

International PHD Programme in Audiovisual Studies

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Voices in real time

Interactive and transmedia testimonies of the Arab Spring, instant archive and new social movements discourses

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'The work of our time is to clarify to itself the meaning of its own desires'

K. Marx, 'For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing' (1844)¹

¹ K. Marx, 'For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing,' in *The Marx-Engles Reader*, ed Robert C. Tucker, 2nd edition, New York, W.W. Norton, p.1978, 12-15

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INTRODUCTION

I remember very well the day in which the 2001 Genoa protest against G8 took off. I was 20 years old and I would have liked to be there myself, but I was in hospital with a kidney infection. Being away from the most meaningful protest of my times seemed like a great defeat to me. At the same time, I have strong **memories of the protest**. I remember the hope, the fear, the sense of surprise when police charges started becoming stronger and stronger, the confusion when we learnt that someone had been shot amidst the crowd, the sense of loss and when it became clear that Carlo Giuliani was dead. I remember everything as though I was there myself. My sense of presence was not only caused by real time communication with people on the ground - my friends being constantly on the other end of the line sending texts on my rather rudimentary mobile phone, telling me everything that was happening in the streets- but also by the unprecedented coverage official media made of the protest. Every single TV station and radio was talking about it: the media impact of that protest was massive comparing to previous protests of the same period². I was away but connected all the time with the events, with the ability of confronting the official news with the news that were coming in through the phone and through the post on the Indymedia Blog³.

I have been going back to that very moment several times over the years, asking myself what was the reason why I had this strong feeling of being part of an experience I had not been physically part of. I realised that both the sense of simultaneity and interconnectedness to the people who were protesting in the streets were inflating my emotions and, consequently, my memories of the events. It was an episode in which both the transmedia and transnational dimension were acting on my own personal experience.

Ten years down the line, in 2011, I was in London finalising my graduation film at Film School. As we were locked into the dark edit suites in the English countryside, my friend told me that, together with the story of the occupation of Tahrir Square in Egypt, also the story of the student protest in London was trending on Twitter. We learnt that in Central London, less than half an hour away from us, hundreds of students were occupying the historical Jeremy Bentham Room inside University College London against the rise in tuition fees. We decided to go down there and see what was going on with our very eyes. What

² L. A. Lievrouw, *Alternative and Activist media. Digital Media and society series*, Polity, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 162-177

³ Indymedia Blog, *Genova il giorno piu' lungo*, 21st of July 2001, retrieved 25th of July 2001 available on <http://italy.indymedia.org> and on 'J21 Genova' on irc.indymedia.org

stroke us was the fact that the room was literally buzzing with people exchanging messages through information technologies – Macs, Iphones, Smart phones connected to each other and to others across the country and the world via Facebook and Twitter. The ideal of an independent media hub that the Media Desk in Genoa in 2001⁴ was already promoting and that had been pursued by the Indymedia movements in the late 1990s and, ever since the late 1960s, by the free radio and independent press movements⁵, or local and street Tv movements⁶, seemed to have suddenly been accomplished. New media seemed to have made possible to achieve one of the main goals of any social movement of the XXth century, that was at the heart of public media models second half of the XXIst century in the Western world. The idea of independent voices being able to reveal the hidden agendas of the official powers by showing the world what was the truth behind the bias of the official news, seemed now possible thanks to the world-wide extension of media networks – official, unofficial, social, interactive, locative, performative, participative media – where the media users were progressively engaging in the construction of the communication flux.

This massive shift is transforming the media ecology by reshaping the concepts of creative industries, audiences, media infrastructures and forms of communication. As Lievrouw rightly states, “throughout most of the XXth century a handful of firms and institutions dominated the media and information

⁴ For more references see L. A. Lievrouw, *op.cit.*, “*The Roots of Alternative and Activist Media*” pp. 28-61 and J. Hands, *@is for Activism – Dissent, Resistance and Rebellion in a Digital Culture*, Pluto Press, London, 2011, especially chapters “Mobil(e)sation” and “@ is also for Alter-Globalisation” pp. 125-161 where Hands draws a brief history of the evolution of mass mobilisation and direct action in the light of evolution of means of communication which at various levels progressively enhanced the ability to coordinate and move mass mobilisation from simple gathering to action. Hands draws a line which connects Mexico Zapatista Movement, 2001 Seattle movement, 2001 Porto Alegre World Social Forum, Factory recovery Movement in Argentina and the progressively prominent role of the internet in mass mobilisation. See also H. M. Cleaver, “The Zapatista Effect: The Internet and the Rise of An Alternative Political Fabric”, *Journal of International Affairs*, 51, 2, 2005, pp.621-40 and V. Aelst P. and Walgrave, S., “New Media, New Movements? The Role of the Internet in Shaping the ‘Anti-Globalisation’ Movement”, in Loader, B., van de Donk, Nixon, P. and Rucht, D. (eds.), *Cyberprotest*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp.97-121

⁵ See P. Brinson, “Liberation Frequency: The Free Radio Movement and Alternative Strategies of Media Relations”, *The Sociological Quarterly*, Volume 47, Issue 4, Fall 2006, M. Pasquinelli, *Media Activism. Strategie e pratiche della comunicazione indipendente*, Deriveapprodi, Roma, 2002 and M. Costa, *Il sublime tecnologico. Piccolo trattato di estetica della tecnologia*, Castelvecchi, Roma, 1998, F. Berardi Bifo, *Alice è il diavolo. Storia di una radio sovversiva*, Shake, Bologna, 2007

⁶ In reference to the history of local TVs see for example the story of Candida Tv in Rome, www.candida.tv. See also R. I. Janković, “Barging into the Collective Body of Images”, *Art-e-fact. Strategies of Resistance*, available at http://artefact.mi2.hr/a03/lang_en/art_candida_en.htm. The local TV was also key to the dissemination of info related to the grassroots coverage of 19th/21st of July 2001 demonstration in Genoa.

industries”⁷, with mass communication systems and integrated industrial mass production and distribution chains structuring collective “publics, markets, or audiences”. In the last two decades, instead, the proliferation of networked media has deeply reshaped the audience's engagement with the media. As Jenkins' famous “convergence paradigm”⁸ shows, the “digital turn” transformed the media sphere in three main directions. First, by facilitating the *flux of contents across different platforms*. Secondly, by promoting the *cooperation among different media industries sectors*. Third, by allowing the *audience's migration from media to media* in a constant search for different entertainment experiences.⁹ On the technological level, this transformation has actually broken the traditional link between infrastructures and forms of communication which had dominated the media system in the Twentieth century¹⁰. On a social level, it has facilitated the rise of a diffused “participatory culture”¹¹ and shared culture where media *audiences* and *consumers* act now as *users* and *participants (prosumers)*¹² “immersed in complex ecologies of divides, diversities, networks, communities and literacies”¹³.

Moreover, it is worth noting another element which is characteristic of contemporary media ecology. Rather than replacing the old media altogether, new media are adding their performativity to previous ones, creating a cumulative media effect. Within the sphere of this articulated transmedia system¹⁴, integrating old and new media, the question of access to media and Media literacy becomes more and more relevant for our contemporary times and it will become even more relevant in the course of the coming years¹⁵. Rather than blindly celebrating the revolution brought about by new media in contemporary mass communication¹⁶. I would like to keep this mutating media ecology at the heart of my

⁷ L. A. Lievrouw, *op.cit.*, Introduction, p.I

⁸ H. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York, New York University, 2006, Introduction

⁹ *Ibidem*

¹⁰ F. Zecca (ed.), *Il cinema della convergenza. Industria, racconto, pubblico*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis, 2012, p.10-11. See also F. Casetti, *Back to the Motherland. The Film in the Postmedia Age*, Screen, LII, Spring 2011, p.10 “old apparatus(..) is disintegrated in favour of multifunctional platforms, (...) old products tied to a single medium (...) are disintegrated in favour of a rich array of multi-platform and crossover products”

¹¹ H. Jenkins, R. Purushotma, K. Clinton, M. Weigel & A. J Robison, *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century*. Chicago: The John D. and Catherine McArthur Foundation, 2006, available at <http://www.digitalllearning.macfound.org/> p.XI

¹² See H. Jenkins, *Idem*, A. Toffler, *The Third Wave*, Bantam Book, New York, 1980, K. Varnelis, *Networked Publics*, Cambridge-London, MIT Press, 2009

¹³ L. A. Lievrouw, *Idem*

¹⁴ For a complete explanation of transmedia storytelling, and the distinction between *storyworlds* o *storytelling environments* - see F. Zecca (ed.), *Il cinema della convergenza. Industria, racconto, pubblico*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis, 2012, p. 26

¹⁵ Expand on Media Literacy

¹⁶ For an extensive debate on this see P. Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary*

research. The questions surrounding this issue will be used as a barometer to test the reach of this transformation. We are all aware of the fact that that these transformations are happening as we speak at high speed and that we need an ever evolving analytical framework to be able to understand them.

In the background of my analysis, I would like to keep the philosophical questions surrounding the more general relationship between citizens and participation, in which the evolving media history is ultimately immersed. As part of the history of essential liberties, which dates back to the 1215 Magna Charta, freedom of speech and of press have been taking a prominent place in the conception of *civil liberty* crossing philosophical and juridical thinking in France, Germany, England, Holland, Italy and the USA between the second half of the Eighteenth century and the second half of the Nineteenth century¹⁷. At the crossroads between the French Revolution and the first versions of the Declarations of Human Rights, these ideals were discussed by political philosophers (i.e. Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot, Kant, Hegel, Marx) as part of the philosophical and juridical definition of the role of the *homme/citoyen* and his rights in the modern sovereignty and State-nation formation. In the first versions of the Declarations of Human Rights freedom of speech and press were already connected to the concept of 'freedom of assembly'. As part of the process of modern formation of "public opinion" - which was discussed by Habermas in his famous book *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*¹⁸ – the role of 'participation' of the citizen has been progressively determined by the relationship among access to information, time of access to information and political agency. The whole conception of "progress"¹⁹ and its consequent framing of the relationship between history and subject, revolved, for German philosopher Immanuel Kant and others, around the ability of the historical subject to participate to the events of his own time, as inaugurated in Europe by the event of the French Revolution in 1789. But it is perhaps only through the idea of "actuality" (*Jetztzeit*) developed by Walter Benjamin in 1940s²⁰ that a proper alternative to the linear idea of 'progress' promoted by the Enlightenment comes to life. Benjamin's idea of actuality is, in fact, determined by a conception in which *non-linear, interrupted and intermittent history of the vanquished* is opposed to the linear homogeneous rational narrative of the history of winners. The transition from a scientific model to a hermeneutic model, opens up to a new

Activism, London, Pluto Press, 2001, Introduction.

¹⁷ L. Fales, *Liberta' civile e storia in Kant*, MA dissertation in Theoretical Philosophy, Università La Sapienza, Roma supervised by Prof. Filippo Gonnelli

¹⁸ J. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1962

¹⁹ See L. Fales, *Liberta' civile e storia in Kant*, MA dissertation in Theoretical Philosophy, Università La Sapienza, Roma supervised by Prof. Filippo Gonnelli

²⁰ W. Benjamin, *Angelus Novus*, Turin, Einaudi, 1995, p.76

historical intelligibility where the practice of *testimony* becomes the tool that allows explorations of the history of the oppressed and the oppressors, and opens a *discourse of the imaginary as 'image space'* (*Bildraum*). This idea is relevant to our discussion because it questions the reading of the relationship between citizens and participation to their history as univocal and unambiguous which lead us into the exploration of an inter relational *space of communication* and a *temporality* and *locality* in a post-colonial perspective, which, in the terms discussed by Homi Bhabha, questions the 'progressive metaphor of social cohesion' by allowing 'displaced, even decentralised strategies of signification" to come forward²¹. What is at the stake here is the concept of historical 'reality' and *whose* historical reality it is.

My main general focus in this Dissertation revolves around the question of **whether our sense of participation to contemporary historical events is effectively being facilitated or not by the media we are using**. In particular, my question revolves around the kind of agency that takes place in a communication space where offline and online actions contribute in the same amount in the shaping of the constitutional space of the communication exchange. My main examples are the protests in Tunisia and Egypt and, in particular, the space of Tahrir Square **as an example of the 'communicating vessels' dynamic between online and offline** spaces which took place there. In fact, if we consider Hayden White²², Keith Jenkins²³ conception of history as *the discourse that is accepted and circulated as history within a particular culture and period*, then we will conclude there is always a good/bad/contested/partial history. It is '*what counts as history*', rather what has some special claim to truth, that we should use as a concept to define the context of the historical action in which we are moving. The question becomes then what *kind* of history does the e.g. Facebook/Twitter record from Cairo represent? Does it produce an evidence of *participation in what* exactly? Should Tahir Square be considered a '*new communication space*' (Odin) which is extended by social media and instant messaging service?

A number of other questions are springing out of this main theoretical core. Did new media really change something in the relationship between citizens and the media? In what way do contemporary social movements promoting political and social change make use of new interactive and social media for events documentation? Is this different than the way Super8 materials was used by collectives from the late

²¹ H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994, p.149

²² H. Whyte, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1973

²³ K. Jenkins, *Rethinking History*, London, Routledge, 1991

1960s²⁴, VHS in the 1990s²⁵ or than the way in which early SD light cameras were allowing political filmmakers to document protests in the early 2000s? In what way does the material collected in real time and shared through the networks affect political agency in the world? How do we measure its possible impact?

The methodological tools I would like to use mainly derive from the 'semio-pragmatical' approach set up by Roger Odin, which is one of the most interesting recent approaches to Media Studies as addressing the question of language and communication in strong relationship to the context in which it shapes itself. This approach combines 'a cognitive dimension and a pragmatic dimension'²⁶ and it is particularly interesting for drawing a context in which the spectator's role in decoding the communication can be understood. I also use extensively concepts deriving from a Cultural Studies (Bhabha, Appadurai, Said) background, in particular Cultural Geography (Gregory, Telmissay), Visual Culture (Mitchell) and Media Anthropology (Gerbaudo), in order to define the specific context where the communication space of reference takes place. For the overarching conception of history, I instead refer to Whyte and K. Jenkins - history as the discourse that is accepted and circulated within a particular culture and period. For the philosophical section related to the definition of actuality, historicity and temporality, I also use the historical-conceptual framework by R.Koselleck and post-structuralist framework by Foucault. In the studies of transmedia and interactive storytelling, I refer mainly to Jenkins and to Gaudenzi, who both approach interactive storytelling as a process focused on the *user's agency*, which deeply challenges the traditional film/audience duality characteristic of Film Studies approach (Gaudenzi, 2013)²⁷.

Defining the research field : transmedia or interactive documentaries?

Defining my research field more precisely, requires a preliminary definition of what is the difference between *transmedia and interactive storytelling*. The definition of *transmedia storytelling* focuses itself on the interaction among different media between themselves – considering the different media as providers of different textual layers and vectors of different semiotical apparatuses. *Transmedia storytelling* analyses

²⁴ T. Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*, University of California Press

²⁵ G. N. Smith and T. Wollen (eds.), *After the Wall. Broadcasting in Germany*, BFI, London, 1991

²⁶ W. Buckland, *The Cognitive Semiotics of Film*, Cambridge University Press, p. 79-82.

²⁷ Gaudenzi, S., *The Living Documentary: from representing reality to co-creating reality in digital interactive documentary*, Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Goldsmiths College, January 2013, p. 15

the narrative from the point of view of the interaction between textual dimensions which are carriers of different meaning universes. The idea of *interactive storytelling* is instead more focused on the narratological tools as they are employed in the narration. A very basic notion of *interactive storytelling* is that this is 'a form of digital entertainment in which users create or influence a dramatic storyline through actions, either by issuing commands to the story's protagonist, or acting as a general director of events in the narrative. Interactive storytelling is a medium where the narrative, and its evolution, can be influenced in real-time by a user'²⁸ (Portaeus, Cavazza, Charles, 2010). The *relationship between the medium and the user* is here considered key to the construction of the narrative and the user's intervention in the story is planned and becomes the main action's engine of the whole platform's functioning system.

Whereas most *interactive platforms* are taking some prescriptive functioning characters from video games – such as the existence of rules which cannot be broken, thus shaping the boundaries within which the user can move him/herself- in the realm of *interactive documentary storytelling* the unpredictable and surprising element of the performance breaks in, becoming part of the story. The allowance of user-generated content in what was before considered the 'walled garden' of the documentary world was facilitated by Web 2.0 collaborative logic, opening new perspectives in which participation between audience/users and makers takes new unplanned turns²⁹ (Gaudenzi, 2013) and becoming an open, creative field where the potential forms of participation are multiple and infinite. Gaudenzi's hypothesis is that 'participative, situated and locative media can enhance a view of reality, where “doing” is a way of being and of perceiving' (Gaudenzi, 2013).

Sustained by Web 2.0's 'implicit architecture of participation' (O'Reilly, 2005)³⁰ and immersed in the logic of participation and sharing which are part of most of softwares and applications (see Ito, 2005; Koskinen, 2004; Landow, 2006; Wesch, 2007)³¹ as well as many contemporary art experiments (see Bourriaud, 2002;

²⁸ J.Portaeus, M. Cavazza, F. Charles, *Applying planning to interactive storytelling: Narrative control using state constraints*, 2010 available at <http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1869399>

²⁹ S. Gaudenzi, <http://www.interactivedocumentary.net/about/me/>. On her website Gaudenzi shares parts of her in-progress PHD research “*Interactive Documentary: towards an aesthetic of the multiple*” where she discusses the future of interactive documentary narration in the realm of new media.

³⁰ O'Reilly T, *What is Web 2.0? Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software*, 2005.. Available at: <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html> (accessed 10 June 2013)

³¹ Ito M, *Intimate visual co-presence*, 2005 . Available at: www.spasojevic.org/pics/PICS/ito.ubicomp05.pdf (accessed 10 June 2013), Koskinen I, *Seeing with mobile images: Towards perpetual visual contact*. Available at: <http://www.fil.hu/mobil/2004/> (accessed 10 June 2013), Landow G, *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization*, Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004, Wesch M., “What is Web 2.0?

Lapenta, 2011; MacDonald and Basu, 2007)³², *interactive documentaries* “generate new, creative, non-linear forms of engagement and interaction between viewers, authors and the material itself, thus opening up the terrain for a new politics of viewing and meaning-making”³³. As Paolo Favero states, ‘no longer “directors”, the film-makers must now envision their role as that of orchestrators and think of their role as that of *curators of an archive*. Shuddhabrata Sengupta, a member of Delhi-based RAQS Media Collective, suggests that the scope of the image-maker, documentarist or artist today is no longer that of showing what was previously unseen (today this, with the present spread of new imaging technologies, can be done by anyone). Rather their duty is to create and curate a space in which viewers can share their own experiences and reflections around topics characterising their everyday life’³⁴.

Towards a definition of interactive documentaries as “living” entities

For the discussion on what documentary is, I will refer to the complete book *Imagining Reality*, compiled by M. Cousins, K. MacDonald (Cousins, MacDonald, 2006)³⁵, which testifies all forms of storytelling “of reality” in its linear form. The reason why I decided not to embark in this discussion, is to do with the fact that documentary is negotiated either in relationship to the notion of “reality” which is called into question by the translation of a certain recognised reality into the form of storytelling or, else, in relationship to the “process of filmmaking” which is employed in the making of it. I will instead discuss Gaudenzi’s definition of interactive documentaries as “relational” identities – *an encounter between the user and the digital platform* – in relationship to a more general concept of linear documentary, which implies the presence of a viewer participating in the act of watching a finished documentary film, a documentary system which is stable in its edited form and a linear storytelling system, where a story is going from A to B. The idea of documentary, in its traditional concept, as a defining “mode” of storytelling, fails to define the “experience” of actively taking part to the process of documenting reality - if not in the form of participating, as a viewer, to the filmmaking experience of the filmmaker himself. This is an interesting discussion in regards to documentary films, especially because various recent examples – like ‘*The Driver, the Leader and the Driver’s wife*’ (UK/ South Africa, 1991) by Nick Broomfield or Kim Bartley and

What does it mean for Anthropology?’, *Anthropology News* 48(5), 2007, p.30–31

³² Bourriaud N., *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon, Les presses du réel, 2002, Lapenta F., “Locative media and the digital visualization of space, place and information”. *Visual Studies* 26, 2012, p. 1–3., MacDonald S and Basu P (eds), *Exhibition Experiments*, London, Blackwell, 2007

³³ P. Favero, “Getting our hands dirty (again): Interactive documentaries and the meaning of images in the digital age”, *Journal of Material Culture*, 2013 18: 259, <http://mcu.sagepub.com/content/18/3/259>

³⁴ *Idem*, p. 7

³⁵ Cousins M, MacDonald K., *Imagining Reality*, Faber and Faber, London, 2006

Donnacha O' Brien's '*Revolution Will not be Televised*' (UK/ Venezuela, 2003) - play with the idea of dismantling the “suspension of disbelief” by exposing the process of filmmaking and letting the viewer enter in the space behind the camera.

Interactive documentaries are, instead, characterised by a shift in the role of the viewer towards *full agency* within the documentary system, a shift in the focus of the action towards the registration of the *process* of encounter between the user and the digital platform, and the employment of *non-linear narrative features* that create a form of exchange between the user and the digital platform (Gaudenzi, 2013). This process is described in the sense of a transformative, *adaptive and responsive ecosystem* (Bisoni, Innocenti, 2013), which goes beyond the mechanism of negotiating reality (Winston, 1995), typical to all forms of traditional, linear storytelling, towards a system of active and *direct participation* (Gaudenzi 2013).

According to Gaudenzi, 'interactive documentaries should be seen as “relational” entities, rather than static ones (...). Their interactive nature demands an active participation of the user, who, *de facto*, becomes a doer, not a viewer. The user needs to act on, interact with, the interactive documentary for it to materialise itself into a new screen. The user is therefore not an external but rather an internal, “part” of the system’ (Gaudenzi, 2013)³⁶. Gaudenzi underscores the fact that the debate on *relationality* is connected to the much wider debate on *affect* (Parisi, 2004, Cough 2008)³⁷ which has been taking place in the realm of Cultural Studies starting from the '90s, which engages with the idea that *affect* is a set of 'pre-bodily forces augmenting or diminishing a body's capacity to act' (Cough, 2000, 2008). This mechanism, by focusing on an evolving *perception* capacity displayed by the audience rather than a static *cognitive/emotional* function, shifts the focus of the action on the “process” and on the “becoming”, rather than on the “being” and the “structure” (Gaudenzi, 2013).

Gaudenzi further defines interactive documentaries as '*living documentaries*' (Gaudenzi, 2013), in the light of the “*liveness and adaptability*” which makes these documentaries change according to their own internal “transformational power” (Gaudenzi, 2013). Interactive documentaries are, therefore, seen as audiovisual works which are able to reorganise themselves in relation to their *environment*, following the idea that a living *autopoietic* being (Maturana and Varela, 1980)³⁸ is autonomous and changes in relation to an

³⁶ Gaudenzi, S., *The Living Documentary: from representing reality to co-creating reality in digital interactive documentary*, Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Goldsmiths College, January 2013, p. 15

³⁷ L. Parisi, *Abstract Sex, Philosophy, Bio-Technology and the Mutations of Desire*, London, Continuum, 2004, P. T. Clough, 'The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedicine and Bodies', *Theory and Cultural Society*, 25:1, 2008

³⁸ Maturana H., *Ontology of Observing: The biological Foundations of Self-Consciousness and the Physical Domain of Existence*, in *Cybernetic Theory, An In Depth Exploration of the Thought of Humberto R. Maturana, W.T. Powers and E. von Glasersfeld*, American Society of Cybernetics, Felton CA, 1988

interaction with its *environment* (Gaudenzi, 2013). If it's true that these kind of processes are mostly taking place in the digital world, it is also true that they do not depend on digital devices as apparatuses.

Why is this useful in relation to Tabrir Square? Why does this matter?

This perception-based process can therefore be a useful tool for us, if applied to the *Tabrir Square communication space* we are using as heuristic tool in this essay. It proves especially useful, in relation to the *feedback dynamic* between online/offline communities that serves as a descriptive model for those interactive forms of documentation which were produced “in real time” to navigate that space-in-between online and offline interactions. As *feedback dynamic* we want to describe 'a string of feed-back loops (action/reaction) which ties them together and transforms them both' (Gaudenzi, 2013). “Real time” will be used in the same way as a heuristic concept, which can help us to identify the shaping up of a non-linear interactive narrative – the translation in time and space of the documentation of a real life experience – and which translates, *almost* immediately, into a *process-based relationship with the time and space of narration*. The digital works we will refer to, as, for example, '*18 Days in Egypt*', entertain an open relationship with the time and the space of the events they are documenting.

Could we say that this communication space in itself behaves like a media platform in itself, which interacts and adapts its media response to the changing environment? Is this communication space a media platform that is curated by the people who live the protest in person and those who follow it from afar, by those who document it on the ground, those who share it and those who archive it? Or, else said, is the high speed of information and the technological possibilities provided by mobile cameras to on the ground and share visual material almost in “real time” through social media, giving a chance to create *a stream of multiple historical narratives* which are already being stored in a collective communication space? Is it maybe possible to definite this as an *interactive documentary platform*, which includes the actions of being on the ground, document events, share material and leave behind a non-linear stream of (un)edited information that can be easily re-organised only through non-linear documentary features?

Let's take the example of Egyptian collective Mosireen. The collective operates on multiple levels. Around the time of the 2011 Egyptian uprising, the collective provided filmmaking courses on a 'pay-what-you-can' basis in downtown Cairo or free access courses to Egyptian people in town and villages on how to make movies. They provided free access to technical support and film and sound equipment. They curated an open Youtube platform³⁹ for people to post their own videos about protest in order to challenge official

³⁹ The Mosireen Collective YouTube channel, available on the web at www.youtube.com/user/Mosireen. Retrieved December 2014. According to *Wikipedia*, Mosireen's Youtube channel holds the record for

media narrative. They organised independent screenings in protest sites (the famous “Tahrir Cinema” in Tahrir Square), where people could watch almost in “real time” footage filmed on the ground by people like them. They provided access to an extensive library of footage from the revolution. They planned actions to archive and store long-term all materials collected on the ground⁴⁰. This set of actions all reflect the engagement with a public sphere that was seen as representative only if created by the largest of people belonging to it, according to a *direct participation principle*. The idea that a public sphere can be representative of the real composition of society, only if the largest number of people belonging it, directly participate and engage in the making of a collective event, is now seen as *directly related to the production of an historical narrative and the creation of the news*⁴¹.

The technological possibilities offered by digital platforms and digital storytelling features developed with it seem to be not so much a cause, but rather an effect, of an arising awareness that in the field of media exists the possibility of creating a powerful tool of connection between *participation, historical narration and social agency*. What I would argue is that this kind of use of technology leaves a *trace of participation related to the taking part of the events of the present*, which can be found in the stream of information recorded by digital platforms and social media, which already, *in themselves, constitute a form of storytelling of the present* that needs to be understood and analysed.

An underlying set of questions in this text entails the *pertinence, significance and topicality* of the subject in relation to ways of participation to contemporary political processes. Why does this all matter to us? Is this just about Tahrir Square and the story pertaining one specific historical process, or is this relevant on a bigger scale? How much can be believed that the presence of social media really played a significant part in the way protest was organised and in the way people reacted to the communication dynamics on the ground? Is this process just a feature of today's life, which is therefore relevant only on a descriptive level,

most all-time views of a non-profit organization in Egypt with over 5 million total views since October 2011 and a playlist of over 250 produced by the collective, published without credits and can have between one and thirty people working on it. Their films have been featured at several European film festivals as well as on TV channels like Al Jazeera. See A.A.V.V., “Mosireen”, *Wikipedia*, available on the web at <http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosireen>. Retrieved December 2014

⁴⁰ R. El-Shimi, “Mosireen Media Collective calls for donations online to remain independent”, *Abram Online*, 23rd of Sept, 2012, available at <http://english.ahram.Org.eg/NewsContent/5/32/53436/Arts-Culture/Film/Mosireen-Media-Collective-calls-for-donations-onli.aspx>. For info about this campaign check Indie Go Go campaign, *Mosireen: Media Collective in Cairo*, available at <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/mosireen-independent-media-collective-in-cairo>

⁴¹ The Mosireen collective also hosts an extensive video archive of the Egyptian revolution, which is constantly being updated and had more than a 100 filmmakers, professional and amateurs, contributing to it. A.A.V.V., “Mosireen”, *Ibidem*

or is it more than that? I would argue that understanding this process is actually relevant because it poses questions related to the flux of data by which we will judge revolution and protest in the years to come. As a mean of foreshadowing the process this text will try to unfold – the exploration into a field which is rather new and unmapped - I will raise questions about *how* the effectivity of this process can be judged. The “storytelling dynamic” will be relevant here not so much in the light of the media used to produced the narration, but in the way the communication space worked in shaping something into a satisfactory narrative. Storytelling will be conceived here as a 'wiki process', where individual components are engaged together into weaving a story. If my descriptive hypothesis is correct in describing what was taking place in Tahrir Square *as an exponential process, a matrix of assembling a body of information* (building up a picture, reporting info, passing them on, building message boards etc..) performed by a growing number of people along the way, then the question becomes *what part* was this dynamic performed by means of combination of physical gathering and social media messaging systems itself really playing to incentivise people in participating into the political process.

The inherent fluidity of social media make social media messages transitioning the web highly perishable material. Some threads and paths get lost and some websites disappear, either because they are not renewed or because they are obscured by censorship dynamics. It is therefore quite difficult at times to reconstruct all paths building a “story” on social media. It will be difficult to find standardized ways to archive this material in the future, and this one of the biggest challenges lying ahead for scholars interested in this kind of topic. Despite all this, I am confident that on this trodden path lies the pertinence of this study, as a way to question whether this “new communication space” here described it is actually becoming a dominant way to participate into the political process.

Exploring the research field. What actions and whose voices?

The interest for the narrative characteristics incorporated by this type of process, which often tries to reproduce mimetic forms of communication used in a way that is open-ended, and daily fluid uses made by social media users, led me to extensive field research, with the aim of collecting audiovisual texts useful for my study. My research was carried out through participation in activities and practices related to the understanding of the functioning of social networks, correlated to interviews, meetings with activists and filmmakers engaged in those kind of practices, active interactive multimedia experimentation, participation in seminars with a specific focus on film and interactive products developed after the season of the 'Arab Spring' and participation to festivals where this kind of audiovisual products where showcased

– from Sheffield Doc/ Fest , IDFA , i-Docs and Power to Pixels, to a number of Human Rights Film Festivals and exhibitions related to this subject. My research focuses primarily on North Africa and the Middle East (Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey, Syria – with reference also to Greece, Spain and the global occupy movements). This area proved important a quite unique research field. It was a laboratory for experimentation and cultural horizon in which a specific use of the new media developed, especially during the years 2011-2012. The centrality of this regional area was especially related to its socio-political and socio-economic dynamics, and specifically in relationship to the numerous uprisings and political crises which took place locally within the above mentioned timeframe. This situation thus gave rise to unprecedented web and social media mobilisation, with consequent dissemination of elaborate audiovisual strategies as *means of expression, place of storage, creative workshops, distribution tools and objects of the communication process itself.*

The theoretical - cognitive path suggested by the materials which I collected and the prospects that opened up because of the aforesaid research experiences, opened a route in the direction of the *problematization of the category of time and space* as questioned within the new epistemological paradigm suggested by social media, and the emergence of elaborate audiovisual strategies that are translating social media feature into narrative-oriented devices. I noticed that these strategies were structurally disengaging with classical narrative features. In particular, I decided to focus on the *tension between real time narration and memory.* I consider this to be a new frontier in artistic and audiovisual research stimulated by the need to give shape to a story that is in itself becoming more 'fast, elusive and fluid', *and its almost immediate transformation in narrative memory, resulting in the process of the filing of experiences.*

I found it especially challenging to reflect on the widespread attempt to find new ways to give voice to present-time collective stories, oriented at enhancing a live memory of the present – with the paradox that, according to the conception of time that seems to be widespread within the field of new technologies, every form of narration becomes 'already', immediately, memory. Subsequently three sub-questions came to my mind: which relationship connects the streets and the network? And what is the meaning of collective action in terms of something affecting public/collective imagination? Uncertainty as created by current world events is taken increasingly as the starting point for a study of identity, meaning-making, self-narratives and life strategising. Is that a need that the aforementioned audiovisuals intersect in a specific way? And then , consequently, whose reality finds expression through interactive and transmedia documentary projects and what kind of 'reality' is there represented? *Whose voice is represented? Who gets to tell which story?*

My main case study is the interactive crowd-sourced documentary about the Egyptian revolution called *'18 Days in Egypt'* by Jigar Mehta and Yasmin Elayat (Egypt/USA) and I focus especially on the use and interaction among different social and collective media like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, Youtube as well as crowdfunding campaign sites like IndieGoGo, Kickstarter etc..in Tunisia, Egypt and Turkey.

I also mention various other examples of the use of more traditional documentaries and well as interactive and transmedia projects also in Iran, Bahrain, Yemen, Palestine, Greece, Spain, USA. Among the other cases of interactive documentaries focusing on protest I studied during my research there are: *'Gaza/Sderot'* (Israel/ Palestine/ Germany/France), *'The Syrian Migration'* (UK) *'On Screen Off record'* (Syria), *'Points of View'* (Palestine), *'The Prysma GR 2011'* (Greece), *'15M'* interactive documentary (Spain), *'Sandy Storyline'* (Usa), *'Geld.gr'* (Germany/Greece).

