

New Exposure:

The Arab Image Foundation and the Curatorial

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It is now about twenty years ago that Lebanese photographers Fouad Elkoury and Samer Mohdad, together with Lebanese artist Akram Zaatari, decided to create an organization with the aim to preserve and study photographs from the Middle East, North Africa, and the Arab diaspora. In 1997 the Arab Image Foundation (AIF) began to operate officially as a nonprofit organization in Beirut. Conceived as an initiative to gather knowledge and promote awareness about the region's photographic heritage through locating, collecting, and conserving photographs, the AIF now holds a collection of more than 600,000 photographs from Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Algeria, as well as Mexico, Senegal, and Argentina, dating from the mid-nineteenth century.¹ Curatorial work defines the mission of the AIF not only in the sense that it is safekeeping and managing a collection, but also in that it has always sought to make the collection visible to the public. One major tool has been an online image database, which makes approximately 20,000 photographs accessible. Another central medium of display is the exhibition format. Since its inception, the AIF has produced fifteen exhibitions that have traveled worldwide, often accompanied by comprehensive publications.

In the context of the AIF, however, curating or the curatorial in general goes beyond the preservation and display of a photographic collection.² The mission of the AIF and the projects it generates are informed by a strong discursive-educational stance, while at the same time the foundation's members often question and challenge conventional curatorial practices. Apart from gathering and disseminating knowledge, they also critically reflect on their role as

knowledge producers and the possibilities, as well as the responsibility, that comes with that kind of agency.

After providing a brief outline of the genesis of the AIF, I will discuss how current and former AIF members, like Lara Baladi, Yto Barrada, Akram Zaatari, and Walid Raad, have curated and worked with different parts of its collection. Looking closely at the diverse approaches they followed in order to show and thematically contextualize photographs, I will analyze how they take on the role of curators, or are blurring the boundaries between their artistic work and curating. Pondering the question of how the AIF members create meaningful correlations between curatorial and artistic practices within the sociopolitical context of the Arab world while constantly negotiating the status and meaning of photography for the writing and rewriting of history, I will focus on the politics of the images they collect, present, and work with. Furthermore, I will examine the impact that digital technology has on the different modes of display they develop as part of their exhibition making or artistic practice, and on the objective of the AIF in a broader sense.

In the light of the colonial past of the Middle East, the AIF and its mission can surely be regarded as an effort on the part of its members to come to terms with their own history by studying the visual culture of the region, represented through vernacular photography. One of the major goals of the AIF is to look at history in general, and the history of photography specifically, from a non-Western-centric point of view. However, the AIF was also established in response to the dearth of cultural institutions and museums after the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990). Only a few years into a fragile state of peace in the mid-nineties that was still marked by tensions, in a city that had been massively destroyed by bombs and military clashes, the AIF was one of the first projects initiated by individuals of the civic society, who—despite a general lack of state funding—sought to create a new cultural infrastructure in Lebanon.

In fact, the members of the AIF initially planned to open a “Center for Photography” in Beirut that was supposed to house the AIF collection and would have been a venue for exhibitions, workshops, and other public events. Yet, over the years, as more artists and scholars like Walid Raad and Lara Baladi from Lebanon, Yto Barrada from Morocco, Issam Nassar from Palestine, and German-Lebanese Yasmine Eid-Sabbagh joined the foundation, it took on a different, hybrid shape. Instead of becoming a cultural institution as such, the AIF today combines the features of an institutional entity with the characteristics of a long-term collective artistic project.

The core of its collection is the result of the individual research the AIF members undertook based on their own interests: some were focusing on a particular genre or specific localities, while others were especially interested in the work of specific studio photographers. In the years

between 1998 and 2002 the founding members Zaatari and Elkoury went on “field trips” throughout Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Egypt, contacting families who, over generations, had been rooted in the social upper class. They did this on the assumption that wealthier people could afford to be photographed as far back as the nineteenth century, when photography was still a luxury item for most. Later they also discovered that often one family member would keep all of the family photos and hand them down to other members of the next generation. Consequently, they were able to locate a large number of images and gather information on the photographers that made them in a relatively short time. They either acquired those photographs or exchanged them for exact reproductions of the “originals.”

