THE REVOLUTION *WILL* BE UPLOADED: VERNACULAR VIDEO AND DOCUMENTARY FILM PRACTICE AFTER THE ARAB SPRING

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vernacular video and documentary film practice after the Arab Spring

Cover image: still frame from video since deleted from YouTube.
Protesters evacuating wounded, Bahrain, 18 February 2011.

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Audiovisual and Visual Art: Visual Art

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Preface

The work for this doctorate took the shape of a programme of *artistic research*. The resulting dissertation is comprised of three distinct, but interrelated elements.

At its centre lies the film *The Uprising*, which was completed in 2013, and which is present in this electronic version as both a link to an online screener and a DVD. The link to the film can be found at the beginning of the second of the two extended essays which accompany it.

The first of these essays is a reflection on the vernacular online videos which form the source material for the film. It is written in a fair approximation of academic style, though in a manner that is in some ways closer to an essay than to that of a conventional doctoral thesis. However, it is mainly distinguished by being written largely as if the film *did not exist*, and these videos were to be questioned, explored and appreciated as free-standing objects in their own right. That is, it tries to see them from the point of view of someone who may never see my film, and indeed may have no interest in seeing it or hearing about it.

The second essay, on the other hand, offers what I hope is a fairly straightforward account of the making of my film, in a style that is by turns anecdotal and reflective, and which is in all cases more personal and informal than the first essay. And it does so in a way that is likely *only* to be of interest to those who are themselves engaged with questions of creative process and their articulation.

It might therefore appear that these two texts are poles apart, in style, in purpose, and in audience. However, I believe that the first essay can, and should, be read as equally part of my attempt to understand why I was drawn to make *The Uprising*, and the choices with which I was thus confronted. Much of the material here originates in presentations that I gave and papers that I wrote *while* I was making the film, whereas the second essay was entirely composed *after* the film was long finished. The first essay has thus emerged from a form of *necessity* that ran parallel to, and was at least as great as, the necessity out of which the film itself was born. In that sense, if no other, it can be viewed not only as the independent analytical exercise it still aspires to be, but also as an alternative account of that same artistic process - and one which is, perhaps, no less revealing for being so comprehensively indirect.

PART A:

The people are

not an image

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Contents

Doubtless Resnais and the Straubs are the greatest political filmmakers in the modern Western cinema. But, bizarrely, their greatness is not the result of the presence of the people in their films: on the contrary, they make great political films because they know how to show us that the people are that which is lacking, that which is not there.

(Deleuze 1985: 281, my translation)[1]

I understood it! I finally understood it and I returned to the Square day after day just to make sure that what I was witnessing was not a dream. What I have seen to be the people really were the people, alive and well, and it wasn't just an afternoon uprising that would vanish with the onset of evening. I realised all of a sudden, then and there, that I never really gave the people their right space in my imagination. The people, the collective, are absent in my novels: there are characters, individuals... but none of the novels has the people in it... Until that day, I saw the people only as a handful of stragglers seeking their own individual interests. When Egyptians became themselves the people, our world, the world of the narrators and storytellers of Egypt, completely transformed.

(Fichere 2011: 228, cited in El-Desouky 2014: 69)

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[1] "Resnais, les Straub, sont dans doute les plus grands cinéastes politiques d'Occident, dans le cinéma moderne. Mais, bizarrement, ce n'est pas par la présence du peuple, c'est au contraire parce qu'ils savent montrer comment le peuple, c'est ce qui manque, c'est ce qui n'est pas là."

Introduction.
Video as a vernacular

Intro 1. Filming in the first-person plural

Not the least extraordinary thing about the Arab revolutions of 2010 onwards is the fact that they have given rise to an exercise in popular self-documentation on an unprecedented scale. In this, they have an obvious precursor in the Iranian Green Movement of 2009, which might be considered an outlier event from the same series, a first tremor announcing the larger earthquake to come[1]. But whether we include Iran in 2009 or not, this ongoing sequence is, I believe, the first time since the invention of the cinema that the people have not largely left it to experts, professionals and/or outsiders to film their attempts to overthrow an oppressive order, but have instead seen it as part and parcel of their revolutionary action, even as part

of their revolutionary duty, to film each other as together they made and unmade history, day in and day out.

The result has been, for the viewer, an almost overwhelming proliferation of material, made accessible in quasi-real time via online video-sharing websites. These videos do not simply sit there on YouTube, either, waiting for us to stumble on them: they are always already in circulation, posted and reposted via Twitter and Facebook, as well as being passed on through more private communications channels, such as email. They are not static objects waiting to be discovered and analyzed: they are fully subsumed within a much larger dynamic process, in which what matters most is not any specific video itself, so much as the energy (both physical and affective) that they gather and transmit as they travel through the complex online-offline ecosystems these events have carved out across the region, and beyond. These videos are, then, not primarily videos, so much as one vector among many for the ongoing work of mutual self-mobilization that makes radical political change possible, or at least, conceivable (Aouragh & Alexander 2011).

This double character, matching massive volume with high velocity, makes this phenomenon even harder to pin down – if indeed it makes any sense to refer to these videos as a single phenomenon at all. After all, no single viewer, however dedicated, is ever likely to be able to view enough of these videos to establish with reasonable confidence what might constitute any given sample of them as "representative". At the same time, one does not have to watch so many of them before one comes across one or more which do not simply *record* events that were, or aspired to be, significant, or even exceptional, but which also *produce* an exceptional effect upon the viewer, even when that viewer is remote, unfamiliar with the context, and has little or no prior emotional connection with the content.

In the first part of this dissertation, I want to explore some of the effects produced by certain of these videos, and which are specific to them *as video*, however much they may remind us of experiences we have encountered elsewhere - whether offline, or in other types of media. And I want to argue that these effects, and the affects associated with them, are, above all, *political*. More specifically, I want to suggest that the political work that these videos do - both those that strike us as exceptional, and those which we are more inclined to treat as unremarkable, as almost too "ordinary" to merit any specific attention - is effected not simply through the documentation of offline events (demonstrations, occupations, speeches, songs, poems, debates, arguments, confrontations, acts of State repression, deaths - to name but a few), and thus through

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1   Paul Mason's account of the rebellion provoked by the falsi-fication of the Iranian election results in June 2009 stresses how not only social media, but online video in particular, were central to the way the movement emerged and spread: "No revolution in history had been recorded so comprehensively, and in such minute detail". And he fore-sees the way in which the existence of this kind of material will change the way that such events are understood and analysed: "Future social historians will gorge themselves on evidence like this, the micro-detail of social responses to unrest…" (Mason 2012: 35). On Mason's account, Iran's "Twitter revolution" revolved more around videos, than tweets. Ulrike Lune Riboni too asserts that the Green Movement "marked the consecration of widescale video recording and uploading as a massive, anonymous and unorganised practice", presenting it as a crucial link in the chain that led from the Burmese uprising of 2007 (whose use of video is memorialised in Anders Østergaard's 2008 documentary film *Burma VJ*) to the Arab revolutions (Riboni 2016, my translation). Yet the role of video in Iran was quite different from that which it would later play in the Arab countries. This shift doubtless owes less to "cultural" differences, or to changes in mobile imaging technology, than it does to the specific political ecology in which the movements developed. In Iran, Internet access was already highly obstructed before the protests, and connection speeds were reduced so much within the first week that the Internet became effectively unusable from within the country, especially in Tehran. Nor could cellphones connect to the Net, as the 3G technol-ogy required had not yet been introduced. It was also widely rumoured that abnormally heavy use of mobile or landline bandwidth was being tracked by the security forces and used as a pretext for immediate phys-ical intervention and likely arrest and torture. As a result, Iranians in 2009 were posting videos knowing that they would mainly be viewed by people *outside* Iran, since viewing them from *inside* the country was too risky (Bajoghli 2014; Mottahedeh 2015: 6; Manoukian 2010: 248). The Ar-abs of 2010-11, by contrast, though they suffered occasional outages and filtering (YouTube in particular was inaccessible in Tunisia throughout December 2010/January 2011, though Facebook was accessible), do not seem to have been deterred from watching video for fear of immediate repression. The videos they posted online were widely seen within their own countries, and across national borders, and were clearly intended in the first instance for their fellow citizens, and only secondarily for more distant observers. Of course, the risks of surveillance were arguably just as great as in Iran, if not greater - the regimes were simply playing a longer game (Gonzalez-Quijano 2012: 103-04, 108, 138; see chapter B2 below for a more extended consideration of social media dynamics in Iran). I argue in chapter A9 below that this difference in audiences, and their potential responses, can be seen to have influenced the nature and quality of the videos themselves. For a lucid comparative account of how different revolutionary or rebellious situations can generate very differ-ent social media configurations, which resonate in different ways with wider publics, see Gerbaudo 2012. On the intrication of social media and the Green Movement generally, see the extended analyses of Manouki-an 2010, Bajoghli 2014 and Mottahedeh 2015 cited above. On the wider political relationship between the Green Movement and the Arab Spring, see Dabashi 2012: 3-4, 14.

the information about the world "away from keyboard" that they inevitably contain, but that it is indissolubly bound up with their *aesthetic* properties as video - that is, with those of their properties that are at once sensory *and* formal (Rancière 2000).

To speak of the aesthetics of these videos, whether singly or as a group, is not to ignore their importance as human documents and/or political gestures, to reduce them to an object of disinterested "appreciation", or to trivialise the very real risks that those who made them took, and often - too often - paid for with their lives. Rather, it is to focus on their nature as *gestures* - that is, as concrete ways of carving out singular blocks of perceptible, sensible space-time, each of which is imprinted with its own specific dynamic character. Alongside the more obvious reasons contained in their subject matter which may have led them to be recorded and subsequently posted on the Internet in the first place, these videos also contain a wealth of information that can neither be mapped without remainder onto their explicit first-order message ("On such and such a date, in such and such a place, such and such an event happened"), nor dismissed as merely "noise". To ignore the formal-kinetic-affective dynamics that traverse them and single them out for us, the viewer, is, I would argue, to ignore that which is most irreplaceable and most valuable about them, and so to risk misconstruing what they have to tell us about one of the most important recent passages in the history of human emancipation.

If I insist on the sensory and kinetic qualities of these videos, it is because the videos themselves insist on them. They are above all exercises in the concrete, and as such, acts of resistance against the kinds of abstraction that characterise both the practice of government[2] and certain species of academic discourse. Their rebelliousness lies, at least in part, in their disdain for legibility, intelligibility and/or "context". They do not offer etiologies, genealogies, or any other type of rationalisation. They do not explain, much less explain away. They are presentations rather than representations. They are committed to appearance as a space of action, and for its own sake, not as something to be decoded or demystified. The strategies of the regime, the arguments of journalists, the blandishments of false friends - these may need to be exposed and unmasked. But while they are aware of the functions of critique and

distance, they do not make a fetish of them, for their main work is elsewhere. Their subject is not "them", even as "they" send their troops and riot police in to crush us. Their subject, in both senses of the term, is "us". If they try to articulate anything, to understand anything, it is simply how it has come about that a moment before there was nothing, and now there is a "we".

But to say they try to understand this "we" is also to miss the point. What runs through all these videos, I believe, is this sense of the "we", of the first-person plural, *not* as the thing that is most difficult to understand, but as that which is most immediately given, most obvious, most concrete. As that which cannot be analysed, but can only be accepted and assumed. In the following pages I will try to add colour and texture to that "we" as the subject of video, but on some level, I cannot analyse it or explain it, either, without reducing it to what it is not. The whole point of this first-person plural is its *originary* quality. You can bring together as many "I"s as you like, and you will still never make a "we". For it is "we" who are, not the consequence, but the starting point (Nancy 1996/2013: 62, 87).

This "we" is not simply a ghostly presence haunting the individual with the camera. This "we" is, in some sense, both the actor of these revolutions, and the maker of these videos. This plural, anonymous, *impersonal* dynamic, traverses these videos and the people who make them, shaping them from within. In this way, it is able to resist what Dork Zabunyan describes as "the danger that threatens all the images produced by revolutionary action, and by the periods that follow", namely:

> that the figure of the hero may be used to control the memory of these struggles, and deprive these actions of their true power. For their power is the power of the impersonal, which cannot be pinned down, nor reduced to the tranquillizing identification of a single name that excludes all other names. (Zabunyan 2012, my translation)[3]

It is through their insistently first-person plural vision of these revolutions that these videos remind us, more perhaps than any other media, that all the other figures

2   On government by abstraction see Scott 1998. Scott's work is indebted to that of Foucault on governmentality, as exemplified in Burchell et al. 1991. For a view of the impact of colonial governance in the Arab world drawing on similar assumptions to Scott, but reaching different conclusions, see Mitchell 2002. For a nuanced consideration of abstraction as valuable so long (and only so long) as it is arrested at a level that remains shared and negotiable, see Bamyeh 2010.

3   "…c'est bien le danger qui guette toute l'imagerie de l'engage-ment révolutionnaire, et de ses lendemains: le fait de circonscrire la mémoire des luttes en mobilisant la figure d'un héros, ce qui a pour effet de délester cet engagement de sa puissance véritable: la puissance d'être impersonnelle, et par conséquent insaisissable, irréductible à l'identification apaisante d'un nom qui en exclut tous les autres." See also on the Arab revolutions, Zabunyan 2013: 16-18, and on the imper-sonality of revolutionary moments more generally, Zabunyan 2011: 143 et seq.

we encounter - figures of the individual, figures of the collective as structure or aggregation - exist only in so far as they emerge provisionally from this "we", and are liable at any moment to be folded back into it.

Intro 2. Video as common property

To say "we", however, is not the end of the matter. What is revolutionary in the first-person plural is not simply its grammatical form, or some sort of inherent superiority of the first-person "perspective", which might easily collapse into a sentimental subjectivism, if not some sort of autism of the collective. As Jacques Rancière has argued, to say "we" becomes a revolutionary act when the empirical "we" - the limited group of people whose actual coming together makes the existence of such a plural subject plausible - cease to speak only on their own behalf, and instead claim to speak on behalf of all of us, that is, of everyone. In the phrases "we the people" (as in the preamble to the American constitution) or "we are the people" (as was heard among the demonstrators in Leipzig in 1989), what is revolutionary is neither the "we" nor "the people", but the conjunction of the two (Rancière 2010: 85, cited in El-Dessouky 2014: 117-118). In such a moment, the people ceases to be an abstraction constructed by the State for its own legitimation, and becomes instead a concrete lived reality, even if that reality has no substance beyond the refusal of "them" - or indeed, the refusal of abstraction per se, as the process which has created "them" as separate from (and superior to) "us" (Garcia Calvo 1995).

This collision of the "we" and "the people" can be heard implicitly in the emblematic phrase of the Arab revolutions, *"Al-sha'b yurid"* - the people want. The very fact that "the people" was assumed by the crowds in the street as their own name represented a claim that went far beyond what their simple numbers might have merited in itself (however large those crowds, they were far from ever constituting a numerical majority of the population). The "we" of these videos then has to be seen and understood in relation to "the people" - that is, to the *third-person* perspective in which the experience and claims of the first person are not simply restated, but radically transformed. They are no longer the experience and claims of one person, or of the small group of us gathered here this afternoon: they are the experience and the claims of *all of us*[4].

How do these videos affirm and, at the same time, move beyond and outside the first-person singular perspective within which they might seem to be confined - if only for purely technical reasons? This question will form a constant theme for my discussion in the chapters that follow. For the moment, I simply want to point to one simple fact: these videos already transcend the perspective of the empirical individual who made them (supposing that they were ever so limited) *at the moment when they are uploaded to the internet.*

By uploading them, the filmer (or her intermediary) is not simply "sharing" her videos, in the limited "Web 2.0" sense of the verb. As the Lebanese performer Rabih Mroué puts it in his "non-academic lecture" *The Pixellated Revolution*, these videos are uploaded not as individual expressive statements, but *as common property*[5]. Whichever individual may have happened to be standing in such and such a place at such and such a time to make this film, the videos that result from all these countless individual actions belong not to that individual, but to "us". If there is a concept of authorship in play here, it is a collective authorship. The self-evidence with which videos are not only remixed, but also downloaded, reuploaded (with or without acknowledgement of the "original"), and generally recirculated as if they were words in a common language, rather than specific authored enunciations, is further reinforced by the essential state of *anonymity* in which they exist. These images are "impersonal, they have no signature" (Zabunyan 2013: 58). The fact that we generally do not know, and do not need to know, who made the video cannot be reduced either to a political tactic to evade identification and reprisals, nor to an accident of the architecture of YouTube at a time when users were

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4   "[T]he people (...) is not composed of Persons, (...) is not the Democratic Majority but rather just the opposite, namely all of us – in other words, that which does not exist, given that it has better things to do [than exist], the poor people..." (Garcia Calvo 1995: s.2)

5   The point that these videos are uploaded as common property, in a moral if not a legal sense, was made by Rabih Mroué during the 24 January 2014 performance of *The Pixellated Revolution* at the Frascati Theater, Amsterdam, but does not figure in the earlier published version of the text (Mroué 2013). A related, but not identical point, is made by the Egyptian video collective Mosireen in their text, "Revolution Triptych": "The images are not ours, the images are the revolution's. / How dare we trade in images of resistance to a system that we would feed by selling them? / How dare we perpetuate the cycle of private property in a battle that calls for the downfall of that very system? / How dare we profit from the mangled bodies, the cries of death of mothers who lost their children?" (Mosireen 2014: 48) By identifying the gift that is made of these images with a more generalised (and possibly more "conventional") struggle against private property per se, Mosireen here both radicalise their understanding of this gesture, and reappropriate it in a way that makes it seem less rooted in the vernacular ethos of civil society, whose sense of the common cannot be reduced to an ideological hostility to the market (Bamyeh 2009: 209-14). Dork Zabunyan has also expressed an analogous perception: "If the Arab revolts are to inspire the cinema "positively", as an "art of the present", then that inspiration may come from the conviction which the actors of these revolts carry in themselves: that these events are not anyone's property, but lay the groundwork for a dynamic memory that links them to other actors whom they do not know" (Zabunyan 2012, my translation; cf Zabunyan 2013: 16).

still encouraged to use pseudonyms ("handles"), rather than their "real names". The desire for *strategic* anonymity (which is undeniable, especially in the case of videos from Syria and Bahrain) appears, through these videos, as entirely continuous with the *experiential* anonymity of the person who made them: the impulse to "fuir la visibilité" ("flee visibility") is indistinguishable from "la joie de n'y être personne" ("the joy of being no one")[6] (Bordeleau 2012: 17, citing Comité invisible 2007: 103; my translations in parenthesis). To upload confirms and extends the experience of filming as a gesture of *self-destitution* (Agamben 2013; 2014; and 2015: 359-379), in terms of both property and identity. The "liberation" of these videos into a larger ecosystem in which their circulation and use cannot be controlled implies consent to what is already obvious: these videos do not and cannot belong (legally) to the person who may happen to have "made" them, because they belong (morally) to all those who make the revolution.

What makes the revolution the revolution, then, is - in part - the coincidence of these two perspectives, the first-person perspective of "we", and the third-person perspective of "the people", through which that "we" becomes, even if only experimentally and provisionally, "all of us". And it is through this coincidence that the concreteness of our own personal experience is allied with the properly political claims that imply an external point of view - that require us, that is, to *assume a position,* not *within* an existing distribution of places, powers and competences, but in relation to, and in resistance *against,* that very distribution as a given.

Intro 3. The demonstration is the *dhikr*

The sociologist Mohammed Bamyeh, who was present on Tahrir Square during the first weeks of the Egyptian revolution, captures very well the interplay of external and internal perspectives that characterises the lived present of the revolutionary moment when he writes:

> Concepts that had been previously unimaginable or abstract became in the revolutionary climate concrete. That which was immeasurable as the manifestation of a collective became felt as the property of the person. One of those concepts,

> "the people," was used so profusely in ways that suggest that it was felt to be a natural and organic extension of one's own sense of truth and justice. The novelty (as well as rarity and passing nature) of **feeling** an abstraction as "the people" was evident in how it was used everywhere and without compulsion as a namesake of what everyone assumed to be intuitively true: "the people have decided..," "the people want..," "the people will not be humiliated..," "the will of the people is..," and so on. These usages were never expressed in terms of any precise mechanisms – i.e. **how** the people might translate its will into a policy, or even whether a revolutionary committee ought to be formed, somehow, so as to express this peoplehood efficiently. In Tahrir Square, where I spent the majority of my time during the first five weeks of the Egyptian revolution, I saw that peoplehood was usually used to express what were commonly regarded as intuitive propositions about which there existed a presumed social consensus. It was never used to express complex or presumably divisive theories of social order. Even "Islam" was never used **then** in any way that was synonymous with peoplehood. (Bamyeh 2013a: 192)

The result is a sense of "the people" that is no longer simply a referent for the top-down discourse of the state, but which instead embodies the lived experience of those gathered together in this place. At the same time, this first-person perspective is no longer something irremediably personal to the individual, but is experienced rather as the indispensable point of access through which they are able to participate in a larger circulation of revolutionary energy, and one which reinforces the perceived necessity of their own particular actions to that larger movement which traverses them:

> In that way, the revolutions drew sustenance, energy, determination, and the will to sacrifice largely out of a broadly distributed moral fire in individual psyches than out of organizational or hierarchical command structures. For "the people" appeared as a macrocosm of the single revolutionary person, who then experienced herself **directly** as the agent of a grand moment in history. (Bamyeh 2013a: 191)

Bamyeh's analysis here chimes with that of Ayman El-Desouky, who sees in the Egyptian revolution the emergence of a specifically "resonant" form of subjectivity, in which acts of public assembly perform a kind of "mass attunement" between "*placed* subjectivities that are both singular and collective" (El-Desouky 2014: ix-x). And like

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6   Bordeleau's account of *anonymity* as a critique of the privatisation of the subject and her experiences, which takes Foucault as its starting point, influences my argument not only here, but throughout this dissertation. Compare also Zabunyan 2011: 143-60 on Deleuze, anonymity and May 1968.

Bamyeh, he sees the possibility of such emergent forms of plurality as rooted in a consciousness of shared values and practices that distinguish the people from those who would rule over them, and which legitimate the claim of the few to speak in the name of all:

> When the people speak their own truth, collectively, what they produce is the linguistic, gestured and performed articulations, embodied memories, of their shared knowledge. (El-Desouky 2014: 12).

Such speech is "a collective expressive force that is at once an aesthetic of resonance and an ethic of solidarity" (idem)[7].

El-Desouky refers to such "socially-cementing" practices, which are both used to express a set of shared values, and themselves *enact* those values in their rhythmic and resonant forms, as *amāra*, a specifically Egyptian practice of performing collective memory in everyday life. I will examine the question of *amāra* in more detail in chapter A8 below, when I consider what it may have to tell us specifically about the practice and circulation of video through the online spaces opened up by these revolutions. Here, I want to note how El-Desouky's argument converges with that of Bamyeh in pointing to the Arab revolutions as marked by the emergence into the public realm of "new languages and new modes of knowing" that were "new to the discourses but older to the realities" (El-Desouky 2014: ix).

This emergent knowledge is what Bamyeh terms an "anarchist gnosis", which he equates with the ways of living and acting of an autonomous civil society existing largely outside and independent of the State (Bamyeh 2009). He sees this not as new in the sense of establishing a radical rupture with the past, but rather as the rediscovery of older values and older ways of living with one another, and which leads him to suppose that "some connection between innovation and rootedness must be suspected even where it is emphatically denied":

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7   The use of the term "resonance" to refer to emergent forms of collective subjectivity (El-Desouky 2014: 106) has been traced back through Badiou 2012: 108-9 who attributes it to Jean-Marie Gleize, who was himself quoting Comité Invisible 2009: "revolutionary movements do not spread by contamination, but by resonance". For a fuller exposition of some of the many implications of this line of thought, see Gordillo 2011a and b, Sabaratnam 2012, and in particular Bordeleau 2014: 149-85 on "resonance communism" versus "voluntaristic communism". On resonance more generally, including its relation to politics, see Nancy 2002 and Cavarero 2005. The question of musicality as both vehicle and metaphor for a performative politics is taken up in more detail in chapter A9 below.

The traditional systems of multiple loyalties (which integrated in practical and useful ways the multiple resources available though tribal belonging, guild membership, religious order affiliations, urban patronage, and mutual help networks) supplied the sufficient basis of a self-organized civic order for centuries, while insuring that no specific group intruded too much upon another – until the emergence of the modern state. Elements of that old civic order appear to have sustained themselves even after modern, authoritarian states devoted all their resources to magnifying state power over society in the name of enlightenment. Yet, the persistence of elements of the old civic ethics can be evidenced in the revolutionary styles themselves: the spontaneity of the revolutions as an extension of the already familiar spontaneity of everyday life; revolutionary solidarity, out of which emerges the will to sacrifice and combat, as an extension of common, convivial solidarity in neighborhoods and towns; distrust of distant authorities as part of an old, rational and enlightened common attitude, based on the simple thesis that a claim to help or guide is unverifiable in proportion to the power and distance of the authority that makes it; and finally, non-violence as a strategy learned not out of a manual written at Harvard, but as rooted in **familiar** *and old habits of protest and conflict management. (Bamyeh 2013a: 199)*

To these participant-observers, the Arab revolutions thus appear in a way similar to that in which the Paris Commune appeared to Marx, namely (in Kristin Ross's phrase) as

> a mode of being intensely in the present made possible by mobilizing figures and phrases from the past (Ross 2015: 29).

And the interest among both intimate and more distant observers in teasing out these lineages through which the past permeates and *radicalises* the present parallels the way in which Marx went on after 1871 to accelerate his study of Russian communal forms, thus descending "from pure theory to Russian reality" and learning, as he put it, to "not be frightened of the word 'archaic'" (Marx in his correspondence with Vera Zasulich, quoted in Shanin 1983: 104-5, cf Ross 2015: 83).

Specific examples of "Arab realities" through which we can see how the figures of the past were mobilised in order to make the present possible are widespread in the emerging literature on the Arab revolutions. Sahar Keraitim and Samia Mehrez, for example, have argued that

*the vital inspirational and organizational sources for the tactics and strategies of life in Midan al-Tahrir during the initial days of the revolution, and well beyond, was precisely the historic familiarity of the millions of people who came to the **midan** with the extended and elaborate rituals and festivities of the popular **mulid** celebrations (...) [For them] the **mulid** spectacle in the Independent Republic of Tahrir became not just a mobilizing factor but a radicalizing one. (...) Egyptians marshaled and deployed a myriad of specifically familiar cultural rituals, symbols, and performative aspects of the **mulid** to nurture and maintain the utopian space that they gradually constructed in the **midan**, the symbolic site of the birth of their freedom (**tahrir**). (Keraitim and Mehrez 2012: 30-32).*

And such phenomena are of course by no means exclusive to Egypt. The French journalist Jonathan Little's account of his visit to the beseiged Syrian city of Homs during the winter of 2012 insists on the way in which the nightly gatherings that bound the rebel populations together under the violent onslaught of the regime's forces not only drew on similar traditions of popular celebration - again, like the *mulid*, associated with Sufism rather than with more mainstream or institutionalised practices of Islam - but that they were explicitly seen by the participants as inspired by these rituals even as they repurposed them. As one of his informants tells him, quite straightforwardly: "The demonstration is a *dhikr*" (Little 2010: 26, my translation), referring to the central Sufi ritual of praise that involves both song or chanting, and rhythmical bodily movement. And as Little's descriptions shows, it is indeed one, albeit a *dhikr* that has been secularised, and in the process turned into a directly revolutionary ritual. Like *mulid al-Tahrir*, and like the Paris commune that itself refered back to the revolutionary commune of 1792, as well as to older forms of local civic autonomy that had characterised pre-modern France, the *dhikr* of the Syrian opposition is not just a repetition of a pre-existing form, but its *translation* (Keraitim and Mehrez 2012: 31)[8].

The Arab revolutions have thus been marked by a dual phenomenon of *vernacularisation*. On the one hand, they have seen the emergence into public space of a whole range of vernacular practices of everyday life that perform the function of a "cementing social imaginary" (El-Desouky 2014: x), and whose profoundly *ethical* orientation serves to give those who recognise themselves in them a sense of their own "profound self-worth that stood in sharp contrast to underserved rule by petty thieves, dour autocrats, and visionless, ineffective functionaries" (Bamyeh 2013a: 191). On the other hand, the visibility of these practices has in large part been made possible by the simultaneous emergence of a range of 21st-century grassroots *vernacular media practices* (Mackey 2010), of which the vernacular video practices to be discussed here are exemplary. Connected to these virtual channels, the everyday lived dimension of these revolutions has been able to spill out beyond the immediate confines of the street and the square, evading the censorship and/or ideological distortions of the mainstream and official media, and thus become visible, not only in Cairo or Sana'a or Redeyef or Dera'a, but anywhere there is an internet connection and a screen (including in the many parts of those countries, and even of those same cities, where these demonstrations must at times have seemed as remote and as exotic as they did to those watching from abroad).

It is this convergence between concrete practices of living embedded in the customs and idioms of specific places and specific communities - the "verbal, visual, performative and spatial configurations of the everyday" (El-Desouky 2014: 92) - and the emerging grassroots media practices that multiply and disseminate them, extending and enlarging their resonance beyond their specific time and place in ways that simultaneously exceed and confirm the limits of the local, that makes it possible, I believe, to speak of the video practices I will be discussing here as themselves genuinely *vernacular* practices. For what marks them out, and differentiates them from the vast majority of what elsewhere has been referred to as "vernacular" online video (e.g. Burgess 2007; Burgess and Green 2009; Strangelove 2010), is not just that they are produced by "amateurs" outside any perspective of institutional recognition or financial gain. If they are vernacular, it is also in this deeper sense that they are an integral part of the wider vernacular life worlds that the Arab revolutions have drawn on in order to lay claim to, and in the process redefine, political agency and the public domain. These videos, that is, are not just documents of those vernacular practices that prexist them; nor are they vernacular simply by virtue of their artisanal conditions of production. They *perform* the vernacular in their own forms, too. They *enact* its ethics of solidarity through the rhythms they create, and in the patterns of resonance they themselves initiate.

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8   On the Egyptian revolution as *mulid*, the *mulid* as desire "to transcend the 'bounded self'", and the oral culture of Sufism as more persistent and enduring than the textual culture of other forms of Islam, see Rooney 2015: 52-54. I discuss the *mulid* as a metaphor for the revolution, and for revolutionary video, in more detail in chapter A9 below.

Intro 4. The vernacular anarchive

My understanding of these videos as vernacular owes much to the writings of those observers of and/or participants in the Arab revolutions such as Bamyeh, El-Desouky, Keraitim, Mehrez and Little, whose familiarity with the practices and histories of everyday life in the region has made them especially alive to this dimension of the people's struggles. But my thinking on this point is also more broadly informed by the work on "vernacular values" carried out by Ivan Illich and his colleagues (especially Esteva and Prakash 1998), and in particular by the essays Illich published on this subject in the early 1980s (Illich 1981, 1982).

For Illich, the vernacular was not simply the amateur and the homespun. It was above all the primary domain of people's resistance to the emerging (or invading) State's colonisation of their everyday forms of life - to the abstract imperatives of bureaucracy and profit that sought to displace the lived ethic of solidarity that (following EP Thompson) he refered to as their "moral economy" (Thompson 1971)[9]. His writings on the vernacular resonate strongly with the accounts of the Arab revolutions as civil society's revelation of itself to itself that I have quoted in the previous section. And his discussion of how the printing press, which would later serve as a key tool for the homegenisation and standardisation of communication, initially functioned in the late 15th century as an anarchic grassroots multiplier of unruly vernacular discourses cannot help but recall the ambivalent nature of today's post-Snowden Internet, with its capacity for functioning as both a vector for emancipatory media practices and an instrument of potentially totalitarian control and surveillance (Illich 1981: 27–51; cf Lovink 2014).

I have discussed in detail elsewhere Illich's account of vernacular values, and its relevance for understanding contemporary online video practices (Snowdon 2014a: 406-414). Here, I merely wish to highlight the way in which he saw the vernacular as above all the domain of living and *embodied* practices, which are by their very nature *performative*. Instead of an abstract Cartesian space ruled by countable coordinates and populated by arbitrary and measurable objects, vernacular space-time is a poly-centric textural and experiential manifold, a palimpsest of dynamic processes each of which is particular to the person

or persons who enact it. The kind of world that results is thus radically *recalcitrant to abstract conceptual analysis*, being rooted in the persistence and indeed cultivation of the infra-logical layers of experience that are mobilised by our own concrete gestural-kinesthetic apprehensions, and whose translation into symbolic language inevitably ends up taking the form of poetry and metaphor, rather than rules and calculations. The vernacular enacts an ethics of solidarity, and it does so through dynamic sensory and aesthetic forms which are not reducible to discourse, but which engage us fully as living bodily creatures.

These vernacular forms are not simply folkloric fossils from some putative golden age, but what Illich's friend Giorgio Agamben has rightly called (following Plotinus as much as Wittgenstein) "forms-of-life" - forms that are inseparable from the life that is lived through them (Agamben 2015: 297-304). Through their contingent singularity, forms-of-life activate the common both as pure potential - the possibility of something new - and as that which is necessarily inappropriable. As such, they just *are* the deactivation of that division of life into *bios* and *zoè* - that is, the politically recognisable life of the individual, and the bare generic life that underlies it - that constitutes the core of modern governmentality, through its implicit generalisation of "the state of exception". By rendering that division inoperative, the possibility is opened for a new kind of politics, one that can escape from the cycle of constitutive violence into which most revolutions fall (Agamben 2015: 359-379). For Agamben, such a politics is anticipated in, but not limited by, the "vernacular figures of anomic communities" documented not only by Illich, but also by Clastres and Sigrist (Agamben 2013: 15; cf Clastres 1974; Sigrist and Kramer 1978).

It is precisely in this sense that I would suggest that both the video, and the video practices, produced by the actors of the Arab revolutions should be thought of as "vernacular" - as forms-of-life that open on to new possibilities, and in particular, on to new forms of living together, new forms of what we hold in common. And it is not only the individual videos, either, which collectively constitute a vernacular. Rather, I propose that we should see their forms of online (and offline) circulation and accumulation as equally embodied and performative practices, which open onto equally singular and unexpected constellations, and therefore require equally concrete description and analysis[10].

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9   Thompson's essay on the moral economy of the English crowd played an important role in the rescue of the Arab crowd from Orientalist mythology and its reinstatement as a rational agent of historical change by scholars such as Hugh Roberts, Edmund Burke III, and Larbi Sadiki. This development is described in Andrea Khalil 2012; cf also Khalil 2014: 31-34.

10   I take it as axiomatic that the online and the offline are thoroughly *enmeshed*, and that both are thoroughly physical *and* virtual processes. Nathan Jurgenson has developed this analysis in his writings against "digital dualism" (e.g. Jurgenson 2012). On the ways in which the

Such an analysis is much harder to achieve, of course. In some sense, we "have" the individual video, and we can explore it and intepret it as much as we like, as I do in the close readings of specific clips that form the core of most of the chapters that follow. The human and social circuits through which these videos collectively move and in which they are encountered, experienced and further elaborated are, however, much more difficult to access and pin down. While they may leave traces - comments on YouTube pages, or on Facebook timeline posts, for example, as well as data accumulating in Google's databases beyond our possibilities of access - the information these can provide about the actual practices of viewing and (re)distributing online video remains limited and indirect. What would be required is, rather, detailed ethnographic fieldwork implying, if not actually spending time with people while they watch, upload, remix, and generally participate in the active circulation of videos online, then at the very least extended interviews (conversations) with them about what they are doing during that time, and how they think about it when they are no longer doing it. Only in that way could we begin to follow Zeynep Gambetti's advice, in her discussion of Occupy Gezi: "One would need to look into the extensive interstices of this politics of the body, rather than into macrolevel discourses, to begin deciphering it" (Gambetti 2013).

Alain Bertho's *Le temps des émeutes* (2009), which I read the year it was published, first suggested to me that online video may not simply be reducible to a series of ephemeral and personal testimonies, but may have the density of a collective political language - especially when it is articulating a comprehensive refusal of the current political dispensation. For Bertho, videos such as these must be approached in all their "subjective thickness", and not just as "symptoms of a social situation that has already been identified" (Bertho 2009: 50, my translation). Daniel Miller's groundbreaking (if in many ways unsatisfactory) study of how Facebook is practiced in Trinidad as a specifically Trinidadian construction (*Fasbook*) that is in many important ways independent of, and even contradictory to, the Facebook you and I may know, indicates both what fieldwork might offer in this domain, and how the burden of theorisation might be shared with those with whom it is in conversation (Miller 2011; see Snowdon 2013 for my reservations). Ulrike Lune Riboni's ethnography of the video practices of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutionaries has begun to open the door to what remains so far a largely hidden domain, though most of her research remains to date unpublished (Riboni 2015,

2015b, 2016), while Cécile Boëx has provided invaluable surveys of analogous productions from Syria (Boëx 2012, 2013a, 2013b). Dork Zabunyan's writings on these videos, especially those made in Syria, from the perspective not of sociology or anthropology, but of cinema as an ever-more hybrid machine, and one that continues to produce concepts (Deleuze 1985: 365-66), have been crucial in sustaining my belief that these videos would repay the same kind of attention one might give to a film by Brakhage or by Rouch (Zabunyan 2012, 2013, 2015; Béghin and Zabunyan 2015; Savona et al 2012). Finally, Alisa Lebow's interactive "meta-documentary" *Filming Revolution* based on interviews with Egyptian artists and activists, and which was released too late for me to take it into account here, is a major achievement and resource, even if it is deliberately focused on practices that lie at the more self-conscious end of the spectrum, where those involved are engaged in negotiating between vernacular impulses (including their own) and a range of professional or professionalising self-definitions (Lebow 2015).

This dissertation, meanwhile, is the product of a programme of what is known as "artistic research". My main activity over the last five years has been as a filmmaker myself, not a student of filmmakers (in the sense in which an entomologist is a student of insects). In the course of collecting the material that I used to make *The Uprising* I have not only watched many hundreds of hours of online videos from the Arab revolutions, but I have also spent extended periods of time "within" the online/offline ecosystems through which such videos circulate. I have read the comments appended to them on their YouTube pages. I have also read blog posts, tweets, Facebook status updates, newspaper articles and academic essays in which they and the events that they record are discussed. I have met people who made such videos, sometimes by accident, sometimes on purpose. I have discussed online video practices at academic conferences, in grassroots media centres, in cafés and in cinemas and on trains, with my friends in their living rooms, with strangers I have met on demonstrations, and - over email, iMessenger, Skype and Facetime - with people I have met and only ever met online. I have had these discussions with Egyptians in Egypt, with Tunisians in Marseille, with Yemenis in New York, and with Syrians in Brussels, as well as with Indonesians, Brazilians, Turks, Algerians, Palestinians, Israelis, North Americans and Europeans - *et j'en passe*. I have spent a total of two months in post-revolutionary Egypt, meeting people when I showed my film as a work-in-progress to different audiences in different places, and as I was doing follow-up research for various other projects, none of which have (so far) borne fruit. But I have always had these conversations, either in the context of friendship, or as part of the process of making my film and (subsequently) trying to

virtual is always already embedded in our everyday, pre-digital lives, see e.g. Tisseron 2013).

understand what it was I had done, and how it might affect people. I have *not* attempted to do the (extremely difficult) work that would enable me to speak with any form of ethnographic authority about the actual practices that constitute the online everyday of YouTube in and around the Arab revolutions, or the emic discourses that surround them. Even if I had had the competence to undertake such a project, I would certainly have been unable to find either the energy, or the time. (For more details about the process of making *The Uprising*, including some of the conversations that took place around it, see Part B of this dissertation below).

What I have done, however, in the course of making and showing my film, is to formulate a number of hypotheses about how the videos I had watched may function - both as individual videos, and as an online/offline circulation of forms and energies. These hypotheses were not arrived at independently of making my film, but are rather integral to my experience of that process. As such, they are *artistic* hypotheses, rather than scientific ones. Still, that does not mean they are necessarily "wrong". It simply means that they remain untested in ethnographic or sociological terms - or have, perhaps, been tested differently.

I describe in greater detail certain hypotheses about how the videos from the Arab revolutions circulate online and offline in the second section of Part A below. For now, and to avoid either prejudging that issue, or speaking of YouTube as if it was one single unified system delivering a set of largely homogenised experiences, rather than an open-ended series of overlapping, partly constrained yet also partly plastic and malleable practices, I choose to refer to the body of work produced by the Arab revolutionaries as they filmed their revolutions as "the vernacular *an*archive".

I do so partly because I wish to distinguish my proposal here from the multiple understandings of the archive and its place in Western thought generated by the now substantial body of work initiated by the seminal essays of Foucault and Derrida[11]. But I am also, at a less reflective

level, simply allergic to a term that would seem to consign these videos to the past, when they remain - at least for me, and until very recently - resolutely of and in the present. Even today, the accounts which they have opened are in no way closed, though the way forward may be difficult to see through the current fog of civil war, neo-authoritarianism and - in the most "positive" cases - parliamentary spectacle.

As Dork Zabunyan puts it, these images are an attempt "to tear a fragment of reality" out of a context that has become unlivable:

> *Before they become an archive in their own right, these images from the "Arab Spring" have a dual function, to put it schematically (...): they serve as weapons in the present and, whether deliberately or not, as forces for the future... (Zabunyan 2013: 51, 54-55, my translation)[12]*

The Tunisian film critic Tahar Chikhaoui makes a similar point when he describes the cameraphone videos made during the Tunisian revolution as the invention of a "pragmatics of the gaze", in which seeing becomes a way of acting. And he goes on to say:

> *To be clear, these are not works of cinema, creative works, but they offer us the prototype of another kind of image. While the distance [that characterised earlier forms of moving image] has not been entirely and definitively abolished, the gap between the screen and the audience has shifted, now it is extremely slight, and mobile. Like this revolution that will lead, whatever its outcome in the short term, to the transformation of political and social structures in the longer term, these images of the revolution show us what the cinema of the future will be based on (Chikhaoui 2012, my translation)[13]*

11   Foucault 1968, 1969 and Derrida 1995 effectively shifted critical attention from the archive as an empirical set of documents, to the archive as a system that governs what can and cannot be said about the past (Baron 2014: 2-3). Christa Blümlinger traces the current passion for the archival among filmmakers and fine artists through five key moments, including Derrida 1995, and the exhibition curated by Okwui Enwezor that was inspired by it (*Archive Fever: uses of the document in contemporary art*, 2008), though her own use of the term owes more to Foucault (Blümlinger 2013: 9; 179-218). For an overview of theorisations of the archive from the point of view of a practicing archivist, see Manoff 2004. On Foucault's own reticence to treat the cinema as an archive and thus project it into the past, see Maniglier and Zabunyan 2011: 32-36. For a persuasive proposal that the presence of the archive in contemporary film practice is best understood not in terms of the source of the material, but rather as a specific kind of *reception effect* - one based on the invo-

cation of the prior contexts of certain images as primary - see Baron 2014 passim, and especially 1-47.

12   "Avant de devenir une archive à part entière, les images des "printemps arabes" ont schématiquement une double fonction (...): elles servent d'armes pour le présent et, délibérément ou pas, de forces pour l'avenir".

13   "Entendons-nous bien, il ne s'agit pas de films de cinéma, d'oeuvres de création mais l'histoire nous a fourni le prototype d'une autre image. Non que la distance soit totalement et définitivement abolie mais la rampe s'est déplacée, elle est devenue à la fois ténue et mobile. Comme cette révolution qui ouvrira, indépendamment de son issue immédiate, la voie à une refonte des structures politiques et sociales dont on verra le résultat plus tard, les images de la révolution indiqueront ce à partir de quoi se fera le futur paysage cinématographique." The allusion here to the work of the great French film critic Serge Daney (whose first work published in book form was entitled simply, *La Rampe* - Daney 1983) is sadly lost in translation.

For Chikhaoui, these videos are not documents of the past, nor are they themselves subject to any existing audiovisual codes. They are the prefiguration not only of different ways of living, and different ways of doing politics, but also of different ways of making images, and of joining them together, whose full implications we are a long way from being able to grasp.

The "object" I wish to construct here, then, is very definitely *not* an archive in the sense of a repository of the past, whether that past takes the form of literal documents, allegorical monuments, or somewhat more abstract discursive formations (Foucault 1969). It is rather a living space, one that is totally porous and plastic to its users, that is constantly being shaped and reshaped by each gesture that contributes to it, each video that is added to it, each comment that is appended. While in standard usage the term "archive" is clearly linked to the idea of written documentation, its etymology refers more generally to a form of rule or governance (Gr. *arkhé*) rather than to any specific technology of storage. On both these levels, the term seems largely inappropiate[14]. I willl therefore use instead the term "anarchive"[15], formed by analogy with the term anarchy (also formed from the same Greek root), which designates not chaos, but a form of order independent of any ruler, any hierarchy, or any institutionalised government.

The term "vernacular", then, should be understood as applying not only to the *content* of the anarchive, but above all to its *form*. The anarchive is vernacular precisely in that it has, and can have, no central card-index, no Dewey decimal classification system, no hierarchical ordering. And yet it is more than just an unstructured mass of random material, of which each element would be animated solely by the narcissistic search to distinguish itself from all its peers. Indeed, it might be more useful, and more accurate, to think of the Arab revolutionaries' subversive reconfiguration of their algorithmic online database of choice as a sort of "Occupy YouTube" by anticipation. Starting in early 2011[16], the videomakers from the region effectively established what might be recognised as a "space of anarchy" (Bamyeh 2009), a "temporary autonomous zone" (Bey 1985) - or, more precisely, I shall argue, a "zone of offensive opacity" (Tiqqun 2001) - within the YouTube database, parallel to those which they and their comrades were establishing at the same time in the physical world, and of which Tahrir Square in Cairo has been the luminous (if also sometimes distracting and misleading) emblem. This online zone was of course only temporary, in the sense that at some point the YouTube of algorithms would inevitably reassert itself and begin to erode its collective identity - erasing its borders, burying most of its contents, and reducing what remained visible to a more "representative", and more "relevant" subset. Nevertheless, for as long as it persisted, it could be called autonomous because it represented - and in certain places, still today represents - a use of YouTube that has been enabled but not foreseen by the website's inventors, and which subverted more than it realised the liberal vision of social media as a forum for individualistic self-expression with its correspondingly decentralised (and inoffensive) forms of collaboration.
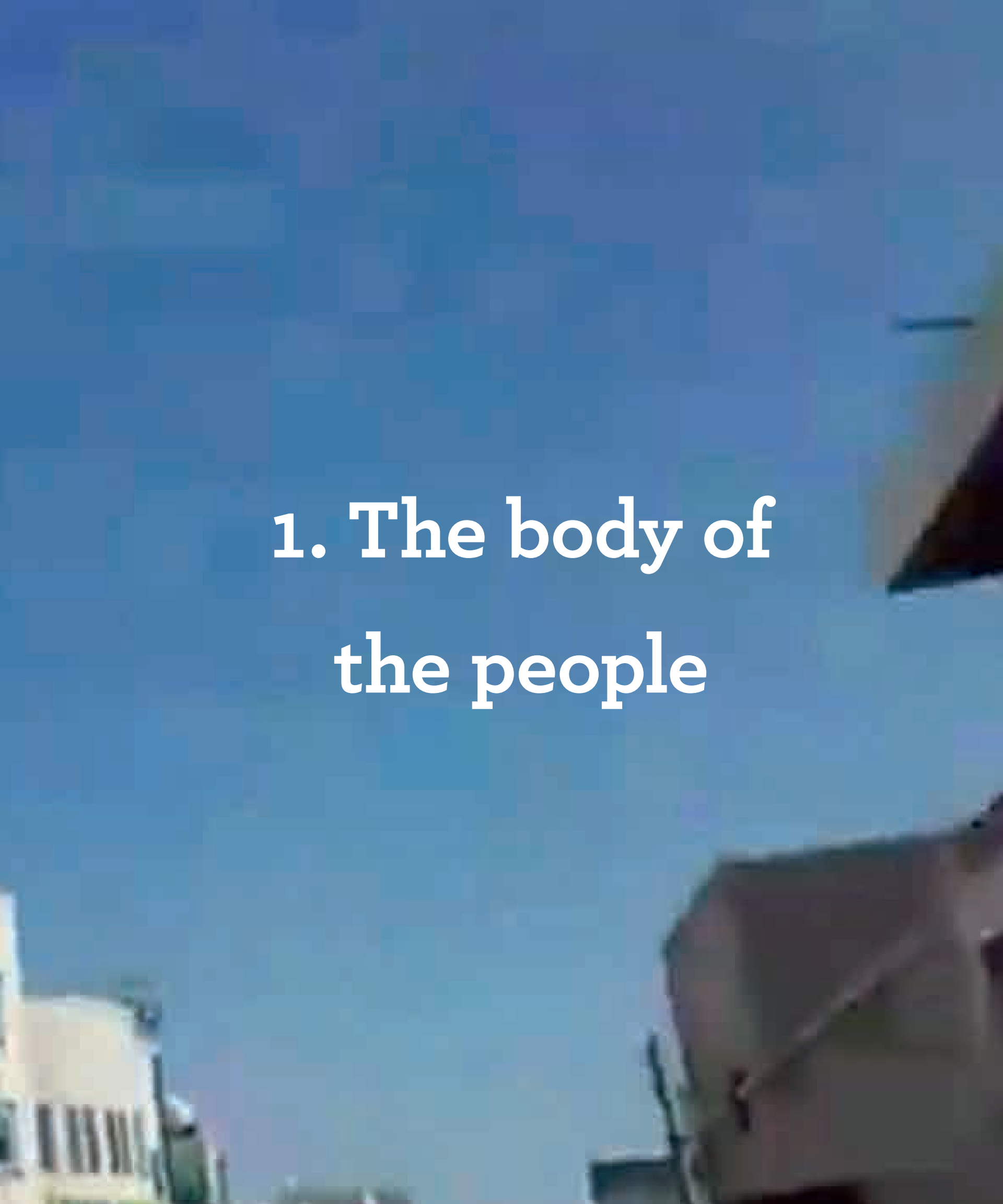
In seeking to understand better, then, how the videos from the Arab revolutions enact forms of video which are at once and indissolubly political, ethical and aesthetic, in ways which (I would submit) earlier practices and theories of online video have barely anticipated, I will be led to consider not only how these videos exist as singular forms created in specific times and places, but also how they organise themselves collectively, so to speak. For it is also through their *collective* rhythms and patterns of circulation that they reimagine what online video is, or might be.

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14   This should not be taken to imply that the deliberate archiving of vernacular video is a pointless task: far from it, especially given the privatised infrastructure in which most such videos remains stranded (cf Vadén and Suoranta 2009 on the importance of "common servers" in building any form of enduringly emancipatory media). For a remarkable example of what can be achieved in this domain, see the bak.ma online digital media archive of Turkish social movements, which was born out of Occupy Gezi: bak.ma/grid/title. (*Bakma* is Turkish for "don't look", an instruction often issued by police to the Gezi protesters.)

15   The term "anarchive" is rare, but I cannot claim it is original. Recent uses include a Russian web archive of anarchist literature (anarchive.virtualave.net, now defunct), and a "digital archive on contemporary art" curated by Anne-Marie Duguet (anarchive.net).

16   I date this phenomenon to the start of 2011 as YouTube was banned in Tunisia throughout the winter of 2010-11, and it was only really with the Egyptian revolution commencing on 25 January 2011 that YouTube became a fully integrated part of Arab revolutionary cyber-space. Tunisian revolutionaries had instead been posting their videos to their Facebook accounts, where they circulated in a related, but somewhat different, way (AlSayyad & Guvenc 2015; Riboni 2016).

1. The body of the people

A1. A happy man

*- No one helped us! We won our freedom for ourselves! The Tunisian people made
their own freedom! The Tunisian people made their own freedom!
- He is so brave! So brave...
- How great are the Tunisian people! Long live the Tunisian people! Long live free
Tunisia! Long live Tunisia the great!*

Avenue Bourguiba, Tunis, Tunisia, 14 January 2011

Double page: Still frame from YouTube video by feb tub, 14 February 2011
Available online at youtube.com/watch?v=R3LazFJ0wa4

Still frame from YouTube video by rideaudur, 17 January 2011
Available online at youtube.com/watch?v=3eSc5H987QQ

TRANSCRIPT

(English version based on a French translation by Jihane Tbini).

Curtains are drawn back, camera advances towards the street below.[1]

> ABDENNACER
> No one helped us! We won our freedom for ourselves! The Tunisian people made their own freedom! The Tunisian people made their own freedom!

> WOMAN 1 *(in French)*
> He is so brave! So brave…

> ABDENNACER
> How great are the Tunisian people! Long live the Tunisian people! Long live free Tunisia! Long live Tunisia the great!

> WOMAN 1 *(in French)*
> He is so brave!

> ABDENNACER
> Long live the free men of Tunisia! Long live free Tunisia! Long live Tunisia the Great!

Sound of women weeping, off.

> ABDENNACER
> O free men of Tunisia, you are free! There is no criminal named Ben Ali any more!

Cellphone rings.

> ABDENNACER
> The criminal Ben Ali has run away! He ran away from the Tunisian people! Ben Ali the thief! Ben Ali the dog! Don't be afraid, lift up your heads! Don't be afraid of anyone! We are free! The Tunisian people are free! The Tunisian people will never die! O Great People of Tunisia! Long live free Tunisia! Glory to our martyrs! Freedom for the Tunisians!

> WOMAN 1 *(in Arabic)*
> How many people died that this day might come!

> ABDENNACER
> You Tunisians who have been excluded! You, Tunisians, in the prisons! You, Tunisians, who were made to feel inferior! You, Tunisians, who were oppressed! You, Tunisians, who were afflicted! You, Tunisians, whose property was stolen! Breathe the air of freedom! The Tunisian people have given us this freedom! Long live the people of Tunisia! Long live the great nation of Tunisia!

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1   To watch the video with English subtitles, go to: vimeo.com/122309594

Camera withdraws slightly inside as the two men in the street walk towards the other side of the avenue.

> WOMAN 2
> Hello? Hello? Listen! Listen! There are three guys out on Avenue Bourguiba.

> WOMAN 1
> There they are! The three of them are over there!

> WOMAN 2
> We can hear his voice from here, it's giving us goosebumps.

A third (?) woman weeps, as the second woman returns into the interior of the appartment, still talking.

> WOMAN 3 *(coming into picture and leaning out of window
> while talking on phone)*
> Greetings! How are you?

> WOMAN 2 *(returning)*
> Listen! Listen! There's a happy man talking in the street! You've no
> idea what that feels like! Listen! Listen!

Sound of weeping.

CUT TO

Top shot of pavement below.

> ABDENNACER
> Glory to the martyrs! We owe it to each and every martyr, to each
> drop of their blood, yesterday and today! Tunisia is free! Yesterday,
> we still had the cars and the ullulations that Ben Ali paid for![2]

> OTHER MAN
> Where have the hire cars gone?

> ABDENNACER
> Where have the hire cars gone?

> WOMAN 1
> They aren't there any more!

> WOMAN 2
> What about the police?

> WOMAN 3
> They're not doing anything.

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2   This is an allusion to the evening of 13 February, when Ben Ali's third televised speech was followed by a report showing the "rejoicing crowds" that had invaded the roads in their cars to celebrate the reforms he had announced. It was rapidly uncovered that not only were the people in the cars paid to make this demonstration of support, but the cars had also been hired specially for the occasion (Bayrem 2012).

ABDENNACER
Long live freedom! Abdelhamid! I'm here in the avenue, I'm celebrating freedom!

WOMEN *(in chorus)*
Tunisia belongs to us!

Ullulations, several voices.

CUT TO

The camera is back inside, framing window.

POLICE
Close your windows! Close all your windows!

Camera moves, framing buildings opposite, leaving the street hors champ.

WOMAN 1
The policeman said to close the windows. Come on now, don't fool around, do as he tells you. Stop now, they've gone.

WOMAN 3
But I'm not filming! I'm just doing a bit of video...

A1.1 You have no idea what this feels like

In this short clip, we hear more than we see a man walking up and down along a main artery ("the avenue", as he calls it) of a North African city. As he walks, he improvises a poetic panegyric in honour of the people of his country, and the freedom they have won for themelves. Yet the people of whom, and to whom, he speaks, are nowhere to be seen. Indeed, as the clip progresses, it may seem that he is less assuming their existence, than trying to conjure them into being. His entire performance seems designed either to make appear that which does not yet exist, or to prevent or defer the disappearance of that which had briefly and provisionally emerged - or perhaps some combination of the two.

Nowhere is this hesitation between the actual, the potential and the past, more poignantly felt than in the complex use of alternating pronouns to figure "the people" whom he celebrates. Sometimes he identifies with, or includes himself in, "the people" ("We won our freedom ourselves!"); sometimes he excludes himself from the people by objectifying them as independent of himself or any other external party ("The Tunisian people made their own freedom!"); and sometimes he addresses himself directly *to* the Tunisian people despite their apparent absence. The fact that when he does so for the first time, he resorts to a kind of tautology ("O free men of Tunisia, you are free!"), suggests not only an elation that at times outruns the spontaneous verbal imagination, but also a real, if disguised, uncertainty as to whether those who are already free really are free, or whether they do not need to claim their freedom again (and again...) in order to be sure of it.

Read in this way, the performance that lies at the heart of this video could be seen as less an act of certainty and completion, than as a sign of the people's persistent failure to emerge fully, even in this hour of their triumph. The apparent emptiness of the street around this improvised orator would thus function as an ironic counterpoint to his triumphant words: as if the Tunisian people had chosen the moment of their greatest victory simply to disappear under cover of darkness. Yet, as he tries to populate the night with the shadows of a people whose existence he has glimpsed only for it to escape him, his solitude is both underscored, and disrupted, by the presence of the camerawoman who made this video and her companions, and in particular by their complex reactions of withdrawal and participation with respect to the drama that is unfolding below their window.

This distance between the people at the window, and the man in the street who proclaims the people, is underscored by the interjections from the audience to which we, the viewers of the video, are party, but of which its protagonist knows nothing (as yet). As the man in the street below invokes the people of Tunisia, one of the women watching tells a friend over her cellphone: "There are three guys out on Avenue Bourguiba...". And a few moments later, she both singularises and amplifies her claim: "There's a happy man talking in the street. You have no idea what that feels like!" This scene is received as, in some sense, a miracle -- but one which initially moves the women at the window as spectators, rather than participants.

Yet, while the happy man's performance of his happiness may be more complex and ambivalent than it at first appears, it nevertheless remains a moment of great joy. It is *not* undermined by the apparent absence of the people it invokes, to which it lays claim, and which it seeks to encourage into a more permanent existence than the fulgurations of that day's events might in themselves seem capable of sustaining.

If this is so, perhaps it is because there are more people present in this video than just the three men in the street, and the three women watching them from their window[1]. And we are given a clue to the nature of this multiple presence very early on, when the first woman murmurs: "How many people died that this day might come!" The people that make it true that the people exist are not exclusively, or even primarily, the living people who are or are not out in the street tonight. They are the people who have given their lives, not just over the past weeks, but over the many preceding decades - who have paid the price of refusing to submit to the sequence of authoritarian regimes that have ruled the country since before it ceased to be a French colony. The really existing people of Tunisia, those who are most obviously and most irreversibly free, are not those who are sheltering indoors, watching emotionally and nervously from their windows: they are the martyrs of the pre- and post-independence regimes, and of the uprising that had begun three weeks earlier, on 18 December 2010[2].

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1   An alternative take of this scene (www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNzC4O1Qh1c) makes it evident that the street is not as deserted as it might appear to us from the high-angle shot which defines this particular video. Still, for the purposes of the present analysis, the people who matter are those we can or cannot see in these shots, not those that would have been visible had the camerawoman run downstairs and out into the night. I return to the significance of this alternate take in A1.2 below.

2   It is probably not a coincidence that the woman who says this phrase shifts from French - the former colonial language, and that of certain elite sectors of education and society in Tunisia to this day - to Arabic, at just the moment when she moves from positioning herself outside the event, in incredulous admiration for the reciter's bravery (as if it was an act she could not herself imagine emulating), to implicitly participat-

A1.2 Switch off the camera!

Of course, there is a very simple and pragmatic explanation for why the (living) people of Tunisia are absent from this video. This clip was shot on the evening of 14 January 2011, the night that Ben Ali dissolved his government, and then fled the country. After a day of demonstrations and clashes with riot police outside the Ministry of the Interior (also situated on "the avenue" - that is, Avenue Bourguiba in the capital Tunis - only a stone's throw away from this scene), the news that the regime had fallen began to spread. The prime minister Mohammed Ghannouchi was named interim President, in line with article 56 of the constitution, and with the support of the army. While Ben Ali himself succeeded in leaving the country, many members of his family were arrested as they attempted to flee. A nationwide state of emergency was declared, which included a curfew from 5pm to 7am, the forbidding of all public assemblies and demonstrations, and orders to the police to open fire on anyone suspected of contravening these orders. In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that very few people are out on the streets. The mood of that night must have been a bizarre mixture of elation, confusion, and deep anxiety. This also explains the very specific resonance of the first woman's opening remarks in French: "How brave he is! How brave!" The man celebrating freedom in the avenue - to give him his full name in "civilian life", the barrister Mohammed Abdennacer Aouini - was doing so in open defiance of the curfew, within earshot of the Ministry of the Interior, and thus at some real risk to his own life[3].

The event recorded in this video was one of the first to emerge from these revolutions through the YouTube ecosystem and capture the wider popular imagination, not only in Tunisia, but across the region and beyond. I am phrasing this carefully, because anecdotal evidence suggests that it was not this particular video, but in fact an alternative take of the same event, shot by Abdennacer's friend who was beside him in the street (one of the three men referred to by the woman at the window in her

commentary), which actually went 'viral' in January 2011[4]. In fact, it did not so much go viral, as mainstream: extracts from it were shown on a quasi-permanent loop on many Arab satellite channels over the weeks following the fall of the Ben Ali regime. But the emotional power of the video discussed here seems to me incomparably stronger than that of its better-known companion piece. Whereas the street-level video simply *records* Abdennacer's performance somewhat flatly, this video shot from a window high-up on Avenue Bourguiba *dramatises* it in a way that reinforces and deepens the complexity and ambivalence of the scene.

It achieves this, I would argue, in three main ways:

- Firstly, by filming Abdennacer from such a distance that he is barely a figure - indeed, we can hardly see him most of the time, and when we can see him, he is just a small dot of white - it emphasises both the fact that it is his *voice* which is important to us, not his physical appearance, and the "fact" of his solitude, despite his repeated invocations to the people. Framing a large fragment of basically empty street, reducing the three people in it to almost indiscernible marks, this video thus, by its "choice" of camera position, opens up a huge gap between the people whom Abdennacer invokes, and his own situation as he strides up and down the avenue, isolated and vulnerable.

- Secondly, by placing the viewer not just at a distance, but with and among the three women in their appartment, whom we also hardly ever see, but whose (very different) voices (and bodies) we can hear (and sense), as they comment, relate, discuss, weep and celebrate, it reinforces the sense of distance that separates those who have obediently stayed at home from Abdennacer who has risked his life to go out into the street. The women's reactions also dramatise before us, and so allow us to recognise, a number of different possible reactions to Abdennacer's act of bravery. One senses that one of the women (the

ing in his recital by invoking an absent multitude that is the very core of the "people" whom the reciter seeks to conjure into existence.

3   My account of the events of 14 January is based on Le Monde 2011 and Puchot 2011a. Abdennaceur Aouini is identified in the titles given to a number of the YouTube re-ups of the two videos that immortalise his performance. He has since continued (as one might imagine) to be a thorn in the side of successive post-revolutionary governments. His official Facebook page can be found at facebook.com/pages/Abdenna-ceur-Aouini-Officiel/199065426798148. For general background on the Tunisian revolution, see Puchot 2011b, Meddeb 2011, Dakhlia 2011 and Honwana 2013.

4   There exist, as far as I know, two videos of this scene: the one discussed here, and the shorter alternate take referred to above (youtube.com/watch?v=TNzC4O1Qh1c). Talking to friends at the time, I gained the impression that most of them knew this event from the alternative, ground-level clip, and that they had seen that clip because it was played almost constantly on Arabic satellite channels such as Al-Jazeera in the days immediately following Ben Ali's ouster, and not because they had come across it on the web. Thus for example, when Rashid Ghannouchi, co-founder of the Islamist opposition movement Ennahda, was confronted with these images during an interview with the satellite TV channel Al Hiwar a few days later, available at youtube.com/watch?v=j1mqH-VAN6bQ, it was the alternative, street-level take that was shown him. It is interesting to contrast Ghannouchi's tears, which manage to seem both spontaneous and completely inauthentic, with those which we hear but do not see the three women shed in the clip discussed here.

oldest of the three?) is more diffident, more cautious, in her response, whereas the younger ones are more impulsive and more easily swept up on the wave of their emotions. In this way, we not only experience Abdennacer's words through the effect they have on the women (their effect on both their own words, and on their bodies, as they move about excitedly, or shake as they shed tears). We also experience the possibility of a range of reactions to what he is saying, reflecting the differences between people's individual temperaments. There may be no "people" down in the avenue, but there is already the microcosm of a people up here in this room with us. And that people is not a unified mass, but a choreography of singular bodies, that is also a series of embodied points of view, which, while they coexist, do not necessarily coincide.

- Thirdly, the form of the video itself further reinforces this sense of dramatisation, or even *theatricalisation*. It opens with the curtain at the window being swept aside, and closes with the window being closed again, on the insistence of the senior of the three women. Within the body of the video, there are basically only two shots - a near-vertical top shot down onto the sidewalk below, and another at a slightly shallower angle taking in the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street, and also - when it pulls back - allowing us to see in silhouette the woman who has gone to the window to recount the events to a friend with whom she is on the phone. However, the way in which the clip moves back and forward between these two camera angles, and the way in which the cuts (presumably done in camera) model our perception of time and space, are tantamount to a conscious manipulation of effect. Together, they work to produce a mounting sense of tension. First, we witness the scene going on in the street below. Then we withdraw a little to consider the effect it is having on the three women as viewers, and thus, by analogy, on us, the audience of the film. Then we go back to a more direct engagement. And it is at this moment that the women emerge suddenly from their reserve and break down the invisible barrier that separates the scene outside from its audience, to provide a collective response to Abdennacer's individual call. Then, just as suddenly, or so it seems, the police appear out of nowhere (in fact, from out of an ellipsis that separates the last two shots), and everything is closed down: the window must be shut, the camera must be switched off.

A1.3 Tunisia belongs to us!

The progression I have just described embodies two separate but related movements which are central to the nature of the vernacular anarchive as a whole. We see the *audience* of the unfolding drama move from passive spectatorship to active participation as, unable to resist the call of Abdennacer's voice, they take the risk of speaking out, of transgressing the boundary between private and public space. And in doing so, the people whom he invokes cease to be an absent phantom (as when they were present "only" as the ghosts of the martyrs), a mere projection, whether past memory or future potential (what Canetti called an "invisible crowd"[5]). The Tunisian people are suddenly embodied there in the night air with him, in the three women's voices as they ring out in response to his call. With their impulsive, self-certain first-person claim on all this land ("Tunisia belongs to us!") - not just the small fragment imprecisely lit up under the sodium lamps here, tonight - their response answers his invocation with a confidence that is partly a function of the fact that it is a sudden irruption, and *not* a lengthy litany whose repetitions may seem to betray an underlying doubt. It is enough for the women to state it once, and its truth shines through, self-evident. The people are no longer absent, or lacking. They are here. And we - the viewer - we are not *looking* at them. We are among them, we are one of them[6].

Of course, the video does not end on this note of supreme certainty. With the benefit (or obstacle) of hindsight, it is all too tempting to read the final intervention of the police - closing down the party, insisting that the windows

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5   Canetti 1973: 47-54. Cf Bamyeh 2007: 12-13 on the perception, common in more egalitarian societies, of the living and the dead as forming a *single* society. Andrea Khalil has used Canetti's terminology, including "invisible" and "double crowds" (such as: the living *and* the dead), to describe the importance of the felt presence of the martyrs for revolutionary and rebellious crowds in Algeria, Tunisia and Libya: "The crowd testified that those invisible 'others', whether the dead, imprisoned, impoverished, or exiled, were, despite state repression, already part of the subjective constitution; subjects are multitudes of others" (Khalil 2014: 3). Interestingly, one of the other "invisible" crowds she mentions is the "virtual" crowd that can be found on the Internet (ibid: 13). Perhaps, when we watch this video from Tunisia, we are watching it from a point of view that is not unlike the point of view of the dead themselves?...

6   This video should be compared with the series of nocturnal videos from the Iranian Green Movement known to English-language netizens as The Rooftop Suite, available at www.mightierthan.com/2009/07/rooftop/. These videos have since been quoted in many films, including David Dusa's fiction feature *Fleurs du mal* (2012), Bani Khoshnoudi's *The Silent Majority Speaks* (2014), and the anonymous documentary *Fragments d'une révolution* (2011), which I discuss in some detail in chapter B2 below. The similarities and differences between them could provide the basis for a first measure of how the Green Movement both did and did not prepare the path for the Arab revolutions. For an extended interpretation of the Iranian videos that relates them to Giorgio Agamben's notion of rendering politics "inoperative", see Manoukian 2010.
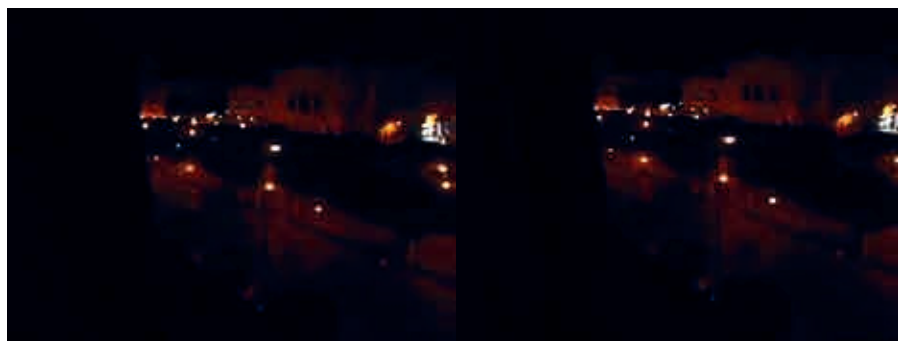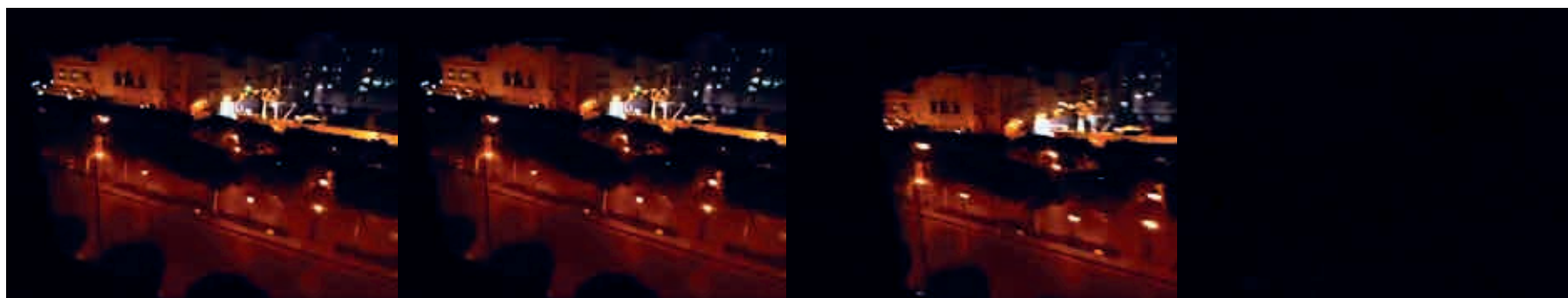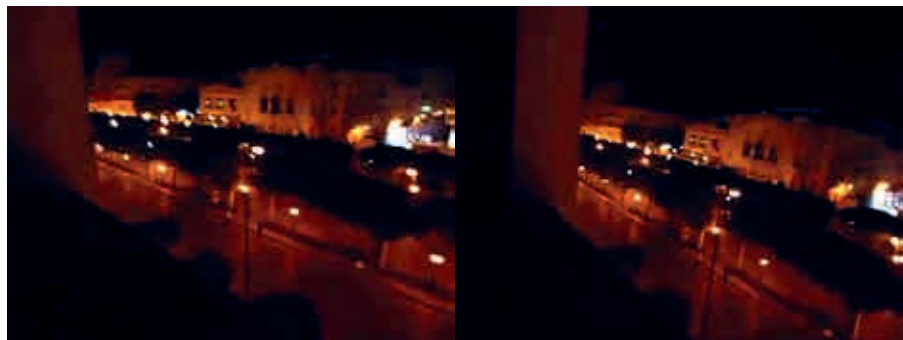
Changes of camera angle dramatise the position of the audience.
Avenue Bourguiba, Tunis, 14 January 2011.

be shut, declaring that "there is nothing to see" - as an anticipation of the counter-revolution that was to follow even those of the Arab revolutions that seemed, for a while, the most successful in translating social insurrection into political change (Achcar 2013: 15-21; Khalil 2014: 62-65). And it would be possible to construct an interpretation of these three minutes that casts these events in an almost wholly negative light. In such a reading, while the curtains open to reveal a scene of celebration, the one man who is celebrating is deluding himself. The people he invokes are nowhere to be seen, they are dead, or have chosen out of cowardice to stay home. And when the police appear, those that had at one moment dared to think they might rebel, simply submit once again, and do as they are told.

Still, I am not sure that this reading is correct. Remember how the clip ends - with the third woman's self-denigrating reference to her film as "only a bit of video". This remark can be read on a number of levels. On the one hand, it is an ironic attempt to deny her own artistry, which only serves to highlight the formal complexity of the short film she *has* made, and suggests that she is at least the equal in her own "art" of the (professional) orator Abdennacer. On the other hand, it is also an act of implicit resistance to her elder relative's insistence that she stop filming, that she stop taking risks for the revolution. Denying that what she is doing is a "film" is a way of suggesting that she doesn't need to stop filming, because she never started (though it is exactly at that moment that she does in fact switch her camera off). Thus, she ends her film by marking her persistent, and unrepentant, insubordination, even as she complies not with the police's orders, but with her relative's plea for her to play it safe[7].

A1.4 The subject of the people

In *Cinema 2*, Gilles Deleuze famously adopted a phrase he attributed to Paul Klee, "The people are missing", to try and encapsulate what he saw as the strength of the best political films produced since the Second World War[8]. Where mainstream cinema in both the US and Europe continued to present an increasingly wooden and unconvincing image of the people as a single unified mass, directors such as Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, or Alain Resnais, showed us instead the *absence* of the people as a possible subject of any contemporary (Western, or central) history. At the same time, though, Deleuze pointed to an alternative mode of political subjectivity, that he discovered outside, or on the internal margins of, the West. In both the direct cinema of Pierre Perrault and Jean Rouch, and the Third Cinema of Glauba Rocha, Lino Brocka, Yilmaz Güney and Ousmane Sembene, the people are not so much missing (or lacking), as they are "yet to come". In the context of the nation-building projects that accompanied the Third World independence struggles in particular, the possibility of a people could not be relegated to a rapidly receding past. The people that was emerging through these struggles belonged rather to a future that was perceived as both imminent, and increasingly inevitable. If they were absent, it was not because they had been retired from history, but because they were still in the process of being born.

Deleuze's binary oppositions in his *Cinéma* books, and his division of film history into two distinct periods, characterised by phenomenologically distinct forms of image, have been critiqued, notably by Jacques Rancière. In a seminal article, Rancière uses a close reading of Bresson's *Au hasard Balthasar* (1966) to demonstrate how the very possibility of the time-image in fact requires the persistence of the movement-image of the classical cinema that had preceded it *within* those works that are most characteristic of cinematographic "modernity" (Rancière 2001: 145-163). At the same time, Deleuze opened his *Cinéma* diptych on the first page of *L'Image-Mouvement* by asserting that they constituted not a history but a *natural history*, a vast essay in classification[9]. And Dork Zabunyan has argued that the transition between the two kinds of image that Deleuze seeks to construct should be understood as *non-linear*, in line with the priority he accorded to processes of becoming over any merely chronological history (Zabunyan 2011 passim, and especially 34-82 and 161-178; cf. Zabunyan 2005: 141-160. On Deleuze's post-war caesura as a crisis in the concept of history itself, see Maratti 2008: 64-65).

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7   For another fine example of how the Arab revolutions represented an occasion, and a catalyst, for various complex forms of rebellion against familial structures of authority, in particular on the part of young women, and with the camera as a privileged vector of such conflicts, see Sara Ishaq's moving portrait of her Yemeni family during 2011, *The Mulberry House* (2013).

8   Deleuze suggests two parallel sources for the phrase, "the people are missing", starting with Klee's Jena Lecture of 26 January 1924, where it appears as: "Wir haben noch nicht diese letzte Kraft, denn: uns trägt kein Volk" (Klee 1945: 53) (in Paul Findlay's English translation:

"We still lack the ultimate power, for: / the people are not with us": Klee 1948: 55). In *Cinéma 2* Deleuze also traces it to two texts by Kafka (a diary entry and a letter to Max Brod) where the phrase in question does not appear as such, but which appear to have played an essential role in prompting Deleuze's use of the phrase, both here (Deleuze 1985: 282-3), and in Deleuze and Guattari 1991: 103-104.

9   The first words of the first volume are: "This study is not a history of the cinema. It is a taxonomy, an essay in classifying images and signs" (Deleuze 1983: 7, my translation; cf 1985: 369).

Deleuze's writings on "the people who are missing" would appear to depend particularly heavily on the prior division of film history into two successive blocks, and so to be susceptible to Rancière's critique. Yet again, it is clear that for Deleuze himself, the absence of the people was never an absolute historical cesura, something given once and for all. In his 1987 lecture on the act of creation at the Fémis, the French film school, he qualified his position in *L'image-temps* in these terms:

> *What is the relationship between the struggles of men and the work of art? For me, their relationship is at once the closest possible kind of relationship, and also the most mysterious. This is exactly what Paul Klee meant when he said, "You know, the people are missing". The people are missing,* **and at the same time, they are not missing**. *(Deleuze 2003: 302, my translation and emphasis)*

In maintaining this paradox, Deleuze anticipates Georges Didi-Huberman's recent proposal towards the end of *Survivance des lucioles*, his meditation on (and against) a celebrated essay by Pasolini, that while the people themselves may indeed exist only as an alternation, an intermittence (figured here by the gleams given off by the fireflies in the Mediterranean night), yet there is still something that is constant, indestructible even: and that is the *desire* that the people should exist (Didi-Huberman 2009: 132-3; cf 2012: 228; Pasolini 1976: 180-89)[10].

It is hard to imagine a film which more aptly fits this conception of the people as intermittence, as that which is simultaneously present and absent, and which exists only through our desire for it, than this short fragment from Tunisia. These three minutes that are not a film, that are "just a bit of video", provide a statement about the Arab revolutions, their emancipatory potential, and the almost overwhelming obstacles that they face, that is as complex, as ironic and as poignant as any feature-length movie that I know. And they do this, not from the point of view of the individual artist - not, that is, from the point of view of the orator Abdennacer Aouini down in the avenue, and

who remains oblivious right up till the last moment of the presence of the women who are watching him from their window - but *from the point of view of the people themselves*.

From down in the avenue, the people remain invisible. Cloaked in darkness or hidden behind closed doors, they are resolutely *hors champ*[11]. Yet despite this absence, in this video shot from the window of these women's apartment, the people *do* appear. And they do so in such a way that we know that they are not just "yet to come", but were in some sense there all along, even before they take voice, and declare themselves in public[12]. But when they appear to us they do so, not as a figure, or an object, seen from a safe distance, that can be identified, represented, and reified, but as a multiplicity of voices, bodies, points of view, which yet seem to be traversed by a single *subject* - a presence, in short, that is too close to us, too complex, too physical, too real, too irrevocable, for us to see it, or ever pin it down.

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10   "So in the end, this is the infinite reservoir on which the fireflies draw: their withdrawal, in so far as it is not a retreat but 'a diagonal force'; their clandestine community of 'scraps of humanity', these signals that they give off intermittently; their essential freedom of movement; their faculty to make desire appear as the very paragon of that which is indestructible…": Didi-Huberman 2009: 132-3, my translation. For Pasolini, the disappearance of the fireflies - which for him, in 1975, seemed inevitable, and which for Didi-Huberman is never decided once and for all, and thus "depends on us" - was a metaphor for the "anthropological catastrophe" that had overtaken the people of Italy (epitomized by the sub-proletariat of the Roman *borgate* whom he had known in his youth), and who, like the fireflies who had fallen victim to the destruction of their natural habitats, seemed to be vanishing as their vernacular culture was bulldozed to make way for the mass-individualistic consumer society.