As for other more traditional documentaries using a linear storytelling techniques I studied, among others, *'The Square'* by Jehane Noujaim, *'Syria Across the Lines'* by Olly Lambert, *'Tabrir'* by Stefano Savona, *'The Green Wave'* by Ali Samadi Ahadi, *'Althawra...Khabar (Reporting...A Revolution)'* by Bassam Mortada, *A Reluctant Revolutionary'* by Sean McAllister, *'Fragments of a Revolution'* by Anonymous, *'Rouge Parole'* by Elyes Baccar, *'Tabrir, the Good, the Bad and the Politician'* by T. Ezzat, A.Abdalla, A.Amin, A.Salama, *'The Act of Killing'* by Joshua Hoppenheimer and others. Then I mention some fiction films such as *'Bye Bye'* by Paul Geday, *'La Vierge, le Copte et moi'* by Nabir Abdel Messeeh.

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Chapter I – *Documenting events in the making today*

1.1. Documenting collective events in their actuality. A Pre-history

The architecture of this work is rooted in the temporal. Every human problem must be considered from the standpoint of time.

(F.Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, London, Pluto Press, 1967)⁴²

1.1.1. *The formation of the modern public sphere: actuality and participation*

The philosophical concept of actuality

Actuality is one of the concepts that needs to be defined in a preliminary stage of this discussion, in order to lay the analytical foundation of the relationship between citizens and their participation to their own historical time. From this point of view, it will be possible to investigate the translation of this relationship into discursive structures that are transformed through media into complex inter-relational languages at a specific moment in time. We are immediately entering here the realm of political, through the definition of the relationship between *narration, participation and citizenship* as main focus of this discussion. I will deliberately not be using the narrative approach developed by Media Studies, I will not be trying to infer the existence of universal structures in the realm of the media and in relation to media discourses. On the contrary, I will be applying a history-informed approach to the concept of *actuality* as result of the reading of a specific philosophy of history and its own internal movement. Far from being a neutral concept in its own terms, *actuality* has instead been defined, since the conception developed by philosophers Gottlieb Leibniz and Immanuel Kant in the XVIIIth Century, as a fundamentally process-oriented concept, strictly dependant on an idea of *time* as seen as one of the elements forming (together with *space* and *number*) that intellectual structure within which humans parse and compare events. In this context, *actuality* is then part of a general idea of history conceived as a *process*, as *time -in -passing*, crossed by the idea of *temporality* which pertains to a specific era. This might seem a paradox, since in the common definition of *actuality* the element of '*in process*' doesn't seem to be so prominent and the whole weight seem to be set on the '*here and now*'. Interestingly enough, though, the definition of *actuality* as the manifestation of the

⁴² F.Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, London, Pluto Press, 1967

moment from which past, present and future can be defined, is, in a general sense, a concept which mixes the idea of *punctual* and *processual*, defining a specific time and space in which the subject of history is placed and from which the sense of belonging to it can be defined, set and perceived.

The reason why understanding Western philosophical definition of *actuality* becomes relevant to our discussion, pertains especially to the attempt of avoiding the readings of a definition of *history* that is univocal and unambiguous within Western philosophy itself. In the transition from a scientific model to a hermeneutic model, as part of a discussion on the crisis of sciences inaugurated by philosopher Edmund Husserl's phenomenological approach in the first decades of the Twentieth century, a new historical intelligibility started appearing. This intelligibility, declined by Walter Benjamin in historical-materialistic terms, was inherently critical to the idea of history as univocal. It was taking from the idea of history as a process the idea that the practice of *testimony* could be a tool for the explorations of oppressed and oppressors' history, opening the way to a discourse of the *imaginary* as 'image space' (*Bildraum*)⁴³. This idea is relevant to our discussion because it questions the reading of the relationship between citizens and the way they participate to their history as something immediately and structurally non-problematic. It leads to the heart of the argument where lies a fundamental contradiction *within* the formation of Western reason. *As the discourse that is accepted and circulated as history within a particular culture and period*⁴⁴, history is considered as good/bad/contested/partial history. In its inherent discursive nature, the historical discourse of a specific time sets the parameters within which narratives can be shared and memories reconstructed. By setting the parameters of a certain idea of history and its internal philosophical movement, the idea of *actuality that every time had of itself*, becomes strategically crucial to define the limitations and boundaries its own narration is subjected to. In the terms set by Reinhart Koselleck (Koselleck, 1989), it is crucial to define the movement of concept that a conception of history is animated by. It becomes thus very relevant to us in the light of the discussion on narrating, archiving and sharing memories in a time closer and closer to actuality that we are about to pursue in the coming chapters. Every narration is essentially historical in the sense mentioned above.

Following the game of continuous encroachment of disciplinary boundaries that marked the path of Walter Benjamin⁴⁵, I will reconstruct the process of rebuilding and overthrowing that Benjamin makes of the logic of progress theorised by Kant and I will underscore the continuity between the Kantian idea of '*taking charge of our own historical actuality*' and Benjamin's concept of '*actuality*' (*Jetztzeit*). This is part of an

⁴³ W. Benjamin, *Angelus Novus*, Turin, Einaudi, 1995, p.76

⁴⁴ H. Whyte, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1973

⁴⁵ See T. W. Adorno, *Prismi*, Turin, Einaudi, 1972, p.234. He describes Benjamin's method in terms of "*Mehrdigkeit*"

attempt to understand the evolution of historical narratives' conceptions that have informed *the relationship between events, public, participation and historical narration*, as mentioned above, since the time in which this relationship was first set during the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

Immanuel Kant is, in fact, the first philosopher who actively reflected on the process of taking part to the historical process on the part of the theoretician himself. His idea of *enlightenment* was to be “*reflective consciousness of the discourse on the present*”. On the other hand, Benjamin, much later, opens a rift with positivist history and carves out a conception in which the non-linearity, interruptions and intermittent history of the vanquished is opposed to the linear homogeneous rational history of the winners. The transition from scientific model to hermeneutic model, opens the way to a new historical intelligibility, which poses some interesting questions that it might be useful to analyse as foundations of this discussion. The practice of testimony becomes in Benjamin's terms what allows us 'to explore the history of the oppressed and the oppressors', and it opens a discourse of the imaginary as “image space” (*Bildraum*) (Benjamin, 1940).

The reason why I would like to enter the philosophical question related to actuality in regards to historical intelligibility and narration, has, again, mainly to do with the idea of *participation*. As part of the process of modern formation of *public opinion* - which was discussed by Habermas in his famous book of 1962⁴⁶ – the role of *participation* of the citizen has been progressively determined by the *relationship among access to information, time of access to information and political agency*. The whole conception of *progress* and its consequent framing of the relationship between history and subject, revolved, for philosopher Immanuel Kant and others, around the ability of the historical subject to participate to the events of its own time as inaugurated in Europe by the Enlightenment and especially by the French Revolution in 1789. So, it becomes essential to understand how this idea came to life and what an extraordinary change in perspective it brought about. This is important in order to perceive how to tackle the question of whether new forms of narrating the present are shaped by *a new concept of our own actuality* or not and whether this entails to an entirely *different concept of participation*.

This sense of *time* and *history* which is deeply rooted into the parameters of Western philosophy, has been widely and effectively criticised in the course of the 1980s and 90s by crucial figures of Cultural Studies like Homi Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994) and Arjun Appadurai, (Appadurai, 2001)⁴⁷- who relied on post-

⁴⁶ J. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1962

⁴⁷ Together with historians like Edward Said (Said, 1978, 1981), literary critics like Frederic Jameson (Jameson, 1986, 1991) and post-marxist philosophers like Etienne Balibar (Balibar, 1991)

modern and post-structuralist methodologies⁴⁸ to found a new approach to the relationship between history, temporality, communities and imagination, reflected in a new conception of *narrative*. This has opened the way to an entirely different conception of *historical discourse*. We will talk about this later in detail, and with specific mention of Appadurai's concept of 'community of feelings' (Appadurai, 2001), in the next chapter in relation to the notion of *imagination*⁴⁹. What is worth introducing here is the concept of 'gathering the present' as a shift towards a conception of participation to historical time that breaks entirely with the idea of *historicity*, which brings inscribed in its own constitution the idea of progressive narration and the project of the reduction to a rational unity which covers up the 'timeless' discourse of irrationality (Bhabha, 1994), towards a new exploration, also in visual terms, of *temporality* and *locality* in a post-colonial perspective, which questions the 'progressive metaphor of social cohesion'⁵⁰(Bhabha, 1994).

Enlightenment as reflective consciousness on the present

Enlightenment is the Man's emergence from the minority which he himself is guilty of. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. Culprit is this minority, when its cause is not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. *Sapere aude!* Have the courage to use your own understanding! This is therefore the watchword of Enlightenment⁵¹.

(I. Kant, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung*, 1784, in *KGS VIII*; it. ed. in Id., *Scritti di storia, politica e diritto*, (ed.) F. Gonnelli, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2004, p.45)

Concerning the afore-mentioned passage from the Kantian text *Was ist Aufklärung?* (Kant, 1784), it is interesting to dwell on the notorious Foucault's notorious interpretation of it in *Qu'est-ce que les lumières?*⁵² (Foucault, 1984). In this paper, Foucault gleans all the innovative research by Kant in the introduction of a "literally disturbing question for philosophy"⁵³, which fully reorganizes the relationship between the

⁴⁸ See the 'archeology of knowledge' and articulation between knowledge and power set by Michael Foucault or the theory of 'ethnographic act' by Claude Lévi Strauss

⁴⁹ For a discussion on "imagination", see Paragraph 1.2.1 *Global imagination, Local imagining. A Cultural Studies Toolbox for Media Representation in the Global World* of this text.

⁵⁰ *Idem*, p.142

⁵¹ I. Kant, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*, 1784, in *KGS VIII*; it. ed. in Id., *Scritti di storia, politica e diritto*, (ed.) F. Gonnelli, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2004, p.45

⁵² M. Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que les lumières?" (1984), in *op.cit.*, pp. 253-261. On the same subject M.Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société. Cours au Collège de France 1975-76*, Gallimard-Seuil, Paris 1997, pp. 20-23

⁵³ S. Chignola, *L'impossibile del sovrano. Governamentalità e liberalismo in Michel Foucault*, in Id.,

subject and his own historical relevance and, consequently, with the action upon and inside his own actuality. There is in fact an impulse, starting from the idea of history, towards the methodological shift that leads Kant to move from an anthropological-ethical reasoning that had accompanied the 1784 historical writing, *Ideas zu einer Geschichte allgemeinen in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, to that of political action, that he inaugurates explicitly from the writing on the Enlightenment. In fact, according to Foucault, it is precisely through this text that the critical and problematic *relationship between the philosopher who writes and his own historical relevance* starts to appear. From the perspective of Foucault's interpretation, Kant ushers in a "practice of the limit" within the discourse of modernity, bringing to light the issue of the relationship with the present and the problematisation "of its discursive actuality"⁵⁴ (Foucault, 1984).

From Foucault's point of view, this opens a practice of interrogation of the present which involves a reflection, on the part of the theoretician, on his taking part in the process of this 'historical actuality' within which he himself is located. Starting from the outlet of the word Enlightenment, it is, therefore, *the thinker himself who proves to be able to produce his own actuality with his own thinking*.

The discourse of the Enlightenment, as enquiry and philosophical problem about itself, as question on the 'today' and as self-nominated process of 'enlightenment', shows the process-oriented structure within Kant's historical conception. The subject is placed in a position of "decision-making"⁵⁵ towards his own historical present, resulting in the development of an "attitude that inverts the notion of what is possible"⁵⁶. Regarding our own present, it thus becomes possible to act and have an impact, reversing the process of self-induced "minority" (*Unmündigkeit*) and reversing the historical process direction. This is due to the work of a collective subject, the *public (Publikum)*, which produces its own culture (*Kultur*), its own social value (Kant, 1784).

In fact, the problem of Kant, according to Foucault, can be framed in terms of "outcome" (*Ausgang*) (Foucault, 1984): this outcome "limits the present, which the thought belongs to, in terms of a difference that needs to be fixed"⁵⁷. This "output" is what constitutes the proper task of the Enlightenment: it can come true only if the historical-political condition of possibility is realised. The task involves the outflow from the minor age in which the man-citizen of the era of 'enlightened despotism' is stuck (Kant, 1784). Minority is, therefore, "a certain state of our own will that accepts the authority of another to guide us

Governare la vita, Un seminario sui Corsi di Michel Foucault al Collège de France (1977-1979), (ed.) Ombrecorte, Verona, 2006, p. 37

⁵⁴ M. Foucault, *Idem*, p. 254

⁵⁵ S. Chignola, *Idem*, p. 38

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*

⁵⁷ *Idem*, p. 37

into areas in which we should make use of the reason" . Culprit is this minority precisely because it is, in part, self-produced.

On the other hand, this minority is both the result of the relationship of mutual determination between the moral and political education of a man in society and the education of the citizen as organised by the power.

First of all it is necessary to emphasize the voluntary element contained in the concept of "minority" as guilty (*selbstverschuldeten*)⁵⁸. In fact, mediation in view of the ideal of the "age of majority" (*Mündigkeit*), characteristic element of the process of the Enlightenment itself, is, at the level of the individual man, the result of the "revolution inside the man" of which Kant speaks in his *Anthropologie*. This corresponds to the output from the same minority, which is understood as hard work and foundation of an "emancipated" attitude of mind (*Selbstbemühung*) (Kant, 1784)⁵⁹, that is moral and in keeping with the ideal itself.

Secondly, at the collective level, it must be understood what are the terms of the relationship among freedom from minority caused by "surveillance" of the "guardians", freedom to "make public use of the reason" and the centrality of the concept of the *public* (*Publizität*)⁶⁰ (Habermas, 1962), as elements of mediation between politics and moral.

Man is guilty of living under the protection of someone else. He will not, therefore, be able to free himself alone. The Enlightenment can be realized only through the action of a collective subject, namely the *Publikum*. Each person, in the era of freedom, will be able to enlighten himself, spreading "the spirit of a rational estimate of the value of its every man and his vocation to think for himself"⁶¹.

At this point it is clear, as Foucault argues, that the *Aufklärung* is "defined by the change of the pre-existing relationship between will, authority, and the use of reason"⁶²: the will is in itself the authority to make the practical use of our own reason, but, at the same time this change happens in terms of *culture* (*Kultur*), which will end up coinciding with the historical movement itself. This sphere is one in which the humanity (*Menschheit*) is embedded into the *public* (*Publikum*) (Kant, 1784). This collective subject is understood on a double level: on the one hand it is the subject of universal history, the actor in the philosophy of history, to which Kant was referring already and, on the other hand, the subject of a

⁵⁸ I. Kant, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*, 1784, in *KGS VIII*; it. ed. in Id., *Scritti di storia, politica e diritto*, (ed.) F. Gonnelli, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2004, p.45

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*

⁶⁰ See J.Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1962, it.ed. Id., *Storia e critica dell'opinione pubblica*, trad. di A.Illuminati, F.Masini e W. Perretta

⁶¹ I. Kant, *Was ist Aufklärung.*, p. 46

⁶² M. Foucault, *Idem*, p. 219

historically specific audience of readers and listeners in the contemporary era of enlightened despotism.

The thrust of minority emancipation takes place, then, on two different levels in a way that overthrows the term "*public*" (*öffentlich*) (Kant, 1784) within the text. Because this collective subject is formed, it is necessary that there is "the freedom to do public use of his reason"⁶³ Kant, 1784). In the era of realised Enlightenment man and citizen should come to coincide and the public sphere should begin to have an impact on society.

Between the lines of the text a radical political proposal is outlined. The real foundation of power is that of popular sovereignty. The general will inspired by Rousseau is not yet historically prepared to legislate for itself, but the foundation of sovereignty, based on the original contract, constitutively resides in the people, not in the monarch. Because the people acquire full freedom to act, realizing practically the Enlightenment, it will be necessary for nature to develop its historical aim, which is the tendency to "free thought." In this sense, notes Rotenstreich, Kant "sees political and social existence as a primary condition for the exercise of Enlightenment, as well as Enlightenment being a primary step towards the realization of human freedom"⁶⁴. This ability to short-circuit the present, identified by Kant within the discourse of universal history, appears, therefore, as a burst of reflective and historical thinking, resulting in a vision of progress that coincides for the first time with its narrative, its performance and its internal consciously reflective descriptive logic. The insight that Foucault seems to be able to gain, it is about the understanding of our own time "in the mobility of a time that becomes"⁶⁵. Therefore, in the Kantian conception, the story is fixed as "irreducibly modern" (*neuzeitlich*)⁶⁶. It is a well-founded concept of progress, history and politics together, intended as a progressive movement towards an *improvement* (*Verbesserung*) as "collective singular" concept⁶⁷, a process of organization of the future in which the subject is seen now universal and is the very progress that has taken on the role of historical agent⁶⁸. But far from being an optimistic conception of humanity, it draws its emancipatory function, firstly against enlightened despotism and then in direct comparison with the French Revolution as the action of taking charge of our own historical "actuality" and formation of the *public* with a precise political function and with a view to the realization of popular sovereignty.

⁶³ I. Kant, *Was ist Aufklärung?*, *op.cit.*, p. 46

⁶⁴ N. Rotenstreich, *Enlightenment: Between Mendelssohn and Kant*, in *Studies in Jewish Religion and Intellectual History*, (ed.) S.Stein e R.Loewe, University of Alabama Press, 1979

⁶⁵ S. Chignola, *Idem*, pp. 56-61

⁶⁶ *Idem*, pp. 56-61. See also R.Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1989, especially pp. 63-64; pp. 266-267

⁶⁷ *Idem*, pp.56-57

⁶⁸ *Idem*, p.57

Flashes and fragments of the present time : getting hold of the memory for an instant

The reflection on his own historical present for Benjamin is instead based on the idea of 'modernity' that the philosopher faces in his writings of 1940. 'Modernity', considered as a period of 'crowding out' of subjectivity, is the time when the crisis has become structural: it has the "characteristics of an epochal crisis"⁶⁹. We may recall that for Kant the time of the Enlightenment was the time "limit", in which it was possible to begin the short circuit between the present and the time of world history, so that the present was going to be able to direct itself towards the future, towards the realisation of the idea of "perfect constitution" (Kant, 1784) and was, therefore, able to show the ambivalence of its own crisis.

Similarly, for Benjamin the epochal crisis is to be found in contemporary society, but it lies in the origins of "modernity", it is endemic to the same concept of progressive history of which the plot is made up. Therefore, there is no short circuit that may allow philosophy of history to learn about its ultimate goal. If there is a possibility of an excavation work on "actuality", it must start from current events, with an eye on the past and one in the future ⁷⁰ should be performed by a "micro logical look" (Benjamin, 1940) which spots "the elements of reality in unintended relationship to a problematic whole"⁷¹. Therefore, it is necessary to bring to the surface the elements that make up the crisis, and, thus, the texture of modernity itself, which is made of the same logic of progress, and its dissolution will be accelerated by unmasking its underlying mechanism⁷². Actuality is the logical time where the philosophy of history begins, a "threshold", where you can see backward and the forward.

Time, in this sense, is not the model of rational and linear history, which, for Benjamin, is only history seen by the winning side. The model of the new historical intelligibility conceived by Benjamin is motivated by non-linearity, which is characterised by breaks and intermissions in the history of the vanquished. The overthrowing of the rational history initiated by Kant is complete: history should be identified by "fragments", history should be treated as "quotable in all its moments"⁷³, where only memory made in fragments counts as flashes of meaning.

The process of accelerating dissolution, starting from "actuality", from "now" (*Jetztzeit*), means destroying the linearity that positivism had led to paroxysm. But it means also to pursue non-linearity as a method of history reconstruction and to insist on the "threshold" which embodies the present. This also shows the

⁶⁹ M. Ponzi, *Organizzare il pessimismo, Walter Benjamin e Nietzsche*, Rome, Lithos 2007, p. 64

⁷⁰ See M. Ponzi, *L'angelo malinconico, Walter Benjamin e il moderno*, (ed.), Rome, Lithos, 2001

⁷¹ C. Buci-Glucksmann, *La raison baroque*, Paris, Edition Galilée, 1984, p.60

⁷² M. Ponzi, *Idem.*, p.65

⁷³ W. Benjamin, *Angelus Novus*, Turin, Einaudi, 1995, p.76

"state of emergency" in the present, and "the idea of redemption"⁷⁴ that starts in the reading of the past. "To articulate the past historically does not mean to know exactly how it was". It means to get hold of a memory in the instant of danger. For historical materialism it is about fixing the image of the past as it suddenly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger. Danger dominates both the heritage and whoever receives it. This reflective consciousness on itself, so as to create a short circuit in history, is not a process, but instead a flash.

The logic of positivist progress can be described as a chain of events, a common progressive journey towards an end, in which every next moment is always considered better than the last. The thrust of progress is unstoppable, "like a storm", with its violence and attempts to move us towards the future. The subject has become aware of the catastrophe, he viewed it from the present time and has thus turned to the past to see the ruins that through the blind logic of progress he left behind him.

In Foucault's interpretation of Kant, the focus was on "the relation of the subject with its historical relevance, the reorganization of the action on its actuality". Kant is the first one to reflect on the taking part to the historical process. His conception is characterized by an idea of 'enlightenment as reflective consciousness of the discourse on the present'. Thus, the formation of the idea of progress can be regarded as the dawn of reflective consciousness of its own actuality. Benjamin draws, instead, a conception in which non-linearity, interruptions and intermittent history of the vanquished is opposed to the linear homogeneous rational history of winners. The transition from a scientific model to a hermeneutic model, opens up new historical intelligibility, where the *practice of testimony* becomes what allows us to explore the history of the oppressed and the oppressors, and opens a discourse of imaginary as 'image space' (*Bildraum*) (Benjamin, 1940).

Actuality as gathering of the present : the telling and being told of the subject

As part of the critique to idea of *actuality* inaugurated by the Kantian idea of progress, but somehow potentially contained in the full explosion of its own original radical meaning – as suggested by Foucauldian and Benjaminian interpretations – we will find the idea of *actuality* explored by post-colonial studies. Bhabha's idea of "gathering the present"⁷⁵ was devised to counteract what Benedict Anderson calls the 'homogeneous empty time' of modernity and progress⁷⁶ as well as the same idea of *historicity* and its progressive movement that comes together with the construction of the modern State-

⁷⁴ *Idem*

⁷⁵ H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994, p.140

⁷⁶ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London, Verso, 1983, p.88

nation⁷⁷, the foundation of which is based on that relationship between citizenship, participation and historical narrative constructed around the time of the French Revolution that we have been analysing so far. Bhabha considers the “Western nation as an obscure and ubiquitous form of living the *locality* of culture. This locality is more *around* temporality than *about* historicity”⁷⁸. Jameson mentions something similar with his notion of “situational consciousness” or national allegory “where the telling of the individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately invoke the whole laborious telling of the collectivity itself”⁷⁹.

In this idea, that takes into account the fact that “the metaphoric movement requires a kind of 'doubleness' in writing, a *temporality of representation* that moves between the cultural formations and social processes without a central causal logic” which is ultimately “dispersing the homogeneous, visual time of the horizontal society”⁸⁰, there is a shift towards a conception of participation to historical time that breaks entirely with the idea of *historicity*, which brings inscribed in its own discursive constitution the idea of progressive narration and the project of the reduction to a rational unity which covers up the 'timeless' discourse of irrationality. Irrationality is here the discourse of the “archaic body of the despotic or totalitarian mass” which seem to be sanitised within the homogenous version of modernity which the historical narration seems to present and support. The proposal is here instead to pose the question “of nation as narration with a plot” which needs to be questioned – and overcome - as specific “*time of modernity*”⁸¹. This means that historicity as discourse is seen as fundamentally supportive the *time/space of the nation*, simplified of all its contradictions, marginal stories, minorities, “emergent practices and meanings located in the margins of 'the contemporary experience of society”⁸². The problem is therefore posed in terms of 'narrative authority of the subject' and its recognition as immediately performative, and therefore transcending the pedagogical discourse of the State-nation. The question of building counter-narratives of the nation that “continually evoke and erase its totalising boundaries – both actual and conceptual – disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essential identities”⁸³. How to build those counter-narratives as carriers of real 'narrative authority' instead of them being enveloped in the 'narcissism of minor differences'⁸⁴ that renders all difference homogeneous

⁷⁷ See also E. Balibar, I. Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, London and New York, Verso, 1991

⁷⁸ H. Bhabha, *Idem*, p.140

⁷⁹ F. Jameson, “Third World Literature in the era of multinational capitalism”, *Social Text*, Fall 1986, p.69

⁸⁰ H. Bhabha, *Idem*, p.141

⁸¹ *Idem*, p.142

⁸² R. Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, London, Verso, 1980

⁸³ H. Bhabha, *Idem*, p.149

⁸⁴ S. Freud, 'Civilisation and its discontents', *Standard Edition*, London, The Hogarth Press, 1961, p.114

to same order's discourse? How can they break with the articulation between pedagogical and performative which pushes them in a place of fundamental liminality? How to break with the 'homogeneous' and 'horizontal' view of society which doesn't recognise the ethnography of different voices ?

As a standpoint from which the inversion can be conceived Bhabha uses Lyotard's discourse on the 'narrated'.

“Where the one doing the speaking speaks from the place of the referent. As narrator she is narrated as well. And in a way she is already told, and what she herself is telling will not undo that somewhere else she is told”⁸⁵

(J.J.Lyotard, *Just Gaming*, 1985)

Within the realm of the post-modern discourse, we observe a fundamental shift that leads Bhabha to the foundation of a more complex post-colonial perspective. The integration of an 'ethnographic' perspective becomes a fundamental tool that brings the author to the understanding of the fact that “the position of narrative control is neither monocular nor monologic. The subject is graspable only in the passage between telling/told, between 'here' and 'somewhere else’⁸⁶. This understanding makes it clear that “in this double scene the very condition of cultural knowledge is the alienation of the subject”. Following Levi-Strauss' methodology⁸⁷, the ethnographic act requires a reflective sense of *observation as a discursive regime*, which requires the observer to become part of his/her own observations and the whole act of observing to become something that can be observed as a whole within which the subjective position/understanding of the indigenous is comprised.

Does the objectivity of *the position of the telling- and -being- told of the subject* require a different discursive regime? And can this regime ever be narrative or linear? What is the communication space asked by this regime?

This requires an *inter-relational space of communication*, towards a new exploration of *temporality* and *locality* in a post-colonial perspective, which questions the “progressive metaphor of social cohesion”⁸⁸. The problem is here whether “forces of social authority and subversion or subaltern may emerge in displaced, even decentralised strategies of significations”. And therefore, he offers the answer structured by

⁸⁵ J.F. Lyotard, J. L. Thebaud, *Just Gaming*, eng, trans, W. Godzich, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1985, p. 41

⁸⁶ H. Bhabha, *Idem*, p. 150

⁸⁷ C. Lévi Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, eng. Trans. By F. Baker, London, Routledge, 1987

⁸⁸ *Idem*, p.149

Fanon⁸⁹ to this problem, which is acknowledging that the narrative of stable forms within the discourse of the nation is essentially false and recognising instead that, within the 'occult instability' of the nation's narrative, lies a sense of 'ephemeral temporality' - a space of constituency of the discourse which could represent a space of struggle and resistance.

Bhabha writes that we need to go beyond “the horizontal critical gaze”⁹⁰ if we are to give “the non sequential energy of lived historical memory and subjectivity as fundamental components of meaning in representation”⁹¹ its appropriate narrative authority. Here Said is directly discussing about reopening “the blocked social processes ceding objective representations (hence power) of the world to a small *coterie* of experts and their clients, to consider that the audience for literacy is not a closed circle of three thousand professional critics but the community of human beings living in society”⁹². In discussion with John Berger⁹³, Said speaks about finding representations within the use of the visual faculty that can “tell other stories than the official sequential or ideological ones produced by institutions of power” and “open the culture to the experience of the Other”⁹⁴.

1.1.2. The whole world is watching! Witnessing and showing dynamic in the narration of dissent

In the previous paragraph (1.1), we talked about the question of *giving voice to participation to contemporary political events and to dissent as part of the participation dynamic*. We have been discussing about participation as an evolving, historical and philosophical framework, which has been forming itself in relation to *public sphere* and *public opinion* (Habermas, 1964), starting from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, in the form of a critical positions towards the *Ancien Régime* privilege and class system. The concept of participation used here, was born in relation to *the taking position of the citizen towards his own history* and was, therefore, initially connected to the emerging concept of *historicity* as tied with the modern discourse on *citizenship* founded by the first *Declaration of droits de l'homme et citoyen* in 1789⁹⁵.

⁸⁹ F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969

⁹⁰ *Idem*, p.141

⁹¹ E. Said, “Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies, and Community” (1982), in Id., *Reflection on Exile and Other Essays*, 2000, p.146

⁹² *Ibidem*

⁹³ J. Berger, *Ways of seeing*, London, Penguin, 1972

⁹⁴ E. Said, *Idem*, p.147

⁹⁵ G. Duso, *Il Potere*, Rome, Carocci, 1999. For a discussion on this subject I refer also to Gauchet, M., *La Révolution des droits de l'homme*, Galimard, Paris, 1989

This idea of *political participation*, which emerged around 1789, was crossed by the same tension between the constitutional movement and the organisation of ruling powers, which was at the heart of the living fervour within the making of the French Revolution (Chignola, Duso 1999, Gauchet, 1989). It was also connected to the discussion on the relationship between *civil liberty* and *public space*, which included the exploration of the field of freedom of expression, of assembly and of press as part of the horizon.⁹⁶

In the same paragraph, we then talked about a concept of *non-linearity in the narration of history*, which was introduced in the 1940s as part of a wider reflection on the *active position of the subject within the time of his own history and its role in the narration of historical events*. This was part of a wider reflection on political participation and the role of witnessing as a form of dissent during the Second World War in Europe. This new conception, introduced by Walter Benjamin among others, was suggesting the idea of a “new historical intelligibility, where the *practice of testimony* becomes what allows us to explore the history of the oppressed and the oppressors” (Benjamin, 1940). We then talked about the experience of promoting “*emergent practices and meanings located in the margins of 'the contemporary experience of society'*” (Williams, 1980) based on the ‘narrative authority of the subject’ (Williams, 1980), aimed at creating alternative narratives to the ones produced by the ruling powers, in the light of an opposition to the colonial powers which was conceptualised by post-colonial authors from the 1960s to the 1990s. Following Said, we explored the philosophical ground behind *the search for visual representations that can “tell other stories than the official sequential or ideological ones produced by institutions of power”* and “open the culture to the experience of the Other” (Said, 1982).

In fact, what was introduced here, through the philosophical excursus that we made, is the idea that participation is, in its modern terms, a concept related both to *historical agency* and *the public possibility of narrating its own history on the part of the subject/ citizen*. It seems therefore necessary, after an exploration into the *philosophical concept of participation*, finally opening the discussion to the *way the narration of the present displays itself in the form of a visual narrative*.

This preliminary discussion was, in fact, useful to plant some signposts that could lead us towards the main question of this research. Namely, *whether our sense of participation to contemporary historical events is effectively being facilitated or not by the media we are using*. In particular, I am interested in exploring *what kind of agency takes place in a specific communication space*⁹⁷ and *whether the way we participate to political events in is any way related to the media we are using to express our voice*. What is interesting about

⁹⁶ For this, I refer to my own MA dissertation, Fales, L. *Liberta' civile e storia in Kant*, MA dissertation in Theoretical Philosophy, Universita' La Sapienza, Roma supervised by Prof. Filippo Gonnelli, 2008

⁹⁷ For Odin's notion of communication space, see Paragraph 1.2.3. *Can Tabrir Square work as a model for a new communication space?* of this text.

the notion of “communication space” (Odin, 2012) (1.2) is that, on the one hand, it implies the use of a medium, but it is unrelated to any specific medium and its technological possibilities. On the other hand, it relies its model on an inter-relational space, therefore, opening the field to a discussion related to the connection between individual and collective narration of historical/political events.

Did new media really change something in the relationship between citizens and the media? Does the way in which we produce documentation of contemporary social movement promoting political and social change impact on the way we participate to it? Is this different way to the way Super8 material was shot by collectives from the late 1960s and broadcasted by TV⁹⁸, or the way in which VHS collected the documentation of the Fall of the Wall in the 1990s⁹⁹ or to the way in which early SD light cameras were allowing political filmmakers to document protests in the early 2000, i.e. Seattle or Genoa 2001? Did the evolution of technology support and facilitate grassroots and independent production of news? And what is the relationship between the news self-produced on the ground and the mainstream media in the light of the evolving technology?