During their research trips, Zaatari and Elkoury also conducted numerous interviews with the owners and photographers, which were recorded on video and audiotape to annotate the prints, negatives, stereographs, and glass plates they collected. Other AIF members, like Yto Barrada and Lara Baladi, did this under similar premises in Senegal, across the Maghreb, and in Iraq. Yet later on, with the increasing recognition of the AIF, more and more photographs were directly handed over to the foundation by individuals and professional photographers. Its collection has continuously grown in this way until today, without the need for extended research and field trips.

Once photographs enter the AIF collection they are carefully cleaned, numbered, scanned, and stored in a climate-controlled room by a small team of archivists and technicians. Preservation, display, annotation, and knowledge production as aspects of the curatorial are hence tightly linked to the digitization of originally analog photographs. While the delicate photo objects are stored under conditions that prevent further deterioration or damage, their digital reproductions can be retrieved, viewed, and studied at any given time and place.

The AIF began its work at a time when museums only started to display their collections online and the idea of a universal dissemination of information on the cultural heritage they catalog became increasingly attractive.³ Digital media and the Internet not only changed the contemporary production and everyday use of photography and the circulation of images, but also fostered the reevaluation of their status as historical sources by giving them new “exposure.” With the Internet and digital storage came what Jacques Derrida called a “promise of the archive”: a seemingly more democratic ground for historiography and a guaranteed afterlife for documents and knowledge, which otherwise would have most likely—sooner or later—been forgotten.⁴

Although due to its institutional structure and the archiving methods it applies the AIF has been frequently referred to as an archive, its members have usually refrained from explicitly referring to it as such. In fact, they often distance

themselves from the term and its bureaucratic connotation in order to highlight the artistic directive the foundation's collection is based on.⁵ Still, one could argue that the AIF's institutional, archive-like features and its expertise in conservation were important facets, if not the prerequisites, for its members to create such a comprehensive and multifaceted collection. Both gave its members a stronger legitimacy to gather private family photographs directly from their owners and photographers.

Besides the shift that the originally private photographs in the AIF collection went through in entering an institutional and public realm, their digital storage, management, and display triggers a transformative process that potentially alters their meaning. Formally analog photographs are not simply saved as digital reproductions. As digital files, aspects of their materiality—forgetting their tactility—are no longer evident, since they are mostly presented as mere images. In the AIF online database, for example, various formats and specific characteristics of different image carriers have been adjusted in size, grayscale, and color according to a uniform display scheme. Information, like traces of use on the surface of the image carriers or written notes on their backs, became less apparent or are completely inaccessible.⁶

Due to their digital remediation, the digitized images of the AIF collection are reconfigured into a new image-form with modified structures, functions, and ways of presentation, which considerably affects the way they are perceived and interpreted.⁷ While their accelerated and simplified distribution as digital images might increase their visibility and value as visual information, it might also endanger their significance as historical documents.⁸ “The photographic transformation of matter into information changes its tempor(e)ality as well,” says media theorist Wolfgang Ernst. He continues,

Physical storage of the photographic print, when professionally conserved, provides a relatively stable enduring memory, but one that is more difficult for the public to access. Once digitized, the electronic image is open to almost real time and new search options like similarity-based image retrieval; at the same time, the “virtual” essence of the electronic image becomes more fragile and subject to alteration than ever.⁹

Furthermore, considering the size of the AIF collection and the time it will take to digitize it in its entirety (which is essentially the objective of the foundation), the AIF and its online database at this point paradigmatically illustrate what Ernst calls “a divided memory world” in which some data circulates online “while undigitized photographs remain largely unseen in physical archives.”¹⁰

However, the alteration of the meaning of individual images when circulated publicly and the effects of the transfer from analog to digital media are issues that the AIF members thoroughly reflect on in their process of exhibition-making,

as well as in their own individual artwork. They do so either by developing elaborate narratives using oral testimonies that historically contextualize the photographs on display, or by highlighting their materiality and the personal relationships the original photographers and former owners have had with them.

