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In the Wake of Trauma:

Representing the Unnameable in Contemporary Art

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ABSTRACT

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Trauma is by its very nature an unnameable entity, one that defies language and instead exists in the realm of dreams, memories, and half-fictional shadows. Nonetheless, the events that form the aftereffects of trauma permeate Western media. As viewers of this media, by way of television, print and the Internet, we are all witnesses of traumatic events. This thesis addresses representations of trauma in contemporary art, with particular attention to their formation of the viewer as witness. Using a lens of trauma theory as a critical framework, an examination of the nature and reception of trauma in the work of contemporary artists Kara Walker and Walid Raad reveals how visual art can provide a complex language for communicating the many dimensions of historical and collective trauma. While Walker uses the traditional medium of the silhouette to investigate history of slavery and its effect on African American culture, Walid Raad has constructed a fictional archive in an attempt to explore the history of war in Lebanon. These strategies and others demonstrate the ways in which Kara Walker and Walid Raad disrupt the experience of viewing traumatic images and create the possibility for multifaceted empathic reactions in the viewer.

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INTRODUCTION

In her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag stated that "being a spectator of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessential modern experience"[1] The prevalence of images that project catastrophic events and human pain through a multitude of media channels has indeed shifted our understanding of how traumatic events are represented visually. In a time when billions of people watched the real-time collapse of the World Trade Center and only a few years later, were able to access grotesque photographs of torture inflicted on prisoners at Abu Ghraib, Iraq, the question of how these traumatic images are consumed and then interpreted is paramount to our understanding of the possibilities and shortcomings of witnessing and understanding the traumatic experience of others.

While traumatic images are everywhere in our everyday visual culture, curator John Miller suggests that the abstract notion of 'what is going on' around the globe is made concrete when representations are displayed for the edification of local and international audiences.[2] Inspired by the way in which artists unpack and deconstruct the visual language of the world around us, my thesis examines how artists represent trauma. Specifically, my thesis addresses how representations of trauma in art might complicate the ways that viewers become witness to images of trauma—a position that is often flattened in the media. At the heart of my research, my thesis asks: if the language of

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[1] Susan Sontag. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Picador, 2003, 18
[2] John Miller. "The show you love to hate." In *Thinking about Exhibitions*, edited by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W Ferguson, Sandy Nairne. New York, London: Routledge,1996, 270.

trauma is grounded in the visual, how might the artist's engagement with trauma navigate a politics of empathy?

The study of trauma in contemporary art is complicated territory, with few scholars approaching artists' multifaceted projects through such a specific lens. In order to develop a lens through which to examine the function of trauma in art, my thesis presents a framework of how trauma has been defined and studied in recent years. Focusing on the work of such scholars as Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Jill Bennett and others, Chapter One provides an introduction to the field of trauma studies and demonstrates the way this field has come to inform an analysis of visual culture and in turn, the artists' engagement with the visual representation of trauma. By using the interdisciplinary field of trauma studies as a starting point, the first chapter of my thesis also maps a methodology for approaching an interpretation of viewer experience, or witnessing, in response to the representation of trauma in art.

My thesis focuses on the work of two very different contemporary artists: Kara Walker (American, b. 1969) and Walid Raad (Lebanese, b. 1967). While the subject matter, material, and form of Walker's and Raad's works are dissimilar, their practices suggest that art can be a powerful medium through which to express traumatic experiences. Both Walker and Raad have been the subject of previous analysis that has contextualized their work in terms of trauma and trauma studies. In the case of Kara Walker, Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw's 2006 essay, "The 'rememory' of slavery: Kara Walker's *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven,*" is the most in depth study of Walker's work and in terms of trauma theory, despite the prevalent mention of the trauma of African American history in a variety of texts on her

work.[3] Trauma is also mentioned in a number of texts about Walid Raad's work, although it is not the focus or framework of much of the analysis of Raad's work.[4]

In addition to providing rich terrain for illustrating the ways in which trauma manifests itself in art, my thesis examines the specific narrative strategies and formal tropes used by Walker and Raad to complicate the ways in which traumatic experience is viewed in their work. I begin each of my investigations of Walker and Raad with a focus on a tangible traumatic event. Chapter Two begins with a description of Hurricane Katrina and focuses primarily on Kara Walker's intervention in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, a work entitled "After the Deluge," which was commissioned shortly before Hurricane Katrina devastated the southern United States. In order to unpack the relationship between artwork and viewer, testimony and witness, my analysis of Walker's work focuses first on an examination of Walker's use of the silhouette and the formal effects of her installation. Further to this, my study of Walker's work traces a number of her historical and popular culture references to show how the trauma of racism is manifest in her work. In addition to describing how trauma is represented in Walker's work, this chapter also discusses how Walker's work creates a context for self-reflexive witnessing of the trauma of racism in her work.

My examination of Walid Raad's work begins with a different site of trauma, the Lebanese civil wars of 1975-1990, and a description of the effect of this war on the

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[3] Shaw's essay can be found in the anthology, *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, edited by Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg. Dartmouth: University Press of New England, 2006, 158-189. However, this essay was based on a chapter in an earlier publication by Shaw, *Seeing the unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 2004

[4] Govan (2005), Kaplan (2004), Lepecki (2006), Rodenbeck (2006, 2007), Rogers (2002) and Wilson-Goldie (2004) reference Raad's work in terms of its traumatic subject matter and the effects of the trauma of the Lebanese civil war, yet they do not provide a reading of Raad's work that draws on an in depth history of trauma theory as a framework for analysis.

record of history in contemporary Lebanon. Raad's primary project, *The Atlas Group Archive*, is a fictional archive that describes the problems of representing the trauma of Lebanese wars in a culture that appears stalled by this trauma. In this chapter, my research closely examines Raad's construction of the archive and the ways in which the "documents" in his collection stand in as pieces of the intangible evidence of trauma in Lebanon. This third chapter explores the ways in which Raad has used fiction, narrative and form to play with the subject position of the viewer, in this case provoking the viewer to question the authenticity of testimony.

In conclusion, my thesis looks comparatively at the work of Walker and Raad to demonstrate the ways in which art can be a powerful vehicle for telling the story of trauma and negotiating the politics of its representation and interpretation. According to Cathy Caruth, "it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available."[5] By comparing the different processes and subject matter of each artist work, my research illustrates how trauma itself moves from something unnameable, to something that is tangible and readable and revealing. As a viewer and spectator, my own experience of looking at images of trauma, as they move across my television screen, has changed as I have observed the ways an unexpected truthfulness has emerged in the fictions that Kara Walker and Walid Raad have cannibalized and reconstituted from the visual culture of everyday life—a process that has created the possibility of complex and multifaceted empathic reactions in the viewer.

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[5] Cathy Caruth. *Unclaimed experience: trauma, narrative, and history.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, 4.

CHAPTER ONE:

Trauma, Spectacle and the Politics of Empathy

Defining trauma

While the word 'trauma' has become part of everyday popular language[6], the

concept of trauma originates in the psychoanalytic investigations of Sigmund Freud, and

later, Jacques Lacan.[7] Freud's early work on trauma addressed a post-World War I

climate of soldiers returning "shell-shocked" and was later applied to the aftermath of

World War II, specifically related to the Holocaust and the bombing of Hiroshima. These

groundbreaking investigations gave rise to a growing interdisciplinary field of study

known today as Trauma Studies. Originating in psychotherapeutic work with survivors

of violence, Trauma Studies reaches across disciplines, engaging in investigations of

memory, witnessing, reconciliation, sociological problems and cultural studies analysis.

Jill Bennett, in her book *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (2005)

comments on the widespread academic interest in the field of Trauma Studies and

suggests that "Feminism, gay and lesbian politics, the politics of Aids, of race, and of

post colonialism have all in different ways sought to instate marginalized 'voices' and to

analyze the conditions under which those voices have been shaped" to "feed" the field of

trauma studies. According to Bennett, "Trauma now becomes the object of study – the

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[6] In medical terms, the word trauma is used to describe a critical bodily injury. Traumology is a surgical field that deals with trauma patients, and hospitals often call urgent care areas trauma rooms. Trauma in psychiatric terms has a different meaning and refers to a mental shock. While recognizing the extremity of physical trauma on the body, for the purposes of this thesis, my research focuses primarily on trauma as it is defined in psychoanalytic terms.

[7] In her seminal work on the origins of trauma, *Unclaimed experience: trauma, narrative, and history (1996),* Cathy Caruth cites Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams, Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through" (1914); "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917 [1915]), *Moses and Monotheism;*and Jacques Lacan's *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (The Seminar of Jacques Lacan , Book 11).*

traumatized subject is a new kind of contemporary identity".[8] For Bennett and others

studying contemporary visual culture, the traumatized contemporary subject is not simply

the result of the insertion of marginalized voices, it is also a vehicle for affective

engagement. To be more specific, Bennett's position suggests that artworks that deal

with traumatic events and experiences become involved in a negotiation of how this

trauma is perceived, remembered and processed.[9]

An understanding of how trauma functions as an experience, memory, and later,

as a testimony, image or artwork can be found in the origins of the field of Trauma

Studies. The Greek origins of the word 'trauma' mean, quite literally, wound or bodily

injury. Cathy Caruth, a noted scholar of the theoretical underpinnings in the field,

defines trauma in light of Freud's earlier research, calling trauma

> a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind...[where] the
>
> breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world [...] is
>
> experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore
>
> not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in
>
> the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.[10]

According to Caruth, in Freud's analysis, the traumatic experience is "an

experience that is not fully assimilated as it occurs."[11] Thus, trauma is more than the

wound, or event unto itself, it is also located in the psychological after-effect of the

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[8] Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy. Introduction to *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time*, edited by Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy. London: MacMillan Palgrave, 2003, 4.

[9] Jill Bennett. *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005, 7.

[10] Cathy Caruth. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, 3-4. Caruth is here referring to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as described by Jean Laplanche in *Vie et moret en psychanalyse* (Paris: Flammarion, 1970), published in *English as Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffry Mehlman (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

[11] Ibid., 5.

traumatic experience. It is in the psychological processing of the traumatic experience that trauma can be understood as an engagement with interpretation. Caruth has noted that "the complex ways that knowing and not knowing are entangled in the language of trauma."[12] This language is played out not only in the repetitive haunting of memories, but also in representations of trauma in images and artworks.

Lacan, in his work on Freud's earlier investigations with psychological processing of the traumatic event, defines trauma as a "missed encounter with the Real."[13] According to Caruth, Lacan relates "trauma to the very identity of the self and to one's relation to another [...] that the shock of traumatic sight reveals at the heart of human subjectivity not so much an epistemological, but rather what can be defined as an *ethical* relation to the real."[14] Here Caruth refers to Lacan's interpretation of Freud's seventh chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* in which Freud describes the dream of a father whose dead son begins to burn from a fallen candle on the bed where the father has recently left him, only to wake and find the dream was real. For Lacan, trauma is located in the awakening of the father himself where "the very identity of the father, as subject, is bound up with, or founded in, the death that he survives."[15] It is the repetition of the traumatic event in the subconscious realm that indicates the traumatized subject. The wound, or the event itself, is actually the referent of trauma, and trauma itself only comes into being though such repetition. It is comparable to replaying an event over and over without feeling that you have it quite right. Because trauma is born out of a strange

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[12] Ibid., 4.
[13] This is a commonly used phrase in psychoanalytic studies and refers to Jacques Lacan's lecture, "Tuche and Automaton," wherein Lacan describes the experience of subjects upon realizing that they are dreaming, or simply seeing a mirror reflection of themselves instead of the real thing; according to Lacan, this experience, or "missed encounter" with something real, is a traumatic event in itself.
[14] Cathy Caruth. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, 92.
[15] Ibid.

repetition, it is never quite real. Everlyn Nicodemus, in her essay on trauma and modernity (which also includes her own trauma testimony), suggests that the modern concept of trauma points to an occurrence that both demands representation and refuses to be represented. In fact, the intensity of the traumatic event itself seems to make it impossible to remember or forget.[16]

Dominick LaCapra, key trauma historian and theorist, analyses ways of interpreting trauma and the subsequent solutions for "healing" in his essay, "Trauma, Absence, Loss." He also discusses dealing with trauma in terms of "acting out" or "working through."[17] LaCapra's treatment of Freud in this regard is particularly useful in defining what is meant by the term 'trauma': "trauma as experience is 'in' the repetition of an early event in a later event – an early event for which one was not prepared to feel anxiety and a later event that somehow recalls the early one and triggers a traumatic response."[18] LaCapra delineates between different kinds of trauma, defining trauma in society as either structural or historical. According to LaCapra "structural trauma" is transhistorical and refers to societal trauma that might relate to such things as racism and sexism, cultural systems, and socio-economic systems. By contrast, "historical trauma" refers to a temporally-limited event, involving tangible losses and particular victims where "not everyone is entitled to the subject position," for example war, genocide or natural disaster are all events which effect specific groups of people.[19] LaCapra makes connections between structural trauma and historical trauma, stating that "everyone is

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[16] Everlyn Nicodemus. "Modernity as Mad Dog: On Art and Trauma." In *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture*, exhibition catalogue by Gerardo Mosquera and Jean Fisher, New Museum of Contemporary Art/MIT Press, New York, 2004, 58-78.
[17] Dominick LaCapra. "Trauma, Absence, Loss." *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 25, No. 4. (Summer, 1999): 700.
[18] Ibid., 725.
[19] Ibid., 722.

subject to structural trauma."[20] In contrast, the specific characteristics of a historical traumatic event produce a certain distinction between victims, perpetrators, and bystanders.

The distinction between structural trauma and historical trauma is also significant in terms of understanding representations of trauma, where structural traumatic experience can be deeply connected to historical traumatic events. LaCapra comments on this relationship stating:

> The traumatizing events in historical trauma can be determined (for
>
> example, the events of the Shoah) while structural trauma (like absence) is
>
> not an event but an anxiety-producing condition of possibility related to
>
> the potential for historical traumatization. When structural trauma is
>
> reduced to, or figured as, an event, one has the genesis of myth wherein
>
> trauma is enacted in a story or narrative from which later traumas seem to
>
> derive (as in Freud's primal crime or in the case of original sin attendant
>
> upon the fall from Eden).[21]

The relationship between structural and historical trauma is not easily delineated. It is often possible that trauma can be both structural and historical. For example, the trauma of apartheid and slavery is structural in its connection to social and economic systems, and it is also historical in its temporal limitations.

Jeffrey C. Alexander's essay "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma" explains how the identification of a collective trauma can indeed begin the sociological structuring of a group:

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[20] Ibid., 723.
[21] Ibid., 725.

It is by constructing cultural traumas that social groups, national societies,

and sometimes even entire civilizations not only cognitively identify the

existence and source of human suffering but 'take on board' some

significant responsibility for it. Insofar as they identify the cause of

trauma, and thereby assume such moral responsibility, members of

collectivities define their solidarity relationships in ways that, in

particular, allow them to share the sufferings of others.[22]

Alexander further discusses how a collective cultural trauma can play both an inclusive

and exclusive role in the formation of social groups, most notably through the ways in

which groups respond to the suffering of others.

Jill Bennett's work on global politics, nationhood and trauma makes important

connections between LaCapra's delineation of structural and historical trauma and the

formation of collectivity, as proposed by Alexander. Deconstructing the idea of the

United States as a 'traumatized' nation state in the wake of the September 11 plane

crashes at the twin towers of the World Trade Center,[23] Bennett suggests that "the

imagined boundaries of victim communities" have "exclusionary effects."[24] Looking to

how these victim communities attract empathy from spectators, Bennett proposes that the

construction of 'national' trauma may be a barrier for recognizing traumatic experience

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[22] Jeffrey C Alexander. "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma." In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander and Ron Eyerman. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004,1.

[23] The coordinated suicide attacks on the United States also involved the hi-jaking of two additional commercial passenger jet airlines; one which crashed into the Pentagon building in Washington and a fourth plane which crashed into a field in rural Somerset County, Pennsylvania. Almost 3000 people were killed in the attacks.

[24] Jill Bennett. *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 2005, 146-147.

"beyond the boundaries of nation and national identity."[25] For Bennett, the process of collective identification with a trauma event produces a politicized subjectivity in the position of victim and subsequently, the empathic reaction of the second-hand witness who experiences the traumatic event through the global media. As an example, Bennett's analysis looks at the Australian transnational identification with the victims of September 11 as an empathic reaction that then motivated a "(racist) preference for a notional American victim" over the arriving refugees of war from Afghanistan, which was then also reflected in a variety of government immigration policies. [26] In this way notions of victimhood, patriotism, and transcultural identification become key factors in the mediation of the traumatic event and how it is later read as image or narrative. Bennett suggests that a productive analysis of trauma taking these factors into account must situate itself within the spatial dynamics of globalism, where events and their mediated images are transnationally absorbed to create a "globalized trauma." In this case, the empathic reaction of viewers of this global image flow also becomes a political tool. To this effect, Bennett states:

> To envisage the impact of trauma in this way is to think through the ways
> in which the world is inhabited in the wake of loss and devastation, and to
> conceive of individual experience in terms of an outfolding. In such a
> model, space is conceptualized as a locus of transition.[27]

Thus the viewers of trauma must negotiate the mediated public spaces where the traumatic event is part of an unfolding global narrative. LaCapra's categorical distinctions between historical and structural trauma, as well as Bennett's proposal that

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[25] Ibid., 178.
[26] Ibid., 180.
[27] Ibid.,187.

the representation and witnessing of trauma is further impacted by the globalism and mass media, are both integral to an examination of how trauma might be represented and received in art.

Visual Memories and Mass Media: Witnessing the Spectacle of Trauma

In his discussion of experience, witness, and testimony, LaCapra defines the subject positions of victim, bystander, perpetrator, and collaborator. Of particular interest in the representation of trauma in art, is the position of secondary witness. A secondary witness views the traumatic event through the lens of an already interpreted experience, a testimony that can be communicated in a variety of ways; whereas a primary witness is a bystander, or in some cases, a victim of the traumatic event itself. While the artist is *sometimes* acting as secondary witness, the position of viewer is always located in the role of secondary witness. According to LaCapra this position is highly problematic. The secondary witness experiences an "empathic unsettlement" or "muted trauma" upon viewing the visual testimony (or artistic retelling) of trauma. According to LaCapra, the process of identification with this testimony can potentially be based on "quasi sacrificial processes of victimization and self-victimization."[28] In this case, the secondary witness can become a surrogate victim of sorts, assuming an inauthentic voice. Here, the process of identification is connected to Bennett's political interpretation of empathy toward trauma victims. This possibility of a secondary witness assuming the role of surrogate victim is particularly relevant when considering how trauma function in a globalized economy of images. The viewing experience of these images, what gets seen and how, across geographic and cultural and perspectives, is ultimately narrated by the real-life

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[28] Dominick LaCapra. "Trauma, Absence, Loss." *Critical Inquiry* 25 (Summer 1999): 717.

power structures, which often come to play significant roles in the production of the traumatic events that are presented for visual consumption.

The negotiation of media images of trauma that permeate the everyday (and the imaginations of artists) requires a further deconstruction of the subject position of those who become spectators and witness of trauma. If trauma is unrepresentable, unnameable and yet somehow conveyed in images of catastrophe and atrocity, how might this visual dissemination affect the ways people come to know and understand the traumatic experience of others?

Much of the discourse examining traumatic images in mass media focuses on photography. Trauma in photography specifically, either mass-mediated or more intimately displayed, presents a politicized map of the relationship between material reality, the production of the image and looking itself. Haim Bresheeth's article, "Projecting Trauma: War Photography and the Public Sphere," discusses contemporary photographic representations of war trauma and their interpretation in the media, by cultural critics, and in the public sphere.[29] The primary site of his analysis is the ongoing war in Iraq and the photographs that emerged from the Abu Ghraib prison depicting US military personnel inflicting torture on prisoners.[30] Citing precursors to this phenomenon, Bresheeth notes director Claude Lanzmann's moral imperative that "there are things that

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[29] Haim Bresheeth. "Projecting Trauma: War Photography and the Public Sphere". *Third Text* 20, issue 1 (January 2006): 57-72.