A new consciousness of news media in the Chicago 1968 revolt

Our films remind some people of battle scenes: grainy, with film camera waving trying to capture material without being hit or confiscated. Well, we, and many others, are at war. Not only we document this war, but we try to find ways to bring that war in those places they have been manoeuvring in order to buy their protection from it.¹⁰⁰

(J. Hess, *Notes on U.S. Radical Film, 1967-80*, in P. Steven, (ed.), *Hollywood, Poitics and Counter Cinema*, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1985, pp.134-150)

1968 was, in a certain sense one of the first big media 'events' connected to the age of television, in which media presence played a key role in the unfolding of the events ¹⁰¹. *Imagination au pouvoir* was the motto of the French May of 1968 and the production of creative material was definitely one of the prerogatives of the movement, as a way of disseminating counter information material and spread the message about

⁹⁸ T. Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*, University of California Press, 1967. See also F. Rosati (ed.), “1968-1972: esperienze di cinema militante”, *Bianco e Nero*, a, XXXIV, n. 7-8, July-August 1973, G. Hennebelle, (ed.), “Cinéma militant (regards sur le cinéma militant français)”, *Cinéma d'aujourd'hui*, n.s., 1986, Fanara, G., (ed.), *Il cinema ribelle 2*, Rome, Lithos, 2002

⁹⁹ G. N. Smith and T. Wollen (eds.), *After the Wall. Broadcasting in Germany*, BFI, London, 1991

¹⁰⁰ J. Hess, *Notes on U.S. Radical Film, 1967-80*, in P. Steven, (ed.), *Hollywood, Politics and Counter Cinema*, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1985, pp.134-150

¹⁰¹ Fanara, G., (ed.), *Il cinema ribelle 2*, Rome, Lithos, 2002, p. 22

the ideals shared and promoted by the students and anti-Vietnam war protesters, both in Europe and in the States, as well as the Civil Right movement in the US. Writings, music, comics, poems, novels, journals, leaflets, even messages written on bodies, were all sources of alternative information used to circulate new ideas and to unmask the lies of the institutional powers, especially to do with the Vietnam War propaganda and the role the wide spread consensus to anti-communist and support to Cold War ideals among policymakers and journalists had in the framing of foreign affairs¹⁰².

Young filmmakers recognised media as a battleground to promote a new vision of the world and to overturn, subvert and disturb the existing powers. Mainly, the focus became the narration of underground worlds which were not allowed and portrayed in the realm of official media, as well as the narration of dissent itself from the perspective of non-biased media. Both in Europe (Germany, France, Italy..) and in the U.S. many filmmaking collective were founded, with the aim of producing counter-information material useful to open the eyes of the public opinion on the police and military abuses.

It became clear that media were the new battleground when, outside the National Democratic Convention in Chicago, on 28th of August 1968, 10.000 students and protesters gathered to protest against the Vietnam war and the assassination of Martin Luther King, which had taken place on April 4th of the same year. The main goal of the convention was to choose the new presidential elections' candidate to run for the Democratic Party. Many protest groups had already announced their presence in order to hold a counter-cultural protest in occasion of the 1968 National Democratic Convention. 10.000/15.000 protesters attended the Grant Park rally after permissions to march across Chicago city were denied by police and a curfew at 11pm was imposed on the city. As several thousand students started marching towards the International Amphitheatre, where the convention was taking place, police started charging protesters. Some sources estimated around 36.000 police officers on the ground, trying to prevent the protest to continue¹⁰³. As protesters saw the police charging them, they started chanting "*The whole world is watching!*". The riots went on for 5 days and saw the deployment of tear gas, batons on the marchers¹⁰⁴, dozens of journalists were retained by police and film cameras destroyed and confiscated. The images of the riots, which were broadcasted on TV, reached spectators and households all across the States. During the violent week, in which reporters and cameraman were beaten alongside political demonstrators and film cameras targeted, the extent to which the media presence shaped events as they unfolded, became clear. A level of premeditation in the display of the media event is reported by some

¹⁰² D. C. Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1986, p.9. See also, A.A.V.V., "Chicago Seven", *Wikipedia*, available on the web. Retrieved December 2014

¹⁰³ J. Schultz, *No One was killed: The Democratic National Convention, August 1968*, The University of Chicago Press, pp.2-5

¹⁰⁴ M. Frankel, "U.S. Scores Chicago violence as a "police riot", *The New York Times*, 2nd of December, 1968

commentators who noticed the presence of journalists inside and outside the Amphitheatre, as well as the sensationalist tone that was used in the propaganda that was set up in the run up to the event, as to prepare the “audience” for a media spectacle. The movement was prepared to the idea of displaying their version of the events. A press conference was held the morning after the Saturday night, where the first head-beatings had taken place in Lincoln Park, to show mainstream journalists what had happened the night before. The sentence 'the whole world is watching' was coined in that occasion, when the rotating movement's spokesman, Rennie Davies, looking at some of the beating's victims said: “Let's tell them the whole world is watching, and they'll never get away with it again”¹⁰⁵. The movement, supported by activists' film collectives like Newsreel, was displaying a high degree of awareness on the importance of providing their own version of the documentation of the events in order to bring public attention to the police abuses, and to counteract the bias of the mainstream media by trying to get their side of the story into the same mainstream by providing facts coming from unbiased sources. The battle for the “making of the news”, had officially started.

Documenting and producing media protests. Some examples (1970-2001)

Some examples of the re-appropriation and power overturning dynamic in relation to the functioning of the media that were aimed at promoted the ideal of an entirely different counter-cultural narrative, are represented by alternative and activist media initiatives that developed themselves in relation to the language of media from the 1970s onwards. One example is the free radio movement that developed in the 1970s. For example, Radio Alice in Bologna, Italy, in 1977, was promoting free grassroots counter-information to mainstream media by using also irony and political humour in an openly satirical vein, openly disturbing and acting on the narrative of mainstream media ¹⁰⁶. Also it is remarkable to notice that the 1990s TAZ (Temporary Autonomous Zone) East Berlin movement, which developed itself after the fall of the Berlin Wall - i.e. the group founding social centre Tacheles in Berlin Mitte - aimed at creating temporary self-organised areas which included large amount of self-produced media, free journals, fanzines, radios, digital *hacktivist* actions¹⁰⁷. The movement was inspired by the book *T.A.Z.* by Hakim

¹⁰⁵ L. S. Washington, “The Whole World is Watching continued”, *In These Times*, August 2008, available on the web at <http://inthesetimes.com/article/continued/3876/the-whole/world/was-watching>. Retrieved December 2014

¹⁰⁶ F. Berardi Bifo, *Alice e' il diavolo. Storia di una radio sovversiva*, Shake, Bologna, 2007. See also M. Pasquinelli, *Media Activism. Strategie e pratiche della comunicazione indipendente*, Deriveapprodi, Roma, 2002 and M. Costa, *Il sublime tecnologico. Piccolo trattato di estetica della tecnologia*, Castelvechi, Roma, 1998

¹⁰⁷ A.A.V.V., “T.A.Z.: Temporary autonomous zone”, *Wikipedia*, available on the web. Retrieved December

Bey, a text which became central for the hackers, cyberpunk and techno-rave movements in Europe and across the States in the 1990s. These movements were interested in taking control and ownership of technology for counter-cultural and political purposes. The same interest in the production of grassroots self-produced media was shown also by the wider Squatting movement all over Europe (UK, Spain, Netherlands, Germany etc.), but also the Luther Blisset Project in Europe (1994 – 99) and the Reclaim the Street project and Wu Ming project in Italy¹⁰⁸. In Italy this movement led to stable counter-power structures called “social centres”, i.e. Forte Prenestino in Rome, where in 1999 was founded one of the first local TV station, Candida Tv – la TV Elettrodomestica¹⁰⁹. Among many other sources, Candida Tv was also responsible for the coverage of the 2001 events in Genoa, that led to the death of protester Carlo Giuliani.

Genoa protest was an event that, similarly to Chicago in 1968, displayed itself as a 'media spectacle' since many weeks before the event itself, with mainstream media preparing the audience for the violence that was supposedly going to be seen, and shown, and protesters training themselves as media activists, ready to provide their own direct version of the story, supported by light cameras equipment and photo cameras and enhanced by the presence of a large number independent filmmakers who came in solidarity with the protesters. The event from was filmed, reproduced with hundreds of cameras on the ground, thanks to the presence of media activists, photographers, documentary filmmakers and professional journalists on the ground, and the documentation was collected and archived, shared through several different media (i.e. newspapers, journals, Indymedia blogs, websites independent documentary films, TV channels etc.), also during the process following the death of protester Carlo Giuliani¹¹⁰.

2014. See H. Bey, *T.A.Z.: Temporary autonomous zone*, New York, Autonomedia, 1991. See also,

¹⁰⁸ Autonome a.f.r.i.k.a Gruppe, Luther Blisset, *Comunicazione guerriglia. Tattiche di agitazione gioiosa e resistenza ludica*, Rome, Deriveapprodi, 2002. For the European collective “Luther Blisset Project” check the story on their website www.lutherblisset.net, for “Reclaim the Streets” which was born in London in 1970s check the website www.rets.gn.apc.org, for Wu Ming, a continuation of Luther Blisset project, after the change in name, check www.wumingfoundation.com

¹⁰⁹ R. I. Janković, “*Barging into the Collective Body of Images*”, Art-e-fact. Strategies of Resistance, available on http://artefact.mi2.hr/_a03/lang_en/art_candida_en.htm

¹¹⁰ To check the documentation, see website www.Processig8.org. See also “I migliori documentari recenti sui fatti del G8 di Genova 2001 con recensione”, 9th of August 2001, available on the web on www.nocensura.com/2001/08/i-migliori-documentari-recenti-sui.html?m1. See also, among others, the documentary F. Comencini, *Carlo Giuliani Ragazzo*, Italy, 2002



Picture 1. Sticker of *Radio Alice*, independent grassroots radio, 1977. The logo shows a group people, with their faces covered by balaclavas, as to underline the anonymous and the subversive aspect of the operation. The group is in the attempt of catching the radio signal under a radio antenna, while one of them had reached the top and managed to plant the “*At full voice*” *Radio Alice*'s motto as a flag¹¹¹.

¹¹¹ Picture taken by Radio Marconi website, http://www.radiomarconi.com/marconi/ancona/valcamonica/amarcord/radio_pag05.html



Picture 2. Cover of political subversive communication journal *I Volsci*, Rome, 1977, linked to independent grassroots radio *Onda Rossa*. The motto on the cover “*When Onda Rossa speaks... (everyone shuts up)*” is completed by the picture of a girl whose mouth is shut, as to underline the power of Radio Onda Rossa's voice and message in matters of uncovering the truth. Here again “voice” “speaking” “hearing” are keywords, as interlinked with the radio medium. Courtesy of Radio Onda Rossa.



Picture 3. A grassroots stencil showing the Indymedia news production process (around 2000/1). The picture shows the process of news dissemination on the street, “the -getting- the- word- out- process “, as being the beginning of a circle of news production which sees media activists reporting back from the street to the Indymedia desk via mobile phone, in order for the news to be published in the shortest time and without any mediation¹¹².

September 11, 2001. The “death of detachment” in the news

“By 'public sphere' we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body...In a large public body this kind of communication requires specific means of transmitting information and influencing those who receive it. Today newspapers and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere”¹¹³

(J. Habermas, *Communication and Class Struggle*, 1964)

¹¹² Picture taken from C.W. Anderson, "From Indymedia to Wikileaks: What a decade of hacking journalistic culture says about the future of news", *NiemanLab*, December 9, 2010, available on the web on <http://owni.eu/2010/12/10/from-indymedia-to-wikileaks-what-a-decade-of-hacking-journalistic-culture-says-about-the-future-of-news/>. Also available on <http://www.niemanlab.org/2010/12/from-indymedia-to-wikileaks-what-a-decade-of-hacking-journalistic-culture-says-about-the-future-of-news/>. Retrieved May 2015

¹¹³ J. Habermas, 'The Public Sphere', in A. Matterlart and S. Siegelau (eds.), *Communication and Class Struggle*, vol. 1, New York, International General, 1964, pp.198-200

Habermas defined 'public opinion' as 'a network for communicating information and points of views. The stream of communication is, in the process, filtered and synthesised in such a way that it coalesces into bundles of topically specifies *public* opinions' (Habermas, 1996) ¹¹⁴. So, journalists are very important players in this dynamic (Saeed, 2012) and the 'selection processes become the source of a new sort of power' that sets the 'discursive level of opinion formation'¹¹⁵.

What happens then when a historical events are on the scale of the 9/11 attack to the Twin Towers? What happens when an event of that scale is broadcasted live while it's happening, allowing, and, to certain extent, requiring the whole world to watch it in real time, breathless? What happens in the reading of the global audience when an event of that scale is reproduced a thousands times by media on a global scale? How does the representation of this event during and in the aftermath, impact on the way people perceive it, remember it and tell this event?

This is a set of difficult questions to answer and it will not be possible to enter each of them in depth. It will be important to at least touch upon all of these, though, since 9/11 represented a pivotal historical moment that impacted on the relationship between real-time narration and people's participation, creating a response in the media and in the people which proved to be unprecedented.

As we all know, on the morning of the 11th of September, 2011, four coordinated terrorists attacks were launched upon the Twin Towers in New York City, the Pentagon area and Washington D.C. The attacks resulted into the collapse of both towers of the World Trade Center complex in New York City and in the killing of 2,996 people who were in the towers on a working day or in the area. The attacks were organised by al-Qaeda terrorists groups through the action of 19 terrorists who hijacked four passenger airlines and flew into buildings in suicide attacks. Two planes were directed towards the Twin Towers in the heart of Manhattan. Within two hours both towers had collapsed with debris and the resulting fires caused partial collapse of all other building in the WTC complex, as well as significant damage to ten other large surrounding structures¹¹⁶. A third plane was crashed into the Pentagon, leading to a partial collapse of its Western side. A fourth plane was directed towards Washington D.C., but collapsed in the middle of Pennsylvania. Within minutes from the first plane attacks, the whole global media were focusing on this *one news*, broadcasting live from the site while the story was still unfolding.

As Kamalipour states, 9/11 can be clearly considered as a 'media event' that "shattered the perceived

¹¹⁴ J. Habermas, 'Civil Society and the Political Public Sphere', *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1996, pp.359-87

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*

¹¹⁶ "September 11 attacks", *Wikipedia*, retrieved in November 2014

invincibility and invulnerability of America”¹¹⁷ and through the representation of which most important ideological and geo-political strategies of the US have been played ever since. With the 9/11 event, and its media coverage, the approach to intercultural relationship as conceived by US has been irretrievably altered¹¹⁸.

This dynamic has not happened openly through the representation of 9/11, but also in the subsequent media coverage of 2003 Iraq Wars which, according to Douglas Kellner (2004), became part of the long-term response of the media to the Attack on the Twin Towers, creating an overtly polarised reading of the event from different sides of the conflict.

“The Iraq War was a major global media event constructed very differently by varying broadcasting networks in different parts of the world. While the U.S. Networks framed the event as “Operation Iraqi Freedom” (the Pentagon concept) or “War in Iraq”, Canadian CBC used the logo “War on Iraq” and various Arab networks presented it as an “invasion” and “occupation”.¹¹⁹

(Kellner, *War, Media and Propaganda: A global perspective*, 2004)

One first consideration to make here is that modern wars have been transformed into a mass mediated phenomenon by “powerful news organisations exhibit their technological tour de force by airing events ‘live’ as they unfolding, extending the terror front into the home front”¹²⁰, contributing in this way to the larger public arena of hyper mediascape with “‘live’ footage of the war zone compressing ‘time-space distance’ and enabling a worldwide audience to experience ‘the reality out there’ (Saeed, 2012).

The 9/11 Attack and especially the Iraqi War seem to be a relevant case in the light of the *discourse of narration of actuality as structuring the relationship between citizens and their own historical time*. It is interesting to notice that media discourses around 9/11 and 2003 Iraqi War have been mostly crossed by a sense of uniqueness of the event on both sides of the polarisation.

According to Fabiszak, it ‘is through the media that the social consensus on the conceptualisation of social institutions is negotiated and achieved’¹²¹ and, since the centrality of media in ‘framing, mediating,

¹¹⁷ Y. R. Kamalipour, “Foreword” in Pludowski T., (ed.), *How the World’s News Reacted to 9/11: Essays from Around the Globe*, Spokane, Washington, Marquette Books, 2007, p. 21. See also S. Saeed, “News Media, Public Diplomacy and the ‘War on Terror’”, in M. Zweiri, E. C. Murphy, *The New Arab Media. Technology, Image and Perception*, Ithaca Press, Reading, 2012, p. 48

¹¹⁸ Y. R. Kamalipour, *Ibidem*

¹¹⁹ Kellner, D., “Spectacle and media propaganda in the War on Iraq: A critique of U.S. Broadcasting network”, in Y.R.Kamalipour, N. Snow, (eds.), *War, media and propaganda: A global perspective*, Boulder, CO, Rowman and Littlefield, 2004, p.69

¹²⁰ S. Saeed, *Idem*, p. 47

¹²¹ M. Fabiszak, *A Conceptual Metaphor Approach to War Discourse and its Implications*, Poznan, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 2007, p. 13

administering and managing wars' has been so central in managing wars in the last decades (Saeed, 2012), scholars have started expressing apprehension that 'foreign policy decision-making has become epiphenomenal to newsroom decision-making'¹²². This is clearly shown in the way language was used by official media to fabric a sense of urgency, the sense of a *totalising 'event' which changes the course of time*, in a similar sense in which Foucault talks about the French Revolution and the way it was perceived all over Europe in the time of Kant ¹²³.

An interesting analysis of this phenomenon can be found in the study "The Milestone Metaphor: CNN and al-Jazeera Discourse on the Iraq War"¹²⁴, where the author analyses the *milestone* metaphor as applied to the war scenario. According to al-Zuweiri, it was used to describe 'a *movement* along a specific *path* at significant points of the *journey*' (Musolff, al-Zuweiri, 2012) in various moments of the Iraqi war, by both CNN and Al-Jazeera channels. The discursive reference to a "road" with "*milestones* to be passed" (Musolff, al-Zuweiri, 2012) seem to have been applied to three different scenarios during the course of the war: positive, critical and skeptical. Nevertheless, this metaphor has predominantly been used in reference to an optimistic scenario where it seems "to have led the public to assume that the more *milestones* are achieved, the more accurate the US administration's policy decisions and predictions about future *progress* are"¹²⁵. So, the war/terror narrative "manufactured" by media become one of war's "main weapons"¹²⁶, in the areas of propaganda, information warfare, public diplomacy and news management (Saeed, 2012).

McNair, in a study on representation of 9/11 in British media, agrees on the interpretation that 9/11 can be considered as an event that caused "the death of detachment" in journalism¹²⁷. Mc Nair mentions the contents of some headlines of TV News Programs and newspapers on the day after the attack in British media, to underline how the reading was translated from American media to British media, in an attempt of showing emotional solidarity to the event. BBC, for example, followed CNN on the same headline "Attack on America". Among the others, Daily Mail headlined "Apocalypse", Financial Times "Assault on America", Daily Telegraph "War on America". (McNair, 2007).

It is interesting to read an article by former New York Times correspondent Raymond Bonner, which appeared on the 10th anniversary of the Attack on "The Atlantic" called "The Media and 9/11: How we Did" (2011). The article, written by a journalist, suggests American and British journalists to take on a self-

¹²² S. Carruthers, *The Media at war*, New York, Palgrave-Macmillian, 2000, p.16

¹²³ M.Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société. Cours au Collège de France 1975-76*, Gallimard-Seuil, Paris 1997, pp. 20-23

¹²⁴ A. Musolff, A.al-Zuweiri, "The Milestone Metaphor: CNN and al-Jazeera Discourse on the Iraq War" in M. Zweiri, E. C. Murphy, *Idem*

¹²⁵ A. Musolff, A.al-Zuweiri, *Idem*, p.44

¹²⁶ Saeed, *Idem*, p. 48

¹²⁷ McNair, B., "UK Media Coverage of September 11" in Pludowski T., (ed.), *Idem*

reflective journey into the coverage of the events at the time. The main questions of the article are: “Did we exaggerate the threat of Osama Bin Laden, thus contributing to the collective paranoia, intrusive security measures at airports, and multi-billion dollar security industry that survives on fear?” and “Did we fail to monitor the erosion of civil liberties?”¹²⁸.

These are important questions for our debate on the construction of historical narratives in real time and the relationship with the audience and they are interesting also in reference to the ongoing debate about media coverage of current ISIS/ ISIL terrorist actions as displayed in Syrian region of Raqqa and its effect on the global media dynamic after the release of online videos beheading of two American journalists, James Foley and Steven Sotloff, British and Indonesian aid workers in the course of Summer and Fall 2014, as well as for the analysis overt interest and investment made by ISIL in media production and social media usage¹²⁹. We will talk about it more extensively in the next Chapter.

The representation of the event of 9/11 definitely represented a big change in the notion of “representation” as the construction of “intermediaries that can re-present the world to us”¹³⁰. The main question is, in fact, and this is relevant as a preliminary step into our further analysis on whether the role of ‘citizen journalist’, ‘citizen witnesses’ and their role in the construction of non-linear narratives might have changed the exposure of the dynamic between what is happening on the ground and its actual narration of it in real time, whether the role of journalist in reporting conflicts has been subject to relevant changes around and since 9/11. Bernard Cohen had been already flagging up the question by separating the ‘neutral’ role of the journalist from its ‘participant’ role (Cohen, 1963), drawing a line of separation between the autonomy of the journalist as ‘watchdog’ and journalist as political actor. Patterson’s survey (1998) on 1,300 journalists had been underlying how one of the reasons in dropping the job was the presence of several different expectations, which had extended the notion of what is a journalist towards a wider concept, which included covering roles like “watchdog, messenger, reporter, analyst, advocate, broker”¹³¹.

¹²⁸ R. Bonner, “The Media and 9/11: How we Did”, *The Atlantic*, 9 September 2011

¹²⁹ Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, *Wikipedia*, Retrieved November 2014, Gertz, B., “New Al Qaeda Group Produces Recruitment Material for Americans, Westerners”, *The Washington Free Beacon*, Retrieved June 2014, but also S. Maher, “From Bin Laden to Isis: Why the roots of jihadi ideology run deep in Britain”, *New Statesmen*, September 2014, Retrieved September 2014, N. Culzac, “Dress like a jihadist: Isis and terror-related merchandise flogged online and in Indonesian stores”, *The Independent*, 24 June 2014, Retrieved November 2014, C. Hunt, Young, vulnerable women being groomed for jihad. Jihadists of the Islamic State are using social media to attract female brides and fighters”, *The Independent*, 24 August 2014, Retrieved 2 August 2014

¹³⁰ Slouka, M. (1995), *War of the Worlds: Cyberspace in high tech assault on reality*, New York, Basic Books, 1995

¹³¹ T. E. Patterson, “Political Roles of Journalists”, in D. Graber, D. McQuail, p. Norris (eds.), *Politics of the News: News of Politics*, Washington DC, CQ Press, 1998, pp.17-32

The question of 'objectivity' and 'impartiality' became extremely relevant during the 'War on Terror' media campaign, when 'embedded' journalists were employed, creating a potential convergence between the war discourse and reporting.

Moreover visual narratives and documentary films that, during the early 2000s, tried to narrate epochal phenomena such as the fall of the Twin Towers of New York, the war in Iraq and Afghanistan or the actions of the global peace movement against the war, but, for reasons related to internal dynamics in the industry, arrived in theatres with extreme delay in respect to the impact these events already had on the public and not always in time to give voice to the actors on which political decisions were made or in time to create a collective consciousness event in time for them to have impact on the present. More extensive reportage, films and visual recollection of the events from a different perspective to the official media made memory of an event that was already historical in the public eye.



OUTRAGE

AMERICA IS CHANGED FOREVER AS
TERRORISTS MURDER THOUSANDS



HIJACKINGS

**Pentagon,
New York
attacked.**

PRESIDENT BUSH

**'Today our
nation
saw evil.'**

SECURITY

**Where
were
our spies?**

CHICAGO

**Loop empties
as people join
their families.**

Picture 4. Front cover of *Chicago Sun Times* on September 12, 2001. The title: “OUTRAGE. America is changed forever as terrorists murder thousands” is a good example of the strong emotionally-led rhetoric used the day after the Twin Towers attack¹³².

¹³² Picture taken from Steven Warran's blog, a web platform collecting several pictures taken by Getty Pictures archive on 9/11. <http://stevenwarran.blogspot.it/2014/07/getty-images-9-11.html>

1.2 Imagination, Actuality, Present-tense, Real-time

1.2.1 *Global imagination, Local imagining. A Cultural Studies Toolbox for Media Representation in the Global World*

When thinking about how political kinds of practices and communicative genres are underwritten and sustained by media technologies, and considering how the political itself is transformed today, one cannot separate “old” media from “new” media, just as one cannot separate the local from the global. What the conjuncture of these forces (new, old, local, global) results in is a politics that increasingly cuts *across local, national, and global boundaries*.¹³³

(H. Tawil-Souri, “Egypt’s Uprising and the Shifting Spatialities of Politics”, in *Cinema journal* 52, Number 1, Fall 2012, University of Texas Press, p.166)

Global Imagination, Local Imagining

In his book *Modernity at Large*¹³⁴, cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai discusses the idea of modernity, framed by modern social sciences and Western social theory – authors like Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber – as a specific moment in time, the so called modern time, that would be breaking with the past in a unique and dramatic manner. Appadurai states that this perspective, which runs through the entirety of modern social sciences’ discourse, has been distorting the meaning of “change” as a concept in itself and has been constantly brought these scholars to read the present time as a time that is predominant to the past. Appadurai states that the concept of “modernity at large” as displayed by the material conditions of the globalised world, has instead pulverised the concept of “modernity”, resulting in a definitive and general rupture with all kinds of previous conceptions of the past. In fact, the combined effect of mass communication and migration created by globalisation processes – in the unique way in which it is inhabited by the presence of electronic media, alongside all other media that were pre-existing the digital turn - has affected the collective imagination in a strong and profound way. The consequence is that this combination is progressively transforming the everyday discourses by

¹³³ H. Tawil-Souri, “Egypt’s Uprising and the Shifting Spatialities of Politics”, in *Cinema journal* 52, Number 1, Fall 2012, University of Texas Press, p.166

¹³⁴ A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis-London, 1996. Italian translation A. Appadurai, *Modernita' in polvere*, trans. P. Vereni, 2001, Meltemi editore, Roma, 2001, p.16

subverting and transforming other forms of literacy that are present at the same time¹³⁵. This configuration, an agglomerate of media experiences crossing movements of masses, is providing resources for experimenting new forms of self-construction, “self-imagination as everyday social project”, in a world where moving images are crossing paths with *de-territorialised spectators*¹³⁶. The existence of “diasporic public spheres” therefore questions, once and forever, the relevance of the “state-nation” as a key factor for explaining relevant social changes. In this new configuration we would be in the process of experiencing new kind spaces where identities can form, mediate, orient and shape their own existence.

Interesting in this perspective, is the concept of “community of feeling” (Appadurai, 1990) that roots itself in the kind of community that only mass-media convergence is able to create around taste, politics, pleasure, local experiences. This ‘communities of feeling’ are able to act on a trans-local level, creating new forms of *social agency* that would not be existing otherwise.

Far from being an apology of mass communications and new media functioning dynamics, and far from being an essentialist evaluation of the performative character of the media themselves as carriers of new kinds of subjectivity, Appadurai's perspective is instead productive in the way it captures a pivotal configuration. This focuses on the node *subjectivity, new media spectatorship and space* as increasingly interrelated in the current global social dynamics. It underlines the role of moving images in impacting on de-territorialised spectators, reconfiguring symbolic relationships and imagination of the self as part of a widening process investing the media community.

If we go further into Appadurai discourse on “self-imagination as everyday social project”, we must also understand the concept of imagination itself, as it is explored by those authors who are embracing a transnational media studies perspective. This is useful in order to understand the role played by this concept in adding an extra layer to the classical social sciences and communication's paradigms of “discourse” and “ideology”.

In this perspective, it is particularly relevant to discuss how an author like Shani Orgad reads the framework of “global imagination” in the context of media representations in the globalised world. Drawing upon Taylor's notion of “social imaginary”¹³⁷ and upon Castoriadis' concept of “imaginary

¹³⁵ *Ibidem*

¹³⁶ For a wider discussion on this, which includes also the 'portability' of contemporary media like mobile phones and the multiplicity of interfaces that are available to contemporary spectators, see I. Christie, *Audiences : Defining and Researching Screen Entertainment Reception*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2012

¹³⁷ C. Taylor, “Modern Social Imaginaries”, in *Public Culture*, 14 (1), p. 106 . “The ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these (...) it incorporates a sense of the normal expectations that we have of one another, the

signification”¹³⁸, Orgad defines cultural practices as immediately constitutive of social imaginaries. He interrogates the role set by media representations in shaping and producing frames for “understanding, narratives and 'scripts' that guide and orient the conduct of our lives”¹³⁹. Following Appadurai's hypothesis that migration and electronic media can represent key factors in the “unleashing” and “nourishing” of imagination in contemporary terms, and are therefore dramatically inflating the power of imagination in people's ordinary lives¹⁴⁰, Orgad discusses the ways in which this constant flow of mediated images and narratives pushes imagination to work in completely different manners.

As defined by Castoriadis, imagination is, in fact, “the capacity to see and think about something as that which is not”¹⁴¹ and can be understood as the ability to represent “the absent as present, with all thoughts and feelings it would bring if it were present”¹⁴². In this perspective, the capacity to imagine relies on a number of symbolic resources (representations) to draw upon, which are essential to the imagination in order to start its work. Representation, in other words, makes available what is absent through signs, rendering possible the labour of imagination itself. This mutually feeding and creative relationship between representation and imagination is, according to Orgad, at the very basis of what can be shared as representations in a cultural and collective manner. Rather than being just a private, individual faculty of the mind, *imagination* is, thus, understood, as *a specific mode of thinking* constituting contemporary subjectivity itself¹⁴³ and it is conceived as a *relational faculty*. As “a human quality which opens the doors to understanding and in turn to the capacity to make judgements in and through the public world”¹⁴⁴, imagination establishes, therefore, a primary level of human *co-participation* through which personal and

kind of common understanding which enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life”. This, despite the fact that Taylor comes from the perspective of 'multicultural' thinking...

¹³⁸ C. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cambridge, Polity, 1987 (1975 p.147, cited in S. Orgad, *Media Representation and the Global Imagination*, Cambridge, Polity, 2012, p.42 “Society must define its 'identity', its articulation, the world, its relations to the world and to the objects it contains, its needs and desires. Without the 'answer' to these 'questions', without these 'definitions', there can be no human world, no society, no culture...The role of imaginary significations is to provide an answer to these questions, and answers that, obviously, neither 'reality', nor 'rationality' can provide”.

¹³⁹ S. Orgad, *Idem*, p.43

¹⁴⁰ S. Orgad, *Idem*, p.43-45 “1. Imagination is a process of negotiation and interaction between personal and collective thinking and feeling. 2. Imagination is both factual and normative, referring to both meaningful real actions and the fantastical. 3. Imagination involves thinking and feeling, and can be messy and contradictory. 4. Imagination is dialectic. 5. Imagination is a moral force”.

¹⁴¹ C. Castoriadis, *Ibidem*, cited in S. Orgad, *Idem*, p. 41

¹⁴² S. Feagin and P. Maynard, *Aesthetics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, cited in *Ibidem*

¹⁴³ S. Orgad, *Idem*, p.43

¹⁴⁴ H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, New York and Hamondsworth, Penguin, 1977, p.41, cited in S. Orgad, *Idem*, p.43

collective thinking can be read and conceived¹⁴⁵.

The concept of “global imagination” (Orgad, 2012) applied as a working tool for framing the dynamics of media representations in a global context, offers, as we anticipated, an integration to “ideology” and “discourse”. The last two are very useful tools for the account of interactions among private and collective expressions through mediated forms, they somewhat lack of a comprehensive sense of what symbolic space these interactions occur in. “Global imagination” is, instead, able to lay out the element of spatiality which we are trying to introduce here as a preliminary factor. ‘Global imagination’ works as a way to establish a relationship between *proximity and non-proximity in the space of political interaction*. The idea of “local imagining” (Appadurai, 1996), instead, as a way in which broader narratives impact on and intersect personal, intimate feelings and narratives of local population – with its correlate of audience construction and engagement with places where the primary communication/interactions takes place (everyday media talks, street discourses, cafes, flows of informal exchanges through various media etc..) - can offer an interesting paradigm to this approach to contemporary geography of narratives and media in relation to protest and dissent. Its value lies in the way this concept can work to describe the way in which that space of continuity between online and offline spaces feeds back into local narratives.

As we know, in fact, most of the organising and networking work which originated the Arab Spring protests in the first place (in Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Bahrein, Yemen¹⁴⁶), took place in a specific *continuity line* which was connecting offline spaces (cabs, cafes, private households, streets¹⁴⁷ etc.) to online spaces like Facebook and Twitter. This element needs to be taken into account when we are referring to the “bundle of constraints” the “actants” of this specific form of communication relied on in that particular context. In particular, this element manifest itself is in the form of a new form of spatiality which informs the relationship between offline and offline exchanges, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, it shapes the imagination investment these spaces become object of.

The specific configuration of “communication space”¹⁴⁸ (Odin, 2012) offered by Tahrir Square in Cairo in

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem* “Imagination, the Kantian enlargement of mentality beyond the individual and the solitary self, requires taking the position of the other, the creation of the appropriate, the formation of an opinion and the materialisation of a political life. The enlargement of mentality involves bringing as many others into one's imagination as it is possible to do: 'The more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my conclusions, my opinion”.

¹⁴⁶ Different is the case of Libya and Syria because very different is the media access of the average population. See T. Ramadan, *The Arab Awakening. Islam and the New Middle East*, Penguin, 2012, p.2

¹⁴⁷ Lim, M., Clicks, Cabs, and Coffee Houses: Social Media and Oppositional Movements in Egypt, 2004–2011. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2), 231-248, 2012

¹⁴⁸ R. Odin, "Pour une sémio-pragmatique du cinéma," *Iris*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 67 to 82. English translation in

the context of the Arab spring in year 2011, for the way it shows the evolving dynamic around *subjectivity, new media spectatorship and spatiality on a trans-local level*, needs to be analysed in relationship to three factors. The first one, is a) the unprecedented level of *co-participation* to the protest and imaginative investment displayed by de-territorialised spectators across the globe, the second one, b) the articulation between *proximity and non-proximity* in the space of political interaction among protesters internally and externally, locally and globally, the third one, c) the *continuity* between online and offline spaces in relation to the *trans-local space* of the protest and dissent .