Arts et couleurs for example, an exhibition curated by Lara Baladi in 2004, based on her research in Senegal, tells the story of the Lebanese photographer Youssef Safieddine, who ran a photo studio in Dakar throughout the 1950s and '60s. Although most of Safieddine's professional photographic archive had been lost, Baladi came across astonishing photographs of his personal life, including self-portraits, snapshots of him with his friends, portraits of his wife, Fatmeh, and pictures of both of them together on vacations in Spain and Egypt. Comprised of black-and-white photographs, montages, hand-colored images, and color prints, the exhibition depicted an image of the couple in the time of an economic upswing and the omnipresent influence of modern Western pop culture, while simultaneously reflecting on the evolution of photographic techniques (Fig. 1 & 2).

A broader perspective on history was provided in *Albums Marocains 1900–1960*, curated by Yto Barrada in 1999. The show consisted of images the artist had located in Morocco, offering an impression of how local professional and amateur photographers took on new modes of representation rather than the conventions of European photography. Their pictures tell the stories of different families and their ways of life (Fig. 3 & 4). They show various urban and rural settings, as well as the influence of the French and Spanish protectorate on Moroccan society.

Both of these exhibitions presented, on the one hand, photographs framed by narratives that acknowledged their meaning as personal memorabilia and, on the other, visual documents that stand at the intersection between subjective memory and history. In addressing topics like migration, the impact of colonialism, and the sociopolitical changes that occurred with the rise of modernity, they defied Orientalist stereotypes and implicitly granted photography a political agency by suggesting a more differentiated look at the past than established historiography often conveys.

Zaatari took an even more explicit political stance with *Palestine before '48*. Presented in the years between 1999 and 2007 in different venues throughout Lebanon, Ramallah, Birzeit, Nablus, Kuwait, Cairo, and Santiago de Compostela, as well as on the occasion of the Noorderlicht Photofestival in Groningen, the Netherlands, in 2004, the exhibition solely included, as its title suggests, amateur and studio photography from Palestine.



Fig. 1. Youssef Safieddine
Selfportrait, Dakar, Senegal,
1966, Collection Youssef
Safieddine. Credit: the Arab
Image Foundation.



Fig. 2. Youssef Safieddine, Youssef
Safieddine and his pregnant
wife Fatmeh Senegal, 1958,
Collection Youssef
Safieddine, Credit: the Arab
Image Foundation.



Fig. 3. Anonymous, Aicha (center)
and Hajja Habiba Amor
Morocco, ca. 1936,
Collection Amor El Alami.
Credit: the Arab Image
Foundation.

Most of the pictures in the show were taken prior to 1948, providing a visual assessment of the sociopolitical circumstances before the establishment of the state of Israel (Fig. 5 & 6). Additionally, a few pictures taken after 1948 gave an impression of the events surrounding the catastrophic First Arab-Israeli War and the subsequent establishment of Israel, commemorated by Palestinians as the Nakba, during which hundreds of Palestinian villages were destroyed, numerous massacres were committed, and more than 700,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homes (Fig. 7 & 8).