[30] Bresheeth also draws examples from previous investigations citing and analyzing various representations: Claude Lanzmann's film, *Shoah* (1985), to discuss possibilities of representing the traumatic; Goya's *Los Desastres de la Guerra* (1810-1820), in reference to the politics of "looking and not looking" at trauma; Robert Capa's *Falling Soldier* (1936), in a discussion of staged war photography and the effect on reception; Nick Ut's photograph of a child victim of a Napalm bombing outside Saigon (1972), and its relationship to the anti-war movement war as spectacle and social responsibility; television images of the second Palestinian Intifada and the effect on the gendering of War; and finally a focus on the Abu Ghraib photographs and their relationship to American cultural consumption of violence and its geopolitical positioning.

cannot and should not be represented."[31] Through analysis he goes on to suggest a more

complicated understanding, stating that "*representation* becomes the crucial condition of

[trauma's] emergence" where "[t]rauma is a result of meeting other's pain and horror

through representation, either by those not directly involved or by later generations. This

remoteness of the traumatized viewer is of great interest – most media consumption fits

this description."[32] The viewer, again, is always a secondary witness and subsequently

becomes a participant in the understanding of the traumatic experience of another.

According to Bresheeth, this process is fundamentally a politics of looking at the pain of

others' experiences that can be both physically and psychologically distanced from our

own. For Bresheeth, through the "great range of visual representations in easy electronic

reach act[ing] like a pacifier – we are becoming inured to pain."[33]

     Similarly Kevin Robbins's analysis of trauma in contemporary visual culture (as

quoted by Bresheeth) suggests that: "The screen exposes the viewer to harsh realities, but

it screens out the harshness of those realities. It has a certain moral weightlessness: it

grants sensation without demanding responsibility of its reality, and it involves us in a

spectacle without engaging us in the complexity of its reality."[34] This media spectacle of

violence and trauma can indeed be used to sway political support (as in the public support

of the invasion of the 2002 invasion of Afganistan and later, Iraq), the longevity of this

support is often lost in the current of media images consistently flowing in all parts of our

everyday environments, creating a sort of moral detachment that differs greatly from the

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[31] Haim Bresheeth. "Projecting Trauma: War Photography and the Public Sphere". *Third Text* 20, issue 1 (January 2006): 58.
[32] Ibid., 58.
[33] Ibid., 63.
[34] Ibid., 63 (quoted by Bresheeth from: Kevin Robbins. Into the Image: Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision (1996) Routledge, London, 1996. p 80)

impact of images in earlier decades. For example, in the 1960's and 70's the impact of

the images atrocities of the Vietnam war, one of the first wars to be televised greatly

influenced the anti-war movement of that generation.[35] According to Bresheeth, our

contemporary consciousness and understanding of the visual environment limits our

capability to consciously absorb an emotional reaction to images. He states that "To

invest in the images might prove painful, so many assault us from every screen that the

mass of suffering becomes just that, a mass without detail, without personal features,

without the demand for taking a position."[36]

In her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Susan Sontag attempts to

address the politics of looking at world atrocities through photography in terms of

sympathy, pity, responsibility and justice. She emphatically states that "being a spectator

of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessential modern experience."[37]

According to Sontag, early photographs of war victims are themselves species of

rhetoric: "They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of

consensus" but they are notable to "unite people of good will.[38] Sontag traces this issue to

the beginnings of photographic journalism citing examples of the Crimean War and the

American Civil War. She suggests that "the understanding of war among people who

have not experienced war is now chiefly a product of the impact of these images [...] the

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[35] Ironically, the ability of the media to instill a sympathy for victims of the 2005 Tsunami in South East Asia was paramount. In this case, widely distributed images of victims of the natural disaster prompted unprecedented financial donations from witnesses in the West. This points to a further politicization of the viewing of trauma. The conscious empathic reaction to these images was without guilt in a geopolitical sense. These were victims of a traumatic event that was completely out of the control of the Western spectator. Even with Hurricane Katrina, while a natural disaster was the cause of trauma, the high levels of poverty increased the catastrophic impact and directly correlated with a system of racist economic inequality. The same images of dead and drowning victims did not instill those witnessing to make large financial contributions in aid.

[36] Haim Bresheeth. "Projecting Trauma: War Photography and the Public Sphere". *Third Text* 20, issue 1 (January 2006): 63.

[37] Susan Sontag. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Picador. 2003, 18.

[38] Ibid., 6.

ultra-familiar, ultra celebrated image- of an agony, of ruin – is an unavoidable feature of our camera-mediated knowledge of war."[39]

Elaborating on how photographic images can be used to induce anger toward perceived "enemies" or can be otherwise manipulate or deny details of events, Sontag suggests that images cannot be used as evidence or as activism because the very dichotomy of good and bad, friend or foe, that they set up, functions in opposition to the end of violence. In fact, in contrast to opposing war, Sontag investigates the politicized effect of viewing representations of others' pain. She cites early art historical examples of this, such as the depictions of hell in Christian art in Jacques Callot's series of etchings, *The Miseries and Misfortunes of War* (1633) and Goya's *The Disasters of War* (1810-1820). Like Bresheeth and Robins, Sontag notes that "torment, a canonical subject in art, is often represented in painting as a spectacle, something being watched (or ignored) by other people."[40] For Sontag, these are the visual precedents for the contemporary spectacle of trauma. Along these lines, she suggests how photographs of human atrocities are used politically in intentional and non-intentional ways, to garner support for or against war by showing or not showing images, citing the suppression of images of atrocity in the Falkland War and later in the first Gulf War. Notably, Sontag also suggests that "the more remote or exotic the place, the more likely we are to have full frontal views of the dead and dying."[41]

Sontag further politicizes the pacified state of viewing and the implications of accepting the inevitability of tragedy happening elsewhere:

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[39] Ibid., 21 and 24.
[40] Ibid., 42.
[41] Ibid., 70.

The exhibition in photographs of cruelties inflicted on those with darker

complexions in exotic countries continues this offering, oblivious to the

considerations that deter such displays of our victims of violence; for the other,

even when not an enemy, is regarded only as someone to be seen, not someone

(like us) who also sees.[42]

Sontag's discussion of the disconnect between the viewer as witness and the distance

between the experience being viewed offers a new understanding of a politics of

empathy:

The states described as apathy, moral or emotional anesthesia, are full of feelings;

the feelings are rage and frustration. But if we consider what emotions would be

desirable, it seems too simple to elect sympathy. The imaginary proximity to the

suffering inflicted on others that is granted by images suggests a link between the

faraway sufferers—seen close-up on the television screen—and the privileged

viewer that is simply untrue, that is yet one more mystification of our real

relations to power. So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to

what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our

impotence. To that extent, it can be (for all our good intentions) an

impertinent—if not an inappropriate—response. To set aside sympathy we

extend to others beset by war and murderous politics for a reflection on how our

privileges are located on the same map as their suffering, and may—in ways we

might prefer not to imagine—be linked to their suffering, as the wealth of some

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[42] Ibid., 72.

may imply the destitutions of others, is a task for which the painful, stirring images supply only an initial spark.[43]

If, as Sontag suggests, the sympathy of the viewer for the victimhood of the subject represented declares the viewer's "innocence as well as impotence," it follows that the ways images affect viewers are fundamental to an understanding of the political dimensions of understanding trauma.

Art and the politics of empathy in the representation of trauma

In addition to photography, art that attempts to represent and interpret traumatic experience or memory, either from collective experiences or individual, is also subject to the same process of reading trauma as those images circulating in the mass media, particularly in terms of the subjectivity of the viewer.

In addition to investigating how representations of trauma might incite or complicate an empathic reaction in the viewer, Bennett's work has also examined art's ability to enable a secondary witness to experience a 'muted' dose of trauma. [44] For Bennett, this type of witnessing is related to Bertold Brecht's notion of 'crude empathy' stating that "[t]he subject who makes an incorporative identification with the trauma of another deals with the unfamiliar experience not by attempting to understand it on its own terms –or on the terms of the one whose experience this is – but by considering 'what it would be like if this happened to me'.[45] Bennett contrasts this with Kaja Silverman's

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[43] Ibid., 102-103

[44] Benett's argument originates in the kind of inquiry that art might instantiate from the idea that art is a vehicle for the interpersonal transmission of experience.

[45] Jill Bennett."Tenebrae after September 11: Art, Empathy, and the Global Politics of Belonging." In *World Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time*, edited by Jill Bennett and Rosanne Kennedy. London: MacMillan Palgrave, 2003, 180.

proposal for "heteropathic identification," which according to Bennett, "forestalls the problem of crude or superficial empathy because it entails identification at a distance with a body that one knows to be, in some sense, alien."[46] Thus Bennett suggests that representations of trauma can illicit feeling of proximity or distance from historical, structural, and personal cites of traumatic events. Bennett goes on to state: "if art cannot communicate the essence of a memory that is 'owned' by a subject, it may nevertheless envisage a form of memory for more than one subject, inhabited in deterrent modalities by different people."[47]

For Bennett, in contemporary art practices "trauma … is conceptualized as having a presence, a force."[48] In contrast to representations of trauma in the media, "visual art presents trauma as a political rather than a subjective phenomena."[49] It is here that the artist's engagement with traumatic history and traumatic events intersects with the politics of representation. How might the artist negotiate the subject positions of victim, perpetrator, witness, and bystander involved with the artist's representation of trauma? How might this, in turn, be renegotiated by the subject position of the viewer? The act of such witnessing, and in conjunction, providing testimony, plays a significant role in the representation and interpretation of the trauma event and its traumatic memory.

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[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Jill Bennett. *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005, 12.
[49] Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO: Kara Walker

Hurricane Katrina: the traumatic event and the artist's response

In late August of 2005, Hurricane Katrina, the third strongest hurricane on record to make landfall in the United States, and devastated the north-central gulf coast causing unprecedented damage across the states of Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama and Florida. The death tolls of the catastrophic event were recorded at 1464 fatalities with 135 missing people.[50] With the surge of the hurricane force breaking the protective levee system around the city of New Orleans, the heart of the storm had the greatest and most damaging impact on the unprepared city. The following excerpt from the United States Department of Commerce Hurricane Katrina Service Assessment Report describes the impact of the natural disaster:

> The devastation left in Katrina's wake over southeast Louisiana and
>
> coastal Mississippi was immense. The storm surge ravaged coastal
>
> Mississippi, and several levee breaches occurred in and around New
>
> Orleans. The levee breaches and overtopping resulted in floodwaters of 15
>
> to 20 feet covering about 80 percent of the city. The catastrophic damage
>
> and loss of life inflicted by this hurricane is staggering, with an estimated
>
> 1,353 direct fatalities1 and 275,000 homes damaged or destroyed.
>
> According to the American Insurance Services Group, Katrina caused an
>
> estimated $40.6 billion in insured losses (as of June 2006). The National
>
> Hurricane Center (NHC) typically doubles the estimated insured losses for

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[50] Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals. "Hurricane Katrina: Deceased Reports, 2006, " http://www.dhh.louisiana.gov/offices/page.asp?ID=192&Detail=5248.

an estimate of total damage losses in the U.S., giving an estimated total

$81.2 billion in damage. Total economic losses could be greater than $100

billion. These impacts make Katrina the costliest hurricane in U.S. history

and one of the five deadliest hurricanes to ever strike the U.S.

Another government text reports that:

Tens of thousands of jobs were lost due to severely damaged or destroyed

businesses and supporting infrastructure. Major highways in and around

New Orleans were damaged or destroyed, disrupting commerce. Katrina

also affected the oil and gas industry by damaging platforms and shutting

down refineries, and interrupted operations at two major U.S. ports in

Louisiana.[51]

Like most catastrophic events, the impact of Hurricane Katrina was covered

intensively by local, national and international news media, as well as by individuals

posting information and video footage to the public through the internet. Images of the

submerged city of New Orleans showed water at the heights of electricity wires, not to

mention hundreds of nameless floating and decomposing corpses, victims waiting to be

rescued on rooftops for days and weeks, and thousands of the recently homeless waiting

for supplies in makeshift shelters and in the New Orleans Superdome. The circulating

images also placed much emphasis on the number of abandoned animals who were able

to escape the flood where their owners had not. The coverage of the damage and

destruction brought with it an overwhelming response to images that are rarely displayed

in the public media. The coverage of the victims (particularly those unable to evacuate),

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[51] U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). "Executive Summary." In *Service Assessment: Hurricane Katrina (August 23-31, 2005)*, 2005, 1. www.weather.gov/os/assessments/pdfs/Katrina.pdf (accessed on July 14, 2007).

their homes, and their neighborhoods, shocked audiences in its display of abject poverty in both the urban and rural South. More notable, was the shock and surprise of the racialized image of African American poverty. The coverage of the impact of Hurricane Katrina presented images that communicated not only the extreme poverty experienced in the South, but also by the fact that this poverty was so clearly and visibly a primarily Black experience.

Opening up a new dialogue on present-day racism in America in the mainstream public media, Hurricane Katrina can be seen not only as a historic traumatic event but also as a manifestation of structural trauma. While the natural disaster is indeed a geographically bound, temporally limited traumatic event, it can in this case, also be linked to the systematic structuring of cultural trauma. This is not to say that the economic marginalization of African Americans in the South (or specifically New Orleans) has a causal relationship with the historical event of the natural disaster (as Dominick LaCapra warns against)[52] but that the traumatic impact of the historical event (natural disaster) is deeply connected to the temporally undefined structural trauma of racism.

As the material reality of the event and the subsequent telling of experience are mediated in a visual language of trauma through the reportage of images in print, on television and the internet, a public narrative of the traumatic event emerges. Both Lisa Saltzman and Jill Bennett—both scholars of visual culture and trauma—have stated that the production of visual art embodies characteristics which present a possibility for the complex negotiation to occur between the representation of a traumatic event and its

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[52] In his essay, "Trauma, Absence, Loss," LaCapra warns against creating a causal relationship between a historical traumatic event (like a natural disaster) and a structural traumatic experience.

collective (or popular) cultural memory. According to Saltzman and Bennett, art that deals with trauma undergoes a unique process of representation—one that names the unnameable and works to translate the cultural and psychological repetition of trauma into something concrete and comprehensible. This translation of the event into an affective artwork, is also then a process of mediation between witness (artist) and spectator (viewer). For Saltzman and Rosenberg, trauma's "phenomenality" is a

> result of negotiations, or the failure of such, within what we take to be the
> space of historical materiality. Furthermore, we are convinced of the
> centrality of pictures, of the visual, or more specifically, artistic
> production and practice, to such negotiations. The formulation of trauma
> as discourse is predicated upon metaphors of visuality and image as
> unavoidable carrier of the unrepresentable.[53]

If trauma is grounded in the visual, and the traumatic event is distributed en masse in vernacular images, how might an artist's engagement with trauma navigate, reproduce and remodel the visual language of this event?

On the occasion of Kara Walker's (b. 1969) first American major retrospective exhibition,[54] *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love*, curator Philippe Vergne began his introductory essay to the exhibition catalogue with a

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[53] Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg. Introduction to *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, edited by Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg. Dartmouth: University Press of New England, 2006, xi.

[54] Prior to this exhibition, Kara Walker has been the subject of many solo exhibitions in the United States, yet no major museum had organized a large-scale retrospective. However, outside the United States, Walker was the subject of such museum retrospectives as *Kara Walker—Sammlung Deutsche Bank*, Mannheimer kunstverein, Mannheim. January 20-February 24, 2002 (traveled to Neues Museum Weserburg, Berlin, Museumquartier, Vienna, Museum voor Modern Kunst, Arnhem, Netherlands); and *For the Benefit of All the Races of Mankind (Mos' Specially the Master One, Boss). An Exhibition of Artifacts, Remnants and Effusvia EXCAVATED from the Black Heart of a Negress*, Hannover Kunstverien, June 9-August 8, 2002.

description of the racist underpinnings of the delayed rescue response by government officials and the media interpretation of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina:

> We are in the United States of America, in 2006, a year after the Hurricane
>
> Katrina disaster that raped New Orleans and flushed into death, misery,
>
> and violence the poorest of the poorest, who happened to be, for the most
>
> part, African Americans. No Middle Passage was needed. One American
>
> politician, Richard H. Baker, a ten-term Republican from Baton Rouge,
>
> was overheard saying to a lobbyist, "We finally cleaned up public housing
>
> in New Orleans. We could not do it, but God did."[55]

Kara Walker's art confronts contemporary African American identity and its relationship to the historical visual legacy of antebellum culture and slavery in our present day culture. In order to unpack the relationship between artwork and viewer, testimony and witness, this chapter of my thesis will examine Kara Walker's intervention with the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. In early 2005, prior to the catastrophic events of Hurricane Katrina, Kara Walker was invited to participate in the Special Exhibition program at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, organized by Gary Tinterow, Engelhard Curator in Charge of the Metropolitan's Department of Nineteenth-Century, Modern, and Contemporary Art.

The exhibition, *Kara Walker: After the Deluge* was on view shortly after Hurricane Katrina devastated the southeastern United States. For this intervention Walker used her drawings and trademark silhouettes combined with selections from the museum's collection to narrate connections between the history of slavery in the U.S. and the racism

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[55] Philippe Vergne. "The Black Saint is the Sinner Lady." In *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love,* exhibition catalogue by Philippe Vergne and Yasmil Raymond. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2007, 7.

at play in the suffering of victims affected by Katrina. An examination of this work

provides the basis for situating the role of testimony, witness and viewer, as well as the

ability of the artist to accuse, invoke empathy and manipulate catharsis.

Silhouettes: Shadows of History and Culture

While Walker's prolific practice incorporates projection, animation, film,

drawing, text and audio, Walker is best known for her use of the historical medium of the

cut silhouette. While she first trained as a painter, it was not until her final year of

graduate school that Walker began to see the cut silhouette as a medium that could

investigate the limitations of painting and the image itself, and also lend itself to such

thematic concerns as race, history, and memory. Shaw has described the historical origins

of the silhouette and its relationship to the racist theories of physiognomy as championed

by Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741-1801). According to Shaw,

> the use of the silhouette, or the 'shade,' as Lavater referred to it, which
>
> was made by tracing the cast shadow of a person's head onto a piece of
>
> paper, evacuated a subject's bothersome interiority while at the same time
>
> inscribing 'character'. The form line, the outer edge of the shade, was then
>
> interpreted within a physiognomic discourse via the specialist's trained
>
> reading of the forehead, nose, and chin [...] Lavater supported his theories
>
> of the shade's ability to convey truth about its sitter's character and racial
>
> attributes with a battery of quotes by contemporary philosophers,
>
> scientists, and art historians.[56]

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[56]Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw. *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 2004, 20.

Given Shaw's etymology of the silhouette, Walker's use of this form is an integral aspect of her project. Her choice of a form is, while often assumed to be simply a feminine pasttime or nineteenth-century fashion trend, is actually imbued with the very racist ideology Walker's work seeks to illuminate. Further to this, the silhouette, with all its peculiar characteristics of edge, interior, blackness and emptiness, when installed, shed important light on how Walker has created a relationship between her large-scale cut-paper installations, the traumatic event, and the viewer.