We are all aware that for 18 days between the end of January 2011 and halfway through February 2011, the *whole world was watching* the thousands of protesters occupying Tahrir Square in Egypt through the countless images that were circulating in real time on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Foursquare etc..) and on traditional media (Al Jazeera, BBC, CNN etc..). We are also aware of the extension of the primary source of visual documentation that was left behind¹⁴⁹ . In fact, the extension of the audience engagement to non-proximity¹⁵⁰ and the established continuity between the space of the protest and that of the internet– on the level of protest organisation and on the level of a wider global audience – had a direct effect on the local events, on a practical and symbolic level. On the one hand, it helped local actors to act more efficiently on the ground and it impacted directly on their morale as a matter of recognition for the abuses that at least, the global audience was able to witness. On the other hand, it also impacted on the wider audience in the sense that these images belonged to everyone – they were part of a common space – and this awareness made the web itself become part of this common space-in-process ¹⁵¹.

The Film Spectator, From sign to mind, Warren Buckland, ed., Amsterdam University Press, 1995, p. 213-227, reprinted in R. Stam and T. Miller, eds., *Film and Theory. An Anthology*, Blackwell, 2000, p. 54 to 67

¹⁴⁹ W. Gunning, "Toward a Cinema of Revolution: 18 Days in Tahrir Square", *Political Perspectives*, 2013, volume 7 (2), 11-43 , p.1. "A revolution fought, remembered, and contested through its images must be understood through them"

¹⁵⁰ E. Gordon, A. De Souza e Silva, *Net Locality. Why Location Matters in a Networked World*, Wiley-Blackwell, West Sussex, 2011, p.166

¹⁵¹ E. Gordon, A. De Souza e Silva, *Idem*, p.9. The idea of "net locality" can bring us a step further into understanding what does the contemporary communication set-up bring to the users' experience. The fact that smartphones query the users about their location before they launch and that localisation is a feature embedded in i.e. iPhones which the users don't necessarily choose to use, but are drawn to use by the way technology is designed, has the consequence of providing users information about location without them having to access the internet. The street becomes 'a network of information' accessible through the mobile device,- information about shops, street names, people's presence in the surrounding etc...- that becomes an extension of the web into the street. This means that the web becomes "a part of the city" and that, for most people – the ones owning a smartphone – the city doesn't exist without the web. In a way, as Gordon and De Souza notice, "there is no physical city without the web" (*Ibidem*). And further "Net localities are always produced in the context of social and

A really good example of this quite peculiar dynamic that took place there is offered by the artwork 'Arab Revolt' produced by Italian photographer Giorgio di Noto¹⁵². The photographer never was in North Africa nor he ever took physically part in the revolt. Nevertheless, he produced an extensive photographic documentation of the Arab Spring made by editing, photoshopping and exhibiting images produced on the ground by direct participants to the events and taken by social media streams shared on the web. Giorgio di Noto became the "author" of images taken by others and found by him on the web by taking pictures of the screen of his computer with a Polaroid camera. The web was the 'square' where the images could be collected and also an archive where they were stored and accessed from¹⁵³. He felt he was entitled to take part in this extended documentation process by expressing his view as an artist and produce another level of representation. An example such as this show us that what we are trying to analyse is a space where the boundaries between real/ virtual, original/copy, representation/ presence are all in question here and that the space in which the actual protest circulated was far more extended than just the physical space where people were gathering and manifesting their dissent.



Picture 5. One of Giorgio Di Noto's pictures, Arab Revolts, online exhibition, 2011. The pictures have been found on the web and re-edited according to the logic of the "web witness" Di Noto, who became effectively the new author of these found pictures¹⁵⁴.

political forces because they extend beyond the limitations of mere physicality and mere virtuality" (E. Gordon, A. De Souza e Silva, *Idem*, p.168)

¹⁵² G. di Noto, *Arab Revolt*, available on the web at www.giorgiodinoto.com

¹⁵³ We will come back in the course of this analysis to these two aspects of the web in regards to this specific configuration.

¹⁵⁴ One of Giorgio di Noto's pictures. See www.giorgiodinoto.com

Beyond 'Orientalism'?

In order to enter this 'new communication space' with all the necessary tools this analysis requires, it is also important to remember that the metaphoric space in which the 'revolutions' 'uprisings' or 'awakening'¹⁵⁵ took place in the Arab World in year 2011¹⁵⁶ is, in fact, also a conceptual space where most concepts belonging to politics, sociology, geopolitics of XIXth and XXth centuries are not at home anymore. "The East, the West, the Oriental, the colonial, the postcolonial – they are no more (...) The postcolonial did not overcome the colonial: it exacerbated its negation. The Arab Spring has overcome them both"¹⁵⁷.

Keeping in mind Appadurai's idea of "communities of feelings", we would also like to consider Dabashi's idea that the Arab Spring represents "a new geography of liberation, which is no longer mapped on colonial or cast upon postcolonial structures of domination"¹⁵⁸. Dabashi talks about "permanent revolutionary mood" which has connected the national and the transnational in unexpected, unmapped ways and which is changing our imaginative geography, leading to a kind of emancipation that develops itself "in an open-ended dynamic"¹⁵⁹.

On the one hand, this expansion is also due to the way these events are reshaping new identities and new solidarities 'both within and without "the Islam and the West" binary'¹⁶⁰. In this respect, we should also rethink the way they connected the northern and southern coasts of the Mediterranean through the

¹⁵⁵ For a discussion on the naming appropriate for the events description and the interpretation that goes with it, see T. Ramadan, *The Arab Awakening. Islam and the New Middle East*, Penguin, 2012, p.2. Ramadan chooses the term 'uprising' over 'revolution' because of the unfinished character of the events and the unwarranted development of its consequences in the coming years. He uses the term 'uprising' in the sense Jean Paul Sartre uses it in his essay "*What is literature? Or Baudelaire (1947)*", where 'uprising' is considered as a concept between 'revolution' and 'revolt'. H. Dabashi, *The Arab Spring. The End of Postcolonialism*, Zed Books, London, 2012, Preface, chooses instead the term "Arab Spring" for the connotation of "hope" and renewal that goes with it.

¹⁵⁶ As for the definition of what is the "Arab Spring" and where it took place, I will follow both Dabashi and Ramadan in defining the first wave as the one which invested Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Bahrein, Yemen, Libya and Syria in the Spring of the year 2011. In the course of my analysis I will also mention Greece Spain and Turkey as examples of the Tahrir Square protest model crossing the wider "Occupy" movement in the Mediterranean context. Mentions will be made also of the events that took place in the UK and the USA between 2011 and 2012 and recent protests in Romania, Bosnia and Ukraine during 2013, but without any further analysis.

¹⁵⁷ H. Dabashi, *Idem*, Preface, xix

¹⁵⁸ H. Dabashi, *Idem*, Preface, xviii

¹⁵⁹ *Ibidem*

¹⁶⁰ H. Dabashi, *Idem*, Preface, xix

spread of Tahrir Square-style protests to Greece, Spain and Turkey, and more recently even to Romania, Bosnia or Ukraine. On the other hand, this is created by that expansion of the public sphere¹⁶¹ that sets the premises for an *open-ended* development of these uprisings. The reality of the political act and its contradictions, its fractures, its discontinuities thus extends the public space even further. It informs the narratives and meta narratives that are characterising the formation of new identities¹⁶² and investing the ways in which knowledge is produced around “the Middle East”, “North Africa”, “the Arab and Muslim World”, “the West and the Rest”¹⁶³.

In this respect, I would also like to mention also T. Ramadan's position discussed in the paragraph “When the other is no longer the other”¹⁶⁴. Ramadan also focuses on the meaning of the 2011 events that took place in the Arab world as a shift in the conception of the “imaginary Orient”. This conception was developed by E. Said in *Orientalism*¹⁶⁵. The idea of 'imaginary Orient' is the Western projection of a cultural, historical, philosophical, religious, geographical structured entity represented by the Orient and the construction of which has been informing Western discourses for the last two centuries. Ramadan raises an interesting point as counterpoint to Said, when he notices how the events that took place in the year 2011 brought a change in the binary paradigm that had been characterising the debate starting from the XIXth century . This debate had been culminating in the “neo-con” perspectives that informed the political debate in the States and in Europe before and after the attack to the Twin Towers in New York and around the third US military intervention in Iraq in year 2001¹⁶⁶. In the analysis of the recent “uprisings”, the category of “likeness” seemed to have replaced the one of “otherness”, as a matter of sketching a sense of common features and common values (like democracy, freedom, justice, dignity for men and women) between the West and the Arab countries. Ramadan quite rightly underlines that this vision carries the same kind of discourse of power and imaginary identity construction that the previous one had been carrying along during the last two centuries. It shows its real face especially when it comes to

¹⁶¹ See also M. Nanabhay & R. Farmanfarmanian, “From spectacle to spectacular: How physical space, social media and mainstream broadcast amplified the public sphere in Egypt's ‘Revolution’”, *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4, December 2011, 573–603

¹⁶² H. Dabashi, *Idem*, Preface, xxi. Dabashi embarks on an enlightening discussion on postcolonial ideological formations as springing out from colonialism and transforming themselves around the notion of 'subalternity'. The neutralisation of 'subalternity' in a simply 'native informant' was the outcome of a process that was placing the Arab and the Muslim outside of the 'self-universalising tropes of the European metaphysics', but it failed to picture 'the non-Western' as a full historical subject.

¹⁶³ H. Dabashi, *Idem*, p.2

¹⁶⁴ T. Ramadan, *Idem*, p.13

¹⁶⁵ E. Said, *Orientalism*, Random House, 1978

¹⁶⁶ See for example S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of the World Order*, Simon and Schuster, 1996

expelling any discourse regarding Islam and self-determined political forms, as the differentiated media coverage produced in the West of the Egyptian and Syrian uprising quite openly shows¹⁶⁷. It is important to keep these implications in mind when we are venturing into the complex territory of media representation, in order not to fall into those clichés an enthusiastic adherence to the events might lead us to - especially because, as we all know, the historical outcome of the recent protests is still unknown and ongoing as we write.

Self-narratives, testimonies, micro narratives

The reason why I mentioned these positions coming from the Cultural Studies area - and especially Cultural Anthropology - has to do with the fact that my analysis will focus on the *production, construction, dissemination of self-narratives, testimonies and representations during the Arab Spring through the specific mode of media representation hosted by interactive media*.

Even if my work will focus on the side of media representation, using the semio-pragmatic tools set by Odin, I will not be able to avoid confronting myself with the changes in the wider political narratives that the space of the postcolonial and global world has been invested by. This is part of an expansive dynamic and it will be important to underline how they informed the identity construction of individuals, and groups, in specific contexts.

The semio-pragmatic approach set by Odin does, in fact, take the context into account in its purest form, without any specific reference to the economic and political constraints declined by the cultural context in which the communication takes place¹⁶⁸. Odin argues that a cultural analysis of the constraints is susceptible of going through a process of *regressum ad infinitum* and that, once we venture into the territory, we are very likely to get entangled into analysing a context that keeps evolving and developing without any possibility for us to control the parameters. As Jane Steiger puts it, it will be difficult for the theorist having to determine all the time “what identities are mobilised within the interaction between an individual and a specific text”¹⁶⁹. On the other hand, Odin also accepts the use of ethnology-methodological arguments¹⁷⁰ in reference to the the point of view of those subjects who are subjectively

¹⁶⁷ T. Ramadan, *Ibidem*

¹⁶⁸ R. Odin, *Les Éspaces de communication. Introduction à la sémio-pragmatique*, Press universitaire de Grenoble, Grenoble, 2011, p.39

¹⁶⁹ J. Steiger, *Perverse Spectators. The practice of film reception*, New York, New York University Press, p. 115

¹⁷⁰ In reference to 'family films', for example, Odin accepts to consider the point of view of the filmmaker who functions more as a 'photographer' than a 'cinéaste". R. Odin, *Idem*, p.93

engaged in a certain activity¹⁷¹ that takes part in the construction of a specific “communication space”. He also accepts that the institutional and technological context might affect the character of a specific “communication space” in time and might require, from a descriptive point of view, the identification of an evolution of it into a “new communication space”, which might involve a change occurred to the *operators*, to the *modes of production of sense* and to the *production of text*¹⁷² (Odin, 2011)

I would argue that, as my analysis will try to reconstruct the shift of dynamics that occurs between the *witnessing* and the *testifying of events* as it displayed itself during the very specific moment in time of year 2011, where the functioning of time/space boundaries has been visibly incurring into a *contraction* and *expansion* mechanism on a global level to do with the spatial “de-centerdness” of the uprisings¹⁷³, the *specificity of the context* will be central to the understanding of the phenomenon in its entirety. Understanding the context in which those events happened becomes crucial in order to grasp the uniqueness of the ‘new communication space’ in which these elements were mobilised. The relationship between the events produced by protesters and the world watching them in real time, with their specific *feedback dynamic*, is, in fact, an *unicum* that was made possible only thanks to the specific historical circumstances encountered.

The interesting element introduced by Odin's framework has to do with the lack of reference to any specific medium. This is the reason why I would like to apply this methodology to my analysis. I would like to understand the specificity of that interaction, as independent from social media considered as a “*dispositif*”, where social media actually act as a specific communication context in combination with the physical space where the events actually took place.

In fact, my hypothesis is that the above mentioned dynamic, far from being independent from the physicality of the places in which it was happening– i.e. Tahrir Square in Cairo – was actually strongly determined by it. The relationship among identity formation and online organisation, the events taking place in the streets, the process of documenting events in real time, the sharing of information through social media, the mechanism of making memory of the events in a short post-real-time span through transmedia platforms – all these elements combined are forming a new ‘communication space’, including online and offline spaces. Tahrir Square represents its metaphor, its symbolic space and its beginning.

The very specific configuration of the “communication space”(Odin, 2012) offered by Tahrir Square in Cairo in the context of the Arab spring in year 2011, shows the evolving dynamic around *subjectivity, new*

¹⁷¹ N. Goffman, *Language de l'art*, Paris, ed. Jacqueline Champion, 1991, p. 19, *cit* in R. Odin, *Ibidem*

¹⁷² R. Odin, *Les Espaces de communication. Introduction à la sémio-pragmatique*, Press universitaire de Grenoble, Grenoble, 2011.

¹⁷³ H. Tawil-Souri, *Idem*, p.160

media spectatorship and spatiality on a trans-local level and its interesting for the three reasons mentioned above. First of all, because it shows a) the unprecedented level of *co-participation* to the protest and imaginative investment displayed by de-territorialised spectators across the globe, secondly because it shows b) the articulation between proximity *and non-proximity* in the space of political interaction among protesters internally and externally, locally and globally . Third, because it shows c) the *continuity* between online and offline spaces on the *trans-local space* of the protest and dissent .

Let us start analysing these specific characteristics of Tahrir's "communication space" by means of *spatiality*.

1.2.2 *The Space of Tahrir Square - Within and Without*

'Permanence is folded into waves of change. The cityscape is no longer . . . an open space framed by buildings, but a constantly morphing place shaped by people doing, hoping, building, destroying and being'¹⁷⁴

(M.Al-Ibrashy, "Days of the Midan", *Magaz*, 401, 2011, p.627)

A space-in-process

Some of the images that circulated widely across global news sites and the Internet during the days of the Egyptian revolutions can set an interesting example for the 'new communication space' that Tahrir Square , in my opinion, represents. Most images coming from Egypt in January/February 2011, depicted the **Midan al-Tahrir**, the main square in Cairo city, full of people day and night, a crowd occupying the space in the most intense and mobilised way and, at the same time, continuing to lead their collective everyday life. Ordinary people who were following the events from afar – such as I followed them from London, as the students began the occupation at the university around the same time, and probably inspired by the events in Cairo– perceived the life of Tahrir Square as if it were a living organism. It is was a universe with its own internal system: food distribution, sanitation, media, control service, "*a utopian community* formed in the square and occupied its centre and peripheries for several days, with tents

¹⁷⁴ M.Al-Ibrashy, "Days of the Midan", *Magaz*, 401, 2011, p.627. Available at http://www.magazmagazine.com/magaz2012/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id.700%3Adays-of-the-midan&catid.157%3Aissue-401&Itemid.123&task.view. See also J. Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street" (EIPCP, *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*), 2011, p. 627. Available at <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en>, cited in D. Gregory, "Tahrir: Politics, Publics and Performances of Space", *Middle East Critique*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 2013, 235–246, p. 243

dedicated to internet bloggers, a medical clinic, food services, and a large peripheral area guarded by protesters”¹⁷⁵ (Telmissay, 2014). The people were seen moving inside the square, running, escaping from police charges, rescuing protesters who had been wounded by police, taking pictures of the events, filming the episodes of violence, gathering information, making demands. but also sitting, standing, eating together, chanting, watching films at 'Tahrir Cinema', chatting and sleeping in the square. Some people were even getting married or giving birth to children. Despite its temporary character, Tahrir Square reproduced the space of a city in a state of mobilisation, but it was also expressing, in its internal organisation, the character of *a specific* community. “A wedding was celebrated¹⁷⁶, and a baby was born in Tahrir Square. These scenes were in some ways a positive mirroring of that other form of the encampment that has become so ubiquitous on the world stage, the shanty towns and improvised refugee camps that spring up wherever a population finds itself displaced, homeless, or thrust into a state of emergency”¹⁷⁷ (Mitchell, 2012). Tahrir Square was thus both a space hosting an intensified positive social life, its internal gatherings and a place where brutality was constantly entering from outside and that required constant reconfiguration in order to keep incursions from the police away from it and to find its organising structure within. A whole repertoire of actions pertaining to protests, sit-ins, expressions of dissent and reactions to violence was displayed in the square during the 18 days from end of January to mid-February 2011. But the square was also theatre to everyday civic life, where private behaviours were moved from private households into the square for a certain period of time and common behaviours were shared amongst previously unknown companions. Being an inclusive space where Egyptians from different walks of life and social classes were merging all at once, Tahrir Square was *reconfiguring itself, in the means of gathering, as a 'space-in process'*¹⁷⁸ (Gregory, 2013).

A space extended to the people watching it

I have never been to Tahrir Square in Cairo and I actually realise, now that I am writing, that I have no real concept of its physical dimensions, beside the one that I gathered from the images seen on the web. It is a place that I know, though, in a mediated sense, for the images that I have seen of it. I am the perfect

¹⁷⁵ M. Telmissay, “The utopian and dystopian functions of Tahrir Square”, *Postcolonial Studies*, 2014, Vol. 17, No. 1, 36–46, p. 37

¹⁷⁶ Francesca Caferri, 'Amori di Primavera', *D di Repubblica*, 13th July 2012, available on the web. Retrieved July 2012.

¹⁷⁷ W. J. T. Michell, “Image, Space, Revolution: The Arts of Occupation”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Autumn 2012), The University of Chicago Press, pp. 8

¹⁷⁸ D. Gregory, *Idem*, p. 243.

example of the supportive participative observer who followed the news everyday during that time and who felt she was becoming more and more part of a space she had no previous knowledge about. This sense of *participative supporting/observing process* was legitimised by the means the information was purveying – interactive, social, transitional, networked media- which were used by the occupiers to organise and send information out of the country, counting on an enlarged, expanded, global network which they themselves were keeping involved through their media performances.

Many images circulated during those days across the networks – from social media and the global news sites. One famous image was of a man holding up a sign that read “I want my Facebook”. Another one showed a man holding up a sign where the word Egypt was composed with letters reproducing by means of internationally recognisable logos, the G of Google, the Y of Yahoo!, the T of Twitter, and so on¹⁷⁹. In the mind of the audience receiving these images *outside of the square*, the physical space and the social media space were progressively becoming part of the same universe – both on an iconic and on a functional level. They were becoming part of a *hybrid* space where a certain level of participation was rendered possible for the rest of the world as well. Due to the amount of images circulating on the web – coming both from the occupiers and from official media - and thanks to the sense of mobilisation experienced at different sides of the globe- *the sense of engagement with that space was extended also to the audience watching the event*. On one level, there was a first-degree of site-specificity, immediate, kind of participation, based on bodily presence and physical proximity. On a second level, there was a second-degree kind of supportive participation made possible by the extended space of social media information, through which footage and images were disseminated and shared. On a third level, there was a third-degree of mediated kind of participation that was amplifying both the “immediate and socially mediated space” through the means of broadcast global media¹⁸⁰. Was that a new kind of *spectatorship*? Was that a new kind of *communication space* protesters and engaged audience were in the process of sharing?

Even In July 2011 – six months after the uprising - revolutionary souvenirs were being sold just outside the green fence which went around Tahrir Square, while protesters were holding a sit-in against the military rule. Among the souvenirs of the protest, there was a T-shirt being sold with the words “25th January Revolution” written on it, accompanied by the words “freedom” and “Facebook”. The signs related to the global internet networks where the information was circulating, like Twitter for example, featured also on the walls around the space of protest or, for example, on the façade of a shop not far from Tahrir Square¹⁸¹. The names of the networks where the footage and images of the uprising had been circulating

¹⁷⁹ H. Tawil-Souri, *Idem*, p. 164

¹⁸⁰ W. J. T. Michell, *Idem*, p.12

¹⁸¹ P. Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*, London, Pluto Press,

(and were still circulating) had come back to the physical space of the protest, in a full circle.

It is interesting to notice that all these images, the ones featuring resistance actions, and the everyday life of the square's temporary inhabitants, and those featuring corporate logos and denouncing the relationship between collective freedom and social media, were *performed, captured, incorporated and reproduced* around, across and in reference to the - presently or formerly - occupied physical space of Tahrir Square. They were creating a link between the physical space and the space of the networks that was living beyond the actual temporality of the protest .



Picture 6. #jan 25 hashtag, Cairo, Egypt, January 2011. The picture shows the correlation established by protesters between the act of being in the streets and Facebook as constituting “the Egyptian social network”¹⁸².

2011, p.48

¹⁸² Picture taken from D. Faarid, “Egypt has the largest number of Facebook users in the Arab world: report”, *Daily News Egypt*, September 25, 2013, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/09/25/egypt-has-the-largest-number-of-facebook-users-in-the-arab-world-report/>. Retrieved May 2015

Performativity of Tahrir Square

Much has been written on the importance of social media for the organisation of the protests and on the sharing dynamics characterising social media usage within that first protest, but it is also important to remember that ‘the primary channels of mobilisation were not mass mediated or hi-tech at all, but they relied on means like “face-to-face meetings, graffiti, posters and landline calls”¹⁸³. The survey underscored the fact that almost “50 percent of people (in its sample) first heard about the demonstrations in Tahrir through face-to-face communication, 28 percent via Facebook and 13 percent via their mobile phone”¹⁸⁴. Actually, if we talk about internet access in Egypt, we will discover that in 2011 “only 25 percent of Egyptian homes were connected to the internet, only 4 percent of Egyptians adults were members of Facebook and only 0.11 percent had a Twitter account”¹⁸⁵.

So, despite the proven function played by the Kullena Khaled Said Facebook page opened by Wael Ghonim after the 6th of June 2010 murder¹⁸⁶ - with 36,000 users joining the page on the first day only- we should not overestimate the role of social media in mobilising people. We should also not underestimate the role of physical presence in the *inner* dynamics of the uprising. Actually, my hypothesis, following Gregory and Gerbaudo, is that the relationship between physical and social media space was actually much more complex and that there was an element of space-foundation-in-process which was taking place between the two.

Let's go back for a moment to how the events were displayed. On the 6th of June 2010, 28-year-old middle class blogger Khaled Said was beaten to death by two police officers in Alexandria. In the days after the event, shocking pictures of the disfigured face of the dead young man started circulating on Facebook among Egyptian youngsters¹⁸⁷. At least two Facebook pages were opened in the following days to protest against the death of the young boy, one of which is the famous “*Kullena Khaled Said – We Are All Khaled Said*” created by Google Middle East and North Africa marketing expert Wael Ghonim¹⁸⁸. In the words of

¹⁸³ H. Tawil-Souri, “It’s Still about the Power of Place”, *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 5, 2012, pp. 86–95, p. 92, cited in D. Gregory, *Idem*, p. 240

¹⁸⁴ Tufekci & Wilson, “Observations from Tahrir Square”, 2012 pp. 363 –379, cited in D. Gregory, *Ibidem*.

¹⁸⁵ Dubai School of Government, “Facebook usage, Factors and Analysis”, *Arab Social Media Report*, 1,1, 2011, cit. In P. Gerbaudo, *Idem*, p.49

¹⁸⁶ W. Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People is Greater than the People in Power: A Memoir*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012, p.58-65

¹⁸⁷ *Idem*, p.58

¹⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, but see also P. Gerbaudo, *Idem*, p.48 and others. Some authors also consider other sources to be crucial in the beginning of the online mobilisation around Khaled Said's death. On Wikipedia there is mention on an article written by Said's neighbour Amro Ali and poster on the 9th of July 2010 “Egypt's collision course with history” as being one of the important sparks of the online mobilisation . The

Ghonim himself, the message of outrage and sadness launched through the web, resonated in the space of 2 minutes with the discontent of at least 300 hundred members who immediately joined the page¹⁸⁹. Within one hour from the opening of the page, the members were already 3000. Wael Ghonim decided to turn the page into a first-person speech. It would be Khaled Said himself who would be speaking through the page “as if he was speaking from his grave”¹⁹⁰. The choice of a colloquial Egyptian dialect, the first-person testimony techniques and the proliferation of pictures made the page extremely popular already in the first day after its opening. By the end of day 1, 1.800 were the comments and 36.000 the members who had subscribed. With 70.000 members who had joined the other page on the same cause, it seemed obvious for the two pages to merge. “*Kullena Khaled Said – We Are All Khaled Said*” linked itself to “*My Name is Khaled Mohamed Said*”. The funeral of Khaled Said took place on the 11th of June 2011 and a thousand people participated to the event. At the same time, a protest was organised in Cairo encountering a strong political crackdown from the side of the police. What was bubbling up online, also in response to the violent reaction by the Egyptian police, which kept perpetuating political crimes of torture and violence towards protesters, spilled into the streets. It started off with a series of ‘Silent stands’ in Cairo in the months following Khaled Kullena’s death and it culminated in the historical protest of the 25th of January 2011.

“Reaching working-class Egyptians was not going to happen through the Internet and Facebook,” notes Wael Ghonim in his memoir¹⁹¹. The organisation of the 25th of January protest required a combination of internet mobilisation together with techniques which would reach out to a part of the Egyptian people which had limited access to information technologies. Printed flyers, mass text messaging and the organisation of a demonstration starting from four different sides of Cairo and crossing four different neighbourhoods, was the option protesters chose, so as to mobilise wider masses. “We needed to have everyone join forces: workers, human rights activists, government employees and others who had grown tired of the regime’s policies,” he writes. “If the invitation to take to the streets had been based solely on human rights, then only a certain segment of Egyptian society would have participated”¹⁹². The 25th of January was Police Day and the protesters were initially mobilising against police violence and repression, but in order to make the cause wider and more widespread, they changed the name of the protest into

article is available on <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=10663&page=0>

¹⁸⁹ *Idem*, p.60

¹⁹⁰ *Idem*, p.61

¹⁹¹ *Idem*

¹⁹² J. Vargas, *Spring Awakening*, New York Times , 17th of February 2012 available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/books/review/how-an-egyptian-revolution-began-on-facebook.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

“January 25: Revolution Against Torture, Poverty, Corruption and Unemployment”. The protesters started walking across the city of Cairo pointing to Tahrir Square and calling everyone to join forces with them.

Millions of people coming from different socio-economic backgrounds ended up gathering in Tahrir Square demanding the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarak. Violent clashes took place between the police and protesters and the internet also seemed to help in bypassing the curfew imposed by authorities.

The irony of the curfew is that it might succeed in getting people off the streets and out of downtown, but in doing so it delivers them back to the Internet . . . Many of my friends are on Facebook through the night, as are those I follow on Twitter, a steady stream of tweets and links. Active public discussions and debates about the meanings of what is taking place during the day carry on in cyberspace long after curfew¹⁹³.

(B. Edwards, Tahrir: Ends of Circulation, *Public Culture*, 23(3), 2011, pp. 493– 504, p. 498)

Mubarak dissolved his government, appointing former head of the Egyptian Intelligence Directorate as vice-president in an attempt to quell dissent. Mubarak asked the aviation minister and former chief of Egypt's air force to form a new government. In response to mounting popular pressure, Mubarak announced that he did not intend to seek re-election in September. On 11 February 2011 Vice President Omar Suleiman announced that Mubarak would resign as president.

As Gregory notes, 'the urban space where “newness” might enter the world does not pre-exist its performance'¹⁹⁴. Judith Butler emphasises the *performativity of the physical space of Tahrir Square*, as a space where ‘the collective actions [of the crowd] collect the space itself, gather the pavement, and animate and organize the architecture (Butler, 2011). Judith Butler goes further by stating that what took place in Tahrir was a “wresting of an existing power” and in doing that “a new space” was created, “a new “between” of bodies, as it were, that lays claim to existing space through the action of a new alliance, and those bodies” were “seized and animated by those existing spaces in the very acts by which they reclaim and re-signify their meanings”¹⁹⁵. Gregory builds further on Butler's considerations by defining the space of Tahrir Square as both a “formation of a new collective subject-in-space-process” and a space where “collecting the space” was *a way of becoming of the space itself*¹⁹⁶.

¹⁹³ B. Edwards, Tahrir: Ends of Circulation, *Public Culture*, 23(3), 2011, pp. 493– 504, p. 498

¹⁹⁴ D. Gregory, "Tahrir: Politics, Publics and Performances of Space", *Middle East Critique*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 2013, 235–246, p. 241

¹⁹⁵ J. Butler, *Idem*, p.0

¹⁹⁶ D. Gregory, *Ibidem*. For a wider discussion of the idea of 'becoming-square' process as a mirroring of what was happening in the physical space into the role played by the internet, see also M. Telmissay,

This *becoming of the space* at the time of the 25th of January Revolution is deeply rooted, in my opinion, in Appadurai's concept of 'community of feelings' as discussed in the previous paragraph (1.2.1). This concept, which is not disjointed from the relationship to material bodies, describes a *mode of connecting* physical bodies in the global space through common feelings and common representations that are enabled by a sense-of-belonging-in-progress which is constantly reconfigured and mediated through means of communication. This mode of connecting, and the *interconnectedness* that comes with it, it is rather rooted in a "global sense of place, as a mobile constellation of the global and the local"¹⁹⁷ (Massey, 1994) and it involves a constant *feedback system* between physical people in physical places and displaced subjects involved in actions that are spatially deferred in relation to their position. In Butler's terms spatiality becomes, then, "transposable"¹⁹⁸ and the performativity of the space finds its meaning in this feedback dynamic involving the protesting actions in the square, its representation in images, the sharing process through social and traditional media and the dynamic of feeding back these comments into the protesting action.

Various analyses of the role of the internet during the Egyptian revolution often underestimate the strict street policing of public space under Mubarak, which would explain why the internet was so popular as a vehicle for protest organisation. Gerbaudo testifies that during Mubarak's regime the average demonstration would gather hardly more than a hundred of people¹⁹⁹. The presence of secret police (*'mukhabarat'*) during demonstrations acted as a powerful deterrent to prevent big gatherings²⁰⁰ (Bradley, 2008) and the use of violence, torture and dissemination of mistrust among acquaintances and friends were all techniques used to discourage dissent and public protests. Nasser Rabbat argues more generally that 'public life in Arab cities retreated from the open spaces to the private ones,' as authoritarian rule was

Idem, p.40. According to Telmissay in the first phase of the revolution (the 18 days Tahrir Square revolution which led to Hosni Mubarak's fall, there were four 'utopian' modes of 'becoming-square' in operation. The first function is related to radical and pacific contestation (embracing the totality of the population and seeking reconciliation as part of the revolutionary vision), the second one is the communal/communicational one (achieving a communal space were the demands were pursued), The third one is the educational function (changing stigmas of society, educating about new moral codes), the secularizing function (call for national unity and the much needed separation between political activism and religious institutions)

¹⁹⁷ D. Gregory, *Ibidem*, on this D. Massey, "A Global Sense of Place", in: D. Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, Cambridge, UK, Polity Press & Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994, pp. 146 – 156

¹⁹⁸ J. Butler, *Ibidem*

¹⁹⁹ P. Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*, London, Pluto Press, 2011, p. 51

²⁰⁰ R. Bradley, *Inside Egypt: The Land of the Pharaohs on the Brink of a Revolution*. New York, Palgrave Mcmillan, 2008, cit in P. Gerbaudo, *Ibidem*

consolidated in the second half of the twentieth century. Salama suggests that for many Egyptians during those decades, 'public space' had become only 'the space that is owned by the government'²⁰¹ (Rabat, 2012, Salama, 2012). On the other hand, Bayat notices that the thick social life of Egyptian streets and the hundreds of coffee shops in big major cities (Alexandria, Cairo etc.), all provided some kind of space for dissent to grow and counter-information to be disseminated²⁰² (Bayat, 2007)

The soon-to-be-square of the revolution became, therefore, a site for liberation, 'simultaneously represented, contested and inverted', because, in Foucauldian terms, '[the] heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible'²⁰³. The ideals of the movement, explains Telmissay, were developed around three ideas. One was the application of the pacifist (*silmiyah*) rule asking for almost no or very little violence in response to police brutality. The second one, was the idea of promoting freedom of movement inside and outside of the square and the call to other squares of Egypt to take part in the revolution. The third one, was the 'migration' of the struggle in the space of the web, through the help of different tools of communication -mobile phones, internet, cameras, etc..²⁰⁴.