11   Cf the alternate take of this scene cited above, in which the camera never once tilts up to see if anyone is watching from the "balcony".

12   This is the burden of Tariq Téguïa's recent feature film *Révolution Zendj* (2013), in which an Algerian journalist named after the great Arab chronicler (Ibn) Battuta travels via Lebanon to Iraq in search of traces of the revolt of the black slaves (Zanj) who, in the ninth century CE, had overthrown their masters and established a short-lived free city. Just before the end of the film, Battuta finally arrives at the supposed site of the city of Zanj in the marshes of Shatt El-Arab. He is accompanied by a local guide whose face is largely concealed behind a scarf that protects it from the wind, and from others' eyes. Battuta looks down into the shallow water in which they are standing. When told that this is the place, he exclaims irritably: "But there is nothing here!" - as if he had expected the marshes to be littered with random fragments of archeological importance. In response to his somewhat obtuse remark, his guide loosens his scarf so as to reveal the black skin of his face. Smiling at the startled Battuta, he tells him simply: "*We* are still here." While some have questioned how successful Téguïa's film is in relating the individual to the collective (Rancière 2015: 87), in this sequence it declares with almost overwhelming directness that Battuta's search is simultaneously successful and completely pointless. You do not have to look for the people, because they are always already there. Or to put it in slightly more Deleuzian terms: it was the intellectuals and artists who had gone missing, not the people.

A2. Video as performance

A2.1 The people as performance

Abdennacer Aouini's invocation of the "people" is not, of course, an isolated incident. Indeed, one of the main consequences of the Arab revolutions has been, perhaps, to revive the sense for both participants and observers (both within the region and outside it), that the word "the people" once again corresponded to something real, and was not merely an antiquated term, irrevocably tarnished by its association with the manipulative rhetorics of nationalist, socialist and/or liberal authoritarianisms, and their conveniently essentialising attitudes towards identity, race, and/or class (Bamyeh 2012: 38-41).

This revival of the term was at least in part accomplished by the emblematic anaphora of the revolutions, *"al-Sha'b yurid..."* ("the people want"), whose circulation in the streets was rivalled only by its travels outside the region, where it rapidly came to function as the dominant unifying slogan of these movements, enabling observers to group together and summarise what might, in many other ways, have appeared as highly differentiated events. The simplicity of the phrase, and the apparent directness of its translation - the precise yet malleable resonances of other "peoples" that it conjures for us, depending on where we are standing when we hear it - should in itself give us pause. As Samia Mehrez has written, commenting on the full original slogan, *"al-Sha'b yurid isqat al-nizam"* (the People demand the downfall of the regime):

> What did it really mean for Egyptians, whose entire uprising continues to resound in colloquial Egyptian Arabic, to borrow this slogan in formal Arabic from the Tunisians? What affinities lay behind this borrowing? What poetics of resistance are written into it that conjoin these region-wide uprisings? What did it mean for people on the street to refer to themselves as **"al-sha'b"** (the people), a word that had been emptied of its signification through decades of abuse by the regime? Why was it significant for the people to will, want, demand (**yurid**), when that will had been denied, compromised, and eradicated for decades on end? And what exactly was meant by the word **'nizam'**? Was this a reference to a 'regime', a 'system', or an 'order'? And which **nizam**: local, global, or both? How does this initial chant and slogan translate itself **horizontally**, over time, as the people continue to invest it with new signification, indeed new translations of power relations between **al-sha'b** and **al-nizam**? (Mehrez 2012: 13)

The term "*al-sha'b*", as it appears both within this phrase and without it, requires "thick", context-rich translations, that are sensitive to the specific moment and urgency of each particular use[1]. Yet those contexts that are so necessary are themselves difficult to pin down, because they are not only complex, but also inherently *mobile*. Indeed, a large part of the value of such a phrase comes precisely from the fact that it is has been extracted from a language (classical Arabic) which has "no native speakers" (Haeri 2003, cited in Mehrez 2010: 99) and, in part perhaps because of that, is able to circulate *across* countless borders that would arrest

The people want a national government. Avenue Bourguiba, Tunis, 14 January 2011. youtube.com/watch?v=U9002_bmQWE

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1   The term *al-nizam* could potentially also benefit from a similar questioning, as Mehrez suggests. Hamid Dabashi in partic- ular has claimed that "[t]his demand for the dominant 'regime' to be brought down is a reference not only to political action but, even more radically, to the mode of knowledge production about 'the Middle East', 'North Africa', 'the Arab and Muslim world', 'The West and the Rest', or any other categorical remnant of a colonial imagination (Orientalism) that still preempts the liberation of these societies in an open-ended dynamic. The challenge the Egyptians faced in getting rid of a tyrant by camping in their Tahrir Square for eighteen days, with only one word (*Arhil* [sic], 'Go!') hanging on banners over their heads, will resonate for a very long time, calling also for the rest of the world to alter the regime of knowledge that has hitherto both been enabling and blinded us to world historic events" (Dabashi 2012: 2). (This call for the bringing down of the dominant mode of knowledge production should be related to the emergence of the people's *own* modes of knowledge production during these revolutions, as analysed in the case of Egypt by El-Desouky 2014, and of which the videos discussed in this disseration are an integral part.) Meanwhile, Philip Rizk, in his critique of media representations of the Egyptian revolution, has argued that the "regime" whose downfall is being sought was never a particular national power-structure, but a glob- al system of neo-colonial domination, of which Mubarak and successors, whether military or Islamist, are more symptom than cause: "These discourses silenced the structural dimensions of injustice and concealed the role of neo-liberal policies promoted by the likes of the IMF, the EU and the US in deepening the stratification between poor and rich. They made you forget that it is out of these structures of injustice that the desire for social justice is born in the first place. These dominating narratives — the narratives of domination — localized the problematic, for instance, to that of a homegrown dictatorship. By isolating the crime, and highlighting the corruption of individuals, these accounts helped set the neo-colonial stage for the now empty shells of the old regime to be replaced by another that maintains the same logic of governance" (Rizk 2014).

more colloquial formulations - borders not only of dialect and register, but also of geography and social class.

How then can we get closer to what is at stake in this (re-)emergent sense of "the people" - both in each of their particular instantiations, and in their circulation between those different moments and different uses? Mehrez offers an important point of entry, I think, when she points to the crucial role not only of words, but of bodies and spaces, in determining both the course of the Arab revolutions, and the ways in which they have, singly and collectively, resonated far beyond the immediate perimeter of their direct action, however significant that already was:

> *One of the most remarkable accomplishments of the various uprisings in the Arab World since January 2011 has been the remarkable transformation of the relationship between people, their bodies, and space; a transformation that has enabled sustained mass convergence, conversation, and agency for new publics whose access to and participation in public space has for decades been controlled by oppressive, authoritarian regimes. Like other uprisings and revolutionary moments whose histories have first been written in great public spaces - from the Place de la Concorde during the French Revolution to the Occupy movements around the world today - people in the Arab world have reclaimed the right to be together as empowered bodies in public space exercising their right to linguistic, symbolic, and performative freedom despite the enormous price in human life that continues to be paid. (...) This newfound power of ownership of one's space, one's body, and one's language is, in and of itself, a revolution. (Mehrez 2012: 14)*

What Mehrez confronts us with here is the dynamic convergence of space, body and language, not as independent variables, but each of them jointly and severally constituting the condition of the others. The physical occupation of space by insurgent bodies, and the equally physical occupation of discourse by insurgent utterances, are not simply parallel or analogous to one another. Each requires the other in order to become fully effective, and fully affecting. The freedoms that are exercised, then, are not simply linguistic and symbolic; they are also and above all, as Mehrez specifies, *performative*.

As we saw in the video of Abdennacer Aouni in the previous chapter, it is the triangular tension between space, the body and language (here as voice), that creates the field within which "the people" can emerge. And that field is above all a field of performance. On 14 January

2011, Aouini did not simply "talk about" the people as if they already existed: he *performed* them, conjuring them into existence through a properly *mimetic* (in the sense of Taussig 1993), and quasi-magical, act of poetic invocation.

The people then is not simply an actor; it is also that which is enacted. Elliot Colla has described this emergent quality very well:

> *As revolutionaries have testified [...] it was the collective act of stating that the people wanted something that created the sense there was a social actor by that name. For many Egyptian activists, it was this locutionary event that proved there was an Egyptian people capable of revolutionary action in the first place (Colla 2012).*
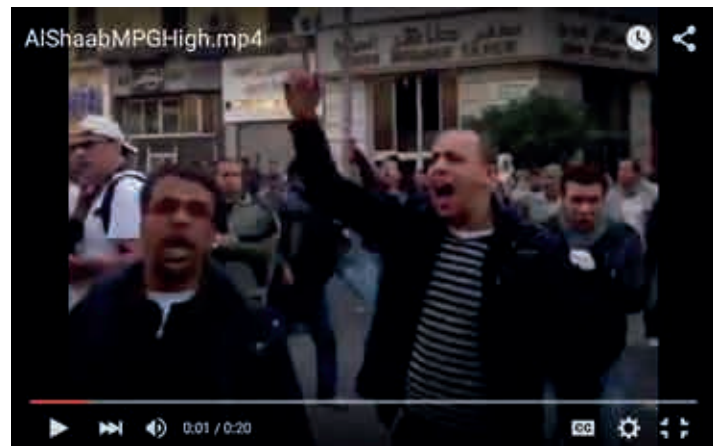
The people want the fall of the regime. 31 January 2011, Egypt. youtube.com/watch?v=2cZgp4tsymw

Judith Butler's recent work on the performative nature of political assembly confirms and extends Colla's insight. As she argues, "the people" who proclaim themselves as the grammatical subject of phrases such as "We, the people", or, "The people want…" -- and while she refers most frequently to the former, her argument is specifically prefaced with a reference to Tahrir Square as emblematic of exactly the kind of gathering of people and voices she wishes to analyse (Butler 2015: 1; cf Butler 2013: 53) --, should not be understood as a singular, pre-existing and substantial, essence, however "progressively" defined, but rather as a performative, plural, conflictual, and self-constituting event:

> *Someone says "we" along with someone else, or some group says it together, perhaps chanting, or they write it and send it out into the world, or they stand one by one, or perhaps provisionally together, motionless and wordless, enacting assembly: when they say it, they seek to constitute themselves as "the people" from the moment in*

which it is declared. So considered as a speech act, "we the people" is an enunciation that seeks to bring about the social plurality it names. It does not describe that plurality, but gathers that group together through the speech act. It would seem, then, that a linguistic form of autogenesis is at work in the expression "we the people"; it seems to be a rather magical act or, at least, one that compels us to believe in the magical nature of the performative. (Butler 2015: 175)[2]

The political meaning of the "people" who are invoked in such moments can therefore not be given in advance, but exists only as the projected outcome of the process which such a declaration initiates, without any guarantee of being able to see it through.

*When and where popular sovereignty - the self-legislative power of the people - is "declared" or, rather, "declares itself", it is not exactly at a single instance, but instead in a series of speech acts or what I would suggest are **performative enactments** that are not restrictively verbal. (Butler 2015: 176, emphasis in original)*

"We, the people" neither presupposes, nor produces, a unity. It founds or institutes a series of debates on the nature of the people, and what the people want. (Butler 2013: 59, my translation[3])

Butler goes further than Colla, however, contesting the primacy of language as the mode of this performance. Following Hannah Arendt, she sees the inaugural moment of the event that constitutes the "self-disclosure" of the people as not linguistic, but physical. It is the coming together of *bodies*, whether in a single time and place, or distributed and yet connected, that not only makes this collective self-enunciation possible, but in some sense, already *is* the claim that, simply through their physical presence or attention to one another, "the people" may be said to have come into existence.

*Although we often think that the declarative speech act by which "we the people" consolidates its popular sovereignty is one that issues from such an assembly, it is perhaps more appropriate to say that **the assembly is already speaking before it utters any words**, that by coming together it is **already** an enactment of a popular will; that enactment signifies quite differently from the way a single and unified subject declares its will through a vocalized proposition. The "we" voiced in language is already enacted by the gathering of bodies, their gestures and movements, their vocalizations, and their ways of acting in concert. (Butler 2015: 156-57[4])*

Throughout her recent work on "a performative theory of assembly", Butler seeks to build on Arendt's theory, set out at length in *The Human Condition* (Arendt 1958), of foundational politics as a "space of appearance"[5]. But Butler refuses to follow Arendt in distinguising between *bios* and *zoè* - between the public realm of politics and the private realm that is the proper place of the body as body, and where the tasks of "bare life" (Agamben), of the reproduction and nurturing of the community, are carried out[6]. This division serves to inscribe the subordination of those who are not fully citizens (women, children, slaves) into the classical model of politics that Arendt seeks to reactualise. But for Butler, the speech through which citizens disclose themselves to one another can never be

2   Butler 2011 and 2013 are collected in Butler 2015 as - respectively - chapters 2 and 5. In the case of Butler 2011, I quote from the earlier publication and provide cross-references to the final version of the article, which is very close to the original in both letter and intention. In the case of Butler 2013 - the French translation of a text never published in the original English - I quote where possible from the later, definitive and heavily rewritten English text (without referencing the 2013 translation). But I continue to cite Butler 2013 in my own re-translation, despite the inevitable imprecisions this process may entail, whenever it contains specific formulations that seem to me valuable and worth retaining.

3   "'Nous, le peuple' ne présuppose ni ne fabrique une unité mais fonde ou institue une série de débats sur la nature du peuple et sur ce qu'il veut." There is no direct equivalent of this phrase in Butler 2015, but see pp.166 and 178 on the serial nature of the people's self-iteration.

4   In Butler 2013: 54, this final claim is explicitly attributed to Arendt. Compare Zeynap Gambetti's account of the priority of bodies over language in the Occupy Gezi protests in Istanbul: "The government, whose tactlessness prompts these resisting and standing bodies to convene again and again every single day, could not have missed the significance of this body politics. These bodies naturally do have a language, even a few languages that are at times congruent and at others incongruent; however, as a whole, they constitute a politics of the body. The rage and dreams that have been embodied in tweets and graffiti since 31 May turn into material realities through the physical existence, visibility, and endurance of the bodies. If history is being rewritten, then its subject is the body" (Gambetti 2013).

5   For a concretely Arendtian account of the spatial-corporeal rhetoric of Occupy Wall Street that brings out precisely this point, see Mitchell 2013.

6   For Agamben's attitude to Arendt on this point, see *inter alia* the discussion of classical and modern attitudes to slavery at Agamben 2015: 45-51. The relationship between Agamben's thinking about "bare life" and Butler's exploration of "precarious life" is too complex to go into here. Much of Butler's recent writing is constructed, more or less explicitly, *against* Agamben's account of sovereignty in terms of the state of exception (see Butler 2004: 50-100, and especially 60-62, and 67-8; Butler 2015, especially 139-40 and 161-64). Some have argued that the commonality between their positions is greater than their disagreements (e.g. Moore 2010), while others see Butler's critique of Agamben as simply missing the point (McQuillan 2005). However we may adjudicate this issue, it seems clear that Agamben writes out of, and for, a more radically disruptive relationship to our existing political dispensation than does Butler. I return to this topic again in chapter A4 below, where I consider the relationship between Butler's self-constituting people, and Agamben's call for a "destituent power".

separated from the vulnerability of the bodies through which it is enunciated - from their private "needs", their weakness, dependency and fragility. Arendt's thinking here supposes a division of labour between the "given body" and the "active body" that belies the almost anarchist inflection of some of her proposals, and defines the public realm as indelibly masculine and hierachical, while brushing its dependency on *other* bodies under the textual carpet. This division threatens to undermine the more radically democratic strains in Arendt's thought, by making it impossible to account for and respond to those who are excluded from the public realm, but on whose labour the existence of that realm depends. For Butler, however, there can never be a "pure" space of politics that does not depend upon the physical space of our immediate bodily needs for its appearance. Politics, for Arendt, is transcendence of that dependency; for Butler, it is the acceptance of our *interdependency* - and so, of the body and its vulnerability as inseparable from any form-of-life through which our deepest political aspirations may be realised[7].

Butler's people are still a performance, then - just not the kind of glorious, quasi-divine performance that Arendt, with her fixation on the politics of the Greek *polis* and Republican Rome, had in mind. The bodies whose gathering is enough to already *speak* the people are the same everyday bodies that suffer and labour, that give life and have it taken from them. And it is precisely through the self-disclosure of their mutual vulnerability, not its concealment or repression, that the kind of energy can be released that makes possible the downfall of the regime (Butler 2015: 98)[8].

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7   For an analogous critique of Arendt's separation of *bios* and *zoè*, see Rancière 2010: 29-30. In Snowdon 2014a I offered a summary of Butler's work on the people as performance (as expressed in Butler 2011 and Butler 2013) that effectively elided her attempt to critique and revise Arendt's disembodied masculinist vision of the public realm. Here, I hope I am able to give a more complex and more accurate reading of her position, which is elaborated at length throughout Butler 2015, though it is arguably a moot point whether Butler's position is as distinct from that of Arendt as she herself seems to believe it to be (Mathijs van de Sande, personal communication, 2015).

8   In her discussion of the Tunisian revolution, Andrea Khalil makes the related, but somewhat more ambitious claim, that all the words spoken by the crowd *as* the people (*ex cathedra*, so to speak) were speech acts that had the power to enact what they declared: "The revolutionary crowd used illocutionary language, or speech acts, to remove the political leader by linguistically claiming political authority for itself. The utterances of the crowd - '*dégage*' and '*al sulta al shaab*' - were speech acts. As they were uttered in unison, they enacted what they said as they were spoken. The words themselves tore down the government as they were shouted by the masses. The fact of saying '*al sulta al shaab*' enacted the reality that the people were now in power, because the government had prohibited exclamation of these words" (Khalil 2014: 56). Her analysis neglects the bodily dimension foregrounded by Butler, and does not dwell on the people as *itself* a performative event.

A2.2 Between the street and the screen

So "the people" of the Arab revolutions, as Abdennacer Aouni recited them into being on the night of 14 January 2011 on avenue Bourguiba, and as I will use the term in this dissertation, is a performance. And, just as importantly for my purposes here, the videos which they produce and post online are *part of that performance – part of that process of constituting themselves as a collective subject, and negotiating exactly what such a form of subjectivity may be and can do. For making and watching images, films, videos, are themselves bodily actions, bodily gestures.*

As Butler puts it:

> *What bodies are doing on the street when they are demonstrating, is linked fundamentally to what communication devices and technologies are doing when they "report" on what is happening in the street. These are different actions, but they both require bodily actions. The one exercise of freedom is linked to the other exercise, which means that both are ways of exercising rights, and that jointly they bring a space of appearance into being and secure its transposability. Although some may wager that the exercise of rights now takes place quite at the expense of bodies on the street, that twitter and other virtual technologies have led to a disembodiment of the public sphere, I disagree. The media requires those bodies on the street to have an event, even as the street requires the media to exist in a global arena. But under conditions when those with cameras or internet capacities are imprisoned or tortured or deported, then the use of the technology effectively implicates the body. Not only must someone's hand tap and send, but someone's body is on the line if that tapping and sending gets traced. In other words, localization is hardly overcome through the use of a media that potentially transmits globally. And if this conjuncture of street and media constitutes a very contemporary version of the public sphere, then bodies on the line have to be thought as both there and here, now and then, transported and stationery, with very different political consequences following from those two modalities of space and time. (Butler 2011 n.p.; cf. Butler 2015 93-94)*

However so distributed - and we will return often in what follows to the question of how bodies in the street and bodies online are both "on the line", yet in different ways and with very different consequences - these images through which the people's energy circulates beyond the immediate space and time of their performance form part

of that performance, and of its wider resonance, however so conceived. And they contribute, not simply to the diffusion of that event, but also to its localisation, to its boundedness.

The people want the fall of the regime! Hama, Syria, 22 July 2011.
youtube.com/watch?v=vy4mwlGDk18

Again, as Butler puts it:

> *When the scene does travel, it is both there and here, and if it were not spanning both locations – indeed, multiple locations – it would not be the scene that it is. Its locality is not denied by the fact that the scene is communicated beyond itself, and so constituted in a global media; it depends on that mediation to take place as the event that it is. This means that the local must be recast outside itself in order to be established as local, and this means that it is only through a certain globalizing media that the local can be established, and that something can really happen there. (Butler 2011: n.p.; cf. Butler 2015: 92; and also 19-20)*

The fact that the "remediation" of the event is not additional to the event, but is part of what constitutes it as the event that it is, is not simply an empirical consequence of the ubiquity of uncontrollable cameras in public spaces in the 21st century. It is implicit in the Arendtian conception of public space as essentially a "space of appearance". What makes my gesture - any gesture - political, is the fact that it is explicitly and deliberately performed for, and before, others.

Butler glosses it in this way:

> *For politics to take place, the body must appear. I appear to others, and they appear to me, which means that some space between us allows each to appear. We are not simply visual phenomena for each other – our voices must be registered,*

and so we must be heard; rather, who we are, bodily, is already a way of being "for" the other, appearing in ways that we cannot see, being a body for another in a way that I cannot be for myself, and so dispossessed, perspectively, by our very sociality. I must appear to others in ways for which I cannot give an account, and in this way my body establishes a perspective that I cannot inhabit. This is an important point because it is not the case that the body only establishes my own perspective; it is also that which displaces that perspective, and makes that displacement into a necessity. This happens most clearly when we think about bodies that act together. No one body establishes the space of appearance, but this action, this performative exercise happens only "between" bodies, in a space that constitutes the gap between my own body and another's. In this way, my body does not act alone, when it acts politically. Indeed, the action emerged from the "between." (Butler 2011: n.p.; cf. Butler 2015: 76-77; and also 103-105)

This space that is "between", this space in which action emerges, encompasses all the "betweens" that are implicated in any given space: not just those between the people who are physically present in that locality, but also the "betweens" that exist between the bodies that are present here, and those that are present elsewhere, and which are linked together by the images and sounds that reverberate between them, through the intermediary (Deleuze would have said, the "intercessor") that is the camera[9].

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9   On the necessary relationship of exteriority to betweenness cf. Jean-Luc Nancy on the role of "spacing": "We would not be "humans" if there were not "dogs" and "stones." A stone is the exteriority of singularity in what would have to be called its mineral or mechanical actuality [*litteralité*]. But I would no longer be a "human" if I did not have this exteriority "in me," in the form of the quasi-minerality of bone: I would no longer be a human if I were not a body, a spacing of all other bodies and a spacing of "me" in "me." A singularity is always a body, and all bodies are singularities (the bodies, their states, their movements, their transformations)." (Nancy 2000: 18) And further on: "The retreat of the political and the religious, or of the theologico-political, means the retreat of every space, form, or screen into which or onto which a figure of community could be projected. At the right time, then, the question has to be posed as to whether being-together can do without a figure and, as a result, without an identification, given that the whole of its "substance" consists only in its spacing" (Nancy 2000: 47, translation corrected). Deleuze borrows the term "intercessor" from the Canadian filmmaker Pierre Perrault (Deleuze 1985: 196). As Deleuze told Claire Parnet in the last installment of the TV series *L'abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze* (1988-89) : "What is essential, is to have intercessors. Creation needs intercessors. Without them, there can be no work. They may be people - for a philosopher, they could be artists or scientists; for a scientist, they could be artists or philosophers - but they could also be things, plants, even animals, like in Castaneda. They may be fictional or real, living or inanimate, but you have to make intercessors." (My translation after French transcript available at lesilencequiparle.unblog.fr/2010/02/23/les-intercesseurs-gilles-deleuze/).

Just as the formal standard Arabic of *"al-Sha'b yurid..."* helped bring into existence revolutions that were specifically Tunisian, Egyptian, Yemeni, Bahraini, Libyan and Syrian, by simultaneously repurposing the lingua franca of the institutional Arab world - the language of bureaucracy, elite literature, and state television - as a point of contact between them, while simultaneously embedding it in dialectal frames that were incommensurable, and sometimes mutually unintelligible, so the images that circulated from one country to another, and beyond them to countries that are other-than-Arab, and to people who may chance on them without having the slightest idea of what is happening in them, or what is being said through them, serve both to open those "local" happenings out onto other spaces and other times, and to confirm them in their concrete, unrepeatable specificity[10].

The people want the fall of the regime! Mahaza Sitra, Bahrain, 21 June 2011. youtube.com/watch?v=v55T9knLqC0

This may sound somewhat abstract. Consider, then, for a moment the way in which the video of Abdennacer Aouini discussed above entwines together different temporalities and different places. We can distinguish, I suggest, at least four different locations in space and/or time within the

event that this video unfolds, which are at once distinct from one another, yet connected:

- the street itself, where the three men evolve, and Aouini recites his praise song for the Tunisian people;

- the appartment above, and the window which gives onto the street, from which the three women can observe what is happening below, without themselves being in turn observed;

- the video that is being made by one of the women, which she is probably monitoring, if not actually watching, on her cameraphone's screen as she makes it, and which she will later upload to the Internet, thus linking the scene to countless, unforeseeable other places and other times; and,

- the conversations which are being conducted by mobile phone in the appartment, one of which at one point plays an important role in the video, while the others are played out more indistinctly in the background, and which link the scene to other places and people around the city, or across the country, or even abroad - people who are then able to imagine the scene, elsewhere yet simultaneously, through the narration that is being given of it.

In addition, we know from the alternate take discussed in the previous chapter, that Aouini's performance was also filmed by his friend below. And through this second video, we also know that at one point Aouini interrupted his recitation long enough to conduct a non-trivial phone conversation with a friend of his own (!). Both these last two connections are present within the block of space-time which the video I have discussed records, though they are not directly perceptible within that video itself.

This scene is thus connected in a number of overlapping ways to countless other spaces and other scenes elsewhere, before we even begin to try and count the ways in which it will later be remediated and recirculated after it has been distributed online. What happens in the street is observed from the appartment above in real time. It is also commented in real time by mobile phone to at least two (and possibly more) other points in space. And then, there is the video recording being made, which not only reconfigures the event differently for the person making it as they film, but also projects the event forward in time, towards those who will potentially watch it later, when it is circulated either locally, by hand (so to speak - but also literally) as the phone it was recorded on is passed around, or by MMS, or by being uploaded - as was in fact the case - to the Internet, and eventually - though this may

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10   On the need for methods of data analysis which take into account social media's refusal to comply with existing analytical categories or geo-political boundaries, see the important work of Leila Shereen Sakr (VJ Um Amel) on the R-Shief living data repository. On the role of the distant observer as primary: "R-Shief aggregates these local and regional missives to create a broad and expansive living archive. This archive produced in local situations fosters a global transnational conversation as it is read, reposted, circulated, discussed, refuted, contested, and expanded by people across many regions. These geographically dispersed interlocutors are as integral to the discourse as are those who are embedded in local situations" (Sakr 2014: 258). Sakr's analysis is also closely attentive to the bodily nature of social media: "I argue that it is the actual material bodies that are writing the information patterns we read on social media (...) virtuality itself is a friction point between material bodies in political operation and information patterns" (Sakr 2015: 2-3). For an interestingly convergent account of the way in which social media functioned within the Iranian Green Movement to co-create "a sensing, breathing, collective body, part flesh, part data, connected across the globe" which was also experienced as "a communal sensorium", see Mottahedeh 2015 passim, and in particular 8, 17.

not have been foreseeable at the time - being picked up by satellite TV channels. The further away these secondary scenes move from the original scene, the more diverse, and the less predictable, these connections and their consequences become.

The different threads that connect this single "event" to so many different places and times are thus uncountably complex. But when we are watching this video, what is most striking about them is the way that they are deftly and intricately *woven back into the scene itself*, as it plays out before us, in such a way, indeed, that if we remove any one of them, the scene as we know it from this video would begin to erode and collapse. The different kinds of "betweenness" that these relationships enact are crucial in particular to the affective resonance that the scene develops as it unfolds. The viewer of the video feels the different ways in which filming this scene, or narrating it to those who are present, or over a mobile phone, alter and extend its emotional texture for the women who are watching it - how these "mediating" gestures contribute to the build-up of tension that finally explodes in the present of the pro-filmic as the ululations that suddenly make these women a part of what they had hitherto "merely" observed. Without these betweennesses - without the spaces to which Butler refers, in which action (and thus emotion) can emerge - there is, in the final analysis, no event to move us, or those who were present to it. In other words - and while this video is exceptional, it is also in this sense indicative of a larger tendency - what might too easily be dismissed as the "remediation" of an "original" event is *not* an operation supplemental to the event, but is *integral to the texture and dramatic structure of the event itself*.

One of the remarkable things, then, about the videos in the vernacular anarchive is that, far from being raw documents of original events which, by the time we see the video, have definitively receded into an irretrievable past, they are - explicitly or implicitly - complex constellations of time and space, in which the place and time at which the video was made is only one of the places and times that go to constitute it as what it is. In other words, like the self-constitution of the people, the events which *are* these videos, are not a single moment in time, of which we who were not there are condemned to know only its ghostly, partial, and imperfect reflection, but complex open-ended series of actions and decisions, including our own decision to watch this video. And it is this distributed structure of the video-event - at once there and here, in the past and in the present, singular (in the act of its making and its unique dynamic form) and plural (in its origins and its consequences, its audiences and its transformations) - that makes it not an inert object, but a *distributor of energy*.

The people as performance is therefore always dependent on the specific place and time of its production in public space, and on the particular character of the individual consciousnesses that are present there and in which it reverberates. But it is also at least partly configured by all the *other* times and places that are invoked around it, if only by those multiple moments and spaces in which we and others like us will come to watch it on a screen. The present that is recorded, then, is always a present whose resonance is augmented and expanded by technology. And the people that is thus performed is therefore not simply present to itself, in however complex a way, but is always already redistributed through time and space. As Judith Butler puts it, the people are *dispersed* by the media - including *their* media - even as those media are part of the means through which they gather (Butler 2015: 167). This dispersal or redistribution is not an afterthought or an add-on. And it operates even in the absence of every camera and every telephone. That is, it is not a function of contemporary media technologies, so much as a consequence of the fact that we live at least one important part of our lives in the open, in public, and for others.

"For the fall of the regime… and of the opposition. For the fall of the Arab nation, the Islamic nation, the security council, the whole world. For the fall of everything." The people of Kafr Nabl, Idlib governorate, Syria, 14 October 2011.

By deciding to be part of "the people", by choosing to appear in public, with and before others, I commit myself both to the concrete, finite limitations of my own perspective, and to an existence beyond my consciousness and control, opened for me by the perspectives of others, and open on to possibilities that I can neither predict nor preempt. These possibilities are determined partly by the perspectives of those who are there around me, whom I can reach out and touch, and partly by the perspectives of those who are elsewhere, and whom I may never meet, but who may still be touched through the part of me that reaches out to them through these sounds and images.

A3. Seeing as the people

Whether such zones are condemned to be suppressed militarily really
does not matter. What matters, each time, is to preserve a sure escape route.
And then re-aggregate.
Elsewhere.
Later.

     (Tiqqun 2001: 13)

A3.1 The kinesthetic image

Watching the videos that fill the vernacular anarchive, one is struck again and again by this ambiguous and ambivalent quality of the people's presence, as described above in chapter A1. Everywhere invoked, everywhere felt, they yet fail to cohere, coalesce and stabilise into a single, intelligible *image*.

This is partly an effect of the quality of those images themselves - their pixellated, chaotic, carnivalesque mobility, that is constantly undoing their attempts to represent or "capture" the reality (or perhaps, more accurately, the emotion, the sensation, the affect) they are chasing after - and partly an effect of their very proliferation. No sooner do we seem to grasp an image of "the people" assembled in a single space and time - something along the lines of those famous top-shots of Tahrir Square that served as the visual backdrop for the predominantly verbal-discursive revolutions presented by Al-Jazeera and other TV channels - than they are off again, springing up to left and right, occupying a hundred squares, or a thousand, rather than one; marching down a myriad streets, not just one main boulevard; chanting scores of contradictory, contrapuntal, slogans; constantly dispersing in front of us only to reform just round the next corner; always on the verge of visibility, but somehow never quite within our sight.

Nor is this problem restricted to the collective. The same ambivalence and instability afflicts the individual. While there are some videos in which the camera manages to focus on one specific person, and what they are doing or saying, for long enough for them to emerge before us in their particularity and individual density, in most of the videos we encounter only glimpses, shards or fragments of human singularity, which somehow fail to add up to what we might conventionally expect to meet when we meet a "person". It is as if, in the intensity of the revolutionary event, the individual had been temporarily dissolved or disbanded in order to throw herself into the movement, while that movement is in turn constantly emerging from the individuals it traverses only to dissolve back again immediately into some simpler, more molecular sub-collective form of agitation. In these videos, then, we seem to be faced with a plurality that is held in tension between two poles neither of which is able to subsume it -- between "the people", on the one hand, and "the individual", on the other.

But that is not to say that these videos are not rooted in anything. On the contrary: however much their attempts to represent either a political event or an individual expression may seem to be undermined on all sides, each

and every one of them inscribes a singularity that, once noticed, is ineliminable and unforgettable. This is the singularity of the human body that is holding the camera[1].

For in all these videos - or at least, in (almost) all the ones I will be discussing - there is always a flesh-and-blood person holding the camera that is filming. And, as a general rule, the filmer does nothing to conceal or eliminate the signs not only of her presence, but also of her physical and emotional involvement in the event the camera is documenting. If all the videos that make up the vernacular anarchive share one thing, it is the unignorable fact that the camera they are made by is supported by a singular human body, and that that human body does not stand outside the action (except in a most literal, and always provisional, way), but is filming, morally if not physically, from *within it*.

As Ulrike Lune Riboni has argued, these videos are made by people who are essentially *participants* in the events they are recording (Riboni 2016). And the ways in which they handle their cameras are, in general, of a piece with the way in which the people around them handle themselves, too. If they run, the filmer runs. If they duck down to avoid a sniper's bullets, the filmer ducks down too. If they are elated, or terrified, or angry, or amused, then the filmer, like any other person present, shares in that emotion to some greater or lesser extent.

The state of the camera is thus *mimetically* bound up with the situation in which the filmer finds herself, and with the states of the people around her - not as a straightforward one-for-one mirroring or involuntary replication, but as a bodily response to their movements, a resonant corporeal dialogue with their emotions and affections, a mutual and creative exchange of properties (MacDougall 2006: 26-28; cf Johnstone 1999: 232-3)[2]. And in the film she makes,

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1   I am grateful to Mark Westmoreland for his insistence on this point in a number of conversations and exchanges between us that began during the EUME Summer School at the American University in Cairo in September 2012, and that continue to the present day. See also Westmoreland 2015: 8, on "the way the camera lens radically situates the body of the filmmaker in relation to the ethnographic encounter".

2   I understand "mimesis" here not only in a sense close to that of Michael Taussig (1993), but more importantly, in line with William Mazzarella's interpretation of Canetti's concept of "transformation" as a form of imitation that enables and is enabled by a self-reflexive distance from both oneself and others: "Humans, Canetti argues, share their mimetic ability with other animals. But, unlike the others, humans imitate self-reflexively. Human imitation is thus, in a crucial sense, *mediate* in that it involves self-consciousness and self-distance as well as an exquisite, fully sensory attunement to the other. Canetti thus locates the kind of critical distance that is usually contrasted with mimetic merger right at the heart of human mimesis (...). Situated at once within and without the mimetic act, human beings make it transformative and creative. Its particular enjoyment and immanent potential arises out of the interplay between sensuous reflex and conscious reflection (...). Canetti takes us a

these states of emotion, and the actions which bear them, are present twice over. They are there in the visual and aural information that we can see and hear *in* the video, and which represents a world in some sense separate from the filmer - which shows us how *others* are moving and being moved. But they are also there in the haptic (tactile-kinesthetic) properties of the moving images she makes, which are often (though not always) the result of a direct physical connection between the camera that is recording, and the filmer's living body[3].

Through this physical contiguity, which is also a form of bodily intimacy, the resulting video takes on an almost seismographic quality. The immediate causal relationship between the hand that holds the camera, the way the camera moves, and the way these movements are translated into the images we see played back, encourages us to read everything which is *not* motivated by the event that the video seeks to represent, as an indexical registration of the filmer's physical, mental, emotional and/or nervous state at the time the shot was taken. They become what Riboni terms, in an interesting coinage, "bodymages" (Riboni 2016).

A famous passage in Chris Marker's *Le fond de l'air est rouge* (1977), his retrospective compendium film that sought to sum up a decade of left-wing struggle around the world, offers an intepretation of such imagery which refuses more mystical or metaphysical intepretations in favour of straightforward empirical-subjective explanation: "If the images shake, it's because the hand of the cameraman was shaking"[4]. Even if we agree with this interpretation of such moments, however, the link between the camera's agitation and the filmer's emotion is far from simple and straightforward. We cannot *directly* perceive in the quality of the camera's shakiness anything like "how it felt to be there", or even "how this particular person who was there felt". The images that we receive

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long way from classic crowd theory's zero-sum drama of mimesis versus reason; in his vision, mimesis is creative and liberatory because of, rather than in spite of, its natural conditioning" (Mazzarella 2010: 719-720; cf Canetti 1973). This should be contrasted with more reductive interpretations of Taussig that have coloured the way in which the term "mimesis" has been deployed by documentary film theorists following Gaines 1999. For valuable correctives from two very different perspectives, see Rancière 2008 (especially 56ff.) and Razsa 2014.

3   Following Mark Paterson and JJ Gibson, the "haptic" can be seen to include not only the cutaneous sense of touch, but also "a range of internally felt bodily states which functions as part of a larger haptic perceptual system" (Paterson 2009: 769, referring to Gibson 1966). These include kinaesthesia (the sense of movement), proprioception (the sense of bodily position), and the vestibular system (the sense of balance). My understanding of the role of the somatic senses in human life is informed in particular by the work of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (e.g. Sheets-Johnstone 2013). In this dissertation, I refer to these perceptual sequences as "tactile-kinesthetic", and reserve the term "haptic" for the "haptic visuality" elaborated by Laura Marks (Marks 2000: 127-193, and Marks 2002) - that is, for a form of imagery that appeals to our somatic senses in part by frustrating our desire for representations of an optically legible world located at a safe distance from the viewer. Marks's work is anticipated by Bonitzer 1999/1982, who was in turn drawing on Deleuze 1981 (see also Barker 2009), as well as by much of the history of experimental cinema for which the refusal of the kinds of distance and disembodiment implicit in perspectival representation has always been crucial (see for example the numerous references to the tactile, the kinetic and the epidermal in Le Grice 2001: 73, 78, 107, and 144 e.g.). The importance of the haptic is closely related to the digital *glitch*, on which see Menkman 2011. For a discussion of the role of the haptic in elite new media art practices, see Hansen 2004. For a longer historical perspective which locates a haptic regime of vision as the earliest of four scopic regimes, extending from the pre-Socratics to Ptolemy of Alexandria, and subsisting in various forms beneath and within the regimes that succeeded it, see Illich 2001. Somewhat surprisingly, Marks 2014 denies the relevance of haptic visuality to elaborating a deeper understanding of the mobile phone videos that emerged from the Aab revolutions. On the neglected topic of haptic aurality, see Coulthard 2013 and Kara and Thain 2014, which discuss how the rise of theatrical surround sound (Dolby Digital) has produced a "new sensory cinema [that] communicates sensations of physical, bodily life through an intensification of its sounds" (Coulthard 2013: 118). The YouTube videos discussed here could be seen as approaching this intensity through a radical (and involuntary) impoverishment of their material, rather like the sounds from the in-built GoPro microphones that provide the basis for the soundtrack of Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel's *Leviathan* (2012) (discussed in detail by Kara and Thain). The special proximity between sound on the one hand, and touch and/or the somatic senses on the other, is a commonplace, both experientially and neurologically (e.g. Deleuze 1985: 307; Deshays 2010: 15-16). For a distinctive approach to this question, see Quinlivan 2012.

4   The allusion is to a celebrated sequence that edits together a series of shots from May 1968 in Paris, the Soviet invasion of Prague, and Santiago, Chile. The standard interpretation of this passage is as a refusal (or disavowal) on the part of Marker of any form of special (magical, revelatory) attunement between the camera and world history. As Cyril Béghin puts it, "the question is inserted between shots, in large white letters, and at first it seems to be leading us towards the mystery of an affective capacity specific to images themselves: as if they trembled with a kind of foreknowledge, faced with the imminence of an essential event. But before long, the question has been answered in such a way as to reduce this sudden ontological inflation to a technical matter - if the images shake, it is simply because the hand that held the camera was shaking" (Béghin 2002: 159, my translation). And this interpretation is adopted by Riboni in her own interpretation of the videos from the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions she has studied: "If the shot shakes, it's because a body is shaking. When the camera seems to fall down, it's a body that has collapsed" (Riboni 2016). Béghin, however, is well aware of the characteristically ambivalent nature of Marker's gambit here - his sly delight in having his cake, while denying that "cake" even exists: "Editing together the fable of a man who trembles beside these trembling images does nothing, however, to reduce the initial effect they have had on me, the viewer, to neutralise the original mystery which they created by themselves, alone. The trembling man trembles precisely because something in him has been pushed out of balance; and these images shake for the same reason, while the fable only pretends to rationalise them" (Béghin 2002: 160, my translation). A more straightforward refusal of Marker's attempt to reduce the political to the personal can be found in Nora Alter's reading of this passage. For Alter, the "quivering" of the images is not just an accident but a "technique" which Marker uses when he wants to signal the presence of contradictions in the political situation being filmed, and which would not be apparent from a superficial reading of the image. The image shakes, therefore, only when Marker the editor wants to discourage us from projecting onto it a simplistic and triumphalist reading of the march of the international Left: "The agitated hand holding the camera, the commentary explains, unconsciously indicates that something is not right. "You never know what you may be filming." The optical unconscious of the camera lens thus captures and communicates the political unconscious of a population or movement" (Alter 2006: 71). As Dork Zabunyan puts it, citing Marker's film to illuminate what is at stake in the insurrectionary videos from the vernacular anarchive of the Arab revolutions, these "fragile hands (...) function *as an intermediary between* a feverish, endangered body, and a tormented period of history" (Zabunyan 2013: 53, my translation and emphasis).

are the result of an unplanned convergence of disparate intentions and affordances. They are recorded by the filmer intentionally, but in part, and often largely, outwith her conscious control. And the combination of the intentional, the unconscious, the machinic and the aleatory stands in the way of any confidence in our ability to reduce them to a direct psychological or physiological transcript[5]. By their very nature, they are complex documents, and often deeply ambiguous. At best, we need to learn the particular dialect they speak. At worst, we need to learn to live with the forms of opacity and contradiction they generate, and which are irreducible to any rational or pragmatic interpretation.

This ambiguity can be traced in part to the way these videos tend to embody a constitutive tension on two different levels simultaneously:

- Firstly, there is a tension between, on the one hand, the attitude and emotion of the filmer, registered in part through the tactile-kinesthetic dimension of the images, but also through other traces of the intimacy between filmer and camera (such as spoken commentary intended only for the viewer-who-is-yet-to-come, or the sounds and noises made by the filmer's own body, as well as, less directly, certain quasi-instinctual aspects of the choices made, such as where to point the camera, how quickly to move (with) it, etc.); and, on the other hand, the attitudes and emotions of the people around her who figure in her images, and whose state may not be at all points identical with her own state (just as that collective may itself be composed of a plurality of discordant or disjunctive perspectives, rather than constituting a single unanimous point of view). Of course, one may suppose that, in the great majority of cases, it is the sensation of participating in a *shared* emotional state that motivates, beyond any documentary impulse, the decision to film now and here, and in this way. But then again, this "sensation"

may in some cases be less a response to an affective state that is already circulating, and more a *desire* to bring about the experience it anticipates - including through the act of filming itself.

- Secondly, there is the tension between, on the one hand, our desire to read some or all of the tactile-kinesthetic properties of the images, and in particular what we might call their "haptic shadings" - the movements, shakes, blurs, defocussings, and mis-scalings that disfigure the image's "attempt" at photo-realistic representation - as straightforwardly transparent not only to the gestures and behaviour of the filmer, but also to her physical, mental and emotional state of being in that moment; and, on the other hand, our awareness that, beyond any contingent difficulties of establishing a reliable correspondance between identifiable features of the image and the behaviour of the body behind it, the actual role performed by *the camera* in relation both to the material situation in which it finds itself, and to the subjective experience of the camera user, remains to a significant extent, uninterpretable and opaque.

From the point of view of the sociologist of social movements, or the political theorist of revolution, or the scholar of "the Arab world", who may wish to extract information or "data" from these videos, who hopes to interpret them "correctly", or even exhaustively, such forms of complexity and opacity are at best an irritating obstacle, at worst an intolerable moral hazard. This may help explain why so much of the academic work that has been done on these videos to date deals with them mainly at the aggregate or statistical level, and avoids as far as possible any detailed analysis of their content, let alone their form (for notable exceptions, see the works by Zabunyan, Riboni and Boëx listed in the bibliography). But from the point of view that I adopt here, these complexities and obscurities are not an obstacle to thinking; they are the very *matter* through which the dialectics of form and content are played out. And so they are precisely that which needs to be thought through, if we are to take the full measure of these videos' implications for the politics of our present.

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5   The most obvious, and violent, disjunction we encounter is the fact that our vestibular system is operational on one side of the recording-projection assemblage only. While in everyday life, running down a street does *not* lead to sea-sickness, watching a film made in the same circumstances often will, because absent the perceptual system operations which "smooth out" our everyday perceptions in line with our prior conception of how our body *should* and (in the standard case) does move through space, we are confronted with a series of abrupt discontinuities on an image-by-image basis which we have no way to knit back together again. The physiological-kinesthetic violence of watching, say, Jonas Mekas' *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* (1972), or Jonathan Nossiter's *Mondovino* (2004), or Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves* (1996), or many of the YouTube videos considered in this dissertation, is in itself proof of the fact that we experience the world in which we live not so much through our real empirical body, as through a virtual body which we project into it, and which presents the world to us as (among other things) relatively continuous and relatively coherent (see Barker 2009, drawing on Merleau-Ponty among others).

A3.2 Filming like a boss

To explore some of the claims I have made about embodiment, subjectivity and plastic form more closely, let us consider a video that is as simple as it is striking; a video in which the content seems to so far dominate or

Tear gas cannister ricocheting off the ground just before it finally detonates.
Diraz, Bahrain, 14 February 2011

command the form, that there should be almost nothing to say about that form *as* form.

On 14 February 2011, thousands of people gathered at different points throughout the kingdom of Bahrain in response to calls for a "Day of Rage", inspired by the recent revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. (The date was also chosen to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the publication of the National Action Charter, a blueprint for change issued by Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa shortly after he took power, and whose promises of constitutional reform and economic participation were rapidly reneged upon: see Jones 2011, Errazzouki 2014.) In the village of Diraz (whose Wikipedia entry remains limited to a list of the village's most famous mosques and *matams*, despite the important role it has played in the ongoing contestation of the regime over the last four years), around 100 people gathered at a traffic intersection, where they were soon dispersed by police firing tear gas. This video shows us the moment at around 2.30pm that afternoon when the police arrive to remove the demonstrators, and their response as almost all of them - including the camera person - flee in panic[6].

Of course, on one level, this video seems almost too simple to require comment. When it starts, the camera is framing the demonstrators frontally as they wave banners and chant slogans, panning roughly back and forward as if to make sure that the full extent of the crowd has been recorded, even though its wide shot is not wide enough to allow the framing of the entire group from a single angle. Then, for no immediately audible or visible reason, the camera makes a long pan that stretches all the way round to the left, and on the other side of the space that is thus opened up - the green expanse of grass at the centre of a roundabout - we can see in the distance a low, black line that is at once somewhat difficult to read, and yet immediately recognisable as "the police".

As the voices of the crowd suddenly grow together into a single confused cry of anger and alarm, and as cars continue to navigate around the intersection apparently unconcerned, we gradually become aware that the police have begun to move - that is, to run - towards the crowd - that is, towards us. At the same time, the camera person is walking to the left, and while, in fact, I understand that she is distancing herself from the demonstration - or at least, from what the beginning of the video suggested was most

or all of the demonstration - to begin with, at least, it feels as though she is moving into, not away from, the police's line of advance.

The police split into two groups, and as one peels off towards the left (where possibly another group of demonstators were gathered?), the other heads directly for the camera. As if finally understanding what is happening, the camera person begins to retreat, moving quite slowly and continuing to film. And as she does so, the police open fire, aiming their tear gas cannisters at the tarmac in front of the filmer, and to her right, where the demonstrators stand[7]. We see the plumes of white smoke that are released, and sometimes we catch a glimpse of a cannister as it ricochets and spins along the surface of the ground. But mostly, we *hear* the detonations. The police fire (by my count) 23 rounds in just over ten seconds. People begin to scream. The camera person continues to track backwards, and her pace increases, but the camera itself remains focused on the police as they begin to fill the roadway, even as the frame starts to rock uncontrollably from side to side. Soon, the filmer is running backwards: but she continues to film *forwards*. In the admiring words of one commenter on the English-language YouTube re-up of this video:

raphion88   4 years ago
That dude is managing to run away and still film the police LIKE A FUCKING BOSS.

A flock of birds traverses the blue sky, as if put up by the sound of the attack. Then there is a momentary lull, and we can see that the demonstration has been reduced to a solitary figure who remains standing there, undaunted and completely alone, waving the Bahraini flag. The filmer, however, continues to run on. Her camera makes a full 360-degree circular pan, and as it does, we can see how other demonstrators are running too, beside her, or just behind, or just ahead. We catch a glimpse of the narrow shopping street she is running into. And when the camera finally comes back to its original angle, we can see how

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6   For general background on the "aborted revolution" (Ulrichsen 2012) in Bahrain, in addition to Jones 2011 and Errazzouki 2014, see also Al-Shehabi 2012, Al-Khawaja 2013 and Shehabi and Jones 2015. For a striking visualisation of the casualties during the first two years of the uprising, go to bahrainvisualized.com.

7   In an August 2012 report, Physicians for Human Rights described the massive (and often lethal) use of tear gas by the Bahraini authorities during the first 15 months of the uprising as "unprecedented in the 100-year history of tear gas use against civilians throughout the world" (Physicians for Human Rights 2012). During the first 15 months of the uprising, tear gas was by far the principal cause of death, accounting for 40% of all fatalities (see bahrainvisualized.com). Concerns extend beyond immediate casualties to the long-term health consequences for residents of villages that have been systematically blanketed with tear gas (both CS and CR) night after night in what appears to have been a deliberate and systematic attempt to drive a wedge between those who had joined the protests and those who had not (Carlstrom 2012). For the history of a weapon that is, in the words of one early proponent, "admirably suited to the purpose of isolating the individual from the mob spirit", see Feigenbaum 2014.

the police continue to run after them, even if they have temporarily stopped firing.

The path of the filmer takes her into a sort of deep urban gulley, dominated by the shade cast by a tall building to the right of the main axis. As she continues, the video descends into even greater confusion. A few more tear gas rounds are fired; a woman screams; the camera, no longer able to maintain the horizontal, picks up random, oblique fragments of the cars it passes, of tarmac, buildings, sky. We hear glass being smashed; cars start to honk their horns - whether in solidarity, or in warning, or in alarm, it is not clear. The filmer runs on a little further. When she turns back to look again, what is happening behind her is also far from clear. Another car sounds its horn, almost right beside her. And the more the camera stares into the distance, the less we are able to make out in the density of the street's shadows the forms of the police (though if we pause the image we can see that they are there, and are continuing to give chase).

And then, right there, in the midst of her flight, in this moment of false calm, as the camera continues to shake and the filmer continues to run on, the video, abruptly, and for no particular reason, stops.

A3.3 Subjectivity as interruption

On the face of it, this video is totally transparent to its occasion. A person is filming a small demonstration. The police arrive to violently disperse the demonstrators, and that violence and the ensuing dispersion are registered straightforwardly. That is, form appears to follow content, and anything that is 'unusual' in terms of the final video can be motivated (explained) in terms of what we can infer was happening while it was being filmed.

Thus the video starts with relatively stable images of the collective of which the filmer is a part, even as she stands back just far enough to almost fit it within her frame. After the police charge begins, these stable, legible images are replaced with the chaotic fragments produced by the camera of a person who has taken to their heels and is being chased down the street, apparently alone, and who is no longer paying much, or perhaps any, attention to what is caught within the frame. And while the filmer is not in fact the only person being chased down that street, once they have begun to flee, the other protesters more or less disappear from view, at least as anything resembling a collective. When we see them again, it is as scattered, isolated individuals, generally plunged into shadow by the

high-contrast lighting, who loom into the camera's visual field for a few seconds only to disappear again.

So on one level, this video records the breaking up of a collective, and its reduction to single bodies, each of which then runs for its own life. And the "proof" of this description is in the way that the filmer herself ends up at the end - alone, isolated, and still searching for a safe refuge that seems to be nowhere in sight. Meanwhile, the "instrument" which effects this breaking up - the police - is figured in the video not as a collective like the demonstrators - who are shown at the outset as a relatively complex yet still legible structure in which individual, personal differences are to some degree preserved - but as a single plasma-like mass, whose component parts are not only identical, but struggle to separate themselves out long enough to be seen as independent of the whole, and that is thus capable of moving and morphing without ever losing its unity and continuity.

However, to read the video in this way is already to "stabilize" it[8]. What is most remarkable about this video is not the way in which form mimics content - or better, represents content to and for us - so much as those points at which form and content can in fact be seen to part company, to the point that they appear to be operating almost independently of one another.

Consider, for instance, the way in which the sound track does or does not coincide with what we see in the image. In this respect, we can distinguish three distinct phases in this short video:

- In the first phase - 0:00 to 0:23[9] - the sound is entirely generated from within the space of the image. We see the demonstration, and we also *hear* the demonstration: the chants, the whistling, the general brouhaha of a lively assembly out to contest something or someone.

- In the second phase - 0:23 to 0:42, roughly - the sound is first of all entirely "off": we continue to hear the protesters, tho now somewhat muffled (because off axis), while we turn to look across the roundabout towards the police. And as the police begin to move towards the demonstration, we still don't hear them:

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8   Just as using a single still image to isolate what in the context of the video itself is hardly an image, but more like one sliver of imagery extracted from a rapid, chaotic concatenation of visual effects, would only further contribute to this artificial immobilisation. Whence the use of image-sequences as illustrations wherever possible throughout this dissertation.

9   All timings given in the text refer to positions within the video concerned, given in minutes and seconds (mm:ss) starting from 00:00.

instead, they appear to advance noiselessly even as they begin to run. It is only when they open fire that we finally hear a sound which is once again related to what we are seeing, and to the police who are now the main actor within the frame. It is as if the police have no recognisably "human" noises associated with them, however close they come to us - no voices, no footsteps. Instead, the only sound through which they are present in this video is the sound of their weapons.

- In the third phase - 0:42 until the end - something rather different happens. For instead of the soundtrack being dominated either by the sound from within the image, or by that coming from the dramaturgical *hors-champ*, the main sonic continuity is provided by the low bass rumble generated by the friction of air against the microphone as the filmer runs, and runs. This "wind noise" (which does not resemble any noise the wind usually makes to human ears, which is itself an experience specific, if not to video, then to the audio(visual) technologies that not only record it, but also produce it) dominates the last half of the video, but it does not dominate it completely. Instead it is regularly punctuated (punctured) by specific dramatic noises relating to the continuing action - the crowd screaming, the footsteps of the filmer as she negotiates a pile of debris in the street, the sound of glass breaking, a woman's cry, a car horn. In general, we do not see the sources of these sounds, at least not at the same time as we hear them. Yet they serve to create a kind of rhythm in this second half of the film that without them would be almost entirely lacking.

In this last section, the image track descends into a kind of chaos. But to associate that chaos with the isolation of an "individual" seems to me to be at best a partial interpretation. True, occasionally an individual figure looms into the field of the camera's vision, only to disappear again. But it is not easy to use this surfeit of tactile-kinesthetic "information" - noises produced by friction/collision, noises that evocatively reference all-too-tangible events (breaking glass, shards of debris being trodden underfoot), the wild jerky movement of the camera itself, and even the blocky haptic play of pixels that generates strange tonal modulations in the blue blue sky - to build up any sense of an identifiable individual human being *behind* the camera, even if we think of the individual who is filming as, above all, a body.

Consider the question of how the camera moves through space. On the one hand, we know that the camera is carried by the filmer, and that the filmer is running. Yet although the filmer is moving more or less continuously from 0:30 onwards, we only *hear* her moving at three points in the

video: around 0:55, around 1:05, and again more faintly at 1:15, and each time for a few seconds only. Each time the sound of what I take to be the filmer's footsteps emerges briefly from the surrounding chaos of the sound track, only to disappear into it again.

The effect of this intermittence is curious. Because the sound of footsteps occupies so little time out of the whole sequence, I would suggest we tend to hear the passages where there are no footsteps, not as if the footsteps were still there but drowned out by the other noises, but rather as if the footsteps themselves had *ceased to exist*. The body of the filmer, rather than an insistent presence throughout the video, is noticeable instead by its extended "absences". It is as if the filmer were struggling not only to avoid being beaten and/or arrested by the cops, but also simply to exist as a biological individual with her own pair of feet, her own independent means of locomotion. Instead, she seems to be carried along by a violent wave of movement that compresses and crushes not only herself, but also the other demonstrators around her. Reduced to particles propelled by this jagged, chaotic flux (due perhaps to the combination of rapid camera movement with a fast shutter speed?), they surface only briefly and intermittently, and then not as themselves, but as rough-edged fragments of what a human being might have been, or might still be.

The other sounds that punctuate the second half of the video function, I would argue, in an analogous way: that is, precisely to *interrupt* any sense we might have of the continuous identity of anything - cars, glass bottles, demonstrations, or persons, both collectively and individually. Indeed, if anyone has a body that is continuous and persistent in this video, it is not the filmer herself, but her camera; and not the camera lens, so much, as the microphone that is part and parcel of this audiovisual equipment. For it is the continuous if fluctuating wind noise produced by the motion of the camera(phone?) through space that provides the nearest thing we have in these last 40 seconds to a consistent and coherent sensory continuum.

So while there is a minimal sense of continuity, both visual and aural, running the whole length of this video, by virtue of its nature as a single unedited shot, the way in which both the sound and image tracks reduce the world around them to a kind of violently irregular tesselation of time and space tends to undermine our sense that this continuity might be grounded in anything as coherent and clearly delimited as a single, persisting, human body. When we look at these images for the kinesthetic cues they contain, these cues refer us back not so much to the singularity of the filmer's experience, the uniqueness of her perspective, even in its unconscious and embodied dimensions, as

to the difficulty of holding a body - any body - together, when it is constantly being invaded, not only by the blunt instrument that is the police, but also by the sharp-edged shards and splinters of all the other bodies - human, and other-than-human - that have been set into motion round about it.

A3.4 Together with others

In this brief video from Bahrain, then, we can begin to see how in even the apparently simplest videos, the aesthetic properties may contribute decisively to the elaboration of a *politics* - how the form of the video can articulate a political discourse that is as, or more, fundamental than its content.

On one level, of course, the video refers to the violent dispersal of *this* particular demonstration that took place on 14 February 2011 in Diraz by the police, in which we see a provisional collective reduced to its constituent members, who once again find themselves alone before the discretionary projection of power of the security forces. And such a reading is not only relevant and important, but doubtless points us towards part of what those who were present that day may have experienced, including the filmer of the video.

However, when we look more closely at how these images and sounds work, we can see that on another level, the chaos that engulfs them in the second half of the video does not necessarily produce the camera person as an isolated individual, as the narrative outlined above would lead us to expect. Rather, it projects her into a movement in which the point of view of the video, in its very abstraction and illegibility - the haptic overload, so to speak, generated by and through a strategy of tactile-kinesthetic excess (what Deleuze, in his essay on the paintings of Francis Bacon, called - appropriately enough in the context of hand-held video - "the violent insubordination of the hand": Deleuze 1981: 99, cited in Bonitzer 1999/1982: 28) - is marked not simply as one point of view among many, but as *porous to the plurality of the world that surrounds it* - including to the part of that plurality that might be experienced (and quite rightly so) as violence.

What we see and hear in the second part of the video, then, is *not* what it felt like for the filmer to be "there", in some clearly defined and identifable place, so much as what it might feel like to find one's self - if one had a "self" - reduced to a fragment spinning in a vortex of fragments, one's body broken up and interrupted, its surviving

elements provisionally figured as just one or more parts among many other parts. The difference between the experience produced by the video, and the experience we may suppose was that of the person who made it, is marked perhaps most obviously by the way in which a large part of the video is shot *looking backwards while running forwards* - a perspective that is totally foreign to the practical morphology of the human body. For while we can easily imagine *how* this point of view may have been obtained in the video, we cannot easily imagine how we could have had the experience it proposes, or anything closely analogous to it, without the intervention of the foreign body that is the camera.

In short, the tactile-kinesthetic dimension of this imagery and its haptic overflow introduce us to a realm in which representation and reference are displaced and disfigured. In this space, conventional objectification of the world - including of the subject position of the filmer - is no longer able to function univocally, but is instead contested from within the video by the production of a series of non-coincident non-Cartesian/non-Euclidean spaces, which invite other readings and other narratives.

We could see this space (or spaces) as intrinsically infra-subjective, and thus recalcitrant as much to the collective as to the individual. Or we could see it as instead exposing one aspect of the grounds of that "betweenness" that Butler identifies as the space in which political action emerges; as an insight into a form of plurality - an "anarchist interval", perhaps (Butler 2015: 163) - that precedes and makes possible any recognisably political form of collective organisation, and any recognisably subjective form of individual experience. By refering us back to a space that cannot be mastered by vision, but which we must *feel* our way through (through touch, through movement, and through the somatic senses of proprioception, kinesthesia and the vestibular system, that provide us with our fundamental infra-subjective sense of location and orientiation in the world), such moments confront us not with a kind of extreme isolation, so much as with the raw material out of which other forms of togetherness - other than those imposed by the administration of bare life - can be built.

In developing her concept of haptic visuality in film, Laura Marks has described how haptic imagery "does not reinforce the position of the individual viewer as figuration does", but instead invites the viewer "to take part in a dispersed subjectivity". In this way, it facilitates the emergence of a self that is no longer the fundamentally isolated self of the optical regime of modernity, but "a self that is deeply interconnected with others" (Marks 2002: 6, 97, 109). And Bodil Marie Stavening Thomsen has similarly argued
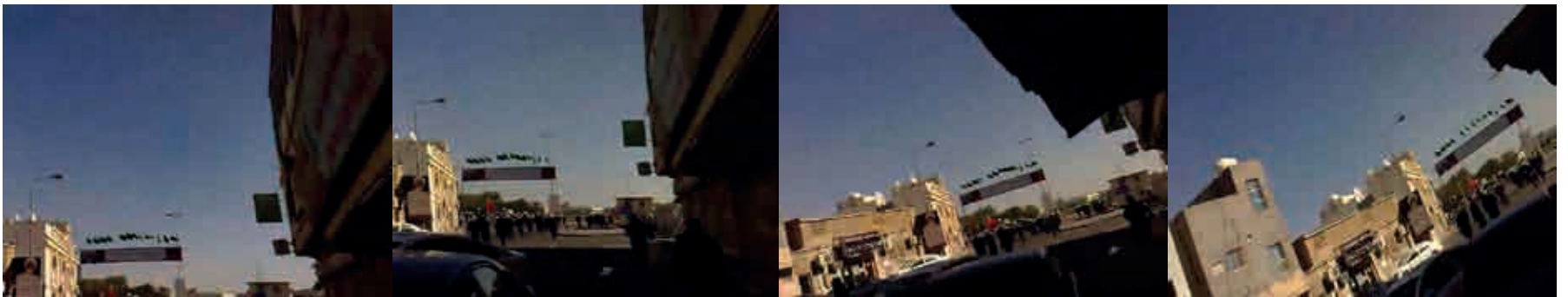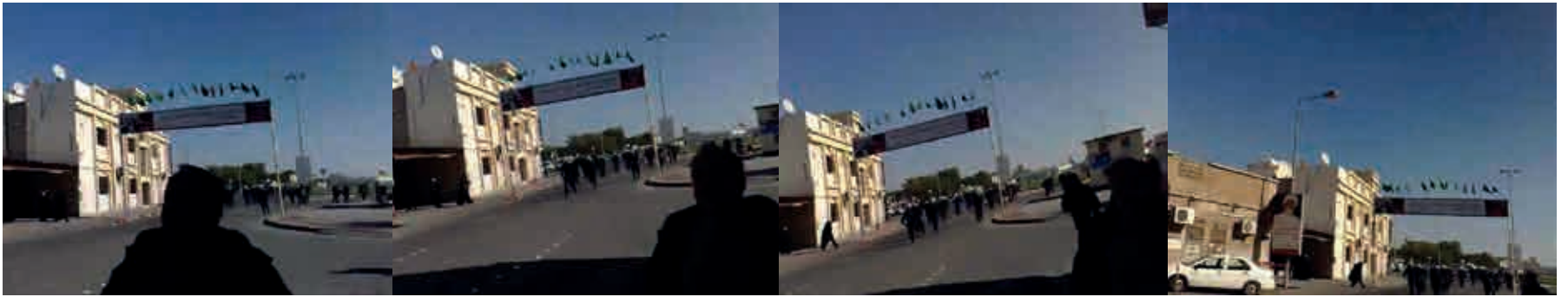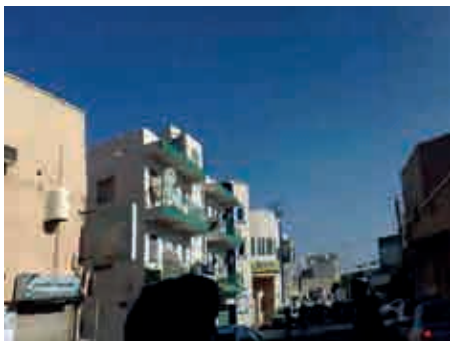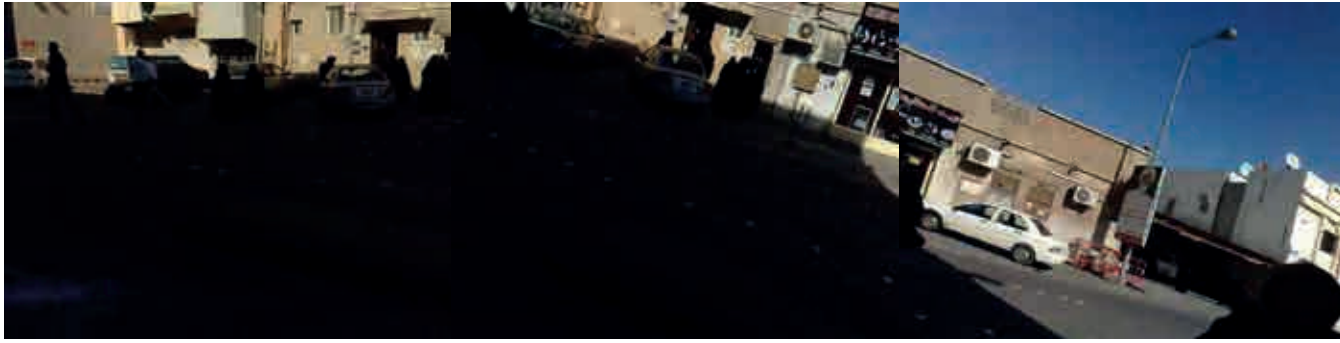
As the filmer flees, her camera pans wildly through 360 degrees.
Diraz, Bahrain, 14 February 2011

that in Nagieb Khaja's documentary film *My Afghanistan*, compiled from footage shot by inhabitants of Helmand province in Afghanistan using cellphones that had been smuggled into them by the filmmaker, it is "due to [the] haptic traces of the camerawork" that "it becomes evident that the cameraman or woman is also part of a community" (Thomsen 2014: 7). One of the functions of the haptic in film and video, then, is not to refer us back to any simple sense of a personal or individual self as the centre of sensation, but rather to dissolve the boundaries between self and other by invoking "sensuous dispositions that exceed anything we might posit as a subjectively felt body-space with a distinct interiority and exteriority" (Paterson 2009: 780). By making explicit the haptic dimension of everyday experience, such videos function as implicit testimony to the truth of Jean-Luc Nancy's claim: "A 'we', even if it is not pronounced, is the condition of possibility of every 'I'" (Nancy 1996/2013: 87). This "'we' that is not pronounced" is, as Butler has shown, above all the first-person plural of our bodies.

It is in this sense that it would be misleading to read this video as primarily an assertion that the filmer, as an individual, was there in this place, on that day, when these things happened. What is important is not the fact of her presence - whether as a narcissistic/spectacular exercise in self-publicity, or as a selfless/purely specular witness to these events. What is important about the quality of her being there was her being there *together with others*, as part of the collective which there came into being. And her participation in that collective is as important in defining where she stands to frame the group when she briefly stands outside them at the beginning - and that is, not far enough away to completely encompass them or objectify them in a single image - as it is in defining how she continues to film when she runs. For when she runs, what the camera records is not her own personal experience of fear, or speed, or disorientation, or exhaustion, so much as *the dissolution of experience itself into a kaleidoscope of intensities*, in which the independent, self-standing presence of both the filmer and the world around her is thoroughly punctuated by the unpredictable rhythm of their mutual absences, opacities, and hesitations.

By fragmenting and interrupting both the space through which she runs, and the objects and persons that can provisionally be found within it, the camera does not so much isolate us within her single perspective, as it maintains the filmer within the possibility of a collective, imagined now not as a unified block, but as a scattered plurality, a variant on that "dispersed subjectivity" to which Marks refers. The fact that this particular kind of dispersion is angular, uncomfortable, and that its outcome is uncertain, does not undermine its essentially plural,

and pluralising, nature. As Butler says, "interdependency (...) is not the same as social harmony. (...) [T]here is no way to dissociate dependency from aggression once and for all" (Butler 2015: 151). Yet even in the midst of all this confusion and terror, the filmer never films as though she was filming (only) for herself, and *as* herself. She always films for the group, and as a member of the group.

To borrow the terminology of the anthropologist James Scott, we might say that optical imagery is paradigmatically a way of seeing like a State, even when the person who is filming demands or offers some acknowledgement that they remain, in and of themselves, an embodied individual, in opposition to the abstract disembodied perspective of governmentality (Scott 1998). And this is so precisely because the "opposition" of "individuals" is, perhaps, one of the figures anticipated and induced - made intelligible and possible - by the objective space of the State itself. To film as though the space "between" (which Butler identifies as the space of politics) can be reduced to the measurable, quantifiable difference (or distance) that can be drawn between individuals and groups - between *this* individual, over here, and *that* group, over there - is effectively to "see like a State", even if one is not, or does not think of oneself as, one of the State's affiliates. And to see like a State is, of course, to view both individuals and groups from *the perspective of the police*. But if this video from Bahrain refuses one thing, both literally and metaphorically, it is the perspective of the police - that perspective from which society can be divided up without remainder, and so rendered entirely legible and intelligible (Rancière 2010: 35-37).

From the point of view of the State, and its police, the events recorded in this video would, effectively, be restricted to the narrative from which we started, which enacts the dispersal of the collective, its (re)atomisation, and its reduction to its constituent parts, without any remainder. For that is precisely what the police here have, through their intervention, set out to achieve. But to film as the person who made this video does - with a willingness to sacrifice optical clarity for the sake of fidelity not to one body (her own), but to the plural body of the collective, and its multiple, and potentially contradictory, affects - is to accept that part of opacity that is always present, both within us, and without us, and which cannot be eliminated. For it is that opacity of both the individual and the collective body which makes another kind of politics possible.

Watching this video, and other videos like it, we begin to unlearn the optics of the state that we have internalised. We begin to know what it might mean *to see like (and as) the people*.

A4. What day is it?

– What are you doing?
– We're filming.
– Is this really the right time?

Homs, Syria, 22 December 2011

TRANSCRIPT

(English translation by Rasha Sadek from MSA transcription.)

A street. The camera is angled up towards the top of the surrounding buildings and the sky. It moves from side to side, as if searching for something. Throughout the entire clip, we will hardly get more than a glimpse of all the people whose voices we will hear.[1]

> WOMAN
> Let's take cover in a building! Let's take cover in a building!

> MAN
> There's nowhere to hide, aunt. Nowhere.

> ADNAN
> We're here filming... Yes?

> MAN
> They're firing mortars at us!

ADNAN laughs.

> ADNAN
> Where's my dad?

The camera swings through 180 degrees, surveying the buildings on either side, as if his father might be hidden in them.

> MAN
> Peace be upon you.

A rapid burst of automatic weapon fire, followed by the sound of a mortar impact. The camera swings back up into the sky, as ADNAN sets off down the street. At the far end, we can see the minaret of a mosque. The mortar fire comes in sporadic bursts, interleaved with periods of quiet.

> MAN
> Keep down! Keep down!

ADNAN crouches as they move along the pavement. The bodies of some of his companions come briefly into view ahead.

> ADNAN
> It's Friday... the Friday of the Protocol ...

He moves out into the street itself, and laughs at the absurdity of what he is saying.

> ADNAN
> ... the Protocol of Death! What day of the month is it?

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1   To watch the video with English subtitles, go to: vimeo.com/83522534.

MAN
What?

                    ADNAN
What's the date today?

                    MAN
I don't know.

                    ADNAN
What's the day of the month? I want to document it.

Increasingly irritated, he still gets no answer.

                    ADNAN
In the name of God, what's the date?

                    ADNAN'S FATHER (?)
I don't know what date it is!

Suddenly, a round of automatic fire, louder than before, causes the camera to shake as ADNAN and the people round him dodge for cover. After a moment's pause, ADNAN runs back on to the sidewalk, and takes cover behind a parked car.

A car alarm has been set off by the firing.

                    MAN *(in distance)*
God is greater! God is greater!²

                    ADNAN
The Friday of … of the Protocol of Death.

                    ADNAN'S FATHER
God's curse on his religion.…

                    MAN
Shshsh! Be quiet! Be quiet!

                    ANOTHER
Hi! What are you doing?

                    ADNAN
We are filming.

                    MAN
Is this really the right time to be doing this?!

ANOTHER
It's ok, *hajj*[3]. It's okay. Let's show this to the dogs of the Arab League!

ADNAN'S FATHER
Damn the Arab League!

ADNAN
This film is dedicated to the Arab League!

The men around them start to call on everyone to retreat.

MAN
Guys, we have to turn back!

ANOTHER
Those whose houses are on the other side, what will they do?

MAN
Some of them can get out that way.

ANOTHER
But that's not safe!

ADNAN'S FATHER
Adnan, which way shall we go? Which way shall we go?

They both begin to laugh.

MAN *(at top of his voice)*
God is greater!

ADNAN *(shouting too)*
Takbir! [Say, God is greater!]

ADNAN'S FATHER
Adnan! Adnan, which way shall we go?

ADNAN *(serious)*
It's the Friday of the Protocol of Death. We are at Qebaa Mosque, Insha'at and Tawzi' Igbari neighbourhoods, Homs. Won't anybody tell me what day of the month it is!

ADNAN'S FATHER
This is no joke, we're completely exposed here.

As the camera tilts down towards the ground, ADNAN says gently:

ADNAN
Don't be afraid, Dad.

---

3   A respectful term for an older man, literally one who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

A4.1 Where's my dad?

The subject of the videos that make up the vernacular anarchive depends upon, but is not reducible to, the singular body that holds the camera. The implicit point of view that these videos embody is that of a "we", as much as of an "I". As Mohammed Bamyeh puts it, in the present of the revolution,

> [the] subject feels like an agent of revolution because he is not an "individual," but a particular expression of the general will, and a personal condensation of "the people" (Bamyeh 2013a: 190).

The revolutionary experiences herself, not abstractly or metaphorically, but *directly* as the agent of the collective historical will (Bamyeh 2013a: 191). And that is partly because, as Andrea Khalil puts it in her study of the North African crowds of 2010-12,

> The person, essentially, was already constituted as a peopled space; thus, being in a crowd is becoming human, becoming oneself. (Khalil 2014: 26)

The singular-plural nature of this experience (Nancy 1996/2013) is exposed by these videos on a number of levels. As we saw in the previous chapter, the dynamic tactile-kinesthetic form of the video, and the haptic propensities of the hand-held camera work (Riboni 2016), tend to dissolve the boundaries of the individual subject, opening it up onto forms of plurality that have no specific assignation. But this openness is also implicated in the immediate co-presence in the time and space of filming of *other* subjects with which the filmer is in relationship in ways which are at once essential and difficult to pin down. This produces moments in which, in Thomsen's phrase, "it becomes evident that the cameraman or woman is also part of a community" (Thomsen 2014: 7). In this chapter, I wish to consider a video in which the presence of that community, and their implication in the subject of revolutionary video, is made even more explicit than in those I have discussed so far.

This video was shot, as it is itself at some pains to tell us, on the Friday of the Protocol of Death, that is, on 22 December 2011, in Homs, Syria. On the previous Monday, a protocol had been signed in Cairo between the Syrian regime and the Arab League under which the League was to dispatch observers to supervise a supposed cessation of violence. The Friday of the Protocol of Death was called in protest against the fact that, according to opposition sources, 250

people had been murdered by the Assad regime during the 48 hours that followed the signing of this text[1].

The video starts *in media res*, and in a state of some confusion. The street is full of people who have left their houses as they flee a violent mortar attack on their neighbourhood (subsequently identified as the Inshaat district, close to the Qeba mosque, whose minarets are visible throughout much of the tape). The young man with the camera greets the people he meets, declares to the camera that he is filming, then breaks off to "reassure" an older woman ("Aunt") that there is no point trying to take shelter indoors. At the same time, he is searching for his father from whom he seems to have become separated. The video thus begins in a state of chaos not so far removed from that in which the Bahraini video discussed in the previous chapter ended: if these people are moving less rapidly, that is not because their situation is less dangerous - on the contrary - but because it is perhaps unclear to them in which direction, if any, safety may lie.

Throughout the video, the filmer - whose name is Adnan - tries repeatedly to "document" the date, in line with a standard evidentiary protocol adopted by Syrian revolutionary videos from the second half of 2011 onwards, doubtless under the impetus of the communications services of the Free Syrian Army[2]. But even as he does this, his camera is documenting something rather different from the focus of his conscious efforts. While he wants to memorialise the precise place and date of this vicious attack on an unarmed civilian population, the sounds and images are busy registering a highly disjointed version of the spaces that make up this one particular street, as dramatised by the nervous hand that holds it, the consistently low angle, and the equally low angle of the afternoon light.

The result is a video which engages the viewer's body forcefully and directly, even as it fails to provide much information as to what exactly is going on around the cameraman. We don't know exactly what Adnan thought he was doing with his camera. We may assume he was

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1   On the practice of naming Fridays in Syria, see Landis 2013. For the Arab League observers mission of December 2011, and the revolutionaries' perspective on it, see Al-Zubaidi 2012a and Filiu 2013a: 187-97. For an account of life in Homs during the winter of 2011-12, see Little 2012. For general background on the Syrian uprising, see Hanano 2012, Filiu 2013a and 2013b.

2   On the way in which Syrian revolutionary video has been organised and even institutionalised, and the conventions that have emerged from this process, see Boëx 2013b and Filiu 2013a: 176. Little 2012 includes numerous passages in which the author observes how the FSA shapes the communication of the revolution in close cooperation with local communities and coordinating committees.

holding his phone in whatever way he could, given that he had to keep his eyes on the street, not the screen, and given the deadly situation he was confronted with, and the people he met along the way and had to deal with, and whatever else he may have needed to do with his hands as well (carry belongings, steady himself on rough ground, remain in physical contact with his father once the two had found each other again). A large part of the humour of this video comes, of course, from the mock-heroics of his attempt to maintain everyday conventions of civility and citizen-journalist accuracy even as he runs for his life through a war zone. Automatic weapons fire sits cheek by jowl with everyday gestures of familiarity and politeness, and the attempt to save one's life is experienced, and presented, as less immenent tragedy, than absurd - and almost domestic - farce.

Still, the low angle of the camera reflects more than just postural convenience and an almost avant-garde visual happenstance. By largely excluding not only the ground they tread on, but also the other bodies that have come together here, by relegating them *hors champ*, this video obliges us to *imagine* those bodies, just as we have to imagine the impacts of the shots and explosions that we hear, but never see[3]. In doing so, it creates a powerful sense of an immediate, bodily community - the community of those who have been thrown together in this street as they try to escape the attack, some of whom seem to know each other well, some of whom would seem to be complete strangers to each other. And it does so by appealing directly to our own bodily imaginations as embodied spectators -- our own tactile-kinesthetic memories of walking streets, and handling cellphones, and being surprised, if not by gunfire, then by the afternoon light.

