

Thesis Proposal:

Dialectic Warfare

An interview with a Lebanese artist describing his patchwork influences:

During the war I was heavily influenced by the pop culture infused 80's and spent my childhood, watching television zapping between "Dabkeh" (the national Lebanese folklore dance) and tango competitions, also, listening to radio and switching back and forth between Arabic songs and 80's classic hits. The result: a slightly bipolar approach to art making that, along with the rest of the Lebanese population, sits somewhere between two cultures, and switches back and forth through a remote control and a radio knob to pick the one that fits most.

Cultural and demographic detachment:

Design and type:

In the 1950's and 60's major Local brands started experimenting with designs and new brandings on their products. The result, Arabic designed fonts closed to Latin ones only to reject the idea of arabesque and detach our country from its regional context in the middle-east in terms of visual identity. A process that I believe paved the way for I what I call *Lebanese Contemporary Mainstream Art*.

Music:

During Abd el Nasser's rule in Egypt and the rise of pan-Arabism and nationalism that spread across the Middle East which was heavily backed by the Soviet Union, pan Arab Artists emerged to promote the Arab cause and nationalism. Moreover, the emergence of international Arab artists such as Oum Koulsoun in Egypt who was composing Arabic quarter tones scale musical pieces which were 20 minutes long and lyrics promoting the Arab cause and blood. In addition, Musicologists in Egypt were experimenting with new modern Arabic instruments such as the oriental guitar all of which to reinforce their pan-Arab identity. In contrast, Lebanon was culturally and artistically heading for the opposite direction. Furthermore, Major Lebanese artists such as Fairouz dismissed using quarter notes (Arabic and oriental musical scales) and experimented with new compositions inspired from the west such as Russian folklore, classical music minor scales compositions wrapped with a Beatlelesque pop song structure but sang in Arabic.

Architecture: (the dying and the rising)

Lebanon's post world-war II, massive architectural projects were built, all of which were of a concrete, brutal, and very modern typology. For instance, international Brazilian architect Niemeyer was commissioned to build a one million meter square fair in Tripoli (A city north of Lebanon) that has nothing to do with oriental/Islamic architecture that rejected the idea of the arch and mosaic, and created a big threat to its existence through its sheer size and monumentality.

A brief cultural and political history of modern Lebanon

During the 1950's, Lebanon flourished culturally and witnessed a golden age in the arts such as music, architecture and design due to a strong national feeling that broke out after the country's independency in 1943. Moreover, it was until the civil war that dissimilar subcultures started emerging as opposing artistic entities. Hence, from socialism in the arts and pan Arabism influenced by the Soviet Union and the Abd El Nasser anti colonial Arab revolution, to westernized movements who believed in Lebanon as part of a western identity, because of intertwining ideologies and common religious beliefs with France the former colonizing country and the west in particular.

The outcome of the dialectic warfare: *an artistic amalgamation*

The result of this local and national dichotomy of beliefs, was the emergence of two opposing subcultures, from which, local artists with radical ideologies fought each other through the art, thus, shooting one another with musical notes, words, scales, architectural facades... Lastly, like any civil war in history, nobody wins at the end, but in this case in particular, what wins is neither physically present, nor defined; its the **artistic amalgamation**, that is, the patchwork of intertwining influences from which the it has emerged. In retrospect, even though the factual civil war has officially ended in 1990, the battle of the arts is still raging in the street of Beirut, between left and right wing artists. However, this time both have decided to fight using their art and not their guns. For all of the above reasons, this over-stretching of the artwork branches into separate "plates of beliefs". In consequence, When these plates collide they shake the foundation of one's nation forming new sediments of beliefs.

The project: “The volume of beliefs”

This operation of blending, colliding and forming gives birth to two volumes, which differ from the conventional ones in the sense that they do not have up and down, sound or no sound, frequency or no frequency they have only one purpose which is turn up the volume of *westernization* and turn down the volume of *easternization* or vice versa.

The execution:

The project will be a knob placed on a panel or a screen and when turned left or right the volumes of the western influences goes up, therefore, the music, visuals lean to westernization and vice versa.

- 1) Turn up the volume of westernization.**
- 2) Turn down the volume of easternization.**

The core idea of this project is a creating a certain solution for the audience will interact with the process of the “volume of beliefs”, hence deciding by themselves what kinds of influences they want to be exposed to rather than being exposed by media that imposes on them its own agenda.

During the installation, the audience will be invited to an empty room with screens inside and a box with several knobs. A representative of the company CCI will be present during the show packaging the results that the audience will be creating upon interacting with the knobs to give it to them packaged in a nice box branded CCI.

Why Cultural Corporate Identity?

The western appropriation of the east as an “eccentric package” and vice versa.