Consisting of ninety-one photographs in total, taken between 1900 and 1967, *Palestine before '48* presented a challenge to the hegemony of Orientalist imaginary, which generally depicts Palestine as a rural, backward region, captured in pastoral scenes matching imagined tableaux of the Holy Land. While those photographs of deserted and barren, or—as they were contextualized—“biblical” landscapes, have often been used by Zionists to justify the establishment of Israel in the spirit of modern progress, *Palestine before '48* illustrated a very different account. It presented images of a dynamic, multi-faith society and the everyday life in its urban and cultural centers, such as Jerusalem, Nablus, Ramallah, and Jaffa. While photography initially provided Europeans with what photography historian Issam Nassar calls “a certain strategic advantage in redefining or reconstructing the history of the ‘Holy Land,’”¹¹ the exhibition demonstrated how the medium also plays “a key role in the formation of the Palestinian collective memory.”¹²

This point was emphasized in the introductory text to the exhibition. It described Zaatari’s interactions with the former owners and originators of the photographs and contained direct quotes about their relationship to specific pictures, as well as the circumstances they were taken in. Parallel to the titles, dates, and names of the photographers that accompanied each picture in the show, the text contextualized the pictures on display while also accentuating the link between personal memory, history, and photography.

In all three exhibitions, *Palestine before '48*, *Albums Marocains 1900–1960*, and *Arts et couleurs*, photographs were exhibited as reproductions of the “original” prints. They resembled the size of the original image carriers, but were printed with inkjet or modern gelatin silver print techniques. Arranged individually or in groupings in uniform wooden frames, they were presented rather conservatively in rows or blocks on the walls of the exhibition spaces.

Mapping Sitting, conceived by Walid Raad and Akram Zaatari in 2002, took a very different approach.¹³ Presenting various kinds of photographic portraits produced in Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq between the 1920s and the 1970s, the exhibition not only included “original” photo objects and albums, it also showed a



Fig. 4. Anonymous, Amono and his adoptive son, Morocco, 1948, Collection Yto Barrada. Credit: the Arab Image Foundation.



Fig. 5. Anonymous, Hindenburg zeppelin over Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Palestine, 1936, Abdel Hadi (Family) Collection. Credit: the Arab Image Foundation.



Fig. 6. Anonymous, Marguerite, dressed up as a man, Jerusalem, Palestine, 1935, Collection AIF/ Alice Agazarian. Credit: the Arab Image Foundation.

stronger artistic intervention in the way photographs were displayed. No longer exhibited as reproductions that mimic the size and appearance of the “original” photographs, the pictures were either significantly enlarged by Zaatari and Raad, who arranged them in series and typologies or, in the case of hundreds of passport photos, displayed in the form of a monumental mural (Fig. 9 & 10). They also created digital montages that were presented as video projections, layering and thus animating a number of so-called surprise photographs—pictures that photographers took on the streets of passersby to offer them for sale afterwards (Fig. 11).

While *Palestine before '48*, *Albums Marocains 1900–1960*, and *Arts et couleurs* were clearly conceived as exhibitions, *Mapping Sitting* was labeled as “a project by Walid Raad and Akram Zaatari.” Rather than taking on the role of curators or mediators, Raad and Zaatari made use of the exhibition as a form of artistic expression to “raise questions about portraiture, performance, photography, and identity in general.”¹⁴ Simultaneously, they made their authorship as artists and their position as members of the AIF in relation to its collection a crucial topic. In the words of art critic Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, *Mapping Sitting* thus “proposed a fourfold challenge to what exhibitions are, troubling the status of artists, artworks, curators, and institutions along the way.”¹⁵ Although *Mapping Sitting* exhibited a group of photographers and focused on the specific characteristics of their practices, Raad and Zaatari clearly suggested that the photographers themselves should not be considered artists. The photographs were not to be regarded as art, but rather as the “content” and the “topic” of an artistically generated display. According to Wilson-Goldie, Raad and Zaatari thus “turned curating into art making, and transposed the building of installations, exhibitions, collections, and institutions into art, as well.”¹⁶

