives are conclusive stories that strive to signify the whole world in one single account. Lyotard's examples of such meta-narratives are the Enlightenment narratives in which knowledge is no goal in itself, but serves human subjects in their pursuit of progress in the moral, political and economic sense. The validity of knowledge functions within an epic story about emancipation and fulfillment; it is a means to a narrative end. Postmodernism is then defined as a radical incredulity toward such meta-narratives.

According to Lyotard the place of narrative within contemporary culture is a modest one. What is left is a multiplicity of contending smaller narratives. Not one of these is superior and has the status of



being conclusive or overarching (meta-). Narratives are no longer able to legitimize the pursuit of knowledge, economic growth, or social and moral emancipation. They only work as expressions of a point of view and of specific interests; those points of view can only become paramount by being convincing or not. To be more precise, they work rhetorically: not based on their truth value, but performatively.

Lyotard's account of the transformation of the condition of modernity into postmodernity does not pay much attention to what has led to this transformation. He elaborates its results and implications. He explicates only one cause, namely the rise of a computerized society. The explosive dissemination of computer technology has replaced narrative as the dominant symbolic form by the database. Lyotard is not the only one who stages narrative and the database as competitive symbolic forms and who argues for the diminishing importance of narrative in favor of the database. In his work about new media, Lev Manovich also argues that narrative as a key form of cultural expression of the modern age has been replaced in the postmodern age by the database (Manovich 2001). Narrative, as well as the database, are competing for the same territory in human culture; as symbolic cultural forms they each claim an exclusive right to make meaning about the world. Manovich sees narrative and the database as two competing imaginations, two basic creative impulses, or two existential responses to the world. They differ in how they do this. The database represents the world as a list or collection of items, whereas narrative creates a cause-and-effect trajectory for representing the world (225). The kind of imagination proposed by the database appears to be spatial, whereas narrative organizes experience first on a temporal basis. They both give efficient access to information, albeit in very different ways. But in our computer age, it is the database that becomes the predominant center of creative processes that are deployed to make sense of human experience, cultural memory and the world in general.

Of course, the database is a rather technical notion and in that sense hard to compare with narrative, which is a symbolic form that can be recognized in all modes of making sense of experience, memory and identity. But Manovich's claim is that the computer-based form of the database has migrated back into culture at large, both literally and conceptually (2001, 214). The database has become a new metaphor that we use to conceptualize lists and collections of whatever kind: collections of documents, of objects, of individual as well as collective memory. Not only the computer database but also the 3-D computer-based virtual spaces "have become true cultural forms—general ways used by the culture to represent human experience, the world, and human existence in this world" (215).

To further understand how the rise of computerized society has redistributed the role of narrative and of the database as competing creative

impulses, Manovich brings in the semiotic notions of syntagm and paradigm. Originally introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure to describe the structure of natural languages, and applied by Roland Barthes to describe sign systems like fashion or food, the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic are two structural dimensions of all sign systems. A syntagm consists of a *combination* of signs. To use the example of natural language, an utterance is produced by combining or stringing together one word after another, in a linear sequence. The paradigmatic dimension is the result of *selecting*; a language user selects each new element from a group of related elements with the same meaning or function. He or she selects a noun from the group, set, or collection of nouns, or an expression from the set of expressions which are synonyms of that expression.

De Saussure describes the paradigmatic dimension as associations that are made "in theory". This means that the elements that belong to a paradigm are related to each other *in absentia*. Elements that belong to the syntagmatic dimension are related to each other *in praesentia*; they are articulated into a sentence or into an outfit. Manovich adds to this difference between paradigm and syntagm that paradigm is implicit and imagined, whereas syntagm is explicit (2001, 230). These characteristics of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions can also be recognized in novels and in cinema:

Literary and cinematic narratives work in the same way. Particular words, sentences, shots, and scenes that make up a narrative have a material existence; other elements that form the imaginary world of an author or a particular literary or cinematic style, and that could have appeared instead, exist only virtually.

(231)

Manovich's claim about new media is that they reverse this relationship between the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic. "Database (the paradigm) is given material existence, while narrative (the syntagm) is dematerialized. Paradigm is privileged, syntagm is downplayed. Paradigm is real; syntagm, virtual" (231).

He illustrates this privileging of paradigm over syntagm by describing what typical interfaces do:

For instance, a screen may contain a few icons; clicking on each icon leads the user to a different screen. On the level of an individual screen, these choices form a paradigm of their own that is explicitly presented to the user. On the level of the whole object, the user is made aware that she is following one possible trajectory among many others. In other words, she is selecting one trajectory from the paradigm of all trajectories that are defined.