Using the white gallery walls as a backdrop, Walker's silhouette vignettes, precisely cut to form black paper outlines, create new historical narratives merging the visual iconography of antebellum culture with the popular visual imagination of American history in the present day. The silhouette itself takes many forms in Walker's work. This form first emerged in her work as black paper that she cut into silhouette figures, similar to those of the nineteenth-century tradition of cutting silhouettes to create a likeness of a person. Walker's silhouettes are often close to life-size and are generally pasted on the walls of the gallery in groupings. (Fig. 1) However, some works by Walker use black paper silhouettes pasted on drawings that function as backdrops to the silhouette. Further to this, more recent pieces have incorporated light projection; in these works light is projected on the wall like a backdrop in a shadow play with the cut paper silhouettes pasted on the walls. (Fig. 2) In other works, the silhouettes are pasted directly on the light projector itself, with only the shadows of the silhouettes on the wall. More recent works have incorporated the silhouettes into stop animation films that resemble shadow puppets.

Likened to plays, theatrical artworks and "historical shadow dramas,"[57] in all of these iterations, Walker's silhouettes seem to take place behind a virtual scrim, creating a phantom fourth wall between the viewer and the works, which constructs a particularly potent viewing experience. Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw has noted that the large scale of the silhouettes pasted or projected on the gallery walls has an uncanny effect on the viewer, sometimes inserting the viewer's own shadow quite literally onto the visual narrative; an experience that is both implicating and disturbing.[58] The formal aspects of Walker's installations create a viewing experience that is also intimate in its ability to allow the viewer into the narrative. This happens both literally (through the use of shadow) and psychologically (through the highly narrative content of the works, where viewing is likened to reading). Shaw has elsewhere discussed the effects of the formal attributes of Walker's silhouettes, stating that,

> In addition to the types of personal association made by individual
> spectators, the physical nature of Walker's life-size silhouettes call forth
> nostalgic emotions from Durkheimian collective consciousness because of
> the medium's links to the archaic visual culture of the eighteenth and
> nineteenth centuries. With its combination of an elegant albeit negative
> form, at its base the silhouette expresses a void: an unknowable black hole
> that is signified by an outer contour line. When combined with what is
> arguably the most pervasively traumatic, guilt-ridden, and gothic episode
> in American history, this form produces an extraordinary space of

[57] Eunjie Joo. In *Kara Walker,* exhibition catalogue by Stephan Berg, Silke Boerma, Robert Hobbs, Eunjie Joo, Kunstverein Hannover. Freiburg, Germany, 2002, 29
[58] Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw. *Seeing the unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker.* Durham and London: Duke University Press. 2004, 39.

projection in which the present-day spectator come in contact with a

magnetic and disturbing specter of a mythical past.[59]

As demonstrated in Shaw's analysis, the form of Walker's work is inextricably tied to its

content. The content of Walker's work is provocative, often evoking strong emotional

responses from viewers. By situating viewers as witnesses to the subversive repetition of

the historical trauma she references, Walker also creates an experience of viewing that is

participatory, and as such further positions her viewer in the oddly transferable roles of

victim and perpetrator. To create this complicated experience of encounter, Walker's

work engages with complicated territory, reproducing visual references of contemporary

representations of the history of slavery and antebellum culture—something we might

call a collective memory evidenced in popular culture. However, to subvert this

experience further, Walker's interpretation of this collective memory in silhouette form

becomes, quite literally, a disobedient shadow of history.

To create the shapes and narrative of her silhouettes, Walker cuts precise layers of

historical fact with fantasy and the (un) imaginable. To build lures of recognition in the

imaginations of her viewers, the specific references in her work cross many decades and

centuries and include a wide variety of sources, recovering the shockingly direct racism

that permeated daily life during the slave period, as well as the discreet and subtle forms

of racism that persist in contemporary life. [60] Walker has extrapolated classical literary

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[59] Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw. "The 'Rememory' of Slavery: Kara Walker's *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven.*" In *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, edited by Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg, 158-189. Dartmouth: University Press of New England, 2006, 160-161.
[60] For example, a visual essay by Kara Walker entitled "Chronology of Black Suffering: Images and Notes, 1992-2007" was included in the exhibition catalogue for *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love*, Walker Art Center (February 17-May 13, 2007). The essay included contemporary and historical advertisements, stills from television and film, both historical and contemporary newspaper clippings, book covers, images of historical artworks, swizzle sticks in the shape of caricaturized African American women, images of African American icons and celebrities, collage and drawings.

references, mid-century movies, the covers of Harlequin romance novels, historical issues of journals such as Harpers magazine and popular culture from antebellum time. For example, *Gone, An Historical Romance of a Civil War as It Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart* (1994), dissects and recomposes the events of Margaret Mitchell's 1936 novel, *Gone with the Wind* and its equally popular 1939 film adaptation. (Fig. 3-4) The hoop skirts of the women in these silhouettes and the embraces of her characters in this work and others pay homage to the Harlequin romance series of novels. In an interview with critic Jerry Saltz, Walker stated, " I think that the historical myths [in my work] are kind of deceiving. I mentioned something about harlequin romances. I didn't read that many of them but I worked in a bookstore long enough to see what kind of an impact they have and who's buying them. It's love. It's desire, all of those things cloaked in a hoop skirt. The only thing that makes it a historical romance is the setting."[61] Further to this, among the many anachronistic narratives suggested in *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* (1995), the tableau of silhouettes invokes Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, demonstrating to viewers how "the fictional characterizations of Uncle Tom, Eva, Mammy/Aunt Cloe, Cassy and Eliza [...] have lived in the American psyche to produce their own fiction, evolving far beyond the confines of the novel."[62] (Fig. 5-6)

In addition to "cutting up" historical popular culture, literature and fashion to create the shadows of an evolving historical memory, Walker has used traditional motifs

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[61] Walker, quoted in Robert Hobbs. "Kara Walker: White Shadows in Blackface." Hobbs, Robert. "Kara Walker: White Shadows Black Face." In *Kara Walker,* exhibition catalogue by Stephan Berg, Silke Boerma, Robert Hobbs, Eunjie Joo, Kunstverein Hannover. Freiburg, Germany, 2002, 74. (Jerry Saltz. "Kara Walker: Ill-Will and Desire." *Flash Art* 29, no. 191 (November–December 1996): 84.)
[62] Eunjie Joo. In *Kara Walker,* exhibition catalogue by Stephan Berg, Silke Boerma, Robert Hobbs, Eunjie Joo, Kunstverein Hannover. Freiburg, Germany, 2002, 30.

of the presentation of history, including the cyclorama, the tableau and more recently, stop-animation film of shadow puppet plays. Of note is the fact that each of these forms have been traditionally used to communicate the events of history. Nineteenth-century cyclorama, in particular, traditionally functions not only as a reference to history, but also as an important part of the viewer's physical experience in the gallery. Wrapping around the viewer in a circular room, the cyclorama immerses the viewer in a sublime experience of an "endless conundrum" of American history, fantasy and phantom.[63] Walker refers to the Atlanta Cyclorama,[64] and its influential depiction of the American civil war's Battle of Atlanta in a 1996 interview, "Well, from the moment I got started on these things I imagined that someday they would be put together in a kind of cyclorama. I mean, just like the Cyclorama in Atlanta that goes around in an endless cycle of history locked up in a room, I thought that it would be possible to arrange the silhouettes in such a way that they would make a kind of history painting encompassing the whole room."[65] In *Slavery! Slavery! Presenting a GRAND and LIFELIKE Panoramic Journey into Picturesque Southern Slavery of "Life at 'Ol' Virginny's Hole' (sketches from Plantation Life) See the Peculiar Institution as never before! All cut from black paper by the able hand of Kara Elizabeth Walker, an Emancipated Negress and leader in her Cause* (1997), Walker parodies the function of the cyclorama, encompassing the viewer not in a seemingly accurate historical account, but in the fragmented and fantastical cycle of a history that is

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[63] "Endless Conundrum" refers to the title of KaraWalker's work, *Endless Conundrum, An African Anonymous Adventuress* (2001).

[64] The Atlanta Cyclorama is a large-scale panoramic painting entitled the *Battle of Atlanta* (1885-86), which depicts the events of the Battle of Atlantic during the American Civil War. It was produced by the American Panorama Company and is presently the central attraction at the Atlanta Civil War Museum in Atlanta, Georgia.

[65] Walker, quoted by Shaw in *Seeing the unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004, 39.

cut from popular imagination and racist regurgitation of visual culture that stretches from the past into the present. (Fig. 6-7)

In a sort of double entendre, *Slavery! Slavery!* also distorts the caricature of plantation life on display in theme-parks that commemorate confederate America.[66] Depicting a base and absurdly humorous plantation life, Walker's parody folds in on itself in an endless cyclical narrative. In Walker's version of 'Ol Virginny', cut-silhouette characters are all black, identified as slave and master through their facial profiles in some cases, and at other times, only in their stylized clothing.[67] The play of the narrative is monstrous and comical: a slave figure jumps from a carriage while a master holds a pitchfork to catch him, a headless slave boy in master's shoes runs away with a chicken, two female slave figures copulate on a rooftop, a slave figure stands atop another like a fountain, spewing fluids from all orifices, a baby foot protrudes from a water melon like a chick breaking out of an egg, while a female slave figure dances with a child slave while holding a knife behind her back. The series of scenes running one after another are non-linear and nonsensical; they caricature stereotypes and confront the viewer with the racist visual imagination that has come to form historical memory of slavery and plantation life in contemporary popular culture, from movies to advertising campaigns for table syrup. Walker's account of plantation life is disturbing in the way it leads viewers to a point of

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[66] Robert Hobb's essay, "Kara Walker: White Shadows in Blackface", in *Kara Walker* (2002), discusses Kara Walker's encounter with "Stone Mountain Park," a recreation attraction in Atlanta Georgia that regularly hosted "Civil War-style encampments created mostly by southerners who dress in authentic Confederate uniform, as well as the building of a *Gone With the Wind* theme park in the Atlanta area which coincided with the 1996 Olympics."

[67] Yasmil Raymond's essay, "Maladies of Power: A Kara Walker Lexicon," in *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love* (2007), outlines the various tropes used by Walker to indicate and blur the racial identity of her characters. According to Raymond, while hoop skirts are worn by both slave women and mistresses, the footwear of her characters expose "hidden plots and desires" of privilege and access—sturdy knee high boots for plantation masters, pointed-toe ankle boots for mistresses, and often bare feet for slaves (who in turn sport single shoes and shoes sizes too big, developing further layers of their potential experience).

recognition, where reading the obscure shadows calls to mind the referents that have

come to form part of the popular imagination. As in other expressions of traumatic

memory, the shadowy images of Walker's silhouettes also suggest an act of repetition,

not unlike the dream sequence described by Freud. However, in Walker's repetition of

racist mythology, the original traumatic event is turned on its head, carrying on as a

bizarre and fantastical nightmare.

Trauma and the viewer's position

The disturbing effect of Walker's narratives often occupies a grey space, where

the story unfolding can be interpreted as funny, dangerous, disturbing and/or sublime at

various points from various perspectives. It is precisely this grey space—between humour

and offence, black and white, victim and perpetrator—that contains the potential to

deconstruct the collective trauma of the history of racism, one that permeates not only the

memories of its victims, but also its perpetrators. In terms of LaCapra's description of

traumatic witnessing, Walker's work destabilizes and complicates the process by which

the viewer comes to understand the traumatic images of her work. By incorporating real

historical references within narrative arcs that are fantastic, absurd, and offensive, Walker

distances the viewer from the reality of trauma. This distance protects the viewer from

over-identifying with the material reality of the traumatic memory, disallowing a

sympathetic response that positions the viewer as equally victimized, and therefore, not

guilty. Instead, identification with the work occurs at the narrative level as viewer's piece

together storylines, and in the process, begin to identify the distorted racist references

located in the popular culture of their everyday lives—from ad campaigns to tabloids to history books read in school. Curator Eungie Joo points out that while

> these are only cut black paper outlines of hair, body parts, clothing, and
>
> landscape [, it] is the ability of the viewer to decipher and assign meaning
>
> to Walker's images that is noteworthy, illuminating our shared visual
>
> vocabulary. Here, even viewers raised in a post-Civil Rights Movement
>
> era locate allegedly extinct racist stereotypes of the antebellum South as
>
> historical memory. The very impulse to accept these shadows as reliable
>
> codes of gender, race, era, class, or notion expresses the many fantasies of
>
> race that Americans have never been able to address frankly.[68]

Further to this, Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw has written extensively on the relationship between trauma, memory and representation in Walker's work and has described the similarly affective experience of viewers recognizing such a visual vocabulary:

> Spectators may encounter the shadow characters of *The End of Uncle Tom*
>
> (and those in other silhouette installations by Walker as well) in a variety
>
> of ways, often finding that the characters express visually myths and
>
> histories that have been 'disremembered' within the public discourse of
>
> American slavery and race relations. This encounter may be an uncanny
>
> confrontation with a previously benign part of a spectator's personal past;

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[68] Eunjie Joo. In *Kara Walker,* exhibition catalogue by Stephan Berg, Silke Boerma, Robert Hobbs, Eunjie Joo, Kunstverein Hannover. Freiburg, Germany, 2002, 29. While Joo's comments speak to the reaction of viewers to Walker's work in an American context, the interest in Kara Walker's work in Europe, as evidenced by her exhibition history in major European institutions, suggests that the cultural and historical references of antebellum culture and contemporary race issues in America are translated across different cultural contexts. In a personal conversation with curator Yasmil Raymond, who traveled to Europe to install two exhibitions of Walker's work in two different countries, Raymond suggested that the impact of Walker's work might be muted as European audiences see the artist's work as a lesson about American racism that is different from the racism that is present in many European countries.

for example, the silhouettes themselves might reference personal

memories of having a profile made during childhood, or might evoke

ancestral profiles that the spectator's family might have owned. Other

spectators find themselves confronted with a visualization of private

sexual fantasies or violent nightmares; thoughts too terrible to utter or

enact are thrown up before them in the form of black paper glued to white

walls.[69]

As Dubois Shaw's describes, the emotional potency of the spectator's reaction to

Walker's work is a powerful tool in the negotiation of traumatic memory in the present.

By inciting such emotion in her viewers—through a complex web of referents that trigger

personal and collective experiences that are ethically ambiguous—Walker's work has the

ability to implicate the spectator, not simply as a witness, but also as victim and

perpetrator. Dubois Shaw notes that in viewing Walker's work,

guilt over the inherited legacy of slavery is not something that European

American viewers shoulder alone [...] In witnessing the complicity of the

black characters [...]African American viewers are given the opportunity

to confront the traumatic possibility that their ancestors may at times have

been complicit in the violent culture that they were forced to live in.[70]

Walker's work even goes so far as to display the ways in which complicity persists,

referencing the "romanticized victimhood" of multi-cultural agendas which capitalize on

this same traumatic history. In one interview, Walker states,

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[69] Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw. "The 'Rememory' of Slavery: Kara Walker's *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven.*" In *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, edited by Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg, 158-189. Dartmouth: University Press of New England, 2006,160-161.
[70] Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw. *Seeing the unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004, 62.

History is carried like a pathology, a cyclical melodrama immersed in

artifice and unable to function without it. The historical romance creates a

will for abusive submission, exacerbated by contemporary ideologies that

revere Victimhood. Everyone wants to play the nigger now.[71]

However, by *involving* the spectator in the traumatic activities that take place in

her narratives, through narrative tricks of referent recognition and considerations of form,

Walker also begins to destabilize the black and white binary positions of victim and

perpetrator. Walker herself confessed in an interview that her work disturbs her audience

because of the nature of the cut outs:

the content doesn't reveal itself right away. So audiences have sort of

giggled or said things like, 'oh, these remind me of my childhood' and

then notice that the happy little 'pickanninies' are running away with a

soldier's leg and hand from a previous scene. Suddenly that leg and hand

belonged to that viewer.[72]

The messy function of identification with the characters in Walker's work is at the core

of its subversive and destabilizing potential. In many of the silhouette vignettes, slaves,

who are traditionally seen as victims in trauma narratives of the antebellum period, are

perpetrators of violence and hate as much as their masters and mistresses. Likewise,

masters and mistresses, who are traditionally seen as perpetrators, also find themselves in

situations that evoke a sense of pity in the viewer. Dubois Shaw has suggested that "As

spaces of blank darkness rendered intelligible by their margins, as reductions of form that

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[71] Walker quoted in Robert Hobbs, "Kara Walker: White Shadows Black Face." In *Kara Walker*, exhibition catalogue by Stephan Berg, Silke Boerma, Robert Hobbs, Eunjie Joo, Kunstverein Hannover. Freiburg, Germany, 2002, 30.
[72] Walker quoted in Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw, *Seeing the unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004, 39.

still maintain certain key characteristics, [Walker's] silhouettes encourage involvement and interpretation, making for an interactive art form in which the racial and cultural specificity of the spectator takes primacy."[73] As viewers find themselves confronted with Walker's familiar, yet strange, retelling of African-American experience, the trauma of the historical events and psychological effects of this experience is renegotiated through the eyes of the spectator. Shaw's seminal text on Walker summarizes this process:

> In the fantasy world that the artist has created, all characters, regardless of
>
> race or social position, are guilty of vile acts and intentions. Each viewer
>
> is prompted to face his or her own potentially traumatic relationship to
>
> history and acknowledge whatever repressed guilt and complicated
>
> feelings he or she might have about any personal relationship to slavery.
>
> Walker's gothic world reminds us 'that fantasy, history and nostalgia, and
>
> the way they are worked on in the unconscious have tangible, ongoing
>
> consequences.'[74]

Walker's curatorial intervention at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in the wake of Hurricane Katrina provides a potent territory for closer examination of the psychological negotiation of historical trauma that is mediated in the present,

Kara Walker at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

For her invitation to exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum, Walker was given carte blanche—she could act as both artist and curator to create an exhibition combining her

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[73] Ibid., 36.
[74] Ibid, quoting Simon Wallis ("London: Recent American Painting," *Burlington Magazine* 140, no. 1144 (July 1998): 496), 64.

own works with those found in the museum's collections.[75] (Fig. 8-9) Providing a

perspective from the Metropolitan Museum, Gary Tinterow, the coordinating curator for

the exhibition introduced the project on the museum's website by saying:

> About a year ago, we invited Kara Walker to do a project at the Met and
>
> we offered her this space. The room that we're in is about 30 feet by 45
>
> feet, and we gave her carte blanche to make new work, to select work that
>
> she had previously made, to go through the Metropolitan Museum's
>
> collection, choose works that she thought were of interest to her—works
>
> ranging from the sixteenth century, Hieronymus Bosch, to Winslow
>
> Homer, to works made in the last couple of years by Kara Walker herself.

Walker's intervention, which combined historical works from the museum's collection as

well as several of her own works, provides important insight into the artist's own practice

of mining history to create a dialogue with the present. Combined with the catastrophic

traumatic events of Hurricane Katrina—which occurred while Walker was developing the

exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum—this particular project also throws into relief the

ways in which Walker unforgivingly ties the past to the present. In the introduction to the

exhibition catalogue, which was published almost a year after the exhibition, Walker

states,

> The story that has interested me is the story of Muck. At this book's
>
> inception, the narrative of Hurricane Katrina had shifted precariously
>
> away from the hyperreal horror show presented to the outside world as
>
> live coverage of a frightened and helpless populace […] to a more

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[75] Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Audio Interview between Gary Tinterow and Kara Walker.
http://www.metmuseum.org/audio/exhibitions/mmaExhibPodcast.03282006.mp3

assimilable legend. Lately, the narrative of the disaster [of Hurricane

Katrina] has turned to 'security failures,' or the question of race and

poverty,' or 'rebirth.' I've heard harrowing anecdotes of survival and

humorous tales of rancid refrigerators. And always at the end of these

tales, reported on the news, in the newspapers, and by word of mouth,

always there is a puddle—a murky unnavigable space that is overcrowded

with intangibles: shame, remorse, vanity, morbidity, silence.[76]

It is these intangible feelings and unnavigable space that come to define a cite of trauma,

one that is indeed a murky territory, or in Walker's words, a "story of Muck." For the

exhibition, *After the Deluge*, Walker's examination of historical and mythological

imagery reveals a unique perspective of the artist's process, and as such, her engagement

in the subject of trauma.