Zaatari further developed this take on the AIF and its collection in *Objects of Study: The Archive of Studio Shehrazade*. This still ongoing project examines the work of Lebanese photographer Hashem El Madani and began with two exhibitions of Madani’s photographs: *Hashem el Madani: Studio Practices* (2004), which was dedicated to Madani’s studio portraits, and *Hashem el Madani: Promenades* (2006), which looked at his work outside of the studio. A third exhibition, *Hashem el Madani: Itinerary* (2007), was a site-specific display of photographs in different locations throughout Sidon, where Madani ran his studio and still lives to this day. Zaatari’s examination of Madani’s oeuvre continues in various video and multimedia installations, as well as a number of photographic series. Over the years, however, the curatorial aspect of his engagement with Madani’s photographs has made way for artistic strategies that have their roots in the conceptual art of the 1970s, which used appropriation as a primary artistic method. Unlike *Studio Practices*, *Promenades*, and *Itinerary*, which were presented as AIF projects, Zaatari now presents photographs of Madani solely under his own authorship (Fig. 12). He regards Madani’s photography not only as an “object



Fig. 7. Samaan Sahar, National Guards, Bethlehem, Palestine, 1949, Collection AIF/Widad Kawar. Credit: the Arab Image Foundation.



Fig. 8. Bedros Doumanian, Jordanian Soldier, Jerusalem, Palestine, 1967, Collection AIF/Bedros Doumanian. Credit: the Arab Image Foundation.



Fig. 9. Exhibition view of *Mapping Sitting* at Nicéphore Niepce Museum, Chalon-sur-Saone, 2004. Credit: the Arab Image Foundation.



Fig. 10. Exhibition view of *Mapping Sitting* at Nicéphore Niepce Museum, Chalon-sur-Saone, 2004. Credit: the Arab Image Foundation.

of study,” but also appropriates the images in the form of “conceptual reproductions.”¹⁷ References to artists like Sherrie Levine—who, by appropriating existing photographs and artworks by other artists, questions notions of originality and authorship, as well as the value system they establish—seem apparent. But Zaatari’s reproduction of Madani’s photographs also contains a self-critical statement and a reflection on the AIF’s mission.

This addresses the foundation’s pedagogic aims and its canonization of photographs from its collection. By appropriating Madani’s photographs, Zaatari relativizes the historically instructive and at times didactic position of the AIF and prevents Madani from being canonized as an artist. Wilson-Goldie reads this strategy, perhaps with slight euphemism, as a measure to keep Madani away from “the vagaries of the art market.”¹⁸ However, the hierarchical gulf between photography and art, and more specifically, between Madani’s photography and Zaatari’s own art that is at least implicitly proposed here, might also be questioned as a somewhat problematic exploitation of the very notion of authorship that artists like Levine criticize through appropriation.

Of all the AIF members, Zaatari’s work is most closely tied to the AIF collection. This can be read not only in his treatment of Madani’s photographs, but also in his work dealing with the Egyptian photographer Van Leo, including the video *Him and Her Van Leo* (2001). Another, more recent, example is *On Photography, People and Modern Times* (2011), a stop-motion montage in the form of a split screen video installation that makes use of photographs from the AIF collection while also being a work about the AIF. Looking back at the photographs the AIF had first gathered in the late 1990s and the interviews Zaatari and Elkoury conducted with their former owners, *On Photography, People and Modern Times* considers people’s relationship to photography and their memories regarding the events that took place when the pictures presented in the video installation were taken. Rather than being displayed solely as historical documents, they become integral components of a complex reflection on visual and oral testimony, presentation and representation, originality and reproduction, photography and video, analog and digital media, the past and the present.

According to Zaatari himself, the video installation is meant “to juxtapose two lives and two worlds that photographs in the collection of the Arab Image Foundation experienced: once in the hands of their original owners and once in the custody of the AIF.”¹⁹ This juxtaposition highlights the materiality of the photographs while also dealing with their remediation as images and their transition from a private to a public, institutional context.