The community that we encounter in this video exists as two main formations. There is the larger group of "everyone" who is there in the street, and who find themselves not only dodging bullets and other forms of deadly projectile, but also engaging in the debate as to which is the best way out, and what will happen to the people who are cut off from that route, which commences at about 1:35. Meanwhile, within that larger group, there is also the smaller group that assembles around Adnan's camera, consisting of Adnan, his father, and the acquaintance who takes shelter with them at around 1:15 when they hunker down behind the nearest car, and who questions not only what Adnan is doing, but also whether this is really "the right time" to be doing it.

3   Compare the use of the *hors-champ* to dramatise the "presence" of the martyrs in the video from Tunisia discussed in chapter A1.

These communities are held together *physically*, by the shared precarity of their predicament, but also *dialogically* - through the larger debate over how the people on the other side of the street will be able to escape, and through the narrower discussion over whether filming is an appropriate activity when one's life is at such immediate risk. The dialogical nature of these people's being together is made further explicit by Adnan's semi-ironic cry of "*Takbir!*", the Arabic formula through which Muslims call on other Muslims to respond by pronouncing the phrase "*Allahu akhbar*". (The fact that Adnan calls out "*Takbir*" *after* the cry of "*Allahu Akhbar*" has gone up, not before it, and that his call generates no response, only adds to the sense that he is operating, whether as citizen journalist, or as potential leader of his own sub-group, in a state of slight desynchronisation from the scene around him). On one level, then, what this video documents is less the bombardment of the neighbourhood, than the conscious persistence in everyday activities - videomaking, dialogical forms of conversation, joking and banter - in the face of such extreme duress that their simple everydayness becomes, in itself, an expression of political resistance.

The whole video is shot through with this dialogical texture, of which the question-and-answer structure noted above is perhaps the most prominent feature. But the provisional community of the street is also held together, more paradoxically, by its very *invisibility*.

In retrospect, it seems no accident that the video should begin with a question: Adnan's "*Abi wainu*" - "Where's my dad?" After all, this question is not just a question for Adnan - it's a question for the spectator, too, as we cannot see either Adnan or his father. Of course, the answer for Adnan is to pan his camera through 180 degrees and head off up the street in the opposite direction, until he is reunited with his dad. But for the spectator, that option is not open to us, even though all our imaginative energy is directed towards conjuring these others to whom Adnan speaks, whom he cares for, and who he argues with. We never meet Adnan's father (tho we maybe get a glimpse of him as an anonymous fleeting figure at around 30 seconds in). We are with these men, but we are not able to get eyes on them. They remain, for us, hidden in plain sight.

As in the Tunisian video discussed in chapter A1, which was made by one woman filming from within a group of three whose presence to one another and to the camera was felt more than it was seen, the camera here seems not to belong exclusively to Adnan, but to his being-together with his father, and with the neighbour they run into, and take shelter with. Adnan is filming for himself, but he is also filming for the others, and as a way of being with them. And the decisions what to do with the camera, and where

to move as they run, are not taken by Adnan as an isolated individual, but together with the others, even though that togetherness is at times more conflictual than unanimous. As a result, the physical inflections of the camera work, the tactile-kinesthetic dynamic which it receives and imparts, reflect not only Adnan's personal experiences, actions, choices, and non-choices, but also the "kinetic dance" (Johnstone 1999: 232-33) that links his body to the bodies of his father and their friend with whom he is running, and - less directly, but no less importantly - to the larger community that they move among, and of which they are just one small part.

If these images function so powerfully at the tactile-kinetic level, it is in part because they are less concerned with showing us what is happening, than with invoking a series of powerful, but non-coincident, *hors-champs*, all of which depend on the low angle in one way of another. There is the *hors-champ* of the bodies of Adnan and his friends and neighbours, conveyed through the movement of the camera itself, and through their voices. There is the *hors-champ* of the enemy, and of imminent death, conveyed by the noise of live fire, and which we project on to the large sunlit expanses of the walls opposite, which I keep scanning each time I watch the video in the hope or fear of seeing a bullet ricochet off the stone, or a mortar strike the second floor, tho I never do. And then there is the *hors-champ* of the way out of this death trap which the men are looking for, and which does not seem to correspond to any particular place in the geography of the visual: as they run towards the mosque, I am thinking, are they running away from danger, or towards it? And this *hors-champ* seems to be figured, in my field of vision, by the blue sky, both for its vast emptiness, and for its inaccessibility.

It is here then, I would suggest, in this moment of utter confusion, slapstick chaos, and impending death, that we actually *meet* Butler's "people" -- that self-constituting, performative, conflictual, and provisional plurality, that is above all a decision made by bodies to meet together, to stay together, and sometimes to separate in order to meet again. We meet them in this street in Tawzi' Igbari just as or more surely than we can see them in any wideshot of Tahrir Square, or Change Square, or Pearl Roundabout. These bodies that surround the camera, influencing its every movement without ever appearing before it as an image, just *are* the people whom we heard Abdennacer Aouini invoking in their absence on Avenue Bourguiba on the night Ben Ali fled Tunisia.

And by watching this video, we too are making the decision, frame after frame, not to look at them, but to look *for* them - to locate them, to care for them, and to try and accompany them to safety.

We join them in looking for the way out which they cannot find, and which the video cannot show us. Of course, we do not run the same risks as they do. But by placing us in a position where we are even less able than they are to orient ourselves, to identify where the threat is coming from, and which route might enable them to escape it, this video makes its viewers intensely *active* in ways which are at once different from, and related to, those which must have characterised the actions of its protagonists. And in doing so, it offers us a space in which we are impelled to ask ourselves what we risk in our own lives, and what we might be willing to risk, in order to be with others.

A4.2 The dogs of the Arab League

There is "a people" present, then, both in this video, and in the community of those who form around it to watch it online, to laugh at it (and *with* those who made it), and to disagree over what it means, both politically and linguistically.

The linguistic dimension of this dissensus is significant, and merits some consideration. I first came across this video when a Syrian friend sent me the link to it with a message saying (I paraphrase): "You must see this, it's hilarious, everybody's talking about it!". For a brief moment in December 2011, Adnan's video was an Internet sensation, at least in one corner of the Arabic-speaking world, rapidly clocking up around 30,000 views on YouTube, together with more than 100 comments. This degree of interest is all the more remarkable when you consider that the conversation that we hear in the video - and on which a large part of its appeal depends - is conducted in a broad Homsi dialect that is largely incomprehensible not only to non-Syrians, but also to many Syrians who are not themselves from that part of the country.

A large part of those 30,000 views presumably are due to the almost 20,000 people who also watched a re-upped version of the soundtrack only, accompanied by a slideshow transcription/translation of the dialogue in Modern Standard Arabic against a neutral black background. Both the fact that this subtitled radio mix was produced so quickly (it was posted online the very same day as the original), and the fact that it was needed at all, tell us something about the way such a video may generate not a single unified audience, but a concatenation of multiple related audiences which, if they often overlap, do not exactly coincide.

من حصص الإنشاءات - مقطع صوتي مضحك

صوت بطل المقطع عدنان:
أبي وينو؟
أحد الأحرار مفادراً: السلام عليكوم

They're firing mortars at us! - Where's my dad? - Peace be upon you.
Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=sl_i-2uHjw4

Yet despite the impenetrability of their local dialect, the actors of this video do not hesitate to address themselves directly to that emblematic instance of pan-Arabism that is the Arab League. Beyond the intentional comedy of dedicating this video of their death run to the international bureaucracy that is just then claiming, and failing, to protect them, surely there is another, perhaps less intentional, irony in delivering their message through a form of Arabic which most of the representatives of that organisation would probably find unintelligible?

But I think there is something more going on here than just black comedy. Even as it demonstrates performatively, and at great personal risk, the uselessness of appealing, or dedicating anything, *to* the Arab League, this video indirectly reaffirms the vocation of even the most anonymous people, and even the most vernacular forms of speech, to speak *in the place of* the Arab League -- to speak not only to and for all Syrians, but to and for all Arabs. In some sense, its acute, self-limiting particularity just *is* its universalism -- what makes it resonate in open-ended, and unexpected ways (Bamyeh 2010: 58-60; and Bamyeh 2011).

In this sense, it is the physical fact of speaking that matters here, as much as what is said. As Judith Butler puts it, the words that are pronounced by the people "do not have to be pronounced in unison, *or in the same language,* in order to constitute 'a people'" (Butler 2013: 60-61, my emphasis). In other words, just as the performance that enacts the people arises in the spaces between people, and between spaces, so it can occur *between languages, and between dialects of the same language*. Each language, each dialect, each mode of speech involved, thus becomes the occasion of the others' necessary exteriority - an enactment of the heteroglossia inherent in any non-imperial form of internationalism (Bamyeh 2003; on heteroglossia and Arab nationalism, see Selim 2004: 40-43, and 59).

It follows that the politics of a video such as this cannot be reduced either to the opacity of its localism, or to its ironic quotation of pan-Arab tropes. But neither does it simply reinstate some larger transnational public sphere of the transparently discursive kind that has, following Habermas, been associated ideally, and idealistically, with the nation state (Habermas 1989; Fraser 2007). Indeed, its primary political function is not linguistic at all. Instead, it inscribes the collective physically, even as it enacts it, through the aesthetic, that is the sensory forms, which it embodies, and through the bodily gestures and movements of which those forms are, in part, the trace.

In doing so, it effectively disables and displaces the Arab League, along with all the ossified forms of pan-Arab nationalism with which its history has been intertwined, including - by implication - the diluted Baathist version that the Assad regime had purported to represent (Filiu 2013a: 163). And in doing so, it replaces them, not with some sort of narrower Syrian nationalism, or even with a Homsi localism that might defy all larger and more universal constructions, so much as with the *particular concrete forms-of-life* that are embodied in the words and actions of Adnan and his father and their friends, on this particular day, in this particular place. In this respect, Adnan's desperate and ultimately failed attempt to specify the precise date on which this video is being performed/recorded points us to the fact that what this video inscribes is not some specific geometric point in the abstract map of space and time that underpins the State and its many avatars (including, doubtless, many facets of the Syrian opposition), but the *singularity* of *this* place and *this* moment: the time whose *rhythm* exists only in the space between that street and the screen on which I watch this video[4] - the place that exists only at the intersection of, on the one hand, the possible and impossible paths that the people in the street take as they look for some way out, and on the other, the paths taken by my eyes as they search these images for signs that would make the choices these people are making minimally identifiable, intelligible.

A4.3 The vernacular as destituent power

The inability, or unwillingness, of the Arab revolutions to produce any organisation that was able to take power or impose a specific post-revolutionary political programme has bewildered many commentators, including some of

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4   On the relationship between form-of-life and rhythm, see Agamben 2015: 242-45.

those most sympathetic to their aims. As Mohammed Bamyeh writes,

> *Not represented in organizations or by leaders,*
> *the revolutions had to remain radical, in the*
> *sense that nothing sustained each other*
> *than a simple and obvious radical posture,*
> *setting people, united but unrepresented,*
> *against the regime. (Bamyeh 2011: 10)*

This pure negativity has most often been seen as a weakness. But as Bamyeh points out, this may be to miss the point:

> *Successful revolutions are those that usher in a*
> *legacy of cultural transformation, and not just*
> *those that topple systems of governance. (...)*
> *[T]he immediate politics of the revolution tends*
> *to be expressed either as partisan dynamics in*
> *their narrow form or as constitutional attitudes*
> *in their more general form. Neither points in any*
> *clear way to the potential cultural achievements*
> *of the revolution. Those can be seen more clearly*
> *only many years after the revolution, because*
> *cultural change follows patterns unlike those of*
> *political or regime change, and because cultural*
> *change is, in the final analysis, **a change in a***
> ***way of seeing**, and not to procedures of ruling*
> *a state or techniques of administering social*
> *order. (Bamyeh 2012: 32-33, my emphasis)*

The Arab revolutions did *not* seize control of the State in order to remodel society from the top down. What they *did* achieve was not simply the recovery, but the *reinvention* of a plurality of forms of civic life which were felt to be at risk from the increasing encroachments and corruption of the State, and which were themselves not only a critique of the values and practices of the ruling regimes, but their effective *suspension* or *deactivation*, at least for a period of time, and in certain spaces. The daily texture of these revolutions was above all the performative and prefigurative enactment of other ways of being together and caring for and supporing one another, in which the distinction between means and ends (on which conventional assessments of political efficacy rest) became in many ways tenuous, even as they remained focused on the goal of securing the dictator's exit (van de Sande 2013). Through this convergence of a purely "negative" programme at the level of discourse, reduced to a common opposition to "the regime" in all its senses (Dabashi 2012), with the proliferation of positive gestures that enact an ethics of solidarity at the level of praxis, the Arab revolutions not only exemplify Agustín García Calvo's definition of the people as "nothing more

than a negation"[5], but also anticipate Giorgio Agamben's reflections on the need to invent forms of *destituent* power, not in analysis or theory, but through concrete practical acting together.

In her work on assembly, Judith Butler sees the performative power of the people as a *constituent* power, occupying an "anarchist interval" that is destined to give way once again to institutionalised forms of constituted power, though hopefully ones that are more humane and more just than those which had preceded it. For Agamben, however, what is at stake in these moments is their capacity not only to unseat all constituted powers, but also to effect their own self-destitution - *the self-destitution of the people itself* as an entity that might one day pretend to take those powers' place. This is not an act of angelic renunciation before the messy exigencies of practical politics, but the *only* way in which a revolutionary movement can prevent the capture of its energy by the circular logic of sovereignty that leads to the endless reproduction of violence and oppression:

> *if revolutions and insurrections correspond*
> *to constituent power, that is, a violence that*
> *establishes and constitutes the new law, in order*
> *to think a destituent power we have to imagine*
> *completely other strategies, whose definition is*
> *the task of the coming politics. A power that was*
> *only just overthrown by violence will rise again in*
> *another form, in the incessant, inevitable dialectic*
> *between constituent power and constituted*
> *power, violence which makes the law and*
> *violence that preserves it. (Agamben 2014: 10)*

To call for such an all-encompassing practice of destitution is not to exit pracital politics for an abstract utopia. On the contrary: it is to exit governance, and return to politics (Bamyeh 2007: 106). For Agamben, the only way that such

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5   "But it turns out that the people, as it is nothing more than a negation (that which is not composed of Persons, or that which is not the Democratic Majority but rather just the opposite, namely all of us – in other words, that which does not exist, given that it has better things to do, the poor people), does inevitably say "NO" and nothing but "NO": that this is not what life was like, that that is not how it used to be, that we do not believe, my Lord, that I do not believe, and that I do not forget the cereals and how good they tasted, even though I must swallow, like Iriarte's donkey, the straw that they feed me; and so on, following the whole string of "NOES" that every now and then sprout from people's hearts in daily life (from their hearts, we must underscore, which are not to be confounded with the little soul, milady, that you keep in your cupboard, as that one would never say "NO")." (García Calvo 1995: n.p., s.2) García Calvo (1926-2012) was a Spanish anarchist, philosopher, philologist, and poet. Expelled from his chair in linguistics at the University of Madrid by Franco in 1965, he went into exile in France. His professorship at Madrid was restored to him in 1976 following Franco's death. He can be seen making one of his last public speeches on the Puerta del Sol on 26 May 2011 in Sylvain George's film *Vers Madrid (The Burning Bright!)* (2012-14). For an alternative video of the same moment, see youtube.com/watch?v=4W_uVt9EuSY.

Adnan and friends looking for the way out.
Homs, Syria, 23 December 2011

a destitution can be achieved is through the revival, or the invention, of a *form-of-life* - that is, a life "in which the single ways, acts and processes of living are never simply *facts*, but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all potentiality [*potenza*]". He recognises such forms-of-life in the "vernacular figures of anomic communities" as they appear in the work of Ivan Illich, Pierre Clastres and Christian Sigrist (Agamben 2014: 15), and which are continued by the countless "spaces of anarchy" that persist and flourish within and around the field of administered life (Ward 2008; Bamyeh 2009 passim, and especially 216-18). Nineteenth-century anarchism, 20th-century European thought and certain recent artistic avant-gardes can be seen as having approximated this insight, only to have failed to achieve the result that they sought:

> The destitution of power and of its works is
> an arduous task, because it is first of all and
> only in a form-of-life that it can be carried
> out. Only a form-of-life is constitutively
> destituent. (Agamben 2014: 13)

Destituent power is, therefore, not a space emptied of power, but a space that is fully inhabited by human beings. It is a space in which, instead of seeing like a state, we are able again to see like the people. That is, it is a *vernacular* space.

As the Invisible Committee put it, in a passage inspired directly by Agamben's concept of revolution as destitution:

> ...in order to bring about the destitution of the
> practice of government, it is not enough to criticize
> this anthropology and its so-called "realism" [=
> the normative egotism of liberal thought]. It has
> to be grasped **from the outside**. Another plane
> of perception must be affirmed. For we ourselves
> act **upon another plane**. And from this relative
> exteriority where we live, where we try to build,
> we have acquired this conviction: the question
> of how to govern can only be posed on the basis
> of a vacuum, on the basis of a vacuum that in
> most cases has had to be deliberately **created**.
> Authority needs to have been sufficiently separated
> from the world, it needs to have created enough
> empty space around the individual, or inside
> the individual, for it to be possible then to ask
> how one is going to assemble all these disparate
> elements that are no longer bound together by
> anything, how the separate units can be reunited
> **as separate units**. Power creates a vacuum. The
> vacuum calls for power. To exit the paradigm of
> government, we have to reimagine politics on

> the basis of the opposite hypothesis. There is no
> such thing as a vacuum: everything is inhabited...
> (Comité invisible 2014: 78-79, my translation[6]).

This video from Homs - magically, impossibly - combines in a single shot these two opposing movements. It bears witness to the action of power that seeks to create a vaccuum over which it can rule - first, by evacuating it of all its inhabitants, and later by reducing all the buildings that had once structured it to rubble. And at the same time, it not only records, but *is itself* the destitutent power of the people in action, not as an abstract or theoretical programme, but precisely in their obstinate refusal of the abstracting force of military power, and the governmental perspectives that it serves.

Destruction in Al Tawzee Al Ijbari neighbourhood of Homs on
6 March 2012 after massive bombardment by Assad regime.
Screengrab from youtube.com/watch?v=PAYrlq8Rlyc

The simple everyday words and actions performed by Adnan and his friends as they run for their lives do not merely act out a precarious black comedy, or make a mockery of the pretentions of the Arab League - and behind the Arab League, of all other institutions that claim to embody an "international order" - to offer them appropriate and effective protection. Beyond these more

6   "...pour déstituer le gouvernement, il ne suffit pas de critiquer cette anthropologie et son "réalisme" supposé [= the normative egotism of liberal thought]. Il faut parvenir à la saisir *depuis le dehors*, affirmer un autre plan de perception. Car nous nous mouvons *sur un autre plan*. Depuis le dehors relatif de ce que nous vivons, de ce que nous tentons de construire, nous sommes arrivés à cette conviction: la question du gouvernement ne se pose qu'à partir d'un vide, à partir d'un vide qu'il a le plus souvent fallu *faire*. Il faut au pouvoir s'etre suffisamment détaché du monde, il lui faut avoir créé un vide suffisant autour de l'individu, ou bien en lui, avoir créé entre les êtres un espace assez déserté, pour que l'on puisse, de là, se demander comment on va agencer tous ces élé-ments disparates que plus rien ne relie, comment on va réunir le séparé *en tant que séparé*. Le pouvoir crée le vide. Le vide appelle le pouvoir. Sortir du paradigme du gouvernement, c'est partir en politique de l'hy-pothèse inverse. Il n'y a pas de vide, tout est habité...". (I am grateful to Catherine Libert for encouraging me to take this text seriously.)

obvious gestures, they are above all engaged in refusing - actively, constantly, vividly - the reduction of their lives to "bare life", to that life which can be taken without any crime being committed, and which for Agamben is the unacknowledged basis of all regimes of sovereignty, whether authoritarian or democratic. By re-inscribing in the streets of their neighbourhood the convivial everyday practices that bind them together, even as the regime seems intent on reducing those streets to a wasteland, both morally and physically, they enact a counter-power whose goal is not to recreate some "better" form of government, but to wrest back passages, moments, places, from the abstract space-time of governance per se, and reclaim them for truly human ways of living (and of speaking) - ways predicated not on our separation from one another, but on our being-together[7].

What we see in this video, and in so many other videos in the vernacular anarchive, is a people that constitutes itself not as an essence, defined by a language or a history held in common, nor by some explicit and rational type of "social contract", but as a sequence of vernacular gestures, gestures which remain within the reach and scope of each person and his or her neighbours, and which - in themselves - represent not the assertion of a sovereignty, but the destitution of all forms of sovereignty, including that of "the people" themselves, and not only of "the people", but also of the (individual) "person". (And it is perhaps this consciousness of their claim as precisely a claim *not* to take power, whether over themselves or others, that generates the self-deprecating sense of humour that is also a key characteristic found throughout the anarchive).

> For what can be in real contradiction with the dominance of the Capital-State are by no means the Persons or the Groups of Persons and their mutual Personal Solidarity: the only thing that can really contradict it is that which remains alive of the impersonal and uncountable people, that which survives below the level of these

Persons who believe they know what they are doing and who are convinced of the future to which they have been condemned; that which remains alive and keeps on reasoning in all of us, given that "all of us" is precisely the opposite of the Majority. (García Calvo 1995: n.p., s.16)

It is through these concrete bodily (and linguistic) gestures that the emerging and provisional communities which inhabit these videos take form before our ears and eyes, and it is through them, and the gestures they imprint on the videos themselves, that their passage through these spaces is able to resonate with the bodies of those who sit at home watching them, whether they are sitting one hundred metres or one thousand miles away. It is through the very specificity of these gestures, their concrete rhythmical-dialogical presence *as video*, that they come to speak not for, but *to*, that in each of us which is "all of us".

These videos, then, do not "document" or "describe" the new forms of community and collectivity which began to emerge in the Arab world in 2010-11 (or the old forms of community which inspired and informed them). They simply *are* those forms of community and collectivity in action, and in the process of being enacted, and of refusing those strategies which would enable their capture by a regime of *representation*. In doing so, they allow us to hear the Arab nation in all its vernacular plurality, its divergences and its dissonances, beyond Orientalist folklore, modernist rationalisation, or pan-Islamic utopia. And it is that dissonance and that heterogeneity -- all those physical and linguistic accidents that remind us of the unpredictability of the terrain which separates us from, and unites us with, one another -- as much as or more than any simple slogan or million-man march, that have, for brief periods over the last three years, given people both within and beyond the region a sense that our weakness and our isolation, *as* people, does not have to be forever.

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7   The non-dialogue between Agamben and Butler that runs through Butler 2015 is perhaps most poignantly encapsulated in Butler's use of the word *destitution* in a sense directly opposite to that in which Agamben employs *destituent*, i.e. to describe a kind of involutary impoverishment of the person brought about by violence of the State or of the market (e.g. Butler 2015: 140). By focusing on "bare life" (a juridical fiction, with real effects) and ignoring the imperative existence of "forms-of-life" (an ontological claim about the basic concrete-relational structure of reality), Butler constructs (and then rejects) a version of Agamben from which all margin for political resistance has been removed. See Whyte 2009 for a refutation of Rancière's critique of Agamben in Rancière 2004, based on a nuanced assessment of Agamben's relationship to Arendt, which is not irrelevant here: "If Agamben is not pessimistic, this is because in the collapse of the border of politics and life, which so distressed Arendt, he sees the condition of possibility of *this new politics, in which it would no longer be possible to isolate a bare life*" (Whyte 2009: 159, my emphasis).

A5. The death of Ali Talha

– They're going to be killed!
– God is greater."

Souq Al Jumaa, Tripoli, Libya, 25 February 2011

A5.1 The war against the image

The videos we have considered in the preceding chapters are characterised by the kinetic-kinesthetic-haptic imagery that traverses them, and the very special kind of vitality - at once fragile, and irrepressible - which such imagery, and the sounds that go with it, seem destined to convey. Yet in order to ensure that this energy can continue to circulate, they are obliged to conjure a precarious truce with the violently hostile world into which they find themselves thrust. Their dynamism exists only under the constant threat of interruption, whether by order of the security forces, by a stray (or well-aimed) bullet, or by the filmer's own abrupt decision to switch off the tape. Their capacity to evoke a singularity that lies beyond conventional notions of the individual, while remaining rooted in the experience of one particular human body, seems owed, at least in part, to a heightened sense of that body's vulnerability, its mortality, its finitude. Indeed, this vulnerability is the most obvious thing that they hold in common with the other bodies that are gathered around them in revolt. As the Algerians chanted during their short-lived but extraordinary insurrection in 2001: "You cannot kill us, we are already dead!" (Semprun 2001: 10). That is: we are *all of us* already dead. You cannot divide us against ourselves by pitting the physically dead against the biologically still living, by trying to separate those who still have something to lose from those who do not[1].

The filmers of the Arab revolution had everything to lose, too. They risked their lives by being in the street, and they raised the stakes even further by taking out their cameraphones. It is perhaps then no surprise that they made, and circulated, a large number of videos in which they recorded and memorialised the deaths of their comrades - of those who were killed around them or beside them. Through their conscientious efforts, the vernacular anarchive is filled with the images of these martyrs, captured in the moments that immediately preceded and/or followed their deaths, often with a brutal, almost unbearable rawness[2].

These images serve, among other things, to remind us that the living bodies to whose proximity the flow of haptic-kinesthetic images has habituated us do *not* exist only in the immediacy and continuity of the first-person perspective that shapes our discovery of them. They are also bodies that have exteriors, that are made of skin and flesh and blood and bones, and are thus exposed not only to the gaze of the State and its police, but also to a whole range of objects that those forces may project at them, and which are lethally harder, and less capable of spontaneous discrimination or generosity, than they are.

Perhaps the most brutal, and the most haunting, of these videos are those in which it is the filmer herself who is shot and dies (or would appear to die) while filming. Such footage is, of course, a recurrent trope of documentary film, at least since Patricio Guzmán included the footage that the Argentine cameraman Leonardo Henrichsen was filming when he was shot dead at the end of *The Insurrection of the Bourgeoisie* (1975), the first part of his film sequence, *The Battle of Chile*, that chronicles the last year of Salvador Allende's democratically-elected government.

Corporal Héctor Bustamante Gómez draws his pistol on Leonardo Henrichsen. 29 June 1973, Santiago, Chile.

The characteristic features of such footage - the sound of the fatal gun shot, the vacillation of the image, the alarmed voices of those nearby, then the collapse of vision as the cameraperson falls to the ground, as a result of which the image itself is plunged into an involuntary semi-obscurity or arbitrary abstraction - can be found in many of the videos of such a moment that exist in the vernacular anarchive. Thus in one example, a filmer in Syria is apparently murdered by the soldiers in the tank that he has decided to film as it traverses his neighbourhood[3].

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1   The complexity of the (very serious) game being played here with language should not be underestimated. During a public debate at Lussas in August 2013, Tariq Téguïa proposed that this slogan actually meant the opposite of what it seems literally to say: it is an assertion of vitality, not of resignation. Cf Garcia Calvo's rousing conclusion to his *Analysis of the Welfare Society*: "The last and only genuine revolution is that of the dead who refuse to be dead" (Garcia Calvo 1995: s.25)

2   Should it need to be underlined, nothing could be further from the conventional imagery of the Islamic martyr's remains as "a holy corpse that remains beautiful" (Malkowski 2012; cf Cook 2007: 118-19).

3   This video has been deleted from YouTube. A copy can be viewed here: vimeo.com/137112135.

The low-resolution tank from where the shot that kills the filmer was apparently fired. Talbesa, Syria, 2011. Video deleted from YouTube

This particular video goes even further, however, into the sense of futility and helplessness that such footage usually induces in the viewer. Due to the fact that the anonymous filmer's cameraphone - unlike Henrichsen's Eclair 16 - is set up to continue recording even when the filmer's intention, and thus the pressure of his fingers on screen or button, have been withdrawn, the major part of this video - more than three of its three-and-a-half minutes - occurs *after* the death of the filmer, not before. As his friend (we presume) stoops over him and repeatedly implores him (in vain) to pronounce the *shahada* (the Muslim declaration of faith), the camera continues to frame an obscurely random fragment of his environment while in the background we hear a voice reciting the Qur'an, whose source is unclear (a radio or TV broadcast? a recording?). The strongly haptic quality of the whole video, flattened by the low resolution image into what is more a quasi-abstract texture than a "picture" of anything, is further intensified by the involuntary absenting of the filmer, as if his death might find a rough and somewhat hackneyed equivalent in the final withdrawal of representation itself[4].

The videos I have considered in the preceding chapters derive a large part of their aesthetic and affective force from the tension between the perspective of the camera, through which the scene is presented to us, and the perspective of the filmer, that we imagine may sometimes and in some

ways coincide with that of the camera, and sometimes not, but which in the end we can only imagine. While we may try to make these two points of view converge, the detailed gestures of any video in the anarchive are constantly splitting them apart again, reminding us of the aporia of identification. In this deeply unsettling video, however, those perspectives seem to have been definitively severed, but not in the way we would wish: the camera continues to perceive the world, however poorly and haphazardly, even after the filmer is dead and unable any longer to see or hear anything. If other videos encourage our identification with the camera as an eye that is even more alive and more dynamic than the physical person who carries it and handles it, this video reveals the threat that hangs over that desire. The camera, here, *is* more "alive" than the filmer. But this fact cannot console us, for all it does is underline how complete the finality of his human death must be[5].

In his "non-academic" lecture *The Pixellated Image*, the Lebanese artist and performer Rabih Mroué undertakes a detailed exploration of the YouTube videos produced by the Syrian revolution, and in particular those videos in which the filmers film - or appear to film - their own death. As frequent as such videos are, they strike Mroué as, at first sight, inexplicable. Having shown several such clips to the audience, he poses the conundrum that they represent in this way:

> *Why do they keep on filming even though they watch with their eyes how the guns are lifted towards their lenses in order to shoot them? I ask these questions because every time I watch this video and other similar videos, I can see that the cameraman could have escaped if he wanted to. He had enough time to run away before the sniper shot him. But instead, he kept filming. Why? Is it because his eye has become an optical prosthesis and is no longer an eye that feels, remembers, forgets, invents some points, and skips some others? I assume that the eye sees more than it can read, analyze, understand, and interpret. For example, when the eye sees the sniper lifting the gun towards it in order to shoot and kill, the eye keeps on watching without really understanding that it might be witnessing its own death. Because, by watching what is going on through a mediator – the little screen of a mobile phone – the eye sees the event as isolated from the real, as if it belongs to the realm of fiction. So, the Syrian cameraman*

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4   For a non-discursive exploration of this *tension* between the determination to document suffering and death on the one hand, and on the other, the abstract quality of the resulting images, see Birgit Hein's short film based on YouTube videos from Libya and Syria, *Abstrakter Film* (2013).

5   This effect of "seeing beyond death" is also closely related to the over-compressed and distorted audio that accompanies it. For some thoughts on compression as disfiguration, and its ability to conjure "ghosts", see chapter A10 below, and the discussion in Snowdon 2014b.

will be watching the sniper directing his rifle towards him as if it is happening inside a film and he is only a spectator. This is why he won't feel the danger of the gun and won't run away. Because, as we know, in films the bullet will lose its way and go out of the film. I mean it will not make a hole in the screen and hit any of the spectators. It will always remain there, in the virtual world, the fictional one. This is why the Syrian cameraman believes that he will not be killed: his death is happening outside the image. It seems that it is a war against the image itself (Mroué 2013: 386-7).

Rabih Mroué, The Pixellated Revolution.
Performance with video projection.

Ulrike Lune Riboni has also described the cameraphone as a prosthesis - one which intensifies involvement, rather than annulling it, thus establishing a link to certain moments in the technical-aesthetic history of direct cinema[6]. But while for Riboni, the effect is to turn vision

into a properly haptic intervention in the world, for Mroué the result is the opposite. The camera does not reconnect the filmer to the rest of her sensorium and, through it, to what is going on around her, but isolates her both from the context of her seeing, and from the rest of her senses, reducing her to a pure eye. The filmer is able to film her own death just because she is already less a filmer, than a member of the audience. It is as if she is already in another space, safely removed from the scene that is being played out on the screen. It is this *other* video - the one we watch, not the one we make - that dominates the filmer's consciousness, until she forgets that she is still a real body, acting and perceiving in a real world, where the bullet can still strike her dead.

Mroué's interpretation is persuasive on its own terms, above all within the dramatic context of his performance. However, there is, in my opinion, still another mystery hidden within this mystery. The real question is not why the filmer fails to take evasive action even when it is obvious that she is in the sights of the sniper, but *why she is filming the sniper in the first place.*

After all, these images have no forensic or legal value. While we can see in the distance a form, sometimes clad in military khaki, sometimes not, wielding a gun, the mere fact of recording this is not of any *use* to anyone. There is no tribunal before which such evidence can be brought. And even if there was, this evidence is no real evidence. It would be impossible to make out from such images the identity of the person responsible for the crime - or, in most cases, even to establish with any degree of certainty to which "side" of the conflict they belong. None of the cameraphone videos I have seen which seek to film snipers or other murderers has the minimum optical clarity which allowed the identification of Corporal Héctor Bustamante Gómez as he appeared brandishing his revolver in Henrichsen's footage, and which later led to his being charged with the cameraman's murder (even if it took a seven-year investigation by Chilean documentarian Ernesto Carmona to make the case against him stick. Bustamante died in prison in 2007 while still awaiting trial - see Carmona 2008).

Why, then, does the filmer film their would-be murderer? I would suggest that what is happening here is not the rational act of a "citizen journalist", determined to bring a repressive regime to justice, if not through due legal process, then at least before the court of opinion. The

6   Riboni quotes Anne-Marie Duguet's description of working with the Paluche, a tiny video camera invented by Jean-Pierre Beauviala in the 1980s, which anticipates the freedom and gestural quality of today's cameraphones (Duguet 1981, cited in Riboni 2016), before adding her own description of the videos produced by the revolutionaries in Tunisia and Egypt: "Framing has been separated from the eye since the production of the first still cameras with LCD screens, and the cameraphone continues this experience. The phone is an extension of the body, absorbing or exaggerating its movements, its stumbling, its dynamism. The tool becomes a prosthetic eye, the filmer stretches out her arm to grasp what the eye cannot see." (Riboni 2016). Compare Beauviala's own description of the Paluche, in the course of a conversation with Jean-Luc Godard, who had tried working with the new camera and rejected it: "you know that for me the PALUCHE is an extension of the body towards people and things, it's the hand's very gesture, its quivering, its emotion; it's a centering of a SUBJECT that has nothing to do with the frame of the cinema..." (Beauviala and Godard 1985). It should of course be remembered that the Paluche was not just a miniscule lens-box more or less the size and shape of a microphone, but also a cable which linked it to a recorder that had to be carried e.g. strapped around the waist (Chauvin 2016: 28). Interestingly, Sony's attempt to reinvent that configuration

in 2013 with its "lens-style cameras" the QX10 and QX100 fell on stony ground, partly because the concept of physically separating the lens from the recording media appears to have been widely misunderstood.

filmer films the sniper in the building opposite, and the moment in which they lift their gun to take aim at the filmer themselves, because she feels a kind of *equivalence* between these two gestures. More than that: she feels that the camera is *stronger* than the gun. By not only capturing the sniper's image, but by imitating his gesture as she does so, and turning it back against him, she feels that she is acquiring and exercising a kind of *mimetic power* over him (Taussig 1993; on the inadequacy of the term "citizen journalism", see Riboni 2015b).

This equivalence of the gun and the camera is most chillingly evoked by another video, also from Syria. Here, the filmer begins by insisting that the world must see the massacre that Asad's forces have just committed in Deraa in the face of the army's attempt to close the town down. After riffing on this theme for some time while the security forces pass by, more or less impervious to his distress, he ends up screaming at the soldiers: 'Shoot me! Shoot me!". It is as if he is trying to provoke them into producing an image of *his* death, so that at least there will be some evidence of their murderousness. Before his adversaries can succomb to his taunting, however, his friends are able to drag him away.

This power that the camera promises, or threatens, to let us wield over others may, or may not, be an illusion. (Mroué himself expresses doubts as to whether these filmers are actually filming their own death, or whether they do not in fact survive "outside" the film which only *seems* to represent their demise). As moderns, we assume that simply taking someone's photograph will neither kill them, nor disable their weapons. Despite that, the filming of the sniper does still seem to function here, less as a rational, material strategy of "documentation", than as an act of symbolic violence by the filmer - a preemptive *counter-strike* against the person pictured.

After all, the sniper's bullet is only effective in the here and now of the space in which they and their target are physically co-present. But the video that records their gestures, and defies them, will continue to circulate long after both the sniper and the filmer are no longer here. It immortalises, not the person who films it, but the shame of the person who is filmed. Such an image, of course, can only be made by someone who puts her body on the line, and who may or may not be wary of the exact risks she is running. But in return, it enacts a kind of power over the person who is pictured that is absolute, and unconditioned. Whether he lives or dies, in this moment of his being
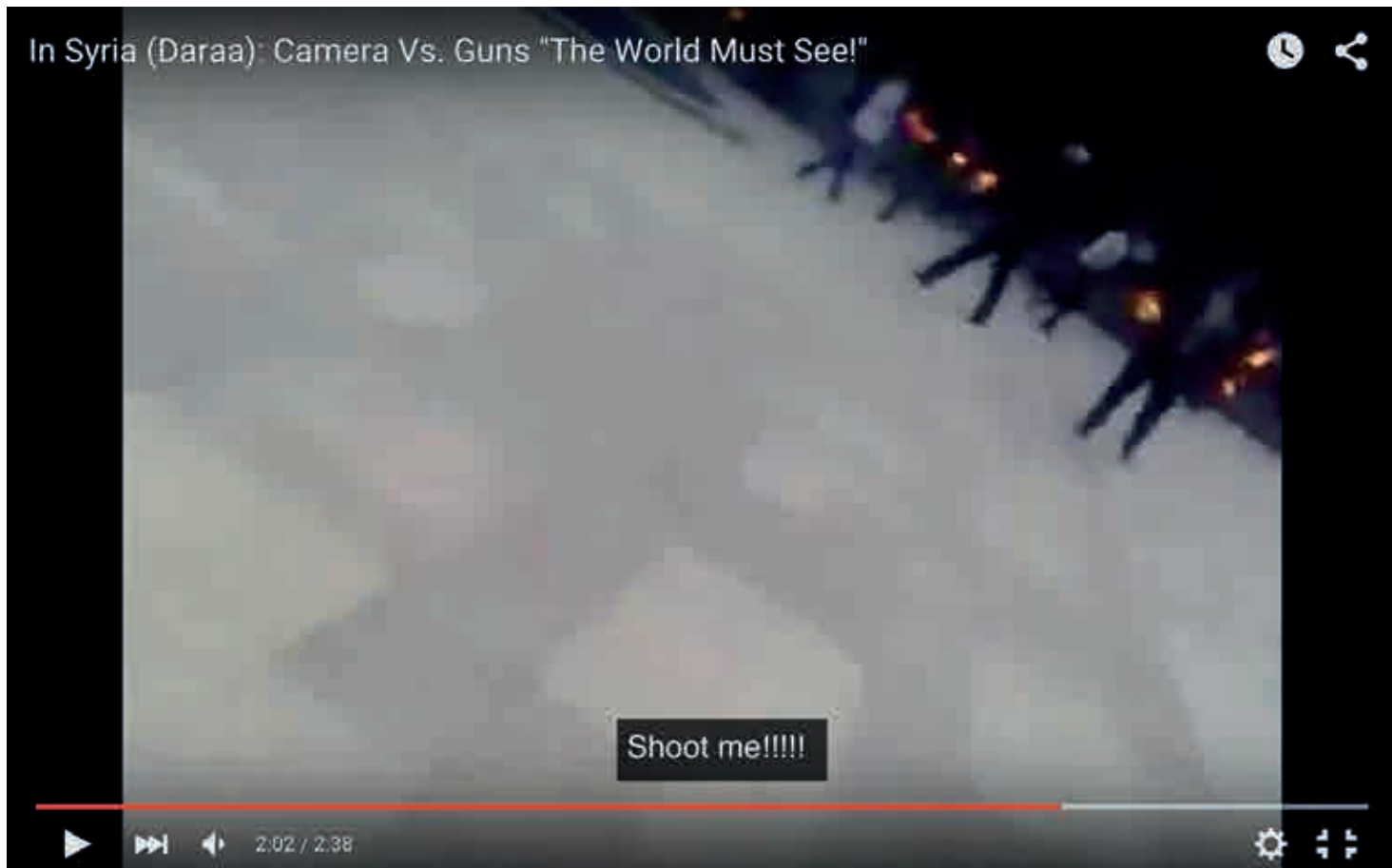
Shoot me!. Screengrab from video uploaded by thesyrianinterpreter, 25 May 2011.
youtube.com/watch?v=BTGFSX2WiMc

pictured the sniper is judged forever. To film him is not just an act of morbid curiosity, or amateur surveillance. It enacts, albeit by anticipation, the judgement of the people - a judgement that is peremptory, and without appeal.

A5.2 The sea is just a suspicion

The Libyan uprising broke out in Benghazi on 15 February 2011, and the Day of Rage on 17 February saw protests spread to many other cities, including the capital, Tripoli. On 25 February several thousand protesters gathered after Friday prayers in the district of Tajura to the east of the capital, from where they set off to march towards the town center. As they passed through the Souk Al-Jumaa neighborhood later that afternoon, they were ambushed by state security forces, including snipers posted on the roofs of surrounding buildings. Different estimates put the death toll for the afternoon at between 10 and 25, with many more seriously wounded.

The march from Tajura followed a week of constant clashes during which the security forces had tried and failed to establish control over the neighborhood, and its brutal repression marked, perhaps, the end of residents' initial hopes that they might see Gaddafi depart as quickly as Ben Ali and Mubarak had before him. By 1 March, most of the people of Tripoli had abandoned overt public protest, and were looking for other ways to continue the struggle. (The city was not finally liberated until six months later, in a major military operation organized by the National Transitional Council, that ran from 19 to 28 August.)[7]

One of those who died during the march on 25 February was a fifty-year old man, named Ali Mohammed Talha. His name does not figure in any of the journalistic accounts of this day that appeared in the international or local media at the time, and I have not been able to find out any more about him[8]. The video I want to discuss here records the moments immediately before and after his martyrdom.

This video is difficult to "transcribe" or describe, as it contains so little dialogue, and so little precise, locatable action. But let me try[9].

A man is advancing through space. He is among other men, though the space between them is not clearly defined, and the crowd seems too strung out, too fragmented to really count as "a crowd". On the soundtrack, there is a lot of noise, of a kind we may recognize (or not) as the sound of wind buffeting the camera's microphone. We may get the sense that we are near the sea[10]. There is a large space that seems to open up on the horizon, far ahead of us and to the left, which seems to hold the future towards which we are heading – promise or disaster. Yet while the bodies move that way, the camera almost ignores this space, and seems intent for much of the time on pointing off towards the right, and down towards the ground, when it's not tilting off wildly up into the sky, dodging and jerking across the multiple layers of off-white cloud.

The sea is only a suspicion. Yet the men who have gathered here continue to advance and fall back in waves, and these human waves form a larger rhythm, which surrounds and absorbs the faster rhythm of the camera's tilting up and down. It is as if the group is testing some invisible boundary, trying to push it forward, incrementally, or at least to hold the line. At the same time, the way the camera is angled creates a long diagonal that emphasizes the inherently unstable geometry of the space, which is further pulled apart by the asymmetries of the faulty stereo sound.

The crowd surges forward twice, and twice they fall back. During the second, more chaotic retreat, there is a strange hiatus: the camera, as if drugged or stunned, in any case in need of relief, suddenly tilts up and then stops moving for several seconds, and the sky, plus a shard of ochre building, finds itself caught within the frame. Just at that moment the sound of gunshots intensifies, and then suddenly, with a single cry, the crowd rushes forwards again. And a few seconds later we realize that although we are moving, we are not going anywhere – the barrier that stands between

7   The best English-language source for the Tripoli protests of February 2011 is the diary of Sandra James, a British woman who had lived in Libya for over 20 years, and whose Libyan husband and two eldest sons took part in (and survived) the 25 February march (James 2012). I have also consulted the information and videos assembled by the New York Times's blog, "The Lede" in the immediate aftermath of the event (Mather and Mackey 2011), and by John Liebhardt at Global Voices Online (Liebhardt 2011). For general background on the Libyan revolution, see Prashad 2012.

8   The date and place of the death of Ali Mohamed Talha, along with his full name and age, were confirmed by information published atayamnal7lwa.net/forum/index.php?topic=4487.385;wap2, as part of a

dicussion which has since been deleted. I am grateful to Amira El-No-shokaty for cross-checking the Arabic-language sources for me.

9   To watch the video with English subtitles, go to vimeo.com/49182496.

10   All the accounts I have consulted place the massacre of 25 February on Aradah Road, near to the Al-Hany crossroads -- that is, several kilometers from the sea front. If it really is the sea we can see in this video, then it must have been filmed on one of the arteries running through the neighbourhood perpendicular to the general east-west direction of the march, connecting Aradah Road with the coast.

"How was it I did not see that sky before?"
Tripoli, Libya, 25 February 2011

us and the sea, between us and the future, has not been demolished, will not be overrun[11].

True, we keep surging forwards, even stronger than before, but others are already trying to work their way back. We are going to meet someone who is returning to us. Returning to us dead. As a martyr. When the camera almost collides with his bloodied head, we run alongside him for a while, then let him go on, while the camera instead reverses course one last time to follow the trail of blood that he has left behind him, as if retracing the steps he could no longer take.

We follow this trace as if it could lead us somewhere, as if it might prove something. As if. And as we advance, the shadow of the filmmaker falls across that trail, as if to cross it out. Or to imprint himself upon it. Or it on him.

A5.3 The opposite of power

On one level, this video simply exemplifies and intensifies the aesthetic strategies discussed in the two preceding chapters. The immersion of the viewer in a reality that is as much tactile-kinesthetic as it is visual reaches a kind of peak in this single shot that unfolds in all its complexity and unpredictability over more than five minutes. Yet at the same time, this video might appear to be the *opposite* of the videos I have so far considered. For it deploys the very same formal and sensory strategies that gave them their vitality, only to be brought up sharp against the incontrovertible evidence of death, which is now no longer merely an idea, or a word, or a threat, but an irreversible and intolerable fact.

In the video of Abdennacer Aouini discussed in chapter A1, the dead were an "invisible crowd" - ghostly presences that lay concealed in the night, and in the imagination of those present, felt rather than seen. In the videos of the martyrs, such as this video of the death of Ali Talha, they step out into the light of day, and reveal themselves in all their vulnerability and finitude. In the place of the vital haptic body that so many of these videos bring to life, we are suddenly confronted with that body's other, its

unbearable double: the human corpse, in all its visceral obscenity and abjection, as it collapses out of life into the definitive motionlessness of death.

The appearance of the dead body from among the filmer's comrades enacts the limits of the subject in all their finitude and finality, even as it exceeds them. And in doing so, it forces us to confront all those aspects of our embodied being which the first-person perspective may sometimes lead us to believe we can defer or ignore. As Judith Butler writes,

> there are certain photographs of the injury or destruction of bodies in war, for example, that we are often forbidden to see precisely because there is a fear that this body will feel something about what those other bodies underwent, or that this body, in its sensory comportment outside itself, will not remain enclosed, monadic, and individual. (Butler 2015: 149)

The vision of the rupture of the body's limits by an act of violence, while it is certainly felt as an attack on our self-image, is also an invitation to abandon the attempt to confine our experience within those limits suggested to us by the images of intact bodies with which we spend most of our time. The corpse is then, in one sense, the *obverse* of the experience that the majority of these videos orchestrate. Yet at the same time, death, and the acceptance of death, are also obscurely perceived to be the *condition* of that sense that the revolution brings of finally being fully *alive*. Dork Zabunyan writes:

> If these [images, as acts of witness] are perceived as legitimate, they owe their legitimacy to the very act of rising up, in which the final frontier that separates death from life is dissolved... (Zabunyan 2013: 52, my translation[12])

And he cites the Syrian filmmaker Oussama Mohamed who stated, in an interview he gave in April 2011:

> something in our minds has changed once and for all. Myself, even, I have the feeling that death no longer has the same meaning. I find myself thinking of my own death with equanimity: maybe it's just an impression, but I think that today we are in a situation in which death can become synonymous with life. The people who

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11   Overall, the video can be divided into seven distinct movements (four 'forwards' and three 'backwards'): 0:00–2:19: first advance; 2:19–2:41: first retreat and regroup; 2:41–3:08: second advance; 3:08–3:35: second retreat and regroup; 3:35–4:12: third advance (to recover Ali Talha's body); 4:12–4:37: third retreat (with Ali Talha's body); 4:37–5:15: the cameraman alone moves forward against the flow of the people immediately around him, retracing the trail of blood the martyr's passage has left on the ground.

12   "Si légitimité il y a, elle réside avant tout dans le geste même du soulèvement où se dissipe la frontière ultime, celle entre la vie et la mort..."

are slain today are a part of me. (Mohamed 2011, cited in loc cit, my translation[13])

If this is so, then it is in part because, as Mohammed Bamyeh has argued, death is not the opposite of life, but of power. For death is "the guarantor of equality par excellence" (Bamyeh 2007: 10). There is no hierarchical prerogative that can provide exemption from its sway. Death is "the most universal common" (ibid: 4). As such, it marks the exit from the realm of governance, and thus the recovery not only of equality, but also of true freedom (ibid: 15-16). As Canetti observed, the equality generated by crowds may be illusory; but the equality generated by death is quite real (Canetti 1973: 19, 83)[14].

The equality that is at stake here is not a material equality, but an equality of power, and in particular the power to put to death. By *accepting* in advance her own death, the martyr abolishes the differential of power between herself and the sovereign. More than that, her own death prefigures the *reversal* of that power, by offering its interchangeability as extensible without limitation to all human beings whatever their condition.

There is nothing mystical, then, about this acceptance of death, in all its bloody, messy detail, that we encounter again and again in the anarchive. We do not need to suppose a parallel reimagining of some afterlife, corpses that smell of musk and roses, or some sacrificial pact with an abstraction such as the "nation", in order to bear these images. Nor do we need to suppose that without such dressing up, they can never be anything but traumatic, an education in brutality. Like war, the revolution spares us what we most fear - not to die, but to die *alone* (Canetti 1973: 84)[15]. And the attention of the camera to the dead and the dying is, then, neither mere voyeurism, nor simply witness to the worst. It is also witness to the fact that even in death, we are *together*. Ali Talha's death may strike those of us who were not there, who did not live through these events, as a form of horror, or (if we are more disposed to be gentle) as a tragedy. But it is above all proof that even at that moment, there were people there to bring him back

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13   "Quelque chose a définitivement changé dans les consciences. J'ai moi-même le sentiment que la mort n'a plus la même signification. Il m'arrive de songer à ma propre mort et je ne me sens pas mal: ce n'est peut-être qu'une impression, mais je pense que nous nous trouvons actuellement dans une situation où la mort peut devenir synonyme de vie. Les gens qui tombent en ce moment font partie de moi."

14   For a different intepretation of the universality of death as that which *legitimised* privilege in Renaissance Europe (as depicted in images of a thoroughly aristocratic heaven), see Illich 1977: 194.

15   On the fear of dying alone in a completely different context, see further B4.2 below.

from where he had fallen, to name him, and to recognise his name as the mark of the general interchangability that governs them all (Bamyeh 2007: 43). And to be governed by this, is *already* to have emerged from under the cover of all other forms of governance.

The convergence of this exit with the discovery of *courage* is not, then, a coincidence. Once one's own personal death no longer seems so important, one has entered, in the simplest of senses, into a realm where *heroism* now seems part of the ordinary repertoire of everyday life. As Bamyeh puts it, describing the "new patriotism" that emerged during the Arab revolutions:

> *Each martyr, typically a friend and a neighbor rather than a professional activist, not only opens up an account that requires being settled, but also proves empirically that heroic qualities, earlier thought to be distant or mythical, now reside naturally in ordinary individuals. (Bamyeh 2011: 9)*

It is because "we are already dead" - not as the singularities we are, but as the isolated individual subjects that the regime (of power and of knowledge) has produced in our place - that each one of us is now able to live without reserve, so completely and so intensely. For that which is really alive in us is "impersonal and uncountable" (Garcia Calvo 1995: s.16). And this life we are living is, above all, the *certainty* that we are now not only together with one another, but together as *equals*.

A5.4 The shadow of the people

Hamid Dabashi has described how he was unable to complete the book on "suicidal violence" that had occupied him for more than a decade until the Arab revolutions reframed the concept for him:

> *It was the suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi (1984-2011), the young Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire on December 17, 2010, in protest to police harassments, that dramatically concluded the whole notion of "suicidal violence" I was developing in this book and thus effectively completed my thoughts on the matter. Before that tragic event setting a massive transnational revolution in motion, it was the "suicidal violence" that targeted both the self and the other of the suicidal person that had triggered my study. After Mohamed Bouazizi's suicide, it was the solitary site of that violence, the body of the person, and*
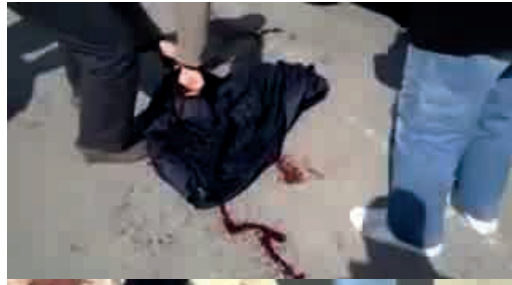
The shadow of the filmer falls across the trail of blood left by the martyr.
Tripoli, Libya, 25 February 2011

the sparing of others from the site of his suicide that gave the whole topography of my thinking about the matter its closure. (Dabashi 2012: ix)

Mohammed Bamyeh identifies a similar, but slightly later turning point, when he writes of the ethical transformations he witnessed in Cairo in the days leading up to the revolution:

in place of earlier incidents of individuals setting themselves publicly on fire in desperate protest of personal problems, there emerged an ethic of preparedness for sacrifice in the name of a collective cause. Revolutionary ethics emerged with this transformation from self-immolation to preparedness for martyrdom. In other words, a transformation from suicidal personal desperation, in which one is prepared to kill oneself, to a new patriotic sense, in which one kills neither himself nor others. Rather, the martyr of the new patriotism confronts only the regime, neither his compatriots nor other strangers, and only with his bare chest, with no illusions and full knowledge of stakes involved. (Bamyeh 2011: 9)

The privileging of this second attitude over the first does not, however, mean that the original gesture of desperation was unnecessary or irrelevant to the spirit of self-sacrifice that succeeded it. Rather than an opposition between these two moments of the revolution, the Invisible Committee propose a more dialectical relationship:

...the individual discovers herself to be so little an individual that sometimes all it takes to bring down the whole lying edifice of society is for one person to commit suicide. Mohammed Bouazizi proved this once and for all when he set himself on fire outside the governor's office in Sidi Bouzid. The power of such a gesture to spark a conflagration stems from the destructive affirmation it contains. (Comité invisible 2014: 46-47, my translation)[16]

Through such acts, the individual becomes not a symbol that represents the people, and through which they can be manipulated, but the figure of the common revealed through her not in her identity, but in the very moment of her self-destitution:

A man dies, and a country rises up. One event does not cause the other, it is just the trigger. Alexandros Grigoropoulos, Mark Duggan, Mohammed Bouazizi, Massinissa Guermah - the name of the dead man becomes, for these few days, or weeks, **the proper name of the general anonymity, of the common dispossession.** *(Comité Invisible 2014: 41, my translation)[17]*

This convergence of anonymity and the proper name is figured in this video in the two opposing moments between which it hangs suspended. On the one hand, there is the epiphanic moment at around 3:30 when the camera fixes the sky above this street in Souk Al-Jumaa for several seconds. Time is arrested, just as it was for Prince Andrei after he was shot at the Battle of Austerlitz, in the moments before he loses consciousness:

Above him there was now only the sky – the lofty sky, not clear yet still immeasurably lofty, with grey clouds creeping softly across it. "How quiet, peaceful, and solemn! Quite different from when I was running," thought Prince Andrei. "Quite different from us running and shouting and fighting. Not at all like the gunner and the Frenchman dragging the mop from one another with frightened, frantic faces. How differently do these clouds float across that lofty, limitless sky! How was it I did not see that sky before?" (Tolstoy 1896/1982: 326).

And on the other hand, there is the extraordinary gesture beginning at 4:37 where the filmer abandons Ali Talha's corpse to follow instead the line of blood it has left behind as it was transported, leading to the comrades who are searching for his ID card in his crumpled, useless jacket[18].

By filming his shadow as it falls across the trail of blood he follows, the filmmaker projects himself inside the frame. But he projects himself not as a character in some 19th-century novel – a person with a unique physiognomy, a particular temperament, a distinctive wardrobe, and a mailing address – but as an anonymous silhouette, the space where a person *could* be. This shadow doubles the ecstatic openness to life suggested by the shot of

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16   "...l'individu s'y découvre si peu individuel qu'il suffit parfois qu'un seul se suicide pour faire voler en éclats tout l'édifice du men-songe social. Le geste de Mohammed Bouazizi s'immolant devant la préfecture de Sidi Bouzid en atteste suffisamment. Sa puissance de conflagration tient à l'affirmation brisante qu'il renferme."

17   "Un homme meurt, un pays se soulève. L'un n'est pas la cause de l'autre, juste le détonateur. Alexandros Grigoropoulos, Mark Duggan, Mohammed Bouazizi, Massinissa Guermah - le nom du mort devient, dans ces jours, dans ces semaines, *le nom propre de l'anonymat général, de la commune dépossession.*"

18   For a similar filmic gesture of following a trail of blood, but without the shadow, see this clip shot in Tunis on 11 January 2011: you-tube.com/watch?v=YZFa8jkvWmU. I am grateful to Ulrike Lune Riboni for pointing me to this video.

the clouds against the blue sky, embodying an act of acknowledgement, even consent, to the fact of death as unavoidable. The shadow *signs* the video, but it signs it not on behalf of the individual *qua* individual, but on behalf of the community. To belong to that community, to gather with it physically in the street, to proclaim its existence, is to accept the possibility of one's own death, and to assert the value of that possibility. In this moment, the unique and the common reveal their interdependence. It is in order to protect the possibility of a unique life for all, even the weakest, that "the people" are called to exist (Illich 1982: 111; cf. Thompson 1971).

This passage effectively positions Ali Talha as the double of the cameraman, his dark mishapen jacket rhyming with the other's shadow. One is alive and anonymous, the other dead, identified, and named. But in that act of naming, and in the hovering over him of the filmer's shadow, there is a double displacement taking place. Like Mohammed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid, Ali Talha becomes - briefly, for the space of that one afternoon in Souk el-Jomaa, and for the duration of this one video - the name of what is common to all, the name of what is most vulnerable and fragile in each of them, the name of their common dispossession, not as that which is to be refused, but as that which is to be assumed and embraced so that it can be deposed, laid down. And this mirroring between the filmer and the corpse of Ali Talha is reflected in the symmetry of their empty silhouetted forms - the shadow of the one, where it falls across the crumpled, blood-drenched jacked of the other.

As the filmer leaves Ali Talha's body behind to follow the trail of his blood, we watch his shadow advancing before him. And as he films his shadow passing over the bloodstains on the ground, we feel a *transfer of responsibility* taking place. As Bamyeh puts it, each death opens an account. The image of the filmer's shadow against the martyr's blood is not simply a striking image, an unusual formal proposition, or a wordless abstract lament. In the *physical contact* which it mimes (Taussig 1993) between the empty, anonymous form of the one, and the vital substance of the other's recently extinguished life, between energy (light) and matter (blood), this video shows us one of the ways in which the dead hand down not only obligations to the living, but also convictions, capacities, energies. And in doing so, it does not simply function as a symbol for the circulation of revolutionary desire and responsibility - it *enacts* another link in the chain of that circulation, in which video archetypically plays the role of a *converter*. For it is through video (among other media) that the solid matter of reality is transformed into the oscillatory energy of the image, and vice versa, as it passes from that street in Tripoli, to a computer screen in Benghazi, or Beni Sueif,

or Brussels, and back out from there, reentering the world away-from-keyboard through its afterlife in the viewer's own body, where it mingles with our desires and memories, to give them form, and direction, and to lend them force.
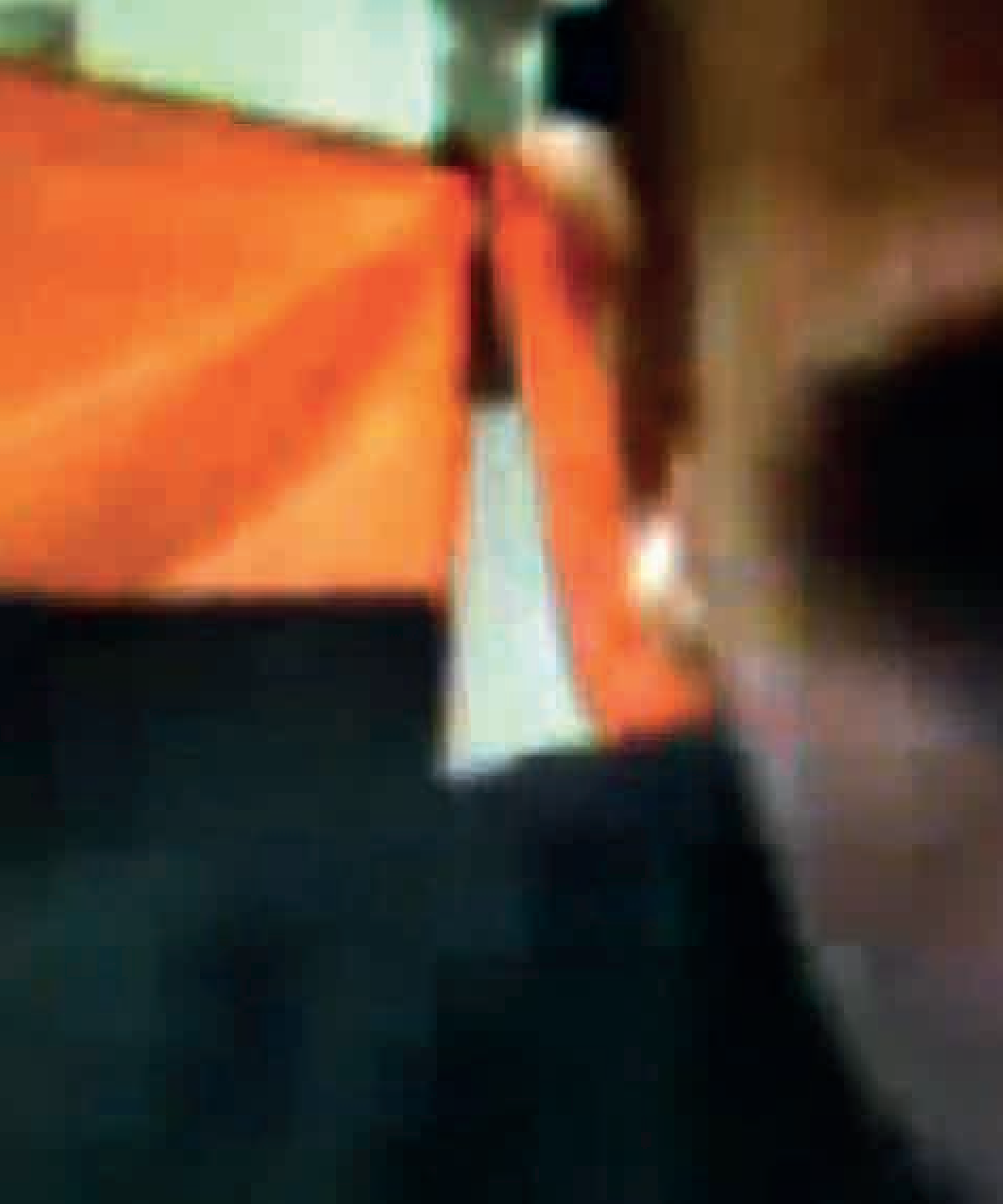
2. Video as critical utopia

A6. The filmmaker as amanuensis

- I want to meet the president! I want to meet the president! I have a lot to tell him! I want to speak to him! I want him to hear my voice! Instead of him sitting there, knowing nothing. Maybe he's not guilty. Maybe nobody tells him the truth…
- No, he's guilty alright!

Dokki, Cairo, Egypt, 25 January 2011

A6.1 We have found our voice

On the afternoon of the 3rd of February 2011, the Egyptian novelist Ahdaf Soueif finds herself walking around central Cairo. Her appointment to give an interview to a satellite TV channel has just been cancelled after pro-regime *baltagiya* (thugs) invaded the station's office and forced them to close down. So instead, with no particular agenda, Soueif walks into Midan Tahrir, the epicentre of the revolution, and starts to survey the scene around her:

> *I go to look at the front line of yesterday's battle. The pavements are broken up and the corrugated-metal sheets are stacked in case they are needed again. 'Don't assume treachery, but be on your guard': men lie on the treads of the army tanks to prevent them moving. The regime's **baltagis** have been beaten back but they're regrouping on the flyover. Lines of young men with linked arms protect the entrance to the Midan. The clinic that was set up when the **baltagis** were beaten back hums with activity. Doctors in white coats change dressings on wounds, take details. Two lawyers - in their legal court gowns - take statements. A woman sees me writing and comes up: 'Write,' she says, 'write that my son is in there with the **shabab**[1]. That we're fed up with what's been done to our country. Write that this regime divides Muslim from Christian and rich from poor. That it's become a country for the corrupt. That it's brought hunger to our door. Our young men are humiliated abroad while our country's bountiful. Be our voice abroad. Tell them this is a national epic that will be taught in schools for generations to come. We've been in Tahrir since Friday and the whole Midan was sparkling. Look what they've done to it! Look at that microbus: twelve people on it at all times and the banners never came down and the flag never stopped waving. The army stopped the ambulance from coming in but these young doctors - they sewed up the **shabab** on the pavement. My son, it took an hour to dig out the pellets from his legs. And then he went back in--"*

And Soueif comments: "Everybody, everybody here has become an orator. We have found our voice." (Soueif 2014: 121-122)

The most obvious way, it seems to me, to approach this passage from *Cairo. My City, Our Revolution*, Soueif's memoir of the first year of the Egyptian revolution, is as, in the best possible sense of the word, a literary trope[2].

The author, whose dress and demeanour are apparently so different from those of the Egyptians around her that she is instantly identified not simply as a journalist, but as a *foreign* journalist ("Be our voice abroad"), encounters an otherwise anonymous female figure who emerges from the crowd in order to tell her what to write, only to instantly disappear back into the collective once her instructions have been delivered. And Soueif, at least as far as we can tell from her own account, complies with those instructions, completely. She submits to this exercise in dictation, recording both the universal and the anecdotal, the picturesque and the banal, the coherent and the confusing, the story and the moral of the story, in what she presents as her interlocutor's own words.

Of course, this kind of self-abnegation is the very stuff of the journalist's trade. But Soueif is not just a journalist. She is a novelist, a writer. Moreover, when we meet her at the beginning of the book, she is a writer suffering from a very specific kind of writer's block. Despite repeated entreaties from her London publishers, she has completely failed to produce the book about Cairo that she had sworn she was going to write. And it is only with the outbreak of the revolution that actually writing a book about Cairo, *her* book, begins to seem possible again.

Still, that possibility is not presented in this scene as due to her having tapped into some inner well of inspiration. Instead, Soueif agrees implicitly to act as amanuensis not only for this one woman, but for the whole unfolding national epic. And in doing so, she is able to reconnect not only with herself, and her native city, but, as a middle-class intellectual, with her people too. The authorial 'I' disappears, and in its place comes the 'we' of the Egyptians with whom she is now reunited.

Of course, behind this allegory of Soueif's creative renaissance lies the figure of the intellectual as the conscience of the Egyptian (or wider Arab) nation as it has been handed down since independence, if not before. Perhaps her most obvious precursor is Naguib Mahfouz

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1   *Shabab*, "youths": cf Soueif's own gloss: "Unpackaged, it carries the signification of 'people, men and women, who are at the youthful stage of life with all its energy, hope, optimism, vigour, impulsiveness and love of life, and who are acting communally, together'". (Soueif 2014: 238)

2   The 2014 edition of Soueif's memoir republishes with a different subtitle the original 2012 text (completed in late 2011) almost in its entirety, with only the epilogue of the first edition omitted (Soueif 2012: 183-194). The later edition adds two new sections written, respectively, in 2012 and 2013, as well as an updated preface and a chronology of Egyptian history. References here are given to the 2014 edition, but I retain the title of the original 2012 edition, which seems to me more eloquent.

who positioned the narrator of his seminal 1959 novel *Children of the Alley* as the one literate man who is able to transcribe the stories of his community (Mahfouz 1996). Mahfouz's narrator is clearly intended as both the novelist's alter ego, and a prototype of the intellectual who "speaks truth to power" (Mehrez 2010: 42; El-Desouky 2014: 9; Jacquemond 2003: 18; cf. Said 1994: 85-102). His decision to locate the writer precisely as the scribe of the community speaks not only to Mahfouz's own ambitions, but also to the ambivalence with which he viewed the function of his profession. The post-colonial intellectual is at once the guardian of the collective memory of the people, and a privileged intermediary who speaks the language of the State, and is thus often called upon to provide the regime with a genealogy that will legitimise its power (El-Desouky 2014: 78)[3].

Soueif's role in this passage, however, is distinctly less ambiguous than that of the narrator of *Children of the Alley*. Unlike him, she has not been coopted by an ally of the ruling caste, who offers her privileged information, and relies on her to collate numerous sources under his guidance so as to put the events of the past in their "right" order. Rather, her only mandate comes directly from the people, through their one anonymous representative. And this episode, rather than framing her work and providing a grid through which to read its structure (which, in Mahfouz's novel, is also the structure of a universal history), occurs somewhere in the middle of her text, where it figures as just one more event among others. In doing so, it reinforces the sense not of order, but of *fragmentation* that suffuses Soueif's memoir, and which makes it such a good example of those "discontinuous modes of narratives that emerged in the wake of January 2011 and that rely on the larger national imaginary for their cementing temporality" (El-Desouky 2014: 73). Rather than confirming her privileged status as author, it is just one episode in the process that began on the first page of the book by which she embraces her role as simply one more Egyptian among so many millions. In her vision of Egyptian society as a resonant and self-organising structure, Soueif's task is not to stand outside it and totalise it; it is simply to take her place. And that place is not a special, privileged place. It is simply a "space into which you" - that is, anyone - "could fit" (Soueif 2014: 4).

This passage thus enacts a moment of transmission and reconciliation between two very different worlds: one turned inward, speaking in colloquial Arabic, the other looking outward, and writing in English; one oral, the other literate; one collective, the other singular. By agreeing to put herself at the service of the first voice that comes along, Soueif inherits from her interlocutor a kind of benediction which extends well beyond this particular paragraph, suggesting that we read her book, in all its polyphonic, non-linear complexity, and openness to revision and incompletion, not as the work of an individual virtuoso, but as something at the same time far more modest, and far more ambitious: a first, provisional attempt at transcribing the great anonymous poem of the revolution.

Soueif's memoir is one of the most moving pieces of writing to have appeared to date in English from the Arab revolutions. My purpose in this chapter, however, is not to analyse this text for its own sake. Rather, I am interested in how the passage I have just discussed might in its turn serve to orient a reading of the countless online videos that these revolutions have generated. Might we not also see them as, in some sense, the scattered fragments of some great collective film that has yet to be edited - as so many individual acts of audiovisual *dictation*, transcribing the epic poem of the people as it is enacted, just as Soueif purports to do in the episode discussed above?

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3   On the public writer as intermediary between the people and the State bureaucracy in contemporary Egypt, see Doss 2008. On the broader question of the deep ambivalence integral to the construction of the relationship between the intellectual and the people in Egyptian national literature, see Selim 2004 passim.

TRANSCRIPT

(English translation by Rasha Sadek.)

TITLES (in English): January 24, 2011 Day One of the Freedom Revolution Dokki, Giza[1]

The filmer advances with the crowd as they chant.

> CALLER
> Down with Hosni Mubarak.

> CROWD
> Down with Hosni Mubarak.

> CALLER
> Hosni Mubarak is going, he is going.

> CROWD
> Hosni Mubarak is going, he is going.

The camera swings round to the right, and discovers a woman standing there, waiting to speak to the filmer, while the crowd continues to flow past, and the chanting contines.

> LEILA
> Let me tell you something. My name is Leila Mohamed Mohamed
> Abdel-Galil. Tell the president we are tired. There is no bread in
> the shops. We stand in line for 2 or 3 hours. People queue at the
> bakeries from 6 in the morning till 1 in the afternoon. The second
> thing is the schools and private lessons. There is no education.

> MAN
> There's no meat, either!

> LEILA
> Every morning we make sandwiches for the kids to take to school.
> Our kids learn nothing at school, when they get home they have to
> take private lessons.

> MAN
> Keep moving, the police[2] are just behind.

LEILA pauses, as if about to follow his lead.

CUT TO:

Further down the same (?) street: the crowd is still advancing and still chanting.

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1   To watch the video with English subtitles, go to: vimeo.com/71670432.

2   *Hakouma*, literally: "government".
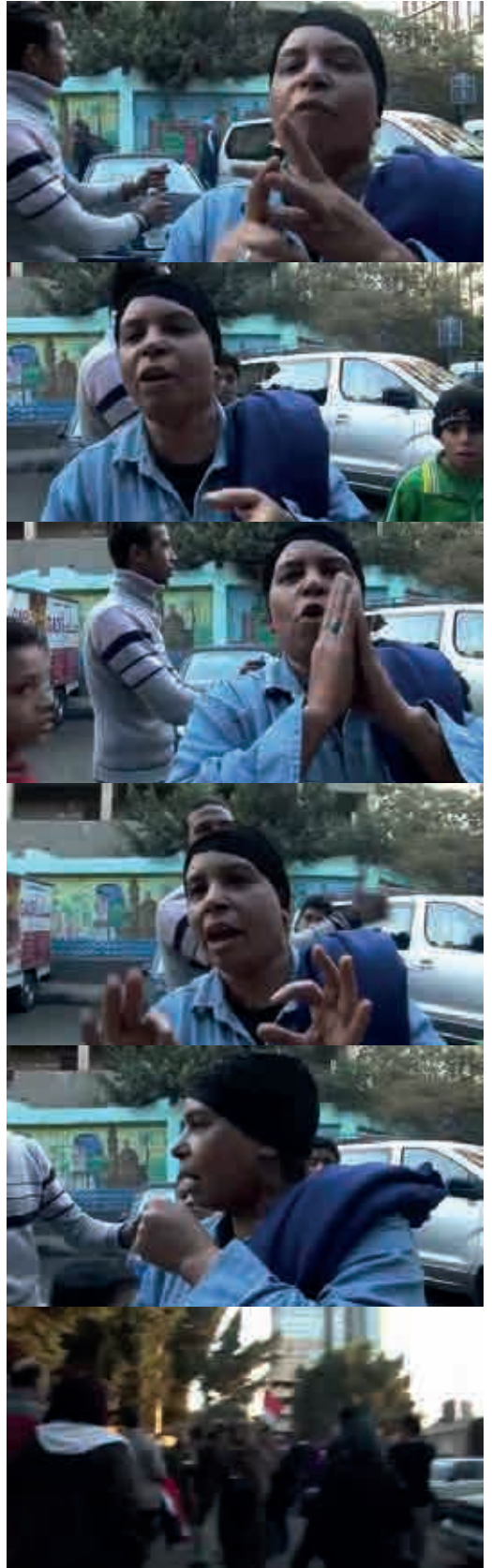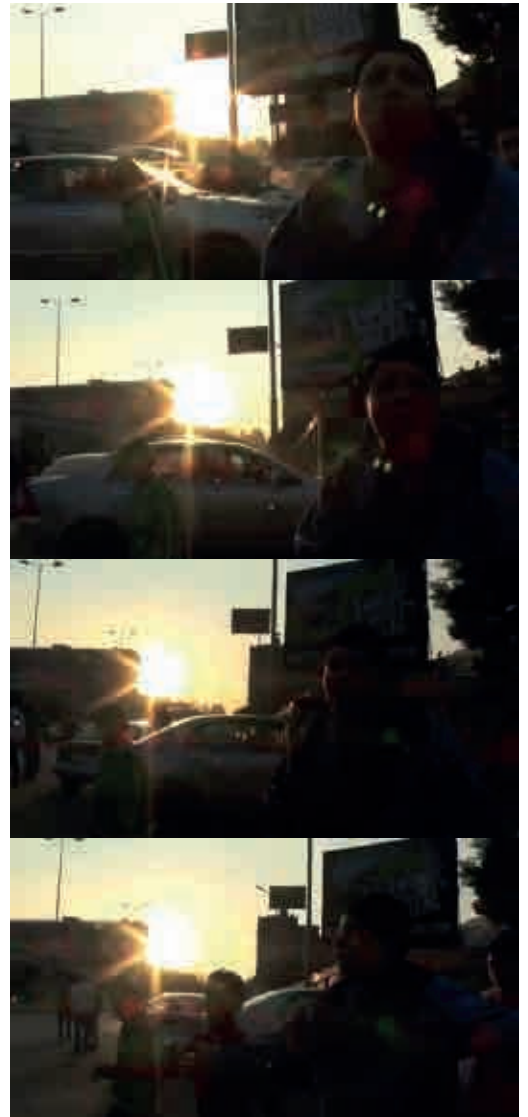
Leila Mohamed Mohamed Abdel-Galil introduces herself to the filmer.
Cairo, Egypt, 25 January 2011

                CROWD
Hosni Mubarak is going!

After a moment, the camera again swings to the right, and lands on LEILA, who is now walking as she speaks.

                LEILA
Let me tell you something. The least would be to live like humans, not like this. We are tired. Women are the most tired people in Egypt. Make the president feel for us. All we ask it that he come down and see the people for himself, not wait for reports in his office or listen to his ministers. They are the ones who have taken everything! Even if they live a hundred years, they won't be able to spend all the money they have stolen!

                CROWD
Down with Mubarak!

                LEILA
Ok? We want to take back our rights! We want to live like human beings. For once, we don't want to be humiliated before other countries, while we watch our children lose their way. That's all.

The crowd have arrived at a junction, the sun is low in the sky.

CUT TO:

A different street. The crowd continue to advance, chanting. Now there are more women around us, not just men as before.

The camera turns slowly to the right again, as the women exclaim and smile, then back to the left, but LEILA has already seen the movement, and begins to address the filmer at the top of her voice. She seems more agitated, and her monologue is visibly beginning to irritate the women around her.

                LEILA
I want to meet the president! I want to meet the president! I have a lot to tell him! I want to speak to him! I want him to hear my voice! Instead of him sitting there, knowing nothing. Maybe he's not guilty. Maybe nobody tells him the truth...

                MAN
No, he's guilty alright!

LEILA forces her way past the other marchers to keep up with the camera, ignoring their interjections and comments.

                LEILA
Maybe his aides hide the truth from him. That's all we want.

Despite her efforts, LEILA falls behind and the camera continues to advance. The marchers, now mainly men again, turn to look at the camera as the filmer draws alongside them.

                ANOTHER MAN
This country does not belong to us.

CROWD
Bread! Freedom! Human dignity!

                    ANOTHER
This government is unjust. A kilo of meat costs 10 pounds[3], which
means that when one, for example...

LEILA appears our of nowhere and interrupts him.

                    LEILA
I want to say just one word to the president! Mr President, give me
a piece of land anywhere, and build me two rooms, and plant me a
palm tree, and give me a goat to milk, and I will eat the dates and
not go to work...

                    CROWD
Leave, leave, Mubarak!

                    LEILA
Because when we work, all the money we earn is spent on electricity
and water bills and transportation. Listen with me, so that my voice
will be heard!

                    ANOTHER MAN
A kilo of sugar costs 10 pounds!

                    ANOTHER (*reprimanding LEILA*)
We are not here just for one person's problems, we are here for all
the people.

                    LEILA
I know! I am telling him because I want him to feel for all of us.

CUT TO:

Same road, same crowd.

                    ANOTHER WOMAN
What I want is...

Then the crowd carries her away.

                    MAN
We are here against tyranny and corruption. That's the only reason
we are here. We want the country to be put right, because it has
been wrecked and destroyed. All we want to do is uproot tyranny
and corruption.

The camera moves forward a few paces, and the person just in front of him starts to talk, as if on cue.

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3   He seems to have misspoken: 10 Egyptian pounds is a very low price for a kilo of meat, tho it would appear he means that the price is too
expensive.

WOMAN

We want a free country, a country where Muslims and Christians
can both worship freely, where mosques and churches can be
opened, so we can pray and practise our faith. We Muslims
are oppressed, we are oppressed in our own country. There is
corruption. Six percent of the people own 80 per cent of everything...