The communal living in the square was co-participated and sustained by a larger virtual, national and international community active on the internet and by the production of alternative and international media coverage. The internet also played a role in mobilising larger groups across the country - students, workers, professionals, etc..-; and in sustaining the uprising by constantly providing public opinion with different information sources – from pictures, to video clips, cartoons, posters, graphics of the events etc... In response to physical repression and media misrepresentation on Egyptian public media, the square based its existence, on the one hand, on the free virtual space that was ongoing on the web which highlighted the creativity of many unknown artists and designers²⁰⁵. On the other, it lived a parallel social life, with sit-ins, gatherings, cinema showings and cultural initiatives organised inside. The internet offered an opportunity to measure the level of success of mobilised groups, the positive and the negative outcomes of the uprising as it unfolded, the ebb and flow of hope and enthusiasm among supporters and

²⁰¹ N. Rabat "The Arab Revolution Takes Back the Public Space", *Critical Inquiry*, 39(1), pp. 198– 208, p. 205, 2012 ; and H. H. Salama , "Tahrir Square: A Narrative of Public Space", *Archnet-IJAR*, 7(1), pp. 128138, p. 128, cited in D. Gregory, *Ibidem*

²⁰² A. Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2007, cit. In P. Gerbaudo, *Ibidem*

²⁰³ M. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', Jay Miskowiec (trans), 1967/1984, <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf>, cit in M. Telmissay, *op. cit.*

²⁰⁴ M. Telmissay, *Idem*, p.40

²⁰⁵ Collective initiatives and anonymity were also very important and gave birth to long-lasting groups like *Mosireen*.

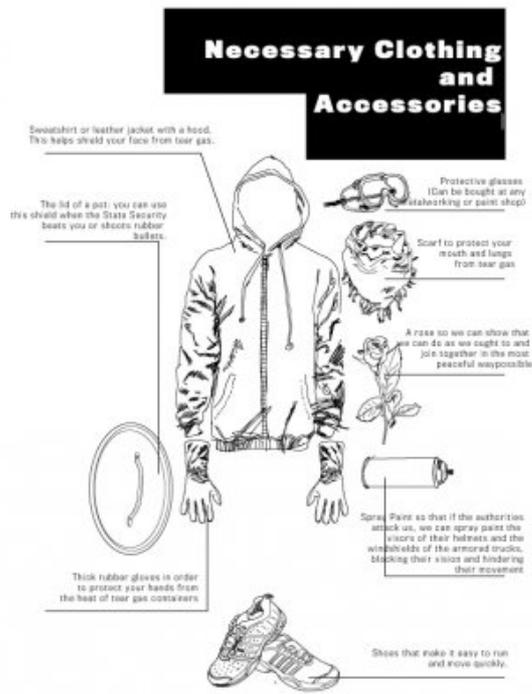
opponents – it acted as a *real-time mirror of the functioning/dysfunctional communication dynamics* that were happening inside the square. Further, the internet brought about the value of solidarity and it acted as an educational tool within the project – it worked as *a space of foundation in-process of the ideals promoted by the square*²⁰⁶



Picture 7. People sitting by Tahrir Square, Facebook sign on a shop, Cairo, Egypt, January, 2011. Facebook became such a symbol in Egypt 2011 that “A young man in his twenties wanted to express his gratitude about the victories the youth of 25th of January have achieved and chose to express it in the form of naming his firstborn girl “Facebook” Jamal Ibrahim (his name.) The girl’s family, friends, and neighbors in the Ibrahimya region gathered around the new born to express their continuing support for the revolution that started on Facebook. “Facebook” received many gifts from the youth who were overjoyed by her arrival and the new name. A name [Facebook] that shocked the entire world²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ M. Telmissay, *Ibidem*

²⁰⁷ Picture taken from article C. Smith, “Egyptian Father Names Baby ‘Facebook’”, *Huffington Post*, available on http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/02/21/baby-named-facebook-egypt_n_825934.html



كيف تثور بجدائة

معلومات وتكتيكات هامة

نرجو نشرها عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني والطباعة (والتصوير) فقط.
مراقبان (Facebook و Twitter) حذاري وقوع هذه المعلومات في أيدي الشرطة أو أمن الدولة.

How to Protest Intelligently

Important information and tactics

Please distribute through email printing, and photocopies **ONLY!**
Twitter and facebook are being monitored. Be careful not to let this fall into the hands of the police or state security.

Picture 8,9. Anonymous Pamphlet 'How to protest intelligently' (2010=2011)²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Picture taken from A. Basu, *Ibidem*, http://www.metamute.org/sites/www.metamute.org/files/u1/Page_1_rev2.jpg



Picture 10. Facebook Cafe Cairo, Egypt, August 2013, Mohammed Morsi's face that's crossed out on the cafe window²⁰⁹

Social Media, Social Change and Citizen Witnessing – A Facebook revolution?

It is important for us to explore the *relationship between social media and social change* as it has been analysed by recent literature on the Egyptian protest, before venturing into the core of our theoretical

²⁰⁹ Picture courtesy of BBC reporter Hugh Sykes, http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/radio4/posts/hugh_sykes_with_his_camera_in_tahrir_square_cairo.

From an email conversation with Hugh Sykes: “Calling it the 'Facebook Revolution' was always an exaggeration, except that the Jan 25th revolt against Mubarak was largely secular and left-wing, and a lot of activism was organised and communicated via Facebook. The Revolution was hijacked by the Islamists, who were much better led and better organised. So Morsi rose to power. The coup that overthrew Morsi in 2013 was hugely popular in most parts of Egyptian society except for the Islamists of course. So it's not surprising to see Morsi's face defaced on the Facebook cafe window.” A face-to-face conversation took place in London, October, 2014, following an email exchange.

hypothesis. Before that, it is also important to frame this debate within the recent much larger question related to new media as located at the crossroads between commons and commodity, which is the main contradiction lying at the heart of the interpretation of new media as intrinsically '*participatory*' media²¹⁰ as part of a wider debate of the changes in the "audience" introduced by the already mentioned "participatory culture"(Jenkins, 2006). When described as being immediately referred to human collaboration and interaction- "facilitator or enhancers of *human* networks – webs of people that promote connectedness as a social value"²¹¹, social media are here described solely on the level of productive forces, in the sense of labour power, raw materials and means of production (technologies, etc.) (Sandoval, 2014). Following this rhetoric, a quality embedded within new technologies themselves should therefore be able to immediately intensify a certain degree of social interaction and render certain media social in themselves . This perspective, though, fails to identify the fact that social media are also involved in certain relationships of production, meaning the social relations through which production, distribution, and consumption are organised²¹², as it is shown by the huge business profit made by the companies involved in the network economy and underlined by contemporary Marxist theory²¹³. By following the social aspect of "social media" and increasingly providing products and services that enable social connections, sharing, cooperation and the production of media commons, private media companies at the same time accelerate the antagonism between the *social* character of productive forces and the *unsocial* character of relations of production²¹⁴. This contradiction is reflected also by the multifocal conception of "user" as which has progressively entered the realm of Media Studies in the last ten years²¹⁵. For example, the definition of "user" as active participants putting a 'certain amount of creative effort' which is 'created outside of professional routines and platforms'²¹⁶, is an interesting case for the framing of

²¹⁰ M. Sandoval, *Social Media? The Unsocial Character of Capitalist Media*, in C. Fuchs, M. Sandoval, *Critique, Social Media and Information Society*, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 17

²¹¹ J. van Dijck, *The culture of connectivity. A critical history of social media*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013

²¹² M. Sandoval, *Idem*, p. 158, but also S. Vaidhyanathan, *The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry)*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2011

²¹³ M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, T. Terranova, 'Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy', *Social Text* 18(2), 2000, p. 33–58

²¹⁴ M. Sandoval, *Idem*, p. 172

²¹⁵ S. Livingstone, 'The Challenge of Changing Audiences', *European Journal of Communication*, 19(1), 2004, 75–86

²¹⁶ The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), based in Paris, issued a report titled *Participative Web: User-generated Content* (12 April 2007). The report was compiled by the OECD Committee for Information, Computer and Communications Policy. Citation in J. Van Dijck, "Users like you? Theorizing agency in user-generated content", *Media Culture Society* 2009; 31, p. 41

these new concepts. On the one hand, this definition links together concepts like “active participation”, “creativity” and “amateur effort”, laying the ground for a conception of “creativity” which is not intrinsically bound to profit. On the other hand, this definition fails to identify how the change in focus within and without the traditional boundaries of the relationship between production and consumption, as well as the transition onto platforms that are external to the professional world, translates into economic and financial implications impacting on the ‘immaterial’ labour force function perpetrated by user agency (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Terranova, 2000)²¹⁷. This transition is shown, i.e., by the case of YouTube, a platform which has become in less than a year “an (independent) subsidiary of a commercial firm whose core interest is not in content per se, but in the vertical integration of search engines with content, social networking and advertising” (van Dijck, 2009)²¹⁸.

This discussion is relevant to the Egyptian case in the way in which the notion of “*participatory culture*” influences the way we interpret the dynamic of online/ offline participation as new forms of political agency and self-narrativisation in protest contexts. The notion of “participatory culture” carries with itself notions like ‘active engagement’²¹⁹ as well as ‘communities’ and ‘(cultural) citizenship’ which, as discussed in the previous paragraphs as referred to “communities of feelings (Appadurai, 2001), cannot be transferred to internet communities without problematising²²⁰. The main thing to be noticed here is that some social media – and we will see how this translates into documentary platforms as well – define themselves as “communities” or “community of communities”. As noted by Van Dijck, YouTube’s Terms of Use recite: ‘*Remember that this is your community! Each and every user of YouTube makes the site what it is,*

²¹⁷ M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, T. Terranova, ‘Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy’, *Social Text* 18(2), 2000, p. 33–58

²¹⁸ Van Dijck, *Idem*, p.43

²¹⁹ The Forrester report, *Mapping Participation in Activities Forms the Foundation of a Social Strategy*, 2007, can be accessed at: www.forrester.com/go?docid=42057. The survey and its results are taken from J. van Dijck, *The culture of connectivity. A critical history of social media*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 56. Although this survey is very outdated, it is interesting to notice the main result of the survey, which is the fact that “participation” does not seem to equal “active contribution”. This survey categorizes users’ behaviour according to six levels of participation. 13 percent of the “users” are identified as ‘active creators’, people who are producing and uploading content like web-blogs, videos, photos. A number of people under 19 percent can be qualified as ‘critics’, being people who contribute by providing ratings, comments or evaluations. Around 15 percent are considered ‘collectors’, described as those who save links or URLs on social bookmarking services which can be shared with other users; another 19 percent are described as ‘joiners’, people who joined social networking sites such as MySpace or Facebook, without necessarily contributing content. The majority of users consist of ‘passive spectators’ and ‘in-actives’, people who are not engaging in any activity, even if they are present on the platforms.

²²⁰ *Idem*, p.44

so don't be afraid to dig in and get involved. This concept of community is related to common sense as a tie between individuals and social groups²²¹. Here two problems arise. The first one is if a community is not a political community, but rather a community of consumption, what kind of 'engagement' comes from it? And secondly, if a platform is designed to perform a certain set of activities, how much freedom does the "user" have in the interaction to the "community"? How freely can he/she engage herself/himself beyond the functions inscribed within the platform?²²² We will investigate the question more in depth when we will analyse the platform '18 Days in Egypt' (2.1.2) and the way it engaged protesting communities on the ground.

Going back to the Egyptian protest, it is important to gather, on a preliminary level, some numbers about the use of the internet in Egypt in the run up to the 25th of January protest and after.

First of all, Egypt is one of the most populous countries of the Middle East, with 82.5 million inhabitants, a young population, with high rates of unemployment and inflation²²³, and a long history of State control over the media. Television has always been the most popular medium and the one that has been able to reach the biggest slice of the population²²⁴. Egyptian television was considered leader in the regional media industry in terms of media content and production²²⁵ and in the past decade Egypt has seen the birth of several satellite channels and the largest number of hours of broadcasting in the Arab World. The reach of international news networks like Al Jazeera has been increasing considerably due to the spread of pirated access to satellite channels²²⁶. Internet penetration has also increased notably in relation to the rise in broadband penetration between 2005 (0.1 percent of users) to 2010 (1.8 percent of users)²²⁷.

According to the Open Society Foundation report written by Abdalla in 2013, the 25th of January uprising was not only *an effect of an internet expansion*, which was on the rise in January 2011, but also, and mainly, *a cause of a wider spread in the use of the web in the nine months after the revolution* - with a

²²¹ A. Hennion, 'Those Things that Hold Us Together: Taste and Sociology', *Cultural Sociology* 1(1), 2007, 97–114

²²² The problem of rating and rankings within social media and participatory platforms is problematised by *he culture of connectivity. A critical history of social media*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

²²³ According to an Open Society Foundations 2013 Report, unemployment between 1999 and 2013 was stable around 10.3 percent and on the rise since February 2013 with mounting economic challenges faced by the Egyptians, in relation also to high inflation level of the last years (it reached a peak of 20 percent in 2008 and readjusted itself around 12 percent in 2011). R. Abdalla, *Mapping Digital Media: Egypt. A report by Open Society Foundations*, 1 August 2013, downloadable on the web at , p.10

²²⁴ R. Abdalla, *Mapping Digital Media: Egypt. A report by Open Society Foundations*, 1 August 2013, downloadable on the web at , p.6

²²⁵ *Ibidem*, p.15

²²⁶ *Ibidem*, p.7

²²⁷ *Ibidem* p.17

switch from 4.11 million users in January 2011 to 8.55 million users in September 2011²²⁸. According to the same report, The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MCIT) has estimated over 32.62 million internet users by 31 December 2012, with a penetration rate of 38 percent and one-third of the users accessed the internet through mobile devices.²²⁹

According to the *Arab Media Outlook 2009-2013. Inspiring local content* report 'with news being one of the most popular forms of content among the young demographic in the Arab Region, it is not surprising that consumption is moving online, with 40 percent of news readers accessing news via Internet in 2009'.²³⁰ In March 2009, Facebook launched an Arabic version in an attempt to expand its presence in the region²³¹ and even before its Arabic version's launch Facebook had already 900,000 users in Egypt, but the use of the Arabic language was just one element in the localisation of content and Facebook in the Arab world was, and still is, considered mainly international user based²³².

The popularity of Facebook seems to have taken a new dimension around and after the 25th of January 2011 uprising – with Facebook users increasing from 4.2 million in January 2011 to 5.7 million in March 2011 and to 8.2 million by September 2011, representing 60 percent of the whole of the users in the Arab countries (15 million)²³³. The biggest social media phenomenon around year 2009 was the sudden uptake of Twitter, embraced by consumers, corporations and celebrities²³⁴. Twitter worldwide went from 0.1 users on May 2008 to 2.6 users in May 2009. When an Arabic interface was introduced in October 2009, 14 percent of the population started using it only in Egypt. With high levels of illiteracy, though, TV remains a major source of information with average 3.5 hours of television watched on weekdays and 4.5 on the weekend, among both old and young people. As internet is most popular among younger generations, though, the average use is 3 hours per day spent online²³⁵.

Online blogging started in Egypt in 2004, with few bloggers gaining followers in the whole of the Arab World. Blogging proved an important mean of self-expression and a space where it was possible to criticise

²²⁸ *Ibidem* p.6

²²⁹ *Ibidem* p.17. Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MCIT), "Indicators", at <http://www.mcit.gov.eg/Indicators/Indicators.aspx>. Retrieved March 2013.

²³⁰ A.A.V.V., *Arab Media Outlook 2009-2013. Inspiring local content*, Dubai Press Club, Dubai, 2010, p.33

²³¹ *Ibidem*, p.72

²³² *Ibidem*

²³³ *Ibidem*, p. 34

²³⁴ *Ibidem*

²³⁵ R. Abdalla, *Ibidem*, p. 20. Cfr. A.A.V.V., *Arab Media Outlook 2009-2013, Ibidem*

Mubarak's regime²³⁶. In 2008, the Information Decision Support Center (IDSC) published a report on the impact of blogging, stating that 15 percent of blogs (160.000 at the time) had between 10.000 and 50.000 visitors and 8.4 percent had over 50.000 visitors²³⁷. The issue was also warning that blog were not subject to censorship.

One early example of impact made by bloggers was the case of Wael Abbas (Misr Digital) who was a pioneer in exposing cases of police brutality in Egypt in 2005. He published on his blog the video shot by a minibus driver who had been sodomised and tortured by police officers. The video created so much buzz that a case was filed in court against police officers and it set a precedent resulting in the first conviction for police brutality in Egypt²³⁸.

After that, the introduction of Youtube in 2005 marked a real change in the online mobilisation dynamic. Groups like "Kefaya" (enough) had already been formed, but didn't have such a powerful tool to share information about their actions. Suddenly, chants like "Down with Hosni Murabak" became available on the web on Youtube, alongside videos of police brutality and human rights violations by police²³⁹.

The general effect, though, was only achieved when information reached the traditional media. For example, Ms Fattah, who had created the 6th of April Facebook page in support of the workers' strike in Al Mahalla Al Kubra city, was detained after the demonstration and the Facebook page were mentioned on TV²⁴⁰.

In terms of the actual organisation of the 25th of January 2011 protest in Cairo, we have different authors commenting in different ways. According to Tufecki and Wilson, social media represented unknown sources of information and were very important for people's decision to take part in the protest on the 25th of January 2011. When researchers asked how protesters became aware of the protests, people replied that they learned about the protests through Facebook, Iphone 3 or direct communication. Facebook was the most important way in distributing visual material to do with the demonstrations and it worked out especially because it was not very easy to control by the regime²⁴¹. "The fact that protesters distributed materials points to the rise of citizen journalism, social media reduced the threshold for mass expression of the opposition during the protests in Tahrir in 2011"(Sneep, 2014).

²³⁶ *Ibidem*, p.35

²³⁷ *Ibidem*

²³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 36

²³⁹ *Ibidem*, p.37

²⁴⁰ *Ibidem*. See also P. Gerbaudo, *op.cit.* and W. Ghonim, *op.cit.*

²⁴¹ Tufecki, Z., & Wilson, C., 'Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest: Observations from Tahrir Square', *Journal of Communication*, 62, 2012, p.363-379.

The role in connecting and motivating protesters played by social media is suggested instead by authors like Wilson and Dunn (2011), who have been drawing a relation between the transnational discourse on Twitter and the protest activities on the ground, underlining 'how geographical dynamics and high rates of motivational content made a substantial contribution to the protesters determination'²⁴². Especially interesting is the relationship drawn between the use digital media and social change in connection to global and diasporic audiences²⁴³. The same authors have been researching on the Twitter *#egypt* hashtag²⁴⁴. The interesting element is the pre-eminence of stories with an emotional elements told through Twitter, rather than facts-oriented messages more similar to traditional journalism storytelling. 'News tweets of the Egyptian revolution on Twitter offer action, drama, proximity and relevance. These stories are made through practices of repetition and layers of agency that are networked, complex and diffused, but do not always produce a coherent narrative' (Sneep, 2014). The term 'affective news streams', describes the collaborative process of constructing news coming from 'individual experience, opinion and emotion in an ambient news environment' (Sneep, 2014, Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012), which requires personal involvement, connection and cohesion.

According to Abdalla, what made the role of social media striking in the run up to the 25th of January was the combination between political organisation – the page providing all sort of info about the protest, from safety emergency phone numbers to detailed times and places for marches – and the transformation of it into a “media event”. The march was advertised on Facebook starting from 10 days before. “People were clicking I am attending the revolution”²⁴⁵

The results of Sneep's research show that 'new media enable people to exchange experiences and facilitates local-global connections, connections between people on Tahrir square in Cairo and elsewhere in the (Arab) world'²⁴⁶. The author explains that:

New media facilitates horizontal connectivity in social mobilization without geographical restrictions. Virtual networks, which exist on the internet and communicate via new media, lead to expressions in the streets in Egypt, but also to real and virtual support from other places around the world. New media provides an open

²⁴² Wilson, C., & Dunn, A., 'Digital Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Descriptive Analysis from the Tahrir Data Sets'. *International Journal of Communication*, 5, 2011, 1248-1272.

²⁴³ Papacharissi, Z., & de Fatima Oliveira, M., 'Affective News and Networked Publics: The Rhythms of News Storytelling on #Egypt'. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2), 2012, p. 266-282.

²⁴⁴ Papacharissi, Z., & de Fatima Oliveira, *Ibidem*

²⁴⁵ R. Abdalla, *Mapping Digital Media: Egypt. A report by Open Society Foundations*, 1 August 2013, downloadable on the web at , p.39

²⁴⁶ J. Sneep, “Citizen Journalists and Mass Self-Communication in Egypt. The Use of New Media as Counter Power During the Egyptian Revolution”, Dissertation, Wageningen University, Netherlands, 2013

space where (young) Egyptians could speak openly. New media were used in practical ways to organize protests and motivated people as well. It enabled citizen journalists to send their own messages, independent of other broadcast stations. Besides new media, traditional mass media such as TV played an important role in strengthening the loop of mass self-communication during the revolution in Egypt. Messages from citizen journalists were broadcasted and in that way reached the majority of the Egyptians. Based on the findings, **new media is a tool that can be used to facilitate social change, but ultimately the people who use the technology are the real drivers of change. The technology enables people to communicate independently, to connect and create networks. This is related to the development of political and social autonomy, which are important when promoting social change.** New media has shown its potential, but socio-economic and political factors preceding the revolution in Egypt should be taken into account. During the Egyptian revolution traditional mass media, such as Al Jazeera strengthened the loop of mass self-communication. Mass self-communication has to be situated in relation to traditional mass media.

(J.Sneep, 2013)

1.2.3. Can Tahrir Square work as a model for a new communication space?

A **communication space** is a space within which the **bundle** of constraints leads **actants** (transmitter and receiver) to share the same experience. This array of constraints governs the construction of the actants and the relationship between them, the choice of the mode of production of meaning and affect, and the construction of the communication operator (from which the meaning will be produced)²⁴⁷.

(R. Odin, "Pour une sémio-pragmatique du cinéma," *Iris*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 67 to 82. English translation in *The Film Spectator, From sign to mind*, Warren Buckland, ed., Amsterdam University Press, 1995, p. 213-227, reprinted in R. Stam and T. Miller, eds., *Film and Theory. An Anthology*, Blackwell, 2000, p. 54)

What a semio-pragmatical approach can provide a framework to real time communication

Roger Odin, in his text *Les espaces de communication*²⁴⁸ (Odin, 2011), sets the premises for a communication model based on the assumptions of his semio-pragmatic semiotic methodology. This model proves to be a strong "heuristic" tool, a "theoretical *dispositif*" - like "spectacles"²⁴⁹ - useful to question the communication paradigms. This methodology proves useful to analyse contemporary settings thanks to its disjointment from any specific medium. The founding preoccupation of Odin's

²⁴⁷ R. Odin, "Pour une sémio-pragmatique du cinéma," *Iris*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 67 to 82. English translation in *The Film Spectator, From sign to mind*, Warren Buckland, ed., Amsterdam University Press, 1995, p. 213-227, reprinted in R. Stam and T. Miller, eds., *Film and Theory. An Anthology*, Blackwell, 2000, p. 54 to 67

²⁴⁸ *Ibidem*

²⁴⁹ R. Odin, *Idem*, p.17 "(..)une 'machine', un sort d'instrument d'optique, une lunette ou plutôt un microscope"

methodology is, in fact, the assumption that it is impossible not to presuppose the existence of a “text”, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, not to recognise that, according to the “context” in which the construction of a certain “text” occurs, its interpretation will be different²⁵⁰. Assuming both the “variability of a text in function to its context” and “the receiver's belief in the existence of a text which was transmitted to him carrying a non-exchangeable sense”²⁵¹, Odin sets the premises for a methodology that is based on a conception of “text” which results from a “communication process”²⁵² and on the consequent decoding operations performed by the receiver. The semio-pragmatic approach assumes a contextual pragmatic perspective where “contextual constraints direct the construction of the text” and where “actants (transmitter and receiver)” are “points of passage of a bundle of constraints which are crossing them and building them”²⁵³. In this perspective the same person can manifest himself/herself in the form of different receivers (R/ R/R2 etc.), according to different constraints it is immersed in and, even if exposed to same sound/image vibrations (V), can produce different texts (T, T1, T2 etc.). At the same time different people exposed to the same vibrations (V) and immersed in the same kind of constraints, can behave themselves as one single receiver (R) and produce one single text (T)²⁵⁴.

A new reception theory, based on the combination between semiotic approach and hermeneutic approach²⁵⁵ finds its origin in this methodology²⁵⁶ (Christie, 2012), opening a way to a new conception of the “audience” whose performance is rooted in the interaction between the individual as receiver and what crosses him/her in the “here and now” of *social communication*. This model, analysing the dynamics between the space of the message emission and the space of message reception, proves particularly interesting when thinking of the kind of contemporary communication situations which we are trying to analyse and that, in my opinion, all revolve around the idea of an *identification between spectatorship and witnessing*.

²⁵⁰ R. Odin, *Idem*, p.16

²⁵¹ *Ibidem*. My translation

²⁵² *Ibidem*. My translation

²⁵³ R. Odin, *Idem*, p. 20

²⁵⁴ *Ibidem*

²⁵⁵ Odin main references are C. Metz, *Essais sémiotiques*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1977, R. Jakobson, *Essais de linguistique générale*, Paris, éd. De Minuit, 1970, P. Watzlawick, J. Helmick Beavin, D.D. Jackson, *Une logique de communication*, Paris, Seuil, 1972, to the theory of “interpretation” elaborated by Ricoeur and elaborated in the year 2000 in the book P. Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l’Histoire, l’Oubli*, Paris, Seuil, 2000

²⁵⁶ I. Christie, *Audiences : Defining and Researching Screen Entertainment Reception*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2012

Tahrir Square: a space of communication of collective memory in real time

Let's take now our "space of communication" represented by Tahrir Square: *the space of communication of the protest's collective memory in real time*. This is a space where the collective memory is created, produced, reproduced, received and shared within the 'space' of the protest which is happening around Tahrir Square during 18 days between end of January and half-way through February 2011. We take this space as a "heuristic" tool, because this represent a good key study for our analysis. As we know, though, protests sparked in various countries across North Africa and other countries in the Middle East. We are using Tahrir Square as an example to then go into more details, differentiating among different experiences, in the coming chapters.

The *axe of pertinence of Tahrir's square communication space* is that of *collective memory*. Memory creates a link between past and present, assures the internal continuity inside the group of protesters and a common identity. But, as we said in the previous paragraphs, the novelty is here represented by the fact that this process happens in real time. The continuity established here is created between the present and a form of continuous present – a sort of anticipation of the future in the present – which ensures the permanence of the group in a situation of potential *memory black-out*. While the events are unfolding and the physical gathering of people is being produced, around the protest there is a high circulation of images, film footage, information, messages which takes shape all around, involving people all over the world which are participating to the event of the uprising. In this production of documentation lies the work of memory enunciation – the generation of history *as it unfolds* – which institutes the very fact of being there physically or virtually, as an *event*²⁵⁷.

Who can be considered as the main *driver of the construction of this memory*? It is the *movement* identifying in Tahrir Square. This movement is thus represented by the unity of people occupying the square day and night for 18 days who take charge of the production of audiovisual materials documenting the events as they are unfolding before their very eyes, in conjunction with the number of participative supporters who, through a form of online mediation, are receiving and passing over the information to other potential supporters. This collective driver is in charge, internally, of the consensus building process and, externally, of the construction of the narrative the movement identifies with. Here the idea of "internal" and "external" needs to be taken critically. Differently from previous forms of protests which have been relying on media production for the consensus building– i.e. Chicago 1968, Berlin 1989 or

²⁵⁷ M. Foucault, "*Qu'est-ce que les lumières?*"(1984), in Id., *Dits et écrits*, II, 1976-1988, Gallimard, Paris 2001, pp.1381-1397

Genoa 2001²⁵⁸ – the continuity between the square and the web, changes here the hierarchy between what can be considered to be synonymous of “within” and “without” the space of communication. The articulation between *proximity and non-proximity* in the space of political interaction among protesters internally and externally, locally and globally, changes the focus from geographical continuity to *imaginary continuity*. The sense of being internal to the protest doesn't rely anymore just on the physical presence within the space of the square, but on the sense of being a *witness* of the events *through the eyes of those documenting them on the ground*.

The articulation here is not only built around the duality of geographical and imaginary contiguity, but also between the act of *collective witnessing* and the *individual witnesses*. No political movement exists without the individuals that are part of it and no storytelling and documentation of the events can exclude the individual visions of those who individually practice the act of documenting events.

We have here therefore, in the space of communication defined by Tahrir square, the construction of two different kinds of actants, the *movement* and the *individual witnesses*, producing two different kinds of memory. The first one being the real-time production of the history of the movement, like the messages on the Khalil Kullena Facebook page or the murals and graffiti production surrounding Tahrir Square, the anonymous circulation of videos, pictures and vignettes representing the memory-making of the movement in real-time, a rich production of texts that, in its diversity, belongs to the space of the protest as a whole. The second one being the individual witnessing and account of brutality and engagement, the account of individual emotional, social, political experiences lived in the space of the protest, the personal storytelling of the events revolving around the Tahrir Square's gathering – like the news and message stream represented by individual Facebook and Twitter accounts of protesters who were documenting and participating in the making of the news. If the *axe of pertinence* of this *communication space* is one, the *actants* are of two kinds and they are determined by two different kinds of *constraints* – one concerning the group, the other one the individual both involved in the process of memory-making.

I live in Beirut, and in the last days of the uprising in Tunisia, I was increasingly drawn to watching the news obsessively, but by January 26, and for the remaining seventeen days, my life was pretty much on hold as the uprising in Egypt unseated Hosni Mubarak. I was glued to the television set and my computer screen simultaneously, zapping, following bloggers, Facebook, and Twitter postings. **History with a capital H was unfolding in front of my eyes; I was a spectator and witness.** Very quickly, the Mubarak regime prohibited international and regional journalists from filming and dispatching reports, so news editors began to broadcast videos recorded by insurgents who used mobile phones and lightweight video cameras. The broadcast of the audiovisual chronicles of the insurgency have radically transformed the rules of journalism as well as the rules of

²⁵⁸ Refer to first part of the chapter

watching news or being at the receiving end. Within days of the eruption of the insurgency in Syria (March 15, 2011), the government, taking a cue from the Mubarak regime, began to expel journalists working for international and regional media. A month into the insurgency, the broadcast of news and footage was entirely fed by amateur video from insurgents, recorded by mobile phones and, to a much lesser extent, lightweight video cameras.²⁵⁹

(R. Salti, "Shall we dance?" in *Cinema journal* 52, Number 1, Fall 2012, University of Texas Press, p.166)

As we can observe from the report quoted above, the interesting phenomenon taking place around the events of Tahrir Square is the *intertwining* of the two kinds of actants and constraints' determination – the collectivity and the singularity of the participants established by the horizontal practice of memory-making – in the form of the *witnessing of the spectator*. "History with capital H was unfolding in front of my eyes - while following the news via social media, explains R. in the account above - I was a spectator and witness". The kind of actant here represented is that of an individual witness who is outsourcing the information coming from the ground through means of horizontal communication, but still feels involved in the act of witnessing of the same events as those he has been outsourcing the information from. The act of individual witnessing is here of a second degree. On the one hand, it is not a process of first-hand witnessing of the actual events – that being the witnessing of the *chronicler* who is collecting evidences – and it manifests itself in the form of *spectatorship* of someone else's evidence, chronicle, account or document. On the other hand, it is a form of witnessing in itself, in the sense that it shares the same bundle of constraints with the individuals on the ground. These actants share the same experience. They choose the same mode of production of meaning and affect, and they participate in the same construction of the communication operator (from which the meaning will be produced). The second-degree witness is involved in the witnessing/ sharing/ memory-building witness in the same way as the first-degree witness, but his participation in the communication process is acted by means of media.

The *communication operator*, given a certain space and a certain axe of pertinence, is what is used by the actants to put the communication in place²⁶⁰ (Odin, 2012). At the level of text production, it works as a vector or 'memory stimulator'²⁶¹ - it reminds us of something by nourishing our memory, but it can also take us to produce a text that can be far from the initial text produced by the operator. Odin used the example of a *picture* that reminds us of someone we used to love like our grandparents. On the one hand, the picture reminds me directly of my grandparents, on the other IT can take me by chain reaction to think of a childhood friend related to that same time and space. The thought of my childhood friend is an

²⁵⁹ R. Salti, "Shall we dance?" in *Cinema journal* 52, Number 1, Fall 2012, University of Texas Press, p.166

²⁶⁰ R. Odin, *Idem*, p.89

²⁶¹ *Ibidem*

entirely different text to the one related to the memory of my grandparents. The operators, by being intentional or unintentional, can establish unexpected relationships among actants and can stimulate the production of new texts which spring out from the communication relationship²⁶².

By transposing this paradigm to the situation we are coming to analyse, we have here a multiplicity of texts - emails, text messages, pictures, footage, Facebook and Twitter streams etc.– which are connecting different individuals who consider themselves part of the Tahrir Square movement. The texts are connecting the individuals both to the collectivity represented by the square as well as to their own single experience of it. Their experience, as we learnt, can be both physical or textual – it can be produced through texts produced by others. The relationship between the chronicle of the events and the participation of an individual who feels part of it can also be established through the testimony of other individuals taking part to live events he or she is not directly taking part to. But this doesn't change his/her involvement in the communication space, nor his/her involvement in the memory-making process. Aren't they both, the first-degree and the second-degree witness, involved in the act of witnessing and in the process of being a spectator? Are they really different in the way they function *within* the communication process?