Like other Special Exhibitions, Walker's project was installed in the mezzanine

galleries of the twentieth-century wing of the Metropolitan Museum, described by

Tinterow as a "small, unloved space" with low ceilings, approximately 2.5 meters wide,

and 10 meters deep.[77] While the project presented an opportunity for dialogue with the

legacy of Fred Wilson's project, *Mining the Museum* (1992) by intervening in the

museum collections, Walker questioned her role within that legacy and its relationship to

her own work. Whereas in 1992, African American artist Fred Wilson critically

intervened in the process of the museum exhibition-making by using the objects in the

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[76] Walker, quoted in Philippe Vergne, "The Black Saint is the Sinner Lady." In *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love,* exhibition catalogue by Philippe Vergne and Yasmil Raymond. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2007, 8.
[77] Walker with Gary Tinterow, "The Artist and the Curator," panel discussion, 2007 Annual Meeting, the Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC), 2007.
http://www.artcurators.org/programs_conferences.asp

collection of the Baltimore Historical Society to tell a very particular story of the history

of slavery in America, Walker's intervention is less a critique of the institution, and

instead functions as an opportunity to explore the socio-political conversation between

historical motifs and her own images.[78] In an audio interview on file at the Met, Walker

states: "Why will I mine the Museum? Am I mining the Museum simply to give contexts

to my work or am I mining the Museum to create a narrative similar to the way I try and

create a narrative within my work?"[79] While the artist had planned to combine her own

works with those of the Metropolitan Museum's collection, the event of Hurricane

Katrina, which occurred some months after the project's beginning and prior to its

exhibition, was, according to the artist, an unavoidable point of departure. Watching the

images of Hurricane Katrina permeate the popular media, Walker stated that she

"couldn't believe that there was such a level of shock and horror on the part of us

witnesses, that there was such a thing as poverty, blackness and race and water and floods

and drowning."[80] For the Metropolitan Museum's audio file, Walker clarified her own

reaction to Katrina and its influence on the process of her intervention:

> When the hurricane struck the Gulf Coast of the United States and we saw
>
> images on TV of strife and struggle and a kind of wetness, and there were stories
>
> that were being told in real time that had a basis in physical reality and some
>
> kind of a hook in a mythical place, I was very interested in trying to create an
>
> artwork, or create a situation, where that mythical space could be explored a

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[78] For more information on Fred Wilson's intervention at the Baltimore Museum, please see *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, exhibition catalogue by Lisa G Corrin, Leslie King-Hammond, and Ira Berlin. Baltimore, Maryland: Contemporary; New York: New Press, 1994.
[79] Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Audio Interview between Gary Tinterow and Kara Walker. http://www.metmuseum.org/audio/exhibitions/mmaExhibPodcast.03282006.mp3
[80] Walker with Gary Tinterow, "The Artist and the Curator," panel discussion, 2007 Annual Meeting, the Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC), 2007. http://www.artcurators.org/programs_conferences.asp

little bit more fully. My biggest worry, after many weeks of hearing the stories surrounding the aftermath of the hurricane, I was very worried about the way it solidified, the way the story solidified, into comprehensible narrative of structural failure.[81]

This statement confirms Walker's continuing interest in the formation (and unraveling) of narratives that bring together elements of the past, present, and imaginary. In this case Walker combined her own works with those in the museum's collection to create new narratives between unlikely artifacts and historical artworks. In the catalogue for the exhibition, Walker tellingly reminds the viewer that "Paintings are neat containers of ideas about the commonplace nature of disaster: The genre painters featured [...] bring to the surface a subjective mix of terror, wish fulfillment, and mundane observation that is sometimes lost in a photography-driven world."[82]

Filling the exhibition space with numerous works, Walker hung pieces in unconventional ways, salon style with "some [works] 4 inches off the ground and some 2 inches from the ceiling"[83], to lead the viewer through a associative visual map. Creating a narrative of "race, poverty and water in art"[84] in the shadow of the spectacle of Hurricane Katrina, Walker installed several of her own already extant large scale silhouettes as well as multiple small drawings, collages and text pieces in juxtaposition with well-known and

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[81] Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Audio Interview between Gary Tinterow and Kara Walker. http://www.metmuseum.org/audio/exhibitions/mmaExhibPodcast.03282006.mp3

[82] Walker, Kara. Introduction to *After the Deluge*. New York, Rizzoli. 2007. Bookjacket.

[83] At the panel discussion at the AAMC, Walker described the way she hung the works in the show and further politicized this in terms of a history of institutional critique, questioning her role not only as an artist but as an "African American woman artists, larger than herself, a token." Her comments further solidified her suspicions of the institution by questioning the opportunity as "grand eloquent gesture of invitation" which resulted in being "sent to the servants quarters," referring to the size and obscurity of the exhibition location. "The Artist and the Curator," panel discussion, 2007 Annual Meeting, the Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC), 2007. http://www.artcurators.org/programs_conferences.asp

[84] Roberta Smith, "Kara Walker Makes Contrasts in Silhouette in Her Own Met Show," *New York Times*, March 24, 2006.

obscure artifacts and nineteenth-century paintings from the collection of the Metropolitan

Museum.[85] Each of the works featured obvious or metaphorical visual references to

water, storm, or race and in total the exhibition included some 53 works by artists as

diverse as Reynier Nooms Zeeman (Dutch, 1623-1663), Peiter Nolpe (Dutch, 1614-

1655), and William P. Chappel (American, ca. 1800-1880). Some historical works of

note included Joshua Shaw's (American, 1777-1860) *The Deluge Towards Its Close*

(1813 ca), a painting which features three dead bodies in the foreground, washed ashore

as dark seas storm in the background; Winslow Homer's well studied *The Gulf Stream*

(1899), which depicts a shirtless black man in a tiny boat with a broken mast struggling

against an impending storm and shark-infested waters; and an unexpected painting

attributed to the style of Hieronymus Bosch, *Christ's Descent into Hell* (1550-60 ca),

which illustrates a landscape of red swamp and fires as figures drown or escape into the

mouth of hell. (Fig. 10-12) The exhibition also included more obscure objects such as

anonymous examples of 19[th-]century vintage silhouettes; as well as two works by the

French silhouette artist, Auguste Edouart[86]; and a tabloid-like fold out book by John

Warner Barber (American, 1798-1885) entitled, *A History of the Amistad Captives: Being*

a Circumstantial Account of the Capture of the Spanish Schooner Amistad, by the

Africans on Board: Their Voyage, and Capture near Long island, New York; with

Biographical Sketches of Each Surviving Africans (1840). (Fig. 14-16) This last piece, by

John Warner Barber uses the traditional form of the silhouette to capture the likeness of

the "Surviving Africans", similar to a "wanted" sign and was installed nearby Walker's

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[85] Please see Appendix for a complete list of works.

[86] Auguste Edouart (1827-1845) is considered one of the most prolific French silhouette artists to live and work in the United States. To popularize the form and his own work, Edouart even wrote "A Treatise on Silhouette Likenesses", a kind of Silhouettist's Manifesto. 861 unsold silhouettes were purchased by the Reverend Glenn Tilley Morse of Newburyport and bequeathed to the Metropolitan Museum in 1950.

series of gauche and cut-paper drawings, entitled *Middle Passages,* many of which feature ships, watery landscapes, and silhouette figures unmoored by their surroundings. (Fig. 17-18) This series and selections from Walker's other series, *American Primitives* (2001) and *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated)* (2005), echo the activity of much of the historical painting Walker selected, albeit as ghostly, haunted shadows of that history.

According to the Metropolitan Museum, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina "Walker's aim is to simultaneously address 'the transformative effect and psychological meaning of the sea' and the role of the black figure as they are represented in art."[87] However, the exhibition might do more than this. Not simply an illustrative exercise, a closer reading of *After the Deluge* suggests that Walker consistently uses metaphorical language to create a narrative that complicates the representation of historical memory, in particular the "solidifying structural stories" about race, gender and sexuality. Assuming the role of interlocuter, or that of the artist-curator, in this case, permitted Walker to further involve her work in a deconstruction of a semiotics, or language of the trauma of racism encountered throughout the American history and converging in the present in the impact of events like Hurricane Katrina. Bruce W Ferguson, in his essay, "Exhibition rhetorics: material speech and utter sense," describes the politics of exhibition making as a speech act, with the ability to communicate as well as deconstruction the narratives of the institution.[88] Ferguson's emphasis on the functionality of the art object within this structure of narrative is particularly useful:

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[87] Metropolitan Museum of Art. "More about this exhibition." *Kara Walker: After the Deluge* (March 21, 2006–August 6, 2006). http://www.metmuseum.org/special/kara_walker/deluge_more.asp

[88] Bruce W. Ferguson, "Exhibition Rhetorics," in *Thinking about Exhibitions,* edited by Reesa Greenberg, Sandy Nairne, and Bruce W. Ferguson. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Art Objects have now been included within the larger semiotic field of a

'language paradigm' or 'linguistic turn' and are transliterated as the

equivalents of 'texts.' Art is treated as a semiotic object with something to

say that can be coded, decoded and recoded in a syntactical and critical

manner by methods like those used in academic literary criticism and

cultural studies in general.[89]

By "mining the museum" Walker's act of selection inscribes each art object not only with

its inherent institutional narrative, but also within the structural narrative of the

intentional texts present in her own work. Each selected artwork thus becomes a

different text to be read within the context of Walker's exhibition as a whole. For

example, Walker installed John Singleton Copley's *Watson and the Shark* (1778), which

depicts a drowning white figure thrown from a boat in shark infested waters—his

companions trying to rescue him while the figure of a black man stands watching the

background of the boat—adjacent to Winslow Homer's *The Gulf Stream* (1899), where a

black figure struggles while a large ship sails forward far in the distance. (Fig. 12 & Fig.

19) This juxtaposition relates alternative readings to the viewer, where the representation

of race is foregrounded in contrast to traditional readings of the formal qualities of the

paintings. The white rescuers, the watching black figure and the lone struggling black

fisherman become characters in another narrative of struggle, survival, rescue and aid.

When commenting on her selection of Winslow Homer's *The Gulf Stream* (1899),

Walker explained:

It's a very striking image, just formally. But I think there's a strange,

disconcerting nonchalance. The boat is adrift and it's tilted, and the sea is

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[89] Ibid.,176.

stormy, and the mast is broken, and he's surrounded by sharks, and he has

this kind of, there's a kind of clarity in some way, which is not too

different from the kind of clarity of seeing a black woman holding her

children and crying out. There is a kind of an iconography, I think, in the

representation of stoicism in the face of disaster that became, in some

ways, one of the attempted metaphors in the telling of Katrina.[90]

Here, in accordance with the intentions of her practice as a whole, Walker becomes the

negotiator of past and present, engaged in a subversion of the visual semiotics of

representations of race, one that exists in her own silhouetted narratives. However, in the

context of the Metropolitan Museum exhibition, the potential for the viewer to connect

the images of the media coverage of Katrina with the historical depictions of the black

figure in art is important and intentional. In the space between her own subversive

imagery, placed in conversation with such historical works as Homer's *Gulf Stream*,

Walker translates the meaning and narrative of structural trauma across time, connecting

slavery with the racism experienced by victims and survivors of Katrina.

Using the exhibition as a medium allows Walker to inscribe the institution itself.

According to Ferguson, every exhibition carries with it a narrative of the institution:

If an exhibition of art is like an utterance or a set of utterances, in a chain

of signification, it can be considered to be the speech act of an institution.

And like a speech act the exhibition finds itself in the centre of an

environment of signifying noises. Less like a text then, and more like a

sound. Thus, the work of art finds itself located in the disquieting context

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[90] Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Audio Interview between Gary Tinterow and Kara Walker. http://www.metmuseum.org/audio/exhibitions/mmaExhibPodcast.03282006.mp3

of its display, in the messiness of the world of received meanings. The exhibition brackets out the work of art and sublimates it to its own narrative ends as a minor element in a major story.[91]

For Walker, already cautious of her status as a token African American woman artist, her role as artist-curator also becomes one of translator and interlocutor, a director enacting a new discursive context within which to receive meaning that is not simply the self-reflexive utterance of an institution already bound up in its own construction of race representation. In her own poetic reflection of the exhibition, Walker has stated that "it made sense at the Met to pull images to create a narrative for others, create a story, I used my work to bridge the sense of ease that people read historical works."[92] Walker also reflected on her questioning of institutional display, stating that it wasn't an issue whether the pieces were hung too high or too low:

> the works were less about their framing but more about the eye line of characters and the arc of the narrative- inventing connections between fingers and eyes and toes- every image inside the frame has a series of gestures inside of it- pointing to places across the room [...] trying to get the public to realize that there are paintings of African Americans when representations were derogatory or non existent- painting was not just about the line and colour and light – there is something in common with drowning and swimming through meaning.[93]

This arc can be found in the connective interpretations of works such as those identified

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[91] Bruce W. Ferguson. "Exhibition Rhetorics," in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, edited by Reesa Greenberg, Sandy Nairne, and Bruce W. Ferguson. New York: Routledge, 1996, 183.
[92] "The Artist and the Curator," panel discussion, 2007 Annual Meeting, the Association of Art Museum Curators (AAMC), 2007.
[93] Ibid.

by one reviewer who also recognized the important narrative trajectory devised by Walker to suggest a deeper meaning:

> The role of water in the history of black people in America is shown as beginning with the Middle Passage from Africa, the subject of a hallucinatory five-panel gouache work by Ms. Walker. Nearby is John Warner Barber's fold-out book, illustrated with wood engravings, of the uprising aboard the Spanish slave ship Amistad, while a Congo power figure from the Met symbolizes the land that has been left behind. Other Walker pieces in this show allude to Mississippi River paddleboats and the cotton trade.[94]

Narrative as reenactment: Dealing with collective memory in Kara Walker's art

Like Walker's other work, the connective tissue created in *After the Deluge* occupies an in-between space. As with her silhouettes, the viewer is again forced to navigate expectations of representation and a haunting history of imagined (and real) visual constructions of racism in American culture. If we consider the relationship between the past and present in Walker's work we can also interpret her process as a performative act of cultural memory. Mieke Bal, in her introduction to *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, defines cultural memory as "memory that can be understood as a cultural phenomena as well as an individual or social one"[95] While Bal describes many forms of cultural recall, Walker's practice would most certainly be

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[94] Roberta Smith. "Kara Walker Makes Contrasts in Silhouette in Her Own Met Show," *New York Times*, March 24, 2006.
[95] Mieke Bal. Introduction to *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, edited by Mieke Bal. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, University Press of New England, 1999, vii.

categorized as *traumatic recall*. This classification is pertinent to the relationship between memory and its narrative form in the present. According to Bal, "Narrative memories, even of unimportant events differ from routine or habitual memories in that they are affectively colored, surrounded by an emotional aura, that, precisely makes them memorable."[96] In contrast, traumatic memories seem to resist narrative, despite the fact that they require narration to be legitimized and integrated and to eventually "lose their hold" over the subject who has suffered the traumatic event.[97] While trauma is difficult to name and tell stories about, in Bal's analysis it is precisely the creation of these stories which allows for the important process of mourning and moving past the traumatic memory. Trauma, as an unnameable, unspeakable phenomenon demands a re-enactment, thus the traumatic memory becomes integrated and legitimized through dramatic stories that are often not the straightforward accounts of a traumatic experience. Bal describes this process and the importance of the translator, or, director, in the creation of traumatic reenactment:

> Reenactments of traumatic experience take the form of drama, not
>
> narrative, and are thereby dependent on the time frame of the 'parts'
>
> scripted in the drama. All the manipulations performed by a director-
>
> narrator, who can expand and reduce, summarize, highlight, underscore, or
>
> minimize elements of the story at will, are inaccessible to the 'actor' who

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[96] Ibid., viii.

[97] Bal on Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992). In Introduction to *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, edited by Mieke Bal. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, University Press of New England, 1999, viii.

is bound to enact a drama that, although at some point in the past it

happened to her, is not hers to master.[98]

In this way, the impression of Walker as director and facilitator for the exhibition *After the Deluge*, as well as in the production of her other works, is significant. Her works constitute a traumatic reaenactment wherein Walker stages not only the remnants of history but the mutated copies that exist in the space between fantasy, nightmare and memory. Walker herself is not the narrator of these activities, rather it is as if her characters enact this real and imagined traumatic legacy.

The question of how the testimonial of trauma is received, is pertinent to the legitimization and integration of trauma in the mourning process. While in therapeutic modes, the dramatic re-enactment of "traumatic (non) memory" is not addressed to anybody and exists without a social component, Walker's work speaks more to a collective traumatic memory, than a therapeutic personal account. This transition is most easily seen through Walker's incorporation of a social component in her ability to incite participatory viewing responses to her work. For example, the viewer reads a narrative arc between the works and through identification and misidentification becomes actively involved in the process of making meaning. In this way the viewer becomes the "addressee", thereby contextualizing Walker's ability to transform cultural memory and traumatic recall in a process of collective integration.

Conclusion

Ron Eyerman has written extensively on the subject of cultural trauma in African American history in his book, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African*

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[98] Ibid., ix

American Identity.[99] For Eyerman, the history of slavery in America constitutes both a cultural trauma and is the formative origin of the collective memory of this trauma. According to Eyerman, "Slavery formed the root of an emergent collective identity through an equally emergent collective memory, one that signified and distinguished a race, a people, or a community depending on the level of abstraction and point of view being put forward."[100] While this trauma originates in the events of the past (African American slavery is no longer), as a cultural trauma that has a collective memory, it continues to exist in the present. By subversively seducing her viewers with twisted representations of a familiar yet absurd history of African American experience, Kara Walker's work complicates the collective memory of the cultural trauma of slavery and destabilizes the legitimacy of present-day racism in contemporary culture and popular imagination. This process of representation does not simply mimic the act of traumatic repetition, rather Walker's act of interpretation breaks down the repetitive cycle of traumatic memory by re-presenting her sources as satirical disruptions of the collective memory. Walker's intervention at the Met further complicates the relationship between the popular imagination of 'historical' racism and the effects of Hurricane Katrina on African Americans in New Orleans. In all cases, Walker's appropriation of the visual vocabulary of racism in America, from pre-Civil War culture to Katrina, provides a potent space for recognition, mourning, and understanding.

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[99] Ron Eyerman. *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African-American Identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
[100] Ibid., 1.

CHAPTER 3: Walid Raad

Post-war Lebanon: Trauma Narratives of a Missing History

The fractured history of war in Lebanon is almost cartographic, tracing a network

of gains and losses that weave together relationships between international players, both

in the West and in the Middle East.[101] Lebanon's strategic value has made it a continuous

site of conflict littered with centuries-old invasions and occupations by first the

Phoenicians, then by the Assyrians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, the

Ottoman Turks and the French until its independence in 1943.[102] The 15-year civil war

(1975-1990) and present-day conflicts continue to involve both internal and external

forces.[103] In contrast to the localized traumatic event of Hurricane Katrina that

metaphorically (and also quite literally) dredged the historical trauma of racism and

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[101] The Lebanese civil war began in the early 1970's after conflicts between the Muslim and Christian populations were exacerbated by the Palestinian-Israeli war, particularly when paramilitary groups associated with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) began launching attacks on Israel from Southern Lebanon. As the conflict continued, neigbouring countries were soon involved, with the Syrian army siding with the Christians. In 1982, after much border tension between the Southern Lebanese Palestinian communities and Israeli forces, Israel invaded Lebanon. By 1983 a multinational force of American, Italian and French peacekeepers were maintaining a military presence in Lebanon. The political unrest of Lebanon, was by the mid-1980's characterized by paramilitary confrontations that involved multi-national players and unorthodox attacks such as car bombings, assignations and the kidnapping of officials. Lebanese government succeeded in organizing a peace treaty in 1991. However, conflict in the country continues today, primarily in relation to the continued conflicts between the Muslim political and paramilitary group Hezbollah and U.S. supported Israeli forces. In 2006, many years after Beirut had begun to rebuild, a conflict erupted between Hezbollah forces and Israel which resulted in an Israeli and US invasion of Lebanon that killed over 1000 Lebanese civilians and left over one million Lebanese people and 300,000-500,000 Israelis displaced. For more information on the history of the Lebanese civil war, please visit *PBS Frontline World: Lebanon: Party of God, June 2003* at http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/lebanon/tl01.html

[102] Judith F Rodenbeck. "In This Issue: Crossing Memory's Green Line—Contemporary Art in Beirut." *Art Journal* 66:2 (Summer 2007): 5.