Again the camera moves forward a few paces, leaving the woman behind, and the person in front of her picks up the role of speaker:

ANOTHER MAN

Look here, boss! We are here to tell all the ministers and officials
that the people's minds have opened up! They have become aware.
Look at the price of meat! Look at the price of tomatoes!

The camera moves forward again, and the individuals' speech merges back into the chanting of the crowd, as they pass before a stretch of sidewalk where many people are standing watching, without joining in.

CROWD

Join us, O our people!

ANOTHER WOMAN (*screaming*)

10 pounds for a kilo of tomatoes!

A6.2 A mutual choreography

On 25 January 2011, the first day of the Egyptian revolution, a march set out through the west bank Cairo neighbourhood of Dokki moving towards the Nile corniche, in the hope (ultimately frustrated) of being able to cross over towards Tahrir Square[4]. Among the marchers was one young man with a camera. And as he took out his camera to film, something rather interesting happened to him. Something not entirely unlike what would happen to Ahdaf Soueif some nine days later.

The original video posted by FreedomRevolution25 lasts 7 minutes and 24 seconds, but in my discussion here, I will focus on the first four and a half minutes (transcribed above), both for their internal consistency - they form almost a miniature film in themselves - and for their relevance to the argument I wish to make.

In the videos discussed in section 1 above, the people were invoked or felt, more than they were seen. They were less an object of vision, than a point of view. And I would suggest that in this respect those videos are typical of one major strand within the vernacular anarchive. In this body of work, what matters as a rule are less the bodies in front of the camera, than the body that is carrying it, and all those that can be sensed and felt around it and behind it, but which cannot be seen, at least not clearly and distinctly.

In this video from Cairo, however, the people are presented to the camera with a clarity and fluency that are quite remarkable. My interest here, then, is to look in more detail at what happens on those occasions when the people *do* appear before us distinctly, in the clear light of day. How do they present themselves to the camera? And how does the camera respond, not merely to their presence, but to their new-found *visibility*?

There are a whole number of ways we could approach this short film. On the most basic level, it seems designed to illustrate one of the most prominent chants of the 25th of January, "We are tired of being quiet!"[5] A people who have

long been excluded from any meaningful occupation of public space - who, as one of them says here, do not feel as though they belong to their country, or as though their country belongs to them - are suddenly freed of the initial layer of fear that had sealed them over, and find a certain tentative sense of exultation in simply going out into the street and giving vent to their thoughts and feelings at the top of their voices, however anxious they may remain about the potential consequences.

On another level, this video clearly also anticipates something like the figure we met in Soueif's text. Of course, there are differences. Instead of Soueif's anonymous woman, we meet someone who begins by telling us her name: Leila Mohamed Mohamed Abdel-Galil. And instead of the writer condensing her interlocutor's wisdom into 14 sentences, the video maker allows Leila to hold forth here for almost three minutes, including a non-negligible amount of repetition.

Moreover, the video maker is perceived by Leila as a conduit, not to the outside world, as Soueif was, but rather to the President of the country himself. The message is, in that sense, less external, less impersonal. And the claims and demands it seeks to negotiate are, at least rhetorically, much more modest. Instead of asserting a power, they entreat attention and indulgence. Whether it is the character of Leila Abdel-Galil, or that of the anonymous cameraman, who remains throughout unseen and unheard[6], or the fact that this is only the first day of the revolution, and the people are still unsure of their power, or even of their existence *qua* "people", the mood is very different from what it will be only nine days later on Tahrir Square. The themes are the same - hunger, corruption, division, humiliation, a country that has been destroyed. But nothing has yet been built in its place, and the mood is even somewhat *ancien régime*, with Leila's insistence that Mubarak, like Louis XVI before him, is an innocent man misled and manipulated by his advisors.

However, there is something else happening in this clip which seems to me even more interesting than the features I have mentioned so far. And this is the relationship between the cameraperson, or perhaps one should say the camera, and the people who take turns to speak through it.

The most obvious thing to say is that we seem to have here, at first sight, a kind of spontaneous mutual choreography, which reaches its peak in the moment starting around 2:50

4   The Egyptian revolution has generated the most literary and intellectual activity in (or translated into) English of all the Arab revolutions. Soueif's memoir remains the best introduction currently available, including to its complex chronology. It should be complemented by other accounts by close observers and participants, including El-Rashidi 2011, Ashraf Khalil 2012, Ghonim 2012, and Prince 2014. Wael Ghonim's narrative should be compared with Hererra 2014, though both interpretations are subject to caution on key points. For more synthetic reflections, see Shukrallah 2013, Bamyeh 2013a and 2013b and Rizk 2014 and 2015.

5   See, for instance, the striking shot beginning at 1:09 in Jasmina Metwaly and Philip Rizk's video, *Cairo Intifada*, which follows a march that set out from the west bank neighbourhood of Imbaba on 28 January 2011: vimeo.com/19513814.

6   The fact that the cameraperson is a *man* may also influence Leila's manner and behaviour. The filmer's gender is clearly established by the form of the Arabic pronoun "you" that Leila uses to address him in her opening speech.

when the camera glides from first one, to another, and then to a third speaker, almost without missing a beat. And this same felicity is already present in the opening movement of the video, when as the camera swings round to the right it comes to a halt on Leila who is already standing there, ready to deliver her speech, as if she was simply waiting for her cue.

I want to stress the word 'spontaneous'. Although at times this video seems to aspire to an almost art-house elegance[7] in its serial representation of the individuals who make up the people, it also gives a very strong sense of *not* being directed by the filmer. If there is a cue that Leila is waiting for, then, it is not a cue from the cameraperson as director, it is a cue from the camera as one of the antennae of the world. And indeed, as the video proceeds, it becomes more and more transparent that within this apparently simple and gracious act of standing up to speak, there is a struggle for power going on among the people themselves, and one which only they, and not the cameraperson, can decide.

True, whether by subsequent editing, or decisions made in camera, the moment that might seem the crucial moment is elided (through a cut at around 2:47). But the main outline of this drama is clear. Four times Leila Abdel-Galil emerges from the crowd and effectively takes control of the camera, demanding and commanding its attention. And if the first two times this happens very smoothly, through some combination of charm and the convergence of mutual curiosities, the second two times it is not at all smooth: she has to grab the camera back, if not physically, then by sheer force of character[8].

So we don't see the moment when the camera is finally freed from Leila's attempt to monopolise it. But we do see what comes afterwards. We move from a struggle between the individual (Leila) and the group around her, to a fluid movement which encompasses three different individuals, three different points of view. In so doing, the camera reconstructs the crowd as a series of concrete subjective positions, rather than simply an aggregate of bodies and voices that form the ground against which the individual

figure can emerge. And we also hear the argument which immediately precedes this decisive ellipsis. To the man who tells her that they are there not to listen for one person but for everyone's problems, Leila responds: "I know. I am trying to make *all* our problems felt."

There is a great deal more riding on this passage, I believe, than might at first be apparent. For what is at stake here is not just the outcome of one particular argument between a group of strangers brought together by the happenstance of a political demonstration. What is at stake here are two radically different ideas about *representation*[9].

On one of these conceptions, the individual functions as the representative of the collective, condensing all its possibilities and problems, and allowing the individual spectator to identify with them on condition that they pass through her. The individual here is necessary to make the collective manageable, identifiable[10]. But there is also another approach to the collective, which aims not to isolate one figure who can represent the "mass", but rather to decompose and articulate that mass itself into a series of distinct, but related, subject positions, without the need for a figure to mediate and unify these different positionalities. In this latter case, each person who briefly emerges for the camera as an individual does so in her own right, and with all the limits and limitations which that right supposes, too (and which Leila, towards the end of her "solo" intervention, seems all too happy to ignore...). This person then does not appear to us *in the place of* other individuals, as do, for instance, the "individuals" we typically meet in "character-driven documentaries" (whose explicit, even deliberate specificity and uniqueness is always balanced against their capacity to stand in for, or offset, some identifiable segment of the larger world around them[11]). Instead, she serves principally to open (or re-open) a space within which other people - who may, like her, be *anyone at all* - can emerge into appearance in their turn, just as she has done.

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7   Compare Brian Henderson's discussion of Fellini's tracking shots: "Fellini's camera *affects* his characters, calls them into life or bestows life upon them. (…) Fellini's tracks are frequently subjective - in the sense that the camera eye is a character's eye. In *8 1/2* the reactions of characters to the camera are their reaction to Guido; the pain we feel when we see them is Guido's pain. Because subjective, Fellini's tracks are most often in medium close or closeup range, sometimes with only faces coming into view." (Henderson 1970: 3)

8   To say that the way in which Leila makes the camera submit to her address is not "physical" is, of course, to accept for the sake of simplicity a highly restricted and overly positivist conception of physicality and embodiment.

9   I am using the term "representation" here in a way that supposes that the political, sociological and aesthetic senses of the term are to some extent continuous, even as their domains of application, and the mechanisms/procedures they deploy, remain distinct. For more on this matter, see my discussion of Steyerl 2012 in the conclusion.

10   It tells us something, perhaps, about the nature of both individuality and spectatorship, that the individual spectator is ultimately idealized here in the figure of the President, to whom Leila's final tirades are explicitly addressed.

11   A good example of such a character-driven documentary is Jehane Noujaim's Oscar-nominated 2013 film about the Egyptian revolution, *The Square*. For an even-handed discussion of the film, see El-Rashidi 2013.

Leila, of course, is not a "good subject", even for a disruptive politics. Through her desire to monopolize the camera's attention, she opens up a space to which she might not otherwise have had access, while at the same time tending to close it down for others. But her contradictions do not simply evoke the spectator's empathy and amusement; they also serve to set in motion a dynamic that embodies for the camera the larger tension between the two modes of representation I have described above. This tension is important because this video, I believe, does *not* propose that we choose one of these modes of relating the individual to the collective over the other. Rather, it proposes that we understand the revolution as a process which can move fluidly between these two positions - but only for so long as it recognises the priority of the second over the first.

This tension, this movement, then leads to a third moment (immediately after the end of the four-and-a-half-minute segment transcribed above), which functions almost as a synthesis of the previous two. Now the crowd regroups, the people link arms in the face of the enemy and, letting their individualities be momentarily subsumed into a larger, almost anonymous, collectivity, they march forward chanting, finally, not for cheaper vegetables or to save the King from his rapacious courtiers, but for whatever it is that they name, 'Revolution'.

Here, then, in this video, we meet the people not as it was once held to be, reified and objectified into some sort of naturally unified entity, but rather as it is in the process of its becoming and emergence, of its progressive, non-linear occupation of the space where, up until this moment, it was not. And this becoming takes the form, on the one hand, of the serial iteration of subjective positions as the attention of the camera passes from one person to another, and on the other, of the temporary and provisional re-submersion of those singularities back into the collective. It is this movement back and forward between the singular-serial, and the collective-univocal, that makes possible a genuinely collective form of enunciation, just as it is the filmer's readiness to submit to the speech of the people, to their direction, that underwrites their mutual transformation, the reciprocal exchange of roles and qualities between them[12].

In this anonymous and apparently "artless" video, we can see unfold the same process that Gilles Deleuze, in his discussion of the direct cinema of Pierre Perrault and

Jean Rouch, described as the "becoming-other" of author and subject[13]. And this reciprocal othering is nowhere more evident than in the transfer of "authorship", of the "directorial" role, from the person with the camera, to the person who appears to and for the camera, and who, simply by the fact of so appearing, subordinates the camera to their will far more surely than they could have done if they were holding it[14].

A6.3 Tokens of obedience

The fragility of the filmmaker's authority over the filmmaking process is a constant trope of documentary practice. Michael Renov theorises one form of this reversibility of power when he identifies domestic ethnography as a site of "shared textual authority" (Renov 1999: 152). What specifically interests Renov are those films in which it is the camera itself, the physical object as instrument, that is seen to change hands, wrested away from the filmer by the filmed. But there are also less direct, if no less powerful, ways in which filmic authority can be transfered, explicitly or implicitly, from one side of the lens to the other.

In his 1991 essay "Whose Story Is It?", David MacDougall considers a number of cases in which documentary films in general, and ethnographic films in particular, may be said to "belong" to their subjects as much as, if not more than,

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12   On "encounter" as a form of generative (and thus, non-representational) film practice, see Westmoreland 2015. On generative seriality as characteristic of performative assembly, see Butler 2015: 166, 178. On transformation, see Canetti 1973 and Mazzarella 2010, cited above in chapter A3.1.

13   "They [Perrault, Rouch] have to become others, along with their characters, at the same time as their characters must themselves become other than they are." (Deleuze 1985: 199, my translation)

14   In his discussion of the way in which certain cinematic practices of the 1960s - principally the Third Cinema of Sembene, Rocha, Güney and Chahine, on the one hand, and the direct cinema of Perrault and Rouch on the other - seem to be trying to invent a people who do not yet exist, Gilles Deleuze relates these attempts to the mode of the time-image which he defines as "serial". By this, he means not merely any kind of sequence, but a sequence which tends to a limit. The characteristic of such a series is that it cannot be encapsulated in any single image, whether that image be that of the collective, or of some individual or group held to represent the collective without remainder. The intervals between the members of such a series are not arithmetic, but irrational (in the mathematical sense of the term), and the limit towards which it tends is always immanent, and always out of reach (Deleuze 1985: 202; cf Deleuze 2003). On the mathematical basis for Deleuze's thinking here, see Rodowick (1997: 139ff). I am grateful to Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen for first drawing my attention to this connection. On the series as intimately connected with the need to generate "intercessors", see the transcript of *L'abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze* (1988-89) cited above in chapter 2 (available at lesilencequiparle.unblog.fr/2010/02/23/les-intercesseurs-gilles-deleuze/). On the relation between becoming-other and serial temporality, see Zabunyan 2005: 253-261. My emphasis here on the alternation between the people as series and the people as (provisionally) unified presence could be seen as consistent with Didi-Huberman's proposal that the mode of the people's existence is, essentially, as *intermittence* (cf the discussion in A1.4 above).
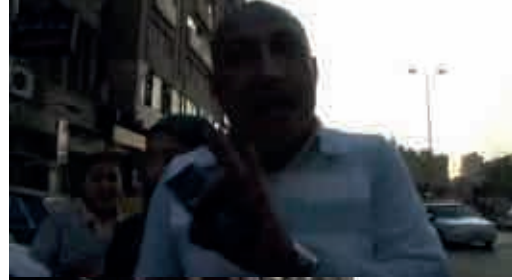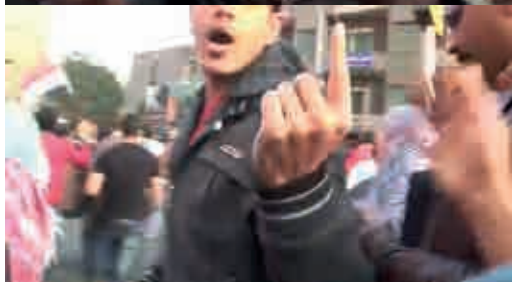
The people as a series of subject positions.
Cairo, Egypt, 25 January 2011

Instructing the filmer. Caïro 26 January 2011.
Still from youtube.com/watch?v=ElQV6nCzH30

to their professional "authors". His analysis ranges widely, extending from the casual assumption of control he reads into Bob Dylan's looks and gestures in DA Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back* (1966) to the larger questions of collective cultural appropriation he has encountered in his own work with Aboriginal communities - those moments when the filmmaker gradually realises that the film he is making "is no longer outside the situation it describes", but is now, somehow, "inside someone else's story" (MacDougall 1998: 157, 163). Such forms of subaltern reappropriation are no less real or powerful for being essentially semiotic rather than material. The transfer of power to the "subject" of the film is thus in many cases quite independent of the obvious, but insufficient, question of who may or may not have their hands on the camera (or, for that matter, the editing table).

Like MacDougall on Cape Keerweer, the video makers of the Arab revolutions often seem to have awakened to find themselves in the midst of a story that they do not, and cannot, control. But there is one major difference. For it is not "someone else's story" they suddenly discover themselves to be inside, but *their own*. Their alacrity to put themselves at the service of the words and actions of others is less the result of some ethic of professional or artistic modesty, than of the direct, visceral experience of their own actions (both as filmers *and* as revolutionaries) as embodying an immanent and plural subjectivity that exceeds their individual experience without thereby

denying or suppressing it (Bamyeh 2013a). Just as Soueif's text invites us to think about dictation as the ideal (and, on some level, idealised) relationship between the intellectual and the people, so the many videos in which a person beside or in front of the camera turns to the filmer and tells her or him, "Film!", suggest that what we may commonly think of as "direction" is experienced here less as a proprietary expert function, than as a constantly circulating, and constantly revocable, mandate[15].

In such a situation, the filmer is less someone who knows how to represent the people (that is, someone who knows how to turn the individuals she selectively films into *representatives* of the collective), than someone who knows how to accept her own role as the people's *delegate*, their messenger. To see the lack of authorial pretension in these videos as merely a function of their

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15   There is not space here to catalogue and classify all the many online videos from the Arab revolutions in which the filmer is explicitly instructed to film by someone who is present to the camera, but not filming themselves. The simplest case, perhaps, is exemplified by a video shot on Tahrir Square on 26 January 2011 which shows, from the inside, a group of demonstrators being kettled by the police. At 3:04, a woman in a state of high emotion instructs the filmer to "Film this farce!" (see youtube.com/watch?v=ElQV6nCzH30). Countless more examples could be listed, from different countries across the region, where the instruction to "Film!" plays a more or less prominent role in the rhetoric of the clip (Riboni 2016). This video is singled out here partly because it was uploaded by (and almost certainly filmed by) the same YouTube user (FreedomRevolution25) as the video discussed in detail in the previous section of this chapter.

"amateur" or "domestic" status is, then, to completely miss the point. Contemporary media practices are governed by preexisting distributions of authority and competence that divide them into elite, industrial and "participatory" or "citizen" forms (for instance), the better to police them. The vernacular videos from the Arab revolutions disrupt these distinctions and deny them their authority. In their place, they seek to establish a radical democracy of images - one that supposes the authority of *anyone* to speak to and for the collective (Snowdon 2014; cf Rancière 2005: 56).

In doing so, these videos show us the revolution as something rather more complex than the straightforwardly "horizontal" and "leaderless" process that has been idealised by many observers of recent uprisings and social movements, whether they are observing them from within or from without. While from certain distances, the revolution may certainly appear this way, when seen from up close - not so close that it disappears into a blur of haptic proximity, but close enough for individual faces to emerge, however briefly - it reveals itself as something both more complex, and more interesting. The collective that traverses the video discussed above is best characterised not by the absolute absence of any form of leadership or representation, but by its constant engagement with a process of dynamic negotiation that may allow such functions to appear, but only for so long as they remain controllable, limited in scope, and acknowledge their own transience.

This video chimes, then, with the analysis of contemporary social movements put forward by Rodrigo Nunes:

> Regardless of what individuals' ideas about decision making, leadership and representation might be, and the practices that they derive from these, their general and most constant framework of interaction is best described, from the point of view of the system, as **distributed leadership**. It is not that there are no 'leaders'; there are several, of different kinds, at different scales and on different layers, at any given time; and in principle anyone can occupy this position. That is, they are not leader**less** but, if the poor wordplay can be forgiven, **leaderful**. (Nunes 2014: 33)

These revolutions are "leaderful" because they do not seek to abolish authority, but rather to keep it answerable to the collective, and to keep it circulating; that is, to ensure that it remains a form of *practical authority* (Bamyeh 2009: 27-28, echoing Bakunin 1882), that cannot be translated into a claim on status or power outside of the context in which it has been granted. The result is a mode of leadership that has more to do with service, or the coordination

of independent initiatives, than with "command and control"[16]. The same can be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of the people's attitude to representation. In the revolutionary moment, the people may appear to actively seek out representation - by individuals, by writers, by cameras and by camera people. But they do so only on condition that this representation remains, as Subcomandante Marcos might put it, *obedient* to them (Marcos 2001: 18; cf. Bertho 2011; Tormey 2006)[17].

Both Soueif's text and this video by FreedomRevolution25 seem designed to foreground just such a relationship, in which the act of filming or of writing serves to express, not the person who is behind the camera (or the pen and notepad), but the person who is in front of it. The accuracy of that claim is always open to question, of course. But if both Leila Abdel-Galil and Soueif's anonymous woman invoke for their interlocutor the role of the public writer, they do so less in the sense of demanding the literal reproduction of their words, than as a metaphor for the kind of fidelity to their intentions, and the kind of effective impact on the ultimate recipient, that they would expect of any competent amanuensis (Doss 2008).

In other words, what matters here is less the accuracy of the *content* of the resulting video or text, than the fidelity and form of the *gesture* itself - the nature of the action it embodies. By presenting itself as the direct result of the filmer's decision to submit to Leila Abdel-Galil's choice of what she would and would not say (and subsequently, to the crowd's decision to take the floor away from her and distribute it to others), FreedomRevolution25's video becomes more than just a document of her words, her demands, her vision of the world. It is, above all, a *token* of obedience, and thus a ground of *trust*.

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16   Compare Gerbaudo 2012, for instance, and his detailed description of three contemporary social movements (the Egyptian revolution, 15-M and Occupy Wall Street) in terms of "choreography", "liquid organizing", and "dialogical leadership". Gerbaudo's ethnographic work is invaluable, but his interpretation is more rigidly binary than is perhaps necessary, and possibly leads him to overemphasise top-down organizational aspects of these movements in reaction. As Nunes says, "The point is not to abandon horizontality, prefiguration and other ideas, which are worthy ones even if their use might be only regulative, but to get rid of precisely the binary scheme by which to criticise or relativise one thing is necessarily to slip into its opposite. It is a matter of opening the space between the two that makes it possible for something, being both to some extent, to be neither. Or rather, to show that the space is already there and has always been, that these mixed states are in fact the only ones that actually exist, and that we stop ourselves from fully understanding what it is that we are doing when we try to shoehorn it into such either/ or oppositions." (Nunes 2014: 12-13)

17   Nunes explicitly makes the link between his analysis of contemporary social movements and Zapatista practice: "distributed leadership can be said to offer a concrete instantiation of the Zapatista motto of *mandar obedeciendo*: 'to rule by obeying'" (Nunes 2014: 40).

This token is offered by the filmer twice over: once, in the form of its making, to Leila and the other people around him on the street that afternoon; and a second time, in the form of its uploading, to all those people who will later come to see it on the internet. By temporarily but repeatedly ceding textual authority to his interlocutors, the filmer creates one of those signs or narratives "that originate in a deeply shared social condition, signaling shared destiny, and speaking *to* that condition, not representing it, with both speaker and addressee fully present" which Ayman El-Desouky identifies as the "specifically Egyptian cultural practice" of *amāra*. And it is precisely through such practices that the people come to recognise themselves, not simply as self-enacted on the *tabula rasa* of some existential present, but as always already bound together *as* the people (El-Desouky 2014: 107, viii; cf Bordeleau 2014: 125–47).

It is this gesture of obedience, rather than any explicit demonstration of "art" or "expertise" on the part of the "filmmaker", that legitimizes this video, just as it is her obedience to the anonymous figure who tells her to "Write!" that legitimizes Soueif's memoir for her readers[18]. Starting from these two texts, we might trace this same gesture, this same positioning of the filmer in relation to the people, through many of the vernacular videos that have emerged from these revolutions. The dialectic of obedience and trust is no less present elsewhere for not being explicitly thematized. By assuming the equal power, competence, and entitlement to act and to speak of whoever may choose to appear before them and their camera, the videomakers of the Arab revolutions do not simply record their testimonies and their actions. They redistribute authority, both over the videos they make, and over the world they collectively inhabit. As a result,

these videos are not simply documents of a moment of possibility that now, alas, would seem to be receding ever more rapidly into the past. They are also messages that continue to circulate, their power to effect change intact and undiminished, and that may still one day reach their true and most effective destination.

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18   Of course, there is also an act of disobedience hidden within this video, and not a negligible one. For, at least as far as we know, the filmer never made any effort to send it to President Mubarak so that he could hear what Leila had to tell him. At least Soueif did finally write her book, and publish it in English, thus accomplishing the task that had been laid upon her: "Be our voice abroad." The filmer, instead, would seem to have kept this video on his flash card or his hard drive until one year later, by which time Mubarak had been deposed and was, at least temporarily, in prison, and the demands which it contained were no longer within his power to grant. This failure to obey does not directly undermine the argument advanced here, though it does complicate it. On one level, one might wonder to what extent Leila's demand to convey her words to the President is a rhetorical set-up, a way of endorsing preemptively the importance of what she has to say, rather than a realistic expectation. On another level, one might argue that the obedience which these videos owe is by its very nature an obedience *to the people themselves*, and that it only obtains among them and between them. To obey Leila by sending the video to Mubarak, would be in this sense to step outside the circle of obedience, by including within the community that obedience defines the figure who is the crystallization of its opposite, who is disobedience incarnate. This may sound like special pleading, but I believe it is consonant with the general sense that infused the Egyptian revolution, that it was Mubarak who had disobeyed God and disowned his own people, and *not* the people who were disobeying him.

A7. The party of the couch

If you just sit at home and follow us on Facebook, then you are the cause of our humiliation.
You will be humiliating ME!
So if you have honour and dignity as a man, come!

Cairo, Egypt, 18 January 2011

A7.1 Inside

As Ulrike Lune Riboni has pointed out (Riboni 2015b and 2016), and as my own experience of watching countless hours of online videos from the Arab revolutions confirms, there are two *absences* from this corpus of work which cannot help but strike the viewer. Absences, in the sense of whole swathes of reality that did exist, that must have existed, but which were not filmed, or if they were filmed, were almost never uploaded.

The first is the near-total absence of *political debate* and *discussion* during the occupations of public space that took place. The second, is the near-total absence of videos filmed in *indoor spaces* that could be described as *private* or *domestic*. (There are lots of videos made indoors: but almost none of them were shot in *homes*, in spaces where families or intimate friends might gather).

This double omission marks a significant gap between Euro-American practices of online video, and those that emerged during the Arab revolutions. It also marks a major difference between the way in which professional *filmmakers* represented these revolutions, and the ways in which their own actors documented and uploaded them.

In both cases, what is missing from the anarchive is, essentially, *conversation*. The kinds of conversation which, in the tradition of documentary cinema, are accessed essentially in the mode of *eavesdropping*. Thus, in all the YouTube videos I have seen, there is no equivalent, or even close cousin to, the scenes for instance in Omar Shargawi and Karim el Hakim's *Half a Revolution* (2011), shot during the eighteen days in Egypt, in which the filmmakers document the often intense and emotional conversations

that would take place each night as their friends who have spent their days out in the streets regroup in one or another flat to exchange stories, discuss strategies, and catch up on news from other parts of Cairo. They also interweave with the footage of the revolution unfolding in the street more intimate sequences documenting co-director El-Hakim's growing doubts as to whether he can really stay in Egypt with his wife and young child as the situation grows increasingly violent.

There is nothing in the vernacular archive to compare with the scenes in Hamza Ouni's *El Gort* (2013) in which the two main characters, Khairi and Wachwacha, invite the director into their homes and unburden themselves to him of their most intimate troubles. Nor is there anything like the intense intergenerational drama within the filmmaker's own family that is played out in parallel with the occupation of Yemen's Change Square in Sara Ishaq's *The Mulberry House* (2013).

And there is certainly nothing at all like the intimate conversations that can be found throughout Jehane Noujaim's *The Square* (2013), in which the actor and video activist Khaled Abdalla can be seen arguing about the revolution with family friend Mona Anis while she prepares dinner, or chatting late at night over Skype with his father who is back in London.

If there is one exception to this rule, it is the Syrian videos of the home sit-ins (*I'tissâm manzalî*) which were staged by women when it was deemed too dangerous for them to attend the regular demonstrations outdoors. Yet, like all good exceptions these videos prove the rule. Bringing together a group of 10 to 20 women, their identities more or less successfully concealed, the sit-ins reproduce and

The friends meet over dinner to make jokes and discuss the day's events. Still from **Half a Revolution**, *2011*

Mona Anis puts Khaled Abdalla in his place while peeling zucchini. Still from **The Square***, 2013*

extend the rhetorics (spatial, visual, aural...) of the outdoor demonstrations. The room is reorganised and decorated, strewn with banners and pictures of the martyrs. And the videos do not record a fragment of the ongoing everyday life that is natural to these spaces, but are used to stage specific and highly ritualised performances for the camera: poems, songs, the reading of revolutionary communiqués... (Boëx 2013b). The home sit-in thus becomes the occasion for an *inversion* of the usual codes governing indoor space. It is as if the need to transform this private indoor space into a *stylised* representation of an outdoor public one is itself intended to signify both the absurdity of the situation in which the revolutionaries find themselves placed, and the strength of their determination to resist the forces ranged against them.

When adducing the reasons why the vernacular anarchive refuses this invasion of privacy that is so common in the Western documentary tradition, we should obviously bear in mind that there may be directly *political* reasons which motivate, or reinforce, this taboo[1]. If the anarchive is essentially the self-presentation of the people, then to present individuals or groups in domestic spaces would not only be a way of fragmenting the people, of splitting

them up and dividing them spatially and temporally (which, in itself, need not be a problem), but it would also be a way of dividing them *socially*.

To show people in their domestic setting, is to show them in the space that they can afford to rent or buy (or which they have inherited), and show how they have chosen (and can afford) to inhabit it and decorate it. Domestic videos, however overtly political their subject matter, and the conversations which they contain, would inevitably show the social class, and probably also the educational level, of the speakers, in a way that their presence in the street would not. The fact that in the street, these distinctions may be equally identifiable from the way people dress, speak, move and gesture, is beside the point. The street, where bodies gather and voices are raised together in common chants, permits the willing suspension of all this coded knowledge about people's origins and class status. Indeed, one could argue that it is because just enough of this knowledge persists outside, that people can take pride in their collective decision to ignore it, to set it aside, in order to construct their unity. Place the same persons in the context of their homelife, however, where the conversations are more individual, and the furniture and size of the rooms, their state of repair, the books and bottles on the shelves, etc, speak for them, and these class distinctions, along with the various ways in which people may attempt to buy their way out of them, become impossible to ignore. By adopting the mainstream Western documentary trope of using intimate conversations in indoor settings to

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1   A taboo that contrasts with the obsession with the family or couple of lovers as the prism through which to narrate the Arab revolutions that limits the capacity of many of the first fiction films set in this context to account for those revolutions' impersonal and collective force (Zabunyan 2013: 71).

develop depth of character, and dramatise political debate, these authored documentaries reintroduce - in some cases reflexively and skillfully, in others clumsily and unwittingly - the semiotics of class cleavages in a way that the vernacular anarchive itself steadfastly refuses[2].

This extreme reticence with regard to the domestic, the interior, and the real biological family, that runs through these videos, is in direct and striking counterpoint to their rhetorical stress on the larger, metaphorical family that has been recreated by the revolution. Samia Mehrez has noted the death of the family as a literary metaphor for the Egyptian nation during the 1990s, as the expansive dynastic chronicles of Mahfouz and al-Zayyat gave way to the schizophrenic first-person narratives of younger authors such as Mona Prince, Somaya Ramadan, Adil Ismat or Mustafa Zikri (Mehrez 2010: 123-143). The fact that the vernacular anarchive is largely insulated against the family, both as a narrative "device", and as a sociological setting, is made all the more striking by the resurgence in and through the revolution of the family as metaphor for the renewal of collective consciousness, and for the ethics of solidarity that underpins that consciousness.

Sit-in demonstration in Damascus, 30 May 2011.
Still from youtube.com/watch?v=iv7CdmLkURs

The most remarkable instance of this is perhaps the video made by Asmaa Mahfouz on the eve of the Egyptian revolution, in which she reports the responses to her original video, and her reaction to those responses, in precisely those terms that are absent at the literal level from almost all the videos that were to come:

> *Everyone who talks to me, talks as if I'm his sister or his daughter or his mother. I felt like I am truly the daughter of Egypt. I felt that I am your daughter and you are concerned about me. This is the most beautiful thing I have ever felt in my life[3].*

A7.2 Outside

The omnipresence of conversation and argument as public pursuits everywhere that space was occupied during the Arab revolutions is not in doubt. As Mohammed Bamyeh remarks,

> *Life in Tahrir Square during the first weeks of the revolution, for example, was characterized by debating circles everywhere, and it was virtually impossible to be left alone, to not be talking to someone else, usually a complete stranger, for a significant amount of time. Talk was in fact the most frequent social activity...* (Bamyeh 2013a: 195; cf. Bamyeh 2012: 37-38)

The near-total absence of such talk from the vernacular anarchive is therefore all the more curious. For the missing interiors discussed above are mirrored by the absence of any attempt to record and distribute significant and substantial conversations, debates or discussions between ordinary people (as opposed to statements specifically staged for and directed to the camera), whether indoors or out.

Thus there is no equivalent in the vernacular anarchive of the (admittedly somewhat artificial) discussions between the protagonists of Stefano Savona's *Tahrir* (2011) which take place while they are encamped on Tahrir Square. Nor is there anything remotely like the totally spontaneous (and remarkably prescient) argument over how the Egyptian revolution would end that Samir Abdallah recorded one night on Tahrir Square in early 2011, and which was one of the highlights of the version of his work-in-progress *Au Caire de la révolution* (2011-) that I saw in Paris in February 2012[4].

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2   The larger problem with many of these films is their commitment to "character development" per se. By adopting the standard modes of narration associated with the "character-driven documentary" - that is, by relying on a small number of characters to "represent" the larger political situation, and by using their psychological evolution over time as the main structuring device of the film, through which larger and more public histories are condensed and made accessible - these films, and in particular those of Noujaim and Shargawi/El-Hakim, produce forms and representational strategies which, whatever their virtues, are in conflict with the distributed, "leaderful" nature of the revolutions they seek to address (Rizk 2014). (Cf Noujaim's explanation of how she started work on *The Square*: "I make character-driven films so I started looking for characters" (Sneed 2014).)

3   See video with English subtitles posted by Iyad El-Bahdadi on 24 January 2011 at youtube.com/watch?v=1UUbVr3eB9c.

4   Screening at Les Trois Luxembourg, 11 February 2012, as part of the festival *Cinéma Tahrir*. For an extract from the film, not including the sequence alluded to, go to vimeo.com/88613459.

This last example is interesting, because it demonstrates that at least people seem to have had no reticence about being filmed by their peers during such discussions. It would appear to be the filmers who instead took the decision that such scenes either should not be filmed, or if filmed, should not be uploaded. The connection between the two 'taboos' - against filming in people's homes, and against filming political discussions in shared common space - may perhaps lie in the peculiarly intimate nature of the relationships formed during the apparently promiscuous open-air occupations. But beside all the pragmatic reasons one can imagine for such choices, this absence also suggests that not only is domestic space registered as radically different from the shared space of the street, but that *eavesdropping in itself* as a cinematographic *modus operandi* is simply not valued, or is even disvalued or disapproved of.

Organizing in full view of the camera. Still from **Tahrir***, 2011*

One could argue that all the events and words that are contained in the vernacular anarchive are there because they were performed and proffered *as common property* (Rabih Mroué: see Intro 2 above), and it is this which makes the videos that were taken of them common property too. Or to put it slightly differently: there is not only a difference between two permanent spaces, one largely indoors, the other largely outdoors, one of which is intimate and private, and the other of which is shared and public, but there is also a difference between (at least) two ways of being in that shared space, one of which is a way of being there for others (and can therefore legitimately be filmed), and the other of which is a way of keeping to oneself, or to one's close friends, and which therefore cannot legitimately be filmed. The fact that the boundary between these two ways of being in shared space falls differently from the way it does at other times, or in other places, does not make it any less real, or any less clear to those who understand the code which defines it.

Is there a deeper connection between the two 'taboos' - against filming in people's homes, and against filming

political discussions in shared common space? It is hard to say, but we can perhaps speculate. Commenting on the omnipresent conversations to be found in Tahrir and in other occupied spaces, Mohammed Bamyeh uses a suggestive phrase to describe part of what was at stake in such encounters: participants were engaged in inventing new meanings, he says, but they were also "performing an erotics of agreement" (Bamyeh 2013a: 195). As Asmaa Mahfouz's reactions in the video discussed above suggest, it is possible that for many the *midan*, with its protective boundary, its improvised networks of mutual aid and its startling inversion of conventional hierarchies of age and generation[5], was experienced not just as a second home, but a surrogate, and indeed superior form of family, whose internal negotiations and quarrels needed to be protected just as much as those of one's real family, in spite of, if not because of, their partly *transgressive* nature.

A7.3 Swimming with Aisha

There are of course many videos taken from within private buildings, looking out, or from on top of them, looking down. But such videos are, as a rule, videos of public events taking place in shared space, and the fact that they are shot from "indoors" does not mean that they give an account of, or access to, the indoor space. In this sense, a window, a balcony, or a rooftop, is simply another, "privileged" viewpoint on events that are offered in common[6]. None of these videos, however, even when they include audible or visual clues to the reactions of those indoors, provide anything like the complex dialogical negotiation of complementary roles between indoors and outdoors that

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5   This inversion of generational hierachies is nicely captured in an anecdote told by Youssef Rakha: "One elderly gentleman – the father of three – sat next to me on the pavement at the Front, as we had taken to calling Abdulmoneim Riyad Square where the attacks of Black Wednesday were concentrated. That was on the next day, towards sunset, and it was very quiet on the Front. A young woman wearing a cardboard and tin helmet started chanting, "Down with Mubarak." People were too tired to join in, but the elderly gentlemen kept staring at her, a smile of awe starting to form on his face. Suddenly he turned to me and pointed in the direction from which the girl's voice was coming. "You know," he said. "When I see the likes of her I feel that I've wasted my life." With a mixture of sorrow and delight he started laughing softly. "If she can do that at this age," he muttered, "what does that say about people like me? When I see the likes of her," he enunciated loudly, "I feel like a piece of crap." (Rakha 2012: 18)

6   I use the term "privileged" here in a purely technical sense. Given that in many Arab cities the inhabitants who live on the rooftops are among the city's poorest, there is nothing intrinsically "privileged" in social or economic terms about being able to literally look down on people. Alaa al-Aswany's novel *The Yacoubian Building* provides, among other pleasures, a good introduction to the complex ways in which social stratification may translate into spatial stratification in one Arabic-speaking society (Al-Aswany 2006).

Swimming in Aisha Gaddafi's pool.
Still from youtube.com/watch?v=q2iTltc0gDI

is found in the video from Tunis discussed in chapter A1 above.

There is however one kind of domestic interior that is very well represented in the vernacular anarchive, at least in the case of Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, which saw their former rulers and their clans flee the country, arrested and brought to trial, or even simply put to death by the first people who managed to locate them. These are the videos in which the filmer takes us on a tour of the palaces and other property belonging to the former dictators. As a rule, these videos tend to have been made only after any looting or destruction was carried out (though in the case of Tunisia, there are some exceptions to that rule).

The important thing to note here, however, is that the transgressive force of this footage is amplified by the fact that it is asymmetrical: no such "revolutionary" footage exists in which the people invade and document their own living conditions. After having suffered regimes whose security apparatuses reserved the right to penetrate their homes at any moment, there is something profoundly liberating about the ability to turn the tables on them in this way. Nowhere is this clearer, perhaps, than in the multiple videos of Libyans not only inspecting Aisha Gaddafi's house, and the damage which previous visitors have done to it, but also simply taking the time to splash around in her swimming pool.

In the case of Egypt, the actual buildings of the Mubarak clan seem to have been well-protected, but there were a number of instances in which revolutionaries documented their invasion of the offices of various State Security corps, "liberating" computers, shredding people's files, and generally lampooning the system under which they had suffered so long[7].

These videos bear a close kinship to those that precede the fall of the regime, and in which the portraits of the dictators are subjected to various forms of humiliation and destruction that amount to a form of symbolic putting to death (see A8.1 below). These are moments of extraordinarily powerful semiotic reversal, in which the people take control, not so much of the material levers of power (which often remained well sequestered and beyond their reach), as of the *language* that had been instrumental to their oppression[8]. These videos of home invasion after

7   youtube.com/watch?v=AOpwrXW0QX8

8   Perhaps the most astonishing of these semiotic revolutions was the transformation of the Pearl Monument in Manama, Bahrain, erected in 1982 on the occasion of the third summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council, into a symbol of freedom and justice by the occupation that grew up around it. This shift in meaning was so successful that on 18 March 2011 the government demolished the monument which had by then become irrevocably associated with the revolution. The irony of this reversal is all the greater when one thinks of the role the GCC's

the flight of the dictator have a similar symbolic value in their transgression of spatial boundaries, though one which rests on a prior shift in material power. It is because the ruling family has fled, or the police has been withdrawn, that these explorations of a domain that was previously forbidden have now become possible.

The transgressive tours through the spaces that had belonged to those "other" families include some of the happiest moments in the vernacular anarchive. As the same time, these videos convey a strange sense of irreality. Is there really nothing behind the curtain that had previously concealed the regime and its agents but some well-watered lawns and a few flat-screen TVs? The real levers of the power that had so long been exercised against the people seem insistently absent. Even the hard drives and paper files that the Egyptian revolutionaries are so elated to get their hands on will later turn out to be "props" in a mutual mise-en-scène, rather than the real functioning nervous system of the regime (see chapter B6 below). With the "triumph" of the revolution, we pass from the self-evidence of the people's appearance in public space, to the illusions and subterfuges of power, sustained by multiple layers of lies, evasions and manipulations. These excursions into the provisionally abandoned corridors of power mark perhaps the end of the beginning of the revolution - the end of its honeymoon period. It is not perhaps suprising, then, if some of these acts of celebratory revenge would leave a bitter taste in their participants' mouths[9].

Peninsula Shield Force played in the brutal suppression of the Bahraini uprising that same month. See Khalaf 2014 for a complex appreciation of the ironies surrounding this event, and Ramirez Jonas 2012 for an eloquent homage to this moment when "[t]he Bahraini protesters changed the text through performance. In turn, the state changed the reinterpreted monument through destruction". For a related interpretation of the transformation of Tahrir Square from a space deliberately designed to thwart community into a space that became the epitome of community, see Hamzamolnár 2014: 137-8.

9   This ambivalence is very well captured in *Night Visitor: The Night of Counting the Years* (2011), Maha Maamoun's poetic found-footage video compiled from YouTube videos of revolutionaries invading the premises of State Security in a number of Egyptian cities (available online at vimeo.com/55608828).

TRANSCRIPT

(From the English subtitles provided in the original YouTube clip).

ASMAA MAHFOUZ (*addressing the camera*)
Four Egyptians have set themselves on fire to protest humiliation and hunger and poverty and degradation they had to live with for 30 years. Four Egyptians have set themselves on fire thinking maybe we can have a revolution like Tunisia, maybe we can have freedom, justice, honor and human dignity. Today, one of these four has died, and I saw people commenting and saying, "May God forgive him. He committed a sin and killed himself for nothing."

People! Have some shame!

I posted that I, a girl, am going down to Tahrir Square, and I will stand alone. And I'll hold up a banner. Perhaps people will show some honor. I even wrote my number so maybe people will come down with me. No one came except three guys! Three guys, and three armored cars of riot police! And tens of hired thugs and officers came to terrorize us. They shoved us roughly away from the people. But as soon as we were alone with them, they started to talk to us. They said, "Enough! These guys who burned themselves were psychopaths." Of course, on all national media, whoever dies in protest is a psychopath. If they were psychopaths, why did they burn themselves at the Parliament building?

I'm making this video to give you one simple message: we want to go down to Tahrir Square on January 25th. If we still have honor and want to live in dignity on this land, we have to go down on January 25th.

We'll go down and demand our rights, our fundamental human rights. I won't even talk about any political rights… We just want our human rights and nothing else. This entire government is corrupt — a corrupt president and a corrupt security force. These self-immolaters were not afraid of death but were afraid of security forces! Can you imagine that? Are you also like that? Are you going to kill yourselves, too? Or are you completely clueless? I'm going down on January 25th, and from now till then I'm going to distribute fliers in the street every day. I will not set myself on fire! If the security forces want to set me on fire, let them come and do it!

If you think yourself a man, come with me on January 25th. Whoever says women shouldn't go to protests because they will get beaten, let him have some honor and manhood and come with me on January 25th. Whoever says it is not worth it because there will only be a handful of people, I want to tell him, "You are the reason behind this, and you are a traitor, just like the president or any security cop who beats us in the streets." Your presence with us will make a difference, a big difference! Talk to your neighbors, your colleagues, friends and family, and tell them to come. They don't have to come to Tahrir Square. Just go down anywhere and say it,

that we are free human beings. Sitting at home and just following us on news or Facebook leads to our humiliation -- leads to my own humiliation! If you have honour and dignity as a man, come! Come and protect me and other girls in the protest. If you stay at home, then you deserve all that's being done to you, and you will be guilty before your nation and your people. And you'll be responsible for what happens to us on the streets while you sit at home.

Go down to the street, send SMSes, post it on the net. Make people aware. You know your own social circle, your building, your family, your friends. Tell them to come with us. Bring five people or 10 people. If each of us manages to bring five or 10 to Tahrir Square and talk to people and tell them, "This is enough! Instead of setting ourselves on fire, let us do something positive." It will make a difference, a big difference.

Never say there's no hope! Hope disappears only when you say there's no hope. So long as you come down with us, there will be hope. Don't be afraid of the government, fear none but God! God says He "will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves"[1]. Don't think you can be safe anymore! None of us are! Come down with us and demand your rights, my rights, your family's rights.

She holds up a handwritten poster to the camera.

I am going down on January 25th, and I will say "No" to corruption, "No" to this regime.

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1   Qur'an, 13:11.

No to corruption, no to this regime! Asmaa Mahfouz, 18 January 2011, Cairo, Egypt.

A7.4 The cause of our humiliation

The absence of indoor scenes during these revolutions is nowhere more remarkable than in the almost total absence of video blogs from the vernacular anarchive (Riboni 2016). This absence is itself obscured by a small number of extremely high profile examples of the genre which emerged from the region at key moments, and thus became the trees concealing the lack of any corresponding forest. (The examples from Tunisia of videos deploying direct speech to camera cited in Riboni 2015b serve mainly to underline how they *refuse* the conventions of the vlog, rather than embrace it). This lack is all the more remarkable if you consider that the vlog, or video blog, is probably the archetypal online video form of the Euro-American internet. Indeed, one Euro-American survey suggested that vlogs were, at least during the years immediately preceding the Arab revolutions, the single most widely-watched genre of user-generated online video content, accounting for some 40% of the "most popular" online videos as measured by multiple criteria (Burgess and Green 2009: 43). This genre, in which a single person speaks directly to the camera in a domestic setting, such as a bedroom or home office, and where the sense of intimacy is generally enhanced by the implication that they are alone as they record their message, would seem to be almost a logical impossibility for the vernacular anarchive. Of the small number of vlogs I have come across, many turned out to have been

recorded by Arabs living abroad. And those which were made in their home countries differ substantially from the Western model.

This point can be illustrated by turning to the vlog which for many people almost came to define the Egyptian revolution: that recorded and distributed by the April 6 movement activist Asmaa Mahfouz on 18 January 2011. Popularized in the English-speaking world as "the vlog that Helped Spark the Revolution", this video is perhaps most remarkable for the ways in which it is *not* a vlog, as much as for the ways in which it is[10].

What is perhaps most remarkable about this video is how it avoids drawing any attention not only to Mahfouz's personality, but to anything which might make us feel we were in a person's home. As if to play down the sense of involuntary intrusion which the viewer might feel on finding themselves having entered someone else's private space, even if invited, the camera is placed so as to more or less entirely eliminate any sense of the environment in which the video is made. Mahfouz's grey and white dress

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10   The phrase "the vlog that Helped Spark the Revolution" is part of the title under which Iyad El-Baghdadi uploaded the English-subtitled version of this vlog. Mahfouz made three vlogs during the eighteen days: they, and their effect on people, are well described in Ashraf Khalil 2012. On the Asmaa Mahfouz phenomenon, see also Wall and El-Zahed 2011.

not only flattens her body out, it flattens her back into the off-white wall just behind her. The only details that persist - a fragment of a grey door with its nondescript handle to the right, the top of a standard-issue office chair to the left - complete the feeling of impersonality. We are not in someone's home, indeed, we are hardly in someone's office. Mahfouz hangs suspended in this anonymous space. But where better than anonymity, from which to speak to all of us?

This vlog, then, is in some sense an anti-vlog, which eschews all the personal trappings, all the theatre of intimacy, which characterises the Euro-American genre. And this refusal to place the image of the individual before the message is further reiterated by the message itself. As her call to Egyptians to come down and join her in the streets on 25 January reaches its climax, Mahfouz says:

> And whoever says it won't be worth it, because there'll only be a handful of us, I want to tell him: you are the cause of all this. You are a traitor, just like the President, and just like the security cops who beat us up in the streets. Your presence will make a difference, a huge difference! Talk to your neighbours, your colleagues, your friends and family, and tell them all to come. They don't have to come to Tahrir, but everybody go down, and let's tell them loud and clear - we are free human beings.
>
> If you just sit at home and follow us on Facebook, then you are the cause of our humiliation. You will be humiliating ME! So if you have honour and dignity as a man, come!

The problem with the home is that it is, on one level, the enemy of the revolution. Indeed in Egypt, those who did stay home, undecided whether to join in the uprising or not, came to be known somewhat derisively as *Hizb el-Kanabah*, the party of the couch[11]. Where the traditional vlog tends to reinforce the sense of domestic space as self-sufficient, because it is designed to provoke and enable the kind of "response" from other "users" that they can make without their having to leave their own bedrooms, Mahfouz's anti-vlog makes explicit the hidden, and deeply paradoxical message running not only through those vlogs that do exist, but, implicitly, through *all* the videos in the vernacular anarchive of these revolutions. For what

each one of them says to us, if we watch it closely enough, is: "Stop watching videos!"[12]

Of course, the injunction "Don't watch videos!" is paradoxical. For it is only by watching a video (this video) that we can hear it. And it is (at least in appearance) only in order to deliver this message that such videos exist. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that each video aspires to be the *last* video we watch, or need to watch. Each video aspires to be the one that finally tilts the balance, that finally gets all its viewers out on to the street, that finally empties the living rooms of the country.

The aim of Mahfouz's video, then, is to eliminate, not video, but its (home-bound) audience - to evacuate the entire population from their comfort zone on the sofa into the streets. Once we are outside, we can still go on watching each other, filming each other, and watching each other's films. But there will be no one left sitting at home, *just* watching. Watching will be fully integrated with making the revolution happen. The revolution will not eliminate the need to watch; it will simply return the act of watching moving images from the private spaces to which they have become confined, to the public space in which they had their origin.

The vernacular anarchive of the Arab revolutions thus seeks to eliminate or subvert the tradition of the Euro-American vlog, as being not a domestic genre, so much as an unwarranted privatisation of public space and public energies. Asmaa Mahfouz's message is not just aimed at the lazy, the timid and the cowardly. It is also aimed at all those who would confine the role of video to the surveillance of domestic spaces and the performance and transcription of individual psychological states. Her direct address to the camera explodes the desire for eavesdropping and other forms of voyeurism. In doing so, she expresses her frustration, not with images as such, but with those images that, in Auden's phrase, "make nothing happen". And the proof that *video itself* has become a form of action, must be supplied by *my* decision to abandon my role as a (provisional, tactical) spectator, and act now in my turn.

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11   On the role of the Party of the Couch in the June 2013 demonstrations, see El-Desouky 2014: 96, and Salem and Taira 2012: 204-06. For an alternative take on the significance of Hizb el-Kanabah, see Albayaty 2011.

12   Mobilization is of course a constant motive for video in revolutionary times. As Cécile Boëx says of the vernacular videos from Syria: "These short films are not just about capturing an event, they also construct their own formal propositions, sometimes comic, sometimes tragic, but always exhorting us not to remain mere spectators of the ongoing violence." (Boëx 2012: 118, my translation) Or as the Egyptian video collective Mosireen put it, somewhat more bluntly: "We do not seek people's pity, we seek to drag you the viewer from your seat and into the street. / We do not seek to inform, we want you to question your apathy in the face of the killing, torture and exploitation that is forced upon us. / We do not ask for your charity, we do not ask for your prayers, we do not ask for words, but for bodies." (Mosireen 2014: 48)

A8. O great crowds join us

Young people of Al-Dahira! Join us on Al-Gezaer Square!
O great crowds of Al-Dahira! God is great!

Tripoli, Libya, February 2011

Still frame from video circulated on Facebook on 15 April 2011 and subsequently deleted. Reupload with EN subtitles available at vimeo.com/149414809.

A8.1 The address of video

In 2006, I travelled to Algeria to attend the funeral of a friend, N., who had died tragically in his late 20s from a rare form of cancer. While in his village, two of his cousins were delegated by the family to look after me and another mutual friend with whom I had made the journey. It was a beautiful spring. In between the often lengthy rituals of mourning, they would take us on extended walks and drives through the surrounding countryside, in which sharing our memories of N. was interwoven with a sense of mutual discovery, and the exercise of a hospitality that made equal room for politics and for botany, for humour and for sadness.

One of the main threads in our conversations was their memories of the 2001 insurrection which, starting from the Kabyle region where we were, had brought large swathes of the country to the verge of *dual power*[1]. They would take great pleasure in telling us stories of how events had played out in their village. One day, while passing a nearby village, a few throwaway remarks testified to the spirit of rivalry that existed between them and their neighbours. To draw them out, I asked our guides how, given the way they viewed the inhabitants of Y, they as the people of X had been able or not to work with them during the insurrection. The answer came back immediately:

> *Suppose one evening they're watching the news on the satellite channels, and they see that down in X, we've torched the police station? Then all the guys in Y will go out and meet on the square, and they'll say to each other: "Did you see what they did down in X? What can we do? How can we go one better?"*

I was reminded of this story in early 2011 when I started watching revolutionary videos from across the Arab region. As the revolutionary energy spread from one place to another, I had the distinct impression that what I was seeing on YouTube (and learning about through other social media) was a large-scale version of the way

that the Algerian insurrection had propagated in 2001. If filming was a means of participation for the filmer, then the videos that they produced and uploaded were not just documents of that participation, but, in the most direct sense, *invitations to others to act in their turn*. Like Asmaa Mahfouz's vlog, their discourse was not impersonal or objective, but directly addressed to a "you" who was no less concrete for being pluralised in unpredictable ways by their diffusion throughout the internet. More specifically, they were inviting the viewer not only to emulate, but to compete with what they had seen, to try to exceed the model in revolutionary fervour. Indeed, perhaps the reason there were so few vlogs from these revolutions was that *all* the videos produced by revolutionaries were felt to contain this element of direct address, this imperative that was no less powerful for being left implicit?

Scaling Ben Ali. Sousse, Tunisia, 14 January 2011. Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=F9a34nCtZGE

One of the clearest examples of this sense of video as a vector for mutual emulation is the countless videos in which protesters from across the Arab world are seen to deface, dismantle, and otherwise destroy the portraits of their much-hated leaders that had too long occupied their public (and thus mental) spaces. Elias Canetti has

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1   See Semprun 2001 for the general outline of these events. Relying almost entirely on reports in French-language newspapers, Semprun provides an account of the insurrection which takes at face value the role that the traditional Kabyle village councils (*aarouch*) attributed to themselves in the self-organizing dynamic. Other sources have suggested that the largely dormant *aarouch* were less an organic expression of the revolt, than an artificial forum *deliberately* revived by the regime, in order to undermine the grassroots organising committees that had begun to emerge not only in villages, but also in universities and workplaces, and whose agenda was far more radical and threatening. For Semprun, one of the reasons the insurrection failed to become a revolution was that the *aarouch* were infiltrated and manipulated. Others argue that the *aarouch* were, themselves, from the start, the infiltration. I am grateful to a number of Algerian friends who wish to remain anonymous for these clarifications.

described the equalizing intent of this kind of symbolic violence well:

> The destruction of representational images is the destruction of a hierarchy which is no longer recognized. It is the violation of generally established and valid distances. The solidity of the images was the expression of their permanence. They seem to have existed for ever, upright and immovable; never before had it been possible to approach them with hostile intent. Now they are hauled down and broken to pieces. (Canetti 1973: 20; cf Khalil 2014: 55)

In the vernacular anarchive of the Arab revolutions, the way in which these acts of destruction are wreaked varies from place to place, and depends in part on the type of portrait that is available to be destroyed. In Egypt, much of the revolutionaries' on-camera rage was vented on the billboards that littered the cities' skylines with images of Hosni Mubarak and his son Gamal[2]. In Tunisia, such operations could be even more spectacular. Once posters were brought to the ground, they would often be set alight, and even run over by cars. In one extraordinary sequence, a group of young men from Sousse risk life and limb to scale the facade of a building in order to bring back a giant portrait of Ben Ali for ritual desecration (attempts to burn it *in situ* having failed) before the encouragement and awe-struck gasps of a large crowd of onlookers.

Syria, on the other hand, is (or, at least, used to be) particularly well endowed with gilded metal statues of Hafez Al-Assad. Harder to destroy satisfactorily with artisanal methods, they nevertheless provided a magnetic focus for the rage of demonstrators in the early months of the revolution, and they would seize every opportunity to have at them, hammering on them with whatever suitable implement came to hand, including sometimes their own shoes[3].

Of course, not all such operations were as public as these ones, performed by the light of day, before large crowds of onlooker-participants. Other such acts inevitably took on the character of clandestine commando raids, due to the risks involved, especially in places such as Syria where the regime continued throughout 2011 and 2012 to control large swathes of the country and brutally repress the least sign of agitation. Thus this video shot at night in which two men, their identities well concealed, set fire to a giant

roadside portrait of Bashar Al-Assad, before making their getaway. Here, it is the video which makes public the energy and courage inherent in an act of defiance which might otherwise have survived only through the charred trace of its material consequences[4].

Bashar goes up in flames. Homs, Syria, 27 March 2011. Still frame from video uploaed by xgotfiveonitx, since deleted from YouTube

Both these images, and the actions they represent, would appear to be infectious. They seem to be offered, and received, in the same spirit of playful rivalry and deadly serious purpose as the provocations that circulated among the villages of the Kabyle region some ten years earlier[5].

2   youtube.com/watch?v=Ak4tATgy0HE

3   youtube.com/watch?v=MkLdCHzgsXQ

4   For a detailed analysis of these acts of iconoclasm in Syria, and their online extensions, in terms of Kantorowicz's theory of the king's two bodies, see Boëx 2013a: 76-80.

5   One Paris-based Algerian friend reported that, during an extended visit to the capital Algiers in the summer of 2011, people would repeatedly tell him: "If only we'd had Internet in 2001, we would have finished with this regime once and for all." Perhaps what matters about this statement is not whether it is true or not, or even whether people really believed it to be true, but the simple fact that making it had become such a plausible and common conversational gambit. It is also significant that this statement was made in Arabic to an Arabic-speaking Algerian, *contra* the propaganda of both the regime and certain "opposition" political parties, that had tried to brand the insurrection as an ethnic separatist rebellion by the Berber-speaking "minority". The experience of the 2001 insurrection would seem to contradict Andrea Khalil's assertion that it was "[t]he violence of the 1990s in Algeria (...) [that] prevented [the country's citizens] from rising in a collective political crowd revolt" during the Arab revolutions of 2010 onwards (Khalil 2014: 71). Her account of recent Algerian politics entirely ignores the events of 2001, and she even asserts that "[s]ince the later 1980s, the Algerian population has refrained from forming into large, heterogeneous political crowds (...) Crowds in Algeria have been small and their demands have remained specific and pecuniary." This is a strange way to dismiss a revolt which on 14 June 2001 had mobilised many hundreds of thousands of people from across the country to march on the capital, and whose key demands included "a State that would guarantee all socio-economic rights and all democratic freedoms", and "the effective subordination of all

*Hammering on Hafez' head. Deir es-Zor, Syria, 22 April 2011. Still frame from **youtube.com/watch?v=MkLdCHzgsXQ**.*

Each of these videos should, I believe, be understood not only as a documentary affirmation ("We did this! It really happened!"), but also as an invitation to do likewise, or to go one better ("*See* what we did? What can *you* do?").

In this way, these videos are not merely produced from *within* these revolutions, because their point of view is that of people who are among the revolutions' actors. They are also part of the internal structure of enunciation through which the people come to constitute themselves as "the people". As Judith Butler has insisted (Butler 2011: cf also the discussion in A2.2 above), this "people" is a people that includes not only those present at the event where the video was made, but also - and above all - those who were absent at that time, but are now present before their computer and/or phone screens to watch these images, and pass them on to others. For these acts of (re)circulation are also among the actions by which the people perform themselves as present, and through which the actions of a

numerical minority achieve a resonance that extends their energy not simply to a majority, but to that which, in each of us, is "all of us" (García Calvo 1995: ss. 2, 13, 16).

These images, in other words, are not principally *about* a "them". But nor are they simply *from* a "we". They are also very clearly, and very pointedly, addressed *to* a "you".

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the executive functions of the State, as well as all the security forces, to authorities that have been democratically elected" (Algeria Watch 2001). As Semprun remarks, this was tantamount to setting as the movement's principal goal "the dismantling ... of the only part of the Algerian state that was still effectively functional" (Semprun 2001: 19, my translation; for the march on Algiers, see Semprun 2001: 26). For a similar sentiment in Tunisia (that the revolt in the mining area of Gafsa in 2008 could have become a real revolution if amplified by images and the Internet), see Riboni 2015b.

TRANSCRIPT

(Based on an English translation by Nabil Shawkat.)

The filmer is advancing through the night, holding his phone vertically as he films the scene around him. At first the only people in the frame are faint figures in the distance, but we can hear the sounds of an assembling crowd, who will grow stronger and come closer to the camera as the video progresses.

          FILMER
Young people of Al-Dahira, join us on al-Gazaer Square!
O great crowds of Al-Dahira neighbourhood! God is greater!
God is greater! Where are you coming from?

          PROTESTER
From Amani.

Confused shouting. The video image momentarily freezes, as we hear people beating on improvised drums.

          FILMER
Where are you coming from?

          ANOTHER PROTESTER
From Amani.

          FILMER
Young people from Amani and Dahira, come and join us!
Join us o you great crowds!!!
Where are you coming from?

          ANOTHER
From Souk al-Jumaa.

          FILMER *(ecstatic)*
Souk al-Jumaa!!! Where are you coming from?

          ANOTHER
Souk al-Jumaa.

          FILMER
People of Souk al-Jumaa, join us!

More and more people are arriving, the confusion of sounds, images, bodies becomes greater and greater.

          FILMER *(voice deepening)*
O great crowds, come and join us!
Where are you coming from?
From Alfiyun? From Souk al-Jomaa?
Where are you coming from?
From Souk al-Jomaa?

Then the video ends as abruptly as it had begun.

A8.2 I know exactly how he feels

A man advances through the night. He holds his cameraphone out in front of him, in the most natural, vertical, position, so that the frame is upright, like himself. Less a window onto the world, than a door through which he might pass towards whatever is coming next. A door so narrow, it seems there may only be room for one person to go through it at a time.

At first, the other people round about him are more a presence than an image. A few stragglers in the distance, a pair of blurred headlights coming towards us, but above all their *sounds* - the sound of voices, car horns, the beating of improvised drums. Then, as the bodies begin to approach and coalesce, their chanting becomes intelligible. Suddenly, we are not looking for the crowd: we are among them.

Even before he meets them, the filmer addresses them:

> *Young people of Al-Dahira! Join*
> *us on Al-Gezaer Square!*

And as he comes close enough to feel their presence, their sheer numbers, his entreaty turns to exultation:

> *O great crowds of Al-Dahira! God is great!*

Yet despite the joy that grips him, he does not lose sight of his initial project. He does not seem to want to join the crowd that sweeps towards him like an inexorable river: he wants *these* people to join *him*. He wants them to follow him to Al-Gezaer Square.

For a long time, I found the spatial dynamics of this video very difficult to understand. It seemed to me that the man holding the camera was trying to turn the crowd around, to lead it back toward *another* meeting point, in the opposite direction to the one in which it was flowing. And this attempt, expressed so joyfully and with such excitement, seemed to me all the more entrancing for the entirely Quixotic and utterly hopeless nature of the project the filmer had set himself.

Of course, that is almost certainly not what is going on. To judge by the available visual clues, the filmer has come *from* Al-Gezaer Square, which lies behind him, and is heading out into the crowd to encourage them to keep moving towards the place that he has just come from[6]. He is an

emissary of the square that is their natural destination, not the lone contraflow prophet of some better option. Even as he advances against their momentum, he remains in this way part of the crowd that he is greeting and directing. There is, despite appearances, *no* real opposition between his "I" and their "we". Which explains why his joy at being reunited with his people is so complete, so unambiguous.

This video was shot in Tripoli in February 2011, during the heady week towards the beginning of the Libyan revolution when it seemed as if Gaddafi might leave as rapidly as Ben Ali and Mubarak had before him, and the eastern working-class suburbs of the capital rose up in electric sympathy with Benghazi and the other rebel cities of the Cyrenaica (see chapter A5.2 for more information on the context). But I first came across it not while deliberately watching videos from Libya, but on the Facebook timeline of A., an Egyptian musician and activist. In the comments underneath (since deleted, along with the original video) A. remarked to a friend how he completely recognized the emotion that this filmer was experiencing: "I know exactly how he feels!". And this remark then triggered an exchange with several other Egyptian friends who all reaffirmed A.'s initial response. In the discursive space opened below the video by the Facebook comment function, I watched this video resonate among them, as they exchanged exclamations and confirmations back and forth. Through watching this video, and responding to it, they were able to relive something which (they all agreed) they had in common not only with the filmer, but with each other. These images from Libya provided - or prompted - a language in which they could talk again about what had just happened in Egypt.

As these reactions testified, there is a powerful sense in this short video of the kind of energy that can be released by the sudden realisation that one is no longer alone. This recognition of a shared desire, a shared determination, that is felt by the filmer in the street as he meets the crowd advancing towards him, extended into the memories summoned up by A. and his friends. And in watching this video, and talking about it, they experienced again that sense of the common bond that had united them on and off the streets of Cairo, even though this was, in a very literal sense, not *their* revolution they were watching -- for indeed, they were more than a thousand miles away.

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6   The filmer is in fact *on* the square, but walking away from it, as if intending to take one of the road's leading out of the square to go and

bring more people. This photograph seems to represent the scene of this video, with the advantage of the clarity brought by sunlight: pbase. com/bmcmorrow/image/52387671. Al-Gezayer Square is the location of an important mosque (whose arcades are visible here on the left), formerly the Roman Catholic cathedral (see wikipedia.org/wiki/Tripoli_Cathedral). All my intepretations of the spatiality of Tripoli are subject to the caveat that I have sadly never set foot there.
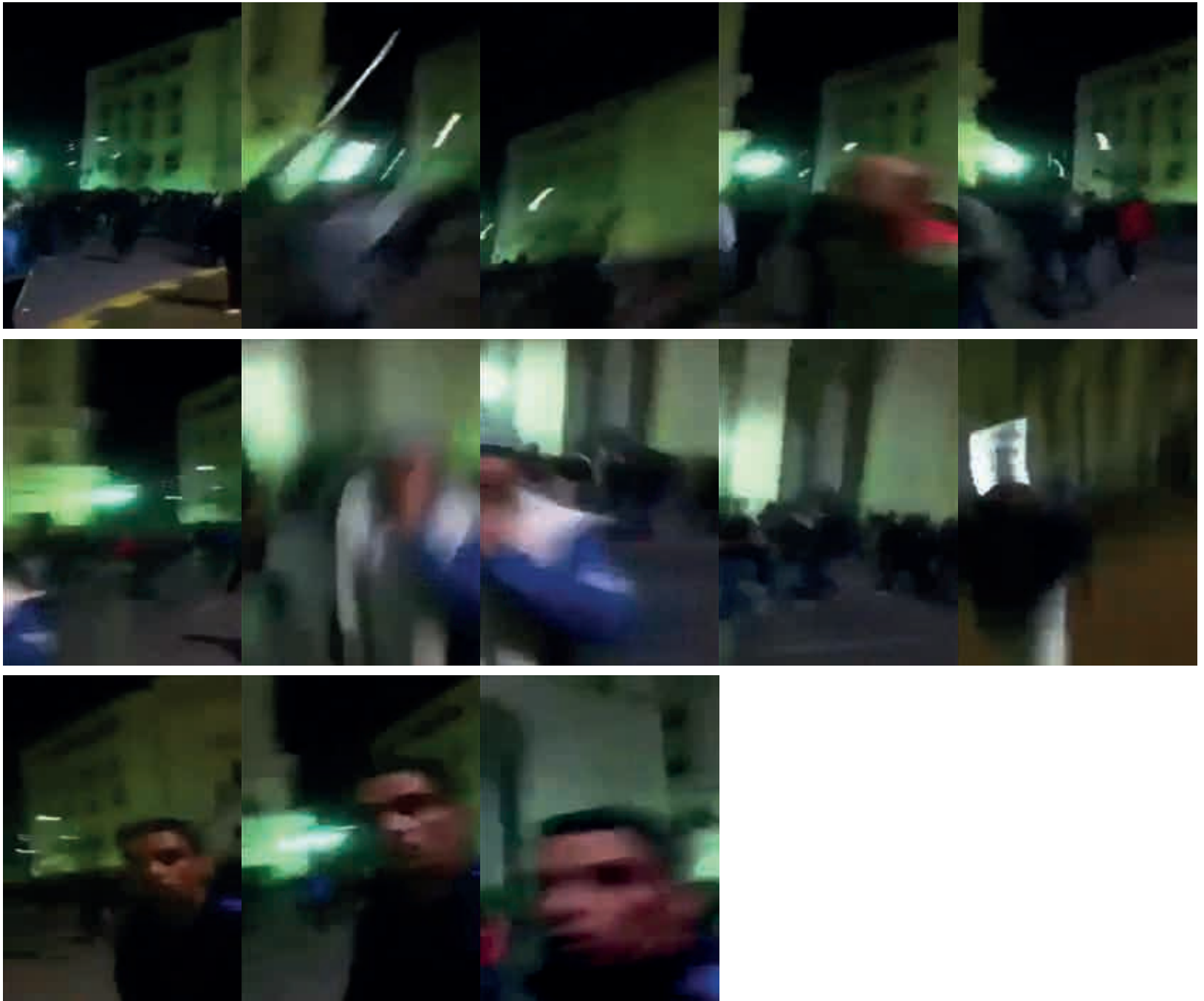
Greeting the people by night.
Tripoli, Libya, February 2011

A8.3 Video as *amāra*

The Italian filmmaker Stefano Savona has speculated that maybe 90 per cent of the cameraphone videos made during the 18 days of the Egyptian revolution were never uploaded to YouTube, but remain on people's flash cards or hard drives. The figure is an anecdotal estimate, but probably points us in the right direction. Savona explains that, having returned to Cairo a year after filming *Tahrir* (2011), he was surprised to find that many of his friends were storing countless videos on their memory cards which they had never thought to upload to the internet or otherwise share in public, but which they kept with them at all times, and would produce whenever they met a stranger who claimed to have been present at the same time in the same place as they had. By showing each other their own videos, veterans of the same event could thus establish a deeper bond than words alone might have allowed. Such fragments of video function less as keepsakes, than as a warranty of the truth of the tales that they would then go on to tell each other - and perhaps, also, as a token that the person to whom they would tell them was worthy to receive them (Savona et al 2012; cf the classification of filmers in Riboni 2015b).

What Savona's friends do when they meet in cafés or on street corners, is a smaller-scale, differently-networked version of the way in which many similar videos circulate through YouTube, and thus on out into the wider social networks[7]. As I have suggested above, these videos are not just inert documents: they are acts of direct address. They not only challenge the viewer to respond to them in kind, by emulating or surpassing the actions they record; they also address the viewer retrospectively, as A.'s conversation with his friends about the Tripoli video show. They provide an occasion on which one's past feelings and reactions and actions can be compared with those of others, and seen to fit with them (or not). In this way, past,

present and future enter into a mutually validating and sustaining network.

These videos thus add to existing cultures of shared vernacular practice, and take part in the generation of new ones. They establish networks in which the nodes are linked together not just by their ability to access one another, but by the fact that they share certain common practices and common values[8]. In this sense, these videos function as *tokens* which may be valuable in themselves, but which are above all valued as the medium through which trust can be established, and which can open the way to dialogues and conversations that are not only more complex, but also more intimate, and for the participants, more dangerous. Crucially, these bonds of trust are not simply a contract between two individuals, but depend on the invocation of the collective of which they both form a part - most obviously, through "the people" as it was formed and affirmed in such and such a place, on such and such a day, and who are therefore present in the videos taken there - even where the videos in question have not been put into broader public circulation, but remain within the "intimate" space of one's personal flash memory card.

These videos, then - both those which remain in the cameraphone's memory, and those which circulate on the Internet - function as what Ayman El-Desouky calls *amāra*: tokens of trust formed out of socially cementing speech and embodied gesture that signify shared destiny to those that recognise them, and that are used to build those relations of practical solidarity on which the revolution depends. El-Desouky traces this specifically Egyptian practice (but which may well have parallels and equivalents in other Arab societies, or even in completely different parts of the world[9]) to a short story by Yusuf Idris (1927-91) that dramatises the structural misunderstanding between the people and the intellectual which is the result of the *absence* of *amāra* (El-Desouky 2014 passim, and especially 29-37).

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7   The hybrid practices by which different groups within the Arab region continue to negotiate the arrival of the personal computer, its networks and devices, and the impact these may have had on video production and distribution, deserve a separate study. Jennifer Peterson's allusions to the lengths to which Egyptian music fans are prepared to go to make peer-to-peer file-sharing a reality give some sense of the questions that might, by analogy, be explored: "Due to their plummeting costs, computers have become common even among low-income urban and rural families, and the practice of transferring files *by removing and re-installing hard drives* is highly common. Songs of all kinds, including *mulid* tracks, are widely distributed by this means, while USB memory sticks, personal MP3 players, and music-playing cell phones are also increasingly serving as a means for the informal distribution of songs. Some internet cafés burn compilation CDs for a modest fee, and many homes and shops use computer-less CD-ROMs connected to speakers so as to enable the playing of music copied as data files. It is these kinds of informal technological solutions that, for example, allow DJs working in highly marginalized conditions to nonetheless function professionally." (Peterson 2008: 7, my emphasis)

8   On the need not simply to refer to "networks" in an arm-waving way, but rather to describe and define the specific types of linkage that operates around each individual node, see Anderson and Harrison 2010: 16: "it is not enough to simply assert that phenomena are 'relationally constituted' or invoke the form of the network, rather it becomes necessary to think through the specificity and performative efficacy of different relations and different relational configurations." I read Gerbaudo 2012 and Nunes 2014 as attempts to explore precisely these kinds of question in relation to the field of "networked" social movements, though without specific reference to the work done within those networks by video *as* video.

9   On the relationship between *amāra* and the South African concept of *unhu*, for instance, see Rooney 2011.

In *The Chair Carrier* (Idris 2009: 177-82; written and first published in 1968), Idris' narrator believes he sees a throne moving down a street in central Cairo on five legs. One of these legs turns out to be an emaciated man who looks for all the world as if he has just stepped out of a Pharaonic mural. Seeing him exhausted, the narrator implores him to stop and take a rest, but the carrier insists that, although he has already been carrying the chair for several millenia, he is doing so on instructions from the Pharoah-God Ptah-Ra, and without his permission he cannot put it down. At each attempt by the narrator to reason him into the rational course of action, rather than continuing with his senseless and outdated task, the protagonist responds by asking for the "amāra" of Ptah Ra. The narrator is unable to provide this, or even to understand what it is he is being asked for, and so the chair carrier goes on forever carrying, abandoning the narrator to worry over his own inability to alleviate the people of their burden, even though no obvious material or political obstacles stand in his way.

While *amāra* is translated as "token of authorisation" in the standard English version of Idris' story, El-Desouky proposes that it has in fact a much wider and more profound meaning than that phrase suggests. For him, the practice of *amāra* is that of "producing signs and tokens of a shared destiny". More specifically, in the context of both Idris' story, and the history of Egyptian progressive intellectuals love-hate relationship with "the people", *amāra* means finding a mode of speech which would allow the intellectual to speak to the people on their own terms, and in their own language:

> But it seems that when the intellectual turns to the people to speak their own truth to them, the speech that seeks to articulate shared knowledge and modes of production of the people seems to falter and communication seems to fail (El-Desouky 2014: 33-34).

It is this failure which the Arab revolutions in effect redeemed, not through the efforts of any intellectuals, but through the people's emergence as those who are competent to speak their own truth:

> When the people speak their own truth, collectively, what they produce is the linguistic, gestured and performed articulations, embodied memories, of their shared knowledge. For these forms are the culturally effective modes of producing common identity and of explaining the world through this common identity. In face of the powers of resonance inhering in these articulations, the speech of the intellectual seems somehow removed and lacking such force of social signification. The

collective social has effectively revealed itself as a new and radical possibility of the political.
> The aesthetic practices of **amāra** (...) project a socially transformed public sphere: expressions of **amāra** index a collectively shared knowledge of the group, while the binding character of this knowledge works through cultural memory as the ability to establish connections and to constitute identity.
> The question of the **amāra** is a question of the production of signs, verbal and visual, and of narratives that originate in a deeply shared social condition, signaling shared destiny, and speaking to that condition, not representing it, with both speaker and addressee fully present. It is not simply a question of the people being made aware or brought to knowledge, but first and foremost a recognition that the people already know and that they do indeed speak their knowing, beyond a specified content or demand. They do not always and only speak in demands, they articulate their knowledge of social realities in socially cementing forms, and that is how they exercise their power (El-Desouky 2014: 12, 80, 107).

The practice of *amāra* is thus in itself the essential message that these tokens carry, beyond any more specific content or form. The two strangers comparing video footage of their presence at the same barricade, on the same day, are not simply checking the veracity of each other's stories. They are sharing signs of a common destiny at the most literal possible level. And the sense of mutual recognition which this act creates is the intimate version of the more public act of recognition set into circulation by A. and his friends' discussion of the Libyan video on Facebook, and how they could recognise in it their own emotions of joy in finding they were no longer alone.

A8.4 *Amāra* as form-of-life

In chapter A2 I argued, following Judith Butler, that the people of the Arab revolutions, as they are revealed to us through the videos in the vernacular anarchive, are essentially a performance. For Butler, this performance, and the claims it carries, are implicit in the simple fact of bodies gathering together, in one place or in many places, offline and/or online, before any words are spoken. Still, Butler's analysis, as I read it, fails to pose one essential question: how is it that people are able to establish sufficient *trust* in one another that they are able to gather together in the first place? What prepares them to risk their bodies

the present, and the new forms that are needed, and that can only be elaborated through spontaneous collective action. They are, in other words, *forms-of-life*, in the sense that Giorgio Agamben has given to the term: forms which render existing dualities inoperative, and that, rather than abolishing them, open them instead to new uses (Agamben 2014, 2015).

These forms which provide a basis for entering into relationship in moments when nothing substantial is yet given in advance, and without predetermining outcomes in a rigid and stultifying manner, are perhaps necessarily *non-discursive*. For it is their ambiguities and opacities that open them to the invention of new and unexpected practices and meanings. Paradigmatically, then, they are forms which are primarily embedded in and supported by our bodily experience, not our rational thinking (Snowdon 2014: 408-09).

The story by Youssef Idris which provides El-Desouky with his starting point offers a perfect example of the embodied, anti-discursive nature of the forms-of-life that are in play here. For the failure of the narrator of Idris's story is, above all, his failure to move outside of, or beyond, the level of rational discourse. Having failed to convince the chair carrier to put the chair down through his own arguments, he then discovers a written note from Ptah-Ra pinned to the chair itself, instructing the carrier to take the chair to his own home, put it down and sit in it. Of course, he assumes that the problem is now solved, and he joyfully announces the good news to the carrier. But the written note turns out to be no use, either: the chair carrier cannot read, and the message from Ptah-Ra as relayed by the narrator is of no value without the *amāra* that should apparently accompany it, but does not.

El-Desouky proposes that the error of the narrator is to assume the *amāra* is some sort of inert physical token, when in fact what is needed is a living gesture. The intellectual's failure is that he does not, or cannot, "communicate with the people in resonant modes of speech, originating in the expression and recognition of a common fate and a shared destiny" (El-Desouky 2014: 33). By remaining within the discourse of instrumental reason, he fails to engage with "the people's languages of urgency" (36), including their gestural language and physical movements, which are inseparable from their words.

This gestural language is incipiently present in the narrator, as Idris goes out of his way to make clear:

> All this I told him with great joy, a joy that exploded as from someone who had been almost stifled. Ever since I had seen the chair

> and known the story I had felt as though it were I who were carrying it and had done so for a thousand years; it was as though it were my back that was being broken, and as though the joy that now came to me were my own joy at being released at long last (Idris 2009: 181).