Feed back dynamic in Tahrir's Square communication space: immersion, inclusion, interaction

Let's try now to analyse the way the *feed back dynamic* works within a communication space of the kind here described. A large number of people are gathered in real life in a specific physical space in protest for 18 days. Thousands of people are gathered in Tahrir Square day and night. They eat, they sleep, they chant, they run, they dance. All sensations accompanying the presence of these individuals on the ground connected in a collective gathering, somehow feed into the collective dynamic as part of the individual and common *experience of being in the square*. A big part of the experience of 'being there' is recorded and structured through sensations which change the way people *interact*, with the space and with each other. The interaction with the space is informed by people's behaviour and a big part of their actions is structured by it.

On the other hand, the people who are gathered in the square film what happens on the ground, post it on social media, share their comments, their discourses – so that their communication space extends into the web in the way we explained so far (1.2.3). This exchange gives birth to ideas and knowledge about each other and about the collective action. The web is a space where many followers from all over the world are

²⁶² R. Odin, *Idem*, p.90

watching and following what the protesters are doing. The audience is active in its participation and keeps sharing info with a wider group, as well as sending their feedback back to the square. Mainstream media themselves are picking some of their info from the social media communication circuit which is initiated by people in the square. This communication circuit *feeds back* into the dynamic of the square, as protesters are aware of what has been said about their actions or about the brutality they experience.

There is another element. In Tahrir Square there is a temporary cinema, set up by collective Mosireen, which shows raw footage collected by protesters during their actions. "One of the hallmarks of the revolution is that it has been filmed by its people"²⁶³ says one of the organisers to a reporter during a break of the activities. And he continues "Part of the whole initiative is a feeling of possession. There is a big difference between watching TV and seeing something that has been filmed by someone just like you"²⁶⁴. "People from State Tv misrepresent us"²⁶⁵ Tahrir Cinema is one way for those for the protesters to present their fellow protesters and passersby "their side of the story"²⁶⁶.

Does Tahrir cinema work as a "mirror" for the protesters who look at themselves while acting as protesters or being victims of brutality? Do the protesters become "audience" themselves? And the "audience" watching and following the events from outside the square, is it just an "audience" or are they also presenting online "their side of the story"? And does this "audience" encompass also the parts of the population who don't have access to the internet and don't know how to navigate it? Are all these people aware of the multiple levels of interaction that are connecting them to others, even when they are not actively performing a communication?

It needs to be reminded, as we said in the previous paragraph (1.2.2), when talking about social media and social change, that the impact of online media on the majority of the population cannot be romanticised and over-stated. As we mentioned before, most segments of the population in Egypt were mainly following the events on State TV (similarly to the events that took place in Chicago in 1968) (1.1.2.) How could the technologically uneducated parts of the population in Egypt, and elsewhere in the world, contribute to the online civic participation and political activism?

This set of questions is crucial for the framing of the question related to *what kind of spectatorship* we talking about here. This question is fundamental when defining what is the specific element which makes the *Tahrir's Square communication space* described so far as a fundamentally *immersive, inclusive* and *interactive* journey that involves both the people present on the ground and the followers involved in the

²⁶³ Stuhr-Rommereim, H., 'Tahrir cinema displays revolutionary power of archives', *Egypt Independent*, 20 July 2011

²⁶⁴ *Ibidem*

²⁶⁵ *Ibidem*

²⁶⁶ *Ibidem*

interaction through online communication . The *Tabrir Square communication space* serves as a descriptive model for a kind of communication situation which involves online and offline communities, which are engaged in multiple interactions (verbal communication, online conversations and sharing, witnessing events in real life as well as testifying the same events online, documenting events in real life and documenting them online at the same time). These interactions involve the online and the offline dimensions in a feedback dynamic that sees them tied to each other all the time, in the process of transforming each other and influencing each other continuously. This dynamic can be described as 'a string of feedback loops (*action/reaction*) which ties them together and transforms them both' (Gaudenzi, 2013) involves the idea that a string of messages, information, exchanges are flowing simultaneously in the online and offline dimensions, feeding into each other and transforming each other continuously.

Let's go back for a moment to the notion of *interactivity* mobilised by Gaudenzi, together with the ideas of "liveness and *adaptability*" described as features characteristic of interactive platforms. Interactive platforms are seen to be able to reorganise themselves in relation to the *environment*, following the idea that living *autopoietic*²⁶⁷ beings are autonomous and changes in relation to their environment (Gaudenzi, 2013).

Could we say that this communication space in itself behaves like a media platform in itself, which interacts and adapts its media response to the changing environment? Is this communication space a media platform that is curated by the people who live the protest in person and those who follow it from afar, by those who document it on the ground, those who share it and those who archive it? Or, else said, is the high speed of information and the technological possibilities provided by mobile cameras to on the ground and share visual material almost in "real time" through social media, giving a chance to create *a stream of multiple historical narratives* which are already being stored in a collective communication space? Is it maybe possible to definite this as an *interactive documentary platform*, which includes the actions of being on the ground, document events, share material and leave behind a stream of un-edited information

Let's go back for a moment to the story of collective Mosireen we mentioned before. During the 18 days of the Egyptian revolution, they constantly filmed with mobile phones and cameras, actively encouraging citizens to do the same. From the testimony of Ziyad Hawwas of Mosireen collective, "Mosireen is a collective non-profit organization dedicated to journalism done by the people with mobile phones and video cameras. The word, which means "to be determined", contains in also the Arabic name for Egypt. In addition to *encouraging people to film* what they see and to show it in the various towns and villages, we

²⁶⁷ Maturana H., *Ontology of Observing: The biological Foundations of Self-Consciousness and the Physical Domain of Existence*, in *Cybernetic Theory, An In Depth Exploration of the Thought of Humberto R. Maturana, W.T.Powers and E.von Glaserfeld*, American Society of Cybernetics, Felton CA, 1988

started to give courses in all provinces to teach simple techniques to make movies and put them on DVD or upload them to the internet. After a short time we have become the Egyptian "Youtube" channel most seen in the whole country. Another group called "military liars," has begun to show how the military treat people, the same group when they came to power, the Muslim Brotherhood, created the collective "Muslim Brotherhood liars." Of course, all movies are copied to the video, so that even those who do not have Internet can see it. I think that citizen journalism is a very powerful tool that allows you to not be dependent on the Egyptian media that are not free ²⁶⁸. Mosireen was founded in the wake of 2011 uprising by filmmakers and activists in order to work as an 'interactive citizen-led publishing platform for challenging official state media narrative'²⁶⁹. Mosireen operates on multiple levels. The collective provides filmmaking courses on a 'pay-what-you-can' basis in downtown Cairo or free access courses to Egyptian people in town and villages on how to make movies. They provide free access to technical support and film and sound equipment. They curate an open Youtube platform for people to post their own videos about protest in order to challenge official media narrative. They organise independent screenings in protest sites where people can watch almost in "real time" footage filmed on the ground by people like them. They provide access to an extensive library of footage from the revolution. They plan actions to archive and store long-term all materials collected on the ground ²⁷⁰. This set of actions all reflect the engagement with a public sphere that is seen as created by the largest of people belonging to it, following a *direct participation principle*. The idea that a public sphere can be representative of the real composition of society, only if the largest number of people belonging it, directly participate and engage in the making of a collective event, is now seen as *directly related to the production of an historical narrative and the creation of the news*. The technological possibilities offered by digital platforms and digital storytelling features developed with it seem to be not so much a cause, but rather an effect, of an arising awareness that in the field of media exists the possibility of creating a powerful tool of connection between *participation, historical narration and social agency*.

²⁶⁸ About Mosireen see <http://www.succedeoggi.it/2013/09/ritorna-il-collettivo/>

²⁶⁹ H. Elsayed, "How Mobile Phones Cameras and Egypt's political turmoil gave the Mosireen Collective a Global following", *Re.framing Activism*, 2013 available online on <http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/activistmedia/2013/01/how-mobile-phones-cameras-and-egypts-political-turmoil-gave-the-mosireen-collective-a-global-following/>. Retrieved December 2014.

²⁷⁰ R. El-Shimi, "Mosireen Media Collective calls for donations online to remain independent", *Abram Online*, 23rd of Sept, 2012, available at <http://english.ahram.Org.eg/NewsContent/5/32/53436/Arts-Culture/Film/Mosireen-Media-Collective-calls-for-donations-onli.aspx>. For info about this campaign check Indie Go Go campaign, *Mosireen: Media Collective in Cairo*, available at <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/mosireen-independent-media-collective-in-cairo>



Picture 11. Cinema Tahrir organised by Mosireen Collective in Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt, 2011, Photo by Danya Nadar.²⁷¹



Picture 12. Egyptians in Tahrir Square look at a banner featuring photographs of people killed during political upheavals in 2011. Photograph: Khaled Elfiqi/EPA²⁷²

²⁷¹ Mosireen Collective, Tahrir Cinema @ Pres Palace, Cairo. Photo by Danya Nadar in L. Starkweather, 'No one lives here' @ RCA reviewed', *Aqnb*, March 21, 2013, available on the web at <http://www.aqnb.com/2013/03/21/no-one-lives-here-rca-reviewed/>. Retrieved May 2015

²⁷² J. Shenker, 'The struggle to document Egypt's revolution', *The Guardian*, 15th of July 2011, available on the web at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jul/15/struggle-to-document-egypt-revolution> Retrieved February 2012

1.3. The making of the news between old and new media

1.3.1. *Collective evidence, covering conflicts between old and new media*

Collecting evidence as a citizen journalist in times of crisis

I would like to investigate here the link that is potentially connecting the fact of 'bearing witness' of events in times of crisis, the gathering of evidence through portable devices (i.e. mobile phones, light-weight cameras, photo cameras, audio recorders etc..) to the act of challenging society through witnessing, as an element that could be considered central to the kind of communication space we are analysing. Since 2009 this phenomenon has proven to be on the rise and it unavoidable for big news groups and major channels, like BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera, to consider it and integrate it into contemporary newsgathering models. But, is the witness who feels compelled to take action by gathering evidences and sharing them with others contributing to social change? And if so, in what way?

Going back for a moment to the question of "user agency" previously mentioned, we should quote Jenkins' definition of the paradigm shift that invested the "audience" with the emergence of Web 2.0.: 'Audiences, empowered by these new technologies, occupying a space at the intersection between old and new media, are demanding the right to participate within the culture' (Jenkins, 2006)²⁷³. This is seen as a way for ordinary citizens to wield media technologies that were once the privilege of capital intensive industries (Van Djick, 2009)²⁷⁴ in a new digital environment that 'expands the scope and reach of consumer activities' (Jenkins, 2006)²⁷⁵ and combines the express of creativity by providing a 'diverse palette of voices' (Deuze, 2007)²⁷⁶.

How does this apply to journalism and to the figure of 'citizen witness'? The figure of the 'citizen witness', which, has recently manifested itself with increasing frequency as a public figure with active subjectivity, supporting, enriching and differentiating the proposal offered by traditional media, and in some cases by providing first-hand testimony that would had gone lost, had they not been caught 'knowing' by an observer accidentally become a witness. Not that the figure of the 'eyewitness' has not had any luck in the

²⁷³ H. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006, p.24

²⁷⁴ J. van Dijck, *The culture of connectivity. A critical history of social media*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 44

²⁷⁵ H. Jenkins, *Idem*, p.215

²⁷⁶ M. Deuze, 'Convergence Culture in the Creative Industries', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 10(2), 2007, 243–63

history of cultural representation and production and sensationalist journalism over the past two centuries, but it seemed confined to the world of 'fiction' and crime novels by Maigret, Still different, is the case of famous anonymous eyewitnesses or informants (*whistleblowers*) before the existence of WikiLeaks and before the Snowden case

Apparently belonging to the ranks of ordinary citizens and then turned out to be professionals of espionage, some famous whistle-blowers were crucial in unmasking abusive powers, such as, for example, in the case of 'Deep Throat', the pseudonym given to the secret informant gave confidential information to Washington Post's journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein in 1972, about the involvement of then US President Richard Nixon in the Watergate scandal and whose identity was revealed only 31 years after Nixon's resignation and 11 years after the death of Nixon, as that of FBI Associate Director Mark Felt. But the figure of the 'citizen witness' we are talking about today took a direct active role in the development of the journalistic narratives and were in some cases been crucial for the coverage of media events of great importance. During the Tsunami in Sri Lanka or Hurricane Sandy in New York, the uprising in Tahrir Square in Cairo or Istanbul's Taksim Square revolt, the revolt of the *indignados* in Spain, during the student uprisings and riots in London and even a short time ago during the uprising 'Euromaidan' (literally 'Eurosquare') in the Ukraine in November 2013, common citizens were crucial witness to events in real time, via Twitter, via Facebook, via Instagram, Flickr, exposing large local crisis to an international audience almost instantaneously. The streams of Facebook, but especially Twitter, were not only an important source of protest coordination, but also provided unique information on the field for the civilian population and correspondents from major newspapers and major TV channels.

Insofar as the Arab Spring has seen the progressive emergence, multiplication and circulation of documentation recorded on the ground by non-professional journalists, the number of activists and filmmakers who have been taking direct responsibility for the coverage of the events in real time and for the dissemination of the material through the network, has grown since. This element didn't make its first appearance into the newsgathering dynamic then, as the former 2004 Tsunami (Allan, Sonwalker, Carter, 2007)²⁷⁷ and 2009 Iranian experience of 'citizen journalism' testify (Hanksa- Ahy - Shapour, 2012)²⁷⁸, nor it is new to the news media landscape the use of user-generated content material for the packaging of the news by major channels, i.e. BBC, CNN or Al Jazeera which started progressively to use crowdsourced

²⁷⁷ S. Allan, P. Sonwalker, C. Carter, 'Bearing Witness: citizen journalism and human rights issues', *Globalisation, Society and Education*, Vol.5, N.3, November 2007, pp.373-389

²⁷⁸ See M. Hanksa- Ahy, R. Shapour, 'Who's reporting the protests?: converging practices of citizen journalists and tow BBC World Service newsrooms, from Iran's election protests to the Arab uprisings', *Journalism Studies*, 13, Taylor and Francis, 2012

material since 2004²⁷⁹. The emergence of user-generated content for newsgathering has been analysed in the last years in the light of the progressive transformation in the dynamics related to production and consumption of the news (Haenksa- Ahy - Shapour, 2012), in the direction of the blurring borders between producers and users (Jenkins, 2004, 2006) within the news making process and in the sense of a transformation of the category of audience within the news world itself²⁸⁰ (Rosen, 2008) . From the point of view of the development of journalism as a profession and the debate internal to the news world, this phenomenon has been posing a number of questions to do with the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity of the documentation²⁸¹.

While journalists have been trained to observe events with impartiality, reflecting on the chosen facts and their inherent truth-value and following a procedure of fact-checking, observers on the ground are less likely to be using the same techniques and rely more on their position of direct observers of events unfolding before their very eyes. In their position as “eyewitnesses” lies the truth-value of this form of news and evidence gathering²⁸²(Allan, 2013). The value lies here in the very fact of “being there”, which is more relevant to documentary-filmmaking observational tradition than it is to straightforward journalism. The concept of 'walking eye in the world', used by Don Peat in 2010 on the *Toronto Sun* ('Armed with cellphones, BlackBerries or iPhones, the average Joe is now a walking eye on the world, a citizen journalist, able to take a photo, add a caption or a short story and upload it to the internet for all their friends, and usually everyone else, to see'²⁸³), underlines the element of news gathering performed by common people as an everyday action in an online environment (Allan, 2013), which needs to be problematised in reference to the more general notion of 'citizen journalism' as the action of carrying out news coverage by non-professional observers in difficult and traumatic circumstances. As a way to counteract the kind of 'helicopter journalism' (Schechter, 2005²⁸⁴, Allan, Sonwalker, Carter, 2007) in Sri Lanka after the Tsunami, multiple reports by bloggers and vbloggers made it possible to get a sense of the event from multiple point of views, which, according to news observers, brought to the report some new sense of spatiality and scale which previous catastrophic events didn't seem to contain in the way they were

²⁷⁹ Some examples of succesful pages: MSNBC.com and BBC news quoted by S. Allan, P. Sonwalker, C. Carter, *Idem*

²⁸⁰ J. Rosen, 'Afterword: The people formerly known as audience, p. 163 in N. Carpentier, B. de Cleens (ed.), *Participation and media production: critical reflections on content creation*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.

²⁸¹ Conversation with Olly Lambert, resident filmmaker at Newnight 2013

²⁸² S. Allan, *Citizen Witnessing. Revisioning Journalism in Times of Crisis*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2013, p. 1

²⁸³ D. Peat, 'Cellphone cameras making everyone a walking newsroom', *Toronto Sun*, 1st February 2010.

²⁸⁴ 'Like the foreign correspondence who flies into a conflict zone and gets its information from a taxi driver'

reported on. As 'individual voices' that are part of a tapestry of different stories and angles about the same event, reports coming from citizen journalists in Sri Lanka 'brought a sense of scale to the story while the whole world was watching' (Johnson, 2005)²⁸⁵.

The strength of this kind of news coverage was characterised by the way the reporters' presence on the ground, their knowledge of the territory, their sense of belonging– as opposed to the so-called 'helicopter journalism' where journalists from abroad collect information second-handedly by relying on local sources – enhanced the vivid, immediate, insightful and sensorial reconstruction of the events. This made possible the real-time coverage of a catastrophic event so destructive to make rescue operations and official news gathering very difficult. The Tsunami report was characterised by its multi-vocal, immediate and shared reporting technique, which made it possible to have a sense of the size and spatial distribution of the event. 'So many people are on the ground in different places. And people pick up very quickly which are the bloggers to read, and they bring the information to the forefront', said Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales to *San Jose' Mercury News* (Allan, Sonwalker, Carter, 2007). The reliability of information was somehow created by its own internal multiplicity, in an environment where 'soft news leaders' quickly gained the trust of the audience and of the fellow reporters on the ground. The way trending stories were selected was based on the feedback dynamic internal to the news posting mechanism itself

Conflict interactive coverage between user-generated content and curated platforms

More recently this kind of news reporting has been used by major news groups such as Al Jazeera during some big crisis, such as the Syrian crisis or the Gaza/ Israel crisis. The project "*Tracking social media from Israel and Gaza*"²⁸⁶ is an interesting example of how major media started using citizen journalism not only as primary source for constructing the news, such in the case of Sri Lanka where local citizens were used as traditional reporters on the ground, but also for new forms of narrativisation and visualisation of the news and their impact on the local reality. This project integrated the space/time aspects of the conflict into the platform by showing in real-time the tweets coming from both the Gaza and the Israel side of the border on an interactive web live blog integrated on the Al Jazeera website. The tweets, which were coming in and being updated in real-time on the web page, become crucial in the spatial depiction of the Gaza/ Israeli conflict in order to monitor the temperature of local people's opinions. Al Jazeera acted as a 'curator' of a

²⁸⁵ B. Johnson, *The Guardian*, 6 January 2005

²⁸⁶ Al Jazeera, "'Tracking social media from Israel and Gaza'", *Al Jazeera live blog*, 16th November 2012, available online at www.m.aljazeera.com/story/20121116121728820347, See also article Al Jazeera, "Mapping violence – an interactive look at the consequences of escalating violence, *Al Jazeera website*, last seen 16th November 2012

page which hosted Twitter, sms, official statements coverage from both sides of the borderline and which was constructed around the spatial visualization of the conflict through a map on which tweets and other forms of messaging were appearing in real time from both sides of the border. The impact of the tweets coming from both sides was measured by the channel on the platform itself and the visualisation of both sides of the stories was giving an overview of the information flow from a point of way external to the conflict zone. The channel was therefore acting as *mediator* both also as *site* where the 'virtual warfare' was displayed, simulated and visualised (M. Zweiri, E.C.Murphy, 2014)²⁸⁷. The interactive element was provided by the reproduction of the instant messaging simulated on screen, but no interaction from the audience was hosted on the platform – although the platform could be embedded on other social sharing sites – such as Twitter and Facebook – where it could be commented on.

The page had a direct resemblance to the way the older 2009 web documentary project '*Gaza Sderot- Life in Spite of Everything*'²⁸⁸ was organised and functioned. The web documentary project, which was co-produced by French-German channel ARTE, French web producers Upian together with Trabelsi Productions (Israel), Ramattan (Palestine), Arik Bernstein (Israel), Serge Gordey (France), deliberately drew a parallel between the two areas by displaying stories at the same time on the two different sides of the border on a split screen. The two stories that could run in parallel or one at the time, were synchronised in order to create a connection where there is conflict in reality. 'Gaza Sderot' is "the story is a multiple interview to people (man, woman, children) living in Gaza (the Israeli strip) and in Sderot (the Palestinian strip) which portrays from the 26th October to the 23rd December 2008 and presents 2 people interviewed every day for 2 minutes in Gaza and Sderot (in total there are 80 main videos). They talk about their every day life in Gaza and Sderot, all share a common thought, that of a living in a difficult geo-political situation, even if they come from different social classes, ages, and genres"²⁸⁹. So the goal of Gaza/ Sderot is to display to the viewer two conflicting stories, converging on the same screen at

²⁸⁷ M. Zweiri, E.C.Murphy, *The New Arab Media. Technology, Image and Perception*, (ed.), Ithaca press, Reading, 2014, p.XIV

²⁸⁸ "*Gaza Sderot – Life in Spite of Everything*", web documentary co-produced by French-German channel ARTE, French web producers Upian together with Trabelsi Productions (Israel), Ramattan (Palestine), Arik Bernstein (Israel), Serge Gordey (France) available on the web at <http://gaza-sderot.arte.tv/>

²⁸⁹ N. Braidia, *Web Documentary. Documenting Reality in the Post-Media Age*, Dissertation University of Udine, 2013 p. 44. From the web page: "In order to document this will to live, short chronicles (2 minutes each) will be shot by both Israeli and Palestinian teams, day after day for two months. These short stories will follow six characters from Gaza and six from Sderot. In this way, we will have a new story of each character every week, and the viewer will be able to follow them intimately for 10 weeks. The stories will be aired via the Internet and users will have a personal, interactive and non-linear access to these contents on the site ARTE France which will include the videos, blogs, forums, links etc." (see under <http://gaza-sderot.arte.tv/en/about#>)

the same time. The interesting element displayed by both 'Gaza/ Sderot' and the interactive page set up in 2012 by Al Jazeera is the co-presence of voices – people who have been filmed and who speak directly to the audience in 'Gaza/ Sderot' or Twitter messages coming from both sides of the border in the Al Jazeera project – which belong to different sides of the conflict line and are shown *at the same time* and *represented as being part of the same space*. This organisation of the space seem to have a meaning both in ethical and ideological terms. This visualisation allows the audience to embrace both point of views at once and it creates a multifaceted, multi-vocal collection of different point of views from people with different ideological views, who are coming from every walk of life – the kind of 'fair balance' which is a requirement of any respectable journalistic narrative.

The line between what can be defined as a web documentary, a platform and a simple website seems anyway not always so clear, since most simple websites are embedding also video and other contents. We will come back to this in more details in the next chapter. What interests us at this stage is to define the peculiarity of a web documentary as being not only 'an online product which features videos and relates to a topic that treats actuality, but it is also the idea of being created with a special narrative concept'²⁹⁰. While "*Tracking social media from Israel and Gaza*" uses an information crowd sourcing model by collecting citizens' Tweets and displaying them on a platform curated by a channel like Al Jazeera, "*Gaza/ Sderot*" is instead the product of the work of a group of professional filmmakers who collected first-handed information on the ground and organised them on a platform in collaboration with TV channel ARTE. Even though the goal and the spatial organisation might seem similar, the media collected on the platform are fundamentally different both on a storytelling and production level . It is not a case that news-oriented channel Al Jazeera would experiment interactive as a way to organise a different kind of live coverage coming from the conflict zone, while factual-oriented channel ARTE would choose to produce a web-documentary where interactive is mainly used in tremns on non-linear storytelling.

A yet different case is represented by the web app launched by Al Jazeera, during the new Isreal/Gaza conflict which took place in Summer 2014. Al Jazeera lunched an app called '*Gaza under attack*'²⁹¹ which features a chronology of the last 4 attacks on Gaza performed by Israeli government (2005, 2008, 2012, 2014). Content visualisation is organised again on a split screen model– similar to "Gaza Sderot" and , to a certain extent, to "*Tracking social media from Israel and Gaza*", even though differently from the other two, the conceptual borderline was there the same as the actual border on the map. The page, organised on a two-sided graphic display, shows names of politicians involved in the military operations on both

²⁹⁰ N. Braidà, *Idem*, p.97

²⁹¹ Al Jazeera, "Gaza under attack. A chronology of disproportionate attack on Gaza", *Web apps Al Jazeera*, available on the web at www.webapps.aljazeera.net/aje/custom/gaaunderattcak/index.html

sides, numbers of victims on both sides, numbers of rockets and air strikes and a brief history of the events. This time the comparative feature displayed by the platform has a double function, totally different from the two previously mentioned ones. On a horizontal, synchronic level, it compares numbers of victims and attacks coming from both sides of the conflict, on a vertical and diachronic level, it reconstructs a chronological timeline of the events which interested the region over the course of the last ten years. The goal is here not to create a parallel that could bring the two sides together, but it is instead to compare the disproportion of means, deaths and casualties coming from the two sides.



Picture 13. A screenshot of 'Gaza/Sderot – Life in Spit Everything' (2009)²⁹²

The citizen witness and the citizen-spectator: manufacture, participation, engagement

There is a set of questions which seems to come naturally when analysing the reports coming from Sri Lanka, Iran as well as the reports coming from the Gaza/Israeli borderline which we just mentioned. Do these narratives exist as reports in themselves or do they become reports only when framed into a news space? In other words, is it enough to record, share and launch a report into the cyberspace or does this operation require a context in order to become meaningful and understandable as a recognisable 'source of information'? When it comes to citizen reports, what makes them different from private diaries, vox pops or just data for databases other than the way the medium which hosts them – namely, the platform

²⁹² A screenshot of 'Gaza/Sderot – Life in Spit Everything' (2009), available on the web at <http://gaza-sderot.arte.tv>

in this case – is designed and organised? For example, does a Twitter stream in itself constitute a news stream just because of its inherent link to an audience or does it become part of the news when inserted into a bigger narrative? What makes accidental citizen reporting a form of first-person reportage?

The multiplication of sources and compulsion to share news via social media, gives the way to a phenomenon of news gathering as everyday social activity' which not only has an impact on the traditional amateur/professional distinction in the eye of the recent expansion of grassroots/ DIY practices (Donghi, 2012)²⁹³, but it also open the way to the shaping of the category of 'citizen witnessing' (Allan, 2013) as a way to explain the act of witnessing as immediately immersed into the networked communication dynamic and as not necessarily related to big traumatic events. In fact, the notion of 'media witnessing', which was already used by Frosh and Pinchevski (2009) to underline 'the witnessing performed *in, by and through* the media', talks ' about the systematic ad ongoing reporting of the experiences and realities of distant others to mass audiences'²⁹⁴ and it could mean witnessing in a triple sense: being 'witnesses of an event, bear witness to that event, and turn viewers into witnesses *all at the same time*'. In this perspective, it is interesting to notice the integration of the notion of *spectatorship* into the idea of the action displayed by common people who are participating to events in real time through witnessing and who are feeling compelled to share their record with other people through online networks (Green, 2010²⁹⁵, Allan, 2013).

First of all, what needs to be clarified is in what way can we consider spontaneous, immediate or accidental something that actually appears to be the “mediated” response to an unexpected event occurring in the surroundings. For example, I am talking about the strange case of Sohaib Athar's Twitter stream inadvertently documenting the arrival of US planes moments before the killing of Osama Bin Laden in the city of Abbottabad in Afghanistan (Allan, 2013) or the recent story of Abdulkader Hariri (@3bdUlkaed6r) who on the 23rd of September 2014 'seem to have broken news of first airstrike targeting armed group ISIL in Syria' on Twitter²⁹⁶ by tweeting a message which was shared 1.4k times: “Breaking: Huge explosions shook the city in what might be the beginning of US airstrikes on ISIS Hqs in Raqqa”.

The question is , on the one hand, whether connecting all together will produce something of greater

²⁹³ L. Donghi, *Gesti autoritrattistici dallo stato di conflitto. Abu Ghraib, Osama bin Laden, shahid di Al Qaida*, Scuola di dottorato in Studi Umanistici, Univ. degli Studi di Torino, tesi discussa il 28 marzo 2014

²⁹⁴ Frosh, P., Pinchevski, A. (ed.), *Media witnessing: Testimony in the age of mass communication*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009

²⁹⁵ J. Green, *The eyes of the people: Democracy in the age of suspicion*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010

²⁹⁶ Al Jazeera, “Did this man-live-tweet-Us-led aitsrikes in Syria?”, *The Stream*, 23 September 2014, www.stream.aljazeera.com. The Tweet by Abdelkader haRiri : “Breaking: Huge explotions shook the city in what might be the beginning of US airstrikes on ISIS Hqs in Raqqa”

value than the fruits of individual creativity and whether of creativity can emerge in small groups or communities' ²⁹⁷. But on the other hand, *are more participatory media better media?*

This is the question that independent journalism organizations such as Frontline or the BBC in London are asking themselves, after the dispute on the arrival of videos from Syria the 'authenticity' of which was not possible to certify, because of the way they were shot – they were all shot in a way that was showing only a portion of the space - that make it impossible to recognise the location. The debate on 'authenticity', 'manufacturing' and 'manufacturing of the self' is very relevant today and it is recently taking interesting and unpredictable turns. The story of manufactured videos and the difficulty to prove some them authentic is crossing both the questions of political propaganda and political marketing/funding research, both within political movements and military army. Being able to establish a 'media truth', both for internal propaganda motives or for official, public PR reasons, is becoming, recently more than ever, the frontline of political battles that requires a major display of resources.

Recently, in 2014, a strand of media-savvy horrifying videos showing the beheading of political prisoners (i.e. the video portraying the violent death of American journalist James Foley in August 2014) was made to circulate on the internet to show the West the power of Jihad and ISIL Caliphate in the region of Raqqa. This made the news for weeks, creating a wave of panic in Western countries and spreading a sense of insecurity and inducing an inflated concept of terrorism threat

All observers noticed the, in spite of the apparent 'uncensored' style of the videos, level of media manufacturing that made them similar to Western movies, with clear visual and narrative signposts, good camera skills, rhythmic, sharp editing, clearly aimed at being understandable and hit the imagination of media-savvy viewers all over the world .

Another interesting case to mention in the debate around 'media manufacturing' is the story of Israeli soldiers posting videos or pictures of themselves engaging in racist and intolerant behaviours or overtly inciting to violence against Palestinians, which brought the Israel Defence Forces to deploy a 'selfie squad' to counter-act the unflattering view of the Israeli army that was being conveyed through the online sharing behaviour of some of the soldiers²⁹⁸.

Interesting in the sense of video making as a way to gather financial resources and provide internal evidence of political/ military action, is also the story portrayed by Ghaith Abdul-Ahad ²⁹⁹ about a master

²⁹⁷ David Gauntlett, *La Societa 'the Makers*, p.263

²⁹⁸ M. Kalman, " Israel Defence Forces deploy 'selfie squad' to boost image' , 27th December 2013, *The Guardian*, available online at ...Retrieved December 2014

²⁹⁹ G. Abdul-Ahad, *How to Start a Battalion (in Five Easy Lessons)*, London Review of Books, [Vol. 35 No. 4 · 21 February 2013](#) p. 13-14

plan that was devised to co-ordinate the flow of weapons into Syria in exchange of evidence of the use of the same ammunition through militant Youtube videos, as a sort of 'militant product placement' video making. Abdul-Ahad tells the story of how the ammunition was provided in exchange of YouTube video to submit evidence of action to the supporters. 'All I want from you is a short video that you can put on YouTube, stating your name and your unit and that you are part of the Aleppo military council. Then you can go do whatever you want. I just need to show the Americans that units are joining the council. I met two Americans yesterday, and they told me we won't get any advanced weapons until we show we're united under the leadership of the officers in the military councils. Just shoot the video and let me handle the rest.'³⁰⁰

I would also like to mention a couple of reflections, that I can only touch upon and leave to further research, but that are worth relating to the context we have been analysing so far. On the one hand, this bundle of questions interrogates a first set of problems, that concerns the question of 'copy' and 'original' and, therefore, the transformation of the media landscape in relation to questions of 'copyright' and 'piracy' in the age of digital reproduction³⁰¹. On the other hand, this set of questions also opens a discourse related to transformations internal to the role of the journalist, newsgatherer and documentary maker, shifting from being an 'author' to being a 'curator'. As tools like "Storymaker" or "Storify" appeared in the last couple of years³⁰² and experiments like Kevin McDonald's "Life in a Day"³⁰³ had a major mainstream success, more media groups are investing on user-generated contents. This is testified, not only by the commitment shown by art-like funds like Tribeca and Sundance, or documentary platforms festivals like IDFA or Sheffield Doc/Fest, but also by consistent investments made by TV channels like ARTE, PBS, VPRO, The Guardian, AlJazeera etc..in financing, producing and supporting interactive, cross-media and transmedia platforms that are based on user-generated content, also providing tools, facilitating debate around the ethics of it and the creation of a community of sharers³⁰⁴.