[103] According to historian Saree Makdisi, the civil war left "almost two hundred thousand dead, hundreds of thousands more wounded both physically and psychologically, and a country in ruins." In Saree Makdisi, "Beirut, a City Without History," in *Memory and Violence in the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Ussama Makdisi and Paul A. Silverstein. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, 201.

slavery in America, the traumatic events of the civil war in Lebanon are located in years of violence, war, and terror.

Trauma, in this case, can be identified in the events of history, and also in the process by which memory, and in turn, history, are produced. The specificity of Beirut as a site of traumatic investigation is complicated by the elusive nature of the history of its 15-year civil war. Not only has the visual representation of Beirut been distorted in the imagination of the West by the mainstream media, but the loss of the historical record further impacts an understanding of time and space already fractured by conflict and violence. In his discussion of post-war history in Beirut, written prior to the invasion of Lebanon in 2006 and the more recent attacks by foreign militaries, Sarree Makdisi calls attention to this absence of official history in Lebanon, literally evidenced in the school history curriculum that ends at 1946. According to Makdisi, the very writing of this official history is politically fraught. He notes that,

> after the end of the war, the new government mandated the creation of a new history textbook that would bring Lebanese students up to date. Historians supposed to represent the country's various sectarian factions were appointed to work together on the writing of the history book, as though to settle differences in writing that they had been unable to settle on the battlefield.[104]

The Ministry of Education has made several attempts to publish a textbook, but with several recalls, as of Makdisi's writing in 2006, an official history had yet to appear.

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[104] Saree Makdisi, "Beirut, a City Without History." In *Memory and Violence in the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Ussama Makdisi and Paul A. Silverstein. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, 201

Trying to understand the complex experience of Lebanese history becomes even more difficult when it enters the visual realm. Maksisi connects this lack of official history with a visual culture analysis of the postcards available in contemporary Beirut. According to Makdisi, "A visitor to contemporary Beirut who wishes to buy a postcard will have a great deal of difficulty finding a card other than one of those first printed before the civil war of 1975-1990. It is virtually impossible to find a postcard showing Beirut in its current state."[105] For Makdisi, the postcards and the images they preserve "serve as substitutes for the practice both of memory and of forgetting, and in so doing they fill in the gap left by the trauma of war [...] these cards seem to relieve Beirutis of the obligation either to remember or to forget; and in so doing, the appeal of their presence is that they offer to free Beirutis from the burden of history itself."[106] As such, Makdisi's analysis suggests that in Beirut, historical record and memory themselves function as evidence of the traumatic events of war.

Of the categories of traumatic events, histories, and experiences that enter into an artist's work, those that revolve around war-time violence pose a particular set of problems related to their visual representation locally and globally. Beirut, a city continuously destroyed and rebuilt only to become a site of destruction once again becomes frozen in time, the images of its pre-war state mediating an experience of the present that is continually in a state of trauma. Simultaneously, images of the traumatic events that make up the international visual record of such a war, are also propelled into the international arena of the media. As in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, images of the devastation of the traumatic events (in this case, over many years of civil war)

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[105] Ibid., 202.
[106] Ibid., 203.

become informants, witnesses, and straight-up propaganda, both locally and abroad.

Thus, as artists deal with subjects, such as the trauma of war that is geographically bound,

their own visual images come into play with those circulating in the media. War as a site

of trauma presents a complex visual culture, one that ultimately reflects various

geopolitical agendas, that ultimately depend on changing positions of power. Similar to

the way that Kara Walker's work subverts, appropriates and deconstructs images in the

mass media, artists dealing with representations of war and the trauma it inflicts, are

always in conversation with the images that saturate international visual culture.

Recently recognized for the growing number of artists present on the international

exhibition circuit, contemporary art in Beirut has received important attention, with

particular reference to the way Lebanese artists have been dealing with documentary

practice, history, and memory.[107] Susan Cotter, curator of the recent exhibition, *Out of*

Beirut, at the Modern Art Oxford, asserts that

> At a time when artists, curators and writers have sought to re-ignite
>
> discussions around art and its relationship to contemporary politics, the
>
> activities of artists coming out of Beirut suggest new and more urgent
>
> frames of reference [...] Conversations with artists in Beirut are infused
>
> with skepticism, irony and a tangible air of defiance. An absence of
>
> discernible boundaries between different forms of practice is part of the air
>
> of reticence and refusal which characterizes the attitudes of many.
>
> Architects make conceptual artworks; artists write books; photographers
>
> give readings and performances and performers create archives [...] This

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[107] Group exhibitions of note include Catherine David's *Contemporary Arab Representations: Beirut/Lebanon*, Witte de Witte, Netherlands (touring 2002-2003), *DisORIENTation*, the House of World Cultures, Berlin Germany (2002), Susan Cotter's *Out of Beirut*, Modern Art Museum, Oxford, UK (2006).

sense of the barely visible that pervades is in strict opposition to and in

tension with the artists' explicit commitment to communicating the Beirut

they share with its inhabitants.[108]

For artists in contemporary Beirut, the volatile status of the visual image in the absence of

an "official" history is at the center of how the after-effects of trauma can be understood,

processed and communicated. As artists communicate their interpretations of this trauma

through exhibitions of their work at home and abroad, the reception of their work is also

subject to its viewers' understandings of the history and politics of an event far outside

their experience, while simultaneously reported in the media. Walid Raad is one

Lebanese artist whose engagement with the subject of trauma also attempts to destabilize

the response of viewers whose own experience is far from the site of trauma Raad locates

in his work.

The Atlas Group Archive

Based in both Beirut and New York City, Walid Raad has been exploring the

relationship between the visual image, or document, and the negotiation of traumatic

history in his work since the early 1990s. Since the United States premiere of his

performative lecture, *The Loudest Muttering is Over: Case Studies from the Atlas Group

Archive* at the 2002 Whitney Biennial in New York, Raad's work has been visible on the

international biennale circuit and exhibited in numerous major group exhibitions and solo

museum shows. Building on my analysis of trauma in Kara Walker's work, an

examination of Raad's practice to date further demonstrates how art can unpack the

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[108] Cotter, Susan. "Beirut Unbound." In Modern Art Oxford, *Out of Beirut*, exhibition catalogue by Susan Cotter, Modern Art Oxford. Oxford, UK, 2006, 26.

complex relationships at play in the visual representation of trauma across boundaries of experience and time.

Raad's most widely exhibited project, *The Atlas Group Archive*, has been ongoing since 1990, although the dates of its inception are debatable and often intentionally obscured by Raad himself.[109] The Atlas Group Archive takes as its form a systematic archival platform from which to explore the relationship between visual information, authority and traumatic history. In his book, *The Atlas Group Volume 1: The Truth Will Be Known When The Last Witness Is Dead Documents From the Fakhouri File in The Atlas Group Archive* (2007), Raad states that,

> The Atlas Group is a project established in Beirut in 1999 to research and
> document the contemporary history of Lebanon. The Atlas group locates,
> preserves, studies and produces audio, visual, literary and other documents
> that shed light on this history.[110]

Through the "archive", Raad has compiled a series of documents and files that relate to the history of the Lebanese civil war and its subsequent continuing conflicts. The documents include films, videotapes, photographs, notebooks and other objects. They are generally exhibited in parts, with each variation drawing out documents related to a particular kind of missing history, one that is invented as much as lost. This display is almost always accompanied by a lecture performed by Raad explaining the archive and the importance of the documents it contains.

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[109] In a personal conversation with the artist Raad explained that he intentionally obscures the start dates of the project to further confuse viewers about the legitimacy of The Archive Group as a real or fictional entity. Personal conversation with the artist. Minneapolis, Minnesota. October 25, 2007.
[110] Walid Raad and The Atlas Group. *The Atlas Group Volume 1: The Truth Will Be Known When The Last Witness Is Dead Documents From the Fakhouri File in The Atlas Group Archive.* La Galerie de Noisy-le-Sec and Verlag der Bushhandlung Walther Konig, Joln, 2004, 10.

The archive is organized into three categories of files, which Raad describes during his lectures, as well as in the online version of the project. "Type A" files are identified as files that the Atlas Group has produced and attributed to imaginary individuals or organizations; "Type FD" refers to those files produced by the Atlas Group and attributed to anonymous individuals or organizations, making them fictional "found files;" "Type AGP" is defined as files that are both produced by and attributed to the Atlas Group.

As a collection, or alternative archive, these documents constitute a narrative of the history that lurks within the material realities of contemporary Beirut and the Lebanese civil wars. For example, one file is attributed to a fictional character, Dr. Fadl Fakhouri, said to be deceased is a man described by the Atlas Group as the "foremost historian of the Lebanese Wars."[111] According to the archive, Fakhouri bequeathed 226 notebooks and two short films to the Atlas Group, of which only two volumes of the notebooks and the two films "are currently made available for analysis and display." Like other documents in the archive, one of these notebooks—Volume 72, titled "Missing Lebanese Wars"—presents an eccentric minor narrative, a romantic interpretation of the history surrounding the catastrophe of war. (Fig. 20)

The Atlas Group provides information on the notebook, describing the piece with a text that states:

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

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[111] Interestingly, the name Fadl Fakhouri, if pronounced in an American accent reads as "Fatal Fakery."

nationalists and socialists on races eight through fifteen. Race after race,

the historians stood behind the track photographer, whose job was to

image the winning horse as it crossed the finish line, to record the photo-

finish. It is also said that they convinced (some say bribed) the

photographer to snap only one picture as the winning horse arrived. Each

historian wagered on precisely when—these are not dashes how many

fractions of a second before or after the horse crossed the finish line—the

photographer would expose his frame. [Each page of the notebook]

includes a photograph clipped from the post-race-day issues of the

newspaper, Al-Nahar, Dr. Fakhouri's notations on the race's distance and

duration, the winning time of the winning horse, calculations of averages,

the historians' initials with their respective bets, the time discrepancy

predicted by the winning historian.[112]

Other documents are equally obscure, ostensibly recording a history of the car

bombs from 1975-1991 with information on the car models, the radius of the area

affected by the blast and the distance the car motor might be thrown as a result of the

explosion. "The Secrets File" contains a series of photographs "found buried 32 meters

under the rubble during the 1992 demolition of Beirut's war-ravaged commercial

districts" which are said to have been "analyzed" to recover "small black and white latent

images ... [of] individuals who had been found dead in the Mediterranean between 1975

and 1990."

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[112] The Atlas Group Archive website. "Fakhouri File: Notebook #72."
http://www.theatlasgroup.org/data/TypeA.html

File Operator #17 is a single-channel video montage of the sunset on the seaside walkway in Beirut. The explanation for the footage, entitled, *I only wish that I could weep* (2000), states that "the seaside walkway was in fact a favourite location for political pundits, spies, double agents, fortune tellers and phrenologues," forcing Lebanese security agents to keep an eye on "all this activity" by setting up cameras along the strip.[113] (Fig. 21) The footage on the tape is revealed to be the security tape of one agent, Operator #17, who, according to the explanation, "every afternoon ... diverted his camera's focus away from its designated target and focused it on the sunset. The operator was dismissed in 1996 but he was permitted to keep his sunset video footage," which he is supposed to have donated to the Atlas Group. The Atlas Group website also notes that in an interview the operator said "that having grown up in East Beirut during the war years, he always yearned to witness the sunset from the Corniche located in West Beirut." Curiously similar to the words of the Raad's character, "Operator 17", in an interview discussing his reasons for developing the Atlas Group project, Walid Raad stated that

> The geopolitical history of contemporary Lebanon that was being written [in the years since the wars ended] was leaving out so much of what I considered to be my experiences of these events. The mere ability to be able to walk freely from West to east Beirut unhindered by checkpoints is not an experience one would have had 15 years ago. I wanted to make documents that were conscious of that.[114]

Raad's lectures that accompany this digital presentation of the Atlas Group documents work to further legitimate this speculative archive. Donning a dark suit

[113] The Atlas Group Archive website. "Operator #17 File: I only wish that I could weep Summary." http://www.theatlasgroup.org/data/TypeFD.html

[114] Walid Raad, quoted in Janet Kaplan,"Flirtations with Evidence," *Art in America,* (October 2004): 134.

jacket, wire-rimmed glasses, standing at a podium and pointing to a screen which projects the systematic organized structure of the archival documents, Raad moves through each "factual" level of information, revealing highly narrative events, speaking in a slightly thickened middle-eastern accent, appearing objective and without emotion.[115] There are sentence-long poetically narrative titles such as "The Loudest Muttering is Over" (2002), performed at the 2002 Whitney Biennial and "My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair: a History of Car Bombs in the Lebanese Civil Wars (1975-1991)_Volume 1, 21 January 1986" (2005), presented in different versions in Norway, U.S., Lebanon, Germany, Belgium, France, U.K. and Switzerland in 2004/2005. In his earliest lectures, Raad introduced the Atlas Group, its mandate and particular variant sets of documents and their narrative histories such as the Fakhouri File or the Bachar File as if they were real documents, real characters, and real accounts of the events of the Lebanese civil wars. A more recent lecture entitled, *My Neck is Thinner Than a Hair. A History of Car Bombs in the Lebanese Wars (1975-1991)_Volume 1, 21 January 1986*, specifically references the historical and narrative web around a particular car bomb dated 21 January, 1986. (Figs. 22-23) Using this particular site of trauma as a starting point, Raad's Powerpoint presentation visually builds a network of people, events and relationships, both real and fictional to weave a subjective history that is both constitutive and unraveling. In a departure from the purely fictitious display of events and people in previous lectures, this lecture ties real political actors to historical events. In fact, "real" images—as in images not produced by Raad as documents for the archive—are included in the stream of

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[115] Andre Lepecki has described several variations of Raad's performative lectures. Lepecki suggests that Raad's use of costume, demeanor and accent in crafting an official and authoritative voice behind the archive. See Andre Lepecki, "After All, This Terror Was Not Without Reason; Unfiled notes on the Atlas Group Archive." *TDR: The Drama Review* 50:3 (Fall 2006): 88-99.

images accompanying Raad's lecture. These images function as found photographs and according to Raad, were 'borrowed' from the last roll of images taken by Georges Semerdjian, an actual photojournalist who documented the wreckage of car bombs and died in the field on January 5, 1990.[116] In the question period after his performance of this lecture in Berlin in 2004, Raad suggested that the "The car bomb is a weapon, a technology, an event, and a form of discourse that has shaped public life in Lebanon for the past 30 years."[117] Here, Raad confirms that he (and his work) are not simply presenting an interpretation of a series of events, but instead seek to unpack the effects and constitution of such events and the way that they have structured a larger discourse about history in Lebanon and the global memory of the nations traumatic past.

Similarly a third type of lecture, *We can make rain but no one came to ask,* presents a video which documents a panoramic view of the city of Beirut, its various neighbourhoods and recognizable architectural points of reference. (Fig. 24) However, the fictional aspect of this video is noticeable in the absence of people in the city, despite the persistent presence of cars and buildings. During the same Berlin lecture, when asked about the lack of people in the video, Raad cryptically responded:

In fact this is something that surprised us as well because when we photographed this area of Beirut there were quite a number of people in the streets; it was a busy time of the day. But when we developed the film we were surprised to find that none of them appeared. We didn't know what to make of this situation, especially since it happened time and time

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[116] The source of these accompanying images is described by Andre Lepecki, See his, "After All, This Terror Was Not Without Reason; Unfiled notes on the Atlas Group Archive." *TDR: The Drama Review* 50:3 (Fall 2006): 97.
[117] Walid Raad quoted in Lepecki. 97.

again [...] This phenomenon caused in us a great deal of anxiety. [...] The

same thing happened in a different neighbourhood where we filmed cars

on the streets. When we viewed the videotape, we noticed that the cares

were also disappearing. After a while we came up with the notion that

maybe time and place are operating in this neighbourbood in ways so that

this universe can exist.[118]

Negotiating Trauma

Like the Atlas Group's video that obscures the real city with an impossible

picture, in a very real way, the experience of car bombs, terror and the crisis of war

scrambles notions of public and private, and the past, present and future, eclipsing what is

seen and what is understood. Often referring to scholar Jalal Toufic's notion of "vampiric

time" in lectures and interviews, Raad demonstrates in his work the similarity between

the post-war experience of trauma and the vampire faced with his disappearing reflection:

he knows he is present, yet cannot comprehend his reflection in any mirror.[119] In the

documents of Raad's Atlas Group Archive, the memories of destruction and exposure

become metaphorically imprinted like vampiric reflections of the city. In a lecture he

performed at the Walker Art Center in 2007, Raad again questioned why he still finds it

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[118] Walid Raad, quoted in Lepecki, 98. Raad gave a similar response to a similar question during a lecture which presented the same video at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, October 2007.
[119] The Lebanese philosopher, Jalal Toufic is often cited by Raad in his lectures and interviews. Toufic has described his notion of "vampire time" in his book, *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film*, 2003. "Vampire time" is a term that Toufic has used to describe the uncanny relationship between the undead, time and the mirror reflection in film. Toufic's analysis makes connections to the undead states of mortality in post-war Lebanon and the theories he develops around vampire films.

possible in Beirut to see through the walls of repaired buildings into imagined living

spaces, as if their facades were still in ruins.[120]

This abstraction of the absence in the history Raad's work presents can be viewed

through Ernst Van Alphen's notion of the "failed experience" of traumatic memory,

which is not really an experience at all—it is a non-experience brought into existence

only by the subsequent narrative of the event.[121] In his engagement with trauma, Raad

attempts to name the unnameable with fiction informed by experience, accepting the

impossible reality of both memory and history and using them to his advantage. In this

way, he allows his own testimony to "unfold itself" in a contradiction of facts,

misinterpretations and subconscious musings. These misinterpretations are, in Raad's

own words, "hysterical symptoms, the events depicted are not attached to memories of

actual events but to fantasies (mine and others') erected on the basis of memory."[122]

This problem of recording or remembering a history for Beirut while it continues

to be in state of conflict, destruction and reconstruction has a devasting impact on the

ways in which the trauma of these events are processed, making forgetting a much easier

task. According to Makdisi:

> the general reluctance to engage systematically with the war, to embark on
>
> a collective historical project to digest and process the memories and
>
> images, to salvage a history from all those fragments and moments—and
>
> hence to project a future based on the hope of the war's genuine end—is

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[120] Walid Raad. Walker Art Center. Artist Talk: Walid Raad. Thursday, October 25, 2007.

[121] Van Alphen has described the repetition of the early event as a "failed experience" because the very language that brings the repetition of the experience into existence is "stalled." Van Alphen, "Symptoms of Discursivity: Experience, Memory, Trauma" in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, edited by. Mieke Bal. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, University Press of New England, 1999, 24-38.