On Photography, People and Modern Times begins with a view inside the cold storage room that houses the AIF collection. Two scenes captured from two different camera

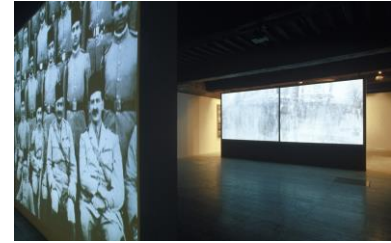


Fig. 11. Exhibition view of *Mapping Sitting* at Nicéphore Niepce Museum, Chalon-sur-Saone, 2004. Credit: the Arab Image Foundation.



Fig. 12. Baqari’s wife, Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon 1954. From Akram Zaatari’s Objects of Study/The Archive of Studio Shehrazade/Hashem el Madani/Studio Practices. Collection AIF/Hashem el Madani. Credit: the Arab Image Foundation.

angles appear simultaneously on a split screen and show its interior: aluminum shelves filled with cardboard boxes, ring binders, and envelopes (Fig. 13). The next scene shows another, more spacious room flooded with natural daylight, where a TV, camcorder, and several Mini-DV tapes sit on a white table: on the left side of the split screen the arrangement is shown from above, while the right side provides a frontal view. On the display of the camcorder on the left side of the screen a tape starts playing that is immediately and simultaneously shown on the TV on the screen's right side. An elderly man with glasses and short brown hair starts speaking in Arabic. He describes how he began collecting photographs, that the urge of collecting and a passion for photography hit him like a fever. Meanwhile, a woman wearing white cotton gloves opens two envelopes and presents two black-and-white photographs: studio portraits of two men with mustaches and turbans, who both carry rifles in front of a painted backdrop (Fig. 14).

This procedure—a person appears on the TV, speaking, while the woman unpacks photographs from envelopes and boxes—is repeated several times during the course of *On Photography, People and Modern Times*. With time it becomes evident that all of the protagonists shown in the video clips on the TV are either the former owners of the photographs placed on the table by the woman in the white gloves or the photographers themselves. They talk, for example, about religious prejudices against photography that were still present in the Middle East during the first half of the twentieth century, or about certain beauty ideals of that time. A woman describes her grandfather's photo studio in Jerusalem. She remembers its glass ceiling and the traditional costumes that her grandfather used for portraying his clients. Another man mentions his cars and the joyrides he used to go on. While looking at his personal photo album, he talks about the liberty of the region before the current national borders were established. Back then, he could easily drive from Jerusalem to Beirut, race in the mountains of Dahr el Baydar, and return the same day.

On Photography, People and Modern Times emphasizes the affective bonds of its protagonists to their photographs vis-à-vis their memories; yet it also sheds light on the relationship between Zaatari's art practice and the AIF collection by addressing issues such as preservation, tradition, and historiography, in line with the curatorial aspect of the AIF mission and the media transfer that goes hand in hand with it.

On a formal and technical level, *On Photography, People and Modern Times* puts photography and video—the two main media of Zaatari's artistic practice—in a reciprocal tension. The combination of analog photographs, on the one hand, and the video clips that were taken by Zaatari and Elkoury during their first research trips, on the other, create a contrast between still and moving images, while *On Photography, People and Modern Times* itself is a stop-motion montage of digital photographs. Concurrently, the



Fig. 13. Videostill from Akram Zaatari *On Photography, People and Modern Times*, 2010. Courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut: Hamburg. Credit: Akram Zaatari, 2013.

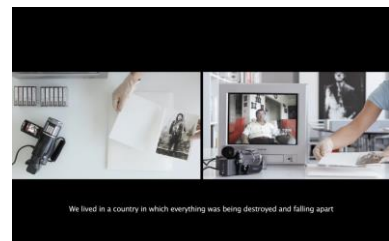


Fig. 14. Videostill from Akram Zaatari *On Photography, People and Modern Times*, 2010. Courtesy of the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut: Hamburg. Credit: Akram Zaatari, 2013.

video installation gives an overview of the advancement of image generating technology, spanning from the black-and-white photographs taken between 1860 and 1960, to the Mini-DV clips filmed in the late 1990s and the high-definition digital photography and post-production technology of the stop-motion montage.

