The Egg: Memory and Visual Structures Within Representations of an Iconic Lebanese Ruin

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The Egg: Memory and Visual Structures Within Representations of an Iconic Lebanese Ruin

The Egg is an iconic ruin in Beirut. It was once the Beirut City Centre’s cinema, designed by Lebanese modernist architect Joseph Philippe Karam in 1965. This structure’s use is complex and ever changing. As such, the Egg is a continuous source of discussions and depictions. This article is a textual analysis exploring visual structures within a series of 15 images of the Egg. The notion of memory is examined within each image. Memory is viewed as a phenomenon rooted in the past with a relationship to the present and the future. Contemporary representations of the Egg are a fascinating reflection related to Lebanon, the civil war, memories of today, and inquiries regarding the memories of unknown future contexts.

Melissa Plourde Khoury

. . . a half-destroyed mess of concrete and steel can lodge itself in a city’s consciousness and become a crucial part of the landscape. (Rainey, 2014, para. 28)

A Brief History of the Egg

Sitting alongside Saint Martyrs’ Square in Beirut, an odd decrepit domed mass of cement and steel rests afloat a platform supported by a grid of columns. It is vacant. Weathered by time and war, bullet-ridden surfaces are crumbling under the heat of the Mediterranean sun. A thin rusted staircase leads to its roof—as if to nowhere. Open voids are filled with shadows. Inside this voluminous battered structure there is a hollowed space and staged seating. It is the decaying remnants of a cinema commonly referred to as the Egg.¹

Prewar Years (1965–1975)

The Egg is a source of curiosity, confusion, discussion, debate, and depictions. Due to its distinct curvilinear form, it is also dubbed the Dome, Bubble, or Soap. It dates back to 1965. Lebanese modernist architect Joseph Philippe Karam originally designed the structure as a cinema within the Beirut City Centre. This center was a multiuse complex that claimed to host the largest shopping mall in the Middle East at the time. The Egg was actually quite small in comparison to the two major towers initially meant to arise behind it. Designed to be 24 meters wide and 11 meters high, the Egg held 1,000 seats (Executive, 2009, para. 3). In the 10 years prior to the Lebanese civil war, the Beirut City Centre construction was never fully completed. Only one of the two towers was actually built. Nonetheless, the cinema and shopping centers below it were open for several years. The Egg was one of many thriving cinemas during the years just before the war. These years are often referred to as a golden era in Lebanese modern history.

War Years (1975–1990)

The civil war started in 1975. This long and complex succession of conflicts entrapped the Beirut City Centre amidst chaos. Through 15 years of strife, the Egg was occupied by militants, ravaged by war, and then left vacant. The Egg is situated near the notorious Green Line, a division formulated during the war as a separation between Muslim West and Christian East Beirut. The Green Line received its name because of the undergrowth that sprouted up among the rubble. Once part of a bustling cosmopolitan city, the Egg came to exist in a no man’s land along an abandoned border. Throughout the war, this structure witnessed atrocities.

Postwar Years (1990–Current)

The war came to an end in 1990. As described in an article from The Daily Star, “Fate of Beirut’s War Ruins Still Unclear,” one constructed tower of the dilapidated Beirut City Centre was taken down in the 1990s, “when the Finance Ministry briefly considered opening its headquarters there, creating the giant hole that remains today.”
The battle-scarred Egg was left standing, yet constantly threatened to be demolished. The structure was then administered by the urban planning department of Solidere, the Lebanese joint-stock company responsible for the planning and redeveloping of the Beirut Central District. At the same time, the Saudi company, Olayan, gained ownership of the land upon which the Egg sits. An article, “Beirut’s Heritage to the Highest Bidder?,” from Now News explains that as war-torn rubble was knocked down, new constructions feverishly took over downtown Beirut. “Assurances were given that developers would integrate the Egg and ‘keep the shell’” (Kalt, 2012, para. 7). However, decisions were never made. The Egg remains standing yet decaying. Solidere is amidst controversy. In some views, Solidere vanquishes pockmarked rubble to produce a new and modern future for Beirut, but in other views, Solidere erases memories of a prewar heritage demolishing symbolic war memorials in an effort to rebuild for an affluent Arab community of investors.