The narrator here is in a state of intense kinesthetic empathy with the chair carrier: but it never occurs to him to translate that empathy into action. The idea that it might be a gesture from his body that is needed - one that would identify his destiny with that of the man before him - does not even cross his mind[11]. He remains, instead, the uncomprehending spectator of his own estrangement. And through his failure to cross the barrier that separates the spectator from the performer, he is condemning that performer to continue to live in the past. As in any genre of performance that depends upon the active collaboration of the audience, it is only through the spectator's response to the chair carrier's call that they can share not only the present moment, but something like a form-of-life. The chair carrier, in this sense, is not a figure of the long-suffering people of Egypt: rather, he is an allegorical figure of the intellectual's own blindness. For it is his sense of his role as the potential liberator of his people that has become instead the burden that *he* carries without knowing it, and which has completely stifled and repressed his own capacity for spontaneity, creativity and joy.

The allegory elaborated here corresponds to a remarkable degree to Fanon's account of the final - and still unsatisfactory - stage in the evolution of a colonial literature, in which the alienated intellectual seeks to be reunited with the people, only to confuse their living culture with its "outer garments", which are nothing but "mummified fragments" (Fanon 1963: 224). This is precisely what Idris' narrator does in his hallucination of the chair-carrier, reducing the Egyptian people to a figure that has stepped out of an ancient mural, not a living human being. This reification tells us nothing about the people, and everything about the intellectual's vision of them. As Mohammed Bamyeh puts it in his commentary on Fanon, the result is a literature that speaks to the people, but only

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11   Compare this anecdote told about the Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing: "While still in Chicago, Laing was invited by some doctors to examine a young girl diagnosed as schizophrenic. The girl was locked into a padded cell in a special hospital, and sat there naked. She usually spent the whole day rocking to and fro. The doctors asked Laing for his opinion. What would he do about her? Unexpectedly, Laing stripped off naked himself and entered her cell. There he sat with her, rocking in time to her rhythm. After about twenty minutes she started speaking, something she had not done for several months. The doctors were amazed. 'Did it never occur to you to do that?' Laing commented to them later, with feigned innocence." (Clay 1996: 170-71)

Alexandria, Egypt, 25 January 2011.
Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=Ak4tATgy0HE

together to the point where they can begin to experience themselves as a *people*? On what *ground* are they able to assemble in order to share not only their power, but also - and perhaps above all - their *vulnerability*?[10]

Ayman El-Desouky's theorisation of *amāra* suggests one answer to this question. The mutual trust of the people is not a groundless leap into the void, but is rooted in a whole world of shared knowledge, that is also a world of embodied practices - of habitual gestures and customary actions which define certain ways of being together that have been elaborated, not rationally and prescriptively, but intuitively and iteratively, over spans of time much longer than those of any individual's episodic memory (cf. Mohammed Bamyeh's intepretation of the anarchist basis of civic traditions at e.g. Bamyeh 2012: 38). These

practices are thus embodied forms of collective memory that carry with them a certain minimal sense of knowing who the other people are with whom I will gather, and of knowing in particular that we share certain basic values - what Caroline Rooney, commenting on El-Desouky's work, has called "an ethics of solidarity" (Rooney 2011: 372; cf El-Desouky 2014: 123) - an ethics that is inherent *in the forms of the vernacular itself*.

This sense of a common moral horizon based on shared everyday practices of speech and gesture enables the kinds of risk without which these revolutions would never have got started. And these quotidian, even banal practices, in turn, need to be reimmersed in such heightened periods of intensely concerted collective action - Butler's "anarchist intervals" - if they are not to fall into fossilisation and decay, but are instead to be renewed, repoliticised and reinvented. *Amāra* forms, as El-Desouky explores them, are above all those forms that guarantee the possibility of such acts of radical *translation* (Mehrez 2012) between an old form that may no longer be directly applicable in

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10   Butler touches briefly on this question, but does not seem to see the need for trust to be grounded in anything prior to the physical gathering of bodies, or in anything more concrete than the **demand** for "new forms of solidarity on and off the street" (Butler 2015: 186-87).

in order to tell them "that their oppression is all there is to them" (Bamyeh 2010: 60-1)[12].

From this negative example, then, we can deduce several things about the nature of *amāra*. The power of *amāra* stems from the fact that it enables trust to circulate beyond the level of any act of conscious intellectual assent, or any rational mode of choice, in the form of a shared knowledge that is throroughly *embodied*.

> When the people speak their own truth, collectively, what they produce is the linguistic, **gestured and performed** articulations, **embodied** memories, of their shared knowledge. (El-Desouky 2014: 12, my emphasis)

And for this knowledge to travel, it must invoke a coordination of bodies that is neither formless, nor entirely predetermined - bodies that are capable of entering into a relationship that is based on, and leaves room for, *play*.

The idea of political commitment as a pure act of will operating in an existential void is revealed here as the real obstacle to any effective collective action (Bordeleau 2014: 125-47). As Giorgio Agamben puts it:

> When one wants to recover life, anarchy, anomie and ademy in their truth, it is necessary therefore first to release oneself from the form that they have received in the exception. This is not however only a theoretical task: it can occur only though a form-of-life." (...) "The destitution of power and of its works is an arduous task, because it is first of all and only in a form-of-life that it can be carried out. Only a form-of-life is constitutively destituent. (Agamben 2014)

If in these revolutions the people found the courage to act, and thus to enact themselves *as* the people, it was not simply through the countless political debates and discussions that their gathering together made possible, but also through the rhythmic interplay between their bodies - a practice of coordination and attunement rooted not in some authoritarian orchestration, but in their own egalitarian and distributed forms of shared knowledge. Such a coordination leaves room for both the familiar and the unheard of, the known and the unknown, because it is essentially *dialogical* - not a hierarchical communication, but an exploratory, questioning contact between equals, experienced not as political discourse or rational argument,

but as something closer to the give-and-take implicit in the rhythms of vernacular song, dance or poetry.

These rhythms embody the collective memory of the community, not in an intellectual currency of inert signs that can only speak to the head, but as living physical gestures that emanate from and engage our full embodied being, that make full use of our capacities for movement and emotion as well as for reflection. The ability of the videos in the vernacular anarchive not only to document what trust made possible, but to elicit new forms of trust themselves, is rooted in the circuits of embodied empathy that circulate through them. These circuits do *not* remain locked in the virtual, as Idris' narrator does, but constantly re-enage the actual - including through the gestures of making, and watching, video. They enact and communicate tactile, gestural, and emotional intensities. And they do so, not in order to impose *amāra* as a frozen language or a fossilised tradition - some sort of absurd throwback to a mythical (here, Pharaonic) past - but to open up the *other* bodies around them to the possibility of new potentialities and new uses (Agamben 2014, 2015). Including, to the possibility of a revolution.

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12   Bamyeh's remark is made in connection with Ngugi's turn to writing in Gikuyu.

A9. The mulid and the network

PETER: So what did you make of the revolution, then?

NUR (laughing): Well, you know how much I like a good mulid. And the revolution, that was one hell of a mulid!

Conversation with Nur el-Messiri, Cairo, April 2012.

A9.1 The culture of the people

Many participants and commentators have remarked on how the Arab revolutions of 2010 onwards were not simply social and political movements, but triggered, and were in turn nourished by, an outpouring of vernacular creativity that, far from being merely decorative, functioned as an integral part of the revolutionary *energy* itself. And we have seen in the video of Abdennacer Aouini's celebration of the Tunisian revolution (chapter A1 above) how, in moments of intense political epiphany, the distinction between rhetoric and poetry, between words as political actions and words as words enjoyed for their own sake, may tend to break down.

In one of the best accounts of the "Independent Republic of Tahrir", Sahar Keraitim and Samia Mehrez write:

> Public performances, sketches, street art, graffiti, poetry and chanting all sprang up in and around the **midan** in a manner that redefined the very role and place of cultural production (...). This was the culture of the people for the people, all inspired by Tahrir. (Keraitim and Mehrez 2012: 45)

And the same dynamic has been documented across the region, from Manama to Tripoli, and from Aden to Aleppo. Nor has it been limited to capital cities, as liberated spaces proliferated throughout the countries to which the revolutionary wave spread[1].

Thus, in the vernacular anarchive, we may come across a Libyan man reading a poem he has composed to a small group of bystanders in a Benghazi street late one night[2]. Or a Yemeni man, clearly wounded in the recent struggles, waylaying the filmer's passing camera in order to recite one of his own poems[3].

In Egypt, two young men, one of them injured in the fighting to occupy Tahrir Square, perform a song against Mubarak to a small group of onlookers[4]. Elsewhere, a rare interior video from Syria (filmed in a mechanics' workshop)[5] shows a young man singing a violently anti-Assad song, while his friend interjects encouragements[6].

Women are also strongly represented as performers, often taking central roles[7]. Thus we may see an older woman in Tunisia borrowing a megaphone to improvise an incantatory curse on Zineddine Ben Ali and all his family, while the entirely male chorus around her responds to each line with an enthusiastic, indeed almost incredulous, "Amen!"[8] In Bahrain, meanwhile, the 20-year-old student Ayat Al-Qormezi galvanised crowds at Pearl Roundabout with her incendiary poems - performances for which she would later be imprisoned and tortured (Al-Mousawi 2011, Cockburn 2011)[9].

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1 The literature on this subject, most of it descriptive rather than analytical, is considerable. For Yemen, see the general overview of creativity on Change Square provided by Alwazir 2013, and the discussion of political poetry in Justice 2011. For Bahrain, Al-Shehabi 2011 describes the early days of the Pearl occupation vividly. The account of visiting the World Social Forum in Tunisia in Shabi 2013 gives a good sense of how such creativity continued to be a part of everyday life more than two years after the revolution. The importance of poetry in the Egyptian revolution is underlined by Colla 2011, while Mona Abaza has documented and analysed its street art in a series of articles (beginning with Abaza 2012). Al-Zubaidi 2012b details a range of creative contributions to the Syrian revolution, from dance, music and drama to "home video". The online catalogue of the important exhibit in 2013 at the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, gives a sense of the range and power of this dimension of these revolutions all across the region (Khalil and Gruber 2013), while Ted Swedenburg's blog (swedenburg.blogspot.co.uk) has provided an invaluable running compendium of revolutionary musical activities from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. On linguistic creativity and the renewal of the Arabic language by revolutionary discourse, see Neggaz 2013. For a sense of how revolution may have existed outside urban centres, see the first-hand account of the Egyptian revolution seen through the lens of a remote southern village in Abu Lughod 2012, and the sociological inquiry into how the revolution was experienced in Tatouine, a town in southern Tunisia that had been consistently "neglected" (that is, punished) by the post-independence regimes, in Khalil 2014: 38-55.

2 youtube.com/watch?v=Q4W2qB2_STk

3 youtube.com/watch? v=z5dk1zWyrSw

4 youtube.com/watch?v=AdKjMiKqVrc

5 In the first uploads of this video, the face of the singer was deliberately, though not very effectively, blurred out. This gesture could be read as not only an attempt to protect his identity against reprisals, but also as a gesture that recognises the impropriety of the camera's filming in a space which is perceived as interior, and thus reserved, if not actually private: compare the argument advanced in A7.1 above.

6 youtube.com/watch?v=AuXmCKoo4Vc.

7 The role and visibility of women in these revolutions should help overturn certain Orientalist assumptions about the automatic and comprehensive subjection of women in Arab societies. But that does not mean that Arab women are necessarily happy with their position in everyday life, in post-revolutionary politics, or even in the liberated spaces of the revolutionary moment itself. There is a large and growing literature on this subject, and the political importance of these analyses can hardly be understated for the future of these revolutions as a whole. To cite only two examples: Winegar 2012 gives an account in which the power of the 18 days of the Egyptian revolution to interrupt everyday patterns of discrimination is seriously questioned, while Khalil 2014: 96-105 documents how women engaged in the revolution in Eastern Libya encountered obstacles that were located not in tribal tradition, nor in the dynamics of the revolutionary moment itself - the revolution in Benghazi was *started* and sustained throughout by women's independent action - but rather in the post-revolutionary return to "normality", where normality takes the form of institutionalised politics and bureaucratic state structures.

8 youtube.com/watch? v=gh5E2BpkWbA

9 youtube.com/watch?v=mcCEk9s82ac

شعر.flv — يا طرابلس قولي له

Poetry by night. Benghazi, Libya, 11 April 2011. Screengrab from youtube.com/watch?v=Q4W2qB2_STk

These videos clearly reaffirm the vernacular texture of these revolutions. Not only are the forms of language that are mobilised generally the local forms of dialectal Arabic, but this dialect, even when poetically heightened (as, for instance, in Al-Qormezi's work), is often replete with locutions and phrasing which are redolent of proverbial sayings and oral idioms which locate it within, or at the overlap between, highly specific linguistic and social contexts.

As Ayman El-Desouky puts it, commenting on the chants and slogans of the first days of the Egyptian revolution:

> The verbal artistry of the demands and their semantic force are most striking in how they performatively reproduce and mirror the lexical and syntactic structures of common forms of speech and proverbial linguistic forms that are associated with the spheres of cultural production constitutive of 'Egyptianness', or experienced culturally as such. (El-Desouky 2014: 95)

In doing so, they break with any sense of a single master narrative of the revolution that could be handed down from on high, as had always been the case in previous periods of Egyptian history that were experienced as progressive:

> ...in stark contrast to the elevated forms of revolutionary speech, still alive in people's memories from the 1950s and 1960s, slogans were shouted such as: 'dabit shurta ya gari wa akhuya, leh tidrabni wi tihbis abuya?' ('Police Officer, you neighbour and brother, why hit my brother and arrest my father?'). And of course the most famous slogan of the day, 'al-gaish wi-sh-sha'b eid wahdah!' ('The Army and the People are one hand!'). Expressions such as 'eid wahdah' (connoting solidarity, but literally the regular army personnel encountered first were from among the ranks of the people) and 'gari wa akhuya' (connoting familiarity and long-lived acquaintance, but also again reminding security forces that they are indeed from among the people) come straight from common everyday forms of speech and idiomatic expressions associated with certain social conditions and communal relations. (El-Desouky 2014: 99)

To the extent that historical memories are invoked, they tend to derive from moments when the people came out in open opposition to the post-independence state, rather than consenting to be represented by it. Thus in Cairo, on 25 January, a march that started in Shubra can be heard

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repurposing chants that were previously heard during the 1977 bread riots, when the people rose up against Sadat's decision to implement IMF-inspired cuts in subsidies on basic foodstuffs. In particular, the chants: "They all dress in the latest fashions / While we are sleeping ten to a room", and, "They eat pigeons and chickens / We eat beans till we fall down dizzy" are directly taken from the repertoire of 1977 (compare Al-Wardani 2008: 17, 70)[10].

"Let's expell Hosni Mubarak!" Cairo, Egypt, 5 February 2011.
Screengrab from youtube.com/watch?v=AdKjMiKqVrc

These creative and above all *rhythmic* dimensions of the revolution are thus amply recorded in the vernacular video anarchive. Compared with the near total lack of footage of more prosaic and rational forms of communication and conversation, even in outdoor spaces (see chapter A7.2), the profusion of such clips as these testifies not only to the delight which they gave to the assembled revolutionaries and their desire to share those moments with those who could not be there, but also to the function of video in revolutionary times as not merely a "transparent" medium for the relaying of discursive or factual "content", but as *itself a form of rhythmic-musical performance on a level with these poems and songs*. Through the intrinsically participatory dimension of sound (what Jean-Luc Nancy in his work on listening refers to as *methexis*: Nancy 2002), these videos thus inherit the particular vocation of music and poetry to transgress and overflow the boundaries that might all too easily come to separate performer from audience, and to draw the audience members, whether offline or online, into participating in the performance itself - that is, in the revolution.

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10   Cf Riboni 2016 on the way the Tunisian revolution revived slogans and chants from the bread riots of the 1980s; and Mottahedeh 2015: 19, 23 on the repurposing of chants from 1978-9 by the Iranian Green Movement of 2009.

A9.2 Call and response

In their 2005 essay, "A Medium of Others: Rhythmic Soundscapes as Critical Utopias", Phil Weinrobe and Naeem Inayatullah consider seven features through which African music can be seen to constitute "a deep politics through its form" (Weinrobe and Inayatullah 2005: 239). Six of these features they take from the work of the musicologist Olly Wilson: call and response structures; a heterogeneous sound ideal; rhythmic tension; a percussive mode of playing all instruments, including the voice; a high density of musical events; and integration of listener response, including physically through dancing. The seventh feature which they consider - restraint - they take from the work of John Miller Chernoff, and they find it most notably figured as the demonstration of virtuosity through doing *less*, rather than more.

Taken collectively, these seven features can be intepreted as the non-discursive formulation of "deep everyday criticisms of modernity", which Weinrobe and Inayatullah sketch out in these terms:

> *Thus, call and response structures suggest dialogical and conversational orientations as opposed to monological methods of communication; a heterogeneous sound ideal can be thought of as a bow to the "plurality of timbres" or a "democracy of differences" that oppose homogeneity; rhythmic tension suggests an expectation of, and a comfort with, social tension that opposes the norm of a unified harmony; a percussive mode of playing calls for dance thereby emphasizing that physical activity serve as the basis for forming a type of community that goes beyond cultivating a sedentary audience; and a high density of musical events may be seen as the result of a desire to include others and otherness. (Weinrobe and Inayatullah 2005: 242)*

Restraint, meanwhile, serves to create:

> *a sonic structure that, relative to other sensibilities, is more generous and mutually supporting, one that is relatively free of a monocular vision, and that is constituted by a collective sensibility in which each individual thread is both necessary and evident. (Weinrobe and Inayatullah 2005: 255)*

The result is not a single prescriptive model for an ideal politics, but a wide range of creative and unforeseeable soundscapes that

*serve as living illustrations, quasi-
experiments, and critical utopias on how to
relate to others in the wider drama of life
(Weinrobe and Inayatullah 2005: 239).*

Weinrobe and Inayatullah base their discussion of the politics of form specifically on the work of three Nigerian musicians (Stephen Osadebe, Fela Kuti, and Sunny Ade), and propose a general contrast with "Western music" (both classical and pop), while insisting that their "African music" is a "changing same", in the spirit of Paul Gilroy's "anti-anti-essentialism" (see especially 260 n1, and 261 n4). They also acknowledge that all seven of these features can be found, singly at least, in Western music, and provide a list of examples to underscore this point, ranging from Billy Bragg to John Zorn (261 n5). Their case rests, then, on the meaningful convergence of several different but related forms in specific situated practices, rather than on some universal meaning that might inhere in each particular form considered in and of itself.

Each of these forms can of course exist in a wide range of different implementations, which may carry different inflections of meaning. Take for example call and response structures, of which Weinrobe and Inayatullah write:

> *Call and response expressions rest on a continuum
> that ranges from an "echo" at one end and a more
> dynamic conversational answer to the calling
> phrase at the other end. The echo is a repetitive
> response, so that if I say "good morning" I can
> expect my listener to respond with "good morning".
> The "conversational response" expression of
> the call and response continuum, at the other
> end, goes beyond echo by providing a more
> deliberate and articulate reaction. Such an answer
> might provoke a different call with a still more
> elaborate response in the next repetition, and
> so on. (Weinrobe and Inayatullah 2005: 243-4).*

Call and response structures, then, vary from direct repetition of a simple phrase, to engagement in complex conversational elaborations of a single initial "argument", whether composed in advance, or improvised on the basis of a broadly-shared repertoire. The purely *musical* structures thus created interact with, and are reflected in, the larger *dramatic* structures that determine the integration or exclusion of the audience in the performance, by solliciting or discouraging various forms of listener response. All these responses, if permitted, will in one way or another turn the "passive" listener into an active and embodied participant in the music itself, whether on the same terms as the designated performers (that is, as a dancer or singer in her own right), or in a more specific, and more discreet,

register (as in the more-or-less vocalised expressions of *tarab* or *saltanah* that characterise the audience's ecstatic response to skilled performance in certain forms of Arabic music - see Racy 2003; also Peterson 2008: 15-16). Indeed, it might make more sense to distinguish musical forms (and their politics) not according to the presence or absence of call and response structures, but rather by the degree to which those structures are deliberately used to engage the explicit (and explicitly physical) participation of the audience in the making of musical meaning.

Such a scale might start, at one extreme, with the purely internal (musical) figure to which the audience's response is expected to be equally internalised - as in, for example, the question-and-answer phrasing of themes in a Haydn symphony, to which the audience's affective and kinesthetic responses, while real, are largely invisible (though none the less keenly felt by performers and other listeners alike). At the other end of this scale would lie a variety of overtly dramatic practices which deliberately puncture and dissolve the boundary between performer and audience in order to elicit a demonstratively performative physical response from the *listeners*, without which the musical performance itself would simply cease to be meaningful. The Sufi *dhikr* ritual discussed in the introduction above is one obvious example of such a practice in which the music exists not to be listened to in stillness and in silence, but only in order to sollicit an embodied and vocal reaction from the audience, who are thus *incorporated*, physically and rhythmically, as active and indispensable participants in the performance itself (see above, Intro 3). Another relevant example would be "the traditional practice of [the audience] inviting the reciter to repeat and elaborate the tone of the line" during Qur'anic recitation (Selim 2004: 178, referring to a celebrated scene in 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi's 1952 novel *El-Ard*).

I have not chosen the example of call-and-response by accident. On the one hand, such structures are omnipresent in the songs and poetry of the Arab revolutions, and thus in the vernacular anarchive[11]. In this they draw on countless

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11   And of course, call-and-response patterns can also be found as a structuring device, a resonating form, in revolts and uprisings beyond the Arab region, too. Occupy Wall Street's invention of the "human mic" is only the most obvious example, though some of its effects may seem almost the **opposite** of those documented here and in A9.3 below. As Bernard E. Harcourt writes: "The "human mic", as a form of expression, communication, and amplification, has the effect of undermining leadership. It interrupts charisma. It's like live translation: the speaker can only utter five to eight words before having to shut up while the assembled masses repeat them. The effect is to defuse oratory momentum, or to render it numbingly repetitive. The human mic also forces the assembled masses to utter words and arguments they may not agree with - which also has the effect of slowing down political momentum and undermining the consolidation of leadership. Somewhat prophetically, these creative measures reinforced the leaderless aspect of the move-

local traditions of antiphonal music making, which survive today not only in sublimated forms, such as the conventions of ecstatic listening that surround the *tarab* genre (Racy 2003), but also in more directly dramatic incarnations, such as the traditions of poetic duelling that remain a staple of vernacular celebrations across the region, from the Palestinian wedding poetry studied by Nadia Yaqub (Yaqub 2006), to the popular "flyting" rituals that figure so largely in the wonderful first installment of Emmanuelle Demoris' five-part documentary *Mafrouza* (2007-2010) set in an informal neighbourhood of Alexandria.

On the other hand, antiphonal structures have in recent years formed the subject of one very well-known political analysis of cultural forms from within postcolonial studies - that advanced by Paul Gilroy in his writings on the music of the Black Atlantic. For Gilroy, antiphony is in fact definitive of the cultural and political forms created by the Black Atlantic, and he describes its import in these terms:

> there is a democratic, communitarian moment enshrined in the practice of antiphony which symbolises and anticipates (but does not guarantee) new, non-dominating social relationships. Lines between self and other are blurred and special forms of pleasure are created as a result of the meetings and conversations that are established between one fractured, incomplete, and unfinished racial self and others. Antiphony is the structure that hosts these essential encounters. (Gilroy 1993: 79)

Gilroy's allusion to an "ethic of antiphony" (200) is frustratingly abrupt, the more so since call-and-response structures are both highly various and widely distributed not only throughout, but also *beyond* the Black Atlantic[12].

Thus, for example, Ali Jihad Racy has argued that in the Egyptian *takht* ensemble,

> musical texture articulates different social positions: antiphony between performers signifies social compatibility, heterophony among performers signifies social reciprocity, and monophony by performers signifies social hierarchy. [Thus] different musical textures enable distinctive social strategies, allowing for individual agency (through improvisation) within a highly structured performance tradition. (Racy 1988, cited in O'Connell 2010: 6)

Poetic jousting in Alexandria, Egypt. Screengrab from trailer for **Mafrouza Oh la nuit!** *(2007) vimeo.com/26573747*

While Racy's discussion of antiphony in *takht* performances is broadly compatible with Gilroy's interpretation of similar structures in hip-hop or Gospel, my point here is not to argue that *since* Arab musical structures share the same predilection for call-and-response structures as do the African diaspora musics considered by Gilroy, they *must* therefore prefigure the same kind of political utopias that Gilroy finds in them (which would also raise the vexed, and doubtless insoluble, question of the influence of Arabic and Islamic musical cultures on those of sub-Saharan Africa and the Black Atlantic - and vice versa). Rather, I invoke these examples and precursors in order to provide a sense of the range of both the musical and the political possibilities encompassed by the term "call-and-response", the better to locate within that range some of the specific practices we may encounter in the vernacular video anarchive, and to begin to think through those examples *not only as musical structures, but also as structures of online video itself*.

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ment itself." (Harcourt 2013: 59) As Judith Butler terms it, the human mic is more a "relay" than a response (Butler 2015: 157). Indeed, it is hard to imagine a "leaderful" practice that might be so affectively *flat*. (For a more Dyonisiac vision of the mimetic musicality of Occupy, see Taussig 2013.)

12   Martin Stokes writes, not without sympathy: "Study of musical hybridity in the past decade provides evidence of diasporic cultural and political strategies in which migrants, refugees, and diaspora populations detatched from nation-states situate themselves in global flows and build new homes for themselves (...). The privileged status of music in these kinds of analyses is connected to its perceived capacities for simultaneity and heterophony (and thus, pastiche, irony, multivocality, and the embrace of contradictions), its collective nature (and thus, imbrication with everyday lives), and its capacity to signify beyond the linguistic domain (and its binary "either/or" codes). From this theoretical perspective, music enables a "politics of the multiple" (...) and provides a unique key to the diasporic condition. The specificity of musical techniques (for example, Gilroy's antiphony) in the articulation of Diasporic consciousness and political practice is often evoked, but evoked in ways that are frustratingly short on detail and concreteness. Normative models of diasporic consciousness and cultural strategy are proposed, which do justice to the musical lives of some diasporas but not others..." (Stokes

2004: 59) The key to Gilroy's sense of antiphony would seem to lie in his lapidary reference to Sterling Stuckey's work on ring rituals (Stuckey 1987; see Gilroy 1993: 248, n28).

Haitham chanting outside Maspero, 9 October 2012.
Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=HBnf0WOY3qY
video recorded and uploaded by author

A9.3 At Maspero

On the evening of 9 October 2012, I joined a march that was descending Cairo's Al-Galaa Street towards the Nile Corniche, to commemorate the first anniversary of the Maspero massacre. Our purpose was to honour the memory of the 28 people who had been murdered exactly one year earlier by the Egyptian army and police as they demonstrated peacefully outside the State TV and Radio building against the demolition of a Coptic church in Upper Egypt[13].

As we passed the Nile Hilton, I was greeted by an old friend from my days as a journalist at Al-Ahram Weekly in the late 90s. "It's good you're here today", Nur told me. "This is the first time in a long while that I feel like we have the old Tahrir atmosphere back".

Half-an-hour later, the procession drew to a halt outside the Maspero bulding. Instead of stasis, a type of Brownian motion immediately kicked in, the crowd forming and reforming into ever less linear patterns, like the fragmentary concatenations thrown up by a kaleidoscope. The flowing energy of the march was reconfigured as multiple proximate pockets of activity - circles gathered around one or another person, who would cup his hand to his mouth as he led the others in a chant. (And though it was mostly, but not always, a man who led the chanting, women were also everywhere - including riding high on

the shoulders of compliant young men so as to get a better view of the proceedings as they filmed them).

Some of the callers mounted on others' shoulders, others simply stood at the centre of the circle. All began to work their words off the people immediately around them. By chance, the circle nearest to me was at that moment being led by Haitham, a well-known activist and lawyer whom I'd met at a friend's house a few days earlier. Spotting me again in the crowd at Maspero, Haitham grinned and walked over to hug me and exchange greetings. Then he plunged back into the circle and launched into a rising crescendo of insults and provocations against both the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and the Muslim Brotherhood, as the people gathered round him followed both lines of attack with great relish.

In the hour I spent that night, floating around in the crowd outside the TV building, I began to realise a number of things of which I had only had the vaguest intimations from watching such events as they are filmed on YouTube. Above all, I saw some of what is edited out by the usually limited duration of the clips people upload: the way in which each circle of chants self-organises, so that one person will lead the chant for several minutes, and then give way to another, who takes over, only to be replaced in turn by a third, and then a fourth, the whole process mediated by a repertoire of glances and hand signals to ensure smooth transitions and fairness in taking turns[14]. And how each circle is only one among many that may be unfolding simultaneously within a relatively limited space, and yet all those different circles coexist quite happily, each with its own style, its own emphasis, its own internal dynamics, its own peculiar audience, and largely untouched by the other circles around it, which nevertheless work with it to support and structure the crowd.

No sooner had I realised this (and the importance of realising this) than the battery of my camera, which had been with me (and charger-less) since the morning, ran out. When I went to look at YouTube the next day, there were many videos that had been posted from the demonstration, but few that illustrated the way in which the circles formed

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13   For a graphic video account of the massacre itself see Mo-sireen 2011. On the singular significance of Maspero in the litany of counter-revolutionary violence see Carr 2013. For a prescient discussion of the massacre as heralding "a move towards a more-or-less openly reactionary state modeled on Latin American dictatorships of the 1970s", see Younis 2011. See also for a more personal reflection Chapter B3.3 below.

14   This observation is perhaps particularly true of chanting led by and for the Ultras, who seem to have both their own specific rituals, and more importantly, their own particularly democratic ways of self-or-ganising such events, which doubtless testify to the unique character of their political culture. On the Ultras' role in the Egyptian revolution, see Woltering 2013 and Ronnie Close's 2014 film *More Out of Curiosity*. Ultras groups specifically (and football fans generally) are of course a widespread phenomenon throughout the Arab region, and often played analogous roles in the different revolutions. On the role of Ultras in the Tunisian revolution, see Khalil 2014: 11-13, based on interviews with two leaders of *Lem Mkashrine*, the oldest Ultra group of the *Espérance* team based in the capital Tunis.

and engaged in the kind of "leaderful" (Nunes 2014) distributed self-organisation I have described above. And there were none that showed how, if you walked through the crowd, you would pass by first one circle, then another, then another, whose mutual co-presence seemed judged to create just the right amount of cross-rhythm between the different chants, the right degree of "sonic heterogeneity" (to borrow Olly Wilson's term) so that this heterogeneity would be audible as dissonance - so that the presence of the other circles would be felt - yet without creating a level of interference and distraction that might become ovewhelming for their neighbours.

Integrating this kind of polyrhythmic, polycentric soundscape must be much easier for Egyptians who are used to attending the *mulid*, for that is exactly how such festivals are described by Anne Madoeuf:

> *The noise and intensity of the festival varies by the day (increasing towards the last day of the festival period), hour (peaking around 11 P.M. or midnight), and by location within the sprawling space. The mulid is an auditory as well as luminary roller coaster: The crack of toy-rifle fire aiming for prizes, the squeak of swing-sets being carted in, the clash of cymbals and drums accompanying merry-go-rounds, the calls of merchants competing for customers, the sounds of whistles from bands of children, the cry of battling marionettes in shows, the steady chant of Quran recitations, and the bouncing lyrics of popular secular music, all mingle together with the rhythmic chanting of the Sufi dhikrs that flow from the tents and loudspeakers. One also hears the sound of swarms of mini pick-up trucks invading the quarter, loaded with material for setting up the tents, with carpets and chairs, generators, electric installations, sound equipment, as well as those necessary effects of daily life (food, table and bed coverings, kitchen utensils, etc.). The raising of tents, placement of equipment, and set-up of the fairgrounds lasts several days. The quarters hosting the mulids seem to almost disassociate themselves from the city and become a busy world unto themselves while settling into the rhythm of the festival. (Madoeuf 2006)*

The result is a constant competition for the participant's attention, which requires in return special capacities both for distraction and absorption in order to be enjoyed to the full:

> *People walk, but others sit or lie down; some talk, sleep, eat, and drink; others laugh, watch, or do*

nothing; but all are there together, tied to the mulid world-making process of the city. How can one be connected to one scene or to one action, and then disconnect from it in order to involve oneself in another story that is unfolding in parallel? Simply by turning from one place, either by looking elsewhere or by leaving it physically. In this way, many levels of integration are combined in one or many scenes, simultaneously or not, from exclusive to disparate, from subjugation to indifference, from intense to the dilettante experience. (ibid)

The Maspero anniversary demonstration thus reproduced, on a smaller scale, and with a reduction in the possible sources of heterogeneity, the *mulid* spatiality, "full of possibilities, interpretations, and multiple microterritorializations". And the constant forming and reforming of the chanting circles seems, in retrospect, as if designed to enact the kind of distributed network that Rodrigo Nunes has described as "diffuse vanguardism":

> *Leadership occurs as an event in those situations in which some initiatives manage to momentarily focus and structure collective action around a goal, a place or a kind of action. They may take several forms, at different scales and in different layers, from more to less 'spontaneous'. This could be a crowd at a protest suddenly following a handful of people in a change of direction, a small group's decision to camp attracting thousands of others, a newly created website attracting a lot of traffic and corporate media attention, and so forth. The most important characteristic of distributed leadership is precisely that these can, in principle, come from anywhere: not just anyone (a boost, no doubt, to activists' egalitarian sensibilities) but literally anywhere. (Nunes 2014: 35)*

At the micro-level, the forms of organization that I saw that night (but was myself unable to film) are well illustrated by one specific online video from the Maspero 2012 demonstration[15]. Here we see how as soon as the more "formal" speeches end at around 7:00, a circle immediately forms in the crowd, and over the next four minutes, a succession of men - from youths in tee-shirts to a middle-aged man in suit and tie - take turns to lead the chanting. Not only do they pick up the rhythms of their predecessors, but they also ring changes on them, and in this way steer the whole process by varying its rhythmic and emotional intensity, until finally they move off from in front of the

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15   youtube.com/watch?v=aM2By5FH6tw

cameraperson, taking the knot of crowd that has formed around them with them.

The *mulid*, then, as it is reenacted by the post-25-January demonstrations in Egypt, is not just a religious or vernacular *topos*. It is essentially a set of related and overlapping yet fundamentally heterophonous practices that generates its own complex network of rhythms and counter-rhythms, its own particular spatial and temporal palimpsest of calls and responses.

A9.4 There is only "us"

Following my participation in the Maspero memorial demonstration, I spent part of the next day searching online to see what others had recorded and uploaded of the event. It soon became apparent that what for me had been the most striking feature of the chanting I had witnessed - the way that it was distributed both within the different circles *and* between them - was *not* what had caught the attention of the vast majority of those who had filmed and uploaded their videos of these chants. Nor, for that matter, was it the first thing I had chosen to film myself, before my battery ran out[16].

I take this to mean, not that the filmers are not aware of this dimension of the chanting, but that they take it for granted - that they do not feel the need to document it so as to demonstrate it explicitly. They film, not to give a wide-scale impression of how these chants as a whole are distributed through space, but to focus in on one particular

moment in that array, as though closely absorbed by that particular chant to the temporary exclusion of all others. This positioning and focus doubtless also speak to their sense of filming as a form of immediate, bodily participation, rather than a more detached survey, as well as to whatever more specific modes of aesthetic-political attention or absorption in which they may be engaged.

Chanting on the first anniversary of the Maspero massacre. Screengrab from youtube.com/watch?v=aM2By5FH6tw

The result is that the chants are never filmed at the molar level of their distribution through space and time across the whole of the space occupied by the crowd at that particular moment, but always at the molecular level. Each individual chant is filmed as if it were a whole unto itself, rather than only one tiny fragment within a much vaster soundscape. When these videos are then uploaded to YouTube or elsewhere, the complex and heterophonous nature of the demonstration as a whole *is* translated into the new online medium. But it is present there, not *within* one specific video, but rather as *the texture and density of the complex video assemblages that are thus generated across the YouTube platform*. As a result, the provisional online assemblages of videos around an event, such as that which briefly emerged in the wake of 9 October 2012, may be seen to function in a way *analogous to the demonstration itself*. It is the YouTube interface itself which, for as long as it is actively occupied by the revolutionaries, produces concatenations and proximities of rhythms which exist only as the provisional disposition within online "space" of the videos posted, with all their individual contingencies and intensities. After the demonstrators have dispersed from the street, YouTube thus becomes a space in which the *mulid* can continue. But its continuance there is also highly ephemeral, even if it can be called back repeatedly by a sufficiently persistent viewer. The *mulid* of the revolution, even when it moves

16   Trying to reconstruct and reinterrogate the videos of 9 October 2012 some three years later while writing this dissertation demonstrated to me the highly ephemeral nature of the media assemblages created by activists as they upload their videos to YouTube and those videos are then processed and redistributed to those searching for them via the site's database architecture and algorithmic processes. Thus, searching for "Maspero October 2012" in both English and Arabic produced radically different results on 10 October 2012 and on 18 September 2015. By the latter date, of the eight videos and video channels I found and noted for future reference in 2012, only two could intially be retrieved, directly (through keyword searches) or indirectly (through 15-20 minutes of associative searching using YouTube's suggestions and other forms of lateral channel-hopping), of which one was a video published by the English-language news portal Ahram Online. While many videos of the massacre itself continued to surface, most of the videos of the anniversary march had since been submerged. However, an hour later, when I reloaded some of the pages I had found in 2012, the "suggestions" column began to refill with videos which were more closely related to the subject of my original search, rather than the miscellaneous news broadcasts on widely varying subjects that had originally manifested. Of course, this reflects the fact that the YouTube algorithm is not unresponsive to viewer behaviour, but is designed to be "trained" by persistent searching and clicking through to produce different kinds of assemblage, which are more closely aligned with (its interpretation of) the viewer's effective interests.

online, remains a *performance*, and one in which not every aspect is simply and freely *chosen*[17].

The result is a pattern of *call and response* that traverses both individual videos *and the vernacular anarchive as a whole*. And it is the collective resonance that forms not only in these videos, but also - and above all - *between* them, that gives the anarchive itself a structure which is both more complex and more concrete than would be implied by simpler translations of online circulation through the metaphor of the "network"[18]. To watch these videos - two, three, twenty, or any number of them - is to hear chants call to chants, gestures call to gestures, and bodies call to bodies, both *within* individual videos, and *across* the spaces that separate them one from another. The provisional rhythmic topology created by such intense waves of activity would thus seem able to temporarily, but decisively, overcome the fundamentally "aimless structure" of the online database that critics such as Alexandra Juhasz have decried, creating instead a set of connections that are profoundly ethical and political (Juhasz 2008: 310)[19].

Of course, online "space" is not really a space, but a representational effect produced by the "calling" of the databases that lie behind it. That is, it is itself a performance of the database, rather than a continuously existing place, like a physical street or a square (Manovich 2001: 219 et seq). And as Molly Sauter has pointed out, within these

multiple metaphorical spatialisations of the network, there is nothing today that really corresponds to "public space": as she succinctly puts it, "there is no 'street' on the Internet" (Sauter 2014: 4)[20]. After all, the Internet began life as a "pseudopublic academic intra-net", and its evolution since is best seen as the "privatization of a perceived commons", rather than of an actual one. The result is, as Ethan Zuckerman puts it, that "there is no public space on our contemporary internet, only complex, nested chains of private spaces" (preface to Sauter 2014: xiv).

Nevertheless, computing technology, and with it the Internet, is inconceivable without the metaphors of spatialization that enable us - not only users like you and me, but also the people who design and engineer all the layers of both hardware and software on which it runs - to apprehend it, imagine it, manipulate it, and produce it. Computer culture "spatialize[s] all representations and experiences" (Manovich 2001: 219), including our experiences of the computer itself. Likewise, Sauter has pointed out how online activism depends upon the repertoire of physical actions built up by offline activism in order to understand just exactly what it is doing (Sauter 2014 passim). Since the electro-hippies and the Electronic Disturbance Theatre, it is analogies with physical, spatial actions - with sit-ins, occupations, blockades, pirate raids, picket lines, or even cattle-rustling (Coleman 2014: 92) - that allow activists to formulate what it is they intend to do online, and how they can go about achieving it. Spatiality is written so deeply into our repertoires of electronic agency that it may be impossible to disembed it without in the process rendering ourselves powerless.

The question then is how the mass uploading of vernacular videos by revolutionaries - both those that record and transmit the rhythms of their songs and chants, and those that convey less explicitly rhythmical events such as I have considered elsewhere in this dissertation - reinvents, albeit only temporarily, the *structure* of online space. I would suggest that it does so, not by offering an overarching

17   On the constraints that apply to all performativity due to our interdependency, and thus undermine any magical interpretation of its operation, see *inter alia* Butler 2015: 151-3.

18   On call and response as the underlying ethical form of our lives, see Butler 2015: 110. On the network as defined precisely by the *absence* of that "singular exercise" which opens given forms onto an unpredictable future, and thus translates them into forms-of-life, see Agamben 2015: 293-95.

19   "YouTube serves well the de-centering mandate of post-identity politics by creating a logic of dispersal and network. However, while there is unquestionably both freedom, and otherwise unavailable critical possibilities, offered by such fragmentations, YouTube limits our possibilities for radical comprehension by denying opportunities to re-link these peripherals in any rational or sustaining way. Collective knowledge is difficult to produce without a map, a structure, and an ethics. (…) Because people consume media in isolation on YouTube, even if a documentary presents radical content, the viewing architecture maintains that viewers must keep this to themselves. In this way, even as the self may be changing because of the conditions of new media, the self is also consolidated. (…) Like much new media, YouTube disturbs the public/private binary, opening up new possibilities for combinations inconceivable without the technology. Yet YouTube forecloses the construction of coherent communities and returns production, consumption, and meaning-making to the individual, re-establishing the reign of the self." (Juhasz 2008: 306-07) While clearly ethnocentric, and historically dated, this view is not without justification, despite its unilateral and impressionistic interpretation of the affordances of the database. It is interesting to ask how far works such as Olivia Rochette and Gerard-Jan Claes' *Because We Are Visual* (2010) or Nathalie Bookchin's *Testament* (2009-16) confirm Juhasz's vision, or subvert it, precisely through the *musicality* they discover/impose upon the YouTube videos of everyday online life that they take as their raw material.

20   "The internet is not a 'traditional public forum.' Online outlets for speech, such as blogging platforms, social networks, forums, or other wellsprings of user-generated content are privately owned. US-based ISPs could be subject to liability if they do not properly police their users' content. The internet has developed into a zone of modern life lacking some crucial First Amendment protections. While the freedom of the press is relatively well protected in the online space, the rights of assembly and speech of the average individual remains [sic] unprotected. Given the internet's current role as a basic outlet of personal expression, association, and communication, this is deeply troubling. While protest[s] taking place in the various public fora in the physical world have a foundation of history and legal doctrine to support their legitimacy as valid and protected political speech, actions that take place in the online sphere can only ever infringe on privately held property. The architecture of the network does not, as of yet, support spaces held in common." (Sauter 2014: 94-95)

geography that might render that space legible and controllable from some Archimedean point, but rather, by producing a vernacular micropolitics that starts from the bottom up, and spreads not through design or conscious intention, but through resonance. The result is a "space of anarchy" (Bamyeh 2009: 216-18) - the unfolding of a temporary autonomous zone (Bey 1985) that presents itself not as rational, objective, abstract and Cartesian, but on the contrary, as intrinsically embodied, performative, affective, poly-centric, and experiential (cf my discussion of Illich on the vernacular in Intro 4 above). Like the *mulid*, it is a "rhythmic reordering (...) superimposed on a preexisting space, while absorbing it and partially blurring it". Through an act of "active imaginary reterritorialization" it creates a topology that is "ephemeral and explicitly counter-realistic", and that teems with "potential inversions, solidarities, and subversions" (Madoeuf 2006).

In creating this resonant structure, the call-and-response forms that I have documented in this chapter can be seen to play a crucial role, by instilling an embodied ethic of solidarity based on dialogical engagement with multiple others, and by insisting on an egalitarian, voluntary, reflexive, and always revocable, distribution of voice. When we try to view this structure synoptically, it appears then as a discontinuous and fragmented manifold that relies on the invocation of a larger collective imaginary to provide a sense of cohesion (a spatial analog of the temporal structure of the revolutionary memoir discussed by El-Desouky 2014: 73f). By *not* explicitly representing the space (and time) of the revolution as a coherent and intelligibly navigable whole, the concatenations of video that emerge on YouTube (and elsewhere on the internet) invoke even more intensely a background of shared memories and shared experiences as the necessary condition of their own fragmentary aesthetic. In this way, the viewer is led to invest even more intensely, at all levels - affective, embodied, ethical and political - in the field of resonant subjectivity that is thus staked out. The fact that not every video answers every other video directly does *not* undermine the collective orientation to dialogical provocation - the invitation to us to view each new video *as if* it were both a *response* to an earlier video, and a *call* upon the viewer to go out and make her own video (that is, to enact, and film, her own revolutionary action) in order to answer it.

This provocation is directly visible in certain videos, such as Asmaa Mahfouz's vlog (see chapter A7.4). And it is present too in those responses to them that leave traces in other media, including writing (see the Facebook comment thread discussed in chapter A8.2). But it is above all everywhere implicit in the intensity with which these videos collectively inhabit the embodied and haptic dimensions

of the audiovisual, as I have argued throughout chapters A1-A5[21]. The dynamic that the filmer's body imprints upon these images is thus above all an invitation to the viewer to *respond* to others - both the others in the film, and the others who are, like her, its audience - so that in this way all those involved will find themselves caught up in the circulation of revolutionary energy, and thus inspired to act beyond what they commonly believe themselves to be capable of. This mimetic relationship of call-and-response, which song and poetry formalise but which is present to varying degrees and in various forms throughout the continuum of human action and expression, is rooted in those "preparatory bodily attitudes" and "incipient movement responses" (respectively Bull and Washburn, cited in Sheets-Johnstone 2013: 31) that underwrite the kinesthetic and affective empathy exemplified by Idris's narrator (see chapter A8.4). But it also embodies the broadly-distributed capacity to go beyond mere empathy, and open oneself to this energy that, in circulating, defines the people as not just a "they", but a "we".

For we cannot watch these videos as an isolated, individuated "I". We enter into them by consenting to a form of perception that exists *only* in the first-person plural. The fact that the people is more felt than seen throughout the vernacular anarchive, that it registers more as an intimate presence whose vibrations are recorded by the cameraphone "directly", without being brought to optical representation, mean that for the viewer, the experience of watching these videos is the experience that we, too, in watching them and responding to them, *become the people*. And the fact that the people is never simply visible *as* the people, but is always "missing" as well as "not missing", has always to be *searched for* as well as being intuited and felt, means that our response to this call is not

21   Anne Madoeuf stresses the primarily tactile-haptic nature of the collectivity created by the *mulid*: "Cairo's mulid space-times are intermediary zones where contacts are made and practiced between people, but also between objects and positions. Because of this fact, it is appropriate to extend one's attention to places and individuals, towards objects, whether fixed or tended. Objects in these festival urban contexts are active, they move people, provide impulses to action. Innumerable worry beads wrapped around wrists are ceaselessly caressed; handles of teapots are gripped by men and women ceaselessly serving and offering tea to friends and passers-by; sides of women's dresses or headscarves are clutched by children who are either carried or walking on their own. In terms of the density of the crowd, imposed proximity is intense. But it is the consensus of those at the mulid to further intensify this density by holding each other close—arm-in-arm, or hand-in-hand, or embracing a comrade around the shoulder as they move around in groups of two, three, or in lines. Is contact with others reduced, attenuated, or enabled when one is submersed within this gender-mixed crowd? Squeezing the arm of one's family member or companion, is it a show for the others, against the vertigo experienced by the individual in the middle of the crowd? Or is this a paradoxical attempt to escape, by a demonstration of linkage, from the non-sense of being alone among a multitude of other beings? Or is this a way of integrating oneself into this collective gathering of bodies while affirming oneself through a concrete touching gesture?" (Madoeuf 2006)

simply a mechanical reflex, but is always a conscious (if not an entirely rational) choice (see A4.1 above).

The result is an experience not of individual videos, but of a whole *sphere* of online video (Treske 2013) which exists, not as an empirical series of discrete video-elements, but as a collective spatial topology that is irreducible not only to its underlying database mechanics, but also to any straightforwardly Cartesian geometry, and which positions us not as rational individuals, driven by personal interests and goals, but as fully embodied and connected human beings, subject to ecstasies and doubts, to intuitions and transformations, and to ineliminable obscurities.

Together, the videos in the vernacular anarchive reveal the existence, somewhere both within and beyond the internet, of multiple *zones of offensive opacity*, to adopt the term proposed by the French collective Tiqqun. And these zones are perhaps, in the final analysis, nothing other than ourselves:

> *There is an opacity inherent to the contact of bodies. Which is not compatible with the imperial reign of a light that shines on things only to disintegrate them.*
> *Offensive Opacity Zones are not to be created. They are already there, in all the relations in which a true communication occurs between bodies. All we must do is accept that we are part of this opacity. And provide ourselves with the means to extend it, to defend it. (Tiqqun 2008: 14)[22]*

In these videos, by assuming the primacy of its own formal-sensory possibilities, video becomes one of the means by which such zones can be defended and extended. It is through such assemblages - of videos, but not only of videos - that the distributions of knowledge and of ignorance, of perception and of blindness, of distance and of intimacy, which support the political regimes these revolutions have sought to bring down (and in which we may perhaps recognise the lineaments of a larger political dispensation, whose measureless ambition seeks to imprison and reduce life everywhere) can be temporarily rendered inoperative, so that new relations may emerge among the "people" - that is, between the numberless

singularities that compose and traverse an "us" (Nancy 1996/2013). Because it is in such moments that we realise that:

> *There is no social heaven above our heads, there is only us and the whole set of concrete bonds, friendships, enmities, proximities and distances that we experience. There is only us... (Comité invisible 2014: 195, my translation).*
> io14: 19we experience. There is only us... *(Comité invisible 2014: 195, my translation)[23]*

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22   "Il y a une opacité inhérente au contact des corps. Et qui n'est pas compatible avec le règne impérial d'une lumière qui n'éclaire plus les choses que pour les désintégrer. // Les Zones d'Opacité Offensive ne sont pas à créer. Elles sont déjà là, dans tous les rapports où survient une véritable mise en jeu des corps. Ce qu'il faut, c'est assumer que nous avons part à cette opacité. Et se doter des moyens de l'étendre, de la défendre. (Tiqqun 2001: 13)

23   Il n'y a pas de ciel social au-dessus de nos têtes, il n'y a que nous et l'ensemble des liens, des amitiés, des inimitiés, des proximités et des distances effectives dont nous faisons l'expérience. Il n'y a que des nous... (Comité invisible 2014: 195)

A10. The last broadcast

No one is gonna believe what they're gonna see right now on this channel. It's just crazy...

Benghazi, Libya, 21 March 2011

TRANSCRIPT

> SPEAKER
>
> ..on top of us, yeah I know... I know, I heard this.
>
> Hello hello? Check check check.
>
> Check check check hello?
>
> If you can hear me, hello.
>
> He is bombing Benghazi, no doubt. I have seen it myself, with my own eyes. Right now I was in an area called Hayet Doular. Doular area. And he has bombed it. He has bombed it, although that area, has no, nothing... not even a camp, nothing.

Exhales loudly.

> I can't talk much, I'm waiting for the battery to charge, and then I'm going to go live with you.
>
> I mean, this is just not good any more. He has to be, he has to be stopped. I mean, I I I just... I just don't know...

Sighs. Speaks in Arabic:

> *Hagibli maya.*

Leans over.

> Give me some water please.

He takes the bottle and drinks. We hear him swallow.

> Okay, I have the video here, I'm preparing everything.
>
> I'm just gonna connect it. Once the battery charges a little, I'm going to download it from the camera, and stream it to you live on the channel. I mean I don't believe that this is happening. Seriously, I don't believe this is happening.
>
> I'm preparing it right now. Just give me some seconds for the camera, for the battery, to charge in, because the video was too long, I don't want to switch on - to switch off at all.

Pants as he leans forward.

> Oh my God!
>
> The planes, they said it's with us, I don't know, I'm not sure about anything any more. I just can't be sure about anything.

Silence.

Where is Al-Jazeera? Why they are not talking any...? Where is the media? They should be there right now, taking videos of what's happening...

Pause.

The bombing hasn't stopped. The bombing is still happening.

Silence. Woman's voice faint, off. He looks up to his right, then back down to the screen. More silence. Sniffs. Tapping (?) noises. Sniffs again, and swallows.

I'm sorry I, I, I can't talk, I really, you will see it all in the video. I mean, it was crazy. And it was just, you know, out of order. And people there were just all over the place, you know. They were looking, but they were in shock. They couldn't, they couldn't believe what was happening, I mean, it was just, you know, out...

Breaks off, sighs.

Okay. Okay, I'm going to try to get the battery in there. Try to get it, yeah, just try to do it as fast... Just try to download it as fast as I can, with the camera. I hope it's gonna work, because it can't, it can't -- charge that much.

Pause: tapping/camera manipulation noises?

Taps on keys, hum is interrupted by this.

Windows jingle.

Okay, it's started. Let me just download it as fast as I can, okay?

Sniffs.

Hardware unmounted noise.

Okay, come on, come on, come on.

Taps.

Yeah.

Silence - taps, sniffs.

Okay.

Silence.

Okay, it's downloading.

I hope to get it before it dies.

Big sniff, presses fingers to forehead.

No one is gonna believe what they're gonna see right now on this channel. It's just crazy, I don't know what has bombed that place.

Crosses hands in front of camera.

But the missiles I have seen... and, and and...

I'm sorry, I cant' talk, I can't talk, I can't I can't talk, I can't I don't know what to say. I can show you the missiles first. We have the images. Yes, I have the images here.

Pause.

Okay, I will play the images for you of the missiles.

Pause.

And - I'm gonna have to hang up, I'm gonna put the... the the the...

Tape cuts abruptly
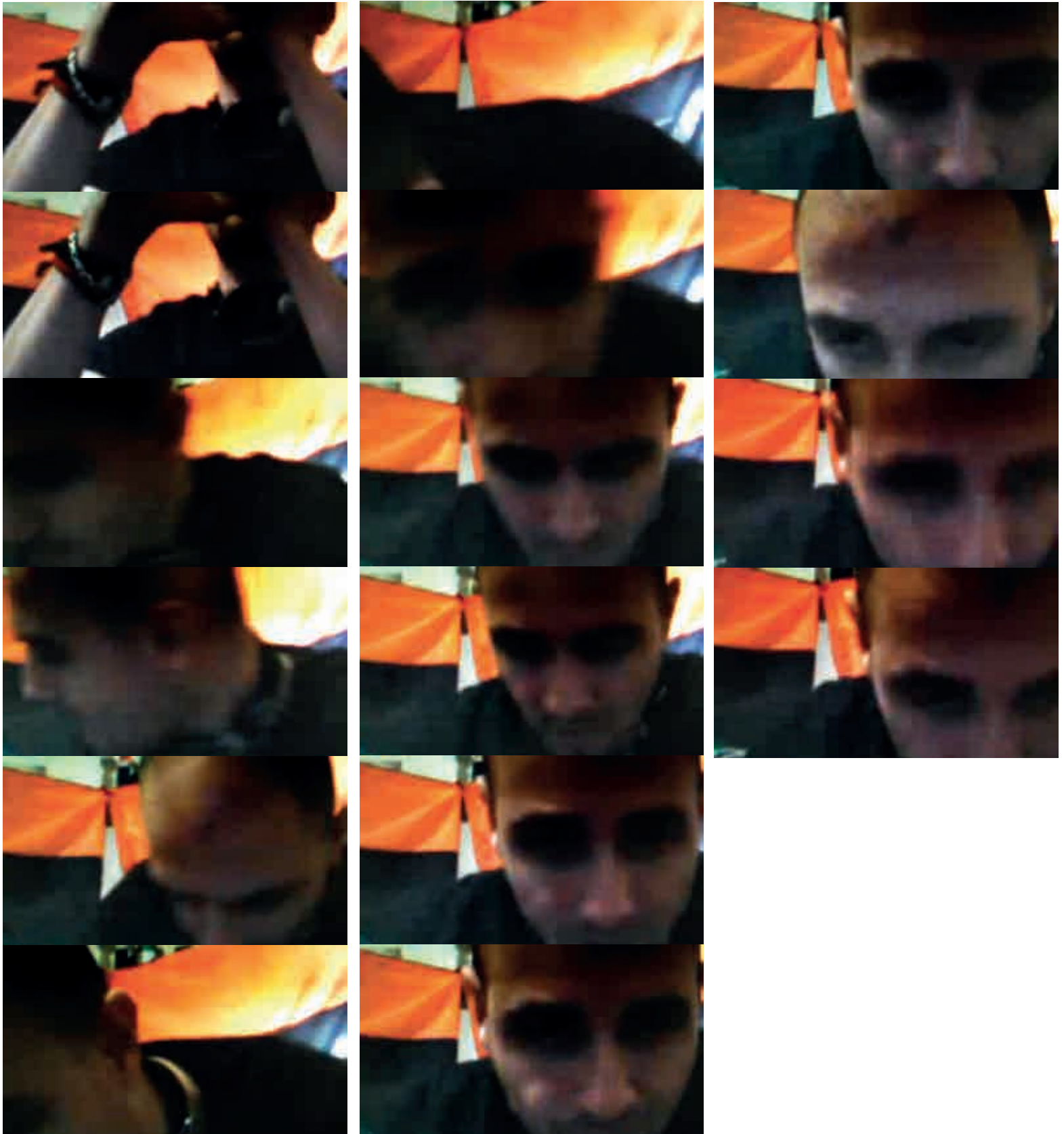
Waiting for the images to upload.
Benghazi, Libya, 21 March 2011

A10.1 I'm gonna have to hang up

A man breaks off a conversation to turn towards the camera. As he leans closer, his eyes come into view. Yet these are not eyes in which we might recognise ourselves: they are empty orbits, two rough smudges of blackness. And even when I say "a man", some latitude of approximation is implied.

From the very beginning, the surface of the image is recalcitrant to our reading. No sooner does a figure emerge, than the pixels that make it up regroup, block and bleed. The face, that we know should be the centre of our attention, oscillates between expressionism and abstraction. The skin tones stretch into ever more garish shades, while the body underneath recedes into the darkness of its sweater - as if the man who is speaking to us, moved by a paroxysm of patriotism, were trying to merge with the flag that hangs behind him on the wall.[1]

While his figure seems poised on the verge of some definitive withdrawal, his voice reaches us clearly, not only across distance and time, but also across all the generations of sampling and compression which separate us, wherever and whenever we may be, from him. Not that the sound track is without its own imperfections, of which the most obvious is the near-constant low frequency hum that serves as a sort of drone, musically binding the whole sequence together. And his voice, too, is insistently incarnate. Its silences are not silences, for they are repeatedly interrupted by a body that is panting for breath, sniffing as if to hold back a head cold, calling for water, sighing or swallowing. Here, the oral largely exceeds the vocal. To such an extent that, by the end of the shot, I find myself hearing the machine hum *not* so much as a mechanical intrusion on some desired transparency, as just another symptom of the too-great proximity of *this* body[2].

So then I try to reconstruct what has happened. This man has run in from somewhere. He is obviously still in some kind of shock, both physical and emotional. In a camera (which I do not see) he claims to have some images - both video and still images - which he wants to show me.

Everything that unfolds before, and with, his webcam is about wanting to show me those images, about wanting me to see them. And at the end, it is the person who wanted to show them to me, who wanted me to want them, and who has succeeded in transmitting this desire to me, who will definitively frustrate me of its object.

So I am promised images which I am told I will not believe even if I *do* see them, and which I never get to see. I am promised them by a man who is out of breath, who has no words, and sometimes, for long stretches, no voice even, with which to describe them. I am promised something that cannot be described, that cannot be believed, and that will *not*, in the end, be made visible. And instead, I am made party for more than five minutes to the long, arduous, complicated, ultimately unsuccessful, and only intermittently intelligible process of trying to extract those images from the camera and put them into the computer.

This video, then, proposes a kind of paradox. If the images are inside the camera - the one that has been brought back from outside - then they must be *real*. Indeed, we have the testimony of the cameraman to reinforce that of the camera. As he tells us:

> *He is bombing Benghazi, no doubt. I have seen it myself, with my own eyes.*

And the camera was, in turn, with him, in order to bear witness to his witnessing.

If the images, on the other hand, were to get into the computer - if the battery could be charged in time, if the camera would "last" long enough, if they could finally be "downloaded" - then we could see them. But there would also be the risk that they would not, then, be quite so real, to us. They would lose something of their reality in being made visible. They would be, as we are repeatedly told they are, unbelievable. And the bond of trust between viewer and filmer, that everything in this video both assumes and leads towards, would be broken at the very moment it is consummated.

The testimony of the camera, then, its power to vindicate the truth, lies less in the images which it can show us, than in these images that remain enclosed inside it. Just as the conviction that the cameraman's words carry is reinforced by his inability to find the "words" for what he has seen. Just as the images he himself has seen with his own eyes remain forever trapped inside him. The force of veridiction that resides in the camera, then, lies less in the images it makes, than in its refusal to share them with us. And the more adamant that refusal is, the greater the truth. So that the ultimate proof that the atrocities which the whole

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1   This is the flag of the Kingdom of Libya (1951-69) that was revived by the rebels during the revolution. Perhaps it is not entirely ironic that the framing preserves the red (here, orange) for blood, and the black for the dark days of oppression, while omitting the green of future agricultural prosperity intended by the original designers: see explanation at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Libya

2   On the relationship between digital compression and haptic visuality, see Marks 2002: 161-176. On the relationship between the haptic and intimate bodily processes, including breathing, see Barker 2009 and Quinlivan 2012.

of this video desperately points towards *did* in fact take place, is that we will never see them. The ultimate proof is that there is no proof that can be shared. Their resistance to representation becomes, for us, the guarantor that these were, in fact, singular events, events in which one or more than one particular lives hung in the balance, in which people died, or risked death, not as images, but as real bodies made of flesh and blood. For the death that *can* be represented is only a generic death, an idea of mortality, an element in a scenario, and not the absolute and irreversible interruption of the present that will one day really happen, to me, as it will to you[3].

This video, then, promises us images of devastation, destruction, horror. And instead, all we get to see is a man sitting in a room in front of his laptop, trying to get it to do something for him, and failing. We see him struggle with the physical signs of exhaustion, thirst, confusion, shock, and recalcitrant technology. We hear his body fighting with lack of breath, with mucus and congestion, and with uncooperative equipment. And we also see his own image struggling, in vain, to cohere in and through the webcam and its associated software.

Of course, as Laura Marks has argued in another context, there is a sense in which the less we can see in these images, the more physical, sensual reality we are inclined to lend them (Marks 2002: 1-20). The less they speak to our eyes, and through them to our rational minds that seek to comprehend and control the world, the more they speak directly, viscerally, through their excess of proximity and their flagrant failures of control, to our bodies. Even as our interlocutor denies us the images he cannot describe to us, his own image, and the sounds which orchestrate it, take on an ever greater and more incontrovertible presence, until they come to stand in for those other absent images. Not for the horror that they can never hope to emulate, nor for the transparency and referential clarity which we imagine we are denied, but for their immediate, pre-conceptual givenness, the spectre of whose arbitrary cancellation is the ground of that horror's possibility.

The result is a kind of visual litotes, in which, the more the cameraman insists that we have not yet seen the images he wants to show us, the more we get the feeling that the *real* horror, the *real* image that announces both his and our ineluctable mortality, is to be found not among the images that are trapped in his camera, but rather in those that lie there before us, pinned and struggling on our computer

screens as we watch him go and come among the lacework of the indifferent pixels, until that final, fatal interruption:

> *I'm gonna have to hang up...*

A10.2 These poor images

> *I have to go now. Please keep the channel moving, and keep the videos posting. And just - I will try if I have any news, I'll try to come and give you the news we have. Even tho that Mo - there isn't much to do... I will try my best to keep this going.*

On the morning of 21 March 2011, Eastern Standard Time, an anonymous American blogger who goes by the handle "LLWProductions" uploaded a portmanteau video to her YouTube channel under the title: *Last broadcast from Mohammed Nabbous and Message from his Widow*. The montage is composed of two extended clips, each consisting of a single shot, grabbed from the live stream of Libya Alhurra TV over the previous 48 hours, preceded by a brief verbal explanation of the context, and separated by a single second of black and silence.

The first clip is the one I have just described: a broadcast made on the morning of 19 March by Mohammed Nabbous, the sole creator and driving force of this online TV and radio station. In this fragment, he is seeking to provide video evidence that Gaddafi's armed forces had just broken a ceasefire recently put in place in response to UN Security Council Resolution 1973.

The second clip consists of an awkwardly framed still image of an Arabesque-style living room, against which plays a radio broadcast made by Nabbous's widow Samra Naas (also known as Perditta) on 20 March, shortly after his death. In the few words she is able to speak through her grief, hemmed in by extended sighs and difficult silences, Perditta announces Mo's death, recounts his wish to find death as a martyr, and implores viewers to "keep the channel going" by posting videos, and doing whatever else they can to halt the bombing of Benghazi. Her message lasts almost four and a half minutes (only 45 seconds less than Mo's), and her silences makes up by far the larger part of it, as her insistence on the vital need to sustain and continue Mo's work is constantly interrupted and undermined by the extremity of her own distress. This second clip is extremely difficult to "watch" in its raw exposure of an unbearable intimacy, and I will not offer any further comment on it here.

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3   On the failure of representation as a paradoxical way of figuring "the challenge to representation that reality delivers", cf. Butler 2004: 146-67.

On the morning of 20 March, Mohammed Nabbous was shot in the head by a sniper while reporting a firefight between rebels and the Libyan army. He died around 3pm that afternoon in hospital. (The audio report he was making as he was shot was also broadcast, and can still be found on YouTube)[4].

By reposting these videos, in this specific montage, so rapidly after Nabbous's death, LLWProductions responds, albeit obliquely, to Perditta's appeal to "keep posting videos". And in doing so, she transforms the meaning of the livestream that was broadcast two days before. By reframing it, not as a breaking report on a war raging just off camera, but as a retrospective hommage to the journalist who made it, she shifts this video from the register of forensic reporting, to that of funerary memorial. In the place of the evidence of a crime, we are presented with a *memento mori*.

As a result of this reframing, much of what might have seemed in the original livestream accidental or incompetent, failures of manipulation or judgement, or simply 'noise', is endowed with a greater resonance, and a different meaning. Rather than unrelated elements in a banal catalogue of arbitrary errors, each misstep is recast as a self-reflexive gesture, exhibiting and commenting on the aporia of media activism in particular, and representation in general. Released from the overbearing present of the breaking news agenda, the technical intermittences and disconnections with which the amateur journalist struggled ineffectually are reconfigured as an extended proleptic allegory of the one brutal and definitive interruption that was about to be visited, against his will, upon his own life.

What makes the video of Nabbous's last broadcast so moving, then, is not so much what it was intended to say - the real struggle to communicate and to bear witness that it embodies - but rather the way that message has been extended and redirected through its afterlife in the YouTube ecosystem, thanks to which it now exists principally as part of a montage made by an anonymous woman blogger from the USA[5]. It is as if in repurposing this video fragment, LLWProductions had completed an act of interrupted semiosis which Nabbous himself had only been able to begin.

It is therefore entirely apt that this reframing is achieved not simply by montage and by verbal context, but also by the (doubtless unintentional) introduction into this video fragment of another layer of opacity and obscurity. For it seems clear that the degraded quality of these images is not simply a further index of the technical difficulties with which Nabbous was confronted on that fateful day in March 2011. Rather, the truncation and pixellation which contribute so strongly to the video's emotional effect would appear to be largely, if not entirely, the result of the additional layers of lossy compression introduced when the original was grabbed, mashed up and reuploaded. What moves us so strongly, then, as we watch Nabbous's face oscillate on the verge of disfiguration, is not something about the images that were broadcast in real time from Benghazi, but rather something about the way in which they have been reflected and refracted back to us from America[6].

So, for me at least, the meaning of this video as we now have it is inseparable from this act of retrospective collaboration between two amateur journalists who never had the chance to meet. In the course of reframing Nabbous's failed attempt to denounce a crime by the Gaddafi regime as both a hommage to his memory, and as her own denunciation of the crime that was his death, LLWProductions accidentally confered on it an opacity that radically reroutes the questions we might ask of it.

In the place of the *document* that Nabbous was finally unable to show us, this video now functions as an index linking his mortality to ours, through the mortal body of the video itself (Marks 2002: 91-110). In these "poor images", to borrow Hito Steyerl's phrase (Steyerl 2009), we see an alternative moral economy emerging, a relationship between indigenous revolutionaries and their international audience that goes beyond the one that Nabbous himself was calling for. Such a relationship would be grounded not on more information, but on less; not on more certainty, but on more humility. It would demand not the impossible proof of war crimes, that always comes too late, but a direct, physical awareness of our shared vulnerability and mortality. And it would be based on the belief that it is by elaborating our own invisible alliances around that shared awareness, rather than through better compliance with the codes of high-resolution visibility promoted by the military-industrial-entertainment complex, that the

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4   For more information on Mohammed Nabbous' life and work, see Carvin 2015 and the memorial website created at http://www.mohamednabbous.com/.

5   On her main blog, motleynews.net, LLWProductions provides a lot of information about herself, but not her name. See: motleynews.net/about/

6   I have not been able to find an upload of the original video from Libya Al Hurra TV, but several videos from other sources informing and/or commenting on Nabous's death include extracts from this video, from which it is evident that the original was of a much "higher quality" in terms of transparency and photographic "realism". See e.g. this clip from Al Jazeera: youtube.com/watch?v=IfYrXa-zitc

protection of the most vulnerable can be most effectively addressed.

These last images of Mohammed Nabbous resemble nothing more than ourselves, if only in our fragility and our imperfection. And it is that fragility and that imperfection which call for the invention of new forms of reciprocity, new modes of grassroots internationalism, new modalities of peer-to-peer protection, beyond and without the current modes of power and governance which have so disserved us.

Though we see each other only through a chain of LCDs, and darkly, still let us hope that next time we may see each other before it is too late.
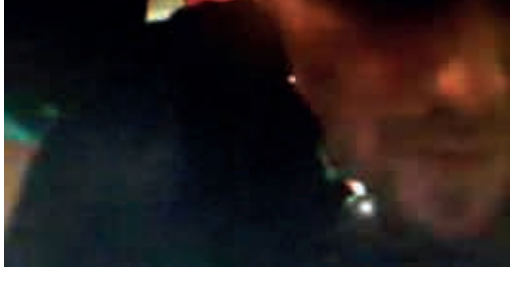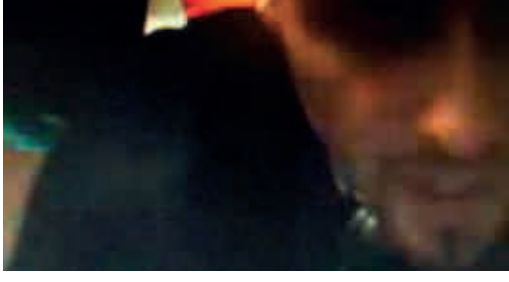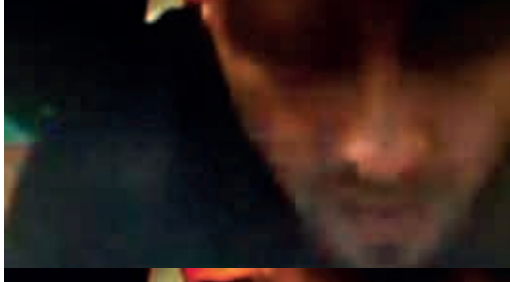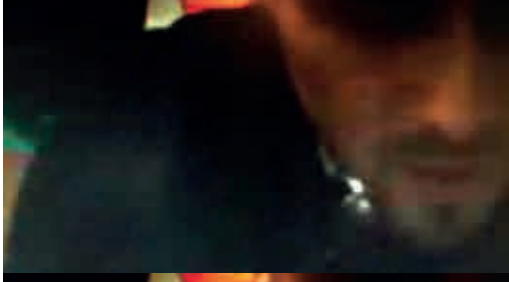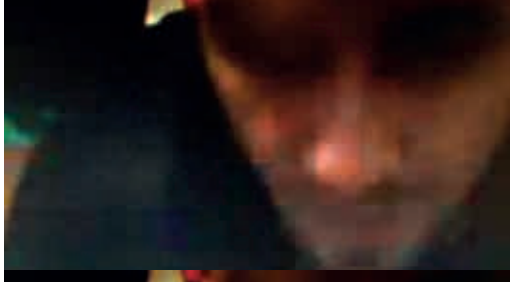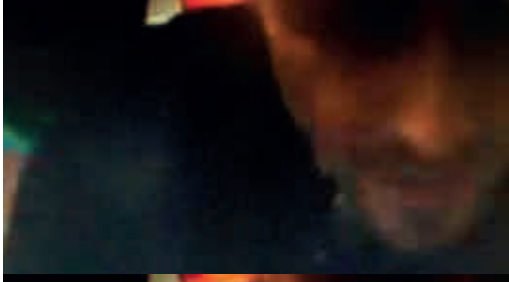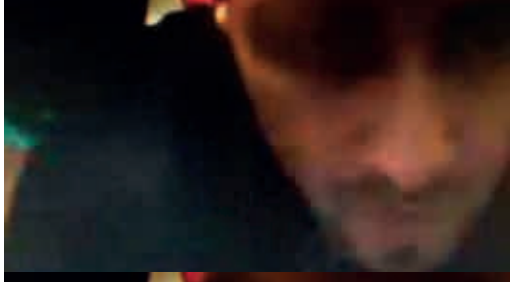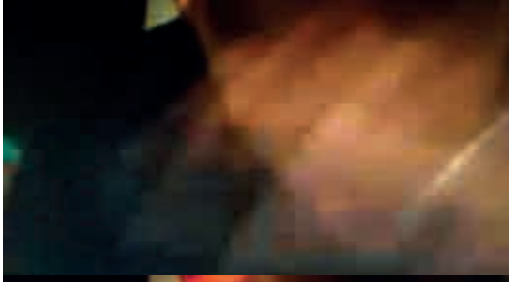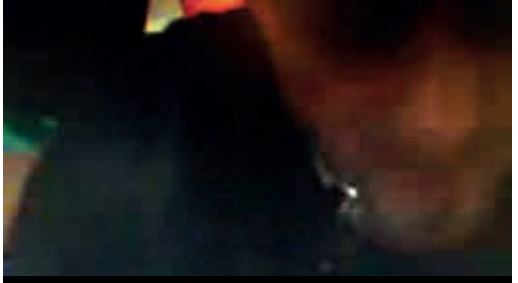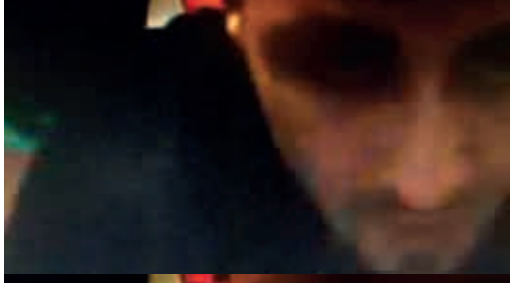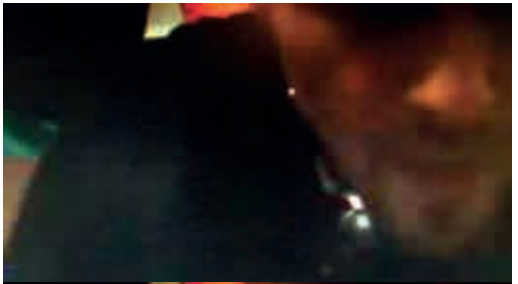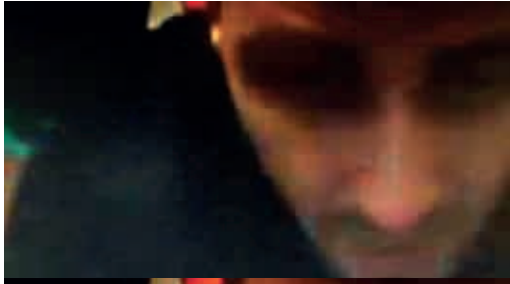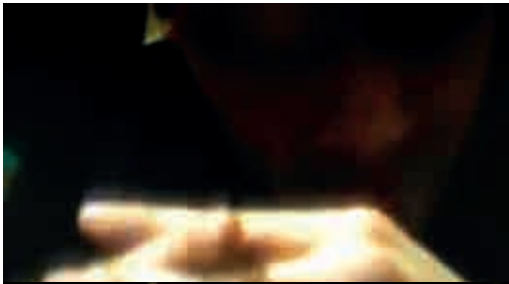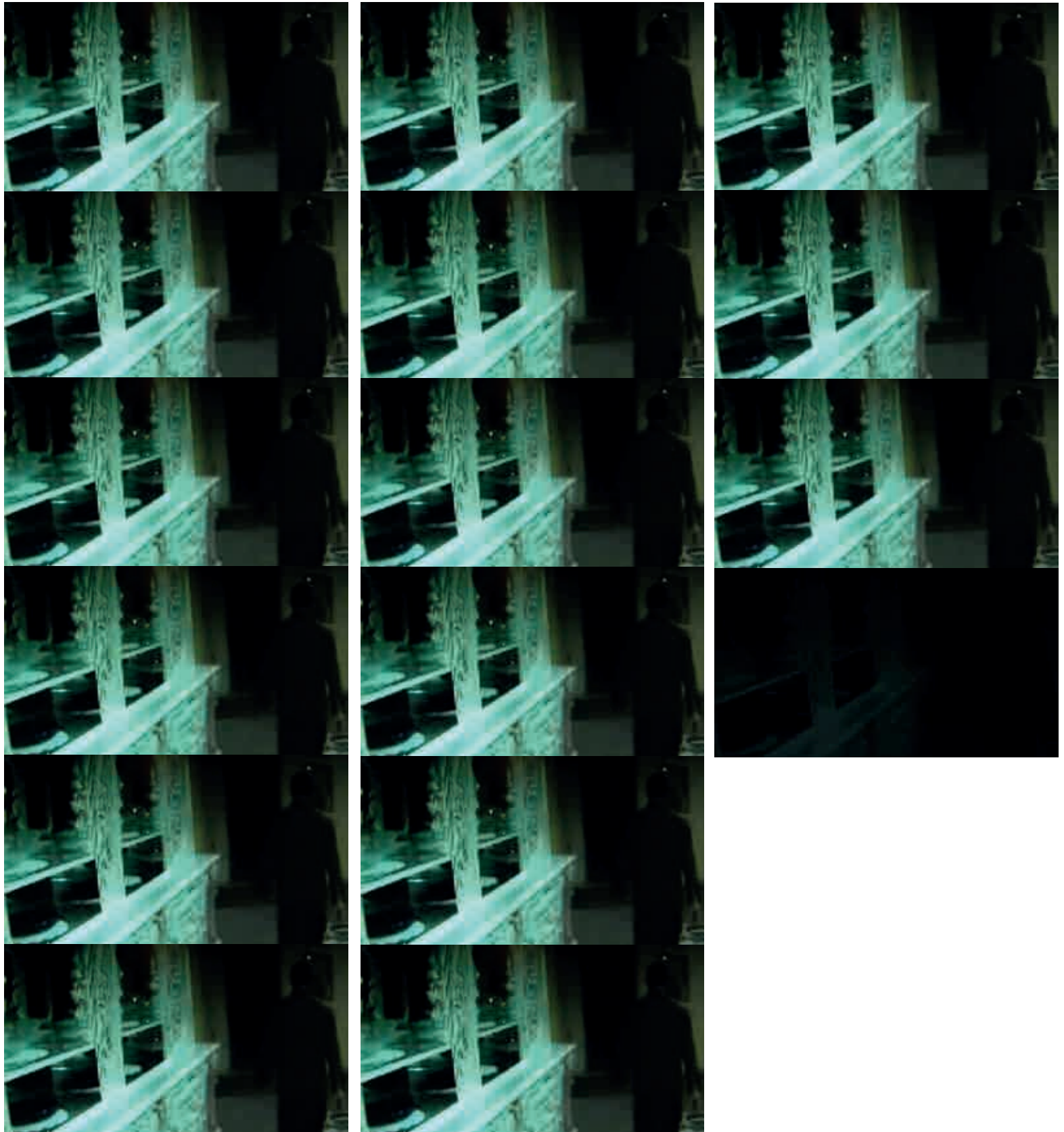
Before / after.
Benghazi, Libya, 21 March 2011

Conclusion:
This is just the beginning

In her essay, "The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation", Hito Steyerl muses on the countless electronic messages that leave our planet every second to wander through interstellar space, where they may eventually be picked up by alien intelligences. Wondering what picture of humanity these signals paint, she suggests that any attempt to reconstruct our species from them would probably end up looking like image spam.