Zaatari encounters this development not without a degree of skepticism, which is pointedly expressed in the final scene of *On Photography, People and Modern Times*. After the final video clip appears on the TV, in which Van Leo somehow nervously asks whether Zaatari will ever return the photographs he gave to him, the objects slowly disappear—first the photographs, then the Mini-DV tapes, then the camcorder, and finally the television—until only the empty table, still visible on the two sides of the screen, remains. In the context of *On Photography, People and Modern Times*, which is mainly concerned with the contextual transfer of photographs from the private into the institutional, this “*tabula rasa*” gesture can be read as critical reevaluation of the building of institutional collections. Zaatari seems to comment on the fact that collecting, as the art historian Matthias Winzen puts it, always causes a “paradox of preserving destruction” by damaging or impairing the original meaning of the collected item when it is removed from its previous context.²⁰ Furthermore, Zaatari’s *tabula rasa* gesture suggests a media pessimism that Siegfried Kracauer expressed about a century ago, in the face of the universal presence of photography. While Kracauer argued that photography does not function as a mnemonic device, but rather as a trigger for collective amnesia, Zaatari questions the impact of photography and visual media on remembering and historiography in our digital age.²¹

New media are consistently employed to fulfill our desire to rationalize time, memory, and trauma, yet our current, digital culture generates a new major problem: “The self-fulfilling prophecy of information overload, speed and connectivity” that comes with it creates, according to media theorist Joanne Garde-Hansen, sociologist Andrew Hoskins, and cultural scientist Anne Reading, ever greater challenges in the way of permanent storage and the continuous transfer of data.²² “Keeping track, recording, retrieving, stockpiling, archiving, backing-up and saving are deferring one of our greatest fears of this century: information loss.”²³ The final scene of *On Photography, People and Modern Times* thus points to more than simply the risk of memory loss that Kracauer defined as confronted by a “flood of photos” that “sweeps away the dams of memory.”²⁴ Today, facing a continuous overload of information and data, it can also be interpreted as an expression of yearning for a more sustainable form of remembering and tradition, one which still leaves time and space for contemplation and exchange.

In *On Photography, People and Modern Times* Zaatari conveys that building and curating a collection, as well as developing a critical and sustainable engagement with it, became a major responsibility for him and the other AIF

members. This responsibility might also become a burden insofar as the safekeeping of the collection and the institutional side of the AIF, given the logistical effort both involve (including a continuous struggle for financial support). This is at least what the title of Zaatari's upcoming survey exhibition, *Against Photography: An Annotated History of the Arab Image Foundation*, insinuates, which is scheduled for April through September 2017 at the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA). In presenting a historical account of the AIF that "reflects on AIF's twenty-year history and the multiple statuses of the photograph,"²⁵ the exhibition will most likely, despite the implications of its rather ominous-sounding title, provide more insights on the curatorial aspect of both the foundation's mission and its members' practices. In any case, it will shed new light on Zaatari's relationship to the AIF and the changes it has undergone over the past two decades.

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1. Argentina, Mexico, and Senegal are all countries with relatively large Arab communities of mostly Lebanese, Syrian, or Palestinian ancestry.
2. Maria Lind, for example, defines the curatorial as "a way of linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories, and discourses in physical space." She imagines "this mode of curating to operate like an active catalyst, generating twists, turns, and tensions—owing much to site-specific and context-sensitive practices and even more to various traditions of institutional critique." The curatorial would, according to her, "thus parallel Chantal Mouffe's notion of "the political," be an aspect of life that cannot be separated from divergence and dissent, a set of practices that disturbs existing power relations. At its best, the curatorial is a viral presence that strives to create friction and push new ideas, whether from curators or artists, educators or editors." See Maria Lind, "The Curatorial," *Artforum* (October 2009): 103. For further reading on the curatorial and curatorial practices, see also, for example, Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schaffaff, and Thomas Weski, eds., *Cultures of the Curatorial* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012).
3. Yvonne Bialek, "'There Without Being There': Ausstellungsansichten als Bilder Betrachten," in *(Post)Fotografisches Archivieren: Wandel – Macht – Geschichte*, eds. Daniel Berndt, Yvonne Bialek, and Victoria von Fleming (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 2016), 193–209.
4. Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," trans. Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (summer 1995): 9–63, here 11, 27.
5. Akram Zaatari, for example, regards the collection, if as an archive at all, then only as an archive of the "collecting practices