More recently, initiatives to prevent the Egg’s demolition include a documentary and social media campaign, Saving the Egg, as well as events used to gather cultural heritage activities. Additionally, the Egg temporarily hosted exhibitions. Activists addressed various concerns through events held at the Egg. Issues ranged from the need for a national war memorial to the commemoration of disappeared persons during the civil war. In contrast to such events, the Egg also hosted several parties. For example, the opening of a new Louis Vuitton store in Beirut, raves, and a glow paint dance party all took place at the Egg. However, today this structure is once again vacant. As such, the Egg’s use is complex and ever changing, from a cinema, bunker, morgue, cultural venue, party hub, abandoned ruin, to a potential demolition site.

Memory and the Egg

The Egg is an iconic structure that significantly evolved throughout the past 50 years. This structure’s historic and symbolic significance inevitably ties it to the notion of memory related to Lebanon.

At first glance, memory seems something inert, stuck in the past—a memory of something that has happened and stopped in time. But a closer look reveals that memory is dynamic and connects the three temporal dimensions: evoked at the present, it refers to the past, but always views the future. (Meckien, 2013)

Likewise, the Egg, its evolution, and the memories related to it can be linked to historical phases in Lebanon, present views, and an unknown future. This article seeks to analyze 15 contemporary representations that feature this iconic war ruin. The images were created between 2001 and 2015. This article proposes that such representations of the Egg can be examined through notions regarding memory—but how?

A Textual Analysis: Representations of Aestheticized Ruin

The Egg, in many regards, is a mass of debris. However, images of this structure in its decrepit state evoke a sort of beauty. This phenomenon is not unique to the Egg. As Andreas Huyssen explains in the article, “Nostalgia for Ruins,” Bombings, after all, are not about producing ruins. They produce rubble. But then the market has recently been saturated with stunning picture books and films . . . of the ruins of World War II. In them, rubble is indeed transformed, even aestheticized, into ruin. (2006, p. 8)

The following serves as a textual analysis exploring the aesthetic qualities and visual structures within a series of representations of the Egg. The notion of memory is examined within each image. Sune Haugbolle’s book, War and Memory in Lebanon (2010), served as an initial basis to understand the idea of memory in relation to the Lebanese civil war. Memory within this article is viewed as a phenomenon rooted in the past with a relationship to the present. Memory is also tied to the creation of new memories and questions regarding the future. First, images as they relate to historic memory and nostalgia are studied. Next, images are examined as visual reminders of the war and forms of memorialization. Lastly, images are then explored in relation to forgetting and amnesia.

Information about each image was gathered from diverse sources, including email correspondences, articles, and artists’ websites. The 15 chosen works are not indicative of all existing images of the Egg; rather, they are a select collection of distinct yet diverse artistic representations that go beyond the common snapshot. The images are embedded with visual meanings.

Historic Memory: Visualizing Personal Experiences

One of Lebanon’s most prolific artists is Mazen Kerbaj. Some of his works are openly tied to
Historical memories of the Egg. Historical memories are clearly individual, yet when seen in a larger context may become part of a shared view. The term historical memory highly relates to the Egg and the plurality of individuals who witnessed, in some way, this structure’s past. Historical memory, as described by Haugbolle, is a part of a “public discourse that allows popular adaptation of people’s lives and imagination to be reflected and represented” (2010, p.11). Kerbaj’s images of the Egg reflect his own experiences and memories. He is an artist, illustrator, designer, and musician who lived through the civil war years in Beirut. Kerbaj’s work is recognized among artists and musicians in Lebanon. Two key works by Kerbaj that depict the Egg are his UFO Series and an excerpt from his comic book Lettre à la Mère (Letter to the Mother). In both instances he personifies the Egg.