(2011, 231)

Interactive interfaces present the complete paradigm to the user by an explicit menu of all available choices. This does not imply that the syntagmatic dimension is canceled out. Although the user of a computer is making choices or selections at each new screen, the result is a syntagmatic, linear sequence of screens that have been followed. But it is important that the paradigm is more present than the syntagm which is less visible and present and embedded within an overall paradigmatic structure. And outside of the special realm of structuralist thought, we have another term for paradigm. It is called *archive*.

The structuralist discourse exemplifies yet another dimension of the fundamental changes brought about by the rise of computerized society. But, as already argued, these changes are not limited to computer technology. Ultimately, it concerns a change in creative processes and symbolic modes that are deployed for making sense of life, memory and identity. It is the paradigmatic dimension of the database, in other words of the archive, that becomes the predominant center of those processes. Because of this cultural change, the symbolic form of (syntagmatic) narrativity has a more modest role to play. It is no longer the encompassing framework in which all kind of information is embedded, but the other way around. It is in the encompassing framework of archival organizations that (small) narratives are embedded.

Archives are no longer considered to be passive guardians of an inherited legacy but instead, they are seen now as active agents that shape memory, and identity in very specific ways. But what are the repercussions of this rise of the archive as the most important symbolic mode for notions of identity? More specifically, what exactly does it mean that archival organizations are active agents that shape not only social and cultural memory but also personal identity?

The archive is far from a neutral guardian. Although the archive is in many cases a place where facts can be found, or, in the words of Jeffrey Wallen, "a place where secrets are revealed or where one can now find truths that had been hidden", the archive is also a place that "actively shapes and produces the identities of those it registers" (2009, 268–69). The archive is responsible for significations that differ fundamentally from meaning produced by narratives.

Wallen describes how contacts with archiving mechanisms shape our identities:

Who we are is always also now produced by archival machines that register, observe, and record our passage through the apparatuses of society ... The driver's license, the school report card, the credit card receipt, the medical report are the artifacts we receive from our interactions with the gigantic bureaucracies of the state, the



school, the financial system, and the medical-insurance complex. Our identities are also woven for us, and the archive is the loom.

(269)

A strong example of the shaping power of archival organization is Wallen's case study of the Stasi archives in former East Germany. Although it stems from a totalitarian society that is utterly bureaucratic in obsessive ways, the point is that the way the Stasi did the archiving, the way it performed as an active agent in creating the identities of those who they register, is not fundamentally different from what any archival organization does:

In almost all instances the Stasi manage to create something akin to the 'biographical illusion' through its techniques of surveillance and its arsenal of policing measures. Thus, in many cases, the Stasi's tales of dissidence converged with the lived experiences of the critical writers the Stasi pursued. Many of the individuals the Stasi branched as hostile or dissident were forced, sooner or later, to act out their Stasi-engineered destinies ... Invariably the two 'stories' merged—that of the Stasi and the individual's own life story—and these individuals were forced to live out the fiction that the state apparatus and the Stasi had fabricated about them.

(Lewis 2003, 387; quoted in Wallen 2009, 269)

The moment that an individual finds out about the fictional record the Stasi has archived of her or him, he or she will begin to think critically and antagonistically about the East-German state apparatus. By doing this they begin to behave accordingly to the accusations the Stasi made against her or him. Ultimately, this results in an internalization of an archival portrait that others have constructed. This true portrayal was not found in the archive but produced by the archive. Although this example is extreme in the sense that it comes from an archival practice in a totalitarian society, it demonstrates well how the archive is not just a neutral guardian but also an active agent.

### **Substantiating Individual Identity by Means of the Archive**

In order to understand better how archival organizations shape personal identities, I will say a few words about Michel Foucault's work on the modern archive. When Foucault writes about episteme (the order of things), he is not referring to archival organizations in the literal sense. An episteme is a more fundamental form of order than an archival organization. But archives are examples of "techniques" or "practices" in which the operations of an episteme can be recognized easily. The

episteme governs the principles according to which archival organizations are structured in such a way that archives can be emblematic examples of the nature of an episteme. But because of the increasing importance of the archive in the Modern age, Foucault has also written extensively on the role of archives in that period. For, what changed radically then is the so-called "threshold of description", the minimum of importance a piece of information must have to be worthy of archiving. This threshold was lowered dramatically to include common people. In the words of Foucault:

For a long time, ordinary individuality—the everyday individuality of everybody—remained below the threshold of description. To be looked at, observed, described in detail, followed from day to day by an uninterrupted writing was a privilege. ... The disciplinary methods reserved this relation, lowered the threshold of describable individuality and made of this description a means of control and a method of domination. [What is archived] is no longer a monument for future memory, but a document for possible use. And this new describability is all the more marked in that the disciplinary framework is a strict one; the child, the patient, the madman, the prisoner, were to become ... the object of individual descriptions and biographical accounts.