- that happened in the foundation from 1997 until this day.” See Anthony Downey “Photography as Apparatus: Akram Zaatari in Conversation with Anthony Downey,” *Ibraaz, Platform 06* (January 2013), accessed August 25, 2016, <http://www.ibraaz.org/interviews/113>.
6. Over the years the AIF began to change its scanning policies, for example, more often scanning the back of photographs. It is currently developing a new online database that will display photographs as images and as objects. For reference, see Daniel Berndt, “‘Not Quite an Institutional Archive, and Not Exactly an Artist Project’ – A Conversation with Rima Mokaiesh and Charbel Saad about the Arab Image Foundation,” in *(Post)Fotografisches Archivieren: Wandel – Macht – Geschichte*, eds. Daniel Berndt, Yvonne Bialek, and Victoria von Fleming (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 2016), 41–52.
 7. See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1998), 45.
 8. See Peter Osborne, “The Distributed Image,” *Texte zur Kunst*, Heft 99 (September 2015): 75–87.
 9. Wolfgang Ernst, “Archive, Storage, Entropy: Tempor(e)alities of Photography,” in *The Archive as Project – the Poetics and Politics of the (Photo)Archive*, ed. Krzysztof Pijarski (Warsaw: Fundacja Archeologia Fotografii, 2011), 56–78, here 64.
 10. Ibid.
 11. Issam Nassar, “Family Snapshots: Representing Palestine in the Work of the First Local Photographers,” *History & Memory* 18, no. 2 (autumn/winter 2006): 139–155, here 147.
 12. Ibid.
 13. *Mapping Sitting* was subsequently on view at the House of World Culture in Berlin, the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens, the Singapore Contemporary Art Museum, and the Krannert Art Museum in Illinois, among other locations.
 14. Karl Bassil, Zeina Maasri, and Akram Zaatari, eds., “Foreword,” in *Mapping Sitting: On Portraiture and Photography*, in collaboration with Walid Raad (Beirut: Mind the Gap and the Arab Image Foundation, 2002), 2.
 15. Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, “Walid Raad and Akram Zaatari, *Mapping Sitting: On Portraiture and Photography*, 2002,” *The Artist as Curator 3, Mousse*, no. 44 (2015), accessed August 25, 2016, <http://moussmagazine.it/ttac3-b>.
 16. Ibid.
 17. See Stefan Römer, *Künstlerische Strategien des Fake: Kritik von Original und Fälschung* (Cologne: DuMont, 2001), 117.
 18. Wilson-Goldie, “Walid Raad and Akram Zaatari.”
 19. Downey, “Photography as Apparatus.”
 20. Matthias Winzen, “Sammeln – so selbstverständlich, so paradox,” in *Deep Storage: Arsenale der Erinnerung. Sammeln, Speichern, Archivieren in der Kunst*, exh. cat., eds. Matthias Winzen, et al. (Munich: Prestel, 1998), 10–19, here 10.
 21. Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography,” trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 3 (spring 1993): 421–436.
 22. See Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins, and Anna Reading, “Introduction,” in *Save As... Digital Memories*, eds. Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins, and Anna Reading (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1–21, here 4.
 23. Ibid., 5.
 24. Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography,” 432.
 25. Quoted from the exhibition announcement on the museum’s website, accessed August 25, 2016, <http://www.macba.cat/en/exhibition-akram-zaatari/1/exhibitions/expo>.