> *Image spam is one of the many dark matters of the digital world; spam tries to avoid detection by filters by presenting its message as an image file. An inordinate amount of these images floats around the globe, desperately vying for human attention. They advertise pharmaceuticals, replica items, body enhancements, penny stocks and degrees. According to the pictures dispersed via image spam, humanity consists of scantily dressed degree-holders with jolly smiles enhanced by orthodontic braces.*

The number of such images now circulating in deep space vastly exceed the number of people currently alive on this planet.

Image spam is, of course, addressed to people who are and look nothing like those in the images it circulates, probably with the aim of inducing them to act - that is, to consume more, or some, of whatever the spam is selling, in the hope that they may thus come to resemble more closely these models. However, Steyerl is interested in the contrary hypothesis:

> *What if actual people - the imperfect and nonhorny ones - were not excluded from spam advertisements because of their assumed deficiencies but had actually chosen to desert this kind of portrayal? What if image spam thus became a record of a widespread refusal, a withdrawal of people from representation?*

In a world in which mass media is now largely dedicated to the ridiculing of the lower classes, and social media and cellphone cameras have opened up a new regime of peer-to-peer surveillance, it would be only rational for the people to choose to vanish. Before, representation was seen as a scarcity and privilege. Now, it is felt, quite rightly, as an invasion, and a threat.

> *Thus image spam becomes an involuntary record of a subtle strike, a walkout of the people from photographic and moving-image representation. It is a document of an almost imperceptible exodus from a field of power relations that are too*

> *extreme to be survived without major reduction and downsizing. Rather than a document of domination, image spam is the people's monument of resistance to being represented **like this**. They are leaving the **given** frame of representation.*

Steyerl relates this self-absenting to the parallel crisis of political representation:

> *Visual representation matters, indeed, but not exactly in unison with other forms of representation. There is a serious imbalance between both. On the one hand, there is a huge number of images without referents; on the other, many people without representation. To phrase it more dramatically: A growing number of unmoored and floating images corresponds to a growing number of disenfranchised, invisible, or even disappeared and missing people.*

Image spam is not a representation of the people, because

> *in any case, the people are not a representation. They are an event, which might happen one day, or maybe later, in that sudden blink of an eye that is not covered by anything. And as people are increasingly makers of images - and not their objects or subjects - they are perhaps also increasingly aware that the people might happen by jointly making an image and not by being represented in one. (Steyerl 2012)*

In these essays, I have tried to draw attention to some of the features of the videos in the vernacular anarchive of the Arab revolutions which correspond to, or ring variations on, Steyerl's thesis. In embarking on this project to document, not themselves, but their revolutions, the people of the Arab countries concerned have produced a body of work in which they are no longer the *object* of others' representations, but the subject(s) wielding the camera. It is they who now determine the point of view and the frame. And in doing so, they have invented a paradoxical form of cinema in which they, as the people, are simultaneously deeply present, to the point that they can no longer be ignored, and yet remain largely *invisible*.

Of course, there are images which purport to show us the people in all their splendour and self-evidence. I am thinking of the top-shot images that give us a synoptic view of an avenue, a boulevard, or a square filled to bursting with a crowd that numbers in the hundreds of thousands, if not the millions. While perhaps the best known of the top-shots of Tahrir Square, which came to serve as the mass media's short hand for the Egyptian revolution

in particular, and even for revolution in general, were made by professionals, there are also plenty of instances in which ordinary revolutionaries with access to a well-positioned balcony or an appropriate rooftop, have made such images themselves and circulated them via YouTube and other online platforms.

However, the function of such images may not be as straighforward as it might appear. Do they really serve to demonstrate the *power* of the people, as might be assumed? Or are they not rather, to adopt a term proposed by Steyerl, *decoys* intended to distract and confuse those in the media or in government who might assume that *this* hackneyed image of the people as a unified and overwhelming mass is the only kind of power that the people want or can imagine? To put it differently: do these images *reveal* the people to us, and demonstrate their power? Or do they function as another kind of *mask* behind which the reality of the people - and the true forms of their power - can disappear?

The invisibility of the people as I have tried to describe it in the first part of this dissertation is a complex phenomenon, which includes a plurality of practices, and is open to multiple interpretations. On the simplest level (Chapters A1-5), the people are invisible because they are no longer in front of someone else's camera, but behind their own cameras. Their presence, then, is produced largely by exchanging an optical visuality for a range of multi-sensorial registers extending from the tactile through the kinesthetic to the haptic. In these ways, we *feel* their presence, even when we no longer see it, through the least movement of the camera, and in particular through those movements that are non-intentional, and which produce forms and figures that exist only on the far horizon of our perception. It is these videos which, more than all the other figures of the people that the vernacular anarchive offers, testify both to the *performative* character of the people (Butler 2015), and to the *impersonal force* that traverses both them and their actions (Zabunyan 2012). In these videos, the people have not merely left the image. They are *already* an event.

This event is the emergence of a "we" - a way of seeing and speaking that breaks with the manufactured individualism of modern (and post-modern) life, and that returns us to our origins in our co-existence with the world and with each other. These videos embody and enact that "irreducible demand" that founds all revolutionary legitimacy: "that we can say 'we', and that we can say 'we' of ourselves (say it of ourselves, and to each other), once there is no leader and no God to say it for us" (Nancy 1996/2013: 62). And this "we" is not simply enacted in the words that these videos record, but permeates them at the level of the embodied

gesture. Already at this formal-sensory level, before and independent of any conscious or explicit discourse, they refuse any "outside" from which "we" could be totalised and administered, and insist on this plurality as not the opposite, but the *condition* of possibility of *my* singularity (loc. cit.).

This urgent, originary sense of plurality is confirmed by those figures that emerge when the people come out from behind their cameras and appear in front of them (Chapters A6-10). Rather than letting themselves be summarised in a single image, or represented by a countable number of persons (as the visual rhetoric of the dominant media - including in their elite, "authored" variations - would tend to do), the people instead manifest as an open series of subjective positions that are perfectly visible, but whose very iteration implies the impossibility of ever totalising them. This turning away from totalisation releases practices and forms that defy the logic of representation even as they repurpose it and proliferate it, producing instead generative pluralities which are not so much leaderless as, in Rodrigo Nunes' felicitous phrase, "leaderful" (Nunes 2014), and so resistant to all strategies of condensation and symbolisation. When the people appear before us in their plural singularity, there is no one to say "we" for them, there is only themselves. And this is true not only of their actions away-from-keyboard, and the ways in which they film them (Chapters A6-7), but equally of the ways in which these videos circulate online (Chapters A8-10), and the "zones of offensive opacity" (Tiqqun 2001) which they reveal, not only within the texture of the offline everyday, but also within the interstices of the Internet itself.

The invisibility of the people is not simply a strategy, a withdrawal that has been effected provisionally, and which may one day be rescinded. It is something integral to their nature, and to the nature of every kind of embodied practice that is oriented towards the messiness and givenness of life, rather than towards that perfection that is simply the image of death under conditions of empire (Bamyeh 2007: 37). But in these videos, another knowledge of death appears, or resurfaces (Chapter A5): that which not only evidences the equality of all, but which also points to the persistence within all of us of that which is genuinely vernacular, thus irreducible to the death-in-life of governance, and therefore apt, at any moment and without warning, to reopen a space of possibility for other forms-of-life together, outside the parameters of what we rather too generously refer to as "civilisation" (Bamyeh 2007: 14-15; cf Foucault 1977; Bordeleau 2012: 59; Garcia Calvo 1995: s.15).

These videos are properly *vernacular* (Introduction), both because they are produced without regard for commercial or institutional values, as "common property" (Mroué), and because they incorporate and enact the people's own ways of knowing which are recalcitrant to the abstract administrative vision of the State (Illich 1981, 1982; Scott 1998). As such, they constitute one of the modes of reemergence into visibility of those older ways of knowing and doing that testify to the continuity of civil society as an arena of "anarchist gnosis", and that provide the basis for a renewed sense of being-together grounded in an ethics of solidarity (Bamyeh 2009, 2013; El-Desouky 2014).

These videos are not an attempt to produce an *image*, however complex and subtle, of the people. They are part of the much wider attempt by the people to constitute themselves as the people: to enunciate, situate and articulate not just the fact of their coming together, but its terms and its conditions, its possibilities and its obligations. And central to those terms is, I believe, that the ongoing, indeed infinite, process of constitution of the people is also and above all its *destitution* as a unified subject that might aspire to take power, and thus perpetuate the cycle of self-alienation and oppression that lies at the heart of the regime of governmentality that structures the State (Agamben 2014, 2015). That is why the people that these images simultaneously conceal and reveal to us, exist only as the circulation that is established *between* one image and the next, and between *these* images and the (equally) anonymous viewer to whom they are addressed.

The people, then, are present in these videos not as a single, unified and persisting subject, but as a serial, plural and provisional collectivity, in which each individual is constantly open to transformation, is constantly "becoming other" (Canetti 1973; Deleuze 1985; Taussig 1993). The result is not some totalitarian state of fusion (whether coerced or voluntary), but a shifting palimpsest of "critical utopias", an online/offline *mulid* in which these different blocs of space-time with their heterogeneous rhythms overlap, collide and enter, more or less easily, into new forms of dialogue with one another (Weinrobe and Inayatullah 2005; Madoeuf 2006; Keraitim and Mehrez 2012).

The people are not an image. But these images enact a people, that is at once beyond them, and entirely contained (concealed) within them. These images are *not* the people. But they are one of the places in which the people can come to appearance, and thus come into being, for they are embodied and mortal, just like us. And that is why they are part - and only one part - of the process through which, in late 2010 and some large part of 2011 the Arab peoples

discovered, to their own astonishment and ours, that they really did exist, after all.

In doing so, they did not simply leave "the given frame of representation", as Steyerl puts it: they broke that frame, thus allowing a different, less defined, more open type of space to emerge in its place, where new kinds of image, and new kinds of political practice (whether representational or non-representational), might take shape. What might such practices look like? As Tahar Chikhaoui has suggested, these videos may be less documents of the past, or actions in the present, than premonitions of what is still to come: they prefigure both another kind of politics, and another kind of cinema[1]. But they do not seek to define that future. They simply seek to keep it open.

Today, when many of those revolutionaries and their sympathisers feel all too keenly the old frames of the past closing tightly around them again, these images can help remind us of what was once possible. For however remote such experiences may now seem, what was once possible remains always possible:

> For the people has no identity, and history
> has no end. (Zabunyan 2013: 72)

Or, as some young Tunisians sang in their joy on 14 January 2011:

> This is just the beginning
> The best is still to come[2].

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1   Tahar Chikhaoui, public debate, Cinéma Le Gyptis, Marseille, France, 10 May 2015.

2   youtube.com/watch?v=Pw0Yt5QxZN4

Still frame from video subsequently deleted from YouTube.
Yemeni protesters entering city riding on bulldozers, 2011.

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products. Despite that and other token gestures towards repayment, I still owe all four of them, big time.

Throughout both the making of the film *The Uprising*, and my long retreat into the silence of writing that followed, Bruno Tracq displayed his usual confidence, not only in the work that we might do together, but also in the fact that the world would be ready for it. The film was a genuinely collaborative effort, in which the most important decisions were fully shared, and much of what I know about these videos I learned while we were editing them together. I am more grateful to him than I can say, not only for his artistic and intellectual contribution to the film, but also for designing the final printed version of this dissertation.

Doubtless, this dissertation, or something like it, could have been written in Microsoft Word. As a matter of fact, it was composed in John Gruber's Markdown language. More specifically, I used Mou for early drafts, VooDooPad to break up the initial structure when it had become too solid, Sublime Text 3 to recompose the whole, and Marked 2 to export the result as HTML or PDF depending on the destination. The result was a simple and fluid process based on free or inexpensive tools that allowed me to focus on what I wanted to say, rather than on what it would look like on the page, or whether the programme I was using might be about to crash. I'm grateful to the whole plain text community for introducing me to this simpler way of working, and in particular to Brett Terpstra for his patience in taking time out to solve several problems that were inevitably traced back to my bad markup, rather than his excellent programming.

The film *The Uprising* was dedicated on its release in 2013 to all those who gave their lives during the Arab revolutions so that their peoples might be free. This dissertation is for my partner Karolina Majewska and for her sister Margaux who was seriously injured just as I was putting the final touches to the text in the 22 March 2016 attack on the Brussels Metro subsequently claimed by the organization known as the Islamic State. I hope that this work may bear some sort of witness, however indirect or remote, to the possibilities that were opened not only for the Arab world, but for all of us, in the winter of 2010-2011, and that in doing so it may help strengthen those who would remain faithful to those other futures they have glimpsed in the face of all attempts to close them down, from whatever quarter they may come.

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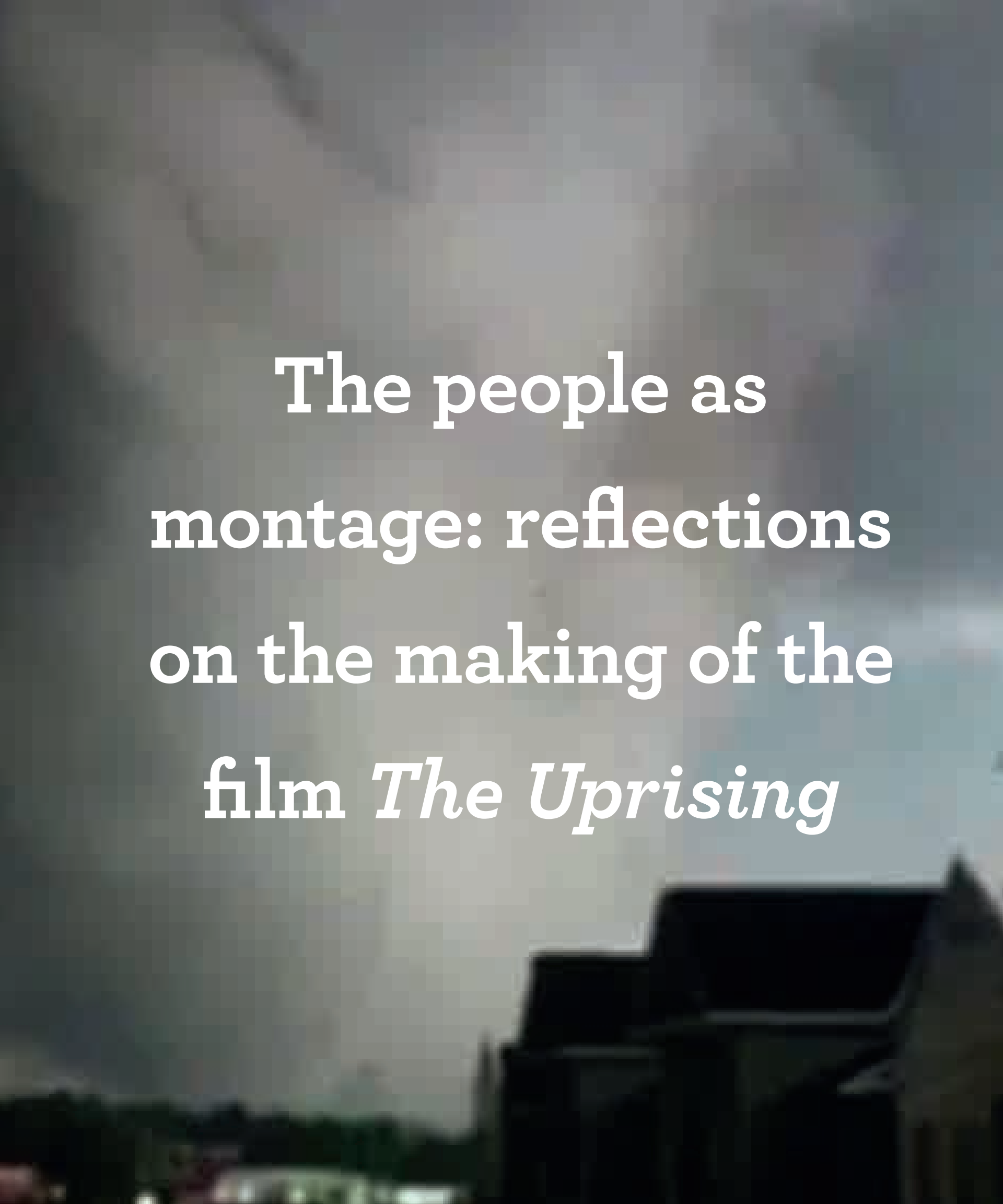
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PART B:

The people as montage: reflections on the making of the film *The Uprising*

Contents

The Uprising

A film by **Peter Snowdon**

Produced by **Rien à Voir** in association with **Third Films,**
with the support of the **Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles et de Voo**

Produced by **Bruno Trac**q

Co-produced by **Samm Haillay, Duane Hopkins, Andrew McVicar, Jean-Frédéric de Hasque**

Written by **Peter Snowdon and Bruno Tracq**

Edited by **Bruno Tracq and Peter Snowdon**

Sound design and original music by **Olivier Touche**

Research by **Peter Snowdon**

Additional research by **Rasha Sadeq, Aymen Amri, Sara Ishaq and Saraa Saleh**

Sound mix by **Philippe Charbonnel**

Grading by **Olivier Ogneux**

Auditorium Studio l'Equipe
Grading & DCP mastering Cinelab Brussel

Belgium/UK, 78 minutes, 2013, DCP, 16:9, 5.1
Arabic and English spoken, English and French subtitles

To watch the film with English subtitles:
https://vimeo.com/81723581
password: thawra

To watch the film with French subtitles:
https://vimeo.com/78829148
password: up

Prologue.
A tale of two shadows

A man is walking down a road, filming with his cameraphone. As he walks, the sound of bullets rings out around him.

He exhanges a few words with a friend who is walking with him. His camera pointing down, towards the surface of the road, he films his own shadow as it advances before him.

Suddenly, without warning, his body crumples to the ground. He collapses on top of the camera, plunging the image into darkness.

The film might well have ended here. But instead, it starts again almost immediately.

Only now, it is his friend who is holding the camera.

Leaning forward, he films his own shadow where it falls across the dead man's body.

I have never seen the video I have described above. It was the Syrian filmmaker Ousama Mohamed who retold it to the audience that had gathered for a debate on "Filming the revolution" at the Cinéma La Clef in Paris on Saturday 17 September 2011, as part of the festival *Printemps du cinéma arabe*. He cited it to illustrate his claim that the revolution in Syria had unleashed a wave of creativity in which even the most apparently anecdotal and trivial video posted on the internet could turn out to have an aesthetic, ethical and political rigour to match or outdo anything the cinema of his country had produced in the past. In doing so, he was reaffirming what another Syrian filmmaker, Hala Abdallah - the widow of the celebrated documentarian Omar Amiralay - had stated a few minutes earlier. For both of them, it was clear that the countless videos being made by young Syrians with no apparent training, and in circumstances whose urgency might seem to override any possibility of developing a formal or aesthetic 'project', were in fact among the most remarkable films ever made in the region. These short, mainly anonymous fragments, were the true heirs of the 20th century Syrian documentary tradition.

After the debate was over, I introduced myself to Ousama Mohamed as he stood on the grey pavement outside, and asked if there was any way he could provide me with a link where I could watch rhe video he had described. He frowned. No, he said, he didn't think he had made a note of the URL anywhere. But if I went back through his Facebook "timeline", I was sure to find it there.

At that time, Facebook still had walls, not timelines. Searching for material chronologically was a nightmare. After I had returned to Brussels, I spent an afternoon trying, but soon gave up the task as hopeless. (I tried again, this morning, 18 July 2014, before sitting down to write the first draft of this fragment, but again with no luck. Facebook is now easier to navigate in the direction of the past, but Ousama Mohamed's timeline revealed no videos, from YouTube, Facebook or anywhere else, prior to the time of our meeting. Perhaps he did post it, though. Perhaps it was just that part of what mattered to him, and might have mattered to me, in 2011, has already been swallowed back up into the recesses of the Internet...)

Maybe I didn't try hard enough. After all, at the time, researching internet videos from the Arab revolutions was my full-time activity. Finding this particular video might have mattered to me, not just as an object of curiosity or emotion, but as an essential piece in the jigsaw puzzle of the film I was already then trying to put together.

But maybe part of me didn't *want* to find it? Maybe I was afraid that it would be a "disappointment", and I wanted to preserve the emotion that this impassioned speech had evoked in me from any untidy and unpredictable confrontation with the reality of a few arythmical and over-pixellated images? Or maybe I was afraid that the video *would* turn out to be just as perfect as I had imagined it to be, and that in its perfection, it would obviate my entire project? That it would make my own work of collecting, collating and assembling such video fragments in some way superfluous? Perhaps I was afraid of encountering a 60-second video that already said everything I wanted to say myself, and more?

Whatever the reason, I never did track down the original video. All that remains of it for me is the outline of its narrative in words, doubtless half-transformed in memory (it was many weeks before I even dared to write down what I had heard Ousama Mohamed say, and doubtless my restitution of his words here is far from accurate). But through its absence, this video had perhaps an even bigger influence on the development of my own film *The Uprising* over the next two years, than it would have done if I had had it among my rushes, and been able to watch it, over and over again.

In one sense, it is as if all I was doing during the time I was working on *The Uprising*, was looking for those two shadows.

B1. Stan Brakhage on Tahrir Square

January-May 2011

—— 1 ——

The Uprising is a feature-length compilation film made (almost) entirely out of YouTube videos shot and uploaded by the actors of the Arab revolutions. It was produced over a period of almost three years, running from January 2011, when I first started watching and collecting online revolutionary videos, to October 2013, when we finished grading the final copy just days before the world premiere in Jihlava. During that entire period, and now beyond, through the writing of this dissertation, watching and thinking about internet video as a form of political and aesthetic practice has been the single major occupation of my life.

My initial intention was not to make a film. I began collecting these videos during the "18 days" of the Egyptian revolution almost accidentally. I had gone online on 28 January when, four days into the uprising, I started trying to call my friends in Cairo to see how they were, and hear their take on what was going on, only to discover that all internet and cellphone communications had been cut. (I had lived in Cairo from 1997 to 2000, working as a sub-editor and staff writer for *Al-Ahram Weekly*, an English-language newspaper put out by the semi-state Ahram publishing behemoth, under its then editor-in-chief the late Hosny Guindy, and managing editor Hani Shukrallah. The time I had spent there was one of the happiest in my life, and I remained in close touch with many of my friends and former colleagues over the following decade, travelling back to Cairo at least once a year, usually on the pretext of attending someone's wedding or engagement party.)

On the eve of 28 January, the "Friday of Rage" that would later mark the beginning of the occupation of Tahrir Square, all the normal channels of communication were down. Yet somehow, the news was still getting out. I remembered an article I had read about how journalists had

circumvented the reporting embargo at the Guantanamo Bay trials by leaving the courtroom at regular intervals to tweet. Most of my friends in Egypt were journalists, and of them, a substantial number worked for foreign media, or knew people who did. Doubtless, then, some of them at least would have access to a satellite phone. So, I thought, if I could go on Twitter, I might at least see that some of them were alive and well and working. (At that point, my experience of social media was limited to a Facebook account, in which I had taken little interest, consulting it maybe once a month, at most.)

An hour later, I had a Twitter account up and running, and had already located half a dozen people I knew, who were out on the streets in the thick of the battle to force their way into Tahrir Square. An hour later, and I had fallen into the black hole that is social media in times of popular rebellion. For the next 14 days, I did very little but follow the unfolding drama through tweets, photos, videos, blog posts, exchanges of comments on Facebook, as well as through all the 'old' media texts that were recirculated, appraised, criticised and built upon through these 'new' media circuits. And no sooner had Mubarak fallen, than the movement spread to Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and Syria[1]. Throughout the spring and summer of that year, I continued, with only slightly less intensity, to follow at a distance, and in slightly deferred real time, the wave of emancipatory protests as they swept through a region that had long been considered by Western experts, and by many of its inhabitants too, to be somehow immune to any form of radical change.

My response to these events was, above all, emotional. On the one hand, I had the impression I was seeing my Egyptian friends finally getting what they had wanted for so long, and my only regret was that I could not be there with them. On the other hand, I felt as though, despite the distance, something of the experience of what people were going through *was* being communicated to me, through these flimsy means that were the sounds and images which the internet could transport. While I felt frustrated at being in the wrong place, I did not feel in any way alienated from the events that were happening on the ground. Trying to understand *how* this sense of "participation at a distance" was possible, and in what ways this impression may or may not have been misleading, has been one of the main themes running through my work over the last four years.

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1   While minor uprisings and sporadic protests were also seen in other countries, including Algeria, Jordan, Palestine and even Saudi Arabia, the six countries generally agreed to have seen a sustained attempt to bring down or refound the regime, backed up by broad popular support in the streets, are Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and Syria.

Alongside my general response to the events unfolding, I also had a more specific reaction to many of the YouTube videos I was seeing. As a filmmaker, and one who has been drawn to work both in the Arab world, and in situations in which ordinary people find themselves in confrontation with authority, I might have expected I would want to jump on the next plane with a camera. But, surprisingly, I felt no such desire. (I wanted to jump on the plane, but to go and help my friends make the revolution, not to record it in images.) Partly, this told me something about the value I place on cinema in relation to other forms of more "direct" political action. But it also said something about the videos I was watching on YouTube and elsewhere. My dominant feeling was that I didn't need to go and film these events, not because I was an "outsider", or because my presence might be counter-productive, but because the people who were making these events happen - people who, as far as I could tell, had no special experience or training in the use of a camera beyond what one might pick up by finding there was a camera in your cellphone and deciding to try it out from time to time - these people were already filming these events *in exactly the way I would like to think I would have filmed them had I been there*.

This last statement needs, perhaps, a little unpacking.

What I recognised in (or projected onto) these videos was partly the character of their formal qualities, and partly the larger political and ethical economy which produced them. My own work over the previous decade had developed from an initial intention to make a broadly political form of direct cinema, to an increasing engagement with personal and experimental modes of filmmaking. And this evolution was in itself, in part, a political and an economic choice. Returning from Egypt to Europe at the time of the emergence of the MiniDV technology, with the express intention of learning how to make political films outside the constraints of any institutional or commercial infrastructure, I started seeking out opportunities to view films of all kinds that were made with little or no money, as I felt that these were the ones that might teach me something relevant to my own situation. Brussels, where I was living, was rich in such opportunities, from the collective-run Cinéma Nova, to the documentary screenings organised by Le P'tit Ciné, and the extraordinary archival programming of the Cinémathèque Royal (since renamed - "rebranded" - as the Cinematek). As a result, I encountered not only a lot of militant cinema (from the historic movements of the 60s and 70s such as Newsreel in the US or the Medvedkine Group in France, to contemporary appropriations of digital technology for political ends), but also a lot of experimental and avant-garde work that had been made in similarly impoverished conditions. Thus I came to know the work of Stan Brakhage and Jonas

Mekas, Kurt Kren and Barbara Meter, at the same time I was discovering that of Chris Marker and Robert Kramer, Santiago Alvarez and Anand Patwardhan. My meeting in 2001 with the American filmmaker Jon Jost, who was to become both a good friend, and a mentor to me, and whose own career straddled the spectrum from his early collaborations with Chicago Newsreel, to his later purely 'abstract' digital experiments, confirmed this tendency. I felt that the message that "there are no rules" must either apply to *both* politics *and* aesthetics, or to neither[2].

As a result, my own work developed an increasingly left-field approach to form, as I tried to integrate formal and expressive possibilities I had discovered in the work of experimental and independent filmmakers who were not perceived as overtly political artists, with the explicitly political purpose of my own projects, and my continuing commitment to documentary method. As a result, I came to develop a method of filming which was not only personal, but intensely embodied and gestural, and which I felt suggested less a subjective perspective on the world that was approached, than an *infra-subjective* realm of perceptions and sensations which have not yet been allocated to a particular individual subject, but which *precede* those forms of subjectivity that we commonly recognise, and which they both ground, and subvert.

This approach ran parallel to a sense that the politics of my filmmaking was not simply a matter of content, or even form, but was rooted in the production *process* itself. I felt it was integral to the politics of my work that it should offer a *model* for how film might be deprofessionalised and reappropriated by those who had little or no financial or cultural capital. The fact that I had come to making film without having either been through film school, or done time within the "industry", and that I was able to acquire all the equipment needed to make and distribute films for, as Richard Leacock liked to put it, the cost of a second-hand car[3], was not for me simply incidental. I wanted to make

2   On rules and the lack of them, see the audio CD *Crossing the Line: Jon Jost in Brussels*, which brings together conversations between Jon, myself and Katia Rossini recorded in Brussels in April 2004 (Necessary Press NECD001: 2005).

3   Leacock described his working method of the 1990s after his move to France - a method which was closely tied up with his collaboration with his partner Valérie Lalonde - in an essay widely circulated as "samizdat" in alternative media circles. Their example doubtless played a formative role in determining how many people who came to filmmaking in the early 2000s saw the potentials of this "new" medium: *"During the last ten years together we worked successfully in High-8 making our final edits on Beta-Digital which was a very expensive final move. We made a video for French TV; a story without a subject, LES OEUFS A LA COQUE DE RICHARD LEACOCK, which I think conveys a feeling of love for what is shown. Some of our films get shown on TV and others don't. Today we shoot and then edit at home on the new Mini-Digital*

films of which, after showing them, I could legitimately say: "And you can do this too!" I believed that the only barrier to entry should be the passion and enthusiasm necessary to learn how to use the tools. It mattered to me *both* that my films should be highly wrought aesthetic propositions, *and* that they should be conspicuously low-tech and low-budget - that they should provoke the reaction, not "how much did that cost?" or "how did he do that?", but, "how could *I* do that?"

So when I started seeing these videos that were being produced from within the Arab revolutions, I was struck by two things. On the one hand, some of them struck me, as Ousama Mohammed and Hala Abdallah would later say, as cinematographic gestures on a par with the strongest I had ever encountered in any other context. And on the other hand, the vast majority seemed to adopt 'spontaneously' a style which was very close to that which I had myself been seeking, in which the gestural nature of the camerawork constantly reminds us of the bodily implication of the filmer, and gives us a sense of being in the presence of a unique individual whose experience cannot be reduced to those policed perceptions that are easily integrated into a sense of a discrete individual consciousness. The Arab revolutionaries, without any apparent training in either Western avant-garde film techniques or the political economy of independent production, seemed to have arrived spontaneously at the same conclusions that I had reached, laboriously and imperfectly, over the course of many years. And they seemed to have done so simply through accepting the conditions and pressures of the present in which they found themselves living and fighting, and by embracing them honestly and directly.

— 2 —

On 1 March 2011, I left my dayjob to start my new work as a full-time PhD researcher at MAD Faculty. At that time, I had no intention of making a film about the Arab revolutions. I continued to watch videos which came across my screen, and to forward those I thought valuable

to friends for them to watch as well. The idea that I would do something with these videos, many of which already seemed to me to be complete propositions in themselves, could not have been further from my mind.

At the end of the month, I went to Paris for a week. The writer and actress Aurélie Namur was presenting a new work, a one-woman play entitled *Le voyage égaré*, at the Centre Wallonie-Bruxelles. The play was based on her experiences during a journey along the Ecuador-Peru border, in which she was mistaken for an anthropologist believed by local indigenous communities to be commissioning ritual murders among the Shuar in order to obtain shrunken heads for Western collectors. As a consequence of this confusion, she very nearly lost her life. She had told me this story several years earlier when I was collecting material for my film *La forêt, une fois* (2010) about people's experiences of getting totally lost in different circumstances. Aurélie's tale did not fit well with the others I had gathered - it was too extreme, too bizarre, too undecidable - but it had remained in my mind. When I heard that it had become a play (and not a novel, as she had originally planned), I immediately asked if I could film her rehearsing it. It seemed to me that the notion of *rehearsal*, more than the play itself as representation or reenactment, would chime with the theme that ran through her original telling of the story - that she had been somewhere completely foreign, completely alien to her, and that when she came back, no one was able to believe what she told them. By the time they got to Paris, Aurélie and her team had stopped 'rehearsing', strictly speaking. But I was still able to spend an afternoon with them, accompanied by my friend and sound designer, Olivier Touche, filming while they did a technical run-through. The results of our work that afternoon would later provide the basis for my short film, *Dieu est dans les racines* (2012). (I discuss this film in more detail below in chapter B4).

While in Paris, I also spent quite a bit of time attending screenings at the Cinéma du réel, the annual festival of documentary and non-fiction film organised by the Centre Georges Pompidou, just round the corner from the Centre Wallonie-Bruxelles. My original reason for attending was that Nicole Brenez had curated a series of screenings on the theme "Le Poème documentaire". The poetic documentary was the official subject of my PhD research proposal, and I wanted to catch as much of the programme as might be possible.

The schedule for Brenez's strand was very relaxed, so I had time to take in other films that were screening during the festival as well. Two in particular made a lasting impression on me, and were to prove crucial in determining the direction that my own work would subsequently take.

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equipment which can go any number of generations without loss. We also have a non-linear digital system, Radius, which takes DV directly through the "fire-wire" and is affordable. We have two cameras, two edit decks and ancillary equipment for about the price of a car in the $20K bracket. You design your movie to go on a DVD with up to about two hours of quality video and distribute like books to a relatively small, discerning audience of like minded people who are waiting to escape the nightmare of TV, Cable systems and the massive garbage heap of the Web. But as usual some one will find a way to screw it up and Valerie and I will go on making movies for the sheer fun of it and the love of each other's company" (Leacock 1997).

The first was an anonymous film, *Fragments d'une révolution* (2011), made by an Iranian woman living in Paris. The film consisted of a large number of YouTube videos from the Green Movement of 2009, interspersed with sequences representing the anonymous filmmaker in her exile, the whole accompanied by a voiceover in which she meditated on her sense of alienation from what was happening in Tehran, and which watching online video only seemed to exacerbate.

The second was a classic of political documentary which, up to that point, I had never seen: Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică's *Videograms of a Revolution* (1992), which uses footage captured during the fall of Ceausescu both to narrate that event, and to reflect on the role that images play in shaping not only our perception of political realities, but those realities themselves.

My reaction to the two films was very clear, and quite 'partisan'. Indeed, it was only long after I had finished work on *The Uprising* that I would realise how far my original vision of them had been influenced, not to say distorted, by my own recent immersion in the online reverberations of the revolutions in Egypt and elsewhere. Where I felt strongly that *Fragments* "betrayed" the original vernacular videos that had inspired it, smothering them in a voiceover whose claims of alienation seemed more an abstract intellectual pose than a concrete lived drama, I found myself drawn inexorably into *Videograms,* as the initial distanciation gave way to a much less explicitly mediated use of the archive material as the film unfolded. At the same time, I was amazed to see how the YouTube videos from Iran that ran through *Fragments* acquired an extraordinarily powerful plasticity when blown up large on the cinema screen.

These impressions seemed to be confirmed by the comments of the authors themselves. In the daily newsletter of the festival, the anonymous author of *Fragments* gave an interview in which she said that her initial plan had been to make a film that would let the YouTube videos speak for themselves, without any explicit authorial intervention, and that it was only as she worked on them that she came to realise that - in her opinion - they were not able to support a narrative alone, and that they needed help[4]. Yet

when Ujică came to present *Videograms* a few days later, he made exactly the opposite point during the discussion with the audience: as they had worked on the montage of the film, he and Farocki had come to feel that the voiceover commentary was less and less necessary, and that they were increasingly able to allow the images themselves to carry the narrative and tell their story for themselves[5].

Here, then, in the space of a few days, the entire aesthetic and political challenge that I was to live with over the course of the next three years was laid out before me, though of course I did not yet realise it. To put it schematically:

1. Was the extraordinary plastic quality of the YouTube images in *Fragments* a result of extremely complicated and expensive post-production treatment, or was it something intrinsic to the YouTube images themselves?

2. More importantly: were such videos, as I already implicitly believed, able to sustain a narrative without resort to an external narrator or some rhetorical equivalent (music, text, other video/audio material...)? Or would they prove too inarticulate, too full of 'holes', too subordinate to the original context in which they had been created and distributed, to be able to provide each other with all the context they needed?

And there was a third point involved here, which I did not yet suspect, but which would later prove to be crucial: when I asked if these images would be enough to construct a "narrative", I meant: narrative. Not a poem, like Rui Simoēs' magnificent *O bom povo português* (1980), included by Nicole Brenez in her programme for the Cinéma du réel; not a critical-analytical investigation of these images, as

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4 "**Q. You work the archive images, that foreground the strength of the collective, in a very personal and subjective way. Was this something you had decided to do from the start?** A. We had set out with the intention to make a film that would, in some sense, carry the voices of these anonymous Iranians. A film that would be made up uniquely of archival images. A montage film. We didn't want to occupy the stage ourselves. We wanted to talk about the situation, and not about our experience of watching these images. But in the end, these images were not enough to tell the story. There were holes in the

narrative. And there were lots of things that these images, despite their force, did not describe. So we decided to introduce this more personal dimension through the emails we were receiving from Iran. Not to talk about ourselves specifically, so much as to make the viewer aware of the individuals who exist in relation to these images. Those who film, and those who watch. These people don't know each other, but in the end, there is a sort of relationship that is created between them. In addition, it was important to show from where these images were being viewed: by people who were far away. This is the position of the spectator of these contemporary dramas. Everyone makes up his own story, his own experience of them, based on where he is situated. We did not want to pretend to be giving an "objective" vision of events. We ourselves were full of questions and doubts. Can we really trust these images? Isn't it unhealthy to watch these acts of violence over and over again, while seated far away, behind a screen? Does that not feed a feeling of disempowerment?" (Journal du Réel 2011, my translation)

5 Andrei Ujică, remarks made during public discussion following the screening of *Videograms for a revolution*, Cinéma du réel, Paris, Thursday 24 March 2011. While the voiceover is not completely absent in the second half of the film, it intervenes only four times in the last one hour and ten minutes, which contrasts with the regular presence of its commentary throughout the first half hour.

both the anonymous author of *Fragments* and Farocki and Ujica had, in their different ways, set out to make. A narrative. A story. Maybe not a story in the classical, purely linear sense. But still: a sequence of events, linked together by at least the *appearance* of some form of causality.

All that was lacking then was the occasion, the prompt that would tip me into motion. It came, by pure serendipity, as I was leaving the Beaubourg center one day towards the end of my stay in Paris. As I emerged blinking into the sunlight, I ran into Laurence Rebouillon, the President of the Collectif Jeune Cinéma, which distributes a number of my short films. At the organisation's AGM on 5 March, the first such meeting I had ever attended, she had floated the idea for an evening of films about the Arab revolutions by Arab artists and experimental filmmakers as one of their regular monthly screenings at the Cinéma La Clef. I had agreed it was a good idea, and offered to see if I could come up with some names for filmmakers to contact. Seeing me dazzled by the early spring sunshine, Laurence seized the opportunity and asked me if I would like not just to contribute a few ideas, but to assume responsibility for programming the whole evening. As I stood there blinking, and thinking how I was really *not* the person to do this (all my contacts in the Arab world dated from my time as a journalist, and had little to do with the worlds of art or film), and that this was *not* the right time for such a project (who would have had the cool head and presence of mind to make "a film" so soon after these tumultuous events? and even if they had done, how would I be able to track them down?), I could hear myself confidently saying: "Yes, of course, I'd love to."

Was this just my usual propensity for saying yes to anything, without pausing to think about the consequences? Perhaps. But I remember also that I immediately came back with the counter-proposal to create a programme that would include not just artists' films, but for which I would also curate a number of "interludes" made up of anonymous YouTube videos. I suppose that, without having completely thought things through, I could already see how doing this would not only resolve the problem of how to locate enough "appropriate" work from the region, but would also give me an opportunity to test out whether putting YouTube videos on the big screen was within my technical competence, or was in fact some complex and arcane process that required lots of know-how, and lots of money, in order to achieve the kind of plasticity which had so much impressed me, despite what at that time I took to be its intellectual elitism and political pusilanimity, in *Fragments of a revolution*.

B2. From Bucarest to Tehran

The original impetus that would lead to my making *The Uprising* was thus reshaped and reoriented by my diametrically opposed reactions to the two films that I saw in Paris in March 2011, and which offered two very different approaches to using the people's own images to make a film about revolutionary change (or the attempt to bring about such a change). Yet looking back now, what strikes me most is not how important that dichotomy between discursive appropriation and verbal self-effacement was to my own process, as how much it was something I had, in my state of revolutionary *enthusiasm* as a distant spectator myself (Kant 1798/1991), projected onto those films, rather than an accurate response to their own formal and discursive strategies. Watching *Videograms from a revolution* and *Fragments of a revolution* again in 2015 as I worked on this dissertation, I have come to see them as radically different from the films I saw - or believed that I was seeing - in Paris some four years earlier.

Thus in 2011, I received *Videograms* as a work that placed its confidence in the ability of the people not only to carry through the revolution, but also to make their own images of that process - a confidence that was confirmed for me by the progressive disappearance of the didactic voiceover as the film proceeded, leaving the images to tell "their own story". Watching it again four years later, however, the film seems to me to tell a radically different story - that of a process in which change had no sooner got underway than it was captured and channelled by a new elite that emerged rapidly from within the old structures of the state and which ensured that the people never came

Realising that something is not quite right. Still from **Videograms of a revolution** *(1992)*

anywhere near the real levers of power. The result is a film in which the people are almost always offscreen, their presence registered only in that brief moment - perhaps no more than 24 hours - when a breach is opened in the fabric of the regime. This is the moment when the official images of national TV suffer a kind of syncope, as the camera operators followed their instructions for dealing with emergency situations by panning up into the sky so as to avoid revealing the disturbances that had broken out outside Central Committee headquarters during Ceaușescu's speech on 21 December.

True, in Farocki and Ujică's film, this disruption of the official image of the leader as the symbol of the nation - the puncturing of the steady flow of images that had hitherto defined what it meant in Romania to see and be seen by the State - is followed by a passage in which these images are temporarily replaced by those of amateur cameras, filming first from the relative safety of their appartment windows, before descending into the streets to participate more fully in the events. However, this passage is all the more powerful because it turns out to be only an interlude that is rapidly aborted. Rather than providing a narrative of the Romanian revolution from the point of view of the people, and using only the people's images, *Videograms* instead shows how this brief interruption in the visual regime of governance is hastily, but effectively, repaired. Within hours, the television station had become, along with the balcony of the Central Committee HQ, the central stage on which an acceptable narrative of the revolution will be constructed. This narrative is constructed in the name of the people, but it is constructed *by* a new elite that has quickly emerged from the wings to seize the opportunity offered, and to ensure that their own interests are as far as possible preserved. Meanwhile, suitable scapegoats were found to be offered up in lieu.

As Constantin Parvulescu has argued:

> [*Videograms*] did not aim to write history, but reveal how, in the act of writing, the historical text constructs its events. It argued obliquely that the popular revolt started in Timisoara was appropriated, with the help of Ceaușescu's intelligence services, by a Gorbachevist echelon of the Romanian Communist Party, but this argument was included in a broader and relativizing statement: Popular revolts, moments of radical democracy, are always the object of appropriations. (Parvulescu 2013: 27)

The result is a film which, instead of celebrating the triumph of the people as told in the people's images, instead

aims to reveal how, in days of unrest, an independent, revolutionary gaze emerges, and how it is rendered irrelevant once the revolution has 'triumphed'. It aims to show that this independent gaze, represented by each of the amateur cameras filming the event (and thus producing a multifaceted picture of history), undermines the social production of hegemonic relations, especially as long as the body of the camera is perceptible. Yet, the presence of these cameras on the streets as participants lasts only a few days; that is, until a centralized and decorporealized gaze reabsorbs their images into a discourse that no longer serves to spark and maintain spontaneous social dialogue (moments of radical democracy), but to control it. (ibid: 2-3)

Filming the filmers filming a television.
Still from **Videograms of a revolution** *(1992)*

In Ujică and Farocki's film, then, the visual regime of television remains dominant, from the first image of the film to the last, and the people's own images exist only as a brief interregnum, long enough to impose the difference of their own terms of seeing, but not long enough to seriously threaten the dominant imaginary of the state, in which the people are no longer the actors of the revolution, but only its spectators. Indeed, Farocki himself has gone further than Parvulescu, suggesting that it is not simply that the visuality of the State once again supplants that of the people, but that in doing so, it is only too happy to *assimilate* the people's images, and to *coopt* those who make them, thus seeking to render the alternative mode of vision they had proposed harmless.

Indeed, in Romania in 1989 there were no "true" amateurs. Even if access to VHS cameras was less closely monitored than the ownership of typewriters, they remained a rare

article, and their owners were already embryonic news cameramen at heart:

> *Romania was also behind the times when it came to non-professional camera equipment. The relatively few VHS cameras attracted users who regarded shooting pictures as a craft and not as a function of the camera's program. Many whose material we quote in the film learned from textbooks or in courses that a foreground gives depth to a frame or that you have to make intermediate cuts because a process filmed in a long, continuous take can hardly be shortened otherwise. The man on his balcony who captured the moment when army soldiers fired over the heads of the Securitate, thus siding with the revolution, gave his tape to a student archive without bothering about its utilization. Many others, however, have tried to use recordings of the revolution to promote their media professions. It is hard to avoid the thought that the cameramen of the revolution wanted to use their work to apply for jobs in post-revolutionary television. With the future political elite in front of the camera and the future television elite behind the camera, we observe the attempt of both these groups to rid themselves of their amateur status. (Farocki 1995/2001)*

The result is a film that, rather than celebrating these "amateur" videos for their irreducible difference, describes their expulsion from the margins as a conscious and voluntary exercise in visual normalisation[1].

In comparison, *Fragments of a revolution* now seems to me, not so much a more subversive film than *Videograms*, as one that addresses a situation which was in itself far more dangerous to the established order. And it does so in a way that is far more emotionally resonant than Farocki and Ujică's work, with its somewhat analytical, and superficially

detached, dissection of the failure of the Romanian people to take control of their own destiny[2].

If I was in your place, would I have the strength to....
Still from **Fragments of a revolution** *(2011)*

Like *Videograms*, *Fragments* also mixes material from a number of sources, and does not rely simply on cameraphone videos from the streets to tell their own story. But it draws on a much wider range of sources than does *Videograms*, which is focused on demonstrating pedagogically how, in the political and technological conditions of 1989, the independent "amateur" camera emerged only to be instantly reincorporated into, and subordinated to, "the broadcast" (Youngblood 2013). *Fragments*, on the other hand, mixes cameraphone videos circulated via social media with news bulletins from Iranian State TV, but also with a narrative that is delivered not through a single, neutral voiceover, but as a series of fictional (or fictionalised) emails. Those that are sent by the fictional filmmaker herself are typed out and displayed on the screen for us to read, while those that she receives are read out in voiceover by a series of actors, both male and female. These different narrative strands are further situated and dramatised by the use of "reenactments" in which we see (fragments of) an actress impersonating the filmmaker as she searches the Internet, watches videos on her laptop, types and receives emails, and goes to her window to observe the Paris skyline of her exile. And while she does not speak, she does offer non-verbal expressions of various forms of emotion, while the cityscape outside

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1   Parvulescu argues that despite their lucidity about the actual course of the Romanian revolution, Farock and Ujică remain hopeful about the possible emergence of a genuinely counter-hegemonic visual discourse through just the kind of embodied, haptic imagery discussed at length in chapters 1-5 of part A of this dissertation: "The independent, amateur camera bears the embodied vision. The state-controlled, official camera produces the disembodied, hegemonic one. The disembodied vision is the vision that aims to erase the traces of its corporeality and historicity from its representation. The images it produces seem to be recorded from outside of history, suspending a possible interaction between the filmed event and the device that records them. Farocki and Ujica's thesis is that the unavoidable social production of hegemonic images (inherent to the mass-character of the media) can be challenged by counter-discourses that, in various ways, recorporealize images..." (Parvulescu 2013: 5)

2   The video tapes of the Romanian revolution had no chance to enter into circuits of resonance, as did those of the Arab revolutions, or, to a lesser extent, those of the Green Movement of 2009, because they were essentially messages addressed, not to the people next door, nor even to a distant observer, but rather to *posterity*, if not to a prospective employer: "While a piece of paper can be used to design a different life and the method of obtaining it, a videotape serves rather to record and to represent that which has happened. In the Romanian revolution, video cameras did not even have this documentary function. The news that the security forces had shot at children in Timisoara, that there had been mass protests, and that the army had withdrawn only reached Bucharest via foreign broadcasts (in words transmitted by radio), through telephone calls, from travelers, various rumor channels, but not through video-tapes." (Farocki 1995/2001)

both rhymes with the events being described in Iran, and serves as an ironic-tragic foil to the other world "over there", from which she is provisionally, but - since these events will happen only once, whatever may come after - irremediably excluded.

Watching it again today, what strikes me most in this film is not the filmmaker's personal appropriation of this material in order to express her own sense of alienation, but on the contrary, her deep sense of emotional *implication* in the events she is watching online, which is no less tangible for being understated. Indeed, her own sense of projection/participation now seems to me as strong, or stronger, than anything that I myself could have experienced watching the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere in early 2011. As she says at one point both of her need to watch these images, and - by implication - of her need to make this film:

> *It's as if I have been living virtually in Tehran. This is my way of being with you.[3]*

Moreover, the representational structure that she puts in place in order to explore those emotions, and their political causes and consequences, which when I first saw the film I found over-intellectual, and even somewhat pretentious, now seems to me entirely appropriate and adequate to the subject, intensifying the viewer's sense of what is at stake, without in any way personalising it or individualising it. Despite the elaborate *dispositif*, the multiplication of individuated voices, and the sense that we are navigating among a relatively limited (and privileged) sector of Iranian society, the film remains firmly anonymous[4] in its mode of enunciation. And the narrative it defines is not one of inevitable failure, but rather, of a persistent openness to the apparently impossible and the unexpected.

As the narrator says in a final passage in which she resorts to writing her words out on paper, rather than on a screen:

> *I confess that this is not the end of the story. I confess that I am legion.[5]*

What led my perception of this film to shift so radically over the last four years? Doubtless, my reaction - both then, and now - has been overdetermined by my own

relationship to the parallel emotions generated by the Arab revolutions, and by my immersion in the making of my own film. In March 2011, anything which did not express an unambiguous confidence in the people, and a similarly unilateral faith that the processes they had initiated would lead to real political and social change, might have been on some level intolerable for me. And so, any film which did not use such YouTube videos to express an unambiguously optimistic vision was difficult for me to identify with, even if it was dealing with a very different situation in a very different place and time. Over the following years, my awareness of the ambiguities, betrayals and illusions that were implicit in the images of the Arab revolution from the beginning would grow and occupy an increasingly important place in both my consciousness and the film I was myself making, even as they did not entirely obliterate the initial confidence and energy which had impelled me to commence this process[6].

I confess that it was not my window that I filmed out of.
Still frame from **Fragments of a revolution** *(2011)*

Perhaps, however, there is also something in the images themselves which underpins this difference. The YouTube videos produced by the Green Movement in Iran in 2009 probably represent the first time online video has been used as a properly vernacular tool for political communication on such a scale. Yet those images *are* very different from those that would emerge from the Arab revolutions only two years later. This is not, I think, simply ascribable to an advance in mobile video technology and its availability - to the higher "quality" (that is, the greater resolution) of the cameras and compression algorithms available in 2011.

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3   "C'est comme si j'avais vécu virtuellement à Teheran. C'est ma manière d'être avec vous." My translation.

4   "Today, "anonymous" is our way of saying, not "I", but "we". (Journal du réel 2011, my translation)

5   "J'avoue que ceci n'est pas la fin de l'histoire. J'avoue que je suis innombrable." My translation.

6   Perhaps… And yet, might not the opposite also be true? Namely, that what attracted me to these videos, and made me want to *do* something with them, was also intimately related to various more negative emotional attitudes I harboured - to certain species of melancholia, or pessimism, that would regularly crystallise for me around images of failure and counter-revolution, without encountering any substantial resistance on my part? It is certainly possible that my initial inability to recognise *Fragments of a revolution* as the great film that I now believe it is has something to do with the kind of rivalry that is liable to be triggered by projects which, rather than being too distant from one's own, are in fact too *close* to it…

Looking for the people in an empty street. Still frame from **Fragments of a revolution** *(2011)*

Nor should we be looking for an answer in a reductive distinction between the visual cultures of Iran and the Arab world (which could all too easily be further reduced to an Orientalist cliché of the difference between the Sunni and Shia varieties of Islam). Rather, I think what I sense here is a difference in the quality of *emotional resonance* which these images both provoke *and respond to*. And if an explanation is to be found for this, then it lies perhaps in the different topology of the offline-online circuits through which such images passed, and whose feedback loops (and/or their absence) ultimately determined the kind of images which people were led to make, through the embedded pedagogy which these circuits provided to the filmers.

As Setrag Manoukian has pointed out, commenting on the videos produced by the 2009 Green Movement:

> *It is difficult if not impossible to ascertain, at least for now, the impact these media had on crowds in the streets, given that in the days of the protest Internet access was limited and slow and mobile networks worked sporadically. (Manoukian 2010: 248)*

And Narges Bajoghli has documented the many obstacles that Internet users faced in those days, including lack of 3G connectivity, extensive filtering by the government, and the deliberate slowing down of connection speeds which made the Web effectively unusable (at least in Tehran) by the end of June 2009 (Bajoghli 2014). In addition, it was widely believed that any above-average use of bandwidth would be picked up by the government's surveillance technology and lead to arrest and torture on suspicion of revolutionary sympathies, without the need to overburden the security apparatus by identifying and assessing the politics of the web page being accessed. As a result, just watching video effectively became a crime in and of itself (Mottahedeh 2015: 6). So, if these videos were part of what "made the protests real" (Manoukian 2010: 248), they did so not for the protesters themselves, who could not see them, but above all for the "distant spectator" outside Iran, who *was* able to access them (Sreberny and Khiabany 2010: 175, cited in Bajogli 2014: 186). The result is a media ecology radically different from that of the Arab revolutions where, during most of their course, the revolutionaries were equally producers and spectators of their own videos, which functioned much more as a channel for mutual mobilisation among neighbours, than as a letter in an electronic bottle directed to a predominantly outside world. In Iran in 2009, the images produced were aimed at a distant audience who *were*, effectively, barred by that very distance from going down into the relevant streets, while those who were in Iran were largely unable to see these images of themselves. The result was a "a situation of uncertainty [that] amplified the dispersed and multiple

character of crowds", whereas the online-offline media circuits of the Arab revolutions tended to concentrate energies and thus create a plurality of overlapping centres, each of which acted as a point of provisional unification (Manoukian 2010: 248).

This difference in the resonant amplification of the images it not simply a fact about the channels through which they circulated, but can itself be felt within those images themselves. And if that is so, then the (anti-)dramatic structure of *Fragments of a revolution* should be seen not as generated out of the unusual and self-consciously marginal (for which read also, 'privileged') nature of the filmmaker's position, but rather out of a deep *adequation* between that position and the character of the videos themselves.

The result is a film which is not only distant in space from the events in which it has its origin, but also in time. Unlike *The Uprising*, *Fragments* is not a film in the present, but is explicitly framed as an act of retrospection. It recounts the Green Movement of June 2009 through the eyes of a narrator who is looking back on the events from nine months later - who knows that what her friends in Iran tried to do then ended in failure, and that many of them have paid for that failure with their lives. It is not a film that tries to participate in a circulation of revolutionary energy that may or may not have been felt at that time; it is a film that tries instead to come to terms with what it feels like when that circulation, such as it was, has been brutally interrupted.

Yet, at the same time, it is a film which remains open on to the future - a future which does not have to be the same as the past. The end of the film is *not* the end of the story. And the final shot expresses, in a way that completely passed me by when I first saw it, this continuing confidence in the people that I was looking for in the film, and that in 2011 I was unable to find in it.

This final shot is taken from a balcony, looking down at a crossroads in a city that I assume is Tehran. The camera pans jerkily across the scene, as if searching for something or someone. But here there is no demonstration, no violent confrontation with the state, no people shouting slogans or waving banners. Undistinguished trees mask much of the row of shops opposite. There is a big wind blowing through their branches. Cars pass along a busy road. A taxi slows to a halt by the traffic lights, and a few people take advantage of a lull in the traffic to cross to the other side. The camera dips down, and finds itself staring for several seconds at the blank concrete wall that encloses the balcony where the filmer stands. Then, just as quickly as it came to rest, it whips up again towards the sky. Suddenly,

with no warning, the image cuts to black, and the film has ended.

Throughout the shot, the camera gives a strong sense that it is searching for something that it cannot find - for some sign that today, nine months later (for this is how we read the temporality of this image, at once similar to and different from the YouTube images that have preceded it), the people still exist, and their insurrection is *not* over. And while it finds no sign of anything that looks like the revolution, the very fact that it is still searching, that it does not stop searching, suggests that the people are still there - that they *must* still be there - even if we cannot see them.

B3. From Paris to Maspero

May-October 2011

— 1 —

The evening of work I curated for the CJC took place as planned on 19 May 2011. The programme consisted of three artist's films/videos from before the revolutions (from Syria, Egypt and Lebanon - total running time: 58 minutes) framed within four YouTube "interludes" using videos from Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria (total running time: 44 minutes)[1].

This programme testified, among other things, to my failure to find any "artistic" video work made since the revolutions that seemed to me worth showing. (In my defence, I should say that the first videos by the Syrian artists' collective Abou Naddara, for instance, were only put online on 5 May 2011[2], while Egyptian video artist/activist Aalam Wassef posted his first post-revolutionary video under his own name on 30 April 2011[3]. The programme and running order for 19 May were finalised by 18 April, before any of this work - which I might have been minded to include - had yet publically emerged.) As a result, it was

designed entirely around the confrontation between artists' work which seemed to me in some sense premonitory of the events of 2010-11, and videos from those events, which seemed to me to have some quality that would allow them to stand up alongside, and even against, the artists' works.

By calling it *Fragments for a revolution* I wanted to indicate a different positioning for this anthology than that which I then attributed to the Iranian film that had contributed to shaping this project. I intended these videos to contribute as directly as possible to the continuation of the movements that had generated them, and possibly to their extension into new territories, including our own. Where the title, *Fragments **of** a revolution*, connoted for me the vision of someone who had come afterwards, to collect the débris of an insurrection that had failed to achieve its ends, *Fragments **for** a revolution* implied that the revolution - the *real* revolution - was *still to come*. In that sense, the basic arc of what would become two years later *The Uprising* was already present in this initial act of curation.

Many of the problems of the next two years' work were also already prefigured here, in particular in the tension between editing and the refusal of editing. While most of the material was presented without any alteration, exactly as it had been uploaded to YouTube, the first sequence was conceived as an exercise in montage. It began with a clip from Syrian State TV which (in a move analagous to the Romanian TV cameraman taking evasive action in order to avoid broadcasting signs of incipient insurrection) cut abruptly away from a shot of a woman spitting on Bashar Al-Assad to a series of innocuous aerial shots of Damascus accompanied by the most banal of patriotic music. Through a long dissolve, I merged this clip with a shot that allegedly showed Bashar's brother Maher personally shouldering a rifle to open fire on a crowd of unarmed demonstrators as they tried to approach one of the headquarters of the regime. This tension was also present in the decision to include towards the end of the programme Tamar Shaaban's music-video remix of footage from the Egyptian revolution, whose intense editing also contrasted sharply with the unedited language of most of the other videos shown. In some sense, one could say that Shaaban's video, which had enjoyed wild viral popularity, also provided one of the implicit models for my own work over the coming years[4]. At least, it offered some authority from within the vernacular ecosystem for politically-

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1   The authored films shown were Julia Meltzer and David Thorne's *Not a matter of if but when: brief records of a time in which expectations were repeatedly raised and lowered and people grew exhausted from never knowing if the moment was at hand or still to come* (2006), Namir Abdel-Messeeh's *Toi, Waguih* (2005), and *Nature Morte (Tabiaah Samitah)* (2008) by Akram Zaatari. Details of the YouTube videos screened can be found in the first column of the table given in Appendix 1.

2   See abounaddara.com, and vimeo.com/user6924378. For more information on Abou Naddara, see Boëx 2012 and Béghin and Zabunyan 2015. The name - literally, "The Man with the Spectacles" - echoes that of the celebrated satirical journal *Abu Naddarah Zarqa* (The Man with the Blue Spectacles) first published in Cairo in 1877 by the Egyptian writer Ya'qub Sannu', and which led to him spending the rest of his life in exile in Paris, the city that also serves as a base-in-exile for part of today's Abou Naddara collective. On Sannu', see Selim 2004: 25-35 and 43-49.

3   Video previously available at youtube.com/watch?v=tapm_ksz-lAc, now private. Wassef had a previous "life" under Mubarak as the pseudonymous video provocateur Ahmed Sherif: see arabist.net/blog/2012/2/16/podcast-26-the-aalam-wassef-episode.html.

4   tshaaban88, "Egyptian Revolution Jan 25th 2011 — Take what's Yours!" available at youtube.com/watch?v=vo5Fn1-2E8o. For background on this video, drawing on the authors' interviews with Shaaban, see Gregory and Losh 2012.

2.
Le Dire

Le Proclamer

**Tunisie
novembre 2010**

French title boards used in the original anthology programme.

directed interventionist montage[5], as well as suggesting that one of the purposes of montage was to provide an implicit "justification" for the passage from non-violent protest to revolutionary violence.

The 19 May screening was remarkable for me in two ways. Firstly, it demonstrated that the simple act of projecting YouTube videos on a big screen without any intervening treatment or processing was in itself sufficient to generate the plastic force that had so impressed me in *Fragments of a revolution*. There was no need for any sophisticated post-production wizardry. I had simply downloaded the clips from the Internet, and recompressed them from the timeline of my editing software to MP2 for inclusion on the DVD used for the screening. Without having anything else done to them, the images we saw on the screen at La Clef possessed this same unique plasticity which was unlike anything I knew from the classic cinematographic repertoire, and which seemed at one moment closer to oil painting, and at another, to the simulated environments of digital video games, than to anything I had hitherto associated with the word, "video".

The other surprise was that I felt that, at the end of the screening, the audience was under the same effect of shock and fascination as I myself had been when I first saw these videos. Certainly, that was the case to judge by the debate. While people were keen to talk to Nameer Abdel-Meseeh, who was present in the theater, about *Toi, Wagui* (2005), his film about his father's political activities as a leftist during the time of Nasser, the other two videos prompted barely any remarks. At the end of the screening, everyone (including Nameer) seemed to want to talk about the YouTube videos. And those conversations continued after we had vacated the cinema, and settled into a nearby café, until well into the next morning.

This left me with a strong sense that I was not alone in the fascination that I felt, and that these videos could speak strongly to people who did not share my own personal connections to the region. After 19 May 2011, I would have many doubts about the validity of what I was doing: but I never again doubted that the simple fact of extracting these videos from the Internet ecosystem, where they would generally be seen on small screens, by one or two people at most at the same time, and putting them on the big screen where they would become a genuinely *collective* experience, could be, in itself, a *political* act.

Through the good offices of Meg Jamieson, the YouTube interludes, without the artists' films, were rescreened (in my absence) on 11 June as part of a festival dedicated to "Protest Film" held at Murray Edwards College, Cambridge[6]. Again, the response (as relayed to me by the conveners) was overwhelmingly positive. At the same time, I began to feel that without the artists' videos, the current form of the programme I proposed was seriously deficient. Without overstepping the boundaries of my role as curator, I wanted to find a way to extend the anthology I had found myself assembling into a "definitive" form that could circulate without the need for any kind of supporting feature(s), providing enough material for a screening plus discussion by itself. At the same time, struggle continued across the region, whether to secure the fall of the regime at hand in Libya, Bahrain, Yemen or Syria, or to try and save the achievements of the revolution from the forces of reaction that had begun to manifest in both Tunisia and Egypt.

I thus spent most of the summer of 2011 continuing to watch YouTube videos, and to try and devise a structure for the *Fragments* anthology which would do justice to how I felt about these videos, and about the significance of the movements which had produced them. I had no sense that I was making a "film", or that this was my PhD project. I continued to think of *Fragments* as a political work of solidarity, rather than a personal artistic project. I was keen to get it over with, both so that it could circulate more widely while it was still "relevant", and so that I could get back to my other, "real" work.

At the same time, the more videos I watched, and the more I tried to integrate the new material into the anthology format, the more intractable the problems I had set myself seemed to become.

The blockage in this process revolved around three main issues or tensions which I felt unable to resolve. At the time, the main problem seemed to lie in the fact that, despite my constant searching and watching, I had not yet found the "right" material to make the form I had chosen work the way I felt it should. In retrospect, I can see that the problem lay less in the material, and more in the fact that the structure I had set out for myself was itself compromised by my failure to make certain crucial choices. In fact, the form I had intuitively developed was helplessly split between a clear narrative structure on the one hand, and on the

5   Another source of encouragement to go down this path was the Syrian rap music video *Bayan Ra2am Wa7ed* (youtube.com/watch?v=pe_N7ouDHBI) with its remixed visuals, uploaded on 10 April 2011.

6   murrayedwards.cam.ac.uk/exploring/filmfestival/mecfilmfestival/protest

other, a much looser, more poetic concatenation of scenes, each of which was to be experienced for itself, and whose interrelationships were more associative than causal.

This contradiction was exacerbated by the fact that my fascination with the circulation of revolutionary energy had led me to collect multiple variations on certain tropes, of which the most obvious were the countless scenes I had found in which crowds or individuals took it upon themselves to destroy the images (photographic, painted, sculpted...) of their dictators that filled their public spaces (cf. the discussion of these videos in chapter A8 above). I was fascinated both by the proliferation of these symbolic *mises-à-mort*, and by the way in which they were shared, viewed and commented online. Seeing similar events resonate with one another across different places and different times, in a sort of grassroots political pattern of call-and-response, reminded me of how my Kabyle friends had described their own insurrection of 2001 spreading and multiplying its effects across their region a decade earlier. (This parallel is discussed in more detail in section A8.1 above.)

I used the term "energy" to refer to what I was seeing, since it seemed to me that this was indeed the immediate object of my perception. I was watching forms interact dynamically - whether these forms were pixels, or human beings, or some hybrid of the two - and through their interactions flowed something that could not be reduced to the sum of their empirical actions and reactions. Just as when we see movement, we do *not* see a series of static positions, but a single flowing gesture; so when we see this kind of revolutionary energy circulating, we do not see just the isolated gestures which it traverses, and then extrapolate from them some greater but ill-defined entity that surpasses the evidence of our eyes. We immediately see the whole movement, and the individual gestures that participate in that movement then manifest themselves simply as its parts. We see the energy first, because that energy is infra-logical, and taps into dimensions of our kinesthetic and proprioceptive experience that precede not only language, but any sense of ourselves as separate and distinct individuals. This energy is cognate with that deepest layer of our embodied experience which, as Ivan Illich saw, is above all the domain of the vernacular (cf. Snowdon 2014 and the Introduction to Part A above; on energy and embodiment, see also Oliver 2004).

There were thus, not two, but *three* contradictory structural-formal principles that I found myself trying to make work hand in hand. I had arrived at these different approaches intuitively, without any conscious decision, and each one responded to a different dimension or aspect of the videos

I was trying to bring together. It was not surprising then that I found my progress paralysed.

The anthology I was trying to construct alternated uneasily between:

1. sequences of poetic/epiphanic images, related to one another by association and by contrast, and unconnected by any clear form of through dynamic;

2. series of "themes with variations" in which shots were grouped not by association, but as direct repetition/imitation of the same trope in different times and different places; and,

3. sequences of formally continuous narrative, in which shot 2 represented the continuation of the action/narrative of shot 1 in terms not of actual chronology, but rather of an imaginary, ideal-typical revolution.

This tension was exacerbated, but also disguised, by the fact that the anthology fell very clearly into two sections - before the revolution, and after the revolution. It was important for me from the beginning - indeed it was one of the earliest decisions I took, and to which I stuck throughout - that what happened "after the revolution" was at least *as*, if not *more* important than what had happened before. Already by summer 2011, it was clear that in Egypt the army had not really relinquished power, and perhaps had no intention of ever doing so[7]. At the same time, since at that point only two countries - Tunisia and Egypt - had achieved the emblematic "fall of the regime", as identified by the flight or imprisonment of the tyrant, the material in the second part of the anthology was not geographically varied enough to sustain the more circular/static/poetic structures generated by approaches (1) and (2), and needed instead a more linear/narrative approach. This tension between poetic/static and narrative/dynamic structural modes was thus already present in these earliest versions - even, by implication, in the anthology of 19 May 2011 - and this would continue to be the major problem that I had to confront and resolve over the next two years. Or to put it slightly differently: the major obstacle to making the film work was to recognise that it was *not* possible to start the film in poetic/static mode, and then move into a narrative/

7   By late 2012, when I spent six weeks in Cairo, the hypothesis that the entire 25 January revolution had been conceived and stage-managed by the army as a means to rid themselves of Gamal Mubarak was already circulating widely. The established role of the army in the Tamarod petition that led to the 30 June 2013 "people's coup" only reinforced this suspicion retrospectively. See Shukrallah 2013 for a perceptive history of this period, including the proposal that the *real* military coup was what happened on 11 February 2011, and Salem 2013 for an analysis of the shifting alliances within the Egyptian ruling class.
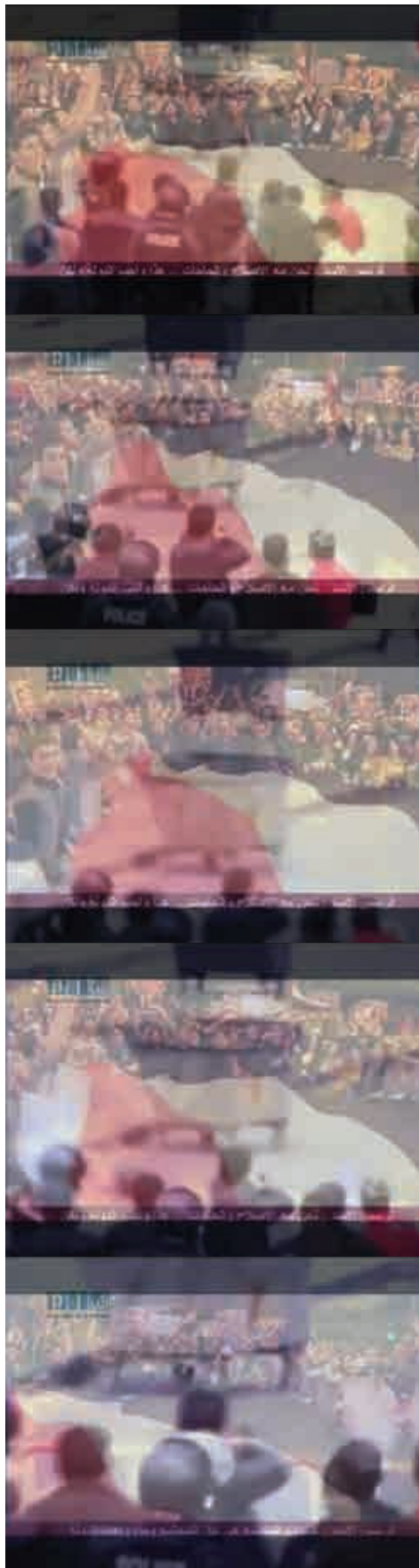
*Montage sequence from **Fragments for a revolution**.*

dynamic mode half way through, as we kept trying to do throughout 2011 and the first half of 2012. And since, for me, the moral and political weight of the film lay in what happened *after* the revolution, not before, it was already perhaps inevitable that the narrative/dynamic approach would have to be adopted from the very beginning.

In hindsight, and when expressed like this, what needed to be done seems obvious. But it was *not* obvious at the time. And it would take a lot of difficult experiences and disappointments, before it was possible to identify the nettle, let alone to grasp it.

— 3 —

I struggled through the summer and autumn of 2011 to make the anthology work. At many points I came very close to giving up on the project, which often seemed to be beyond my strength. I attributed this failure to many different causes, beside my own general incompetence. In particular, I was dogged by the thought that I was missing the most important video clips that would enable me to finally nail the structure because of my poor Arabic language skills, and my reluctance to make too many demands on my friends in Egypt and elsewhere who were acting as volunteer translators. (As if a video which contains some interesting dialogue, but is otherwise visually and aurally "inert", could have resolved anything.)

I was also reluctant to show the results of my indecision to other people. On the couple of occasions when I did overcome my reticence, however, the reactions were so positive, that they gave me the strength to keep going. Jon Jost stopped over at our house on his way through Brussels that summer, and his enthusiasm for the extracts I showed him inspired me to keep working away. Then, in early October, my two closest friends in Cairo, Hani Shukrallah and Fatemah Farag, came to stay for a few nights. Their visit was to have a determining influence on what happened next.

On the evening of 9 October, to celebrate their arrival, we went out to walk around the Ilôt Sacré in Brussels. At a loss for more original ideas, we stepped into Chez Léon, the mothership of the infamous *moules-frites* restaurant chain, to eat dinner. As we sat there giving our order, Hani started to receive text messages from his son Hossam, who was at a large demonstration in Cairo protesting a church demolition. The demonstrators had just reached the State TV building, popularly known as "Maspero", and there things had begun to go wrong. Without any provocation

from the peaceful crowd, the army had begun to attack them with a violence which, even by the standards of late 2011, was unprecedented. As the reality of what was happening slowly filtered through to us, we sat there, eating our traditional Belgian dishes, and growing more and more anxious. Hossam sent regular updates, detailing the horrors he was witnessing, and assuring us he was safe, but our appetites could not survive. We skipped dessert, and drove home so that we could follow the unfolding tragedy with our attention undivided, via social media and Al Jazeera.

That night 28 people died, and some 212 were injured, at the hands of both paid thugs and regular soldiers, firing live ammunition and driving their APCs indiscriminately into the crowd, to crush people to death beneath their wheels. Within hours, videos were circulating showing in horrendous detail what had happened. There had already been opportunities to realise that the Egyptian "regime" had *not* in fact been brought down, but was still alive and well, and was ready to use disproportionate force to terrorise those who thought the revolution might have really changed the balance of power between the people and the State back into submission. But for me, the realisation came that night in October. This was the event that crystallised for me what the revolutionaries were up against, and how far the counter-revolution was prepared to go in order to turn the clock back[8].

The Maspero massacre thus became for me the political and emotional epicentre of what I wanted to say about "after the revolution". While I still didn't know how to get to that point, I now knew where I was going.

On the morning of the 11th, before they set off to the airport, I finally got up the courage to show Fatemah and Hani a little of the material I was working on. I expected them to be unimpressed by such a "raw" compilation of images with which they would already be more than familiar. Instead, they sat glued to the screen, even during those parts of the footage that they knew by heart. At the end, Fatemah turned to me and said: "It's really important that you're doing this. Because these images are all disappearing. No one is managing to archive them, no one is doing anything to preserve them. And right now, all the regime wants is to erase every trace of the revolution, so that they can make the people forget the power that they once knew they had."

I couldn't quite believe that it was true that no one else was doing this. I was already aware of a not-unrelated though much narrower project, *Eighteen Days in Egypt* (originally intended to be a crowd-sourced film, tho subsequently abandoned in that form.) I knew of the work of the Mosireen collective, and supposed that they must be archiving as well as producing videos, though on what scale I had no idea. And I suspected that there might be other projects, in Egypt and elsewhere, to save at least something from being dragged down in the oceanic undertow of the YouTube database, which for all its many virtues, was never designed to function as a historical archive.

Nevertheless, whatever might be happening elsewhere, I now felt I had been challenged to do my part. And I knew then that I was stuck with seeing this project through, at whatever cost to my studies, however long it might take, and even if I had no idea of how I was going to do it.

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8   I was not the only one to feel this way: see Carr 2013. For more on the Maspero massacre, see chapter A9.3 At Maspero.

B4. The possibility of address

As we entered the winter of 2011-12, I remained convinced that my work with the YouTube videos from the Arab revolutions was just a sideline, a piece of essentially political "solidarity" work that I was performing in my "spare" time, even if in fact it was also occupying much of the "core" time that should, in theory, have been devoted to my PhD. And while I must have sensed that what was happening with these videos was important for me not only as a "citizen" but also as a filmmaker, I have no recollection or note of having consciously acknowledged this idea. In my mind, my YouTube "anthology" was still just an interlude, before I got "back" to the more "serious" work that awaited me. I certainly had no sense that it might not only come to take the place of the projects on the basis of which I had been accepted into the MAD Faculty PhD programme, but that it might also in fact *correspond* very well, on some deeper level, to the research programme that I had originally laid out.

What I was aware of, as 2011 headed towards 2012, was that the specific film projects through which I had proposed to carry out my PhD research were gradually coming to pieces in my hands, and it was not clear to me what, if anything, I might find to replace them.

I had come to MAD Faculty having been awarded an LSM bursary on the basis of a proposal entitled "The poetic documentary: between lyric form and collective memory". I had defined my project as follows:

> *To reevaluate the 'lyrical' tradition in documentary filmmaking, and show how it may be relevant to addressing the social and political realities of collective experience in a globalised world, through the production of two documentary films (one short, one feature-length).*

Behind this language lurked what I hoped would be a relatively simple process of extrapolation. While studying for my Masters in Transmedia at Sint Lukas Hogeschool in Brussels, I had developed a sequence of short films under the collective title *Lost Persons Area* in which I explored a number of adjacent practices around the nature of storytelling. The practice which had proved most fertile to my mind, and which I considered would constitute the core of my work going forward for the foreseeable future, was based on the creation of complex audio montage soundtracks characterised by polyphonic forms of narration. I would begin by recording audio interviews with a number of different people, and then break their speech down into small fragments that I could recombine to create imaginary "conversations" between my interlocutors, even though none of them had ever physically met. These audio montages then provided the jumping-off point for me to use my Super 8 camera to explore analogous or parallel experiences to those described on the sound track. I thought of the image track not as an illustration of these stories, but as a *performance* of them, which was also a re-interpretation of them on my own, often somewhat idiosyncratic terms. The clearest example of this method was my film *La forêt, une fois* (2010), for which I had recorded eight different people telling me stories about how they had once got so lost while out walking or cycling in an unfamiliar environment that they feared they might never get found again.

One way in which I thought of these works was as creating *imaginary communities*. My idea for my PhD was to see what would happen if I applied the same process and compositional principals to recounting the experience of *real* communities - to telling the stories of people who not only shared the specific concrete experiences they were talking about, but also lived together on a daily basis. Could I use this approach not only to create imaginary models of possible interaction, but also to represent something of the reality of people's lives for whom the idea of "community" was not an empty, or merely aspirational, term? And what would happen if I did that? Would this convergence function to reveal something new and unexpected of that community to others, or even to itself? Or would it create tensions and contradictions between the reality that pre-existed the film, and the "reality" that the film sought to co-create? And might this confrontation test, or even undermine, the approach to representing collective experience that produced it - thus forcing me to find or invent other ways of working that might be more adequate?

My initial research project revolved around two films that I felt might enable me to explore the potential and pitfalls of this approach, though in very different ways. The first was to take as its jumping-off point Cairo's 6th October Bridge, a 20-km-long urban flyover that traversed the city, and which I had stared at every day from my office

window during the last year I had spent working in Egypt. My idea was to use the physical bridge as a prompt, both for conversations about the urban restructuring of the city since the time of Anwar Sadat, and for eliciting memories of the October War after which the bridge was named. I had already filmed the bridge on numerous occasions, in both video and Super 8. What remained to be done was to record two series of conversations, one with people of a generation who might have personal memories of the war, and the other with some of those who lived and worked in similar proximity to this glorious monstrosity as I had.

The second, longer film, was to be about the transformation of the European working class, approached from the point of view of the non-European workers who now made up such a substantial part of it. More specifically, I proposed to look at how migration over the previous hundred years had transformed the Limburg region of Belgium, by following a number of local residents whose families had migrated to work in the mines there from different parts of Europe and beyond (Greece, Turkey, Ukraine...) as they made the journey back home to visit the relatives they had left behind. Again, I felt this would bring me into contact with groups of people who had shared experiences, and thus allow me to test whether my imaginary conversations were a fruitful way of exploring the experiences of people who were already involved in *real* conversations with one another. For this project I had the support of Het Vervolg, an organisation based in Winterslag, Genk, which had a long record of supporting lens-based art work around the theme of mining and its aftermath, and of its founder Paul Boutsen and his colleagues Karen Wyckmans and Gunther Truijen. I was lucky to meet them at a time when they were keen to branch out from still photography into film and video, and they had offered to act as my producer, and to help me raise the necessary funding.