(Foucault 1979, 191–92)

Foucault argues that a variety of new ways of examining and describing individuals was developed. The question which then emerges is in which sense this accumulation and processing of the new data differed from the knowledge production of earlier centuries. Scientists from earlier centuries also were obsessed with classifying objects and archiving the results of these classifications.<sup>2</sup>

Foucault's answer is that while it is true that plants, animals, and even human beings had been the subject of study before the examination regime was in place, they entered a field of knowledge as general categories, as a species for example, and not as singular individuals:

What was innovative about the new archives was precisely that they objectified individuals not as members of a pre-existing category, but in all their uniqueness and singularity. Far from being archivable in terms of their shared properties, human beings became linked to all the unique series of events (medical, military, educational, penal events) which made them who they are as historical individuals—a history which could now take the form of a file while the individual became a case.

(DeLanda 2003, 11)

In other words, whereas in the old archives individuals were used to build or substantiate categories, in the new archive, categories are being

used to build or substantiate the individual. This leads to a situation in which human bodies, events and archives interact, and it is this interaction which brings about individual identity. This identity is then not seen as a subjective interiority but as an objective exteriority. All the facts about people accumulated in the files and dossiers of databases and archives, extracted from us via a variety of examinations, provide people with an identity. This identity is not a matter of interiorized representation, like an ideology, but of an external body of archives within which we are caught and that compulsorily fabricate an objective identity for us. This "archival identity" may perhaps have little to do with our sense of identity, but this may not be the case for an insurance company, for example, for whom archived medical facts are the key to our identity, whether we like it or not (12).

One of the radical implications of this modern archive is that anyone who is not in the records does not really exist. This is, for example, at stake now with the thousands of migrants, who try to arrive in Europe, but then it turns out they have no passport. Migrants without a passport have no identity, cannot be considered as migrant, and are sent back to the country they came from, which will also not allow them into the country because they cannot prove what their nationality is. This drastic consequence is understandable when we realize that archival administrators do not observe, describe and classify reality, migrants in this case, but the other way around; they shape people and events into entities that fit the categorizations and that are recordable. This kind of reification entails that there are virtually no other identities than those that are contained in records and archives.<sup>3</sup> It also implies that exclusions from the archive are inherent to any archival organization. Those exclusions concern memories, documents, practices of knowledge production that are overlooked, not taken seriously, considered as unimportant or without any value. This explains why memories and knowledge 'outside the archive', are also part of the archive, in the sense of produced by archival rules of exclusion. Consequently, an archival organization has an inside as well as an outside.

#### Reanimation<sup>4</sup>

Although memory manifests itself in the form of narrative as well as through archival organizations, it is striking that many, and I would like to say the most significant, contemporary artists use the medium of the archive to address the issue of memory and identity. I will discuss two of these artists, Santu Mofokeng and Walid Raad. The works of Santu Mofokeng and Walid Raad are examples of artistic archival practices that pertain to a larger category of memory practices, meant to reanimate excised histories. Many contemporary art practices foreground these exclusions from the archive by presenting them "as yet" another archive.

Artists highlight this residue of the archive by collecting images that were until then not considered to be “archivable”, that is, of any value or importance. These images excluded from the archive are still there but cannot be looked at because according to the accepted discursive rules they do not show or articulate anything worth knowing.

An example of such an artistic practice transforming exclusions from the archive into an archive is the *Black Photo Album* by South African photographer Santu Mofokeng. The *Black Photo Album* is the result of an investigation of images that were commissioned by black working and middle-class families in South Africa in the period between 1890 and 1950. It was during this period that South Africa developed and implemented a racist political system. During this period, it was still common practice to depict African people in the same visual language as animals, as part of the fauna in their own natural habitat. In the ideologies of authoritative knowledge, they were considered as “natives” and the official, “archivable” images had to confirm such a notion of African people. The photographs commissioned by black people and representing them as bourgeois families did not fit this ideology and were excluded from the archives of official knowledge.