Her UFO Series is a collection of six square mixed media pieces that were exhibited and sold as prints in Beirut. In this series photographic images of the Egg were reworked with textured scratches of light colors. The rough markings are vibrant. They almost glow in contrast to the dark photos. These bright strokes transform the Egg. The structure is personified with eyes and a mouth. At times the Egg, in this collection, sits within a glowing field of tall grass or projects vivid beams of light from its interior voids. Each image includes handwriting that reflects Kerbaj’s memories, clearly outlining them in time. He refers to the Egg as a friend from Grendizer (a TV anime of a super robot). He recalls the Egg from various personal perspectives—viewing it from his grandparents’ balcony as a child, attending a rave inside of it when he was 15 (Figure 1), performing there as a musician, and later exhibiting there as an artist. He concludes the series with his lack of concern for the Egg’s potential demolition. The text for this final image reads, when translated from French to English: “In the worst case, we will get a glass tower that will become a super UFO at the end of the next war.”

In his comic book, Lettre à la Mère, there is another representation of the Egg. This image was also produced outside the comic book context as a silkscreen poster and sold at Plan Bey in Beirut (Figure 2). The book illustrates remnants of famous landmarks from the war. The Egg is one of them. These structures are shown as detailed black line drawings against light solid-colored backdrops framed in white. The vignette of the Egg features a line from the novel The Stranger (1942) by Albert Camus. It reads, “Mother died today.” It suggests a sort of apathy. Kerbaj, in his work, refers to Beirut as an
irresponsible but loving mother. Her death is a kind of bittersweet ending. The Egg serves to symbolize the war-torn city where Kerbaj is from.

Another portrait of the Egg that relates to historical memory is Ayman Baalbaki's, “Beirut City Centre (the Egg)” (Figure 3). In Baalbaki’s painting, expressive brush strokes depict the Egg against a vibrant blue sky. The Egg is viewed from its front façade. It appears tall as it sits atop layers of columns and platforms. The brush strokes connote the rough battled-scarred surface of the Egg. Simultaneously, the work evokes beauty. This painting gained significant attention. It was the first auction of Lebanese Modern art by Bonhams in London. Baalbaki’s work is recognized within both local and international art markets. Much of his work draws from the Lebanese civil war. “Beirut City Centre (the Egg)” is a powerful representation of architecture, destruction, and suffering. The work is evocative and stoic. Similar to Kerbaj, Baalbaki experienced the civil war years. As described on Bonhams’ site, Baalbaki

... drew from the deep reservoir of memory formed by these disturbing experiences. Concerned with the link between imagery and memory, Baalbaki uses his art as a haunting aide-memoire to the conflict that has plagued Beirut, reminding people that even in times of relative peace, they should not disregard the deep systemic divisions that gave rise to conflict in the first place. (n.d., para. 5)

Both Kerbaj’s and Baalbaki’s works are tied to personal experiences, perspectives, and memories. However, like other images of the Egg, they become part of a public discourse. These visuals then transcend from individual expressions to shared readings and for some, shared memories.

Nostalgia: Imaging Longings for the Past

Representations of the Egg are tied to nostalgia. The images represent a structure built before the civil war. Sentimental longings for the more peaceful prewar years are a common psychological experience by the Lebanese. Such longings exist even for a generation who did not live during these years. The Egg, as a ruin, is unavoidably imbedded with nostalgia. “In the body of the ruin the past is both present in its residues and yet no longer accessible, making the ruin an especially powerful trigger for nostalgia” (Huyssen, 2006, p. 7).

One collection that intentionally suggests nostalgia is that of Lebanese photographer and video artist Caroline Tabet, Beirut Lost Spaces. Her works contains several images of the Egg or as she titles each, “The Dome 2001” (Figure 4). The Egg within these black-and-white photographs is one of many deserted or uninhabited places in Beirut that are all intended to be changed or vanquished. Her images were exhibited at Art Factum Gallery in Lebanon. They show the Egg’s interiors as solemn. Light from outside fills these interiors, creating dramatic contrasts. The spaces appear to yearn for the indistinguishable brightness that protrudes from the outside. The

Figure 3 Ayman Baalbaki’s 250 cm x 200 cm mixed media on canvas entitled “Beirut City Centre (the Egg)” (2015).