As 2011 proceeded, I tried to advance all three of these projects, uncertain which if any of them might prove feasible within the timescale of my PhD. Discussions with friends in Cairo soon convinced me that in the current context, where everyone was completely preoccupied with the aftermath of the revolution, trying to engage Egyptians in conversations about something as apparently remote and irrelevant to their present concerns as the October War and its legacy for town planning was likely to prove extremely difficult. And in any case, I soon began to wonder what *my* attitude now was to the giant and resplendently tanned portraits of Hosni and Gamal Mubarak that used to line the October Bridge, which I had spent several years filming, and which had all now been destroyed or dismantled. While doubtless some sort of fascination still lurked, I found myself having difficulty reconnecting with the sensations and emotions which had made me attach

such importance to the idea of this film over the preceding years.

The film about migration and the transformation of the working class, meanwhile, was floundering in a no-man's-land between Paul Boutsen's enthusiasm, and my sense that the internal logic of the project was leading me away from the experimental kind of work I wanted to be doing, and towards a more conventional style of observational documentary filmmaking with which I was increasingly uncomfortable, and which did not sit so easily with the terms of my research proposal. I was also unsure whether I would be able to secure the level of funding necessary to make it a success. As a result, when Het Vervolg contacted me that summer about joining a funding application they were making to the Flemish Ministry of Culture and Heritage, I suggested we propose an entirely different project, which - like my work on the Arab revolution videos - had been taking shape in the background, independently of my "official" research plans.

For the previous two years, an anthropologist friend, Juan Javier Rivera Andía, had been conducting fieldwork in the village of Cañaris in northern Peru, where a Canadian mining company was undertaking feasibility studies for a major copper mine they wanted to develop on the community's land. Working in Cañaris had been a life-changing experience for him, and he was keen for us to travel there together to make a film about what was happening. I had immediately begun to imagine a multi-screen video installation which would offer a metaphoric transcription of the space of the village as he had described it to me, while the sound track would provide a polyphonic conversation recreating the villagers' relations with each other and with their environment. I had no immediate plans to proceed with this project. But I had begun to feel that it offered a far better test-case for the hypotheses underlying my PhD research than either of the films I had initially proposed. And the budget required was less than half what I estimated would be needed to make the Limburg migration film.

In the end, our funding bid for the Cañaris project was half-successful: the Ministry awarded us enough money that it would have seemed rude to turn it down, but not enough to complete the project in anything like the form we had imagined. With few other Belgian funding sources to turn to, and no co-producer ready to hand, travelling to the Peruvian Andes to film for any length of time was completely out of the question. The result was an extended period of uncertainty which only ended in late 2012, when Juan Javier and I reconceived the project as a found-footage installation based on my interpretation of his existing fieldwork video archive. This led us to make *The

Owners of the Land, a five-screen installation first shown at the Waterschei coal mine in Genk in October 2013. The final work sought to remain true to the original "brief" in terms of content, but was so far removed in process and in form that it had almost nothing to do, either with the methods developed in *Lost Persons Area,* or with the original subject of my PhD. (One could, however, argue that it only existed at all thanks to the experience of working with found footage on *The Uprising.* Without this film largely behind me by the time we embarked on *The Owners of the Land* in the summer of 2013, I might never have imagined that making such a large-scale work using only Juan Javier's archive was even possible.)

The resulting installation consisted of five films shown in separate spaces, ranging in length between 6 and 22 minutes, for a total running time of just under an hour. While most of the films only made sense as fragments of a whole, one of them stood out from the rest as a work in its own right, and has since gone on to have an independent

life as a single-screen work at festivals. *We are going to record* was also the first film we "found" in the archive. It consists of outtakes from a series of recording sessions for a CD of vernacular music from Cañaris, for which Juan Javier had brought two recording engineers from Lima all the way to this remote corner of the northern Andes. Placing his mini-DV camera on the first available surface, he had left it to record while he acted as an anxious mediator and facilitator in this often surreal cross-cultural encounter. The result was a kind of naturally-occuring fragment of Pedro Costa. The film was assembled by eliminating all the musical performances, and most of the functional dialogue, so as to leave only the awkward silences in which two radically different forms of life faced off against each other across the ill-defined frontier of the microphone. Though it took only a few days to put together, this short film is for me every bit as complex - and as politically important - as *The Uprising.*

Found acts of resistance. Still frame from **We are going to record** *(2013)*

As I wrote in an essay for the DVD liner:

> ...[Juan Javier's] videos [of these recording sessions] condense a complexity of feelings and relationships between the ethnographer/filmmaker and the people whose culture he wants to study and "preserve" in a way that I have rarely seen. And they do so through means that are almost entirely non-verbal. While words do play a role in the absurdist comedy that is enacted here, most of the work is done, not by the outsiders who are moving around and talking, but by the villagers themselves, even as they are imprisoned in these fragments of extreme immobility and silence. Through these multiple demands -- for silence, for them not to move, for them to keep a constant distance from the microphone, for them not to make noises with their legs or hands -- the forces in play here conspire to reproduce something like the conditions that obtained in the early years of still portrait photography, when very long exposure times would oblige sitters to hold the same pose for an unnaturally long period without moving, thus turning the simplest of expressions and gestures into a complex, demanding and highly rhetorical performance. The ways in which the musicians and singers of Cañaris and Incahuasi accept, assume and reinvent this constraint in between takes, speaks to a world of attitudes, intentions and practices, which have nothing to do with producing quality audio recordings, and which we can hardly begin to imagine, but which perhaps do have something to do with some of the words these poses might make resonate for us: dignity, patience, resistance. (Snowdon 2013: 24-25)

— **2** —

During this period I also completed one other film: *God is in the roots*, the addition to the *Lost Persons Area* sequence that I was working on when I travelled to Paris in March 2011. Indeed, when I was not working on the material that would eventually become *The Uprising*, I was engaged with *God is in the roots* throughout the summer and autumn of 2011. I pursued my collaboration with the sound designer Olivier Touche at a distance, exchanging draft materials and rough cuts over the internet, before finally meeting up in Paris in October to finalise the soundtrack.

The film that finally came together out of this process that stretched over a period of almost three years was composed of four distinct elements:

- fragments of the audio recording of the story Aurélie Namur had told me in 2009 about the journey she made into the Amazonian forest in search of "primitive man", reduced and interrupted to the point where the exact subject that she is discussing almost ceases to be intelligible;

- the Super 8 footage shot in Paris in 2011 of her rehearsing the play, *Le voyage égaré*, which she subsequently wrote, based on this experience;

- excerpts from Bryan Ferneyhough's virtuoso flute solo, *Unity Capsule*, performed by Gunar Bjornason, which accompany the wordless "interludes" that separate the episodes of Aurélie's narration; and,

- an original electroacoustic soundtrack by Olivier Touche, based on transformed field recordings from the same rehearsals of *Le Voyage égaré*.

(The film also exists in an installation version, presented at the exhibition *Beyond Art and Design* at the Gallerie De Mijlpaal in Heusden-Zolder in March/April 2013, under the title *A better rope trick*. The installation consists of the film projected onto a screen in a dark space, with a rope of the same kind Aurélie used in her performance hanging between the projector and the screen.)

Becoming plural: Aurélie Namur in **God is in the roots** *(2012)*

My aim had been to use the fragments of the original story as a metaphor for the theatrical experience -- for the stage as a space of infinite possibilities and terrible consequences. However, as work progressed, the sense of the "space" that was at stake became increasingly "mental", rather than just "physical". And so, the result is a film in

which the theatre, too, is, perhaps, just another metaphor for that place described in Aurélie's text - that place in which we wish we had been born, where we are always at home, and not at home, from which we will always return without witnesses, and about which the stories we tell are destined never to be believed.

The result may seem far removed, both from my interest in imaginary communities, and from the aesthetic and political propositions that would come to shape *The Uprising*. It is, after all, not a polyphonic conversation, but a monologue, albeit an unusually fractured and fragmented one. And to the extent that a collective is explicitly invoked, it is that of the Shuar village that assumed that Aurélie was the anthropologist whom they held responsible for the death of a number of their people over the preceding years. The relationship of collective to individual that her narrative develops is thus one of apparently complete exteriority - the village is present in the film only through Aurélie's narration of them - and complete hostility. Indeed, it would seem to be hard to imagine a collective any more remote from the open and self-confident plurality constituted by the singular cameras and camerapeople of the Arab revolutions.

But this contrast is, I believe, misleading on both counts. On the one hand, *God is in the roots* develops Aurélie's monologue not as a paradigm of the singular voice, but rather as an extreme exaggeration of individual isolation that proves, ultimately, unsustainable. In the final shots, her personality (as figured by her form on the surface of the film image, and in particular by her face) collapses into a discordant and disruptive plurality. The lack of integration with any external community, the film implies, inevitably leads to the irruption of an unmanageable internal collectivity - a return of the *social* repressed that threatens to tear the individual apart. And this descent into something like madness is explicitly attributed to *social* causes: confronted with the threat of imminent death in the middle of the Amazonian forest, it is not extinction itself, but the lack of any *witness* to that death (and to the moments of life that immediately precede it) that triggers the process of mental splitting and dissociation of the personality by which the subject is rent asunder.

The centrality of the role of the witness for Aurélie was reflected in the fact that the first play she wrote after she recovered from her journey to Peru was not the account of that journey, but an exploration of the centrality of witnessing in our own society. *On se suivra de près* (2011) explores the reactions of a group of people confronted by the death in their midst of an unknown woman, and the question of how they can bear witness to someone they have never known, and to whose identity they have no means of access[1].

In my film, the absence of a community to bear witness is resolved not through Aurélie's narration, but rather through the people we see working with her to stage this solo performance - her producer/director Félicie Artaud, the technicians (light, sound, stage manager), and their assistants - and who occupy this space (at least during rehersals) along with her, enabling the solitude of her performance through their constant collaboration and *attention*.

Becoming plural: Aurélie Namur in **God is in the roots** *(2012)*

This theme of witness resonates with the YouTube videos produced by the actors of the Arab revolutions on several levels. On the most basic level, these videos are themselves acts of witness. They preserve some record of events that might otherwise pass unseen, or be rapidly forgotten even by those who were present to them. On another level, however, their enclosure in a quasi-first-person perspective poses an issue both for the original videos, and for any project like mine which seeks to use these videos and *only* these videos to carry a complex narrative structure over an hour and a half. The "subjective camera" is notoriously untenable as the point of view in which to anchor a filmic narrative. As Mathieu Triclot has pointed out, following Pascal Bonitzer and Alexander Galloway, this device can only be sustained for short periods of time, because it inevitably suggests a non-standard, even non-human state of consciousness. In the cinema, it is the person we see in front of the camera, not the person whose point of view we adopt, with whom we identify. The function of the camera is not to give us such direct (and unrealistic) access to the perspective of the other, but simply to bear witness

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1   On the fear of dying alone, see Canetti 1973: 84. On knowing that one will not die alone as the *origin* of politics, see Bamyeh 2007: 4.

to them (Triclot 2011; Galloway 2006; Bonitzer 1999/1982; Snowdon 2014a).

If this is so, it is because the position of the witness is not simply secondary, but constitutive. As the philosopher Kelly Oliver has argued, "subjectivity requires the possibility of a witness" (Oliver 2004: 196):

> From his work with Holocaust survivors, and being a survivor himself, Dori Laub concludes that psychic survival depends on an addressable other, what he calls an "inner witness". It is the possibility of address that sustains psychic life and the subject's sense of its subjective agency. If the possibility of address is annihilated, then subjectivity is also annihilated. To conceive of oneself as a subject is to have the ability to address oneself to another, real or imaginary, actual or potential. Subjectivity is the result of, and depends upon, the process of witnessing — address-ability and response-ability. Oppression, domination, enslavement, and torture work to undermine and destroy the ability to respond and thereby undermine and destroy subjectivity. Part of the psychoanalyst's task in treating survivors is reconstructing the addressability that makes witnessing subjectivity possible. (198)

In a not unrelated way, Judith Butler has also argued for the centrality of address to our constitution as ethical subjects, in both our precariousness, and our potential persistence:

> The structure of address is important for understanding how moral authority is introduced and sustained if we accept not just that we address others when we speak, but that in some way we come to exist, as it were, in the moment of being addressed, and something about our existence proves precarious when that address fails. (Butler 2004: 130)

This search for the witness to whom both the sense of her life, and the possibility of her death, could be addressed was Aurélie Namur's journey, as she told it to me, as she later reenacted it in her play *Le Voyage égaré*, and as I have tried to remain faithful to it in my film *God is in the roots*. But it is also the journey that, without thinking about it in precisely this way, I would find myself trying to unfold for others to see in *The Uprising*.

For it was only when the isolation and fragmentation of the individual YouTube videos in my anthology had been overcome that the film would be able to function as a revolutionary gesture in its own right. It was by teasing out

of them their ability to *address* each other, and to *respond to* each other, that a sense of agency - both ethical and political - could be restored to them: that sense of agency whose absence defines our current state of dispossession.

To do that, though, it would not be enough for these videos to bear witness to some objective state of affairs - to those recognisable things and actions that we can see in them. In order for them to embody a sense of collective political agency as a real, lived possibility, they also had to bear witness to

> that which cannot be reported by the eyewitness, the unseen in vision and the unspoken in speech, that which is beyond recognition in history, the process of witnessing itself. (Oliver 2004: 180)

B5. No Revolution Without a Revolution

November 2011-April 2012

— 1 —

Shortly after Hani and Fatemah's visit, I bit the bullet and decided to show the rough assembly of the anthology I had created to my friend and long-time editor Bruno Tracq. I know Bruno as someone capable of both passionate enthusiasms and acerbic demolitions, and I was afraid that in its present unfinished and under-defined state this project would fail to impress him. But if anything, his reaction was even stronger than that of my previous viewers. After watching the hour or so of clips I had placed more or less end-to-end in the timeline, he told me that he thought this was the most important project he had ever had the opportunity to work on, and volunteered to help me try and complete it whether we could find a budget or not. He went on to say that he thought that together we could give it a more fluid, more cinematographic form, than it had presently, and which would enable it to reach a much larger audience than it would as an anthology. He made it clear that he felt we could achieve this without in any way detracting from or compromising the sort of "respect" with which I felt we ought to treat these images. He finished by adding that to transform it into a finished film should not even take so long: "We can be finished by Christmas", he concluded, confidently[1].

Bruno's offer of help was an enormous boost to me. I was reaching the point where I could hardly spend another day staring at the screen on my own, searching in vain for inspiration. I knew that there was a huge problem of conceptualisation that I was unable to get a handle on, and which needed to be resolved before the project could progress. I was confident that a second pair of eyes would enable me, or themselves be able, to pinpoint that issue and resolve it much more quickly than I could alone.

I was also attracted by the idea of moving from a pure anthology, where each clip was presented as it had been uploaded, separated by several seconds of black, and a title board including details of where and when it had been shot, to a compilation that was through-edited, and that could be presented and received as a single continuous cinematographic proposition. I could see that this shift of style might create as many problems as it solved, but I was also certain that it was necessary in order for these videos to reach the kind of broad audience that I felt they deserved. My project was *not*, and had never been, to make a "work of art" that would appeal to, and be accessible to, only a small coterie of artists and intellectuals. I wanted to make these videos *more* politically active, not less. And that meant finding a mode of presentation to which a broad audience could relate, now, today, and not in some utopian future when the writings of Guy Debord and Jean-Louis Comolli had been fully integrated into the primary school curriculum. To turn these *Fragments* into a feature-length "film" meant they would have a chance to be distributed through more mainstream circuits, and to be seen in larger theaters. If I was going to spend so much time getting them right, then I wanted them to be seen (potentially, at least) by an audience that would be the widest possible, both politically and cinematographically. I did not want to be simply "preaching to the choir".

So in early November operations moved from the attic of my house into Bruno's (temporary) studio - a large room looking out onto an overgrown garden in south-east Brussels, with no central heating, too much natural light, some very dusty bookshelves, and several large and extremely uncomfortable sofas. It was there that we worked through the winter, and there that we would regularly invite two or three of our friends to come over and shiver for several hours in front of an inadequate gas heater, while they watched the long chaotic assemblages of material that we dared to call "rough cuts".

Up to this point, I had hardly made any attempt to edit the material I had assembled. I had simply chosen clips, placed them in a certain order, and given them titles of my own choosing, as well as prefacing them with the place and date where I believed they had been shot. Within certain sequences, such as that in which I had assembled a series of clips showing the symbolic desecration of the dictators' portraits, I had begun to alter slightly the in- and out-points, partly so that I could execute audio overlaps and cross fades across the intervening titles, and in this way provide a minimal experiential sense of "continuity" between different events happening in different places. But

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1   He has since pointed out that he did not specify Christmas of which year...

I had never again, since the long dissolve between the two Syrian clips that had introduced the original programme in May, made any more elaborate attempt to construct connections between these different elements. Up to this point, what continuity there was, was an *intellectual* continuity, that existed only in the mind of the spectator.
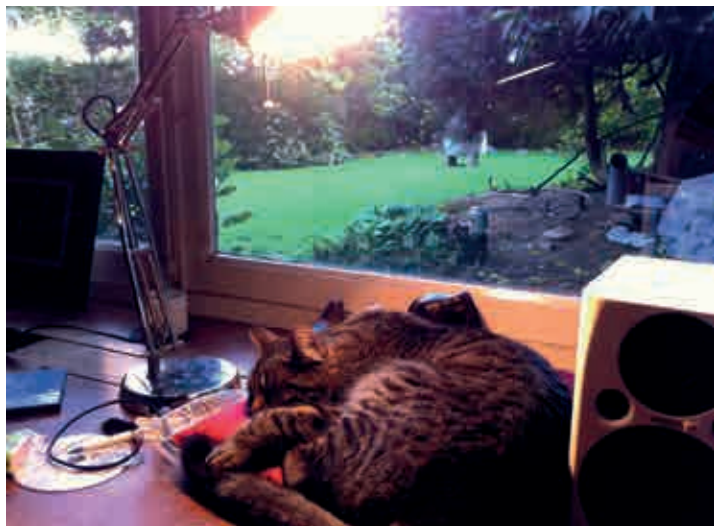
Editing station with editor's cat. Photo by Bruno Tracq

The last outline I wrote for the *Fragments* anthology before I began work with Bruno was divided into a series of sequences, which I described as follows:

1. Prologue: dress rehearsal (Scenes from 2008 strikes in Egypt and Tunisia: protestors fight with security forces, tear down portraits of Mubarak)

2. Taking one's courage in one's own hands (Sequences in which people 'speak out': overcoming one's fear, daring to go down into the street, to stand up and be counted)

3. Reclaim the streets (crowds of protesters marching, growing ever larger)

4. A short history of iconoclasm (Montage of scenes of people tearing down/burning/destroying portraits and statues of their leadership)

5. Fighting for it (Confrontations between protestors and security forces)

6. The price to be paid (Scenes which recognise the fact that many people have died. Showing actual deaths, or not?)

7. Victory (Moments of jubilation from Tunisia, Egypt and Libya)

8. No border (Moment when Palestinian refugees from Syria flooded into the Golan heights)

9. Pedagogy of the Revolution (clips in which people explain to other people how certain aspects of the Old Regime worked)

10. The people in the Tuileries (Scenes of people entering 'forbidden zones': presidential palaces, security archives, etc etc.)

11. Loneliness (Last broadcast of Mo Nabbous)

12. Restoring 'order' (Scenes in Tunisia and Egypt which bear witness to continuing oppression and attempts by army and 'deep state' to frustrate real change)

13. Permanent revolution (Final call to continue the stuggle (?), both in places where regime change still seems far away (Syria) and where it has happened without producing real freedom)

14. Epilogue. The revolution that would not go away (from a working document dated 29 October 2011)

Most of these sequences followed the same logic of accumulating evidence of how the same or similar things happened in different places, at different times. Where possible, this logic was translated into a path of increasing intensity. Thus my notes for the *Reclaim the streets* sequence read:

Montage: Egypt - excerpt from P Rizk[2]; Syria - medium procession; Yemen - big funeral; Tunisia (?); Bahrain; Algeria; Yemen (huge).

While this outline poses some important questions to which I will return, what is clear is that it suggests a form that possibly owes more to the musical oratorio, than to any known structure of revolutionary or political filmmaking. The sequences are defined by their pedagogical intention, which is apparent in their titles. And while there is an overall narrative arc, the way in which that is translated into formal structures privileges stasis over dynamism, duration over narration, and association over causality.

When I started working with Bruno, the first thing we did was to throw this fragmentation of the material into separate sequences based on repetition of the same or similar clips

2   The reference is to the video "Days of Anger" by Jasmina Metwaly and Philip Rizk: vimeo.com/19344953

out of the window. Our earliest assemblages were two-hour-plus *complilation-fleuves* in which we put all the videos we thought strong enough or interesting enough into the timeline, and sought some sort of associative ordering. We continued to respect the original video formats, and did very little internal editing, only shifting the in- and out-points of the clips in order to try and keep their lengths under control. These early assemblages did not do very much for our audiences, except perhaps stun them into a state of sensory and informational overload. Our process here, in so far as we had a process, was perhaps more about familiarising ourselves with the material, than about really editing it.

After a few highly chaotic cuts, we settled back into something close to the basic structure that I had already defined for my "anthology". Slowly, the shape of an ideal-typical revolution began to emerge from the mass of video I had already assembled. However we moved only very slowly towards a more interventionist editing style, hampered by our feeling that to "respect" the clips meant to leave them more or less in the form in which we had found them. We also remained largely blind to the major structural contradiction that would hold us back for many months to come.

Even as each half of the film became better integrated in itself, the two halves - before the fall of the tyrant, and after the fall - remained radically different in nature. The first half of the film was organised as if it was a series of "stations of the cross". Each sequence consisted of a number of variants of the same event taken from different countries, thus illustrating in the most literal way possible the thesis, "As in Tunis, so in Cairo... (etc)". After the fall of the tyrant, however, the fact that we had no material from Yemen, Bahrain or Syria to draw on played into the tendency to look for a more detailed and sequential narrative in the material we did have, and produced a form which was far more linear and dynamic.

In retrospect, this tension was obviously *the* Gordian knot that was crying out to be cut. We had to choose between these two options. Either we made a piece of vaguely polemical video art in which the fragments remained fragments, mirroring one another across time and space without ever coming together into a lived unity of energy and purpose; or we made a film which constructed the composite narrative of a possible pan-Arab revolution out of these fragments. In the former case, the "film" was merely there to serve as a frame for the fragments, and exhibit them. In the latter case, the fragments had to be made to serve the film, at whatever cost to their "integrity".

It is hard to say why it proved not only so difficult to take this decision, but even to see that it had to be taken. However, one hypothesis does suggest itself to me. Usually, when a filmmaker works with an editor, the two people's relationship to the material to be edited is very different. The filmmaker was present when the footage was shot, and the editor was not. As a result, the editor has none of the experiential and emotional investment in the *context* in which the footage was originally created, and which can easily blind the filmmaker to the actual *effect* of the shots as they exist on the screen.

In this case, however, neither of us was present when these videos were shot. We were *both* discovering them, not at the same time, but in the same way. Our investment in them - our tendency to identify with them, to recognise something of ourselves in them, or to project something of ourselves onto them - was thus of a similar kind, even if our specific reactions to each particular video might differ widely from one another (tho perhaps not as widely as it might have done, since we already had a working relationship that dated back over six years at the time, and our sensibilities had come to converge closely in a number of areas, while remaining equally distinct in others).

In addition, the material we were discovering did *not* bear the traces of some sort of real-world continuity which would have made it possible to tease out of it a structure by a process of induction. It was not the product of a single period of filming, in one or more coherently related locations. Not only was it not created with the aim of making a single film out of it, it was shot across six countries, in many different towns, by countless different filmers, each of whom had their own agendas, their own character, their own interests. When we discovered it, therefore, we discovered it as something much closer to the first half of the film of this period than to the second half. We saw the clips as what they were - isolated shots, which had most often been selected by me not for what they could contribute to a larger structure, but because they already had an internal structure which gave them a certain independent force.

The static, repetitive nature of the structure of the first part of the film at this stage was, then, less a "mistake", than a natural extension of how I had selected the material, how both Bruno and I had discovered it, and how it had been made. This form reflected our experience as *viewers*, rather than our intentions as *filmmakers*. We found ourselves in the same relationship of fascination to this material *as a series of fragments that were more or less unrelated to one another*, and which I had selected precisely because they produced that experience of fascination. This made it more difficult than it might otherwise have been for us

to help each other to see these videos differently - not as self-contained "films" in their own right, but as merely the building blocks of a story that had to be told.

As we worked through the winter, the film began to exist with this tension almost unnoticed at its heart. The title of the film quickly changed from *Fragments for a revolution* to *No Revolution Without a Revolution* - a phrase offered us by the film editor and educator Yvan Flasse (who was also the owner of the house in which our studio was temporarily lodged). Yvan had seen this phrase on a poster as he drove over to attend one of our work-in-progress screenings. I was never able to locate the poster, so I don't know if it really said that, or if it was the more common slogan, "No *evolution* without a revolution" which Yvan had, in his haste, misread. Either way, we liked this title because it chimed with one of the few certainties that we had about the structure of the film: that at the end, the viewer had to have the feeling that the *real* revolution - that which would make another Maspero impossible - was still to come. But in itself, it did not make that structure any clearer. The keys to unlock our problem were close at hand, and I was the one holding them: but for some reason, I could not see them.

This film went through many different versions. By the end of November we were already feeling sufficiently confident both to envisage seeking post-production funding from the Film Commission of the Communauté Française de Wallonie-Bruxelles, and to contact the British company Third Films to see if they would like to come in as co-producers with a view to approaching the BFI. (It was already clear that while we could reach fine cut without a budget, we would need a significant cash input to finish post-production, in particular to make the sound 'usable' in a theatrical context.)

Third were enthusiastic. "Imagine the effect it would have if we could screen this tonight on the side of St Paul's!" was one of their reactions during our first meeting in December (this was at the height of the Occupy movement in London). And while they were ultimately unable to raise any UK funding for the project, the detailed feedback on different cuts from Duane Hopkins, Samm Haillay, Dan Elliott, and Andrew McVicar, as well as from friends and colleagues of theirs with whom they shared our workprints, provided us with crucial encouragement and guidance at various points along the way.

Indeed, though we did not suspect it then, we would have to wait another 18 months for someone to offer us the financing we needed to be able to finish and distribute the film.

Despite all these warning signs, by Xmas 2011, we were beginning to feel confident that we had found the right form for the film, and we started sending rough cuts to certain Class A film festivals to see how they would respond. At the same time, we continued working into the new year to refine our execution. This version of the project, which is the first that actually bore the designation 'film' (as opposed to 'anthology', in the case of *Fragments*, or 'remix', as for the earliest versions on which I had worked with Bruno), reached its steady state with Edit 36 (that is, the 36th timeline created in Final Cut Pro since Bruno joined the project) dated 1 April 2012. It is instructive to compare this timeline with the outline of the anthology from the previous October cited in the previous section. What is most remarkable, with hindsight, is how many of the decisions made while assembling the anthology remained operative, for better or worse, in this first stable cut of the film.

Edit 36 follows the broad outline of the last version of *Fragments*. The film is now divided into six segments, four leading up to the fall of the tyrant, and two following the fall[3].

After a proleptic prolog, the film begins with a section that corresponds to sequences 2 and 3 of the anthology (speaking out, reclaiming the streets). There follows a section which combines sequences 4, 5 and 6 (destroying portraits, fighting for it, the price to be paid). The next section corresponds to sequence 7 (victory), but also includes a significant amount of brand new material, including humour in the face of repression, and a reprise of the battle with the forces of order.

The fourth section is entirely new, and focuses on the occupations of public spaces, and the way in which these precipitate the fall of the tyrant - material that was entirely lacking in the earlier conceptions of the anthology. The fifth section is a reprise of sequences 10 and 12 (the people in the Tuileries, counter-revolution), and the last, much shorter section, corresponds to sequence 13 (permanent revolution) and the Epilogue.

Sequences 8, 9 and 11 from the anthology had thus effectively been dropped.

The entire film now used a total of 51 video clips, some of which were trimmed to focus on the moment of essential

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3   For more detailed information on the clips included in Edit 36, and their relation to those composing the final cut, see Appendix 1.

action, or to permit more fluid cutting from one to the next, but internal editing remained rare. All original framing formats were respected, so the picture was constantly shifting between 16:9, 4:3 and the vertical 3:4 format invented by (certain) cameraphones. Sound work (courtesy of Olivier Touche) was restricted to trying to clean up the original YouTube stereo and render it slightly less aggressive over the long run. Each of the different segments of the film referred to above was separated from the next by several seconds of black and/or silence, in what was doubtless a hangover from the atomising presentation of the anthology format. The whole film ran one hour, sixteen minutes and 46 seconds.

We had thus taken a long detour through a range of far less explicitly structured edits, and had tried a number of very different ways of ending the film, in order to arrive back at something which was much closer to my original plan for the anthology, but which nevertheless diverged from it in several significant ways.

The major changes established during the winter of 2011-12 can be summarised as follows:

1. The use of video blogs to introduce the first four sections

Asmaa Mahfouz's first video blog (discussed in some detail in Chapter A7 above) had been part of the first version of the anthology shown in May 2011. At the time, I was impressed by the emotional impact which its direct address had on me as a spectator. When asking myself, how can we make these videos *speak* to the viewer, one obvious answer was: to make the people in them speak to the viewer quite literally. The idea was that, by placing video blogs in which people spoke directly to the camera at regular intervals throughout the film, this would repeatedly bring the address of the images as a whole back to the viewer in the theatre. I thus spent some time deliberately seeking out and having translated whatever video blogs I could find from different countries. These then formed the introductions to the first three sequences of Edit 36.

The ambivalence of this solution is evident in the fact that we did not extend it to the last three sequences (though Asmaa Mahfouz did return at the end of the film to address

So YOU are the ones who can overthrow them!

A young Syrian man in a Greek student hall of residence buttonholes his virtual audience.
Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=IausGqaun4A

the viewer in closing). If the device worked, why not make its use systematic? That we did not is not simply, I think, due to the fact that it was hard to find enough video blogs from these revolutions to use (cf. the discussion above in chapter A7 on the exceptional nature of such videos in the context of the Arab revolutions). I think it was also a sign that something was wrong with the conceit, and that once the film began to stand on its own two feet, it no longer needed these rhetorical crutches. But the problem ran deeper than that: while Asmaa Mahfouz's vlog was deeply affecting when seen in isolation, when viewed in the context of the emerging structure of the film it functioned more as a reassertion of the fourth wall, than a successful attempt to break it down. This is not something that is intrinsic to the clip itself: it is a function of how it worked in this new context we were creating. Rather than opening the film up to the viewer, and forcing them to reflect on their own situation, and their own reactions, as I had hoped, these vlogs functioned mainly to arrest the movement of the narrative that was emerging. They failed to open up an alternative space (Brechtian, Godardian, or otherwise). They were not a window, but a wall - not only visually, but verbally too.

Their failure forced us to reassess not only the way we were using this footage, but also the film's relationship to the viewer in general. And it was by finding a way of keeping these moments in the film, without allowing them to interrupt the flow of the narrative, that we would finally begin to resolve the real structural problems of which they were not the cause, but merely a symptom.

2. The decision that death must be shown, and not just suggested

One of the earliest rules I set for myself, was that I would not include in the anthology I was constructing any video which showed the "moment" of death itself. I did not have a specific reasoning for this: I simply felt that this was wrong, and that if the fact of death was to be present, it should be represented indirectly. For some reason, I carried with me the supposition that to suggest death, rather than to show it, was both more ethical, and more emotionally effective. By placing the viewer in a position where they imagine what happened, rather than seeing it, I could leave them the freedom to imagine only as much as they thought they could bear.

In the end, the decision to show death was taken gradually, piecemeal, and without systematic reflection. It was inspired by two main developments:

- On the one hand, the discovery of the video clip of Ali Talha's death, discussed at some length in chapter A5 above. While in this clip the actual moment of death takes place offscreen, the sudden appearance of Ali Talha's bloody corpse, and the extreme proximity of the filmer to it, opened a door which made it seem difficult to exclude other videos in which death was directly shown. Once the Ali Talha clip had become central to what I felt was valuable about this material, it began to seem necessary to show death in a far less squeamish way than I had originally planned.

- On another level, I began to feel that since the people who made these YouTube videos had wanted to show these scenes, it would be tantamount to censorship to exclude them from my film. What right did I have to take this decision? Since clips of martyrs and of the moment of their martyrdom were not only widely filmed, but widely watched as well, I felt I would be misrepresenting the source material to eliminate them from my film simply on the grounds of respecting my (Western) viewers' sensibilities.

Walking towards death. Alexandria, Egypt, 28 January 2011. Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=IausGqaun4A

In fact, Edit 36 was in some ways the most violent version of the film we ever made. By following Ali Talha with two further videos of deaths, including a long clip from Alexandria which had greatly shocked me when I first saw it, and in which the moment of death is clearly visible, we went further than I had ever envisaged I would go. At the time, I rationalised this by saying that each of these two subsequent clips include someone who acts as the representative of the viewer within the video. It was therefore, I argued, not the death itself to which we are reacting, and which takes place at some distance from the camera, but rather - as in the video of Abdennaceur Aouini

Pushing back the riot police. Qasr El-Nil bridge, Cairo, Egypt, 28 January 2011.
Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=OF5Z1K0bwQE

discussed in chapter A1 - the reactions of the viewer within the frame which trigger our own reactions[4].

Later edits replaced these two clips with material which, while equally or more violent, is also very different. In the clips used in the final version of the film, the moment of death itself (of the bullet's impact, if you will) is NOT shown clearly, but is the subject of a momentary ellipsis in the confusion of the situation. At the same time, the position of the camera is no longer a *safe* position as it was in the two clips used in Edit 36: it is always clear that the filmer himself has taken the same risk as the person who was killed, as it is in in the video of Ali Talha (Sobchack 1984). These two differences, I believe, make a large difference in the way in which these scenes of violence are received.

(The decision to show scenes of death and/or great violence in *The Uprising* is discussed in more detail in chapter B10 below.)

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4   The two videos in question are: Protester shot dead in Alexandria (youtube.com/watch?v=f1Z-elNpkrk), and a video from Aden since deleted from YouTube.

3. The inclusion of certain narrative elements in sections 3 and 4

The basic movement of Edit 36 centers on repetition-intensification, in a build-up/stop/start-again pattern. Each segment builds (as best it can) towards some sort of moment of maximum intensity, using a limited range of material, then stops and cuts to black. There then follows a video blog intro, after which a new cycle starts over again.

However, in addition to the more conventional narrative line of the fifth section, which was already present in the anthology, there are now elements in sections 3 and 4 which *undermine* this more pedagogical-episodic structure, and which in retrospect were clearly paving the way for the final structure still to come.

Thus, the decision in section 3 to restage the scenes of conflict between revolutionaries and security forces already (in a sense) seen in section 2, and to lead it towards a climax in which the revolutionaries are seen to win, that is, to push the security forces back, and thus pave the way for a more lasting occupation of public space, already contradicts the *isolated* nature of each section, and starts to build a larger structure *across* sequences in which we recognise both repetition and change in terms of what are clearly narrative criteria ("success" replacing "failure").

Similarly, in section 4 on the occupation of public spaces - which would survive into the final cut of *The Uprising* virtually unchanged - the sequence of clips is no longer just a matter of iterative intensification of a single figure, but also tells a story: the intensification leads up to the moment when *something happens*. The fact that the nature of this event may later in the film appear to have been in some sense inadequate, or even illusory, does not affect the fact that, at the moment it happens, it marks a decisive break in the sequence of events which have led up to it.

Taken together, all three of these changes pointed towards the need for a narrative structure which would embrace the whole film, and not just isolated moments within it. The formal structuring of the film needed "signposts" which would not interrupt continuity of action, but which would facilitate it. Elements of such a structure were already present in the last half of the film, but remained largely absent from the first half. And the decision to show death, and not just suggest it, in itself implied the need for a narrative that would be large enough to absorb the shock of these sequences, and lead them towards something like a meaning, rather than just leaving the viewer stranded in the visceral present of their horror.

All these elements were pointing in the same direction. It would take, however, a few more disappointments in order for us to make the commitment to conceiving the film as a single narrative arc from beginning to end.

B6. The victory of the people

Every revolution is a dice throw.
(Mallarmé/Straub-Huillet)

As the narrative structure of the film slowly emerged, one problem seemed to me to loom larger than any other. I felt that there should be, must be, a shot in which we would see the *victory of the people*. A shot in which we would see the people and the State in the same shot (Bazin 1976), and we would see the people win. How would that victory be represented? By the expulsion of the State from that shot - that is, from the space and time which they had shared with the people, against the people's will.

The problem was that there did not seem to be many such shots around, if any. In the street-level material I was looking at, it was extremely rare to find footage in which

the police ran away in a way that was *spatially coherent* and convincing. Perhaps because the cameraperson tended at that very moment to be running after the police, and in these moments, the de-framing of the scene did not serve my purpose, however expressive it might be otherwise. I needed to see the police run away, and I needed to *know* that they were gone, not just temporarily displaced from one side of the road to the other, and liable to counter-attack at any moment.

While top shots could more easily achieve this kind of demonstration of the space occupied by the revolution at the beginning of the shot (relatively little), versus that which they occupied at the end (all of it), in doing so they reduced the event to a diagrammatic demonstration. Even the celebrated shot of the battle of the Qasr El-Nil bridge in Cairo on 28 January 2011 taken from a room high up in the Semiramis Intercontinental Hotel, which I had seen more or less as it was posted online, did not provide what I needed. Not only did it take us away from our position as spectator as we were then constructing it - in the street, at eye-level with the people around us, and with the same privileges and obstacles to vision which that gave them

The battle of Qasr el-Nil bridge. Cairo, Egypt, 28 January 2011. Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=dBtYLBQPRGQ

The victory of the people. Cairo, Egypt, 28 January 2011.
Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=eh7DoZpHcpY

- to offer a bird's eye view of this crucial passage in the progress of the Egyptian revolution, but the more I looked at it, the more its dramaturgy seemed uncertain, more ambiguous than I had realised at first. Indeed, a large part of the victory effect of the clip comes from the reactions of the people who are in the room with the cameraperson, watching and commenting on the events as they unfold.

In the end, the shot which I settled on to fill this place came from a much less dramatic and much less strategically significant moment on the same afternoon. At Ramsis Square, outside Cairo's main railway station, a group of young men struggled, and finally succeeded, in seeing off an APC belonging to Central Security using just their determination and a handful of stones. Though not perfectly demonstrative, this shot provided a clear enough sense of a defined action with a clear goal, unfolding in an intelligible space over a limited period of time. Moreover, the final expulsion of the police vehicle from this space is represented not just by its leaving the shot, but also by the resounding cheer that is raised by the crowd, and which signs their victory. The camera then makes

a triumphant circular pan, taking in a riot shield that one of the revolutionaries has captured from the enemy, and which he holds aloft like a trophy in the afternoon sun. The circular camera movement is *in itself* a perfect metaphor for liberation, as it releases the eye from its focus on the target against which it is directed, and at the same time, from the hors champs as *fear* of the unseen (of a police unit arriving from an unexpected direction, and shifting the balance of forces against the protesters). This jubilation, in which the joy of the crowd is mirrored in the joy of the camera, is then rapidly channeled into a new action. The decision is made to march on Tahrir Square, and a group of those who have played a key role in this small, but apparently decisive victory, march off down the road chanting, "The people want to bring the regime down".

I say *apparently* decisive. While this shot solved my problem of what to place at this moment, in order to signify the victory of the people, it is not clear what sort of victory is actually represented here. Have the people actually gained the upper hand over the security forces?

Or have the security forces, unknown to us, just received instructions to make a tactical withdrawal from this particular position, in order to regroup elsewhere?

This question is not unlike that which Chris Marker asks himself towards the end of *A Grin Without a Cat* (*Le Fonds de l'air est rouge*, 1977), when he revisits a sequence from the 1968 march on the Pentagon which he had previously used in *The Sixth Side of the Pentagon* (1968). In the original montage, Marker had edited the footage in order to make it appear that it was the protesters who pushed back the army cordon. But in fact the soldiers had inexplicably but deliberately evacuated that position, allowing the protesters to storm forward until they were finally stopped by the last line of riot police at the top of the steps leading up to the building - a surge which nevertheless came to represent for them a sort of "symbolic victory".

Marker narrates the final confrontation with the police as they lash out violently at the protesters who are massed around them:

> *The police were clearly scared. I filmed it, and I showed it as a victory for the movement. But, when I look back at these scenes again, and I unite them with the stories the police told us about how it was they who lit the fires in the police stations in 1968, I ask myself: weren't some of our victories in the '60s made out of the same stuff?*[1]

The afternoon of 28 January 2011 ended with the reverse move to that which Marker had filmed at the Pentagon. In Egypt, it was the riot police that were withdrawn from the streets, not only around Tahrir Square, but across the whole country, and their place was then taken by the army, initially perceived as potentially the guardian of the people's interests, and a "fair broker" in their relationship to the regime. So this shot of the APC being "chased away" from Ramsis Square could function as a synecdoche for the victory of the people - or it could be taken as prefiguring a larger, stage-managed move in the army's playbook. And this second interpretation would be consonant with those more pessimistic accounts in which the entire popular "revolution" is seen as having essentially served to provide the army with the cover they needed to carry forward their own plan to eliminate the Mubarak clan, and reassert their control over the nation's affairs and economic resources (Salem 2013).

As Marker says elsewhere in the same film, "You never know what you are filming." And this same logic of suspicion could be extended to other videos from the vernacular anarchive. Thus Mohammed Abdelfattah's extraordinary footage of the invasion of Central Security headquarters in Medinet Nasr seems to show the revolutionaries taking control of one of the key institutional spaces of the regime, confiscating files and computer discs, as well as revelling in their transgressive discovery of this realm that had previously been entirely off-bounds to them, and lampooning its former occupants[2]. Nevertheless, this video is perhaps as significant for what it does not show, as for what it does show. In particular, the fact that on exiting the building, the army, which had observed the whole operation, interposed itself and obliged those leaving to hand over all the documents they had taken to them, in theory "for safekeeping", is not shown or mentioned in this video. As Abdelfattah told me in 2012 when I asked him about this video, "At the time I felt this was a great victory. But now, I feel that we were manipulated from beginning to end."

While we were editing the film, I was fully aware of these complexities, contradictions and ironies. I knew that some of the footage I showed suggested scenarios that were not borne out by the subsequent course of events, and that the people who had made these videos had since become aware of this. Should not this awareness have been a part of the discourse of the film that I was making?

I have two answers to this. The first is to say that since the film is creating an imaginary pan-Arab revolution, what matters is what we see in the video, and not what actually happened, as the footage is not meant to be read in that narrowly referential way. This may be true, but it is not very convincing, since after all, if the vast majority of the images of these revolutions turn out to be "illusions", then perhaps the imaginary revolution that is being proposed here has little or no basis in reality? Which is obviously *not* the claim that the film exists to make.

The second answer, then, is to say that the potentially illusory nature of such images is part of the film's own discourse. Indeed, at one point in *The Uprising*, the viewer is *specifically* cautioned that what we thought we saw the first time may not be what actually happened. This warning comes towards the opening of the sixth day, when a Tunisian activist uses images of protests continuing *after* the revolution not only to deconstruct the way the occupations of the Kasbah in 2011 were misrepresented by

1   This transcript is taken from the discussion at libcom.org/forums/history/grin-without-cat-le-fond-de-lair-est-rouge-04122013. I'm grateful to Paige Sarlin for prompting me to consider this scene.

2   youtube.com/watch?v=eh7D0ZpHcpY

Deconstructing the revolution. Tunis, Tunisia, 2 April 2011.
Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=0rNbkQB5qIA

the dominant media, but also to pose the crucial question, "What has changed?"[3]

The fact that we need to continue demonstrating, and that the images of these demonstrations are demonstrably the same as those that were seen before the fall of the tyrant, suggests not only that the revolution continues, but that there is no guarantee that it will produce a liberation that is any more meaningful or real than that produced by the earlier images. The persistance of these images creates a space in which it might seem that these images are all there is to the revolution, and is tantamount to a revisionist reading not only of these specific images - the images of the victory of the people - but of *all* the images in the film.

I don't think that *The Uprising* is a nihilistic or intrinsically pessimistic film. Far from it. But I think that the way in which this sequence functions not only as an ironic repetition of the earlier streetfighting sequences, but as *a mise-en-abyme of the film itself*, does open up a space in which what is most striking about these images is no longer the simple emotions they may carry - joy or despair - but their intrinsic *uncertainty*, their structural

undecidability[4]. And it is this undecidability which, I think, creates a space in which the spectator realises that her commitment to the revolution, if that is what she feels, is not necessarily doomed to failure, but is not grounded on any certainty of victory, either. In this revolution, there is no historical necessity working itself out. Confronted with these undecidable images, our decision to see them *as* revolutionary becomes itself a Pascalian wager - a performance as provisional and fragile as the people themselves[5].

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4   The undecidability of the image is further underlined by the fact that the video used to demonstrate the point that the police are attacking unarmed demonstrators without provocation does not, itself, prove that this is what is happening: the segment we see could easily have been edited to conceal previous violence from the crowd, and it is the commentator's words that determine our response to the images while we watch them, not the actions visible in those images themselves.

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3   On the Kasba sit-ins, see Coll 2011 and Chennaoui 2015.

5   On Pascal's wager, see Zizek 2014.

B7. The Alexandria moment

April 2012-June 2013

— 1 —

In April 2012, the issues and contradictions from which *No Revolution Without a Revolution* was suffering came to a head.

At the invitation of my friend Fatemah Farag, I travelled to Egypt to present the rough cut of the film to some of the journalists who work for the community news organisation she had founded after the revolution, Safaa Welad el-Balad[1]. I wanted to do this, partly because I had not been back to Egypt since the revolution, and partly because I wanted to see how people who had lived through those events, and who did not know me from Adam (and so might have less inclination to protect my feelings), would react to what we had done with these videos.

During the eight days I was in Egypt, I was able to organise three screenings of the film: two with Safaa Welad el-Balad at their offices in Alexandria and Mansoura, and one in Cairo with a small group of close friends. These three experiences were all radically different one from another, but the total impact of the screenings, and the conversations which they sparked, was unforgiving and, for me, definitive.

This may seem strange, when two of the screenings were, at least superficially, unqualified successes. In Mansoura, where we travelled first, the Safaa office was full to overflowing, and despite the lousy projection set-up and the constant coming and going, the screening

1   For more information about Welad el-Balad see Waldhorn 2015.

Introducing the screening in Mansoura, under the watchful eyes of Fatemah and Ernesto.

The audience looking unconvinced at Safaa Welad el-Balad,
Alexandria, April 2012. Photograph by Nabil Shawkat

The author being open to correction at Safaa Welad el-Balad, Alexandria.
April 2012. With Fatemah Farag. Photograph by Nabil Shawkat

was a highly emotional experience. At the end, instead of questions or criticisms, people basically delivered testimonials as to how moved they were. Some wept while they spoke. Others expressed their surprise, and delight, at having seen themselves, or heard their voices, on the screen. Afterwards, some thirty of us went out for dinner, and people continued to come up to me and thank me for the film, and express the hope that I would come back and show it in Mansoura when we had finished.

In Cairo, with my friends, the effect was in many ways similar, if more personal. As one of them said the moment the screening was over: "What the fuck did you do with YouTube?!" (She meant it as a compliment.) The screening functioned largely as I had hoped it would - as an occasion for remembering, for relating personal stories both to familiar images and to foreign ones that had not been seen before, and for communing in the ambivalent emotion necessarily evoked by events which seemed at once so vividly present, and so grotesquely distant from the current realities.

Gratifying and supportive as these experiences were, they paled in significance compared to the reaction of the audience in Alexandria. Safaa Alex shares an office with a number of other community organisations. By the time we had got there, and got set up, we were running very late. In fact, we were running so late, that the screening did not start until the time originally scheduled for the Cine Club that was due to follow it. In the meantime, all the Safaa journalists had jumped on the opportunity to talk to Fatemah, whom they saw only infrequently, about their own problems and issues. She retreated with them to another room, and I was left to show the film to an audience who had turned up expecting to see a completely different movie.

It turned out that this audience was mainly composed of members of the Nubian Women's Association of Alexandria, who were also experiencing scheduling problems and had come in to see my film while waiting for their own meeting to begin. And it turned out that the Nubian women of Alexandria did not think much of what I had done with YouTube. They had two main complaints: the first, was that they did not understand the lack of chronological order in the material shown, which simply left them bewildered and confused. The second, and from my point of view more serious complaint, was that the film completely misrepresented how the revolution had actually unfolded, because it made it look as though the protesters had just started throwing stones and burning things for no good reason. They were adamant that their protests had been peaceful, and that it was only the violent repression of these peaceful protests which had forced

them to themselves resort to physical force. They were not a bunch of willful rioters; they had simply been refusing to let the security forces push them back into submission. This point was made repeatedly, and forcibly, by a number of young women (and one even younger man) who had themselves been among the actors of these events in Alexandria, and it left a lasting mark on me. I felt that I had, in effect, done exactly what I did *not* want to do: by my thoughtlessness, and my own tendency to take the rightness of these actions as a given, I had betrayed these people's own sense of their dignity as it had played out on the ground.

This encounter left me with the sense that there were serious problems with the film. Since late December, we had been sending the rough cut to selected A-list festivals, and getting polite rejections. I was already beginning to conclude that the current edit might be undistributable. While I was in Egypt, another A-list festival turned us down, but only after reliable sources had leaked to us that we had made it to their final pre-selection short list. This was disheartening, of course. But it was nothing compared to the way in which I reacted to the screening in Alexandria, and the conversations which it sparked with Fatemah and our friend and former Ahram colleague Nabil Shawkat who had travelled there with us. I now felt that the film, in its current form, should not be distributed or shown at all. I was convinced that there was a serious problem with the first half of the film, and that this problem was partly to do with the distribution of violence, as the Nubian Women of Alexandria had made me understand, but also perhaps, more obscurely, to do with the anti-linear structuring of the material, in ways that they could not articulate for me, but which I would now have to work out for myself.

Previous feedback from friends and colleagues in Europe had centered around one point: that they felt it took them too long to "get into" the film. While different people pinpointed different moments where they finally felt caught up in what they were watching, ranging from 20 to 30 minutes from the beginning, for me, these various reactions had coalesced with my own subjective sense of the film, which was now repeated each time I watched the movie. It was clear to me that the first 16 minutes were somehow just marking time, however strong the individual clips might have been in another context, and that it was only when we came to the death of Ali Talha, that I myself felt that the film had finally begun.

Taken together, this information was all pointing in the same direction. The opening sections of the film, in the best case led people to expect a very different film from the one that the later sections delivered, and in the worst case, led to them losing all interest in the film whatever

happened subsequently. Even more importantly, in the case of some of those who had taken part in these events, they felt betrayed by the way it represented their actions. We needed to offer a much clearer exposition of the fact that these were peaceful demonstrations that had been violently repressed. And we needed to bring the rhetorical choices of the first sections into line with those of the later sections. At present, the film was suspended between the pedagogical-poetic exposition of the first half, and the more "conventional" narrative strategies of the second half. And everyone, including me, seemed to feel the same way about these strategies: it was the second one which worked.

After my return from Egypt, Bruno and I stopped working on the film for several months. Our first application for post-production funding from the Communauté Française had been turned down, and I was as yet unclear in myself about what lessons to draw from my experiences in Egypt, which had been extremely intense, but also very confusing. It was also at this point that I finally realised that either this film was my PhD project, or I was never going to get a PhD. I therefore found myself embracing this work as not just an activist sideline, but a full-blown piece of artistic research, just at the moment I was also accepting that I didn't know how I was going to finish it, or even if it was "finishable" in anything like the way I had so far imagined.

I don't know if it was a coincidence, but it was also at this point that I began to write the academic texts - initially conference papers, several of which later became journal articles - that would eventually provide the basis for the first part of this dissertation[2]. The precise funcion of this writing in the context of my *creative* work remains unclear to me. Was this focusing on individual videos, and discussing them as if my own film did not exist - as if I would never try to "edit" them - merely a convenient distraction that I needed to stay in touch with the project while I was suffering from director's block? Were these assertions of the integrity and self-sufficiency of certain videos a kind of psychic compensation, which helped me take the step towards a far more interventionist and "aggressive" treatment of this material within the film itself, by publically reaffirming the unity of what I was about to tear asunder? Or was there a deeper and more directly supportive connection here, in which working out verbally what I felt these videos were trying to say

would also help steer me over the next 12 months towards a cinematographic form that might have an equivalent clarity and force?

However that may be, by the time I met up again with Bruno in June, the options outlined above had become quite clear to me. We needed to take the entire film back to the drawing board, and restructure it as one continuous narrative sequence of events, even if those events were arranged in defiance of any "realistic" sense of where and when they had happened. We needed to take the more radical implications of our choices (which, in this case, happened to be those which took us *closer* to conventional forms of film narration, rather than further away) to their logical conclusions. Rather than waiting 20 minutes for the story to begin, it had to start immediately, and continue without interruptions. And in doing so, we would also be able to make it clear exactly where the responsibility lay for this eruption of violence. Greater clarity in general would also make possible greater clarity on this specific point.

These decisions had three main consequences for the period of work now opening:

1. We needed to get rid of the video blogs, which in their current form functioned as a wall, not a window, blocking the viewer out of the world of the film. But at the same time, we wanted to keep many of the ideas and sentiments which they articulated in a way that no other material we had did.

2. Rather than working inductively, making the film that was suggested to us by the material we had collected, we needed to decide first what film we wanted to make, then look for the material that would enable us to tell this story. This meant sitting down and writing out a scenario, which would then function both as an outline for the film to come, and as a series of instructions for continuing picture research.

3. We needed to provide the film with a 'frame' which would impose a simple contract on the viewer, namely, that they should either accept or reject en bloc the decision to recompose these fragments from a number of real revolutions into an imaginary pan-Arab revolution. The first few minutes of the film should effectively give us a licence to edit the following clips together without respect for real-world time or place, by making it clear to the viewer that it was not the aim of this film to reconstitute something that might pass for historical "reality".

2   After two more informal presentations in spring of that year, I sent out my first formal paper proposal on 2 June 2012. This paper - given at the ASN2.0 Conference in Loughborough in September 2012 - then became the first draft of Snowdon 2014c. For a full list of conference presentations given during and after the making of *The Uprising*, and the publications based on them, see Appendix 4 below.

As it turned out, these three decisions would define not only the problems facing us, but the solutions to those problems, too.

— 2 —

In order to address these issues, we then proceeded as follows.

First, I decided to remove the vlogs entirely from the body of the film, and instead to use *their soundtracks only* to compose a polyphonic prologue that would set the scene for the film to come, both in terms of subject matter, but also in terms of style. In this way, we could establish from the outset the *freedom* with which the documentary material would be treated. This would also make it possible to edit the vlogs so as to keep only the precise moments of speech which interested me (something that would have been very difficult to carry off if we had kept the image track). In doing so, of course, I was not only dramatically abandoning the attitude of reverence that had previously paralysed us before our material, I was also returning to precisely the way of editing and composing film that I had developed in my work on *Lost Persons Area* (briefly described in chapter B4 above), and which consisted of elaborating the polyphonic sound track *first*, and only then going on to make/find the images that would fit with it. From the moment I began to work in this way on the prologue, I felt that I was no longer editing other people's videos; I was making a film in a language that I immediately and instinctively recognised as *mine*.

This decision then raised the question of what images *should* go with these voices. I decided that the opening and closing images of the film should be *metaphorical*, not literal, and should serve as the ultimate frame within which the YouTube footage would be understood[3].

I have no memory or record of where the idea for the storm imagery we settled on came from, in terms of a logical thought process. In retrospect, however, the choice was clearly influenced by two films which Bruno and I had seen over the previous couple of years and which we had discussed at length, without immediately relating them to the project we had in hand: the Coen Brothers' *A Serious Man* (2009), and Jeff Nichols' *Take Shelter* (2011). This (initially unconscious) resonance makes sense, if one thinks that this transition in our thinking was above all about assuming the *fictional* dimension of the project. (For more detailed discussion of the storm imagery, see chapter B8 below.)

Bruno then proposed that if we wanted to give the film a single narrative progression from beginning to end, we should first write a detailed scenario, setting out exactly what we wanted each section, each sequence, each clip to say. Through a process of dialogue to which we both contributed equally, we established in the space of a single day (11 July 2012) this scenario, which then became our bible for *all* the work that followed. (It was at this point, also, that Bruno added the title of co-writer to those of editor and producer, in recognition of his indispensable creative contribution to the project)[4].

In the process of doing this, some further crucial decisions were taken. In particular, Bruno proposed that since one of the major problems we had was that people found themselves dropping in and out of the cinematic experience during the course of the film, not in response to any specific formal decisions we had made, but simply because the rhetoric of the film was not sufficiently unified, we should make it our aim to remove as far as possible all the shifts and discordances between the video clips that constantly reminded the viewer of the enormous range of sources we were drawing on. Even if we tried to produce the greatest possible continuity at every level, from micro to macro, he argued, the original material would still be so varied that the essential, irreducible differences between the different videos would continue to shine through.

This approach subsequently became something of an article of faith for us, partly because it made a great deal of sense to me in terms of how aesthetic form works in general. Up till now, we had been working *with* the grain of the material, trying to highlight and emphasise what

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3   This decision was also in part a response to the repeated critiques we had received - in particular, from prospective funders - that the film lacked an "authorial point of view", and was "just a list of You-Tube URLs." The idea of authorship, in particular as a marketing tool, is anathema to me. At the time, I remember thinking that if we put a big, obvious metaphor at the beginning and end of the film, that would be so in-your-face "authorly" (while, on another level, its precise meaning would remain so vague and difficult to pin down), it would "shut people up". It turned out I was right. After we introduced the prologue into the film, we never again received any observations about the absence of an "authorial vision"…

4   The actual scenarisation process was as follows: unsure how to begin, Bruno told me the storyline of Joss Whedon's *The Avengers* (2012) which he had just seen, and which, he said, had exactly the structure that we needed for *No Revolution/The Uprising*. I listened to this story, and then told him the story of our film as if it was *The Avengers*. He wrote my words down while I spoke, and this document became the basis for the next year of work. The whole process took around an hour. Much later, after the fine cut was finished, I rented *The Avengers* on DVD. I was completely unable to recognise in it the story which Bruno had told me, or, *a fortiori*, the plot structure of *The Uprising*… (I therefore put this down as a key moment of *creative misunderstanding*.)

were already its own intrinsic features. But now we began to work *against* that grain, trying to create a sense of continuity and unity out of clips hardly two of which had been shot on the same camera, in the same place, or by the same person[5]. However hard we tried, we were unlikely to eliminate the polyphonic, variegated character of the material, but in doing so, we could set up a much more obvious and explicit *tension* between that material's character and the formal structure of the work. It seemed to me that enhancing this tension was a recipe for greater aesthetic and emotional intensity, rather than less.

The first step we took down this road, also at Bruno's proposal, was to think carefully about the *diurnal sequencing* of the material. In all edits up to and including Edit 36, one clip followed another with no respect for what time of day or night the action took place. As a result, the viewer was constantly ricocheting back and forward from night to day and back to night again, without rhyme or reason. We made a major step towards establishing the terms of our "realistic anti-realism" by deciding that from now on, the film would be divided into a consistent sequence of alternating days and nights, each of which would last long enough for a genuine diurnal rhythm to be established. The basic structure of our written scenario, then, was that it was divided into days. To our surprise, when we had finished writing it out, we found that it took precisely seven days to tell the progress of our ideal-typical revolution as I had imagined it...

To underline this, we decided to flag up the structure by naming, or numbering, the days, thus - hopefully - further emphasising that they were in some sense "ideal" days, not to be identified with the actual days of any real historic sequence. In doing this, we were inspired by another recent film we had both seen and enjoyed, Rian Johnson's *Looper* (2012), which manages a very complex temporal structure by signposting the jumps back and forth in time with precise notations on screen, superimposed on the opening images of each scene in a very large font. Initially, we started out with days of the week (Monday, Tuesday...), but this became confusing when events that took place on one real-world revolution's "Friday of something" were allocated to our fictional "Tuesday". And numbering the days did not help, as in Arabic all the days (except for Friday) are named using numbers.... Finally, Bruno

suggested that, since we wanted the film to deliver the viewer into the present, the sequence should be a reverse countdown, finishing with "Today". This choice worked for us, and though it would prove highly contentious in test screenings, we decided to stick with it[6].

*Year Six: from **Looper**'s year-by-year montage (2012)*

Once this structure was in place, and we had a detailed scenario to work to, my task was simple, or at least, could be simply expressed: I needed to find the right clips to enable us to tell this story. This meant researching, locating and translating a lot of videos which I would previously have ignored, because they were not intrinsically exceptional. Their quality was not their uniqueness, but precisely their *lack* of individuality: the fact that they did *not* provide a sense of access to some extraordinary and unrepeatable event, but rather that they were sufficiently generic that they could be used not only to narrate a story of which they were not originally a part, but could also lend that story some sense of the unexceptional, and the everyday. I had moved on from seeing the revolution as an *event* in the strong sense of the word - something so unique, that everything that came after it was changed[7] - and was now instead interrogating it as a repository of the ordinary, the predictable, and the repeatable. It was out of that contrast between the extraordinary and the ordinary that the *rhythm* of our own film would be constructed.

I spent most of the summer of 2012 looking for such material - which I termed "process footage" - on YouTube. This was no easy task, as YouTube provides no rational way to search its database in terms of the audiovisual

5   The film uses material from two vlogs by Asmaa Mahfouz, one during the prologue, and another, also as sound only, in the closing sequence. It also contains two clips from the 18 days in Egypt by the same cameraman, FreedomRevolution25, which were shot several days apart, one of which is discussed at length in Chapter A6 above. The only other cases concern videos shot on the same phone in quick succession, and uploaded separately, which have been treated as a single source for editing purposes.

6   To be more precise, our experience in test screenings was that when we kept the countdown in, people objected that it was not necessary, but that when we removed it, confusions over temporal sequence, and the relation of the narrative to historical reality, would begin to reemerge. Having people feel that we were spelling out something that was already "obvious" to them seemed a small price to pay for ensuring that it *was* obvious...

7   On the concept of an event, see Zizek 2014.

content of its videos. The only searchable terms are the words which users have chosen to associate with their videos when they upload them, either as title, text or tags. As a result, one is entirely dependent on what people think is significant about their own video, and how they express it. This complication was further compounded by the need to search in at least three languages - Arabic, English and (for Tunisia) French - and in the latter two to predict what transliteration or spelling the non-native speakers who had filmed the clips might choose to adopt for certain key terms. Add to this that it is impossible to search the YouTube archive by date or place of upload (ie. there is no easy way to find out what Libyans were uploading in Tripoli on 17 February 2011), and the result is a process in which trial, error, frustration and occasional serendipity play an overwhelming part. With the help of friends across the region, I was able to make some headway, but it was still hard going. I was also helped by the fact that, as the first anniversary of certain key dates rolled by, many YouTube users seem to have searched through their own personal archives and uploaded previously undistributed footage from a year ago in order to mark the day. Some of the most impressive footage I have seen from the Egyptian revolution, for instance, only became available to a wider audience in this way some 12 months after the event[8].

The rushes we already had provided a good basis for the "new" scenario, but many more were needed as we were faced with dilemmas that we had not previously encountered. The first two sections in particular were completely reconceived to follow a narrative form, in which a first day of peaceful protest was followed by a day of violent repression, which in turn prepared us for the revolutionaries' forceful assertion of their physical and moral authority through their beating back of the security forces in order to occupy strategic public spaces.

Having removed the video blogs which were now condensed into the vocal score for the opening minutes of the film, I also set out to find wherever possible footage which could replace their discursive function. I looked in particular for clips in which individuals emerge from the crowd to address the camera spontaneously, voicing their grievances and their claims. At the same time, we very quickly eliminated almost all the footage which showed street activity from a high angle. As well as the flipping back and forward between day and night, the movement between street-level footage and videos shot from balconies and rooftops was also identified as a major source

of "disruption". While the viewpoint we were seeking to establish for the film was multiple, it also needed to have a certain minimum physical coherence. Thinking about it, it was obvious that the shots that seemed to establish the character of the film were almost all taken at street level, and in all of them the camera was either moving, or explicitly available for movement. The film seemed "alive" as long as we kept moving, and remained at eyelevel with the people round about us. Shots that did not correspond to those criteria were either removed, or used deliberately to punctuate that movement, to comment on it, or - at the very end of the film - to, in some sense, sum it up.

So the result was a film in which the point of view of all the different cameras was much more continuous as well. We are in the street, we are with the people, and we follow them as they advance or retreat, when we are not in fact leading the movement ourselves. This initial continuity of situation and angle thus laid the ground for us to embrace editing, rather than refusing it, and in particular, to embrace cutting for continuity (whether on action, or - more frequently - for some form of graphic/rhythmical match). Because of this basic spatial and stylistic coherence (hand-held mobile cameras, at street-level - that is, a camera which embodied the *essential characteristics of the revolutionaries themselves*, embracing their mobility and their humanity, and did not distance itself from them in these respects), we were then able not simply to juxtapose shots which were often of a very different nature, but to cut them together for continuity, so that *the imaginary continuity of the pan-Arab revolution the film was now constructing seemed to flow naturally out of the internal continuity of the videos themselves.*

This process took a long time to realise effectively, and while I sometimes had doubts along the way that we would find the material we needed, I never doubted that we had taken the right decision to suspend the distribution of the film and reinvent it entirely. We worked from July 2012 until June 2013, editing when Bruno was otherwise unoccupied, and when I had new material that I had found which I thought would fit well with such-and-such a sequence. Over that time we progressively refined, improved and finally determined the edit, until we were totally confident in each and every cut. In the process, a number of other shibboleths fell, of which the last was doubtless my refusal to reformat the material from its original aspect ratio, on which I finally gave in after Bruno had convinced me that this was the last barrier to achieving the audience's continuous engagement with the narrative that we sought. (All the 4:3 material was thus reformatted as 16:9. The 3:4 vertical cameraphone footage, of which only 2 or 3 shots survived, was left to stand as too unusual, and too distinctive, to need to be "normalised".)

8   For a good example of such a video that was uploaded one year to the day after it was filmed, see the video "Day One of Freedom Revolution" discussed in some detail in chapter A6 of this dissertation.

The most fundamental change which we made over that period of 12 months, tho, was to redefine our understanding of what it meant to "respect" the footage. At the outset, I had naively defined respect in my own mind as non-intervention. I could maybe play a little with the in- and out-points, but each clip had its own integrity in terms of space and time, which was not to be tampered with. Because I was originally working only with "exceptional" videos, which I experienced as almost short films in their own right, this taboo was further reinforced. However, as we began to construct the film as itself a larger narrative continuity, it gradually became clear that this taboo had to be transgressed. To simply string these videos together in a way that they had never been intended to be seen, one after the other, was not intrinsically any more "respectful" than editing them so that they worked well together, so that the internal rhythm of each one adapted so as to fit with the internal rhythm of its neighbours. After all, I had the example already there before me, not just in the in-camera cuts made in certain videos when the filmer had pressed on "pause", but also in the video montages that had been among my earliest and strongest experiences of revolutionary videos, such as Tamar Shaaban's video from Egypt, or the Syrian rap videos (referred to in chapter B3 above).

This was the most basic lesson of all editing: that you have to make the rushes serve the film, and not vice versa. But it was also an eminently *political* lesson. In my early work on the *Fragments* anthology, under the guise of respecting this material that came from the people, I was in fact treating it as a series of non-negotiable, non-revisable and non-revocable statements by atomised individuals. By learning to edit it, Bruno and I were also, paradoxically, learning the same lesson the revolutionaries themselves had had to learn, and that they continue to learn today: how to put the collective before the individual.

B8. The voices in the storm

The decision to use storm imagery to frame the film was taken in mid-2012. As noted above, it was, in part, a pragmatic decision. I had begun to imagine a prologue and epilogue to the film which would allow me to use the voice track from the video blogs we had collected without the images of the speaker staring at the camera. I wanted to be able to edit their words more freely, and I wanted the viewer to relate to their bodies as voices, not as images. I wanted to use them to invoke not just specific ideas and feelings, but the imaginative texture of the film as a whole. I also wanted to begin (and end) the narrative by suggesting that narrative itself is not all there is, but is rather the provisional linear condensation of certain potentialities which the rest of the time are held in reserve, and which always contain a myriad other possibilities which have not (so far, this time) been enacted. In this way, I felt I could defuse the desire to refer our narrative back to the real world, as if the real world was itself a single narrative sequence which could be used to verify or falsify the claims which we might make about it. However, I needed to find the imagery which would dispose the viewer to interpret the voices she was hearing in that way. In order to open up interpretations, rather than close them down, this imagery had to be *metaphorical*[1].

I do not recall any precise reason why I elected to use imagery of a storm to accompany these verbal montages. I can offer many explanations for this choice, but all of them are *post hoc* rationalisations, part of my attempt to understand what I had done, rather than statements of my actual, conscious reasons for doing it.

At an unconscious level, I was clearly influenced by the two films mentioned above that I had seen over the previous years and which had formed the subject of earlier, unrelated discussions with Bruno. The first was *A Serious Man* by the Coen Brothers, which closes with the imminent arrival of an apocalyptic storm[2]. The second

was Jeff Nichols' *Take Shelter*, which used storms to figure not only the protagonist's fears of apocalypse, but also the *undecidability* of those fears, whose status - are they paranoid delusions? or realistic and grounded, at least within the economy of the film? - cannot be determined simply by looking at the forms taking shape on the screen/ in the sky.

Consciously, once the decision to use storm imagery had been taken, I set off in search of both the *right* storm imagery, and a way of explaining its integration into the rest of the film.

It soon became apparent that the storms that worked for me, visually, where tornados (as being not only the most "archetypical", but also the most dynamic), and that the best tornado videos came from North America. While I found a lot of extreme weather imagery from North Africa and the Middle East, the most visually impressive events were from the "wrong" countries (for instance, the water spouts that are often seen off the coast of Lebanon, or the walls of sand that are to be found advancing over the deserts of the Gulf). At the same time, a quick search through classical Arabic texts (including but not limited to the Qur'an) revealed very few appropriate references to extreme weather as a metaphor. After a certain amount of agonizing, I decided to overcome this reticence, and embrace the fact that the storm imagery we used, and its justification, would take us *outside* the perimeter of the Arab world, and could thus potentially serve to open the film up to other times and other places.

Once this taboo was overcome, I quite quicky settled on both the images that worked best for me, and the text that would go with them. American storm chasers provided a number of tornados to choose from. And indeed, at one point, we thought of using these images not only at the beginning and end of the film, but also to punctuate it - an idea we soon abandoned, as just another way to break the narrative illusion we were trying to create.

The choice of the first clip, however, was motivated above all not by the storm itself, but by the intense, trance-like roaming handheld camera work, which set the exact tone of constant mobility I wanted for the videos that were to come.

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1   These considerations were identical with those that had governed my way of working in my short films *La forêt, une fois* (2010) and *Dieu est dans les racines* (2012), which relied on the relative autonomy of sound and image tracks in order to create loosely metaphorical relationships between what my interlocutors told me, and the image-associations their words suggested to me.

2   I mention these references here without any intention to indicate an allegiance, or suggest a limitation on the meaning that these

images may have in my own film. As one friend told me with great glee at the end of a screening of *The Uprising*: "The end of your film made me think of *A Serious Man*. I hated that film. But your film is completely different. In *A Serious Man*, the storm represents the end of everything. In your film, it's a *beginning*."

As for the clip which closed the film, it operated in almost the opposite way: filming from the window or terrace of a house, the camera person seemed effectively imprisoned and unable to escape, as the tornado bore down directly towards him and his neighbours. This sense of the inescapable gave precisely the feeling we wanted at the close of the film, as if what had preceded had not been the event, but a way of deferring the event, which - for that very reason - was now, finally, inevitable.

Sandstorm as almost motionless wall. Kuwait, 25 March 2011.
Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=tCFhs8mwiJQ

The sense that this US material might suggest to the viewer that the events that made up the body of the film were not confined to the region, but could potentially spill over into the rest of the world, as they indeed already had done, was underlined by the original audio of the last clip, in which the filmmaker or one of his companions says several times, as he stands stock still while the storm bears down upon him: "It"s coming over here! It's coming over here!" This audio did not survive into the final sound edit, but hearing it while we were working on the image cut perhaps had an additional reinforcing effect, not only on the perceived impact of this scene, but also on our understanding of the film as a whole.

Meanwhile, I had a memory of having read an analogy between storms and revolutions in Kropotkin's book on the French revolution. Research failed to locate such a quote in that text, but led me instead to one of Kropotkin's English-language articles for the newspaper *Freedom*, to which he contributed between 1886 and 1907. As soon as I read this text, I knew that this was the answer to my problem, tho I could not immediately say why:

> It is no use to sneer, and cry, 'Why these revolutions?' No use for the sailor to scorn the cyclone and cry, 'Why should it approach my ship?' The gale has originated in times

past, in remote regions. Cold mist and hot air have been struggling long before the great rupture of equilibrium – the gale – was born.

So it is with social gales also. Centuries of injustice, ages of oppression and misery, ages of disdain of the subject and poor, have prepared the storm. (Kropotkin 1998: 22)

It was only after having lived with the quotation for many weeks as we worked to finalise the edit, that I realised what it was about it that spoke to me so directly. From the beginning, I had been afraid that the storm metaphor would be read in too conventional a way, as *naturalising* the revolution, and thus in some way depriving people of their agency, by reducing their actions to a phenomenon that was viewed as mechanical, a predictable process of action and reaction. (This is not how I personally think of "nature", or of storms, but it occured to me that other people might well take it in that sense - in particular, those who were most likely to take exception to such an interpretation.)

In this passage, however, Kropotkin gives the idea of the storm a totally different sense. His conception of nature, that is, is not of a simple mechanical system in which there is no place for individual or collective agency. Rather, nature here is, above all, *history*. The terms that enable the analogy to be elaborated have nothing to do with agency per se, its presence or its lack: they are to do with the present crisis as being a sign not just of present conditions, but of a whole sequence of events which preceded it, and which stretch back into time immemorial.

This metaphor suggested, then, something that I felt was present in the film, but which could easily be missed: that when we watch these videos, we are not just seeing the present of their recording, nor the future emancipation which they anticipate. We are also seeing the history of these images - a history that has an almost geological depth and complexity of stratification. (That Kropotkin was not just a historian of revolutions, or a theorist of anarchism, but also an eminent physical geographer and geologist, whose discovery of glacial formations in Russia dating back to the Quarternary Period earned him an offer of a chair in geology at Cambridge - which he wisely declined - may not be irrelevant here (Johnson 2011).)

The storm, then, is not just an image of the present. It is an image of history, human history as a history of oppression and emancipation. The images of the revolution are historically complex images, too. And while these complexities are often only felt, not stated, they are sometimes made explicit too - as for instance in the

The closing scene of **A Serious Man***. (2009)*
One of the CGI storms which punctuate **Take Shelter** *(2011)*

*Tornados at the opening and close of **The Uprising**.*
Huntsville, Alabama, 21 January 2010. Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=kuxKlJDZDEg
Alabama, 27 April 2011. Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=Xyd_B2mEcFY

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footude from Shubra where the chants of 25 January 2011 self-consciously repeat those of 18-19 January 1977 (see the discussion in chapter A9.1).

The storm is an image of history, then. But history is the *form* its meaning takes - its temporal structure - rather than its *content*[3].

Rather than a surrendering of agency, then, I have come to see these images as symbolising that dimension of collective agency that is experienced as *impersonal* (Zabunyan 2012; cf Zabunyan 2011: 143-60). Elsewhere, I have theorised this in terms of the identification of the revolutionaries with the computer as the dominant figure of destiny in our time. Through the popular slogan *Game Over XXX*, where XXX was the name of the tyrant you had not chosen, the Arab revolutionaries chose to identify not with the player of some out-moded 1980s arcade video game, but rather, with the *machine*, "that incarnation of the fatality inherent in bureaucratic society". In doing so,

> the people invest themselves with the aura of an impersonal, suprahuman force. The individual who is carried by, and carries within herself, the masses, feels that force as something equivalent to justice, that is, as something sacred. She is the agent of destiny, and it is destiny which speaks through her. Game over, Mubarak. The force which had been crushing them for decades, centuries, was finally, briefly, diverted to crush, or at least to wash away, the tyrant in his turn. (Snowdon 2014b)

Even if we no longer hear God (or a god) speaking in the thunder, what we hear is very like a god.

But these shots of tornados taken in Alabama do not only include the tornado. They also include the person who is filming, and who is present throughout, as voices or footsteps on the soundtrack, and as the movement of the frame, whether or not they are running towards the storm, or simply standing and waiting for it to come to them.

If the tornado figures the collective in its impersonal aspect, then the movement of the camera, however slight or dramatic, figures the hesitations and the fascinations of the singular subject. Indeed, this same movement of running *towards* danger, rather than away from it, can be found in several other sequences of the film, and most notably in the sequence that leads up to the second martyr, who was killed during the attack on Change Square in Yemen on 18 March 2011.

Running towards the wall of smoke through which snipers are firing.
Sanaa, Yemen, 18 March 2011.
Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=TVSe_tBFYD8

These storm shots then are not *just* about that part of each of us which is impersonal, and which links us to the collective - what the Greek poet George Seferis called "the ceremonial depths of the collective self" (Seferis 1987: 158). They are also about the individual's relationship to the impersonal and the collective, and in particular, her choice to overcome her fear, and to confront this impersonal force, rather than turn away from it. If these storms *are* the revolution, then these shots are not simply the point of view of the spectator, the uncommitted bystander. They are rather the point of view of a person - *any* person - who chooses to stand her ground even when she finds herself in the eye of the revolution. That is, they are the proof that this impersonal force does not *abolish* the individual, but rather is made up of that individual's courage and steadfastness, together with the courage and steadfastness of countless other individuals who find themselves connected together by this *movement*.

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3   Compare the critique made by the Egyptian video collective Mosireen of the spectacular images of the revolution produced by the media that turned it into a pure present: "Images are a trap. A cerebral complicity between brain and frame causes an acceptance of a distorted fraction as a reality complete. / That time, the cameras were pointed at Tahrir Square, the police trucks, the flags and tanks and victory signs. / They were pointed at the present, erasing the past, disabling the future - nothing before was as relevant, and nothing to come." (Mosireen 2014: 49) Deleuze showed a similar hostility to the cinema's ability to reduce temporality to a single point: "it's only in bad films that the cinematographic image is in the present tense" (Deleuze 1985: 54; cf Zabunyan 2011: 117-18).

B9. Music as the future of the cinema

Cinema is the music of the future.
(Hans-Jürgen Syberberg)

Summer 2013-February 2014

— 1 —

In the spring of 2013, Bruno and I again submitted a funding dossier (our third) to the Commission du film expérimental of the Communauté française. After we had met with our *rapporteur*, Luc Plantier, something told me that this time might be different. Finally, we seemed to have a defender within the Commission who just *got* the film, without us having to explain or justify it to him. And that intuition was right: the decision came back positive. The Commission gave us the maximum amount which we had requested, EUR 20 000 - not quite, but almost enough for us to complete post-production on the film.

At the same time, the changes we were making to the film each time we met were getting smaller and more subtle. Though it was not quite finished, it began to seem very close to reaching the point at which it would need to be "abandoned". We had entered the phase of what Jacques Tati would have called "l'ébénisterie" (literally, "marquetry-work": see Paganini 2012, quoting Jean Rouch). Having received post-production funding from the Communauté française, we were also eligible for distribution support if the film should be selected for one of around twenty qualifying festivals. Since we had no other obvious way of funding distribution (making one or more DCPs, pressing screener DVDs, designing and printing a poster, doing mail outs, etc...), we felt it was important not to let the opportunity for another EUR 5000 pass us by. We therefore shifted our distribution strategy to target not just universally recognised A-list festivals, but any and all festivals that were on that list and so might give us access to additional funding. We began sending a new almost-

fine-cut out to the relevant selection committees across the world. Of course, once we had begun trying to distribute this cut, it seemed even harder to decide that the film *was* finished: why not just wait for someone external to the project to give us a signal by offering us a screening? And so we mulled, agonised, and, increasingly, *waited*.

Still, we could not wait forever. By the end of June, Bruno and I agreed we had reached fine cut, and we started discussing a strategy for the sound design with Olivier Touche in Paris. We decided that in addition to cleaning up the sound as he had for Edit 36, Olivier would try to "spatialise" it by creating the sound track in 5.1 surround. While all the channels would be generated out of the original thin stereo of the YouTube clips, we hoped that this might still produce a sound stage, however sketchy and lo-fi, that was more in keeping with the 16:9 format in which the film had finally found a home, and which might also be somewhat easier on the ear.