These images remain scattered in the private domain and are largely invisible. In the words of Santu Mofokeng:

They have been left behind by dead relatives, where they sometimes hang on obscure parlor walls in the townships. In some families, they are coveted as treasures, displacing totems in discursive narratives about identity, lineage and personality. And because, to some people, photographs contain the “shadow” of the subject, they are carefully guarded from the ill-will of witches and enemies. In other families, they are being destroyed as rubbish during spring-cleans because of interruptions in continuity or disaffection with the encapsulated meanings and history of the images. Most often they lie hidden to rot through neglect in kists, cupboards, cardboard boxes and plastic bags.  
(2011, 230)

Mofokeng’s *Black Photo Album* reverses the exclusion of these images from the authoritative public domain. He collects these images and the stories about the subjects of the photographs. Within the context of the gallery and the museum, he presents them in a new format in combination with the stories. By doing this the neglected memories and images are inserted into the public domain and form the archive from which until now they had been excluded. This reanimation of the invisible exclusions from the archive implies much more than bringing to life almost forgotten memories. By making these images into archival objects the ideology that subjected African people to the lower orders in the ‘family of men’, is rewritten.

Another example of an artistic practice compensating earlier exclusions is the work of Lebanese artist Walid Raad and his fictional collaborators of the Atlas Group. These collaborators donated work to the Archive of the Atlas Group. To give an example, *Missing Lebanese Wars*, consisting of plates and a notebook, was deposited in *The Atlas Group Archive* by a well-known (but fictional) Lebanese historian, named Dr. Fadl Fakhouri. Other fictive legatees of the archive are Asma Taffan (*Let's be Honest, the weather helped*, 1992) and Habib Fathallah (*I Might Die Before I Get a Rifle*, 1993). Walid Raad himself also donated work to the archive (*We Decided to Let Them Say, "We are Convinced", Twice*). The project of the Atlas Group unfolded between 1989 and 2004. In the 2004 Raad decided to end this "collaborative" project. In 2006, a retrospective exhibition was organized that showed the complete Atlas Group Archive in one single place, the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin.<sup>5</sup>

By means of the works in *The Atlas Group Archive*, Raad questions the mediation and archiving of information. The artistic, fictional archive enables the exploration of new epistemic and cognitive models. This new knowledge challenges the kind of knowledge that is disseminated by the dominant mass media and by Western discourses about terrorism, colonialism and orientalism. The presentation of artistic works as belonging to an archive directs the attention to the cognitive conflicts and problems thematized by these works. Walid Raad explains why the archive, as a place, is the necessary framework for his cognitive project:

I like to think that I always work from facts. But I always proceed from the understanding that there are different kinds of facts; some facts are historical, some are sociological, some are emotional, some are economic, and some are aesthetic. And some of these facts can sometimes only be experienced in a place we call fiction. I tend to think in terms of different kinds of facts and the places that permit their emergence.

(Quoted in Knape 2011, 99)

Besides fiction, the other place in the work of Walid Raad that permits these facts to emerge and become visible and knowable is the archive. And in Raad's case, fiction and the archive are intimately related; his archives are fictional.

The documents and images presented by the Atlas Group are not inherently fake or fictional. The texts and photographs were not manipulated. But it is their montage and assembling into a narrative or specific historical situation that propels them into fiction. The montage of image and text, or of different images is a specific mode of producing knowledge. The texts and images are never presented at face value, but they always "trouble each other". (Chouteau-Matikian 2011, 104) A good example of this use of montage is the *Notebook Volume 38: Already Been in a*



*Lake of Fire* donated to the *Atlas Group Archive* by the already mentioned Dr. Fadl Fakhouri. This file contains 145 photographic images of cars. These cars are of the same brand, model and color, as those used in car-bomb attacks during the Lebanese wars of 1975 to 1991. Notes and annotations made by Fakhouri are attached to the images. They specify information such as the number of casualties, the location and time of the explosion and the type of explosives used. The documentary information is all real and true. What is fictional, however, is the bringing together of these different elements in the notebook of the imaginary character of Dr. F. Fakhouri. And of course, the notebook is an archival genre. By using the notebook as the framework where factual images and notes are presented, a cognitive status is assigned to them. It is thanks to this archival genre that the images and notes are no longer disparate elements without any cognitive value. They become knowable and visible objects through the newly acquired status as archivable objects. The fictional archive of the *Atlas Group* present, in the words of Chouteau-Matikian, "latency, lapse, and speculation as vectors for historical truth equal to those of verification, authenticity and proof" (105).