Figure 4 Caroline Tabet’s 72 cm x 110 cm 35 mm black-and-white photograph entitled “Beirut Lost Spaces: The Dome” (2001).
cinema is empty. The abandoned spaces contain only puddles of accumulated rainwater, layers of dust, and random debris. Tabet's work accentuates nostalgic readings of the Egg through intimate photographs of this ruin.

Reminders: Visuals of the War

Representations of the Egg inevitably relate to darker perceptions of loss, as they serve as reminders of what was one of the most gruesome civil wars of the 1900s. As Florence Gaub elucidates in the article, “Multi-Ethnic Armies in the Aftermath of Civil War: Lessons Learned from Lebanon,” “When the Lebanese Civil War ended in October 1990, the country was left with 150,000 dead, a destroyed infrastructure and a population that was scattered in hostile groups” (2007, p. 6). Several images of the Egg highlight the violence and destruction that tie this structure to the war and memories of it. The Egg was a part of the bloody massacres in which the Lebanese killed each other, at times because of religious differences and at times aimlessly. Haugbolle explains that, “Lebanese cultures and society were wary of these often disturbing memories” (2010, p. 134). The Egg is a constant reminder for many who struggle to face memories of the war. As explained in The New York Times article, “An Image of Tolerance Still Manages to Flicker in Old Movie Theaters,” the Egg is like other cinemas in Beirut by epitomizing “the conflicting versions of Beirut that are always competing for prominence, like the political parties and militias that fight for power” (Cave, 2012, para. 6). Some images may be interpreted with the Egg as a metaphor not only of the war or Beirut but also as the civilian victim, foot soldier, militia, sectarian leader, and external force.

One example of the Egg that appears victimized, immobilized yet stoic, is the work of Spanish photographer Manel Armengol. Armengol is internationally recognized for his photojournalistic images. He traveled the world throughout the past 40 years to photograph key moments in time in various contexts. Beirut was one of the many places he captured through his photographic lens. Like others who visit Beirut, Armengol found the Egg captivating. His photographic series of the Egg’s exterior at times only shows portions of the ruin’s surface. The most cropped composition is “Tribute to ‘The Egg’” (Figure 5). This detail accentuates the structure’s surface. For a viewer familiar with the Egg, the textured cement, clusters of artillery markings, and a hint of recognizable graffiti provide just enough visual information to be indicative of the Egg. The image is artful. Delicate cracks on the cement, patterns of dark patches, splatters, and scrapes create an artful abstract composition. However, these seemingly painterly markings are reminders of the war. They place the image on an edge between the Egg’s beauty as a ruin and its disturbing past.
In Steffen Richter’s image, “The Egg and Mohammad Al-Amin Mosque, Beirut” (Figure 6), the Egg is an ominous presence photographed at a low camera angle with dramatic backlighting and darkened shadows. Richter is an engineer from New Zealand who travels to diverse locations taking photographs. Beirut was one of his many travel destinations. The Egg was intensely captured as part of his dark collection portraying Beirut landscapes. This photograph is in Richter’s online portfolio. Here the Egg is viewed within its surroundings. Richter’s high-contrast photograph places the Egg in the foreground, while a much larger structure, the Mohammad Al-Amin Mosque, appears smaller in the background. The sky is foreboding. The decrepit state of the Egg is exaggerated. Voids are blackened to the point of creating a sense of unease. The Egg serves as a threatening reminder of the war—a decaying monolith in front of the pristine structure of the mosque.

Similarly, another image of the Egg’s exterior with foreboding overtones is “Beirut’s Mask” (Figure 7) by David Hury. Hury is a news correspondent and photographer, originally from France. He currently resides in Lebanon. This image was first published in his book, Beyrouth sur Écoute (Wiretapping Beirut). It was exhibited in both Beirut and London. It was also sold as a poster through the Beirut Prints series. Like other artists, Hury sees this frontal view of the Egg much like a face. He compares the Egg to a skull or monster. Similar to Richter’s image, Hury’s photography contains darkened shadows of the front facade. However, this composition is tightly cropped. The Egg sits alone. Extracted from its context this monolith is like a massive and foreboding monster. Looking down upon its viewer, the Egg is a fearful reminder of the war.