Indeed, the main problem facing us now - and it was a *major* problem - was that the YouTube sound was very difficult to listen to for sustained periods of time when projected at any volume in an auditorium. Where the images naturally assumed a painterly quality when transferred to the big screen, the sound track seemed in many ways irredeemable. Overcompressed, constantly "pumping" due to the automatic limiters, struggling to eke out some sense of stereophonic space from two cheap microphones that were placed only a few centimeters apart, it had almost no dynamic range, and most of the frequencies we are accustomed to hearing had been eliminated along the way. Though intellectually I knew that this was a major obstacle to the acceptance of the film, I had become so accustomed to the cameraphone/YouTube sound during the editing process, I had lost any real sense of how it was affecting my perception of the film - and thus, of how that perception might be transformed, if we could only find a way around this apparently insoluble problem.

We exported the audio to the appropriate formats and transferred it electronically from Brussels to Paris. Due to ongoing work on *The Owners of the Land* for which I had by then a definite exhibition date, I was not able to travel to Paris immediately to participate in the first stages of the sound edit. Resigned to the fact that a miracle was unlikely, and that we would just have to make the best of a bad job, I was in no particular hurry to immerse myself in what I imagined would be an important but largely frustrating stage of our work. In any case, I knew from experience that the first days of any sound edit are highly technical, and that the creative part - if there is one - comes later. So I was happy to agree on the broad lines of our approach with Olivier over Skype, and then join him a week later to hear

what he was up to, and see what we could do to try and prevent the anti-cinematic sound from undermining the cinematic experience Bruno and I had sought to create.

I arrived in Paris on 16 July, and went straight to Olivier's studio. ("Studio", as in "studio flat". This film was literally "home-made" in that, apart from a brief spell when Bruno was working out of a dedicated editing studio, it was created in the homes of myself and my collaborators. The image edit was finalised in my sitting room in Brussels, and I spent a large part of the sound edit perching on Olivier's fold-down bed, in an attempt to put some distance between myself and the loudspeakers.)

When I got there, he was looking rather sheepish. I thought he must have some bad news to tell me. "You know what we agreed to do?" he asked me, and I nodded, yes. "Well," he said, "I've kind of done the opposite..."
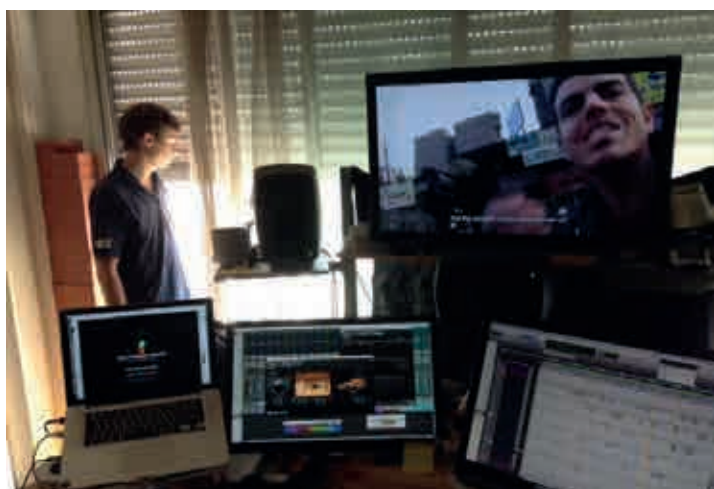
Sound edit, Paris, 16 July 2013. With Olivier Touche.

Rather than explain, he sat me down and played me the first quarter of an hour of the film. Instead of the nagging, tinny assault on my eardrums that I had grown used to, I found myself plunged into a rich, expansive and well-modulated soundscape. The image seemed to stretch out to touch the sides of the room, while each shot breathed with an inner rhythm I did not remember hearing before. Within minutes, I had stopped listening to the sound track, and was just *watching* the film again: watching it in a way that I had not watched it since before it was a film. The wall of noise that had previously stood between me and the images collapsed, and I found myself following the events that were unfolding onscreen with an attention and an emotion that I had not felt since I first came upon them on YouTube. It was like discovering them all over again for the first time.

When I had recovered from the shock, I asked Olivier what he had done. His confidence somewhat restored by my reaction, he explained. He had tried to spatialise the YouTube stereo, but it was so narrow that it sounded hardly any different in 5.1 than in its native format. So instead, he had taken a deep breath, put all the sync sound from the original videos in mono in the centre channel, and then recreated the other five channels *from scratch* using field recordings from his own sound bank. As a result, there was now not only a *real* sense of space that corresponded to the widescreen image on the screen, but there was also a much fuller range of frequencies and harmonics in play throughout. While the five surround channels only rarely dominated the sync sound, they served to open it out and let it breathe, and they offered us a material that was sufficiently rich and plastic that we could modulate it not only rhythmically but musically, in terms of density, texture, volume. As a result, the soundtrack became as, if not more malleable, than the image track. What only a year earlier we would have considered a heresy, now appeared as the only way we could break through the final barrier separating the film from its audience[1].

We worked on the sound design over the next ten days, and I encouraged Olivier to add even more layers of complexity as we proceeded. In addition, I felt that the prologue and epilogue, which I had already composed using a number of non-YouTube sounds to create the atmosphere of the storm that was about to break, were already verging on a form of musical composition. If the film was to be coherent, then that kind of musicality would have to recur at intervals throughout the film, and not just at the beginning and the end. Drawing on some experiments we had made together with granular synthesis back in 2009 while working on *La forêt, une fois*, and which in the end we had not used in that film, Olivier created a series of drone-like textures which could be used for a number of purposes. Beyond their inevitable emotional coloration, they seemed to me vital both to create continuity between sequences where otherwise the transition from one sound environment to another would have been too abrupt, and to further fill out the soundscape so that the spectator was not unnecessarily alienated from the images by the unnaturally reduced harmonic spectrum. They were especially useful in supplying the bass frequencies that were almost entirely absent from the original material.

These experiments culminated in a version of the sound design in which, as the violence of the people reached its culmination - in the shot of the Central Security APC

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1   At one point, we had even discussed with Bruno adding a line to the closing credits specifying that no sounds not originating in the original YouTube clips had been added to the film, to avoid any suspicion of having done deceptively what we were now about to do both systematically, and quite openly...

Sound mix at the Studio l'Equipe, Brussels,
with Olivier Touche and Phillipe Charbonnel. 17 October 2013.

being chased off Ramsis Square in Cairo discussed above in Chapter B6 - there was a period of about ten seconds during which we completely removed all the other sounds, whether sync or not, leaving only the music that Olivier had written (for by then, it was a form of music) to convey, as if by antiphrasis, some sense of this moment of "the victory of the people".

In the end, we did not keep this version. Indeed, one of the themes running through the subsequent sound mix was the need to tone down the musical elements so as to avoid effects that were (or might be perceived to be) overly "manipulative". Still, I regret that we do not have an alternative "composer's" cut of the film in which this moment, along with some others in which the music also played a more prominent role, could have survived.

At the time we created this passage, I was thinking very specifically of the moment in Ingmar Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* (1972) when Agnes briefly appears to return to life, and the communication between the three sisters that had previously been impossible happens, simply and

miraculously. Here, Bergman makes a similar gesture, eliminating all sounds (including the sisters' voices as they talk) and replacing them instead with an extract from Bach's Fifth Cello Suite. It was just this sense of a "possible impossibility" that I wanted to conjure for the "victory of the people". But I also recognised that to suspend "reality" so completely just at the moment when it finally seemed to be complying with the will of the revolutionaries would perhaps be asking too much of both the material, and the audience.

— 2—

We completed the sound edit in early August, and then suspended operations for the summer. Bruno and I both had other projects to work on, and as long as no premiere had been scheduled, there seemed to be no urgency to proceed with the sound mix and grading. Perhaps our experiences of 2012 left us sceptical too of how long it

might take to find a festival that would be prepared to take a chance on us. At the end of the month, I retreated to a small village in Crete to try and get some rest and remember what the sun looked like. And it was while I was there, that I received an email from the selection committee of the Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival in the Czech Republic inviting us to premiere *The Uprising* in their Opus Bonum competition.

I was overjoyed, and slightly alarmed. This meant we now had barely five weeks to complete the film and produce the screening copy. Before we could fully think through the implications, we wrote back to accept their invitation. A series of frantic phone calls ensued, trying to pin down dates and people, and transform vague expressions of interest into hard commitments without triggering massive price inflation in the process. While it was not easy, we managed to establish a schedule which would more or less work, even though it meant mixing the film the week before the premiere, and grading it with just days to go. There was no margin for error, though the fact that Jihlava agreed to screen the film from a BluRay disc, and did not insist on a DCP, meant that our timeline was possible, if not easy.

The sound mix was the most difficult element to schedule. Not only did we have to find dates that would work for four people - our mixer Philippe Charbonnel, Olivier, Bruno and myself - and when a studio would also be available at Studio l'Equipe in Brussels, but the scale of the task that faced us far outstripped what we had initially planned and budgeted for. We had allowed two days to mix the film, which was ambitious even supposing that the sound track consisted of only two tracks of sync sound plus at most four tracks of atmosphere and effects, as one might expect for a documentary. But in working with Olivier on the sound edit, we had ended up inventing a world whose complexity was equal to that of a fairly elaborate feature film. As a result, we arrived at L'Equipe not with six tracks, but *ninety-six* tracks that needed to be mixed.... (Ironically, in the end we were saved by a series of IT failures at the studio, which consistently reduced the number of hours we could work each day. To compensate us, we were repeatedly gifted additional studio time. In the end, we spent six days in studio 2: and it was not a second too much.)

The grading went much more quickly, partly because the visual material we were treating was simpler, partly because we chose a broad-brush approach, and partly because Olivier Ogneux who did the grading for us is a virtuoso. The approach was simple: to iron out the vast and still quite disturbing chromatic and textural diversity of the images, without obliterating it completely, in line

with our maxim that however much we tried to reduce the discordant multiplicity of the material, we could rely on it to still shine through. The grading was not a particularly pleasant process for me (unlike the sound mix, which really felt like the culmination of the whole artistic process, and was immensely pleasurable, if also completely exhausting). I found it very difficult to "accept" what was happening to the images; almost every change we made struck me as unnatural and bizarre. In the end, I decided that I was too much attached to the chromatic carnival I had been watching over and over for the previous two and a half years, and that I simply had to trust Bruno and Olivier's judgement, since they were in any case in complete agreement on every decision. It was only some time later - after around two or three public screenings - that I was able to see the film through their eyes, and to fully appreciate the choices they had made. Today, the film as it is graded seems to me *obviously* right. But at the time we were doing it, that was not how it felt at all.

Grading with Olivier Ogneux at CineLab Brussels. 18 October 2013

And so, thanks to a great deal of good will, and a certain amount of luck, we were able to produce the first BluRay projection copy and send it by FedEx to Jihlava the week before the festival opened.

—3—

I was so delighted that Jihlava wanted to show the film, that I arranged to attend the entire festival along with my partner Karolina.

The Opus Bonum award is a unique event in world cinema, as it is awarded by a jury of one person - usually, a celebrated but idiosyncratic filmmaker - who is invited to choose not the best film, but the one she personally likes

the most. Past jurors in a list whose only flaw, perhaps, is its overwhelming masculinity, had included Khavn De La Cruz, Woody Vasulka, Jørgen Leth, Mike Holboom, and the Belgian filmmaker Xavier Christiaens. In 2013, we had drawn Craig Baldwin, possibly the most celebrated - and certainly the most political - living found-footage filmmaker. While this might superficially have seemed like a good sign, I was completely unsure how he would view my work. I was concerned that his post-Situationist politics of subversion of the mass media spectacle might not be compatible with my celebration of grassroots creativity, and that the immersive experience Bruno and I had created might appear to him as little more than "riot porn".

We spent a somewhat unreal week drinking coffee on terraces wrapped in overcoats in the unusually sunny late October weather, eating sausages from small cardboard trays while waiting for the theatres to open, and watching not only the other films in the Opus Bonum competition, but as much as we could manage of the wider programme too. My personal high point was not a film, but attending a stirring lecture by the British activist and former Guantanamo prisoner Moazzem Begg, and later getting to shake his hand and exchange a few words when I ran into him in the lobby of our hotel.

The Uprising was scheduled to screen on the penultimate evening of the festival. The theatre was only about a third full - far less than for the other programmes we had seen in the same space - and as the film proceeded, I felt a sinking sense that it was not connecting with the audience at all. The bad suddenly plunged into the unthinkable when about half way through the BluRay disk started to jam. At first an irritating blip, these incidents grew progressively worse, until just before the end the disk seized up altogether, and refused to play the last minute of the film at all. By this time I was in the projection booth, in a state of high anxiety. I had calmed down a bit by the time I was called down for the question and answer session, which passed off reasonably well, though after the disaster of the projection itself, even being pilloried in a stockade would have seemed a welcome relief. The only consolation was that I knew that Craig Baldwin was not at the screening: he must have seen the film in advance, in the comfort of his own hotel room. Hopefully, whatever disk he had used had been somewhat better behaved.

I spent the next 24 hours walking around Jihlava with Karolina discussing what my next career move might be, now that any hope of my ever making another film with other people's money had been so dramatically and definitively destroyed. I felt an acute embrassment even to be seen in the streets of the town, and would have prefered

to have snuck away quietly on the next coach, without having to say good bye to any of the festival-goers I had got to know. Not only had I contrived to humiliate myself, but even more importantly, I felt I had let down all the people whose videos we had used, too[2].

In my heart, I had long hesitated between insisting on a rigorously "no budget" approach, and the strategy we had adopted - of courting funding agencies and institutional support, and implementing higher production values. As I said above (in chapter B1), one of the forms of connection that I had immediately felt with the people who had made these videos was the fact that they were operating outside any known professional, institutional or commercial economy. Their work was truly vernacular, and as such it converged with my own conviction that the real politics of filmmaking lay in the choices one made about production and distribution, as much as in the form or the content. At the same time, I was fascinated by the potential for projecting these videos on the big screen - not only for their plastic qualities, but also for the *political* experiment of watching them as a *collective* experience. And it was obvious early on that, even if the images might look good without any further treatment, it would be immensely difficult for any moderately sensitive audience to sit through an hour and a half of YouTube material with the sound track in its "raw" state.

Once I had decided that the film needed to be post-produced in order not only to be acceptable to more mainstream distribution channels, but simply in order to be *watchable* at all, then all the other choices we had made followed on logically. Some of these choices were, perhaps, compromises. But even the compromises made sense, given that the basic political proposition was to put these videos in cinemas, so that people who did not already know each other, and who might never have chosen to watch them if they had been left online, might sit down and watch them together, and then talk about them with each other afterwards.

2   I had adopted the position that, while the videos that made it into the final cut might have been uploaded as "common property" (in Rabih Mroué's phrase - see the introduction to part A above), I would nevertheless try and contact the people who had uploaded them, explain the project to them, and request their permission to include their footage in my film. The exceptions to this rule were in cases where I felt that to do so might endanger the security of the person concerned, and in those where I felt that the person who had uploaded the video was almost certainly not the maker of that video, but an amateur anthologist like myself, or a "front" intended to protect and conceal the videomaker's identity. As a result, out of the 100 clips that make up the final edit of *The Uprising*, I felt that I was confident that 39 of them had been made by the person who uploaded them, and that they would not be put at risk if I wrote to them. Of those 39 that I tried to contact (mainly via their YouTube accounts), only 10 responded. All the replies I received could be briefly paraphrased as follows: "Of course you can use the video. Why are you even asking?"

The point of showing the film in a festival, then, for me, was not simply to reach that particular festival's audience, or even to be noticed by the industry representatives - distributors, buyers, TV channels - who might be expected to show up there. The point was to raise the cumulative *visibility* of the film so that when we subsequently released it for more general circulation, including via the Internet, it would not sink without trace, but might be broadly reappropriated as "common property". This wish applied both to the film itself, and to the aethetic and narrative methods it developed and exemplified. Just as I had always wanted people to see my films and think, "I can do that, too", so I wanted *this* film to show people, whether within or beyond the Arab world, that it *was* possible to use these videos to tell a story that could be as compelling as any big-budget feature film. And not just *this* story that we had found in them, but a thousand other stories, too.

So far, however, it seemed as if this approach was going to bury the film even more deeply and securely than if I had locked it away in my cellar and never shown it to anyone. I was so mortified, that on the final day of the festival, Karolina and I even debated whether we shouldn't go to some other screening, or perhaps out to dinner, rather than attending the awards ceremony. But when the time came, the memory of the opening night extravaganza, with its mock harvest festival ambience and unintelligible but hilariously surreal Czech sense of humour won out, and we duly slipped into our reserved seats in the DKO theatre a few minutes before the lights went down and the curtain went up.

A little later that night, before the cameras of Czech public television, Craig Baldwin awarded the 2013 Opus Bonum prize for best world documentary to *The Uprising*. Announcing his decision, he said:

> It is a happy development indeed when we see the revolution in the technical possibilities of documentary production – information gathering, witnessing and reportage – so bound up with the concurrent manifestation of political liberation, when populations have not only come to a sharpened awareness of their oppression, but also at the same time, the means by which they can record it, communicate it, and propose to change it. This year's winner is a film which in turn saddened me, frightened me, outraged me, inspired me, and ultimately made me truly proud to be a part of the democratic project and the struggle for human dignity. The Opus Bonum Award goes to Peter Snowdon's profoundly compelling compilation of amateur footage from the Arab spring **The Uprising**.

In the chaos that live television so often brings, Craig was unable to complete the statement he had prepared. Meanwhile, I myself was so astonished, I made a completely impromptu acceptance speech in which I managed to thank most of the population of the Arab world (past and present dictators excluded), while forgetting to mention my collaborators and producers. (I *think* they have forgiven me.) In the confusion as we left the stage, I lost touch with a bottle of sloe gin which was part of the prize, and which ended up going home with the jury instead. But I was so happy, I wouldn't have minded if he had kept the trophy too. (There was no cash prize: just glory, and a one-metre-high brass statuette that looks as though it might come in useful for deterring burglars. I had to splash out on an extra suitcase in order to get it home.)

The next morning, waiting for our ride to Leipzig in the hotel lobby, three Czech businessmen interrupted their meeting to come over and shake my hand. They weren't quite sure what I had done, but they recognised me from having seen me on prime time television the night before. It seemed this was enough to make *them* very happy, too.

— 4—

This is not the place to recount in any detail the history of the distribution of *The Uprising*, its highs and lows. The film went on to screen at more than 20 international festivals, winning three further prizes, and was sold to VOD in nine territories. No television channel expressed any interest in screening it. No distributor approached us about marketing a DVD. However, it did begin a number of parallel lives - circulating in academic circuits on the one hand, especially in the US and France, and in more political-activist milieux on the other hand - which continue to the present day. I tried to keep track of these screenings for a while, but eventually gave up. My desire to get the film noticed seemed to have worked - and inevitably, the results were impossible to control, and difficult to monitor. By spring of 2014, friends were reporting having met people who had seen *The Uprising* at an anarchist festival in northern Holland, or at an activist meeting in Canada, in every case without my knowledge (though not without my blessing). I was glad to see the film developing its own "natural life", the images in it returning to something like the "common property" in which they had originated.

In February 2014, we organised twin Belgian premieres: first at Bozar, as part of the Séminaire de l'ERG (the Ecole de Recherche Graphique where Bruno was teaching at the time), and a week later, at the Cinéma Nova. The Bozar

event was a fiasco, culminating in the most embarassing question and answer session (or rather, no-question, no-answer session) I have ever participated in, before an audience that contained a certain number of Arab-European cultural luminaries. The experience was only saved by the Lebanese artist Paola Yacoub, who having shared the pain of the platform with me, sidled up to me afterwards grinning, and said: "You have made a *militant* film! That's why *these* Arabs will not like it!"

The screening at the Nova, on the other hand, could not have been more different. The film played to a full house, and as soon as the lights went up, it was as if the cinema had been turned into a boxing ring. The film seemed to have divided the audience into two equal halves: one that hated the film, and the other that loved it. Someone would say something nice about the film, and half the audience would applaud. Then someone would say something damning about the film, and the other half would applaud. The two halves of the audience continued trading blows back and forward like this for quite some time, becoming more and more outspoken as time went on. Having become highly emotional in defence of the film after a young woman in the balcony accused it of being "counter-revolutionary", by the end I decided just to sit back and let the two camps fight it out among themselves. Eventually the organisers called 'time', and we all went down to the bar to drink beer and replay the debate in our various affinity groups.

These two screenings back to back were a gruelling experience. But together they added up to a strange, but curiously effective initiation rite. After having been dragged over two very different kinds of coals in this way - one lit by a transnational cultural elite, the other by the neo-Trotskyite left - I felt that I was now impervious to criticism. Henceforth, anyone could say anything they liked about the film, and it would have no effect on me. And so far, that has been true. (The fact that along the way, I have met a lot of spectators, including many from across the Arab region who had lived through these events, who have gone out of their way to tell me not only how much they liked the film, but even how "true" it was to their own experiences, has also helped confirm me in my belief that if I may have done some things wrong, I must also have done at least one fairly big thing right.)

However, among all the debates and discussions, there was one reaction that stood out because it made me radically rethink what it was I had been trying to do in making *The Uprising*, and what I had actually done. This was a conversation I had with Jon Jost after the film's second screening in New York in late February 2014, where it had its US premiere as part of the Museum of Modern Art's Documentary Fortnight. By serendipity, Jon was in town.

After the show, which had finished with a long Q and A, he came up to me and said, "You talk about narrative a lot, but for me the film isn't a narrative film at all. The construction is essentially musical."

This comment hit me between the eyes, because it said something that seemed at once blindingly obvious - especially in terms of the way I had approached various aspects of the work such as the composition of the prologue, or the sound design with Olivier - and which at the same time contradicted the way in which I had been explicitly conceiving the main thrust of the project over the previous year and a half (as reflected in the second part of this dissertation).

The next day, Jon expanded on his insight in a post on his *Cinema Electronica* website:

> Eschewing voice-over and explicatory materials, the film dives directly into the visceral reality which shifted from Tunisia, to Egypt, to Yemen and Syria, as the populist demand for change, for an end to corruption and dictatorships, spread like wild-fire across the middle-east. Seizing on this emotional roller-coaster, riding from the delirium of massive crowds to the grim deaths of unarmed civilians in the face of military power, **The Uprising** seems to me orchestrated as a symphony, using the shifting tonalities and qualities of the various images used – blurred, jagged shifts of light, sometimes shifting into solarized simplicity – and cuts them with an internal aesthetic which verges often towards abstraction, but without ever lapsing and losing the emotional intensity of the situation. Indeed, I think it is just this abstract infrastructure which makes the film work so powerfully. Equally, the sound is used in this abstract sense, building into musical crescendos, and then going silent, shifting in concert with the images to orchestrate exactly as do the abstract sounds of a symphony, coaxing, enticing, shifting one's inner world through pure aesthetics, yet ones which touch deeply inside us. (Jost 2014)

This description answers very precisely to the way in which I had always thought about my films *before* I made *The Uprising*. And it answers as well, I think, to the film that *The Uprising* is. Throughout the editing, I was obsessed with the need to give the material a narrative form, yet in doing so, I was actually shaping it in a distinct (if not entirely contradictory) way. If *The Uprising* functions, it is not because it endows its material with some kind of narrative or meta-narrative plausibility, tho it does hang its structure on a kind of loosely sequential frame. It works

Work! Freedom! National dignity!

Mohamed Ali Square, Tunis, Tunisia, 8 January 2011. Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=Cq3Tvj0J1XQ
Near Safriya Palace, Bahrain, 12 March 2011. Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=GaTF9ZefMKE

because it is attentive to the way these videos function as a kind of music in themselves - a structure of call-and-response that knits them together despite the very different spaces and times in which they originate[3]. These videos as they circulated on YouTube already seemed to me to compose a kind of *critical utopia* (Weinrobe and Inayatullah 2005), one which sought to define a future that would function according to different rules from the present, while drawing creatively and critically upon the past. In *The Uprising*, I tried to make the rhythms that lie at the heart of this structure both audible and visible. The search for a narrative was a part of that struggle; but it was also, to some extent, a stalking horse, a mask, a form of camouflage, which gave a certain kind of coherence and "seriousness" to my project (including in my own eyes), while allowing me to pursue a kind of form which might have been rejected by both myself, and my eventual audience, if it had been made more obvious. (See chapter A9 above for a fuller account of how I believe this musical structure works *outside* the film, on YouTube itself.)

The same can be said, I believe, of the editing style. While I often spoke with Bruno about our decision not only to embrace editing, but also to pursue cutting on action, Jon's remarks made me reconsider some of the most important cuts that we had made. And I realised that the cuts which, for me, define the film, its language, its style, are not about cutting on action, but about cutting on *rhythm*: about matching patterns and shapes which function rhythmically to connect two shots, whether they are visual patterns or aural patterns.

This explains why for me the most important cut in the film - the one which, every time I see it, provokes in me a kind of inner exultation, which is partly a joy in what is depicted, but also a species of delight at seeing the film finally and definitively "hit its stride" - is that which occurs at 7:55. Here, following a long impassioned speech by a woman standing on a window ledge outside a trade union headquarters in Tunis, the film cuts from the Tunisian crowd chanting "Work! Freedom! National Dignity!" to a

Bahraini marching band - cymbals, bass drum - marking the rhythm as they prepare to lead the crowd around them in the emblematic chant of these revolutions: "The people want the fall of the regime!"

The rhythms of the chanting in these two clips *almost* match. The Bahraini band as they strike up their beat *almost* pick up the rhythm and tempo and emphasis of the crowd in Tunisia. The two groups are separated by almost a month, and by over 5000km. They are also separated by two very different, but not completely unrelated, political histories. Watching one clip follow the other, one has the sense, not of a single rhythm being propagated mechanically, but of that kind of creative responsiveness one feels when one musician *listens* to what another musician has just done, and then consciously and deliberately repeats it while *changing* it, both in order to adapt it to her own feeling, and for the sheer pleasure of that *transformation*[4].

This *"almost"* is the space that separates thoughtful responsiveness from blind replication. And it is in the rhythm of this *"almost"* that we can register, both the proximity of those ties that bind these two moments together, and the *differences* that persists within and through them, and that mark each one, in and for itself, as irremediably, irreplaceably *singular*.

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3   On the origins in early Soviet cinema of this understanding of montage as the circulation of movement between shots over and against the distance that separates their pro-filmic occasions in both time and space, and its relationship to the Foucauldian conception of history not as an object of study, but as a force that is able to question and disrupt our present, see Maniglier and Zabunyan 2011: 84-88. While I cannot say I count Vertov as a significant conscious influence on my own work, Malcolm Le Grice's relation of his disruption of chronology through cutting to his definition of the camera as a **participant** in what it sees, and his refusal of a passive role for the spectator, suggest how such an approach to montage may be particularly appropriate to material born not only out of revolutionary times, but also out of an intuitive sense of filming not as representation, but as **action** in and on the world, requiring an equal and equivalent action from the viewer in response (Le Grice 2001: 44-50; cf the discussion of filming as participation in chapter A3 above).

4   On "spontaneous and uncontrolled transformation" as the **opposite** of power, see Canetti 1973: 387ff., and especially 438.

B10. "I know he is my brother"

*...wealth is accumulated in foreign cities off the
back of Arab sweat. The sweat, though, is filtered.
A crying woman will always find a magazine to be
printed in. But the shattered, skull-flecked brains of
a martyr of Maspero?*
(Mosireen 2014: 50)

—1—

I began work on *The Uprising* with the belief that we
could not, and should not, show clips in which people die
on camera. As I described above in chapter B5, I had not
reasoned this out: it just seemed to me an obvious ethical
taboo. I could not imagine myself filming someone who
was dying, so why should I use such films when they were
made by others? Over time, however, my position on
this issue changed radically. This was partly to do with a
conscious shift in my understanding of these images in
terms of martyrdom as an *active*, not a passive state - "a
corporal act of witnessing" (Mottahedeh 2015: 8). However,
it was also the consequence of more intuitive, and less
conscious processes, which involved gauging both my
own reactions to different cuts of the film, and trying to
understand those of the people we showed them to.

The process of screening work-in-progress versions of the
film in different places to different audiences brought the
"cultural" dimension of their different reactions home. In
Egypt, I was never criticised for having shown too much
violence, or for having made death too clearly "visible". Tho
one Egyptian friend did repeatedly leave the room during
the screening due to the excessive emotions certain shots
evoked for her, she made it clear afterwards that this was
her way of handling these images: there was no critique
intended of my decision to include them in the film, on the
contrary.

In Europe, however, not only did many (though not all)
people find it difficult to handle the emotions that this
footage made them feel, but they found it difficult to accept
that they had been "made" to have these feelings. Their
response was not how terrible it was that these people had
had to give their lives for this cause, but how terrible it
was that I had chosen to expose them to this fact when

I could have spared their feelings. I felt that I had made
them know that these people had died in a way that they
did not want to know it[1].

This was, of course, the kind of criticism that I had feared.
And since I wished to make a film that could reach a
broad Euro-American audience, I did not wish to go *too
far* in this direction. Still, as time went by, and I saw more
and more of this footage, and observed or participated
in online discussions about it, I felt increasingly that to
exclude death from my film would be tantamount to
censorship. These people had chosen to film and to publish
these videos. These clips are not unusual or isolated, but
together make up one of the most prominent genres of
revolutionary video (and yet, they still fell far short of
giving a true sense of just how many people have died, or
been grievously injured, during these revolutions). Who
was I to produce a "sanitised" vision of these revolutions,
or to conceal the cost that had been, and that continued
to be paid? Revolutions *are* intrinsically violent events, in
which people on both sides die. To pretend otherwise is not
just to mislead people about the potential consequences of
their actions; it is also to subscribe to a certain ideology
of *non-violence* (as opposed to a *practice* of non-violence)
which is, in part at least, intended to prevent and foreclose
any serious attempt at radical political change (Churchill
1998)[2].

If people chose to come and see a film about a revolution,
I therefore reasoned, they should know what to expect. If
not, then they should ask themselves how their concept of
"revolution" had been so deformed as to make them forget
the violence that such events involve, however hard people

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1   Vernacular martyrdom, as opposed to that commanded
and controlled by the State or proto-State organizations (nationalist
movements, political parties, terrorist groups,...), is a source of enormous
cognitive dissonance for any liberal politics. For a discussion from a
different cultural context of choosing to die as the performative shaping
of a message of which one's body is the media, see Makley 2015, and in
particular her comment that "forms of self-immolation protest, as efforts
to amplify messages in and through dying, pose grave challenges to the
individualist notions of intentioned speech that ground liberal presump-
tions about the possibilities for redemptive political agency" (453).

2   My point here is not that violence is ("unfortunately") nec-
essary in order for a revolutionary movement to "take power" - an
argument whose contradictions and limitations are well-known - but
that what is being essentially refused in the call for non-violence is *the
State's claim to an unconditional monopoly on legitimate violence*, and
indeed, to function as the arbiter of the distinction between "violence"
and "physical force". Non-violence as a performative tactic is an attempt
to disarm the State; it is not the rejection of the use of physical force by
the people. On the convenient illusion of the Egyptian (and more broad-
ly, Arab) revolution as non-violent, see Rizk 2014. See also Mohammed
Bamyeh on Fanon's approch to violence: "The problem, then, is when
violence is associated with a process of limitless abstraction" (Bamyeh
2010: 58).

may try to avoid it. They should *not* blame the filmmaker for showing them "the facts".

I also felt quite strongly that to "suggest" death without showing it would be a form of ethical evasion on my part. Often, it is said that to allow the violence to take place "offscreen" is not only more respectful of the spectator's sensibilities, but also more powerful than to "force" them to watch the act itself.

I personally have always associated this argument with the sequence in *The Man from Laramie* in which James Stewart is punished by being shot in the hand (a sequence I remember discussing at great length with my father when I was a teenager: he was full of admiration for it). The shooting takes place just to one side of the cinemascope screen, as his outstretched arm extends beyond the edge of the frame, leaving the viewer to follow the progress of his pain as it is acted out on Stewart's face.

James Stewart struggles shortly before he is maimed by his assaillants. Still from **The Man from Laramie** *(1955)*

This argument is, of course, contradictory when it is made on grounds of ethics, rather than effectiveness. If the filmmaker has a duty to protect the viewer from extreme emotional distress of the kind that seeing documentary images of death may induce, then it cannot be an "ethical" alternative to "suggest" death without showing it, knowing that the effect of that suggestion will be even more "powerful" than the images themselves. Clearly, the taboo on death has nothing to do with the possibility that such images may (re)traumatise the viewer, nor the fear that they will lead her to become more blasé, or even callous, in the face of others' suffering (a fear plausibly refuted by Susan Sontag in her Oxford Amnesty Lecture (Sontag 2003)). *The taboo is about seeing the images themselves, independently of their emotional or political effect.*

As Judith Butler puts it, discussing the political regulation of the senses:

> there are certain photographs of the injury or destruction of bodies in a war, for example, that we are often forbidden to see precisely because

> there is a fear that this body will feel something about what those other bodies underwent, or that this body, in its sensory comportment outside itself, will not remain enclosed, monadic, and individual. (Butler 2015: 149)

The reactions of my audiences suggested to me how far this kind of interdiction has, by now, been internalised in our culture. Death is experienced as an assault on our conviction of our own completeness and autonomy. By leaving it to our imagination to supply the missing image, we are, perhaps, simply ensuring that we can enjoy the frisson of horror, without having to acknowledge the evidence that the object of that horror does, really, exist, outside us - and that, in the face of it, we are neither what, nor where, we would like to think we are. Death, too, is one of the "transformations" we are capable of.

In the rest of this chapter, I want to reflect a little further on the nature of this taboo as it raised its head during the process of making *The Uprising*, and the steps that led me to overcome it.

— 2—

The argument that showing extreme violence and suffering is less politically effective than to suggest that violence can be found, among other canonical statements, in Harun Farocki's very first film *Inextinguishable Fire* (1969), which explores how individuals are able to participate in the invention and manufacture of a weapon such as napalm without feeling any personal responsibility for the consequences of its use.

In the prologue to his film, Farocki sits at a table facing the camera, and reads a text that explains his decision *not* to show documentary footage of people suffering under the effect of napalm attacks. At one point he says:

> How can we show you napalm in action? And how can we show you the injuries caused by napalm? When we show you pictures of napalm victims, you'll shut your eyes. You'll close your eyes to the pictures. Then you'll close them to the memory. And then you'll close your eyes to the facts.

As if to prove his point, he then proceeds to take a lighted cigarette and press it on his forearm, while he continues to address the camera:

Still frame from **Inextinguishable Fire** *(1969)*

A cigarette burns at 400 degrees C.
Napalm burns at 3,000 degrees C.

There then follows a long account of napalm's characteristics as a weapon, set against a shot of a (dead) rabbit being incinerated on a table.

Still frame from **Inextinguishable Fire** *(1969)*

Farocki's tactic here is to offer us images of lesser horrors, that stand in for the greater horror that he has already told us we would not be able to bear the sight of. In this way, his opening statement about the viewer's inability to see such horror without closing their mind might be interpreted less as a general truth about the world outside the film, than a formal move within the economy of the film itself. By accusing the viewer of moral cowardice, Farocki is less imposing his view of human psychology on her, than challenging her to prove him wrong. As these images confront her, the memory of these words thus acts as a stimulus to remember the greater horror for which they are merely standing in[3].

Farocki's purpose in *Inextinguishable Fire* is precisely the opposite of that of the videos of death as martyrdom in the vernacular archive. The film is intended to produce a mimetic constraint, but one of a quite different kind from that produced by the image of the martyr's suffering body (Gaines 1999). Its subject is a kind of self-deceptive behaviour which, it implies, we are all liable to indulge in, and which we need to stop. And one of the ways in which it seeks to encourage us to stop ignoring the consequences

of our actions, is paradoxically by freeing us from any sense of *individual* responsibility for our self-deception, which is shown to be a structural problem of capitalism, not a personal character flaw. Personal responsibility begins with our rejection of the kinds of self-deception which the film deconstructs. The film, that is, aims to *produce* politically responsible subjects: it does not assume their prior existence. It challenges us to choose no longer to resemble the scientists, politicians and businessmen who created napalm. The object of mimesis, then, is not what is depicted, but rather the film's critical distance from it. It is the mental gap between the actors and the roles we are invited to identify with, and not those roles themselves.

The martyrdom videos, on the other hand, invite us to identify with a different kind of difference: that which separates the subject from his own death. They show us actions of which we believe we are incapable, which only "heroes" can perform, in order to impress upon us that *anyone* is capable of making a similar commitment to sacrifice his life if circumstances should call for it. What is important in the death it shows us is not whether or not we can empathise with the person's pain. What is important, is that we should recognise in ourselves the beginnings of her or his courage. And that recognition begins with the thought: "If he did that, then maybe I can too." (Bamyeh 2011)

The death of the martyr, which the video exists to exhibit, does not matter because it is a crime, though it is that too. It matters, because it proves that death can have an emancipatory power in this world, not just the next. And it proves that not through what it shows us, but through the effect it has on the viewer.

— 3—

In the end, what broke the taboo definitively for me was one of those moments of inner recursivity, when you find that the film has not only asked you the question, but already answered it. Thus it was that I found myself one day staring at the cut in the timeline, and I realised that two clips I had chosen for entirely independent reasons were in fact intimately linked.

For me, one of the most violent images in the film is, in fact, a video in which no one visibly dies on camera. People did die in this place, and at that time, but we do not see it happen. All we hear is the slightly unreal dry patter of automatic weapons fire, then the camera falls to the ground, the image is inverted, and we find ourselves lying

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3   These images are principally: a shot of insects in a glass jar dying under the effect of pesticides; and television footage being watched by one of the film's "characters" which includes images of a man suffering from napalm burns - that is, exactly the image Farocki had said he would not show us…

The earth turned upside down. Deraa, Syria, 22 April 2011. Still frame from youtube.com/watch?v=WbeuYtFmcyQ

there, the sky below and the road above us, while people scream in pain, and the many injured in our immediate vicinity try to move and call for help.

This video gives a visceral sense of what it is like to actually be shot at - the combination of intensity and detachment - that few other videos I have seen convey so graphically. But for a long time, I hesitated as to whether we could keep it in the movie, whether it was not too harsh a trial for the viewer to find themselves thus immobilised, unable to move out of the way of what might or might not be about to happen. When we took it out, the film seemed to have a vertebra missing. When we put it back in, I found myself involuntarily averting my eyes.

What finally resolved this issue for me was not only realising that none of the people we are close to in this clip - the cameraman and those immediately around him - had actually died, though in some cases their injuries were severe. (According to Al-Jazeera, 100 people were killed in Deraa on that Friday, and some of them are probably visible in this shot, even if it is not clear that they have died). The main factor was realising that the clip we had placed three clips before was actually a *demand* that we watch *this* specific footage. While the connection was obvious, I had not made it before.

His camera wheeling wildly in every direction, a man advances across a square towards a road where police (both uniformed and in plain clothes) are advancing slowly, as if sweeping through the town at the end of an operation to force everybody back into their homes. As he approaches the column, he begins to shout at them, insisting that the protest is peaceful. But when they try to send him away, and order him not to film, his tone changes: "The world must see what happened in Deraa!" he repeats over and over again.

"The world must see?" one of the soldiers asks, his voice imbued with a weariness and cynicism that seem to stretch to the end of time. "The world must see!" the cameraman screams again, as he begins to retreat.

One of the soldiers gestures towards him with his weapon.

"Go on! Shoot me! Shoot me!" responds the man, as if there was almost a kind of relief in saying those words, in finally understanding that this was what he had accepted when he first left his home.

(The soldier doesn't shoot him, at least, not at this moment. The shot ends abruptly, but naturally, by the decision of the filmer to turn the camera off as he stumbles across uneven ground.)

When I finally realised what the filmer here was saying, this resolved for me the question, not only of the clip from 22 April, but of the decision to show death in general.

These are the brains of one of us who was run over by an APC

I don't know who he is but he's my brother, I'm certain, he's my brother

At Maspero, Cairo. 9 October 2011
Still frames from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FaxNz3fJhhw

"The world must see what happened in Deraa!" this man said, risking his life to say it. And it was precisely the video (a video, one of many) of "what happened in Deraa" that I had been considering removing.

Not any more.

— 4—

Under the orange glow of the sodium lights, the camera gazes down into a white cloth spattered bright vermillion. The boy who is holding the cloth in his hands lifts it up towards the camera so it can be filmed as clearly as possible. In the centre of the cloth the red liquid pools more deeply, and we can just make out something soft and viscous to the touch.

The men round about him are agitated, all talking at the same time. Addressing the camerawoman (the Anglo-Egyptian activist Sarah Carr), the boy says:

> *These are the brains of one of us*
> *who was run over by an APC.*

Barely missing a beat, Sarah asks him:

> *What was his name?*

The boy replies:

> *I don't know who he is, but he is my*
> *brother, I am certain, he's my brother.*

This short scene was filmed on the Nile Corniche in Cairo on 9 October 2011, during the Maspero massacre. Deciding, almost at the very end of the edit, to remove it from the cut of *The Uprising* was one of the hardest decisions I had to make. And indeed, ever since, I feel a regret at having not included it in the final version of the film.

It is true that this is a difficult shot to watch, and one that viewers at test screenings sometimes (but not always) found hard to take. However, it is not, I think, any more difficult than watching the shots of brains being exposed and examined, often very physically, in a Pittsburgh mortuary in Stan Brakhage's film, *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (1971).

(Nor is it essentially more graphic or more shocking than the sequence towards the end of *Harlan County USA* (1976) when a young man leads Barbara Kopple's camera through the night to film a part of Lawrence Jones' brain that is still lying on the ground where he was shot.)

The boy who shows the brain of this stranger whom he has just seen killed to the filmer repeats several times, "I know he is my brother". In the context of the event itself - the massacre of protesters at a demonstration intended, among other things, as a show of Muslim-Christian unity - this statement is above all a statement that the religion of the person who had died is unimportant, and that the solidarity of the revolution transcends the categories that the regime would use to divide the people. In the context of my film, however, as Bruno pointed out on one occasion when we were debating the decision of whether we should keep the shot in the film or not (an issue on which, at different times, we each took both ends of the argument), it is also an invitation to the viewer to identify with all the people we have seen in the film, those who died, and those who could have died but did not - to identify with them, not as victims of oppression, but as actors of their own destiny, and who are prepared to give their lives for freedom.

Still from **The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes** *(1971)*

In this sense, the repeated emphasis on "knowing" - "I *know* he is my brother" - seems to acquire a particular inflection, as if the boy who is holding the brains of this stranger in his hands knows that they are brothers *by virtue of having seen inside his body*. Where the vision of the interior of the dead human body is often experienced as deeply shocking and alienating[4], here, it seems to be, on the contrary,

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4   Cf. Brakhage in the audio commentary to the Criterion DVD release of his film, detailing his own reactions while filming this footage: his constant fear of passing out, his sense that if they had brought in the corpse of a child he would have had to stop filming and abandon the project, etc. "I have never clung so tightly to my camera as I did while making this film!" See also MacDonald (2005: 89-92).

humanising. His response to the other boy's sacrifice is channeled through his own almost crazed insistence that the other should not be ignored or forgotten. It is as if the preliminary gestures he had to perform (and which we do not see, but can suppose must have taken place: how else did the brain get into the white cloth in which he carries it?) in order to be able to carry these few pounds of flesh and blood around had filled him not with revulsion, but with an extraordinary and quite unexpected tenderness, an abrupt and irreversible intimacy. It is by caring for him in this exorbitant, almost obscene way, that this stranger has become more than a friend to him, a "brother". They have been, quite literally, bound together by blood.

This shot then, as Bruno had recognised and I had not, is, among many other things, a metaphor for the film that we were making. For the film itself wanted to be just that: a vessel in which we could tenderly yet roughly carry what remained of these people whose names we did not know, and show those traces to complete strangers. And we did this, not to underline the distances and differences that separate the viewer from them, but to assert, despite and across those differences, a fundamental act of solidarity, grounded not so much in our shared vulnerability before the military wing of the State, as in our shared *determination* to stand with each other - to "mutualize endurance", as Zeynep Gambetti has put it (Gambetti 2013) - whatever the consequences might be.

And so this shot itself remains for me, in some sense, an integral part of *The Uprising*, even though you can no longer see it in the final cut, up there on the screen.

Epilogue.
All the distance that is possible

Towards the end of the same debate at the Cinéma La Clef during which he had described to us the video in which a man films his shadow laid across his dead friend's body, Ousama Mohamed took the floor for a second time. And again, his statement made a lasting impression on me.

The discussion of how to film the revolution had gravitated naturally to the role that vernacular video was playing in redefining our sense of both what a revolution was, and how and where films - "real films" - were made. Yet, also perhaps quite naturally, not everybody in the room was in tune with this approach. At one point, a number of voices were raised in quick succession to criticise what seemed to them the unreflective praise being lavished on these "amateur" videos, and to call for a more critical attitude. How, they asked, could these videos possibly help us understand what was going on in Syria, Egypt, or anywhere else, when they were being made so quickly, and in such a relation of brute immediacy to the events they described? To understand what was happening, its causes and its consequences, surely we needed (so they said, these dissenting voices) real filmmakers - professional filmmakers, artists, that is, *experts* - who would be able to stand back from the events that were unfolding, and view them with more *distance*?

As this line of argument was deployed across the room, I could sense Ousama Mohamed, who was standing at the back, getting more and more tense. Finally, there came a pause in the onslaught, which allowed him to ask for the floor.

Moving forward to project his voice, and - or so it seemed to me - just managing to control his anger, he waited until the room had fallen completely silent. And then he said:

> When someone goes down into the street, to demonstrate peacefully, and they find themselves being shot at with live ammunition, and maybe some of the people around them are wounded, and others killed. And then they go home that night, having seen all that. And then, the next morning, despite what they have seen, and what they know now is the price they may have to pay, that person

> **still** decides to go back down into the street and demonstrate again: then I say, that that person has already taken all the distance from their own lives that it is possible for a human being to take.

And then he sat back down.

After he had spoken, the room remained silent for what seemed like a very long time. But it was not exactly the same silence as before.

Over the years that have passed since that day in September 2011, I have often thought of Ousama Mohamed's words during this debate, and the emotions that they evoked in me. His decision, his single focus, and his sincerity made a deep impression on me. If there was an ideal audience I had in mind while I was making *The Uprising*, then perhaps it was him, or at least, someone who could speak the way he did that day. Someone whose intellectual sophistication made him more, rather than less, able to see not only the humanity of these people who had had the presence of mind to film their own first steps towards emancipation, but also their complexity and their intelligence, and whose deep humility in the face of these gestures made him more, not less clear-sighted in their defence[1].

However, it was only many months after the film had been finished and released that, one day in May 2014, I thought back to Ousama Mohamed's final - and for me definitive - statement on the attitude that these videos embodied, and realised that it encapasulated, not just the ethical stance that I had recognised in this material, and that I hoped still shone through these fragments after I had compiled and edited them into a film, but also, *the narrative arc of that film itself*.

The basic structural principle of *The Uprising* had been given to me in those few sentences, before I knew I was even making a film. Without intending to, without even being conscious of it, I made this film in order that others could see these videos as I saw them, and as I believed Ousama Mohamed saw them too.

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1   In 2014, Ousama Mohamed's own film about the Syrian revolution, *Silvered Water, Syria Self-Portrait*, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival (out of competition). The first part of the film uses a large number of amateur videos, many of them shot by members of the Assad regime's armed forces and their associated militias. These videos, and the use which Mohamed makes of them in his film, have very little to do with the properly vernacular videos produced by the revolutionaries which he had described in Paris two-and-a-half years previously, or with what he had then had to say about them. Though the film was generally well-received, for me its use of perpetrator images produces a positioning of the spectator that is properly intolerable, despite (or perhaps, because of) all the author's efforts to redeem these images. For a critical appraisal of this dimension of the work, see Bortzmeyer 2014, Zabunyan 2015 and Rancière 2015: 90.

For a long time, when asked I would say that the subject of my film was not how or why a revolution unfolds, but simply what it feels like after so many years of silence and repression to find in oneself the courage to go down into the street and speak one's mind, both individually and collectively, sometimes quietly, sometimes at the top of one's voice. As one of my favourite chants from 25 January 2011 in Egypt put it, quite simply: "We are tired of being quiet".

However, after the film was finished, I realised that the actual structure of the film was somewhat more complex than that. Its "subject", if it had a subject, was not what it is like to go out into the street for the first time after so many years of misery and oppression. It is what it is like to go out into the street the *second time*, when you now know - not in theory, but by direct, concrete experience - what the likely price of such an act of defiance will be. And this decision is represented in the film not once, but twice - the first time on Day Three, when the people return to the street after the massacres of Day Two, despite those massacres; and again, at the very end of the film, when the voice of Asmaa Mahfouz reasserts their determination to continue the struggle peacefully, against images of scenes that figure an increasing violence not only on the part of the regime - as in a shot of an abandoned, burning tank - but also of the revolutionaries - as in the clip taken from that large body of videos from Bahrain that I came to refer to as "Molotov cocktail ballets".

The film, therefore, performs for the viewer a ritual of virtual *initiation* into the process of confronting and accepting death through which those revolutionaries had passed who continued to defy their regimes, even when they could no longer ignore the possible consequences. Instead of asking the viewer if she still wants to go out into the street, now that she knows what may happen to her, it asks her if she still wants to keep on watching the film, even though she now knows the kind of images she may be confronted with. The film is therefore a rehearsal in the imagination of the viewer's attitudes not only to the deaths of others, but also to their own death. Such a rehearsal is common in all those traditions for which life is, as Montaigne could still say, about learning how to die, but is totally foreign to all traditions such as ours in which life is about ignoring the inevitability of death right up until the last possible minute (Ariès 1975; on life as preparation for death, cf. Bamyeh 2007: 47ff.). This makes *The Uprising* an extremely strange experience for many Western viewers, evoking as it does their own deeply repressed relationship to violence and death in ways they may not be prepared for.

Still, since I saw the relationship between what Ousama Mohamed said on 17 September 2011, and the structure of my film, I have been unable to think of *The Uprising* as anything else than a secular rehearsal of, or preparation for, death - not the deaths of the anonymous martyrs figured on the screen, but the death of the viewer who confronts these images in the cinema.

In my writings about the vernacular anarchive, I have developed a number of theories - or perhaps I should say "hypotheses" - not only about these videos, but also about their relationship to revolutionary subjectivity. And there is, thus, a theory implicit in them of what a revolution is, or may be, in the early 21st century. But the film *The Uprising* does not develop a theory about revolution, or about the development and possible future evolution of *these* revolutions. *The Uprising* simply asks the viewer a question. And that question is: What is there in our own lives, that we might be prepared to die for?

Still frame from **Days of Anger** *by Philip Rizk and Jasmina Metwaly. vimeo.com/19344953*
Molotov cocktails choreography. Bahrain, 2012. Still frame from video subsequently deleted from YouTube.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Playlist of video clips used in three versions of the film

*This table lists all the online video clips used in the editing of the two versions of **The Uprising** which we tried to distribute, and in the original anthology screened in Paris at the invitation of the CJC. The table should be read from right to left: that is, the final cut of the film is taken to define the identity of the clips, and the other two columns provide detailed information on clips only if they cannot be referenced to that already provided in one of the columns to the right.*

FRAGMENTS FOR A REVOLUTION (PARIS, 19 MAY 2011)	NO REVOLUTION WITHOUT A REVOLUTION (EDIT 36, 1 APRIL 2012)	THE UPRISING (EDIT 69, OCTOBER 2013)
		(PROLOGUE)
	B1 (= C79) Tunisia Revolution 2011	C1. Tornado in Huntsville Alabama 1/21/2010 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuxKlJDZDEg // Michael Sparks - USA, 21 January 2010
		VO1: Last broadcast from Mohammed Nabbous and Message from his widow // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiWgDuG6_Is // LLWProductions - Libya, 20 March 2011
SEEING WITH ONE'S OWN EYES	NO REVOLUTION WITHOUT A REVOLUTION	VO2: Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the vlog that Helped Spark the Revolution//,http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgjIgMdsEuk // ,Iyad El-Baghdadi - Egypt, 1 February 2011
		VO3: رسالة شاب في اليونان لشباب الثورة السورية// ,http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IausGqaun4A // SyrianFreePress - Syria, 17 March 2011
	B2 (= C1 VO 2) Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the vlog that Helped Spark the Revolution	VO4: Bahrain's revolution against the brutal Al-Khalifah // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5PsOaJv4fPY // mohammad2009m - Bahrain,14 April 2011
		SEVEN DAYS BEFORE
	B3 (= C6) Libya - (Libya: Oh Great Crowds Join Us)	C2. thunder storm in sanaa yemen 05 05 2008 عاصفة رعدية في صنعاء // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HpNgaYdojo // lonelyfreeman - Yemen, 11 May 2008
A1 **The man with the camera phone** // Video deleted from Facebook // Syria, 5 July 2008		C3. (Lightning and thunder in Cairo). // Video URL mislaid. // Egypt, date unknown (pre-revolution?)
	فلاش- دمشق مسائية الميدان 23-7 الي مابشارك مافي(C7=) B3 ناموس	C4. (Thunderstorm approaching Sanaa) // Video URL mislaid. // Yemen, date unknown (pre-revolution?)
		C5. Demonstrations at Green Square in Tripoli - LIBYA REVOLUTION 2011 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vm0zB79f5Uw // ReadTheQuran4Peace - Libya, 22 February 2011

	B4 Days of Anger // https://vimeo.com/19344953 // Jasmina Metwally and Philip Rizk - 30 January 2011	C6. (Libya: Oh Great Crowds Join Us) // http://www.facebook.com/video/video.php?v=147773815288054 // anonymous - Libya, date unknown (February 2011?)
		C7. فلاش- دمشق مسائية الميدان 23-7 الي مابشارك مافي // ناموس http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahm_ZLTEgdw // fnnsyria - Syria, 23 July 2011
	B5,Sitra funeral procession on Friday // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJpgc31DvFA // AlJazeeraEnglish - Bahrain, 18 February 2011	C8. Bahrain women protest Barbar 09.06 حرائر // الثورة في مسيرة باربار http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8THkGpuT5E // Liberty4Bahrain - Bahrain, 9 June 2011
		C9. Tunisie Ben Ali Tunis 8/1/2011 تونس بن علي // تونس العاصمة http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cq3TvjoJ1XQ // Med BMN - Tunisia, 8 January 2011
	B6 (= C96) Yemen Revolution in sana'a 13 May 2011	C10. March with coffins at Safriya March 12 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GaTF9ZefMKE // AgainstBahrainTV - Bahrain, 12 March 2011
Montage effects A2 (Woman spits on Bashar al-Asad) // Video no longer publically available. // Syria, 30 March 2011 A3 (Syrian regime forces open fire on crowd) // Video no longer publically available. // Syria, early May 2011		C11. طفل يقود مسيره لباب البحرين. // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIKrGP452rg&feature=related // IxLoveBahrain - Bahrain, 25 February 2011
	B7 (= C1 VO3)رسالة شاب في اليونان لشباب الثورة السورية	C12. الشعارات المرفوعة في الجمعة العظيمة. // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oG31EfSMWmE // daraanews1 - Syria, 22 April 2011
		C13. January 25th, Shubra 2011 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59WBvyrad_0 // gsquare86 - Egypt, 24 March 2011
	B8 (= C19) SYRIA: Pro-Democracy Activists Burn Poster of Dictator 3/27/11	C14. Day One of Egypt's Freedom Revolution - January 25, 2011 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0-oJUk_P_A&feature=plcp // FreedomRevolution25 - Egypt, 24 January 2012
		C15. Tunis مظاهرة بحضور النساء و الاطفال في المزونة Sidi Bouzid // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3yVcfWS6zQ // hetzengegenislam01 - Tunisia, 27 December 2010
	B9,[SAVE-LIBYA] Protesters Burn Gaddafi's Poster in Zawiya, Libya // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cX5TN6zAPR4 // SaveLibya - Libya, 22 February 2011	C16. Day One of Egypt's Freedom Revolution - January 25, 2011 (ctd)

		C17. (Sunset over Sanaa) // Video URL mislaid. // Yemen, date unknown (pre-revolution).
	B10 Mubarak down in Alexandria // https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ak4tATgyoHE // Mo'men Azkoul - Egypt, 25 January 2011	C18. SUNSET OVER CAIRO // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjjSBAze4IM // epicflo - Egypt, 25 March 2007
TO SPEAK OUT LOUD		C19. SYRIA: Pro-Democracy Activists Burn Poster of Dictator 3/27/11 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1cs08Mjq2aQ // xgotfiveonitx - Syria, 27 March 2011
	B11 La Révolution du Jasmin: Protesters burning Ben Ali's portrait (SOUSSE, La B11 Révolution du Jasmin: Protesters burning Ben Ali's portrait (SOUSSE, TUNISIA: 01/14/2011) // https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9a34nCtZGE // Ikbel Amri - Tunisia, 14 January 2011	SIX DAYS BEFORE
		C20. Egyptian Protestors Gathering- January 31 2011 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYNIHs2m4SY // usernameandword - Egypt, 31 January 2011
	B12 (Destroying the statue of Hafez Al-Asad) // Video deleted from YouTube // Syria, 22 April 2011	C21. Jan 25 Demonstration in Alexandria - مظاهرة يوم الغضب في الإسكندرية // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uf9uH7wlGnA // hatimamen - Egypt, 26 January 2011
		C22. Egyptian Protestors Gathering- January 31 2011 (ctd)
	B13 (= C32) Protest in Souq al Jumaa- Tripoli مظاهرة في سوق الجمعة - طرابلس	C23. La Tunisie se révolte! Sidi bouzid // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SN0XAUVHqpo // Med Ithemac - Tunisia, 27 December 2010
Proclamation A4 (= B1, C79) Tunisia Revolution 2011		C24. Egypt Revolution: January 28, 2011 - Friday of Rage // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONjiXRD3ZX8 // FreedomRevolution25 - Egypt, 10 July 2011
	B14 (Protester shot dead in Alexandria) // Original video deleted from YouTube / available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vu2soLQXLyI&spfreload=10&bpctr=1459708010 Egypt, 28 January 2011	C25. Jan 25 Demonstration in Alexandria - مظاهرة يوم الغضب في الإسكندرية (ctd)
		C26. Egypt Revolution: January 28, 2011 - Friday of Rage (ctd)
	B15 (Man shot dead in alleyway) // Video deleted from YouTube // Yemen, date unknown	C27. Egypt's Freedom Revolution, Day 2 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElQV6nCzH30 // FreedomRevolution25 - Egypt, 26 January 2011

		C28. 14 قمع مسيرة سلمية في البحرين - الديه يوم الغضب // 2011فبراير // http://www.youtube.com/watch? v=ZoJU1MHLzRI // margadoosh - Bahrain, 14 February 2011
	B16 (Calling on God by night from the rooftops) // Video deleted from YouTube // Syria, date unknown	C29. طلق مباشر,Bahrain 13-3-2011: Direct Bullet // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xge-Sl5MnyI // في عقول الواعين, Bahrain,19 March- 2011
		C30. DRAMATIC VIDEO Bahraini security forces attacking peaceful pro-democracy demonstrators FEB.14 // http://www.youtube.com/watch? v=VJINi_IFa7s // xgotfiveonitx - Bahrain,14 February 2011
	B17 (= C45)محمد الربع ساخرا من قصف منزله	C31. In Syria (Daraa): Camera Vs. Guns "The World Must See!" // http://www.youtube.com/watch? v=BTGFSX2WiMc // thesyrianinterpreter - Syria, 25 May 2011
Challenge A5 (= B2, C1 VO2) Meet Asmaa Mahfouz and the vlog that Helped Spark the Revolution		C32. Protest in Souq Al Jumma - Tripoli مظاهرة في سوق الجمعة - طرابلس // http://www.youtube.com/watch? v=RdlBRgi0BFc // 17thFebRevolution - Libya, 27 February 2011
	B18 The dead want to bring down the regime Deir Ezzor, 22-07-2011 // http://www.youtube.com/watch? v=fSoqC3fUL_Q&feature=plcp // thesyrianinterpreter - Syria, 22 July 2011	C33. Bahrain riot police use gun against protesters 13-03-2011 // http://www.youtube.com/watch? v=ZEV_iH9keVE // citizenarena - Bahrain, 13 March 2011
		C34. Massacre in Daraa, Syria, April 22, 2011 // http://www.youtube.com/watch? v=WbeuYtFmcyQ // izraadaraa - Syria, 22 April 2011
	B19 (= C48) Fruit Bazooka, Homsis' latest invention—Khalidiye, Homs 15-07-2011	C35. (Protesters flee carrying wounded) // Video URL mislaid. // Bahrain, 18 February 2011.
		C36. installment 7 // http://www.youtube.com/watch? v=TVSe_tBFYD8 // wewanttobefree - Yemen, 3 June 2011
	B20 (Bahrain: man down) // Video deleted from YouTube // Bahrain, date unknown	C37. installment 13 // http://www.youtube.com/watch? v=usnmbXfLyok // wewanttobefree1 - Yemen, 3 June 2011
		C38. Arriving at hospital // deleted from YouTube // ??? - Bahrain, 18 February 2011
	B21 tank man Bahrain // Original video deleted from YouTube / available here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSt5okZV4fs // shirazfm a - Bahrain, date unknown	C39. BAHRAIN Video Of CNN Reporter Under Gunfire While Interviewing Blood Soaked Protester 2/18/11 // http://www.youtube.com/watch? v=jgbwkFxZiew // VexZeez - Bahrain, 25 July 2011

Gathering A6 (= B3, C6) (Libya: Oh Great Crowds Join Us)		C40. -#Bahrain: #Sitra- TearGasing Al Qareya vlg // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKloN6bYMrI // MrBuHaider - Bahrain, 16 March 2012
	B22 (Yemen: APC corrida) // Video deleted from YouTube // Yemen, date unknown.	C41. حوارات درازية مع المرتزقة // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RwZtrcOso4 // Duraz 14 - Bahrain, 30 August 2011
		C42. الرصاص في أريانة // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p80ieXydPro // azertyrotana - Tunisia, 14 January 2011
	B23 (= C53) جمعة الغضب يوم النصر Friday Of Rage (Egypt Revolution)	C43. Bahrain: Helicopter pointing its flashlight towards protesters // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsdnC6t_cTI // Ali Hasan - Bahrain, 8 September 2011
		FIVE DAYS BEFORE
	B24 (= C54) Friday: A Day of Anger: The Battle for Ramses Square	C44. Tripoli (2/22) - Silent streets of Fashloom // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ZwRy-zomzc // mukhtaralasad - Libya, 22 February 2011
		C45. محمد الربع ساخرا من قصف منزله // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHtEtNIYh6I // 5000zikoo - Yemen, 21 September 2011
	B25 Crossing Qasr El-Nil Bridge on Friday January 28 // https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqG8yeLo8Wk // motherofthetribe - Egypt,28 January 2011	C46. حداد على روح الشهداء في درعا 23 4 2011 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wO7FSsoXFt4 // free4syria2011 - Syria, 23 April 2011
Singing A7 (= B29) Egyptian Revolution: Chants in the heart of Tahrir	CUT TO BLACK	C47. حداد على روح الشهداء في درعا 23-4-2011 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTjuyr3m2iw // free4syria2011 - Syria, 23 April 2011
	B26 (= C61) إحدى نساء إب ترد على علي صالح بعد حديثه عن الإختلاط في ساحات التغيير	C48. Fruit Bazooka, Homsis' latest invention—Khalidiye, Homs 15-07-2011 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtxAqAcNgfM // thesyrianinterpreter - Syria, 15 July 2011
		C49. إطلاق الرصاص على مظاهرة الإنشاءات جمعة بروتوكول الموت // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwNr9cKvlQg // jojomomo29 - Syria, 23 December 2011
	B27 (= C62) L'imprécation de la femme du peuple	C50. (Security forces open fire from rootfops). // Video URL mislaid. // Libya, date unknown.
SCENES FROM AN UNFINISHED REVOLUTION (EGYPT)		C51. كوبرى قصر النيل جمعة YouTube YouTube الغضب MP4 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Shgc6Cg6Rys // rnnnews1 - Egypt, 1 March 2011

	B28 (= C63) شاهي الحرية freedom tea. (a Libyan tea Party in Benghazi)	C52. Attack on Qasr El-Nil bridge // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQf071jRWFA // AhramOnline - Egypt, 29 January 2011
		C53. جمعة الغضب يوم النصر Friday Of Rage (Egypt Revolution) // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OF5Z1KobwQE // almadaa11 - Egypt, 16 February 2011
	B29,Egyptian Revolution: Chants in the heart of Tahrir // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DA4llX3b6PQ // weareallegyptian - Egypt, 9 February 2011	C54. Friday: A Day of Anger: The Battle for Ramses Square // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eh7DoZpHcpY // 3arabawy - Egypt, 2 February 2011
		C55. Battle of Ramses // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NULguR_LoHQ // bokamasr - Egypt, 5 February 2011
	B30 (= C64) Tahrir Square response to Mubarak's address (10/2/2011)	C56. Day of Rage. A walk from Kast el-Nile bridge towards Tahrir, Cairo. Friday 28 Jan. 9 P.M. // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qmb4DW4S2mg // Bent Christophersen - Egypt, 2 April 2011
		C57. Bahrain: Ppl chanting "Down Down Hamad" in Sitra Nov 6 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9f1QUVIoKd8 // MrBuHaider - Bahrain, 6 November 2011
	B31 (= C65) أغنية ساحة العاصي 2011 6 27 مظاهرات حماه بدكم بشار لا والله	C58. (Lightning and thunder in Cairo) (= C3 ctd)
The artists A8 Expell Hosni Mubarak Song // https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdKjMiKqVrcEgypt // forfaith - 5 February 2011		FOUR DAYS BEFORE
	B32 شعر — يا طرابلس قولي له // flv. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4W2qB2_STk // قناة ثوار ليبيا - Libya, 11 April 2011	C59. F16 over cairo // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rb6NTJTQXfc // mkmagz - Egypt, 2 February 2011
		C60. More F16 jets flying over Tahrir (Liberation) Square, Cairo 30th January 2011 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvfVjUa8kuU // ajhands - Egypt, 7 February 2011
	B33 (= C66) "تنحي" ميدان التحرير لحظة مبارك	C61. إحدى نساء إب ترد على علي صالح بعد حديثه عن الإختلاط في ساحات التغيير // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=auytoUDf3eg // Wazie Alkadri - Yemen, 17 April 2011
		C62. L'imprécation de la femme du peuple // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gh5E2BpkWbA // webamri amri - Tunisia, 29 January 2011

	فرحة جماهير الإسكندرية بعد تنحي مبارك (C67 =) B34	C63. شاهي الحرية freedom tea. (a Libyan tea Party in Benghazi) // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxUtEVA9idA // elabbar33 - Libya, 20 March 2011
The people and the archives A9 (= B38, C77) Storming Egypt State Security		C64. Tahrir Square response to Mubarak's address (10/2/2011) // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXMH5nSazPc // momoz88 - Egypt, 11 February 2011
	B35 (= C68) Tunisie - La joie des tunisiens - Ghannouchi degage	C65. مظاهرات حماه 27 6 2011 ساحة العاصي أغنية بدكم بشار لا والله // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uR13amzkx4 // syria1a1 - Syria, 27 June 2011
	CUT TO BLACK	C66. ميدان التحرير لحظة "تنحي" مبارك // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l96wRjM4EEg // mnbasharstar - Egypt, 11 February 2011
	B36 (= C69) جولة في منزل القذافي المجرم Gaddafi house in Tripol	C67. فرحة جماهير الإسكندرية بعد تنحي مبارك // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYcDJrvTcG4 // arabicode - Egypt, 11 February 2011
		C68. Tunisie - La joie des tunisiens - Ghannouchi degage // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwoYt5QxZN4 // partifederaliste TN - Tunisia, 14 January 2011
	B37 (= C70). Swimming @ Aisha Gadafi's house	THREE DAYS BEFORE
		C69. جولة في منزل القذافي المجرم Gaddafi house in Tripol // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQnmCbmV4ME // freeeeelibyan - Libya, 24 August 2011
	B38 (= C77) Storming Egypt State Security	C70. Swimming @ Aisha Gadafi's house // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2iTltcogDI // sandowarrior - Libya, 26 August 2011
		C71. معا نبني ووطننا // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lBIJ5wuoZY // DragKhai - Tunisia, 15 January 2011
	B39 (= C76) Release of Political Prisoners and Protesters from Bu-Sleem Prison (Tripoli, Libya - 2011)	C72. Scenes from Tahrir Square morning 02/12/2001 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yfNRhpTMBU // manalbishop - Egypt, 13 February 2011
Restoring order A10 (Army clearing Tahrir square encampment) // Video deleted from YouTube // Egypt, 8 April 2011		C73. Egyptians clean Tahrir square, Cairo 13 Feb. 2011 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EnANVjBOEc // TahrirSqaureEgypt - Egypt, 13 February 2011
	B40 (= C81). Tunisie - 02 04 2011 - شنوا إلَّي تبدّل ؟؟؟ Kach Jdid ?	C74. Tahrir Square gets Washed // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22zYzYMTjWE // Wa'el Abdul aziz - Egypt, 12 February 2011

		C75. Egyptians clean Tahrir square & Talat Harb // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwxfMY7MXTI // TahrirSqaureEgypt - Egypt, 12 February 2011
	B41 01-28 هذا ما حدث في مطار تونس قرطاج Tunisie sidi bouzid // https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oizaBeEH2Yc // alladil66 - Tunisia, 28 January 2011	C76. Release of Political Prisoners and Protesters from Bu-Sleem Prison (Tripoli, Libya - 2011) // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NK1tX3e_10M // libyanevidence - Libya, 25 August 2011
		C77. Storming Egypt State Security // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOpwrXWoQX8 // elsaffani - Egypt, 5 March 2011
	B42 (= C86) Protestor Abdel-Aziz & others speak outside Parliament	C78. Tunisie Situation Tunis 15/1/2011 تونس // الوضع في تونس // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWweEoGMM9A // Med BNM - Tunisia, 15 January 2011
		C79. Tunisia Revolution 2011 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TElZMobEeYE&lr=1 // Mohamed Bk - Tunisia, 14 January 2011 (video now deleted)
	B43 (= C87) Shubra - Maspero march, October 9 2011 - Graphic	TWO DAYS BEFORE
The innocent A11,شهادة والدة محمد // عبدالهادي - عمره 16 سنة https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47a6TXylA3M // Egypt, 14 April 2011		C80. Tunisie pendant la nuit // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5va5wTBwsA // Aymen Medimagh - Tunisia, 23 September 2011
	B44 (= C88) The Maspero Massacre - 9/10/11 - What Really Happened	C81. Tunisie - 02 04 2011 - ؟؟؟ - شنوا إلّي تبدّل Kach Jdid ? // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rNbkQB5qIA // hchichadz - Tunisia, 2 April 2011
		C82. طائرة تخترق حاجز الصوت فى سماء القاهرة - تصوير صدفة // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVs5LJS6Dis // mahmoud mohamed - Egypt, 29 October 2012
	B45 (= C89) Shubra - Maspero march, October 9 2011 - Graphic	C83. Bahrain Apache Helicopter near Salmanya Hospital // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03VuoqTD2NU // Moslimiran - Bahrain,16 March 2011
	CUT TO BLACK	C84. Dispositif policier et militaire, Tunis - 21 septembre 2012 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sO2FFvbbrmk // LeCourrierdelAtlas - Tunisia, 21 September 2012
	B46. ("Asad, you are the shame of the Syrians") // Video deleted from YouTube // Syria, 4 December 2011	AUDIO from: Tunis Demonstration on 09/04/2012 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRGVaYp-jZA // Tajeddin Benissa - Tunisia, 18 April 2012

THE LAST BROADCAST		C85. LA POLICE TUNISIENNE DISPERSE DES MANIFESTANTS DEVANT LA MOSQUEE D'EL FATAH // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Uqg76k-aZU // copwatchnews - Tunisia, 19 February 2012 (account now terminated)
	B47 (= C93) The hero of bahrain break out Pearl Roundabout in sep 3 2011 !!	C86. Protestor Abdel-Aziz & others speak outside Parliament // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlMH9TKjczs // Sarah Carr -,Egypt, 12 July 2011
		C87. Shubra - Maspero march, October 9 2011 - Graphic // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FaxNz3fJhhw // Sarah Carr - Egypt, 11 October 2011
	B48 (= C90 AUDIO) Asmaa Mahfouz's vlog on the Eve of the Revolution	C88. The Maspero Massacre - 9/10/11 - What Really Happened // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ot-0NEwc3E // mosireen - Egypt, 10 November 2011
		C89.Shubra - Maspero march, October 9 2011 - Graphic (ctd)
	NO REVOLUTION WITHOUT A REVOLUTION	YESTERDAY
		C90. Sidi Bouzid -Tunisie -Rebellion a Meknassy // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPn7HKYiI4I // partifederaliste TN - Tunisia, 25 December 2010
	CREDITS	AUDIO FROM/ Asmaa Mahfouz's vlog on the Eve of the Revolution // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UUbVr3eB9c // Iyad El-Baghdadi - Egypt, 2 February 2011
A12 (= C1 VO1) Last broadcast from Mohammed Nabbous and Message from his widow		C92. عمليات الجيش السوري الحر في حي بابا عمرو // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmxMEDD1rvQ // maleksab92 - Syria, 3 December 2011
		C92. The hero of bahrain break out Pearl Roundabout in sep 3 2011 !! // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLaPMYmDKjo // feb14bhr - Bahrain, 4 September 2011
		C93. Molotov cocktails in Bahrain // Video deleted from YouTube. // Bahrain, January 2012 (?)
		C94. (Protesters enter ciry riding on bulldozers.) // Video URL mislaid. // Yemen, date unknown.
		C95. شاب يمني يرقص على اصوات القنابل والرصاص الحي صنعاء // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvdPV98a8RE // 1 - Yemen, 17 October 2011

		C96. Yemen Revolution in sana'a 13 May 2011 // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdDPDpej9AY // MrEthzxz - Yemen, 10 June 2011
		C97. Amazing shot of the 4-27-2011 alabama tornado // http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xyd_B2mEcFY // spadez303 - USA, 2 May 2011
		TODAY

Appendix 2. Screenings of *The Uprising* (selected).

Public screenings

2013
Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival / Turin Film Festival

2014
Documentary Fortnight (MoMA, NYC)
Hamburg Documentary Film Week / Mash Up Film Festival, Paris / Distrital,
Mexico DF / Edinburgh International Film Festival / Etats-Generaux du Film Documentaire, Lussas, France / Dokufest,
Kosovo / Berwick Film and Media Arts Festival, UK / Arkipel, Indonesia / Kiev International Documentary Film
Festival, Ukraine / Muestra Doc Bogota, Colombia / St Louis International Film Festival / Bratislava International
Film Festival / Festival des Nouveaux Cinémas Documentaires, Paris / Amiens International Film Festival, France /
forumdoc.bh.2014, Brazil / Streams European online film festival

2015
Squeaky Wheel Film and Media Centre, Buffalo, NY / Union Docs, NYC / Open City Docs Fest, London / Big Muddy
Film Festival, Carbondale IL / Belfast Film Festival / Cinéma Gyptis, Marseille / Cinéma La Clef, Paris / Centre for
Contemporary Art, Glasgow / Eye Want Change, London / George Eastman House, Rochester, NY

2016
Kunstraum Kreuzberg, Berlin

Screenings as part of academic seminars and conferences

2013
Université de Paris 8

2014
Williams College, MA
Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA
Duke University, NC
University of Northern Carolina, Chapel Hill
Aberystwyth University
Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris
Performing Protest: Reimagining the Good Life in Times of Crisis, Catholic University of Leuven
Video Vortex #10, SALT Beyoglu, Istanbul

2016
Ecole Normale Supérieure, Lyon

Distribution (VOD)

UniversCiné Belgium (Belgium) / UniversCiné (France) / Volta (Ireland) / Filmin (Spain) / leKino.ch (Switzerland)
Flimmit (Austria) / Netcinema.bg (Bulgaria) / DAFilms (international)

Awards

Opus Bonum award for best world documentary, Jihlava IDFF
Eastern Maidan through the Eyes of Europeans Award, Kiev IDFF, Ukraine
Special mention, international competition, Forum Doc Belo Horizonte
First Prize, Streams European Online Film Festival

Appendix 3. Writings about the film (selected)

Gabriel Bortzmeyer, "Déplis de peuples", *Vacarme*, hiver 2016, 104-112 (in French)

Touria Khannous, "Cultural Manifestations of the Arab Revolution: New Visual Images and Performances", in *Alternative Dramaturgies of the New Millennium in Arabo-Islamic contexts and beyond: Selected Papers from the 10th Annual Meeting of the Tangier International Conferences : Performing Tangier 2014*, edited by Khaled Amine and George F Robertson (Collaborative Media International: 2015).

Rodolphe Olcèse, "The Uprising de Peter Snowdon", *A bras le corps*, 3 Septeber 2014 (in French)
abraslecorps.com/pages/magazine.php?id_mag=164

Damien Marguet, "Cinéma Révolution", *A bras le corps*, 31 August 2014 (in French)
abraslecorps.com/pages/magazine.php?id_mag=154

Florian Krautkrämer, "The Revolution will not be televised (but uploaded). Zu Found-Footage-Filmen über den arabischen Frühling", *Cargo*, 22, 2014, 34-38 (in German)

Ela Bittencourt, "Capturing Upheaval: MoMA's Documentary Fortnight 2014", *The Brooklyn Rail*, 4 March 2014
brooklynrail.org/2014/03/film/capturing-upheaval-momas-documentary-fortnight-2014

Jon Jost, "New York, New York", *Cinema Electronica*, 20 February 2014,
cinemaelectronica.wordpress.com/2014/02/20/new-york-new-york/

Dork Zabunyan, "Mal de fiction et passages de l'histoire", *Trafic*, 82, summer 2012, 5-15.
edenlivres.fr/o/16/p/21900/excerpt, retrieved 8.07.2012 (see pp.11-12)

Appendix 4. Writings, interviews and conference papers by the author

Peer-reviewed articles

"The Revolution *Will* be Uploaded: Vernacular Video and the Arab Spring". *Culture Unbound*. 6, 2014: 401–429. Available online at: cultureunbound.ep.liu.se/v6/a21/ (A shortened version was published as "Libya: The Shadow of the People" in *Mada Masr* on 18 February 2014: madamasr.com/opinion/libya-shadow-people)

""Game over Mubarak": the Arab Revolutions and the Gamification of Everyday Life". *Fast Capitalism*. 11(1), 2014. Available online at: uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/11_1/snowdon11_1.html

""Film!": The Arab revolutions and the filmmaker as amanuensis". *Visual Anthropology*. 29:3, 2016: 263-277.

Other articles and essays

"Distorting the Pain of Others". *In Media Res*. 4 April 2014. Available online at: mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/2014/04/04/distorting-pain-others

"Jouer la révolution". *Smala Cinéma*. 3, octobre 2014. 19-22.

"The Last Broadcast". *Found Footage Magazine*. 2, 2016. 84-88

Interviews

"Revolution Footage". Interview (+ Bruno Tracq) with Caroline Genart (in French). *Smala Cinéma*. 1, juin 2013. 66-71.

Interview with Pamela Cohn. *BOMB Magazine*. 20 February 2014. Available online at: bombmagazine.org/article/1000048/peter-snowden

"Filmer pour agir sur le présent". Interview with Catherine Ermakoff and Ulrike Lune Riboni (in French). *Vertigo*. 48, 2015. 17-30.

Conference papers

"Death and disfiguration: video allegories from the Arab revolutions", *Thinking Reality and Time Through Film: the International Lisbon Conference on Philosophy and Film*, Faculty of Letters, University of Lisbon, 6-10 May 2014.

"YouTube and the (re)invention of the Arab nation", *Media and the Margins: Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association annual conference*, Bournemouth University, 8-10 January 2014.

"'Film!': The Arab Spring and the filmmaker as amanuensis", *Visible Evidence XX*, Swedish Film Institute, Stockholm, Sweden, 15-18 August 2013.

"Game Over Mubarak: a play studies approach to the YouTube revolutions", *Video Vortex #9*, Leuphania University, Lüneburg, Germany, 1-2 March 2013.

"The Revolution will be uploaded: vernacular video and the Arab Spring", *Making Connections: 2nd Anarchist Studies Network Conference*, Loughborough University, UK, 3-5 September 2012.

"Video after the Arab Spring: learning from YouTube", panel presentation, *Open Engagement 2012*, Portland State University, Oregon, USA, 18-20 May 2012.

"No Revolution without a Revolution", panel presentation, *Media and the Arab Spring*, Clinton Institute for American Studies, University College, Dublin, Ireland, 14-15 April 2012.

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