But in the case of *Notebook Volume 38: Already been in a lake of fire*, the goal of this artistic project is not conveying knowledge about the kind of cars that were used in car-bomb attacks during the Lebanese wars. What is much more important are the layers of transmission due to which this kind of knowledge was lost; and subsequently, the archival framework thanks to which this knowledge can be retrieved. What is important is that the documents in the *Atlas Group Archive*, whether they are photographs, texts or videos, are never authentic or original, but always digital reproductions. They are always scanned, increased but often also decreased in size, and multiplied. The point is that "their original state is lost in the layers of transmissions, exhibitions and repetitions, and metaphorically in the *rumors* of history". (Chouteau-Matikian 2011, 105) After the cognitive impulse has been installed by means of these inauthentic reproductions, what should be verified is not the materiality of these artefacts but the structures through which knowledge is lost or transmitted.

Santu Mofokeng, as well as Walid Raad, use an archival framework to retrieve identities and historical knowledge that had been excluded from the official, institutional archives. They do not use a narrative framework to transmit the memories of identities of the past and historical events. They use an archival framework, because the medium of transmission due to which these identities and this historical knowledge were lost was the archive, not narrative. The representation of narrative identity seems to be no longer the only productive way to make these excluded identities exist. It is now the symbolic mode of the archive which has become more effective to provide identity to people, to histories, which have been inexistent, invisible, unacknowledged. To use Walid Raad's

words, "The layer of transmission due to which this kind of knowledge was lost" was transmission by means of the archive. The most effective way of countering exclusion from the archive is the archive itself, using an archival organization to include what has been excluded so far.

The works of Raad and Mofokeng are prime examples of the more modest role of narrative form. Their works are still 'telling'; they still rely on narrative for the constitution of identity, but narrative is no longer the encompassing framework in which all kind of information is embedded. In their work, it is the encompassing framework of the archive in which (small) narratives are embedded. The remaining question, central to this book, now is: what is the ethical difference of this very specific narrative form, a form which consists of narrative embedded within an archival organization?

To answer this question, we should first assess the ontological difference between narrative identity and what I have called archival identity. Archival identity is what archives impose on us. Narrative identity is the result of our lived sense of self. It is defined by temporality and change and results in a notion of identity which considers the self as a process of becoming. When narrative becomes embedded within an archival framework, or when narrative is produced by an archival organization, there seems to be a tension between two notions of identity which are almost binary opposites of each other.

This tension cannot easily be resolved; all I can do is to use the perspective offered by ethics to further understand this tension. Then it will become clear that this tension is not a narrative tension or an archival tension, but an ethical one produced by the embeddedness of narrative within the archive. But what is ethics? Jill Bennett distinguishes ethics from morality in the following way:

An ethics is enabled and invigorated by the capacity for transformation; that is, precisely by not assuming that there is a given outside to thinking. A morality on the other hand, operates within the bounds of a given set of conventions, within which social and political problems must be resolved.

(2005, 15)

The given set of conventions based on which a morality operates consists in the case of archival organizations of given sets of categories. This implies that the archival framework is a confining one. It determines the parameters within which small narratives can be told. The capacity for transformation which narrative and ethics have in common is restricted by the "bounds of a given set of conventions".

Santu Mofokeng's work demonstrates the confining effect of the archive extremely well. The life-stories suggested and partly told by the collected photographs are all embedded by the colonial archive,

according to which the portrayed persons are first black. There is nothing to transform about this archival identity. Their class identity is clearly a narrative one; they have climbed the ladder of class difference and now belong to the bourgeois. However, their selves as processes of becoming are embedded within an identity which is imposed on them: their being black.

### Notes

- 1 He developed this idea of narrative identity in his book *Oneself as Another* (1990). He started developing his theory of narrative identity already at the end of *Time and Narrative 3*.
- 2 For clear descriptions of the history of archival science, see Fernanda Ribeiro (2001) and Rumschöttel (2001).
- 3 In archives interfaces function as the critical nodes through which archivists enable and constrain the interpretation of the past. The interface is a site where power in the Foucauldian sense is negotiated and exercised. It is power exercised over documents and their representation, over the access to them and over the uses of archives. See over archival interfaces Hedstrom (2002).
- 4 This discussion of Walid Raad and Santu Mofoken is based on the last chapter of my book *Staging the Archive: Art and Photography in the Age of New Media* (2014).
- 5 The complete contents of the archive are published in the following book: *The Atlas Group (1989–2004): A Project by Walid Raad* (2006).

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