In George Daou’s collection of photomontages titled d-scapes, the Egg and its surroundings are significantly altered. Daou is a Lebanese architect and photographer. In several of his d-scapes, the Egg is mobilized as an alien-like robot that appears to be attacking Beirut. At times, it is a sole invader, while in other instances it is multiplied as a drove of massive Egg intruders. For Daou, this series represents the Egg reacting against the Lebanese people and their infinite debates about the structure (G. Daou, personal communication, April 26, 2016). In one of Daou’s images, the Egg takes on the alter ego of a gigantic mechanized crab that crawls along the sandy shores of Lebanon under the watchful eye of a soldier (Figure 8). Daou’s works show a dark and surreal side of Beirut. The eerie representations depict the Egg as both colossal and minuscule, with references to destruction and
death. For some, images evoking the Egg as the “other” or an invader conjure memories related to the war itself. The images also create a new war in which the Egg fights back.

Syrian artist and author Khaled Sedki depicts the Egg in more multifaceted representations. His master’s thesis in Architecture, entitled Beirut’s Broken Egg (Figure 9), is dense with visuals, several of which are collage. The intent of his thesis was to, “write somewhat of an urban biography of Beirut which spans over three phases of Beirut’s modern history; (dream) Prosperity, (death) War, and (illusion) Resistance” (K. Sedki, personal communication, February 4, 2015). As such, parts of his thesis contain strong links to what he describes as a second phase related to war and death. One page that is richly symbolic features an egglike central form that is textured with an image of the Egg’s surface. Inside this form, there is a cropped picture of a reclined woman wearing a white dress. She is symbolic of the Egg’s potential beauty. She is tied to notions of progression and modernity that have since died. This central image evokes a sense of enchantment that prevails through sensitive and critical gazes. Beneath this central form, a painting of a man and a woman wearing traditional Lebanese costumes appear to bleed downward. They represent the vanished realities of Beirut’s past. The overall composition is framed by a row of army tanks to the bottom, an infiltration by fighter jets along the top, and silhouetted toy soldiers from the sides. Text lists of all the participants in the war. It is as if those who together have broken the Egg signed the image (K. Sedki, personal communication, February 4, 2015). Sedki, upon visiting Beirut, found the Egg to be a fascinating example of architecture. He self-published his thesis online. His thesis and the images it includes were primarily part of scholarly discussions, particularly at the University of Kent, where Sedki graduated. The piece retells the past symbolically. It evokes nostalgia and recalls specific participants in war itself.

Memorializing: Architectural Proposals for Reconstruction

As the dark days of the Lebanese civil war came to a close, reconstruction of Beirut began. The Egg became subject to several proposed architectural designs by both professionals and students. This structure and the land that it sits upon serve as a fascinating and challenging restoration project with no final agreement in sight. Three of the more proliferated architectural plans for the Egg are those of Christian de Portzamparc, Bernard Khoury, and Anthony Saroufim.

Portzamparc is a French architect. The Olayan Group commissioned him in 2011 to design a five-star hotel on Plot 987 where the Egg sits. Portzamparc produced a design in which the Egg appears quite small. It is still war-torn and nested among several towers. The Egg in his design simply exists with little or no reference to this iconic structure’s diverse meanings. The design is a kind of pseudomemorialization.