[122] Janet Kaplan. "Flirtations with Evidence," *Art in America* (October 2004): 137.

partly a matter of public policy and partly a matter of a widespread

popular will to deny. In contemporary Beirut, time itself has not quite

stopped, but certainly the discordant, uneven, unfinished, rough present

looms larger than either an increasingly remote past or the prospect of a

brighter future, both of which seem to be fading away, leaving Beirut

stranded, cut off from the past-and the future.[123]

Despite the temptation to forget, Raad's archival project, however fictional, attempts to

construct a history or, rather, a story of a history that is, like traumatic memory, quite

elusive. In fact, this project questions the possibility of translating experience into an

authentic memory, and in turn, into a part of history.

How does, for example, any object, experience, feeling, or event become a

fact in the testimony of an eyewitness to an event of historical, collective

dimensions? [...]

What we have come to believe is true is not consistent with what's

available to the senses. If truth is not what's available to the senses, if truth

is not consistent with rationality, then truth is not equivalent to discourse.

Today, we find ourselves in a position where what we take to be true is

what rings true at the level of the psyche ... In Freud's analysis of hysteria,

when a subject undergoes a traumatic experience, what they come to

believe has been little to do with what actually happened to them. But

what they come to believe is certainly related to fantasies that are based on

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[123] Makdisi, Saree. "Beirut, a City Without History." In *Memory and Violence in the Middle East and North Africa*, edited by Ussama Makdisi and Paul A. Silverstein. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006, 204-205.

memories and that those fantasies are very important [...] I think the

hysterical symptom then becomes, in a way, a document of something.[124]

Complicating Viewer as Witness

Fiction and fantasy are productive tools in processing traumatic memory. As

described earlier in my reference to Cathy Caruth's interpretation of Freud and Lacan, it

is through the act of repeating a traumatic event in ways that are distanced from real life

experience that provides a safe space for dealing with the emotional effects of a traumatic

event. Raad has used these same strategies to subvert the response of viewers,

particularly those encountering his work in exhibitions outside Lebanon. Like Kara

Walker, The Atlas Group cuts truth with fiction in order to subvert the experience of

viewers encountering traumatic events in his work. Whereas Walker makes reference to

such fictional social constructs as theme parks or the novel, *Gone With the Wind*, Raad's

creates his own fictional interpretation of history that exists between truth and fiction, and

injects doubt into what the viewer assumes to know about the events of the Lebanese

civil wars, despite being at a far remove from that experience. When looking at the Atlas

Group Archives, it becomes clear that Raad's quirky minor narratives are seductive and

flavoured with nostalgia for the local and everyday. Raad inserts the romantic possibility

of an idiosyncratic group of historians meeting to gamble about horse races while

political unrest and violent attacks destroy the city. The story locates a characters and

lives in Lebanon that are filled with things that are not what we may imagine could be

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[124] Raad quoted in Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Profile: Walid Raad, The Atlas Group Opens its Archive." *Bidoun* 2 (2004). http://www.bidoun.com/2_walid.php

happening in a war-torn country. Raad reminds viewers of unique and particular

experiences of Lebanon, yet they are highly unlikely and suspiciously odd.

Raad's constructed histories rarely break this ironic tension between fact and

fiction; they are interwoven with small pieces of "truth" and plausible experience. This

intimacy of detail—colour coded bullets, neighborhood celebrity car bomb detectives,

poetic sunset strolls—all provide the viewer with a kind of "insider" story. As a device,

this injection of specific detail, has the potential to inject doubt into the experience of the

viewer. Lured into the narrative trope of poetic detail, the viewer is attracted to specifics

that exist outside of body counts, injuries and the larger discourse on the political actors.

It is as if one is getting a highly specialized tour, in particular if one attends Raad's

lecture. According to Raad, by using the unusal and personal "traces" of history, The

Atlas Group Archive is

> trying to find those stories that people tend to believe, [that] acquire their
>
> attention in a fundamental way, even if they have nothing to do with what
>
> really happened. Traditional history tends to concentrate on what really
>
> happened, as if it's out there in the world, and it tends to be the history of
>
> conscious events. Most people's experience of these events ... is
>
> predominantly unconscious and concentrates on facts, objects,
>
> experiences, and feelings that leave traces and should be collected.[125]

Provided with these fictionalized traces of a possible histories, the non-Lebanese

spectator may be prompted to seek an authentic representation of history of the Lebanese

Civil War, asking how much is Raad revealing, and how much is hidden, coded, outside

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[125] Raad quoted in Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Profile: Walid Raad, The Atlas Group Opens its Archive."
Bidoun 2 (2004). http://www.bidoun.com/2_walid.php.

of non-Lebanese understanding. In this case, self-reflexive questioning constitutes what Dominick LaCapra has termed "attentive secondary witnessing" According to LaCapra, the "attentive secondary witness" uses this sort of empathic unsettlement to have a kind of virtual experience, while recognizing the difference between secondary witnessing and the direct experience of trauma.[126]

Raad's use of fiction suggests that he is aware of the pitfalls elucidated by LaCapra, in particular the appropriation of victimhood through empathic response. The lack of emotion in Raad's concocted histories supports this interpretation—indeed, one critic states that

> Rather than taking pleasure in arcana, Raad's work exudes a mania for minutiae that turns melancholic and openly joyless. His art is like a detective report or a communique from a secret agent: Facts are related, occurrences indexed, detachment and delusion mingle with obsession.[127]

While the archive contains a sense of curiosity and even humour, here Raad's investigation of the traumatic is riddled with contradiction: we know we are seeing a history of civil war yet we are denied the currency of the spectacle of graphic violence. This juxtaposition, between the referent trauma and the fictional narration, between the romantic nostalgia and lack of emotion, is, according to Hal Foster, successful in its affective oscillation between local tragedy and tabloid spectacle; it can be read as "referential *and* simulacral, connected *and* disconnected, affective *and* affectless, critical

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[126] Dominick LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss." *Critical Inquiry* 25 (Summer 1999): 722.
[127] Jerry Saltz. "Interrogation Nation," *Village Voice*, February 7 2006, http://www.villagevoice.com/2006-02-07/art/interrogation-nation/

and complacent."[128] For the viewer to be a secondary witness, the possibility for self-reflection lies in the ability to see contradiction, negation and paradox.

In this way Raad's strategic engagement with trauma is intricately connected to the geopolitical context of his subject. The contemporary history of violent political unrest in Beirut is first and foremost politically linked to structures of power and specific transnational relationships that are today narrated by concepts of terrorism and occupation. While Raad may not be engaging in an act of political intervention, his work will be read and contextualized in light of these geopolitical situations, particularly when seen on international exhibition circuits.

According to Sontag's final treatise on the consumption of images, the viewer is always implicated: "So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering." As stated earlier, "Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence. "[129] In Raad's reconstruction of a traumatic national history, in which images are clipped and collaged, and VHS video is intentionally blurred or shown in fast-forward, we, as viewers become part of an investigation of the experience of trauma that is complex and activated. We are seductively invited to engage in the process of understanding an experience in which it is not possible to believe, and which is impossible to render.

In the mediated global spectacle of traumatic narrative and image, Raad ensures that the viewer's empathic response is troubled by doubt. The artist's representation of contemporary traumatic history is not a direct translation. As with the very nature of trauma, it is difficult to navigate between the "truth" and "fiction." In this case, Raad

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[128] Hal Foster quoted in Judith F Rodenbeck, "Car Crash, 1960." In *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, edited by Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg. Dartmouth: University Press of New England, 2006, 112.
[129] Susan Sontag. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Picador, 2003,103.

leads the viewer strategically through his or her own Lacanian "missed encounter of the Real." Confronted with the "fictions" of his Archive, we are lost, without a history to rely on and unable to reach any solid conclusions about the car bombs, the building blow-outs and the disappearing cars Raad weaves into his narrative.

During his lectures, Raad discusses the prevalence of car bombs not only in the history of Beirut but also in contemporary London, Madrid and Baghdad. He cites the thousands of car bombs in Beirut as events that can help us to comprehend a larger collective global crisis, characterized by violence, war, economic and environmental devastation, a world in which problems at this scale come to be understood as a fictional abstraction of reality by way of statistics and seemingly distant images. Further to this, Raad has cited the events of September 11 to explain the universality of how victims might come to deal with trauma events through repetitive memory and representation. He has stated that:

> There is a constant identification of these historic events with the victims
> [...] The World Trade Center becomes about naming all the victims,
> showing the faces, telling the narratives, because that kind of victimhood
> gives you the right to speak and to be listened to with awe in a way that no
> other subject position permits. We're not sure that we can yet listen to
> those positions, let alone make them manifest and say those are the people
> who died, these are their stories. They can be listened to but they will not
> necessarily be heard. Just like the buildings. You can go to Furn al-
> Shubbak, photograph it as much as you want, document it

exhaustively—I'm not sure what you will know, and the same goes for the victims.[130]

Through the *The Atlas Group Archive,* Raad has uses fiction to juxtapose trauma and the politics of its representation within the framework of globalization and its currency of images. Raad's position as an international artist based in both New York and Beirut mediates his engagement with Beirut as a site of trauma. Raad's work speaks simultaneously to viewers in Beirut who may have a personal stake in his act of testimony; and to non-Lebanese viewers whose mediated experience of this traumatic history is far removed. In contrast to the documentary image, Raad's artistic engagement with the subject of trauma is an act of negotiation, as well as a way to witness and translate the materiality of the traumatic event into a subjective impression. The viewer, as a witness to the artist's testimony, becomes a participant in the narrative he or she produces, navigating the distance of time, experience and geography to create a subjective "structuring" of that trauma. Raad's negotiations between his own position, the specific site of trauma and his global audience connect the memory of traumatic experience and the politics of empathic response.

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[130] Raad quoted in Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, "Profile: Walid Raad, The Atlas Group Opens its Archive." *Bidoun* 2 (2004). http://www.bidoun.com/2_walid.php.

CHAPTER 4: Some Concluding Comparisons

Works of art by Kara Walker and Walid Raad based on history and collective memory yield deeper meaning through the lens of trauma studies. In contrast to the representation of traumatic events in the media, these examples demonstrate how art can provide a deeper understanding of what constitutes trauma and how it manifests itself long after the event has taken place. In addition, the work of these artists casts in relief the relationships between image and spectator, victim and witness, and in turn, uses these relationships to subvert and destabilize the traumatic history referenced by their work. This deconstruction of how representations of trauma affect those who have experienced trauma, and those who have not, is a powerful tool in the process of mourning a collective experience of trauma.

While the form and content of Walker's and Raad's works are markedly different, both artists have used particular formal and narrative strategies in their engagement with distinctive forms of traumatic experience. In Walker's work the shadowy histories of slavery, antebellum culture and racism in the United States emerge twisted and unruly under her scissors. The traumatic impact of this history of slavery and racism is a collective social and cultural problem. As earlier discussed, Dominick LaCapra has classified this type of trauma as structural. While slavery was indeed temporally limited (slavery was made illegal in the United States in 1865), the effects of this event of cultural and socio-economic systems are transhistorical, and carry on across generations. This structural trauma is so ingrained in social life, that it is an integral part of the cultural and socio-economic systems that produced it. In contrast with Walker's work, the

subject of Raad's project is the 15-year civil war in Lebanon. Of a type classified as historical trauma by LaCapra, the catastrophic events of war that Raad decomposes and restructures, are limited to a specific period of time, and can be defined by tangible losses with specific groups of people affected. While the civil war has affected some aspects social and cultural systems of Lebanon, its history is recent and distinctly connected to specific events.

These distinct classifications of trauma present obvious differences in the way they affect socio-economic and cultural systems. The history of slavery and racism in the United States has permeated much of everyday life, from civil rights, to the omission of African Americans from official histories, to politics, education and economic disparity, not to mention the prevalence of racist ideology throughout the mainstream media. Certain catastrophic events, such as Hurricane Katrina, shine a spotlight on situations that are otherwise seen as a marginalized constant -- racism and economic disparity, for example. Walker's methodology is to mine the evidence of how this experience is mediated through cultural outlets such as literature, popular culture, historical records and visual culture: literally to cut the silhouette of the collective imagination and collective memory, which has been shaped by that traumatic history. While Walker dismantles the structure of racism in America, Raad, in contrast, engages with the historical composition of war. History itself is affected by civil war and ongoing conflict in Lebanon, with all parts of life touched by a constant cycle of destruction and rebuilding, one that has allowed a state of catastrophe to become the norm. Raad's work not only demonstrates the effects of such trauma on the composition of history itself (through his archive), but also on how one experiences the memory of such trauma.

Despite dealing with completely different subjects, Raad and Walker have used similar strategies in their approach to the representation of traumatic history. As trauma theorists have shown, trauma lies not so much in the material event, but rather in the subconscious aftereffects of the event. Because trauma is not always consciously assimilated in the moment it occurs, it exists in the realm of interpretation, or processing of the memory of that moment. The traumatized subject will replay the traumatic event over and over without ever getting it quite right. As described in Chapter One, trauma lies in the repetitive memorializing of the traumatic referent, which is the event itself. In terms of Walker and Raad's engagement with trauma, both artists's works suggest that they are aware of the failure of images that simply depict the traumatic referent: Walker quite literally presents the shadows of the trauma of racism, while Raad presents traumatic events between and around the facts of war, using fiction to demonstrate the difficulty in naming, representing and historicizing trauma. Each of these artists take part in an act of traumatic repetition: their images are, in many ways, shadows or ghosts of the events they reference. Walker's and Raad's works acknowledge the relationship between trauma and visual images, yet they do not simplify the process of representation.

Both artists' deconstructions of the visual references of structural and historical trauma are powerful in their ability to communicate the problems with images that simply illustrate traumatic events. Walker "cannibalizes" historical and contemporary racist imagery and regurgitates it in the form of shadows.[131] Her wraith-like silhouettes are—in

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[131] In his essay, "The Black Saint is the Sinner Lady," Philippe Vergne writes of the resonance of the Brazilian cultural ritual of cannibalism or *anthropophagy* in Kara Walker's work and quotes Brazilian writer Oswald de Andrade: "As a symbolic practice cannibalism implies understanding the relation of otherness. It is a metaphor in philosophy and in the reflection on violence. It encompasses the structuralization of societies, the birth of language or desire itself and the amorous infusion of individuals." According to Vergne, "These words could actually stand as a program for Walker's work [...] She has

both form and shape—a sort of afterimage of the traumatic referent, one that allows Walker to manipulate the "Grand" narrative into a twisted memory that bridges the world of both nightmare and fantasy. In Walker's work the viewer is led through an act of traumatic interpretation, or naming of trauma, one that not only repeats the traumatic referent, but subverts the collective memory of this experiences and offers a new and complex way of thinking about how this history has been represented.

Similarly, while Raad's work collects a visual history of the Lebanese civil wars into a fictional archive, at every turn he avoids the traumatic images of war that one might expect; there are no pictures of dead bodies, or refugees, or military personnel in *The Atlas Group Archive*. Even the fictional records of bullet holes in buildings cover each hole with large brightly coloured circles. Instead, Raad's record of the traumatic events of this period in Lebanese history are called into existence through obscure and absurd details that have little to do with the time of the war or the factual experience of it. Like Walker's featureless figures, Raad's non-referential images (of car models, horse races, dental offices and sunsets) suggest an act of traumatic interpretation, naming an experience about trauma that is not processed in the event of a bombing, or evacuation.

By abstracting real traumatic images into shadows or fakes, both Raad and Walker engage in a process that is, in itself, an act of traumatic repetition. Each of their projects provide examples of how art, as an inherently interpretative device, can give form to a process of remembering. However, by calling this trauma into existence, both Raad and Walker also produce a space for deconstructing the ways in which trauma has been presented in the larger social sphere. Their subversive interpretation of historical

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thoroughly swallowed and digested codes of representations coming from a diversity of carefully and critically selected sources in order to elaborate her own language," 22-23.

mythologies, popular images and the media destabilizes the ways in which trauma is consumed by viewers.

Both Raad's and Walker's manipulations of traumatic referents in their work function as powerful ways to complicate the subject position of the viewer, who is also a spectator to the traumatic events displayed in their work. In Walker's work there is a problem with the viewer assuming that racism is not something they subscribe to. Walker seduces viewers with strategic narrative forms and humourous and abject historical referents to create a process of recognition that demonstrate the ways in which her viewers participate in the racism that has come to form much of America's cultural history. In Raad's work, the problem lies in the fact that viewers are often geographically removed from the site of the trauma and yet, because of the prevalence of media images of these traumatic events, they assume that they can empathize with the experience. Raad's use of fiction and performance to represent the traumatic history of the Lebanese war in an indecipherable combination of fact and fiction becomes a strategy for showing viewers their own subjective and biased positions. These similarities of approach suggest that a deconstruction of trauma in visual culture can reveal the ways in which our understanding of traumatic events is dictated by media spectatorship.

Today, as the media promotes and makes a celebrity of the first African American President of the United States, and images of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict move in and out of center stage, the traumatic histories both Walker and Raad aim to unpack once again seep into the frame of images that circulate in the global media. As artists, Walker and Raad act as translators of these traumatic histories, working out the shadowy fictions lying beneath the traumatic event itself. And, under the glow of media messages, their

work reveals not only how trauma functions in the eyes of both victim and viewer, but also how images themselves frame narratives of traumatic experience. By creating works which invite recognition, reaction, and doubt, the works of these artists open the possibility for a deeper understanding of trauma, one that holds within it possibilities for empathy and reconciliation.