Let's go back to our initial question regarding *social change*. If we refer to Atton's definition³⁰⁵(Atton,

³⁰⁰ *Ibidem*

³⁰¹ See A. Beltrame, L. Fales, G. Fidotta, (eds.), *Whose Right? Media, Intellectual Property and Authorship in the Digital Era*, Udine/Gorizia FilmForum 2013, XX Udine International Film Studies Conference, March 12-14, 2013, Udine, Forum Editrice, 2013

³⁰² See the web tools "Storymaker" and "Storify"

³⁰³ K. Macdonald, "Life in a Day", 2011, available on Youtube at www.youtube.com/user/lifeinaday, but also "Sandy Storyline", 2011, available on the web at <http://sandystoryline.com>,

³⁰⁴ M. Bair, "Skills, Attitudes and Approaches for the Journalist as Curator", *Mediashift*, PBS, 8th of June 2014, available online at.. Some examples of recent user-generated content projects that have been produced. See also M. Ingram, "[It's not Twitter – this is just the way the news works now](#)", *Gigaonline*, 15th of December 2012, Retrieved December 2012

³⁰⁵ C. Atton, *An alternative internet*, New York, Columbia University press, 2004

2004) of 'alternative media', we meet an interesting ground that crosses the way media are employed or modified by their creators and users (communication practices) with social arrangements of new information and communication technologies used 'to challenge or alter dominant, expected or accepted ways of doing society, culture, and politics'³⁰⁶ (Lievrouw, 2011). This is a perspective which sees in the 'recombinant, networked nature of new media infrastructure'³⁰⁷ the possibility for 'DIY' information to be shared and recombined, through an extension of the network and a logic of feedback which allows critical discourses to circulate. In particular, if we follow Lievrouw's genre classification, we encounter two forms of alternative media which are interesting for our work and which are both used in the communication space of Tahrir square: in the *participatory journalism* and *mediated mobilization*³⁰⁸. The first category, *participatory journalism*, pertains to the social domain of reporting, news and public opinion, it takes the form of online news, blogs and has the purpose of covering under-reported groups and issues. The second category, *mediated mobilisation*, is to do with social movements using social media, virtual worlds and mobs to mobilise. The interesting element encountered in the "Tahrir Square" communication space is the convergence of the purpose of documenting events, covering under-reported groups and mobilising on the same kind of actions and the same kind of media.

As stated before, as an effect of an arising awareness that in the field of media exists the possibility of creating a powerful tools of connection between *participation*, *historical narration* and *social agency*, there seem to have been a combined response that has employed technological possibilities offered by digital platforms and social media towards digital storytelling techniques that have enhanced a stronger link between *participation*, *historical narration* and *social agency* (1.2.).

If we go back for a moment to the beginning of the Arab Spring, we should for a moment remember the death of Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year fruit vendor whose unlicensed wooden cart was confiscated by a female officer in the provincial town of Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, in December 2010³⁰⁹. The young man, humiliated by the loss of the goods who provided him with livelihood and by the lack of response by public officers whom he complained to, set himself to fire in "suicidal protest"³¹⁰ that spark protest all over Tunisia, giving rise to a powerful revolt that saw the convergence of people from every walks of life in protest against poverty, corruption, injustice. The self-immolation gesture of Mohamed Bouazizi initiated an articulation of street protests that, eventually, brought to the end the 23-year old dictatorial regime of President Zine al-Abidine Ben-Ali, despite the fact that nobody could have predicted such a powerful

³⁰⁶ L. A. Lievrouw, *Idem*, Introduction, p.19

³⁰⁷ *Ibidem*

³⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p.23

³⁰⁹ S. Allan, *Ibidem*, p.120

³¹⁰ *Ibidem*

domino effect³¹¹. Inspired by the Tunisian revolt, in the following days and weeks, several protests began in Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and Syria, mainly due to the fast spreading sharing of videos and pictures related to the Bouazizi suicide that were posted by citizens on the web³¹². As Omar Amar of the Lybian Youth Movement later commented: “The Sidi Bouzid picture spread like wild-fire on the internet”³¹³. As Karen Fahim observed on the *New York Times*, Mohammed Bouazizi’s picture had quickly become, on the web as well as in the mainstream news coverage the “revolution’s icon”³¹⁴.

“The battle for the survival of man as a responsible being in the Communication Era is not to be won where the communication originates, but *where it arrives*”³¹⁵ (Eco, 1986), stated Eco in 1986 referring to TV. In particular, the functions of seeking people, amassing ‘reputation capital’ and trust online³¹⁶ and ‘getting people on the street’³¹⁷ are achieved by new media technologies and the way they have been widely practiced starting from the 1990s. Allan notes correctly that, if availability and circulation of information doesn’t necessarily increase “informed citizenry”³¹⁸, at the same time no data seem to draw a direct connection between “involvement in social networking” and actual “civic participation”³¹⁹. One possibility is that, in particular in relationship to the ways media are used by young people, reflecting a ‘generational gap’ in the use of the media, ‘social networking is recasting familiar assumptions about civic participation’³²⁰ and that “citizenship must be rethought in a manner alert to its multiple, socially contingent re-inflections within a new media ecology”³²¹ where the dichotomy real/virtual is conceptually outdated. What is interesting is, instead, the fact that, on the one hand, the use of technology that has been made during the Arab Spring, i.e. Tunisia and Egypt, reflects a relationship between real concerns felt by people on the ground and the resonance of the news produced and shared through digital

³¹¹ *Ibidem*

³¹² *Ibidem*

³¹³ *Ibidem*. As Allan quotes, Omar Amar’s testimonial was quoted by UK-based Channel 4 News and proved to be crucial in the news coverage.

³¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p.213

³¹⁵ U. Eco, “Towards a semiological guerrilla warfare” in *Travels in hyperreality*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986, pp.142

³¹⁶ *Idem*, p.151 secondary literature on the same topic are...

³¹⁷ *Ibidem*, see secondary literature

³¹⁸ S. Allan, *Ibidem*, p.149

³¹⁹ *Ibidem*

³²⁰ M. Ito, ‘Lessons for the future from the first post- Pokémon generation’, *Nieman Report*, 64(2), 2010, p.18. See also G. Doy, *Picturing the Self. Changing views of the subject in visual culture*, London, New York, I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2005. K. Mallan, *Look at me! Look at me! Self-representation and self-exposure through online networks*, *Digital Culture and Education*, 1(1), 2009, p.51-66

³²¹ S. Allan, *Ibidem*, p.150

technologies. On the other hand, it suggests a widely spread use of technology, especially among young people, that reflects “personalised and affective forms of engagement”³²² related to concerns and preoccupations that are situated in the “politics of everyday”³²³ more than in a project for the future. What I would argue is that this kind of use of technology leaves a *trace of participation related to the taking part of the events of the present*, which can be found in the stream of information recorded by digital platforms and social media, which already, *in themselves, constitute a form of storytelling of the present*.



Picture 14. Protester in New York, USA, 2011 in protest against The Hosni Mubarak regime cut on internet access because of the role Twitter and Facebook was playing in organising dissent. The protest went viral on the web in various forms and it took place in the streets in various cities of the US.³²⁴

³²² *Ibidem*

³²³ *Ibidem*, p. 151

³²⁴ “From the Egyptian demo in New York: who's afraid of twitter?”, *Img.ly*, posted in January 2011 from *Twitterrific*, available on the web at <http://img.ly/2TgS>. Retrieved May 2015



Picture 15. Protester at Auckland March for Democracy in Egypt, USA, February 2011, in protest against regime cut on internet access³²⁵

1.3.2. *Witnessing events, building testimonial encounters*

Transmedia archives, living documentaries, live events

”A hundred years after cinema’s birth, cinematic ways of seeing the world, of structuring time, of narrating a story, of linking one experience to the next, are being extended to become the basic ways in which computer users access and interact with all cultural data. In this way, the computer fulfils the promise of cinema as a visual Esperanto which pre-occupied many film artists and critics in the 1920s, from Griffith to Vertov. Indeed, millions of computer users communicate with each other through the same computer interface. And, in contrast to cinema where most of its ‘users’ were able to ‘understand’ cinematic language but not ‘speak’ it (i.e., make films), all computer users can ‘speak’ the language of the interface. They are active users of the interface, employing it to perform many tasks: send email, organize their files, run various applications, and so on.”

(L. Manovitch, *The language of New Media*, p.7)

Gaudenzi further defines interactive documentaries as '*living documentaries*' (Gaudenzi, 2013), in the light of the “liveness and adaptability” which makes these documentaries change according to their own internal “transformational power” (Gaudenzi, 2013). Interactive documentaries are, therefore, seen as audiovisual works which are able to reorganise themselves in relation to their *environment*, following the

³²⁵ 'Who's afraid of Twitter', *Flickr*, copyright © & (M) LGD 2011, posted February 2011, available on the web at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/lgd/5493254679/>

idea that a living *autopoietic* being (Maturana and Varela, 1980)³²⁶ is autonomous and changes in relation to an interaction with its *environment* (Gaudenzi, 2013). If it's true that this kind of processes are mostly taking place in the digital world, it is also true that they do not depend on digital devices as apparatuses.

This perception-based process can therefore be a useful tool for us, if applied to the Tahrir Square communication space we are trying to describe in this essay. It proves especially, in relation to the *feedback dynamic* between online/offline communities that serves as a decriptive model for those interactive forms of documentation which were produced “in real time” to navigate that space-in-between online and offline interactions. As *feed back dynamic* we want to describe 'a string of feed-back loops (action/reaction) which ties them together and transforms them both' (Gaudenzi, 2013).

Could we say that this communication space in itself behaves like a media platform, which interacts and adapts its media response to the changing environment? Is this communication space a media platform that is curated by the people who live the protest in person and those who follow it from afar, by those who document it on the ground, those who share it and those who archive it? Or, else said, is the high speed of information and the technological possibilities provided by mobile cameras to on the ground and share visual material almost in “real time” through social media, giving a chance to create *a stream of multiple historical narratives* which are already being stored in a collective communication space? Is it maybe possible to definite this as an *interactive platform*, which includes the actions of being on the ground, document events, share material and leave behind a non-linear stream of (un)edited information that can be easily re-organised only through non-linear documentary features?

One of the elements that I would like to underline in the following paragraphs, is that a set of *live events* devoted to *remembering events on the ground*— like festivals or commemorations events and anniversaries — were crucial in the *process of creation of digital storytelling features* able to translate the complexity of multiple interctions happening on the ground. The act of *witnessing* more specifically in reference to its memory-making function becomes a *relational* experience investing film creators, film programmers, film audiences and space and time of this exchange, in the realm of a dynamic producing, internally, *social agency* and, externally, impacting on the *public opinion discourse* as part of the project itself. This is especially true for what concerns the Human Right Film Festival Network, which carries the flag of politically-oriented festival network, devoted at creating a platform for sharing narratives of the present time. This function, though, was recently perpetrated also by major *cinophilia-oriented* festivals like Berlinale, Cannes Film Festival, or even London Film Festival, which have been playing a 'soft leadership'

³²⁶ Maturana H., *Ontology of Observing: The biological Foundations of Self-Consciousness and the Physical Domain of Existence*, in *Cybernetic Theory, An In Depth Exploration of the Thought of Humberto R. Maturana, W.T.Powers and E.von Glaserfeld*, American Society of Cybernetics, Felton CA, 1988

role in disseminating contents connected to protest and dissent, in the making and in the form of a collection of multiple, non-traditional formats.

Remembering the revolution

"Egyptians are highly sensitive about official attempts to write history and create state-sponsored narratives about historical events. When Hosni Mubarak was vice-president in the 1970s he was himself on a government committee tasked with writing – or rather rewriting – the history of the 1952 revolution to suit the political purposes of the elite at that time. That's exactly the kind of thing we want to avoid." (...) "Documenting the revolution sounded like an easy thing, but what is the revolution? When did it start? When did it end? What constitutes participation in the revolution – is it only those who went down to Tahrir, or is it also the doctors who worked extra-long hours in their hospitals to treat the wounded? What about a police officer who fought the protesters – is he a part of the revolution or not?"³²⁷ (J. Shenker, 'The struggle to document Egypt's revolution', *The Guardian*, 15th of July 2011, available on the web. Retrieved February 2012)

The tension between acts of mass popular participation and official attempts to catalogue and record them was clear in Egypt since the time of the revolution, as afore mentioned with the actions taken by Mosireen in an attempt of remaining free of entanglements with the ruling power and keeping editorial independence. We will go back to this in the following chapter (Chapter II, 2.1.). This question didn't involve only the straight-forward activist community, though, but also members of the public, conscious citizens and academics. The task of *preserving* material of the revolution was not seen as a main purpose only by the activist community, but it very soon became of interest of institutions like Egypt's National Archive. The question of *memory-making, storytelling of the present and historical agency* was burning, as burning became the question related to 'whose story' and 'which documents' needed preservation – a question of "ownership of the process of revolutionary change"³²⁸. Less than a week after the fall of Mubarak, professor Khaled Fahmi received a phone call from the head of national archives asking him to take part to a unique new project that would document the country's dramatic political and social upheaval and make it available for generations of Egyptians to come³²⁹. The question immediately became the one of *narrative*, in the sense underlined by historian Hayden Whyte. "I was initially very reluctant," said Fahmy to *The Guardian*. "I didn't want people to think we were producing one definitive narrative of the revolution. But then I started thinking about the possibilities, and suddenly I got excited."³³⁰ The aim set by historian

³²⁷ Khaled Fahmi reported by J. Shenker, 'The struggle to document Egypt's revolution', *The Guardian*, 15th of July 2011, available on the web. Retrieved February 2012

³²⁸ *Ibidem*

³²⁹ *Ibidem*

³³⁰ *Ibidem*

Fahmy was "to gather as much primary data on the revolution as possible and deposit it in the archives so that Egyptians now and in the future can construct their own narratives about this pivotal period." A special committee was set for this task and the archival work encompassed a huge variety of material - from official records and insurrectionary pamphlets to multimedia footage and updates on Twitter and Facebook³³¹. One of the discussions was, for example, on the "start date" of the Egyptian revolution. Was the beginning the 14th January, the day the Tunisian president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali was forced from office or was it, instead, June 2010 when the Khaled Said was killed by two police officers, the incident that gave birth to the *Khaled Said* Facebook page and started the process of massive mobilisation against the Mubarak regime?³³² "The question of access to information and archives is political, because reading history is interpreting history, and interpreting history is one way of making it," added Fahmy. "Closing people off from the sources of their own history is an inherently political gesture, and equally opening that up is a political – even revolutionary – act." This attempt, in a way highly problematic and meaningful in its *processual, inter-relational nature*, is extremely interesting in the way in which *building an archive of a revolution in the making*, as an operation in itself, reflects the tension and the ambiguities between the "leaderlessness" of the revolution, the "openness" of the space and time, the "impossibility" of a linear storytelling, the "horizontal" of a multimodal, multi-vocal approach and the inherently problematic authoritative element constituting an archive, as a "collection" of information "selected" from a multitude or concretion of aggregated, unorganised, unfinished materials that are present in a certain time, in a certain space considered the "archivable" dimension.

Reflections on truth: 'Your eyes have seen it all'

Tweets took flight, but their senders did not. 'If [people] are transported in one way (..)they are surely left in place in another, holding the camera or the cell phone, face to face with those they oppose, unprotected, injurable, injured, persistent, if not insurgent.'

(J. Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street" (EIPCP, *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*), 2011)

As we said, Arab Spring has shown an unrivalled ability in media communication. The events have been told by a number of real-time images ever seen before and communicated to the entire globe through the channels of the network. The images of Tahrir Square, protesters packed day and night with the women in

³³¹ *Ibidem*

³³² *Ibidem*

the front row, have become part of our collective memory in Europe. The urgent need to document the event and to witness the events paced, brought the whole society to produce a steady stream of images distributed via social networks every day. "Most people filmed continuously with their mobile phones- says the Egyptian artist Paul Geday, director of the short film 'Bye Bye' shown in the *Forum Expanded* section of Berlinale in 2011· even when snipers fired on the crowd and people were dying next to them. Filming had become a duty for all of us'. The route of viral dissemination propagated by social media injected symbols within a communication system that was shared by everyone on the ground and a sense of acceleration of the historical processes made us witness of a unique moment in history so much as it was at the time very difficult to understand it.

What does it mean for the people on the ground to document what was happening before their eyes? How is it possible to make memory of something that was still happening? And how is it possible to draw a connection, sometimes unclear and non transparent, between individual memories and collective history? When asked to report on the revolution that had happened just few months before, many filmmakers invited to the 2011 Berlinale, had to confront the legacy of the riots in front of the growing influence of Islamism. 'We must have faith and keep on fighting to support open ideas so they can win'. Many repeated that time, distance and reflection were necessary to really understand what happened. It was necessary to leave the record and enter the field of memory, in order not to lose his memory and not be overwhelmed by the event.

"*Althawra ... Khabar*" by Bassam Mortada is documentary that takes us to the forefront through the eyes of six young journalists, three men and three women, who, when the revolution started in January of 2011, were employed by the editors of Al-Masry Al-Youm, a newspaper linked to the Youtube channel independently. The six became crucial witnesses, almost by chance, and found themselves in the position to play a key role in news coverage of the event. For all six it was a crucial moment: the difficulty to remain objective in a moment so tense for their country, the effort to hold off the fear or euphoria of the moment. Nora Younis shared her guilt in the moment when she found herself inside only hotel with network coverage and she started filming from the window a killing that took place on the bridge Qasr al-Nil Bridge just a few feet from her. Its news coverage proved then essential to reconstruct the facts of what happened., but when she filmed it she was safe, hiding behind the window while people were being killed in front of her eyes. The events in Cairo, Suez protests, rallies pro-Mubarak, were filmed in spite of the interruption of the Internet and the darkening of the phones. The key question of the film is how can we force an impossible distance from something that fully engages our own identity'. Non professional journalist Nadia Younis, activist and blogger from Egypt who participated in the making of the

documentary *“Alhawra ... Khabar”* believed that 'Cinema is not a sect and anybody can make movies'³³³.

Instead, they suggest that those of us who inhabit the privileges that are attached to sectors of Europe and North America need to learn from the events in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain and Syria that the contemporary public sphere depends not on a digital repertoire alone (important though that is) but also on brave bodies-in-alliance installing new spaces through the conjuncture of what Butler calls 'street and media.'

(Gregory, p.243)

During the 62nd edition of Berlinale, filmmakers, documentary filmmakers and video artists converged around these issues, showing their work just few weeks after the events and while the Tahrir Square protest was still ongoing. Feature films, shorts, documentaries and installations had been selected as multiple representations of the same number of forms of narrative events. A multiplicity of memories, collective events, but also search for identity, often told with humour and sometimes just made out of details. A diverse set of forms was presented, defying any attempt at universalism, in an attempt to compose a framework where each element would be a piece of a mosaic built collectively. For example, one film was telling the story of the attempt of selling a piano in the middle of the revolution in Egypt, a piano that has a life of its own and does not want to leave the house at any cost. This was the theme of *“Bye Bye”*, short film made by Egyptian director Paul Geday. The choice of the director was 'to exclude the revolution as a primary subject, not to spoil the spirit of those 18 days, not to take advantage of it'. The film takes place in one room, through one single frame. “The revolution needs to be filmed and narrated through social media, it is a moral duty, it must be disseminated and performed through footage. But personal films, -said the director – have the function to reveal private feelings toward the revolution, feelings that are fragile and true. This can be told with humour, through the fear of losing the memory or being swept away by the flood of event and through the ambivalence of our attachment to material things”.

The same mocking spirit, contrary to the exploitation of the revolution as a theme, can be found in the hybrid film / documentary *“La Vierge, Le Copte et Moi”* (*The Virgin, The Copts and I*) by Nabir Abdel Messeeh. 'Why don't you make a film about the revolution?' says French producer on the phone to director. Driven by his secular education to probe the veracity of the statement of his mother, who believes she saw the Virgin Mary in a videotape, Nabir sets off in search of the key to the cult and in search of the link with the copt community he comes from. Soon he faces a number of obstacles, discovering the mistrust and conflicts between Copts and Muslims in the underground of the society. But the real driving force of the story is the hilarious relationship with his mother. Driven to violate the categorical prohibition

³³³ N. Younis, journalist, activist, blogger. My transcription of an interview during panel *Documenting Revolution* at Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin, February 2012

of the mother, Nabir sets off to find his family in a rural village and eventually involves the whole community in a reenactment of the apparition of the Virgin. In the end, the mother will direct the improvised company will and drag them all in a surreal adventure of neorealist cinema. The film warns on the presumed purity of documentaries and suggests the existence of a deeper truth narrated by fiction.

Sean McAllister, British filmmaker and director of the documentary *"A Reluctant Revolutionary"*, is located in Yemen and, while traveling with a group of tourists in Eastern Europe, sets out to film the story of Kais, a tour guide determined to attract tourists to the country. Suddenly a rebellion against the government breaks out and the protesters, women in the front row, occupy a square in the center of Sana'a renaming it 'place of change'. McAllister soon realizes to be one of the few journalists left in the entire Yemen. Kais, who had shown some skepticism about the whole thing, begins to be crossed by a growing enthusiasm for the events. His life, including his debts, the pregnancy of his wife, lack of money for food and intelligence services who put themselves on the trail of Sean, becomes more and more complex day after day. Sean and Kais make a pact of iron and find themselves in the midst of a protesters's massacre, displayed by snipers hidden in the corners of the square. Kais will give Sean the sense of his presence in that place: 'It does not matter if you cannot get the material you filmed out of the country. The most important thing is your eyes looking at everything. Your eyes have seen it all'. The narrative power of the documentary arises from the relationship of brotherhood between the two men, a Yemeni and a Scotsman, witnesses, together, of a unique moment in history.

An interesting solution to the problem of 'authenticity' posed by the way the proliferation of images seem to work in times of war and unrest, in the complex and constantly renegotiated space between subjective participation and objective news gathering, is provided by the documentary film *'Silvered Waters. A Syrian Self-Portrait'*, 2004. The film, an extraordinary account of the horror of civil war in Syria, openly takes position in relation to 'establishing the truth', by stating a chosen and total inter-relational subjectivity between two characters. Osama Mohammed is a filmmaker, who left Syria on May 9, 2011. His destination was France where was in exile. He got invited the Cannes Film Festival 2014 where he went without a film, but as a *living witness* with a repository of raw footage show by '1001 people' in Syria. Osama, in the mean time, was got contacted by a young Kurdish woman, Simav, who was still based in Homs and had given herself the mission of *filming everything she saw*, the limitless destruction, desolation, horror and brutality of the siege of her city. The film is narrated by Osama in counterpoint with the Skype he has with Simav. Their online discussions about *filming, what to film, how to film it, who is filming* are an incredibly powerful account of the 'impossibility of making sense' through linear storytelling in times in which a *univocal historical truth seems impossible to be established*. In the film there is a constant contrast between the

'possibility of showing' and the 'impossibility of making sense,' the accumulation of raw footage coming from several different anonymous witnesses on the ground (brutal footage of torture, violence, sodomy..), depicting a space of 'making public' what is neglected or censored and forgotten, and the *intimacy* of Osama's and Simav's voices whose *personal stories* and reactions make the footage resonate beyond their power of anonymous /collective denunciation.



Picture 16. An image from the film *Bye bye* by Paul Geday, Egypt / Netherlands, 2012.

Bearing witness, building a testimony, narrating dissent

As stated at the beginning of the paragraph, I would like to explore the act of *witnessing* more specifically in reference to its memory-making function. First of all, let's outline the difference between *witness* and *testimony*. In the case of witnessing, the object of representation is equated to the 'viewer's own experience', while in the case of the testimony it is equated to the 'ability to construct a knowledge that makes the experience commensurable with other objects or events. In other words, witnessing is considered as a 'moment of seeing' that exceeds knowledge, where it is possible to have glimpses of the events, but any narrative, history-making function is impeded'³³⁴ (Bernhard-Donals, R. Glejzer, 2011), while testimony implies a narrative construction that can be compared to others. As underlined by Leshu Torchin in the Opening of the book *Film Festivals and Activism*, when Igor Blazevic, the founder of One

³³⁴ M. Bernhard-Donals, R. Glejzer, *Between Witness and Testimony: The Holocaust and the Limits of Representation*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2011, Preface, VII

World Festival in Prague, defines the human rights film – outlined and programmed within the Human Rights Festival Network- as 'information and testimony rather than art and entertainment', he sets the premise for a conceptual shift that, despite its seeming self-evidence, sets the human right film's screening dynamic as a whole, in terms of *relational* experience investing film creators, film programmers, film audiences and space and time of this exchange, in the realm of a dynamic producing, internally, *social agency* and, externally, impacting on the *public opinion discourse* as part of the project itself.

The experience of a human right film's screening is therefore conceived and read in the framework of the testimonial encounter – in the terms expresses by McLagan – as the evolving 'interface between the testimony or programmed films and the audiences hailed as witnessing public, viewers who take responsibility for what they have seen or are ready to respond to'. And this, as noted by Torchin himself, needs further understanding for the implications inherent to the project. The word 'testimony', from its Christian meaning to its juridicial background, passing through it's therapeutic and performative meanings – as noted by Felman and Laub - has evolved through the centuries around the function displayed by an individual (or a group of individuals) who carry a certain narration of a situation – with the intention of it being truthful – for the sake of a beneficial transformation to the community.

Going back for a moment to the definition of 'human right film' by Igor Blazevic, we will find three transformations which might be interesting briefly underline in this context. Firstly, the *taxonomic* aspect– the definition of a 'human rights film' typology as characterised by *an ethical/political discourse in its own constitution*, which invests the film as vector of a message of potential change. The second one is its *reception* by *an audience community* created by the very experience of the screening of such films in the context of a shared responsibility. The third one, is *the shift from a merely aesthetic discourse* or a discourse based on *cinophilia, film theory, film history and film criticism*, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, on industry-oriented models, to focus instead on a *relational* definition of film festival, which defines a space that builds itself around the problematisation of a discourse on truth and on information as a process that conveys a different kind of knowledge to the one institutionalised by other contexts. The *transformative feature* mentioned by Torchin and carried by this conception of 'human right film' as acting in the field of the audience's expectations within the framework of the testimonial encounter, is, in fact, the notion I would like to apply as heuristic tool to explore the social and political role played by the Human Right Film Festival Network in the years 2011/ 2013.

What I would like to discuss through some case studies, is the impact on local dissent discourse formation, internally, and on the freedom of speech promotion, externally, as exercised by *activism and protest* on local screenings and transnational circulation of a set of films/ discourses on, within a certain time frame, as a

counterpoint to the official news-making agenda and as a call for action, in relationship to the new media dynamic itself. The way I would like to do is by analysing the node *testimonies/ live screening event/ online communication space* as a way to produce social agency that was experimentally outlined in new ways in some editions of Human Rights Film Festivals in the years mentioned above.

My hypothesis, is that the initial idea of international human rights networks as potentially able to constitute “channels for bringing alternative visions and information into the international debate” (Keck and Sikkink), which was framed at the end of the Sixties in the context of nationally rooted political and media networks exchanging contents on an international level, is in the process of re-structuring itself in the light of the current transnational dimension of new media communication. The 'space of flows' as "simultaneity of social practices without territorial contiguity" - theorised by Castells and well represented by the evolving hubs like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter - constitute the material pre-condition from which most recent protests have reached their intensity, the place where they have been socialised and disseminated and where the documentary footage testifying some political events has been produced and showcased in the first place. This process, on the one hand, diminishes the need for the physical presence of live screening events- as underlined by Iordanova - but it could also be reinforcing the *mobilisation* potential of protest discourses carried by *filmmaking as a testimonial practice*, within events like the one organised by Human Right Film Festival Newtork that are characterised by a strong *community-building factor*.

In other words, these screening could have been acting, as it happens in the context of the discourse on 'choreography of assemblies' displayed by most recent forms of online protests in Gerbaudo's terms, more or less intentionally, a form of *soft leadership*. By concentrating attention on the process of filmmaking – and/ or film showing – these festivals have been promoting the idea of film as political tool in itself, which has certainly encouraged a new politicisation of films. On the other hand, though, these festivals have also been acting as a bridge to the industry community, interested in understanding the phenomenon of social change and in having access to that footage and those actors that would have been stayed out of reach if a “protest-friendly” space wouldn't have been provided for this encounter. In the context of a profound change of footage collection and production dynamic, the understanding of the 'human right film' discourse in its diversity, becomes extremely relevant to try and identify a first hypothesis on the strategic element represented by live screenings in the context of a wider digital circulation of discourses, and its access to bigger networks. The cycle of protests chosen is selected through the common feature of digital media as a mean of dissent narration and the cases I would like to mention are the 2011 editions of One World Prague, the 2012 edition of One World Romania and the 2013 edition of Cine Derecho Humanos

de Buenos Aires.

New media goes to festival

The March 2011 ONE WORLD Prague edition called '*Your energy is needed elsewhere*' – less than one month after the 18-days Egypt revolution- sees the foundation of a new event called 'NEW MEDIA FOR SOCIAL CHANGE' and the organisation of a strand called 'One World Many Ways, new directions in Human Rights Documentaries' which sees the participation of international guests - a key blogger in the analysis of the dynamics among documentary, internet and TV, a filmmaker from Egypt bringing footage directly from the heart of the unrest in Cairo – as a focus on the response by filmmakers and journalists to topical events – but also two commissioning editors from big broadcast groups, a filmmaker organising a filmmaking workshop on low-budget filmmaking for non-professional filmmakers and a focus on the *Wikileaks* case which had shaken the world of information just few months before, on the 1st of September 2011.

'Our goal – states the 2011 One World film catalogue – is to draw attention to the significance of new media, which has fundamentally changed the way in which people obtain, share and use information. Today access to technology opens the way to more effective reporting of human rights breaches and is, for example, playing a greater role in checking up national and local politicians or improving awareness of socially excluded groups.' Moreover, the event page in the catalogue lists several campaigns using social media in innovative ways, among which some citizen journalism platforms like Kloop (Kyrgyzstan) kloop.kg aimed at young citizen journalists and Crowd voice (Bahrain) , an open crowd sourcing platform for collating, monitoring and evaluating information provided directly by citizens around the world. The festival also hosts the 2010 documentary *The Green Wave* by Ali Samadi Ahadi which narrates the murderous repression acted by Iranian government on protesters during 2009 presidential elections through the testimonies of Blog posts that were written by a number of anonymous Iranians who experienced the aftermath of the election chaos in Teheran.

Two months before the screening in Prague, in January 2011, the same film had been premiering at Sundance Film Festival, where the director had been stating 'The day will come when they (the governments) will have to listen to the will of the people'. Following this thread based around a discourse on digital civil resistance and citizen witnessing, which develops progressively in the course of 2011 through some topical events, like the one month-long Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia that brings to the destitution of President Ben Ali (18 December 2010- 14 January 2011) to the Tahrir Square 18-days

Egyptian unrest that brings to the destitution of President Mubarak (25 January 2011- 11 February 2011), the One World Prague film programming strategy of the March 2011 edition focuses on 'access to technology', 'education to low-budget filmmaking' and 'sharing of information through digital media' as part of its innovation policy and of the widening mission of a Human Right Film Festival of present times. One year later, while several other Human Rights Film Festivals especially in Europe (Belgrade, Sarajevo, Skopje, Budapest among others) open the way to a discourse on the impact of new media and technology hosting some films that are starting to come out about protests around the world, in February 2012 the institutional festival Berlinale organises a specific 'Focus on Arab Spring', based around the representation of protest and the function of 'citizen journalism' in the context of the Arab revolts.

In the mean time a wave of protests employing social media and messaging systems as communication tool had been crossing Europe, the Arab World, Canada and the United States during the whole year 2011– the student protest wave in the Uk against the rise in university tuition fees in December 2010 with the invention of the first Phone App 'to keep protesters safe on protest' and the systematisation of flash-mobs as a disruption system by UKUncut, the occupation of Change Square in Sana'a January 2011, the occupation of Puerta del Sol in Madrid on May 20, 2011 – coordinated mostly via Facebook and Twitter - the streets riots of London in July 2011, coordinated through Blackberry messaging system, which caused Cameron's strong censoring measures 'against social media in time of civil unrest', the Greek anti-austerity protests in May-July 2011, the occupation of Zuccotti Park in New York in September 2011, the Quebec student protest movement in February 2012.

In March 2012, in Bucharest, One World Romania hosts two strands - out of its 10 strands- devoted to protest and activism. The first one, called *Online revolutions* hosts the films 'Fragments of a Revolution', 'Tahrir, the Good, the Bad and the Politician', 'Rouge Parole', on Egypt, Tunisia, Iran and the second one, aimed at problematising activism which is called *Activism is stupid?*.