Contrary to the work of Portzamparc are highly conceptualized architectural proposals by Khoury (Figure 10) and Saroufim (Figure 11). In both of these instances the Egg is viewed as a single meaningful form. The designs tie this structure to the past and a proposed future. Bernard Khoury is one of Lebanon's most renowned yet controversial architects, as he often tackles problematic sites. His design proposes a temporary solution for the Egg until further decisions are made regarding the site. He covers the Egg with a mosaic of mirrors reflecting the surroundings. There is a large screen on the Egg’s facade. In his design, the Egg is a place for video installations and serves as a major electronic portal linking Beirut to a virtual community.
The use of a screen contemporizes memories of the Egg’s original purpose as a cinema. Unlike Khoury, Anthony Saroufim’s architectural proposal is not a commissioned work. Rather, his design was part of his diploma project at Ecole Spéciale d’Architecture in Paris. Saroufim is a Lebanese photographer and architect. He explores relationships between these two practices. His diploma project achieved acclaim as a means of maintaining the Egg and memorializing the war. It was published in Archileb, Designboom, L’Orient-Le Jour, L’Officiel Hommes, Agenda Culturel, and Courrier International. Saroufim chose the Egg because of its interesting relationship with Beirut. When the civil war started in 1975 the Egg, made to be a theater, lost its spectators only to become a spectator itself. It was witness to the changing theatrics of the city. The Egg saw the different life cycles of Beirut from the prewar era, the 15 years of destruction, and the reconstruction phase. The question he raised in approaching this project was, “How can we see what the Egg saw?” (A. Saroufim, personal communication, April 27, 2016). His project transforms the Egg into an optical device that shows the consequences of the war. Optical lenses were positioned around the Egg in relation to the concentration of damaged areas on its surface. “. . . Interior spaces of the site remain untouched and inaccessible to the visitors, representing the part of war that can’t be changed” (Neira, 2016).

Though Portzamparc’s, Khoury’s, and Saroufim’s designs never came to fruition, they are new ways of envisioning the Egg, its surroundings, and its meanings. All can be viewed as a form of memorialization to various extents. Some may debate how the proposed designs evoke the memories and meanings associated to the Egg.

Nonetheless, they all keep a future planned version of the Egg as others threaten to demolish this structure.

Memorializing: Inhabiting an Abandoned Space

Another means to examine the memorialization of the Egg is through images that inhabit this abandoned space. After the war, the Egg was appropriated in new ways as a cultural venue and party hub. Per Strömberg’s chapter, “Funky Bunkers: The Post-Military Landscape as a Readymade Space and a Cultural Playground,” explains such practices of appropriation as, . . . central to artists’ critique of the contemporary world and their visions for alternative futures. Arguably the notion of “readymade space,” or alternatively “found space,” is useful as a theoretical metaphor in order to describe, categorize and analyse practices of creative reuse and, more precisely, to explain how, by playing with the original contexts, worn-out everyday spaces can acquire new functions, meanings and appearances in the cultural economy. (2013, p. 68)

Likewise, the Egg is memorialized as images show how the structure is reused in actuality or metaphorically. As the Egg is inhabited, the related images focus on alternative subject matter. Such images flip common models of representing the Egg, shifting typical readings. One example is a photograph by Lebanese/Australian photographer and artist Tanya Traboulsi, “Scrambled Eggs, Lebanon 2010” (Figure 12). This nearly black-and-white image shows the three members of the Lebanese rock band Scrambled Eggs performing inside the Egg. This
photograph was part of a long-term project and published book by Traboulsi, *Untitled Tracks*. The photographs documented the underground music scene in Lebanon. In “Scrambled Eggs, Lebanon 2010,” the band members are backlit by stage lights. They perform alongside a large screen, amps, wires, and microphones. Onlookers can barely be seen standing next to the bright lights. The image and its title play off the name of the band and the location of the performance. The impression of people, music, and light within the interior of the Egg alters the perception of the space greatly. The Egg is transformed from a decrepit void to a kind of cool urban space as part of an underground music scene. Though pictorially the band overshadows the Egg itself, conceptually this image may be seen as a means of memorial that is visually quite different than other representations commemorating the Egg.

Christina Anid also memorializes the Egg. However, in her collage, “She Will Win in the End” (Figure 13), nature rather than music inhabits this structure. Anid is a Lebanese artist currently living in Greece. She created this work for the exhibition Rebirth at the Beirut Exhibition Center in 2011. The piece currently resides at the Fadi Mogabgab Art Contemporain gallery in Beirut. Anid imagines the Egg living a new life. This structure lives without needing anyone’s consent or agreement. Nature independently takes over. She explains that, “the skeleton temple, dead before having a chance to become the banner of a golden Beirut, became a temple of nature. Invaded by it, recuperated by it” (C. Anid, personal communication, April 26, 2016). Foliage consumes the Egg, while roots elevate it from the ground. She further elucidates that the Egg exists in an ego-driven country and world in which nature is given little respect. “Nature will take the decisions politics couldn’t or didn’t” (C. Anid, personal communication, April 26, 2016). In this image nature is a force that memorializes the Egg.