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Appendix A:
Exhibition Checklist for Kara Walker: After the Deluge

Kara Walker (American, b. 1969)
Untitled, 1996
Cut paper, watercolor, and graphite on paper mounted on canvas
69 _ x 66 inches (176.5 x 167.6 cm)
Private collection

Kara Walker (American, b. 1969)
Untitled, 2002
Graphite on paper
65 x 70 inches (165.1 x 177.8 cm)
Brooklyn Museum
Alfred T. White Fund 2003.15

Kara Walker (American, b. 1969)
Untitled, 1996
Cut paper and pastel on paper mounted on canvas
69 _ x 69 _ inches (176.5 x 176.5 cm)
Collection of Ninah and Michael Lynne

Kara Walker (American, b. 1969)
Middle Passages, 2004
Gouache, cut paper, and collage on board
Series of 5
Each: 17 x 17 inches (43.2 x 43.2 cm)
Collection of Marc and Lisa Mills

Kara Walker (American, b. 1969)
Burn, 1998
Cut paper and adhesive
92 x 48 inches (233.7 x 121.9 cm)
The Speyer Family Collection, New York

Kara Walker (American, b. 1969)
Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War (Annotated), 2005
Portfolio of 15 offset lithography and silkscreen prints
Each: 39 x 53 inches (99.1 x 134.6 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Purchase, Dave and Reba Williams Gift, 2005 (2005.215.1-.15)

Kara Walker (American, b. 1969)
American Primitives, 2001
Gouache and cut paper on paint board
Series of 36 (17 on display) plus 8 framed text panels
Dimensions Varied
Collection of Rachel and Jean-Pierre Lehmann

Subtitles:

Ancestor, 11 x 8 inches (27.9 x 20.3 cm)
Beats Me, 8 x 10 inches (20.3 x 25.4 cm)
Big House, 8 x 11 inches (20.3 x 27.9 cm)
Entrance to the Underground Railroad, 8 x 11 inches (20.3 x 27.9 cm)
General Defeat, 9 x 12 inches (22.9 x 30.5 cm)
John Brown or Big Love, 8 x 11 inches (20.3 x 27.9 cm)
Lands Cave, 8 x 11 inches (20.3 x 27.9 cm)
Night Conjure, 8 x 10 inches (20.3 x 25.4 cm)
Revised Trajectory, 8 x 11 inches (20.3 x 27.9 cm)
They Say Water Represents the Subconscious in Dreams, 8 x 11 inches
     (20.3 x 27.9 cm)
The Negro Muse Misses His Mark (Again), 11 x 8 inches (27.9 x 20.3 cm)
Trilogy, 9 x 12 inches (22.9 x 30.5 cm)
Influence of the Recent Dead, 6 x 6 inches (15.2 x 15.2 cm)
Familiar, 9 x 12 inches (22.9 x 30.5 cm)
Untitled, 11 x 8 inches (27.9 x 20.3 cm)
Untitled, 9 x 12 inches (22.9 x 30.5 cm)
Untitled, 9 x 12 inches (22.9 x 30.5 cm)

Winslow Homer (American, 1836—1910)
Dressing for the Carnival, 1877
Oil on canvas
20 x 30 inches (50.8 x 76.2 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Amelia B. Lazarus Fund, 1922 (22.220)

Winslow Homer (American, 1836–1910)
The Gulf Stream, 1899
Oil on canvas
28 1/8 x 49 1/8 inches (71.4 x 124.8 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, 1906 (06.1234)

Joshua Shaw (American, ca. 1777–1860)
The Deluge towards Its Close, ca. 1813
Oil on canvas
48 _ x 66 inches (122.6 x 167.6 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Gift of William Merritt Chase, 1909 (09.14)

Unknown Artist after John Singleton Copley (American, 1738–1820)
Watson and the Shark, ca. 1778
Oil on canvas
24 7/8 x 30 1/8 inches (63.2 x 76.5 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Gift of Mrs. Gordon Dexter, 1942 (42.71.1)

John Carlin (American, 1813–1891)
After a Long Cruise, 1857
Oil on canvas
20 x 30 inches (50.8 x 76.2 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Maria DeWitt Jesup Fund, 1949 (49.126)

William P. Chappel (American, ca. 1800–1880)
Berg's Ship Yard, 1870s
Oil on slate paper
6 1/8 x 9 1/8 in. (15.6 x 23.2 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Edward W. C. Arnold Collection of New York Prints, Maps, and Pictures, Bequest
of Edward W. C. Arnold, 1954 (54.90.511)

William P. Chappel (American, ca. 1800–1880)
Adult Funeral Procession, 1870s
Oil on slate paper
6 x 9 1/4 in. (15.2 x 23.5 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Edward W. C. Arnold Collection of New York Prints, Maps, and Pictures, Bequest
of Edward W. C. Arnold, 1954 (54.90.489)

William P. Chappel (American, ca. 1800–1880)
The Bathing Party, 1870s
Oil on slate paper
6 1/8 x 9 1/4 in. (15.6 x 23.5 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Edward W. C. Arnold Collection of New York Prints, Maps, and Pictures, Bequest
of Edward W. C. Arnold, 1954 (54.90.514)

William P. Chappel (American, ca. 1800–1880)
Old Ferry Stairs, 1870s
Oil on slate paper
6 1/16 x 9 1/8 in. (15.4 x 23.2 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Edward W. C. Arnold Collection of New York Prints, Maps, and Pictures, Bequest of Edward W. C. Arnold, 1954 (54.90.491)

William P. Chappel (American, ca. 1800–1880)
Infant Funeral Procession, 1870s
Oil on slate paper
6 1/16 x 9 3/16 inches (15.4 x 23.3 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Edward W. C. Arnold Collection of New York Prints, Maps, and Pictures, Bequest of Edward W. C. Arnold, 1954 (54.90.502)

William P. Chappel (American, ca. 1800–1880)
Baptism, 1870s
Oil on slate paper
6 1/8 x 9 1/4 in. (15.6 x 23.5 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Edward W. C. Arnold Collection of New York Prints, Maps, and Pictures, Bequest of Edward W. C. Arnold, 1954 (54.90.515)

William P. Chappel (American, ca. 1800–1880)
Baked Pears in Duane Park, 1870s
Oil on slate paper
6 x 9 1/8 in. (15.2 x 23.2 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Edward W. C. Arnold Collection of New York Prints, Maps, and Pictures, Bequest of Edward W. C. Arnold, 1954 (54.90. 494)

William P. Chappel (American, ca. 1800–1880)
The Boot Black, 1870s
Oil on slate paper
6 1/16 x 9 1/8 in. (15.4 x 23.2 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Edward W. C. Arnold Collection of New York Prints, Maps, and Pictures, Bequest of Edward W. C. Arnold, 1954 (54.90.501)

William P. Chappel (American, ca. 1800–1880)
The Garbage Cart, 1870s
Oil on slate paper
6 1/8 x 9 1/4 in. (15.6 x 23.5 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Edward W. C. Arnold Collection of New York Prints, Maps, and Pictures, Bequest of Edward W. C. Arnold, 1954 (54.90.507)

Unknown Artist
Male Power Figure (Nkisi), 19th-century
Democratic Republic of Congo or Angola; Kongo peoples

Wood, iron, glass, terracotta, shells, cloth, fiber, pigment, seeds, beads
28 _ x 13 inches (72.4 x 33.03 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Muriel Kallis Steinberg Newman Collection, Gift of Muriel Kallis Newman, in
honor of Douglas Newton, 1990 (1990.334)

Auguste Edouart (French, 1789–1861)
A Treatise on Silhouette Likenesses, 1835
Overall: 9 x 5 _ x _ inches (22.8 x 14.5 x 1.8 cm)
Lithography
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Bequest of Mary Martin, 1938 (38.145.570)

John Warner Barber (American, 1798-1885)
*A History of the Amistad Captives: Being a Circumstantial Account of the Capture of the
Spanish Schooner Amistad, by the Africans on Board; Their Voyage, and Capture near
Long Island, New York; with Biographical Sketches of Each of the Surviving Africans,*
1840
Overall: 9 7/16 x 6 1/8 inches (24 x 15.5 cm)
Sheet size of fold-out wood engraving: 9 _ x 19 _ inches (24 x 49 cm)
Wood engravings with hand-coloring and letterpress
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1954 (54.509.80)

Unknown Artist (American, 19th-century)
*Two Men, one cutting a Silhouette (possibly Judge Kent and Dr. Mason of Bangor,
Maine)*, date unknown
Cut paper with watercolor background
15 7/8 x 13 1/8 inches (40.2 x 33.2 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Bequest of Glenn Tilley Morse, 1950 (50.602.143)

Attributed to William Henry Brown (American, 1808-1882)
Woman Seated in front of a Window, date unknown
Cut paper with lithographic background
14 3/8 x 11 _ inches (36.5 x 29.9 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Mary Martin Fund, 1984 (1984.1101.1)

Samuel Metford (American, b. England, 1810-1890)
Thomas Williams, the Town Crier of New Bedford with Wife and Daughters, date
unknown
Cut paper with lithographic background
14 7/8 x 19 _ inches (37.7 x 50.3 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Bequest of Glenn Tilley Morse, 1950 (50.602.1240)

Auguste Edouart (French, 1789–1861)
Magic Lantern, date unknown
Cut paper with watercolor background
10 _ x 13 _ inches (26.2 x 34.2 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Bequest of Mary Martin, 1938 (38.145.392)

Auguste Edouart (French, 1789–1861)
South Sea Islanders, date unknown
Cut paper with watercolor background
10 3/8 x 13 _ inches (26.5 x 34.2 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Bequest of Glenn Tilley Morse, 1950 (50.602.1377)

Unknown Artist (American, 19th-century)
Edgar Allan Poe, date unknown
Cut paper
6 7/8 x 4 inches (17.5 x 10 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Mary Martin Fund, 1960 (60.603.21)

Unknown Artist
A Small Girl with Cape and Hat, date unknown
Cut paper
12 _ x 7 5/8 inches (31 x 19.5 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Museum accession 1942 (X.792)

Unknown Artist (19th-century)
An Old Man and Woman, date unknown
Cut paper
14 x 12 inches (35.5 x 30.5 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Bequest of Mary Martin, 1938 (38.145.339)

Unknown Artist
Washington Passing the Delaware, date unknown
Embossed print
5 7/8 x 8 1/8 inches (14.8 x 20.5 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Museum Accession 1950 (X.791)

Reinier Zeeman (Dutch, ca. 1623-1667)
Water, no. 3 from The Four Elements (ca. 1651-52)

Etching and drypoint
2 7/8 x 7 7/8 inches (7.4 x 20.1 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Bequest of Grace M. Pugh, 1985 (1986.1180.1412)

Pieter Nolpe (Dutch, ca. 1613-1653)
The Bursting of St. Anthony's Dike, 5 March 1651
Etching
13 _ x 20 inches (33.7 x 50.8 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1963 (63.617.3)

Jean Audran (French, 1667-1756) after Nicholas Poussin (French, 1594-1665)
The Flood (Winter)
Engraving
18 7/16 x 23 11/16 inches (46.8 x 60.2 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1953 (53.600.1162)

Style of Hieronymus Bosch (Netherlandish)
Christ's Descent into Hell, ca. 1550–60
Oil on wood
21 x 46 inches (53.3 x 116.8 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1926 (26.244)

Figure 1. Kara Walker installing *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven (1995),* Walker Art Center, 2007
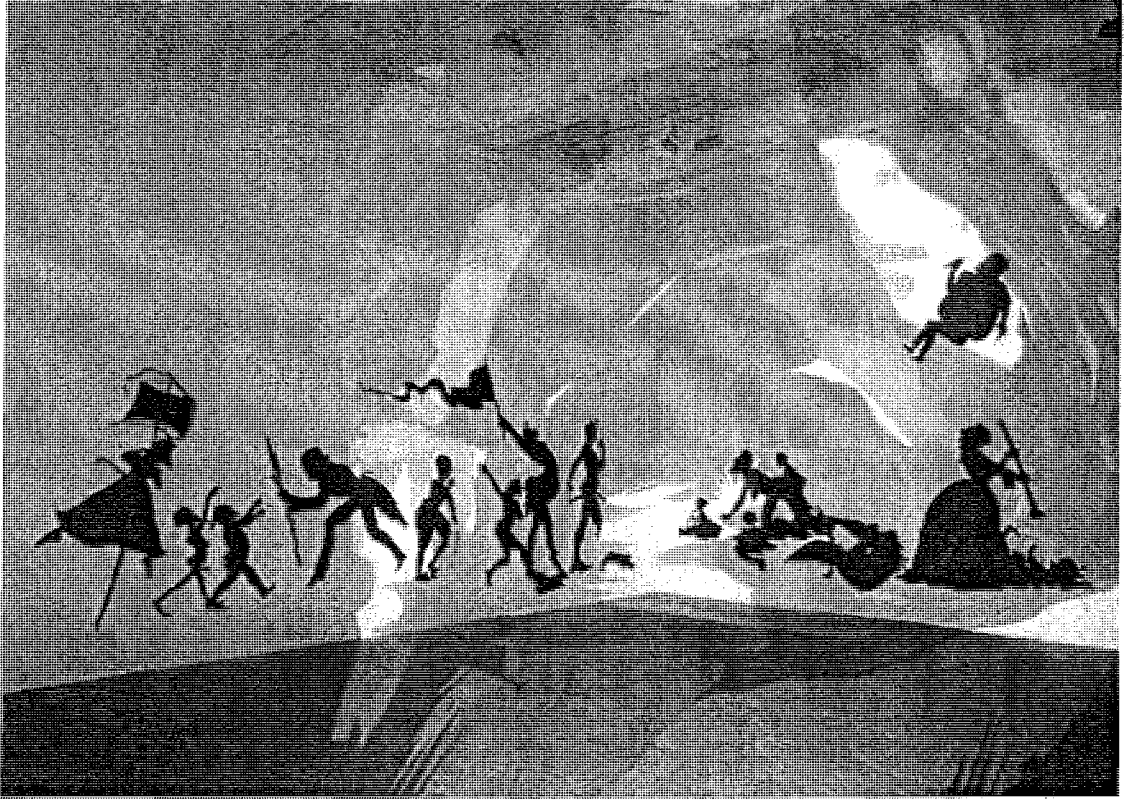
Figure 2. Kara Walker, *Darkytown Rebellion*, 2001, cut paper and projection on wall
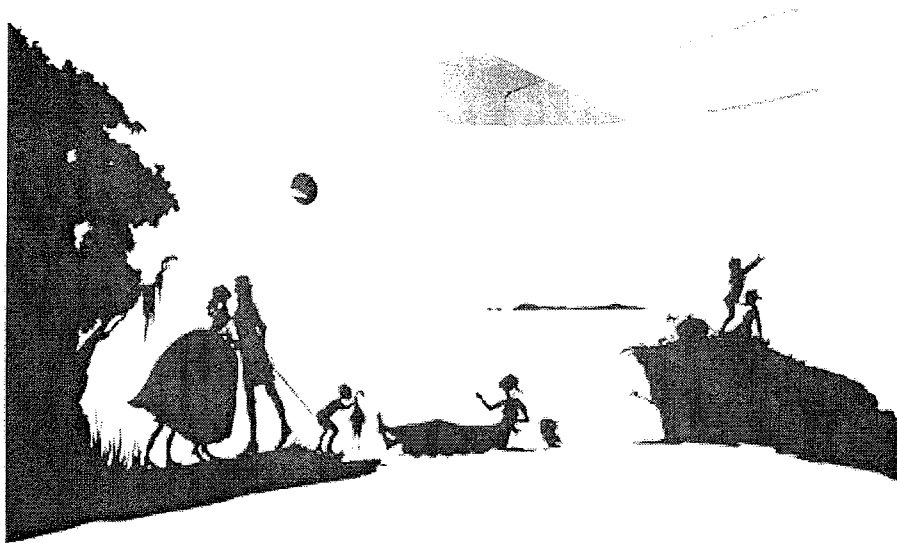
Figure 3. Kara Walker, *Gone, An Historical Romance of a Civil War as it Occurred between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart*, 1994, cut paper on wall, installation view at the Walker Art Center
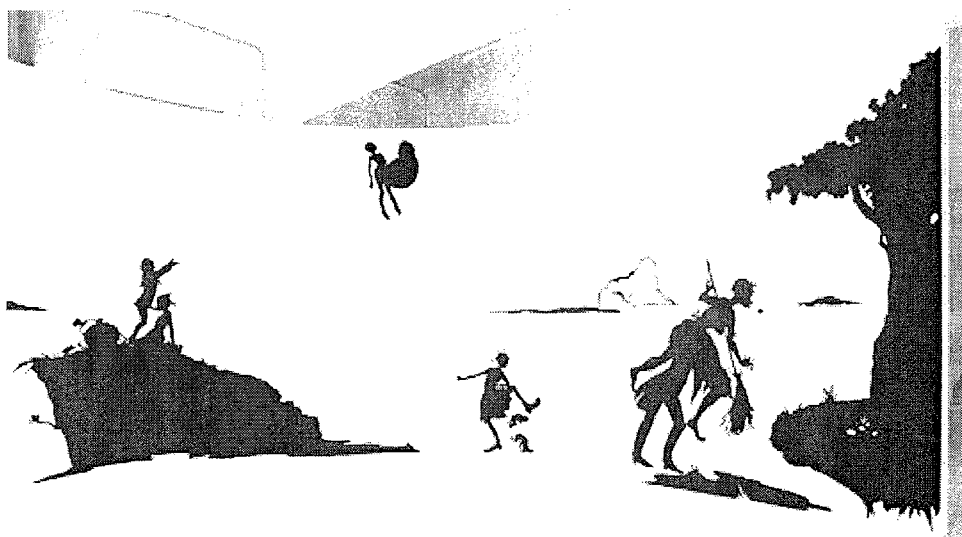
Figure 4. Kara Walker, *Gone, An Historical Romance of a Civil War as it Occurred between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart*, 1994, cut paper on wall, installation view at the Walker Art Center
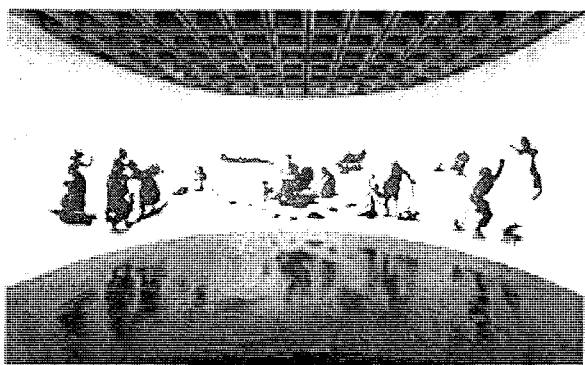
Figure 5. Kara Walker, *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven,* 1995, cut paper on wall, installation view
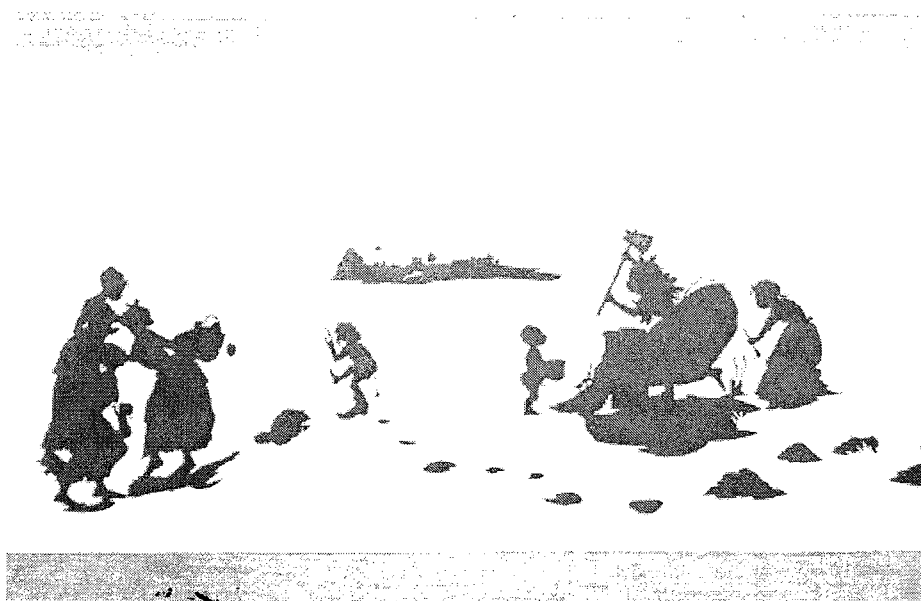
Figure 6. Kara Walker, *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven,* 1995, cut paper on wall, detail
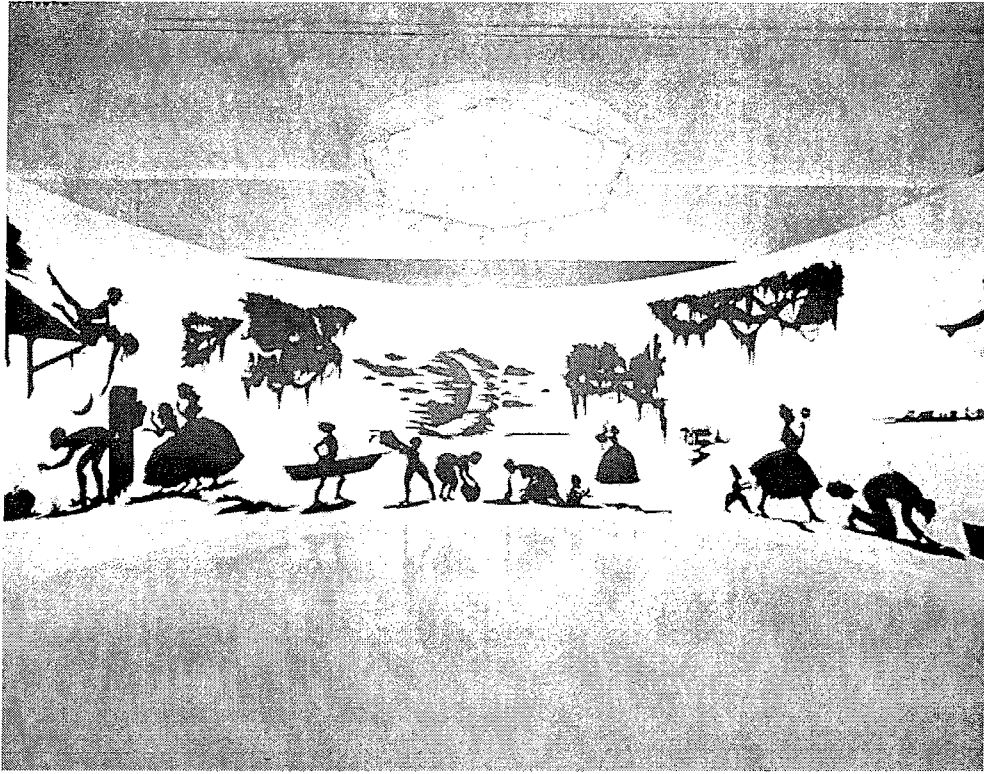
Figure 7. Kara Walker, *Slavery! Slavery! Presenting a GRAND and LIFELIKE Panoramic Journey into Picturesque Southern Slavery of "Life at 'Ol' Virginny's Hole' (sketches from Plantation Life) See the Peculiar Institution as never before! All cut from black paper by the able hand of Kara Elizabeth Walker, an Emancipated Negress and leader in her Cause*, 1997, cut paper on wall, installation view
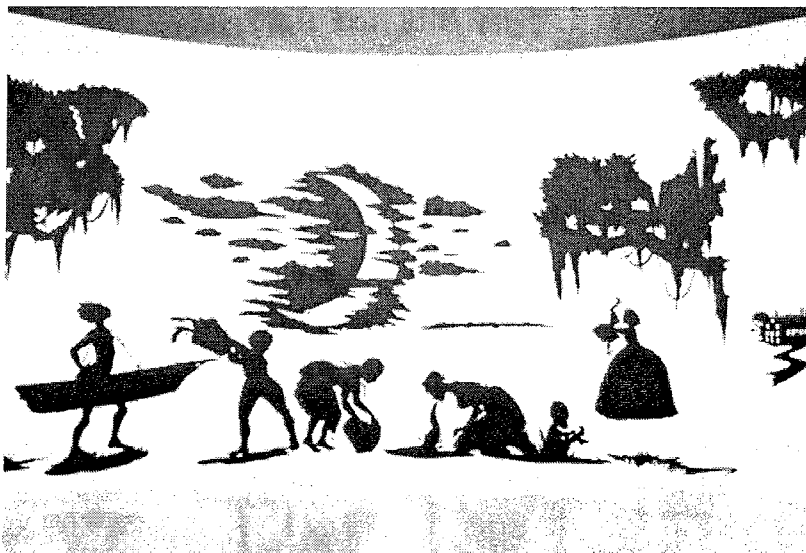
Figure 8. Kara Walker, *Slavery! Slavery!. . .* 1997, cut paper on wall, detail
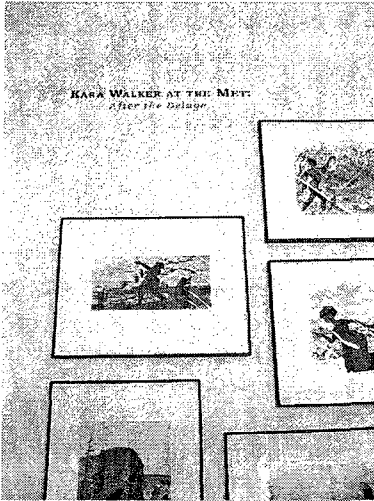
Figure 9. Kara Walker, *Middle Passages* (2004). Installation view, *Kara Walker at the Met: After the Deluge*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2007