If five thousand years of eastern civilization is summed up by yoga lessons, belly dancing “arabesque” as a fabricated western typology and drawings of dragons here and there, then the rational side of reducing the east to a knob is reflexive to the western commodification of the east itself. Moreover, globalization might have rendered the east and the west as two different entities inside the same package, that is the package of branding and consumption.

CCI, Corporate Custom Identity

(Globalized and localized vs. person)

Since the world is only *globalized* and *localized* in the sense that the person has no option but to subdue to one of these. As a result, a fake brand called *CCI Corporate Custom Identity* will be created which I will design a corporate identity such as logo, and costumes, also, a fake online store will be designed for people who want to order online, a tailored identity to fit their needs, desires and objectives. This store would have representatives in 192 countries, that is in the entire planet.

Appendices:

Technical specifications

- Timeline:
 1. Concept Development: 3 Months
 2. Prototyping: 5 Months
 3. Construction: 6 Months
 4. Presentation: 2 Month

* Estimated Total: 16 Months

- Budget:
 - 1) Sensors, 200 \$
 - 2) Midi keyboard, 250\$
 - 3) Monome hardware for patches on max msp 700\$
 - 4) Technical tools, 300\$
 - 5) Time salary, 5000\$
 - 6) Books, 500\$
 - 7) Print papers props for set, 500\$

- Bibliography:
 1. **Out of Beirut: Works by Artists Emerging from Beirut Today**
Author: Walid Raad, published by JRP Ringier Kunstverlag AG, 2007
 2. **Scratching on Things I Could Disavow**
Author: Walid Raad, published by Walther Konig, 2008
 3. **The Atlas Group, Volume 1: The Fakhouri File**
Author: Walid Raad, Published by Konig Walther, 2005
 4. **Tamáss1: Contemporary Arab Representations, Beirut/Lebanon**
Author: Bilal Khbeiz, Elias Khoury, Rabih Mroue, Marwen Rechmaoui, Walid Sadek, Jalal Toufic, Paola Yacoub, Michel Lasserre, Walid Raad, published by Witte de With/Fundacio Antoni Tapies, 2002
 5. **Cultural Appropriation and the Arts**
Author: James O. Young, published by Blackwell Publishing, 2008

6. On Identity

Author: Amin Maalouf, published by the Harvill Press, 2000

7. Musical identities

Edited by Raymond A.R Macdonalds, published by Oxford University Press, 2002

8. Histoire de Beyrouth

Author: Samir Kassir, published by Fayard, 2003

9. The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era

Author: Seyla Benhabib, published by Princeton University Press, 2002

10. Créolité and Creolization: Documenta11_Platform3

Author: Petrine Archer Straw, Jean Bernabe, Robert Chaudenson, Juan Flores, Stuart Hall, Dame Pearlette Louisy, Jean-Claude Carpanin Marimoutou, Annie Paul, Virginia Perez-ratton, Ginette Ramassamy, Francois Verges, Derek W. Alcott, Gerardo Mosquera, Isaac Julien, published by Hatje Cantz, 2003

11. Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers

Author: Kwame Anthony Appiah, published by W. W. Norton, 2007

12. Society of the Spectacle

Author: Guy Debord, published by Black and Red, 2002

Narrative Biography:

Having spent my teenage years writing music and playing in rock bands which got famous for embarrassing performances at the age of fourteen, watching cult films and spending hours gazing at album cover artworks at record shops, I finally chose to major in the Arts.

I graduated with a Bachelor degree in Liberal Arts, emphasis in communication Media Arts from the Lebanese American University in summer 2003. The Liberal Arts program provided me with a broader perspective on different fields in the Arts, such as film production, photography and graphic design. One of the many projects I realized during my studies was my short docudrama film project called “Anti Classical Experimental Kitchenware” which I directed and wrote the music and script for. The movie is about an experimental scientist/musician who makes musical arrangements out of kitchenware sounds. Furthermore, what he actually does is a musical composition with rhythms and melodies made out of a buzzing fridge sound, a blender, and a microwave.

However, after I elaborated the idea of “Anti Classical Experimental Kitchenware” to the teacher, he expressed his concern that executing such a concept would be very challenging because sheer experimentations like that tend to fail sometimes. Nevertheless, I decided to take the challenge and proceed with my project. The result turned out to be rewarding, and the film was selected to be screened in the European Film Festival that showcased the best of Lebanese short movies alongside major independent European films in the year 2002.

As for my background, it goes without saying that one’s career will always be influenced by one’s social, demographic context and environment. Being a Lebanese, I was raised under the influence of Western and Arab cultures. These different cultural conditions create a hybrid ground that is conducive to a critical and self-reflective approach to life, which made me particularly able to adapt to different cultural settings. As a consequence, I feel driven to seek ‘other’ settings that could expose me to additional challenges and opportunities, In addition to my experimental film project “Anti Classical Experimental Kitchenware” which made me realize that experimentation in the arts is what I wanted to do in my life.