**Amnesia: Ironic Images**

Counter forms of remembering is the notion of forgetting. The term amnesia is common within discourses related to memory in Lebanon and the civil war. One perspective on the psychological condition of forgetting the war is explained by Haugbolle as, “Some Lebanese were simply tired of the war and wanted to escape the depressing and humiliating association with abductions and car bombs and focus on the future” (2010, p. 80). Furthermore, “amnesia functioned as a means to keep traumatic experiences at a distance” (Haugbolle, 2010, p. 72). In addition to forgetting the war’s traumas, the Lebanese are notorious for an intentional form of amnesia that favors a live-for-today lifestyle. Hatty Pedder and Matt Crump envision the Egg in ways paradoxical to other images. Their ironic images diverge the Egg from its more common readings, thus creating a kind of amnesia of its war-related past.

British artist, illustrator, fashion stylist, and photographer Hatty Pedder appropriates several visual references to Lebanese culture within a series of her collages. Beirut was one of the many travel locations that inspired her work. She creates her collections based upon her experiences, observations, and perceptions related to the places she visits. Her image “Egg” is from a collection entitled, *Khosh Bosh!: Beirut—An Identity Adrift* (2013) (Figure 14). This piece was exhibited at and is represented by the Mojo Gallery in Dubai. When translated from Arabic
to English, the title refers to a relationship that is free of formalities. This witty, vibrant, collaged narrative sheds light on the peculiarities of Lebanese society. Her works are described as fresh, vibrant, and pugnacious. Pedder depicts the Egg silhouetted from its actual surroundings. The Egg is placed at the end of a red carpet, under a chandelier, against a striking blue backdrop. In the foreground, paparazzi photograph a woman in a sequined dress. There are billboards on either side of the Egg. Each billboard depicts a famous Lebanese singer. Nancy Ajram, a contemporary pop figure, juxtaposes Fairuz, a legendary performer. The Egg is an out-of-place war ruin in this scene. It is contrasted by a combination of fame, glamour, and lavishness. The Lebanese are infamous for an abundance of unaffordable luxuries and an extravagant nightlife at times amidst war, social volatilities, and economic instabilities. Pedder’s image places the Egg in relation to several paradoxical visual symbols. This image plays off the idea of amnesia as an extravagant scenario contrasts the Egg as a war ruin.

Matt Crump creates another image of the Egg that colors over and minimizes the Egg’s more common connotations. Typically, the Egg is represented as a gray complex of steel and concrete. However, Crump represents it as a small bright pink oval at the base of a spacious clear blue sky (Figure 15). Crump is an American photographer who travels the world transforming his photographs into vibrantly colored digital art. His compositions are minimal. Plastik Studios commissioned this photograph of the Egg in collaboration with photographer Matt Crump. The image was featured in the series #MinimalBeirut for Plastik Magazine, Volume 25, Spring 2015. This series includes images of Beirut landmarks and forms a commentary meant to celebrate Lebanese culture. For those who know the Egg as a place for raves and glow paint parties, the image may serve as a reminder. Crump’s art is referred to as candy-colored minimalism. It is a kind of escapism. Beirut and the Egg are far from being minimal or vibrantly colored. #MinimalBeirut was well received by the Lebanese, who viewed this fresh and fun collection of images (Rao, 2015). Crump’s image transforms a war ruin into a kind of eye candy. One may view this as a means to forget its dark past or celebrate its iconic status.