Figure 10. Kara Walker with *Burn* (1998), left, and *Untitled* (1996), installation view, *Kara Walker at the Met: After the Deluge*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2007

Figure 11. Joshua Shaw, *The Deluge Towards Its Close*, ca.1813, oil on canvas
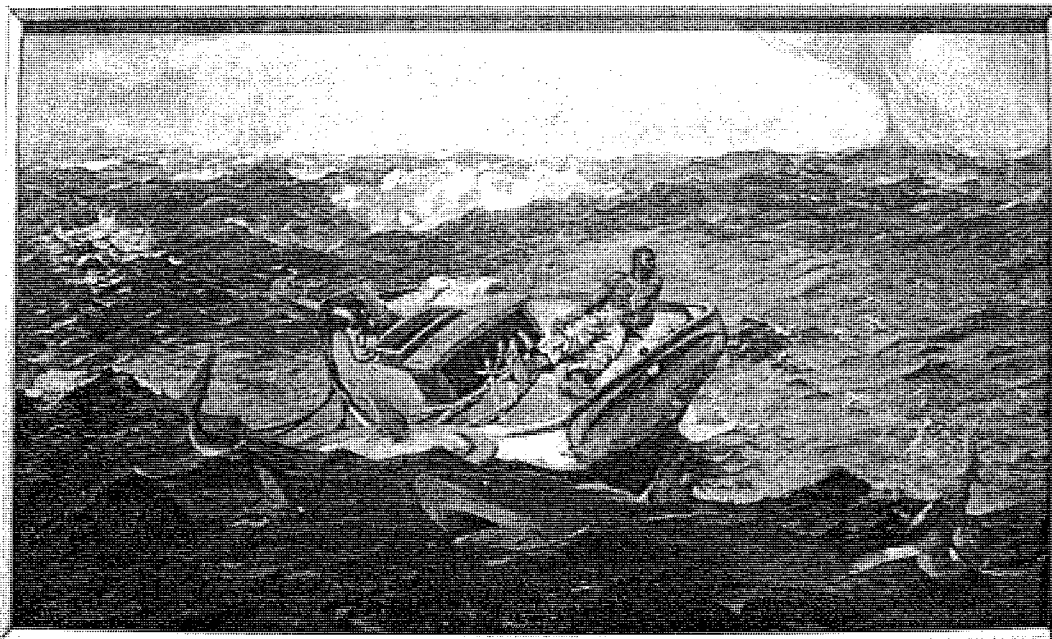
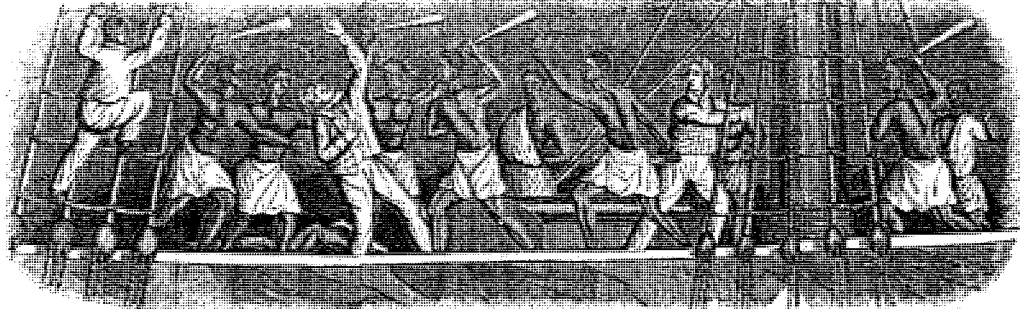
Figure 12. Winslow Homer, *The Gulf Stream*, 1899, oil on canvas
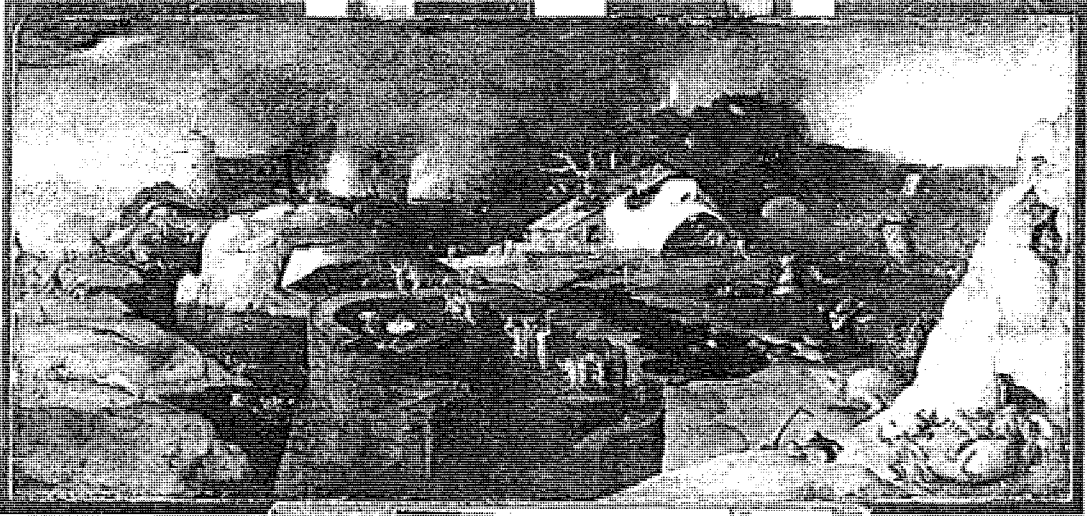
Figure 13. Style of Hieronymus Bosch, *Christ's Descent into Hell*, ca. 1550-60, oil on wood

Figure 14. Auguste Edouart, *A Treatise on Silhouette Likenesses*, 1835, lithography

Death of Capt. Ferrer, the Captain of the Amistad, July, 1839.

Don Jose Ruiz and Don Pedro Montez, of the Island of Cuba, having purchased fifty-three slaves at Havana, recently imported from Africa, put them on board the Amistad, Capt. Ferrer, in order to transport them to Principe, another port on the Island of Cuba. After being out from Havana about four days, the African captives on board, in order to obtain their freedom, and return to Africa, armed themselves with cane knives, and rose upon the Captain and crew of the vessel. Capt. Ferrer and the cook of the vessel were killed; two of the crew escaped; Ruiz and Montez were made prisoners.

Figure 15. Pages from John Warner Barber's book, *A History of the Amistad Captives: Being a Circumstantial Account of the Capture of the Spanish Schooner Amistad, by the Africans on Board: Their Voyage, and Capture near Long island, New York; with Biographical Sketches of Each Surviving Africans*, 1840, wood engravings with hand-coloring and letterpress
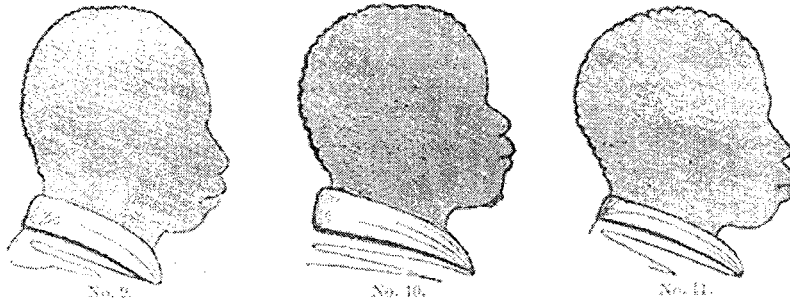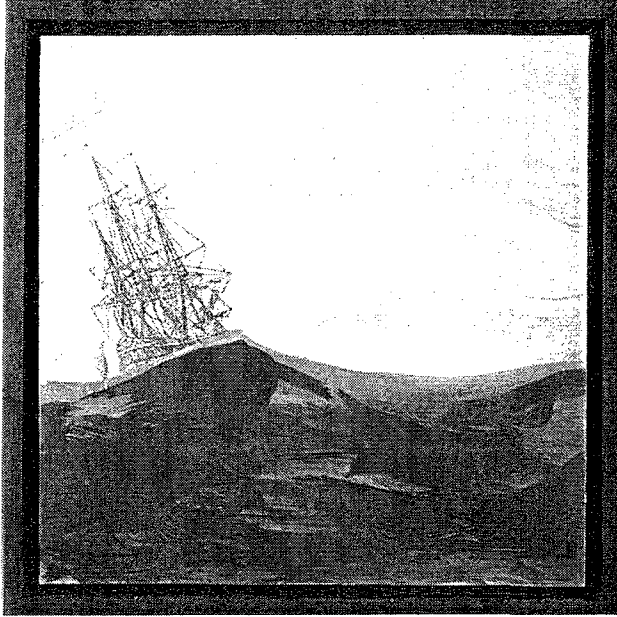

Figure 16. Pages from John Warner Barber's book, *A History of the Amistad Captives: Being a Circumstantial Account of the Capture of the Spanish Schooner Amistad, by the Africans on Board: Their Voyage, and Capture near Long island, New York; with Biographical Sketches of Each Surviving Africans*, 1840, wood engravings with hand-coloring and letterpress, detail

Figures 17. Kara Walker, *Middle Passages*, 2004, gouache, cut paper, and collage on board

Figures 18. Kara Walker, *Middle Passages*, 2004, gouache, cut paper, and collage on board
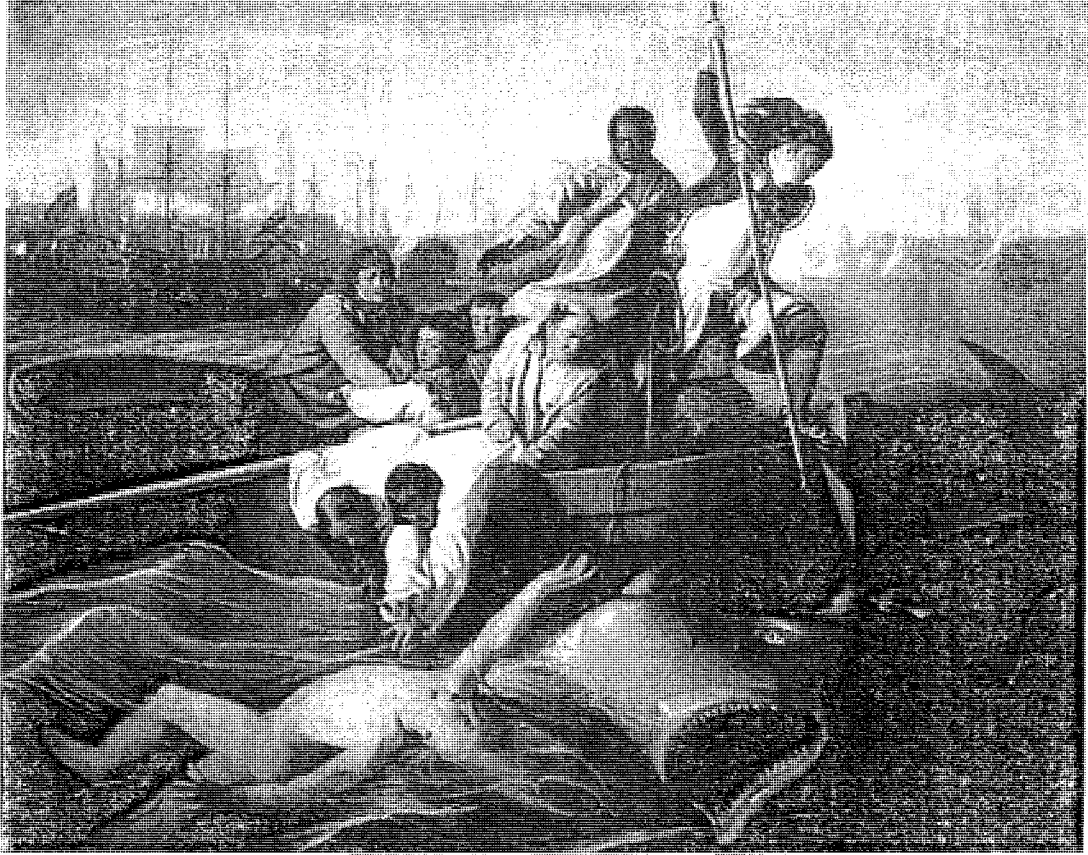
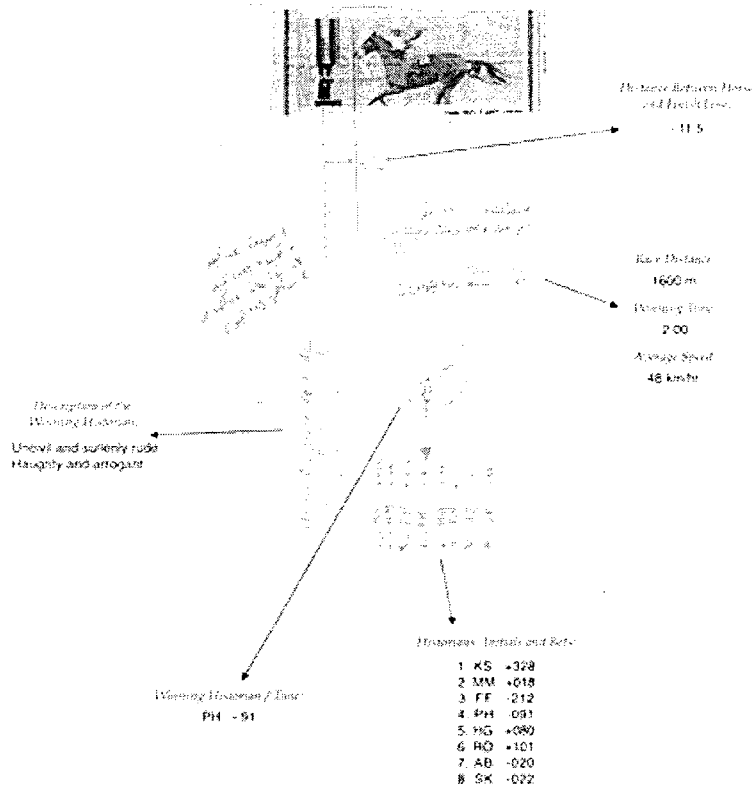Figure 19: John Singleton Copley *Watson and the Shark,* 1778, oil on canvas

Figure 20: Walid Raad/The Atlas Group Archive, *Fakhouri File: Notebook #72: Missing Lebanese Wars*, 2004, collage on paper

Figure 21. Walid Raad/The Atlas Group Archive, *Operator #17 File: I only wish that I could weep*, 2001-2002. Video still
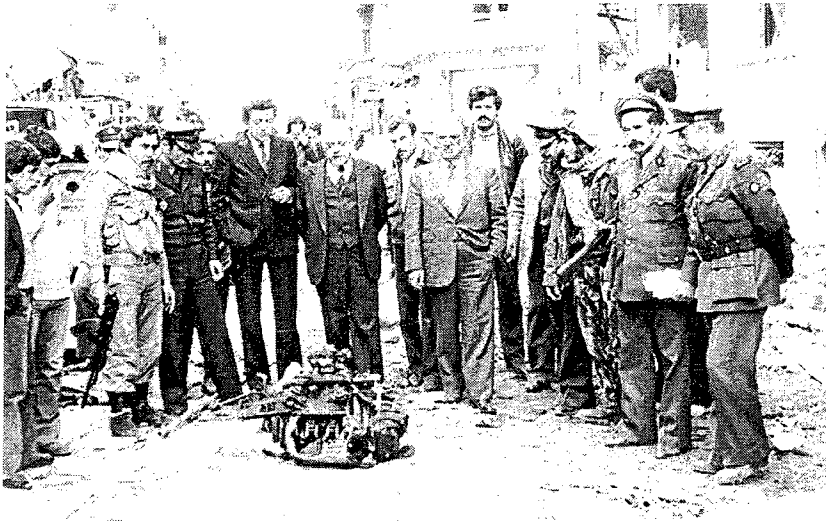
Figure 22. Walid Raad/The Atlas Group Archive, *My Neck Is Thinner Than A Hair*, 2002, detail, inkjet print

Figure 23. Walid Raad/The Atlas Group Archive, *My Neck Is Thinner Than A Hair*, 2002, inkjet print, detail. Figure 22 and 23 were shown as part of the performative lecture of the same name.

Figure 24. Walid Raad/The Atlas Group Archive. *We Can Make Rain But No One Came To Ask,* 2006, video still. This video is often shown as part of the performative lecture of the same name.