Artist Statement:

Antoine Abou Jaoude considers himself a contemporary situationist international who instantiates his artwork through the use of the non artistic and the *milieu*. As an illustration, dressing up as a housewife and interacting with the sounds of lemon squeezers, guitars and bow, in a project he had done in his undergraduate studies. Also, he fantasizes in being in a large architectural open space, only to record the sounds of disembodied coffee machines, and clicking high heels on 60’s like French marble, only to project these sounds on to his “situationist” artwork.

Statement of Artistic Research:

When I first wrote the premise for my thesis proposal, I couldn’t see but a future long-term research project in the making.

As a global Lebanese citizen I am very inspired by “The Atlas Group” project and how it started as a research based project only to be taken farther to become this mish mesh of art infused with research, in which the projects creators are exhibiting works from Centre George Pompidou, Berlin, to New York. In my case, I dream of creating a long lasting project that creates reputable socio-cultural artworks with a hefty effect that would echo it’s way throughout the globe. Since I am a global citizen, I believe that the arts is a universal language that overcomes social taboos, traditional values etc. As a result, one needs not to speak it s language but only to practice it visually and auditory with his fellow artist the “person”

I hope my thesis proposal that I have briefly discussed above, will contribute in empowering cultural understanding between the west and the east and also as an artist, I believe that taking part in bridging the gap between cultures, is definitely a soulful process that I definitely need for my artistic integrity and inspiration in order for me to contribute to my society and other ones in a fruitful way. Also, from a designer, musician point of view I have come to the US to share my dreams and artistic aspirations with my colleagues and let their culture and mine intertwine both artistically and creatively, because only when we blend two cultural components that harmony makes it away to a given artwork.

However as I mentioned in my Artist Statement, as a “situationist” I believe that one can be inspired and create artwork in any given context, since everything is new to me and I am living a fresh experience, as a result, I feel like a new born child about to write his first experiences on the blank pages of the book of his life.

But then again I might be over dreaming here, but I have learned to believe that the only way to fight life’s professional hardship is through believing in my dreams and aspirations and the more I dream the bigger my chances get to reach for my goal.

Contextual and Historical Statement:

How can an artist be praised as a genius several years later after he had done a movie in which he films a business modern Frenchman walking in alley then sitting on a semi-leather 60’s chair for literally an hour.

Play Time, released in 1967; directed by “situationist” film maker Jaque Tati made a huge impact of my thinking and on the way how to interpret reality as an artist. Because, I was so taken by it’s sheer realism, spontaneity, and well crafted banality, up to a point that the first thing that popped in to my mind was me wanting to become a “situationist”. Since then, I have decided to make art out of everyday life. Furttthermore, after I have known which school of thought and movement I wanted to belong to, I went ahead and I made my first art project (movie called anti classical experimental kitchenware) as my first “situationist” work, in which, like Tati, I tried my best to spread my sensitivity on every detail that I had interact with and dealt with in everyday life, like, making arrangements from lemon squeezers and buzzing fridge sounds.

A year later, I went on and wrote several articles for the American university in Lebanon, one of which was the Simulacra of Downtown Beirut. Beirut was completely rebuilt after the civil war. Hence, In this article, I tried to remain faithful to “situationism” as much as possible, be it in the article’s approach, concept and representation. For instance, the

concept of the article was narrated from the point of view of ("Bchara el Khoury" former president, and one of the political pillars of our independence). Bchara El Khoury has a very big statue in downtown Beirut city made out of marble whereby in the article he would be narrating the story of the new down town Beirut and trying to actually figure out if this is Beirut or not since they completely changed it from a middle class "souk" oriented downtown to an upper class touristy area in which Saudi chic "Christian Dior" hype clients and Kuwaiti residents flood during all four seasons of the year. Bchara El Khouri figure and statue in downtown city is actually still alive in reminiscence to what the city has witnessed throughout history.

At the end the figure of "Bchara El khouri" couldn't adjust to this new city that took the place of the previous Beirut, he gets lost asks for directions couldn't because none of the tourists realized his presence since they were only interested in boutique and chic. As a result the statue of Bchara El Khouri steps down and decides to leave heading to the other city, which is not present anymore, however, it does still exist in the past and in our fading memories. Upon the departure of "Bchara El Khouri" life in Beirut Downtown never ceased to function and tourists continued flooding in to its small alleys and districts searching for Hype and Dior.

The reason why I wrote socio-political articles because, Nevertheless, according to Guy Debord, "Situationism" combined arts and politics, social context and *social-discontext*, also, It's a movement that died immediately after it's creation, because, in my view, non fiction in the arts is very hard to be apprehended by the masses since it reminds them of the banalities of their everyday life.

Lastly, I will try my best to remain faithful to my artistic and cultural roots in my thesis that I will be making in Digital Arts and New Media program, however, hoping to be able to present my artwork at the end through an updated and contextual version of early 60's "situationism"