**Image Makers and Audiences**

Numerous image makers have found inspiration or interest in the Egg. As such, their images further compound this structure’s significance. All of the images noted exist in multiple online contexts. Most of them were exhibited, and many...
were published. Some of the images from this article can be found in collective formats. For example, Wen Wen’s master’s degree in Architecture thesis at Harvard Graduate School of Design, Institute of War: An Anti-Nonument Approach to Contemporary Ruins, published many images of the Egg. Bananapook, a blog that features art and design in Beirut, showcases several examples as well. Various images of the Egg are then viewed, downloaded, shared, rephotographed, and printed within a potentially infinite perpetuation of dissemination. Even if the Egg ceased to exist tomorrow, images of it remain through circulation.

Current circulation, however, is confined to fairly niche audiences. Viewers of the Egg’s images range from artists, art collectors, architects, musicians, thesis advisors, or stakeholders of the Egg’s plot, to name a few. Viewers are typically people interested in the Egg or Beirut. Ironically, many viewers did not know the Egg throughout its history. Many viewers are non-Lebanese or youth with no memory of the Egg. Hence, the notion of memory is quite different between those with a memory of the Egg and those without. At times, for those who remember the Egg’s past, images of the Egg arouse cynicism, disgust toward political indecisiveness, grief, anger, or the desire to forget. For audiences with no memory of the Egg, the images are at times tied to a kind of empathy, curiosity, sadness, and frustration. The question then arises: How does memory relate to a viewer who sees an image of the Egg with no memory of the actual Egg’s past?

The Making of Memory

Images of the Egg build upon a broader and complex notion of memory regarding this iconic ruin that is rooted within a 50-year-long historical context. Viewers of the Egg’s images form new understandings, interpretations, and visions. In an article in BBC news online, “How Fake Images Change Our Memory and Behaviour,” Rose Eveleth explains that memory is, “quite easily subverted and rewritten” (Eveleth, 2012, para. 3). How images of the Egg are seen and remembered inevitably disrupts previous memories or creates new ones. Upon seeing an image, a memory is made. At times the memory has great impact upon the viewer; in other instances, memory is more of a fleeting thought. Regardless, these memories are not separate from the past. Rather they are in the present, tied to the past, and inspire questions related to the future.

The creators of the images examined within the context of this article may be viewed as both image makers and “memory makers” (Haugbolle, 2010, p. 9). All of the image makers noted in this article serve to build new memories of the Egg within new landscapes far removed from Saint Martyr’s square. For example, after viewing Kerbaj’s UFO Series, one cannot help but see the resemblance of a face in the Egg. After viewing Crump’s work, one may relook at the Egg’s potential in vibrant colors. Or after viewing Saroufim’s work, one may try to ponder a reconstruction of the Egg with a series of lenses. It is understood that none of the images is actually the Egg. The images are subjected to artists’ perspectives and contain built-in subjectivities. They are not actual memory or history itself. However, they become part of memories and a modern historical context. Viewers may never have envisioned the Egg in such ways without seeing the images. Regardless of whether or not viewers identify with such imagery, the images are still seen and remembered.

Some image makers even consider the memories of the Egg itself. It is as if this nonliving edifice remembers its own past. In numerous instances, image makers metaphorically bring life to the Egg. It is compared to a mother, friend, alien, monster, crab, and a spectator, to name a few. As such, the Egg takes on very human or living attributes. Many have considered it to be almost alive. As image makers accentuate the aliveness of the Egg, it is as if it has its own memory. In this case, notions of memory go beyond audiences. Rather, memory in a sense belongs to the Egg itself.

The Egg today is inaccessible. The images provide viewers with the memories or perspectives of the image makers. They also provide a glimpse into this prohibited structure. The images become part of a discourse associated with a contemporary episteme and raise inquiries related to their future contexts and meanings. Images of the Egg are embedded with memories that are formulated or built upon by the images. Contemporary representations of the Egg are a fascinating reflection related to Lebanon, the civil war, and memories of today, as well as memories of unknown future contexts. What will the Egg and images of it come to represent in future memories? How will the war continue to be remembered or forgotten through representations of the Egg? What kind representations of the Egg are yet to come?

Note

1 This article uses “the Egg” rather than “The Egg,” following the most common practices found in texts about this structure.
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References


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