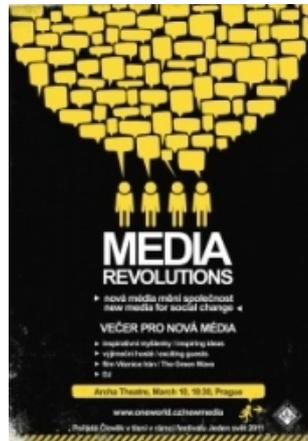


Picture 17. An image from the documentary 'Rouge Parole' by Elyes Baccar, Tunisia, 2011³³⁵

In the presentation of the first strand, the catalogue states: *'If the Romanian 1989 revolution was the first one to be televised, the Green movement blossomed on the internet and was fuelled through the virtual networks. The change of tools took only 20 years, but the blood that they shed when they took the streets was not virtual at all.'* And the second strand the catalogue states: *'In Romanian, even the word activism has a funny resonance, and this cannot be blamed only on our recent communist past. We are not living in a society that values this kind of attitude. But in recent months, people took the streets in Romania in a sudden change of spirit. The films gathered under this banner offer different approaches to civic involvement. These people have doubts as well.'* The films listed below are from Estonia, Uk, United States, Peru and show different kind of activism and different level of involvement in political action, but they are all united by a question on 'what is activism', which clearly the festival program sponsors and supports. This edition of the Human Right Film festival testifies a real change in intensity compared to the previous one. In this edition of the festival the choice of films is made with a clear 'educational' and 'testimonial' stance taken by the festival itself, which proposes itself as a space where a protesting / mobilised community can find shelter and a hub for discussion. The intent of the festival is that of providing tools that can be useful for interpreting the protests that are crossing the streets of Bucharest in that same moment, plugging into the net where online communication around dissent is ongoing . The impact the screenings are aimed at having on the local reality is directed at the re-framing of historical and current circumstances – with a touch of irony as well –

³³⁵ Picture taken from C.Savall, "El cine que refleja la vida", *El Periodico*, December, 1, 2012, available on the web at <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/barcelona/cine-que-refleja-vida-1373130>. Retrieved May 2015

in order to 'sharpen views and cut through established perceptions' with razor-like films. The festival represents itself as a space nurturing alternative views and, rather than just analysing, participates in first person to the protest debate.



Picture 19. Media Revolutions, Social Media For Social Change, One World Prague 2012

The case of the August 2013 Cine Derecho Humanos de Buenos Aires is totally different, but it represents a quite interesting and creative counterpoint in the discourse around social change. To respond to this situation of instability crossing Argentina again in 2012, after a decade of relative stability, the 15th edition of Buenos Aires Cine Derecho Humanos sends out a call aimed at gathering films to do with the relationship between art and social transformation. In its statement Florencia Santucho, while mentioning the financial difficulties the festival is undergoing, declares *'the universality of the cinematic message becomes a tool of social change when we break down the intangible barriers that separate the passive spectators from the reality behind the screen and we give Art the power to connect worlds. We are undergoing a profound change in the communicational paradigms, and this year's program reflects through its productions and identities as self-representative society that takes over the audiovisual language'*.

When one goes through the titles chosen by the festival, it's interesting to find such a relevant number of 'animation', 're-enactment'-based films or 'hybridisation' of documentary and fiction as a way of addressing political change. The most striking example is *'The Act of Killing'*, the film by Joshua Oppenheimer, which tells the story of a group of perpetrators who, challenged by the filmmaker about their role in the Indonesian genocide, decide to dramatise their role, initially to play the parts in a film – they play the victims and they play themselves – to then embark on a completely unsettling and shocking journey into the surreal representation of the genocide imaginary and the slow and sudden realisation of their role in historical events. But it is also a case like *'L'Intervallò'* by Leonardo di Costanzo, a fiction film starring non-professional actors, or the case of *'Los hijos de las nubes, la última colonia'* starring actor Javier Bardem and

analysing the North African situation in the eye of the Western powers' policies through his eyes, or even '*Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry*' about the story of the Chinese artist who made himself a symbol of the Chinese government censorship.

All these films are highly interested in expressing through highly cinematic tools an imaginary/fictionalised embodied access to a political content, to the exact opposite side of the spectrum of the discourse promoting *direct* access to filmmaking practices through online technologies and low-budget equipment and of *first-person testimonies*. Here the discourse of dissent is, instead, channeled through a form of testimonial encounter that involves not only the film-testimony and the witnessing audience, but also a way of taking distance and elaborating through the mediation of art cultural discourse . The organisation of the programme around these films somehow takes position against the immediacy of the protest discourse based on the urgency of participation – with the intent of bringing the elaboration and gestation of subjectivity discourse through the mediation of artistic languages back into a framework including a differentiated conception of testimonial encounter in the project of Human Rights Film Festivals.

Chapter II - *The Storytelling of Our Own Time*

2.1. Tunisia, Egypt, Spain, Greece, Usa, Turkey. A global protest space online

Is there a dominant global image— call it a world picture— that links the Occupy movement to the Arab Spring? Or (to narrow the question quite drastically) is there any single image that captures and perhaps even motivated the widely noticed synergy and infectious mimicry between Tahrir Square and Zuccotti Park? One would first have to register the dramatic differences between the two sites and situations. The Arab Spring was a series of more or less hard revolutions of the classic form, involving various degrees of violence and demands for regime change; in the US, Occupy Wall Street continued a soft revolution that began with the election of Barack Obama, whose 2012 State of the Union address echoed many of its demands. But there is also a curious mirroring between the hard and soft revolutions that characterize this global moment. The hard revolutions of the Arab Spring, which ask for not much more than democracy, civil liberties, and a decent Keynesian economy, turn out to be the inspiration for an American imitation that takes on the very centre of American capitalism— not the state, but the system that is widely perceived to have corrupted the state and the whole political process. While moderate and restrained in its tactics (nonviolent occupation of public spaces), Occupy Wall Street was radical in its demands and (some would say) even more radical in its refusal at the outset to be pinned down to any specific demands. And this is something it had in common with Tahrir Square, with its conspicuous insistence on an anti iconic, non sovereign image repertoire. Tahrir Square may have opened a Facebook account, but it refused to have a representative face come forward as the avatar of the revolution. This was partly tactical, of course, for if the police had been in possession of such a face, they would have quickly arrested and tortured the body connected to it. But it was also a key ideological feature of the Occupy movement, which insisted on an iconography of nonsovereignty and anonymity, renouncing the face and figure of the charismatic leader in favor of the face in and of the crowd, the assembled masses. When faces did emerge, they were those of anonymous individuals or indefinitely repeatable masks, such as the grinning visage of Guy Fawkes, a singularly awkward and inappropriate icon of a nonviolent revolution. This is why the iconic moments, the images that promise to become monuments, of the global revolution of 2011 are not those of face but of space; not figures, but the negative space or ground against which a figure appears. The figure that circulates globally, that embraces both Tahrir Square and Zuccotti Park, and has perhaps been overlooked because it is hiding in plain sight, is the figure of *occupation* itself.³³⁶

(W. J. T. Michell, “Image, Space, Revolution: The Arts of Occupation”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Autumn 2012), The University of Chicago Press, pp. 8)

³³⁶ W. J. T. Michell, “Image, Space, Revolution: The Arts of Occupation”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Autumn 2012), The University of Chicago Press, pp. 8



Picture 20. Headquarters of Mosireen Collective, Cairo, Egypt, 2012³³⁷

Relying on the snowball effect inherent to the web as a network provided with 'power of cumulative connections'³³⁸ and unrivalled outreach potential to connect online and offline communities, many grassroots movements of our recent times have been self-producing documentary material on the ground. On the one hand, the process of documenting events that were witnessed in real time has contributed to increasing political the visibility of the movements. On the other hand, the act of spreading of the message through the web during dramatic political changes and upheavals has opened new communication avenues between activists and other less immediately engaged Internet users, merging communication techniques in unexpected ways. As testified by 2009 Green revolution Iranian protesters, through 2011

³³⁷ Picture taken from L. Starkweather, 'No one lives here' @ RCA reviewed, *Aqnb*, March 21, 2013, available on the web at <http://www.aqnb.com/2013/03/21/no-one-lives-here-rca-reviewed/>. Retrieved May 2015

³³⁸ J. Hands, *@is for Activism – Dissent, Resistance and Rebellion in a Digital Culture*, Pluto Press, London, 2011, especially chapters "Mobil(e)sation" and "@ is also for Alter-Globalisation" pp. 125-161

Arab Spring activists as well people in Spain and in Greece, to those involved in world-wide Occupy movement³³⁹ and recent Turkish protests, people have been using Internet tools, open source softwares and social media to spread their own messages across the world in order to create a space for connecting people in a new, horizontal, global, leaderless way³⁴⁰. On the one side, voicing discontent techniques have been developing themselves in relation to the global context where political struggles were resonating. On the other side, they have been shaping up their own functioning modes in relation to the ever evolving web connection nodes as a way to increase their outreach scope on people and networks.

Departing from this set of preliminary considerations, I would like to analyse the characters and functioning modes of a new communication landscape where the practice of voicing discontent is immediately connected to the participation building moment as well as the operational and fundraising phase. The continuity among the *oppositional/propositional*³⁴¹ moment, the spreading of the message and the financing of the cause traces the borders of a new territory where media distribution models, political practices and advertising techniques are potentially overlapping and sharing common grounds. This process is testified by the very recent emergence of some political apps and various crowd funding initiatives, which are starting to be used as platforms to gather people around political issues as well as to collect funds for political events and groups. The continuity between the moment of participation building and the propositional moment is particularly clear in the production of news through crowd sourced material that made the front page of important newspapers, like the case of Egypt or the Occupy movement³⁴². It is also particularly clear in some of the funds' collection cases, like the crowd funding campaign that has been set up by political group like Egyptian collective Mosireen in September 2012³⁴³ and the crowd funding campaign set up in Spring 2013 by some Turkish protesters, only three days after the protest had started fuelling the streets of Istanbul³⁴⁴. The purpose of the Mosireen crowd funding campaign was to “film, archive and disseminate visual information” about the Egyptian revolution in the

³³⁹ Norton, Q., “How Occupy Became This Century’s Free Speech Movement”, *Wired*, 11th of November 2011, available on the web, Retrieved December 2011, M. Wells, “Occupy Wall Street – were you arrested on Brooklyn Bridge?”, *The Guardian*, 2nd of October 2011, available on the web, Retrieved October 2011.

³⁴⁰ P. Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*, London, Pluto Press, 2011

³⁴¹ M. Telmissay, “The utopian and dystopian functions of Tahrir Square”, *Postcolonial Studies*, 2014, Vol. 17, No. 1, 36–46

³⁴² M. Wells, “Occupy Wall Street – were you arrested on Brooklyn Bridge?”, *The Guardian*, 2nd of October 2011, available on the web, Retrieved October 2011.

³⁴³ For info about this campaign check Indie Go Go campaign, *Mosireen: Media Collective in Cairo*, available at <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/mosireen-independent-media-collective-in-cairo>

³⁴⁴ Indie Go Go, *Full Page Ad For Turkish Democracy in Action*, available at <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/full-page-ad-for-turkish-democracy-in-action>

year and half following the actual uprising³⁴⁵. Turkish campaign was at the beginning to help fund a full page advert on the New York Times in order to get the story known outside of the country. The actual results of the campaign have massively outweighed the initial project, raising interesting questions related to contemporary interplays between traditional and new media ³⁴⁶.

In the light of the Couldry's concept of 'media practices' as 'open-ended range of practices focussed directly or indirectly on media'³⁴⁷, I would like to analyse this crowd funding campaign's case study as a specific kind of media process which needs to be understood within the ecology it develops in. The media process, a combination between the role of media and their relationship to the web of cultural phenomena with the form taken in the articulation made by specific individuals or in the context of local experiences, is a social experience and it needs an ethnographic approach in order to be understood. I therefore would like to describe it first and then argue, following Gerbaudo's theory, that the whole question related to new forms of visibility circulation within the networks needs to be framed in terms of specific visibility regimes which are responsible for creating networks that are embracing both online and offline spaces, like the crowd funding campaigns we are analysing here. In this process of re-territorialisation of the media processes, as displayed by crowd funding campaign like the Mosireen one or the Turkish one, new forms of power relationships are getting formed and new message geometries are getting designed, reshaping the traditional relationship between crowd and platforms in crowd funding campaigns.

Movement apps

With smart phones becoming crucial tools of online protest, political movements between 2010/2011 started experimenting with programming independent crowd sourced apps for smart phones that, not belonging to corporations, and therefore not being subdued to financial interests, could tackle social and political issues and actions that movements themselves were promoting³⁴⁸.

³⁴⁵ R. El-Shimi, "Mosireen Media Collective calls for donations online to remain independent", *Abram Online*, 23rd of Sept, 2012, available at <http://english.ahram.Org.eg/NewsContent/5/32/53436/Arts-Culture/Film/Mosireen-Media-Collective-calls-for-donations-onli.aspx>. For info about this campaign check Indie Go Go campaign, *Mosireen: Media Collective in Cairo*, available at <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/mosireen-independent-media-collective-in-cairo>

³⁴⁶ Indie Go Go, *Full Page Ad For Turkish Democracy in Action*, available at <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/full-page-ad-for-turkish-democracy-in-action>

³⁴⁷ N. Couldry, *Theorising Media as Practice*, *Social Semiotics*, 14(2), 2004. p.4 republished in J. Postill and B. Brauchler (eds) *Media and Practice* Oxford: Berghahn books, 2010 and (in Polish) as 'Media w kontekście praktyk: Proba teoretyczna' in *Kultura Popularna* 27(10), 2010

³⁴⁸ D. Pizio, "Le app che fanno movimento", *Il Manifesto*, 30th May 2014. Retrieved May 2014.

During the student demonstration against the tripling in university tuition fees that took place in December 2010 in the UK, a group of London-based IT students and hackers invented *Sukey*, a “tool for non-violent demonstrators”, a phone app programmed to prevent protesting crowd from being “kettled” by police in the middle of a demonstration. “*Sukey* works like a personal news desk for demonstrators, providing an overall view of what's going on. This is made up by crowd sourcing report from people at the demo who use *Sukey* and feeds into people who use social and traditional media in order to report on the activities on the day”³⁴⁹ “Kettling” is a word used to describe a form of forced containment used by British police in recent protest to prevent demonstrators from moving from one location to another . “Kettling is an aggressive crowd control tactic employed by the police. The term comes from the way it creates pressure. Police trap a crowd in one place without food or water for many hours. They squash the crowd into a smaller and smaller area and they become stressed, panicked and eventually exhausted. Kettling has been criticised for suspending human rights. Which is where *Sukey* comes in.”³⁵⁰ *Sukey* is based on the idea that freedom of movement and freedom of protest are human rights and that everyone has the right to information and to keep themselves safe. “We're now there at Parliament Square, there's not a lot of data in here at the moment and everywhere is free, so that's fine. But what this compass does - and this will rotate based on which way you are facing. It tells you in what we call 'sectors' which areas are accessible, which areas aren't. So, if I know... if head towards a green sector I know I'm going to be able to move. Yeah? Similarly if there is a red sector that's... I can't go through. It might be police. It might be a building. I don't know what it is, it doesn't matter because what this is for is, you know, keeping freedom of movement”.³⁵¹

In Spain a community of hackers, activists and graphic designers have been launching an app called *Memetro*, which is considered by them as “a tool of collaborative civic disobedience”. During the last years of economic crisis, the cost of tickets has been increasing by 50 percent and Spanish citizens have been protesting against the costs. In order to promote the concept that public transports should be a public good, *Memetro*, which allows people to signal to the panel control the appearance of a ticket officer on a bus or on the underground, uses crowd sourced information to send a message back to all users in order to avoid meeting the ticket office³⁵².

Another example is *Bankiamap*, an Android and Facebook app created by the Spanish #15M in support of demonstrators who wanted to protest against the Bankia bank in Madrid, in May 2013. The bank had

³⁴⁹ From an interview with Techie Sam, one of the founders of *Sukey.org*, during the shoot of the documentary film I co- directed “*The Real Social Network*”, London, UK, December 2010

³⁵⁰ From an animation taken from the *Sukey* website. Check www.sukey.org. Retrieved December 2010.

³⁵¹ From an interview with Techie Sam, one of the founders of *Sukey.org*, during the shoot of the documentary film I co- directed “*The Real Social Network*”, London, UK, December 2010

³⁵² D. Pizio, *Ibidem*

been pledged guilty of fraud for taking around 1500 account holders to bankruptcy³⁵³. “ My parents had been tricked as well – said Fanta, member of hacktivistas.net collective – and I decided I would use all my means to avenge the swindle”³⁵⁴

The idea was to provide all bank's branches phone numbers so that also protesters who could not attend the protest in person could participate to the protest by bombarding and blocking the bank's telephone lines with all sorts of requests. This way of using apps seem to be replicating the 'primary mode of digital networking and communication in the global justice movements'³⁵⁵, as Juris states, that allows users to disseminate ideas and information through means of iterative posting as well as to interact, collaborate, coordinate, and debate complex ideas, by adding the extra element of the self-production and creation of the unifying 'news desk' platform where these information can be shared. The stream of info is therefore hosted by a 'protest-friendly' platform where institutions, like police in the case of *Sukey*, are “guests”.

For example in the Sukey HQ there was a huge debate on whether offering the tool directly to the police was a good idea or not. Some people said that Other people thought that “the police are going to use it and they will use it to see where protesters are going”. According to one the creators, Techie Sam, it was a good idea to offer it directly to the police, because it was directly exposing police to debating on the implications of the rules they themselves were supporting. Techie Sam though that 'we should be offering an interface of this to the police. With the line as follows: You say that anyone who is non-violent can leave a kettle. Yeah, so we're opening it to you the Metropolitan Police to tell us, in each kettle that's formed, because we'll know where they're formed, where people can exit, so we can give that information out to the protesters. If they say no to that then that makes kettling illegal'³⁵⁶.

³⁵³ *Ibidem*

³⁵⁴ *Ibidem*

³⁵⁵ J.S. Juris, “Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: Social media, public space, and emerging logics of aggregation”, *American Ethnologist*, Volume 39 Number 2 May 2012, p.266

³⁵⁶ From an interview with Techie Sam, one of the founders of *Sukey.org*, during the shoot of the documentary film I co- directed “*The Real Social Network*”, London, UK, December 2010

2.1.1 *A Turkish Indie Go Go Campaign for a Full Page Ad on NY Times.*

To get in the heart of the question, let's take a step forward into 2013 Turkey. While thousands of people were marching across Turkey, building a spontaneous and progressively radical protest against Erdogan's authoritarian regime and getting an extremely violent and repressive response from the government, three New York-based members of 'Occupy Gezi' set up a fundings collection on the well-known Indie Go Go crowd funding platform. In just a few days the campaign was able to mobilise thousands of people across the world, well beyond its own creators' initial expectations. The group posted on Twitter, asking followers for advice about the best online crowd-funding platform. Within the next 20 minutes after receiving an answer, they had already started the campaign on Indie Go Go and promoted it on social media. Donations started coming in almost immediately³⁵⁷. During the following 18 hours, people donated over 60.000 dollars to the their Indie Go Go campaign, possibly participating to the most successful – and second-fastest³⁵⁸- political crowd funding campaigns of all times.

According to Indie Go Go website itself, the amount collected at the end of the campaign on June 9, 2013 was 103,371 dollars- more than double the amount required to reach the goal of 53, 800 dollars which the creators set in order to put a full page ad on the American newspaper³⁵⁹. This element is particularly interesting if we think of the role social media had already played during the Turkish protests and how the campaign intercepted the free-floating information flux conveyed by social media. If it's true that more than 2 million tweets were sent out in just eight hours on the first protest's Friday in Istanbul³⁶⁰, it is probably correct to think that the snowball effect created by social media was at its peak when the crowd funding campaign was put in motion. The big majority of the Indie Go Go campaign supporters had already been massively mobilised through social media. This element reveals partial independence of the audience's participation from the crowd funding platform itself, with people who participated to the

³⁵⁷ R. Jalabi, *Turkish trio who took out New York Times ad: 'It's really not about us'*, The Guardian, 5 June 2013, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/05/turkish-trio-protesters-new-york-times-ad>

³⁵⁸ Indie Go Go campaign, *Full Page Ad For Turkish Democracy in Action*, available at <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/full-page-ad-for-turkish-democracy-in-action>

³⁵⁹ *Ibidem*

³⁶⁰ Social Media Participation Lab, *A Breakout Role for Twitter? The Role of Social Media in the Turkish Protests*, New York University, available at http://smapp.nyu.edu/reports/turkey_data_report.pdf. Also, James Devitt, *Turkish Demonstrators Turn to Social Media in Taksim Square Demonstrations*, New York University Web Journal, 13 June 2013, available at <http://www.nyu.edu/about/news-publications/news/2013/06/18/turkish-protestors-turn-to-social-media-in-taksim-square-demonstrations.html>

campaign without necessarily knowing Indie Go Go as a platform. The element which made the campaign tap into the social media flux so successfully was instead the perfect timing as well as the emotional impact the images circulating on the web from within the process– as well as its lack of coverage on the national media – were generating around the world.

Since the very beginning of the Turkish protests, social media played a huge role in the protests, especially because much of the Turkish media had clearly downplayed the protests themselves³⁶¹. The idea of putting up a full page ad on New York Times was thus mainly directed at creating a link between information circulating on digital platforms and the traditional platforms – like newspapers or TV stations- where the impact of the protest had been visibly reduced. In the words of the Indie Go Go page creators Murat Aktihanoglu, Oltac Unsal and Duygu Atacan themselves, the media in Turkey had worked in reinforcing the official version by remaining silent on the events of Gezi Park during the first days of the protest and this has generated a strong emotional response from those who wanted the story to get quickly out of the country. 'Arrests of numerous journalists, artists, and elected officials and restrictions on freedom of speech, minorities' and women's rights all demonstrate that the ruling party is not serious about democracy. Time and again, the Prime Minister has mocked and trivialized his nation's concerns while Turkey's own media have remained shamefully silent'³⁶².

The process of official negation of the Taksim Square facts was one of the factors putting in motion a unique social media coverage from the ground. This media coverage from the ground was actually very different from other recent similar episodes, like the ones related to 2011 Arab Springs uprisings. According to the statistics collected by Social Media Participation Lab at NYU, in fact, 90 percent of geo-localised tweets were coming from within Turkey and around 50 percent from Istanbul itself, while during the Egyptian uprising only 30 percent of the tweets were coming from inside the country and the majority was coming from outside. Moreover, 88 percent of the tweets which have been circulating were written in

³⁶¹ Barçın Yinanç, *Turkish media's 'poor coverage' of Gezi protests slammed at EU Conference*, Hürriyet Daily News, 13 June 2013, available at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/Default.aspx?pageID=238&nid=49139>, Daniel Dombey, Funja Guler, *Turkish media criticised for muted response to protests*, Financial Times, 5 June 2013, available at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/19fd3f64-cdfc-11e2-8313-00144feab7de.html>, A.A.V.V., *'Harmful for children': Turkish TV channels fined for live coverage of protests*, Russia Today, 13 June 2013 available at <http://rt.com/news/turkey-media-fined-protests-629/>. Eric Pfanner, *Turks Angry Over Dearth of Protest Coverage by Established Media*, New York Times, 6 June 2013 available at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/07/world/middleeast/turks-angry-over-dearth-of-protest-coverage-by-established-media.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0,

³⁶² Bostinno, <http://bostinno.streetwise.co/2013/06/05/indiegogo-users-set-record-in-support-of-turkish-protesters/>

Turkish language, an element which implies that the main audience of those tweets was Turkish.³⁶³

The initial plan behind the crowd funding campaign was to bring together thousands of people in order to create impact through the help of international newspapers, in a way that could never be ignored by Turkish newspapers and TV stations. On the one hand, the funds would be collected on the web through a crowd which was already informed and engaged in spreading the message across social media networks. On the other hand, through the advert published on the front page, the story would make its way into mainstream news, reaching out to a different audience. But, way beyond page creators' expectations, the success of the campaign played itself out before the full page advert on The New York Times was even published. By the time the advert was published, the story of the campaign itself had already made its way into the news, revealing the 'contagion' was following a different route – especially after the media shutdown played by Turkish government had opened the way for a reflection on media censorship³⁶⁴.

Choreography of crowd funded assemblies

The interesting question regards here the dynamic which was created within the media world created by political crowd funding campaign like this one. As I said above, I would like to refer to these campaigns as 'media practices', an 'open-ended range of practices focussed directly or indirectly on media'³⁶⁵. This concept, which is rooted at the crossroad between cultural studies, social science and media anthropology, proves extremely useful in analysing specific media processes which need to be framed specifically within the ecology they develop in.

Media activists of our recent times have been using new media to both communicate their own message as well as constantly enlarge support, with the main goal of challenging mainstream political narratives with an action which would self-produce testimonies and memories of collective events in real time. Practices

³⁶³ Social Media Participation Lab, *Ibidem*

³⁶⁴ Tom Mc Carthy and Rava jalabi, *Turkish protesters raise \$55,000 for full-page ad in New York Times*, 3 June 2013, The Guardian, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/03/turkey-new-york-times-ad>, Alex Konrad *Full-Page Ad Inspired By Turkish Protests Is One Of Indiegogo's Fastest Campaigns Ever*, Forbes, 4 June 2013, available at <http://www.forbes.com/sites/alexkonrad/2013/06/04/full-page-ad-inspired-by-turkish-protests-is-one-of-indiegogos-fastest-campaigns-ever/>, Huffington Post Live, *Turkish Protestors Use Indiegogo To Help Fund New York Times Ad*, 6 June 2013, available at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/03/turkish-protestors-indiegogo_n_3381340.html

³⁶⁵ Nick Couldry, *op. cit.*

which had seen the light on the ground, have been transformed and translated into new evolving free-floating communication modes and opening new grounds of interaction between visibility, territoriality and communication. As Brighenti noticed, the main action of shaping the field of visibility has been pursued through the same type of regime in which media operate and thrive', rendering visibility a crucial notion to be taken account in the analysis of current media practices in order to understand contemporary public domain's construction and transformation³⁶⁶.

Some media scholar have been incredibly enthusiastic of the possibilities opened by new media as a way of challenging traditional forms of authorship and the authority of point of view as displayed by linear storytelling as well as being a way to convey forms of direct democracy through non-representative means. The constant flux of information provided by social media in real time seemed to suggest the possibility of a space created by a multitude of voices which constantly loose and find their individual timbre within the stream, creating new interactions between individuals and collective. The debate has been polarised by positions that place themselves on either a very positive or very negative side of the spectrum, investing technology itself of some attributes that are ,in fact, to do entirely with the use we make of them³⁶⁷.

Optimism or pessimism excesses, though, can lead into the dangerous territory of essentialism, where the role of social media and new media platform in the realm of contemporary media practices becomes important in itself rather than being articulated in the context of specific experiences. I would argue, following Gerbaudo's comments, that the question related to new forms of visibility circulation within the networks needs to be supported by the analysis of individual phenomena which display different forms of visibility and participation building. This is also the case of the ways in which visibility regimes are responsible for creating specific networks which are embracing both online and offline spaces, like the crowdfunding campaign we are analysing.

The relationship between virtual and real world produced by digital communication is definitely changing the landscape of realism in many ways. If virtuality extends itself everywhere³⁶⁸, way beyond the digital world, creating an open system where online and offline spaces are overflowing into each other's original

³⁶⁶ A. Mubi Brighenti, *Visibility and Social Theory*, Hampsire, Palgrave Macmillian, 2010, pp.103-110

³⁶⁷ The debate between techno-pessimists like Morozov and Galdwell and techno-optimists like Shirky is well reported by P. Gerbaudo in *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*, London, Pluto Press, 2011 pp.11 -15

³⁶⁸ A. Galloway, *Intimations of Everyday Life: Ubiquitous Computing and the City*, Cultural Studies, 18(2/3): 383, 2004

scope. In this sense, we could say that new media geographies are overlaying themselves onto physical spaces³⁶⁹, producing forms of re-territorialisation and extending themselves to the realm of symbolic reconfiguration. As it has been noticed by Gerbaudo 'social media have been chiefly responsible for the construction of a choreography of assembly as a process of symbolic construction of public space which facilitates and guides the physical assembling of a highly dispersed and individualised constituency'³⁷⁰. And way beyond the spontaneity and unrestrained participation assigned to social media and to digital activism in general, 'influential Facebook admins and activist tweeps become 'soft leaders' or choreographers are involved in setting the scene, and constructing an emotional space within which collective action can unfold'³⁷¹.

This is certainly true of the Turkish protest's crowd funding campaign, where the 'soft' leadership played by the New York-based 'Occupi Gezi' members who set up the campaign was fully accepted by the thousands of followers and funders across the world as a form of vehicle for a message that was already moving fast and intensely through the network. The violent images of the events happening in Istanbul had created a 'choreography of assembly' based on strong emotional factors which made people all around the world frantically share images and videos, friends' Facebook updates, Tweets, pictures and everything they can to express solidarity with the protest.

A small group of people – regular citizens in their own definition but with a strong interest in technology³⁷² - who were based in the States, thousands of miles away from the center of the protest, took initiative and spoke on behalf of thousands of people, giving voice to a feeling which proved to be widespread and fast growing. "Watching the events unfold in Turkey really really made us think we have to do something," Murat Aktihanoglu, one of the crowd funding organizers. "We are regular citizens. We are not activists. We are not politicians. So we thought the best thing we could do is try to increase global visibility and attention on the situation in Turkey". "We want the government to start listening to people. We want the government to start respecting democracy in Turkey," said Aktihanoglu.³⁷³

³⁶⁹ A. Mubi Brighenti, *Idem*, pp.103-110

³⁷⁰ P. Gerbaudo, *idem*, p.11

³⁷¹ *Ibidem*

³⁷² According to journalist Alex Konrad, the three members were all 'tech geeks' with a strong interest in new media A. Konrad, *Ibidem*

³⁷³ A. Petroff, *Turkish protesters crowdfund for NYT ad*, CNN Money, 5 June 2013, available at <http://money.cnn.com/2013/06/05/technology/social/turkey-crowdfunding-nyt/index.html>

Animated by an anti-hierarchical feeling which made them refused to be recognised as leaders, the three members interpreted the collective feeling they sensed on the web and wrote a collective statement as the tagline of the campaign³⁷⁴: 'Activists - We hear you. Protesters - We are you. You have power. You can speak your mind at the New York Times!'³⁷⁵. They wrote the statement *as if* they were the whole collective, as though, according to a sort of synecdochical process, the part had become the whole. Their role proved to be essential to bring together onto an online space an existing physical crowd which was composed by completely different people, with a completely different degree of involvement into the event. The crowd who participated to the campaign was made out of Turkish activists which were out on the streets, Turkish indignant citizens, Turkish expats all across the world and general international public who was made aware of the events through web channels. Their call was effectively opened to anyone who believed in the idea of freedom of speech, facilitating the rise of "liquid"³⁷⁶ forms of interaction between different platforms like social media, traditional media and crowd funding sites.

After a week of intensive crowd funding campaign, the advert was put on the New York Times. 'Just picked up my NYTimes outside my door. ****Front page under the title with photo of Turkish protestors in the park***. LEAD STORY of the NYTimes today! I assure you that it was triggered by the Ad. Congrats all! (the hard copy is far more impressive than online)'³⁷⁷ recites ceo91, one of the supporters commenting on the crowd funding website. But what does it mean to use an advert to convey opinions or editorials? A traditional editorial space has been used for advertising for quite a long time already. So, what is the difference when it is used for opinions or editorials? ³⁷⁸ The act of sponsoring a revolution on the full page advert on The New York Times opens a number of new questions on the relationships between medium and message .

If we follow Gerbaudo's approach, we could say that contemporary popular movements are characterised by majoritarianism and an attention on creating unity³⁷⁹ by adopting practices of 'appropriation of public

³⁷⁴ P. Gerbaudo. *Not fearing to be liked: the majoritarianism of contemporary protest culture*, Open Democracy, 20 January 2013, available at <http://www.opendemocracy.net/paolo-gerbaudo/not-fearing-to-be-liked-majoritarianism-of-contemporary-protest-culture>

³⁷⁵ Indie Go Go campaign, *Ibidem*

³⁷⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2000

³⁷⁷ Indie Go Go campaign, *Full Page Ad For Turkish Democracy in Action/ Comments*, available at <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/full-page-ad-for-turkish-democracy-in-action?c=comments>

³⁷⁸ A. Salario, *Crowdfunding the Revolution*, Blog, 5 June 2013, available at <http://www.alizahsalario.com/2013/06/crowdfunding-the-revolution/>

³⁷⁹ P. Gerbaudo, *Idem*, pp.19 and following

space' which are re-organising spatial and temporal scenes of social life and therefore projecting messages onto the virtual world as part of this process of re-shaping and re-organising. Advertising techniques seem to respond to this majoritarian attitude of creating unity and re-appropriation of the public space. This space is also the space of contemporary advertisement, where social messages are conveyed through marketing techniques, as it is for social advertising. In this case, it is not a non-profit organisation or an institution advertising its message, but a whole collective of people.

The whole question really revolves around the interplay among the crowd, the message conveyed/shaped and the platform hosting it. The interplay among all these elements shapes the campaign itself, its dynamic and its impact, but also the vectorial relationships among these elements, namely where does the message come from and where does it go. In my opinion, the interesting question is whether the dynamic created by these elements is really giving voice to a message which is sourced from the crowd or whether the message is set *a priori* through advertising techniques and then supported by the crowd. Is it the use of advertising techniques conveyed by a campaign like this a form of communication which gives voice to the supporters' message or does it shape a language which then gets transferred back to the crowd and appointed to them through a form of 'soft' leadership?

After Crowd funding

It is undoubtable that the impact exercised by this Indie Go Go campaign was huge. Not only the story of what was going on in Gezi Park was successfully brought to American media, but the campaign also set a new record as fastest crowd funding campaign of all times,. After reaching its set goal, the creators created a Reddit page in order to develop the discussion on how to spend the excess money which had been continuing to pour in even after the New York Times ad had been fully funded³⁸⁰. Many proposals were formulated - the creation of documentary material, films or web platforms to multiply the impact of crowd sourced news. In the end, the final decision reached through referendum – as stated on the Indie Go Go site- was to fund 'a global coordination team of 10 experts, and provide a yearlong stipend/honorarium for their expenses.' 'Using advertorials on a variety of Internet platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Google, etc. reach at least 1 million undecided voters and inform them' . Reserve a sum 'for the technical cross platform needs of the internet platforms such as security, hosting, etc.'³⁸¹

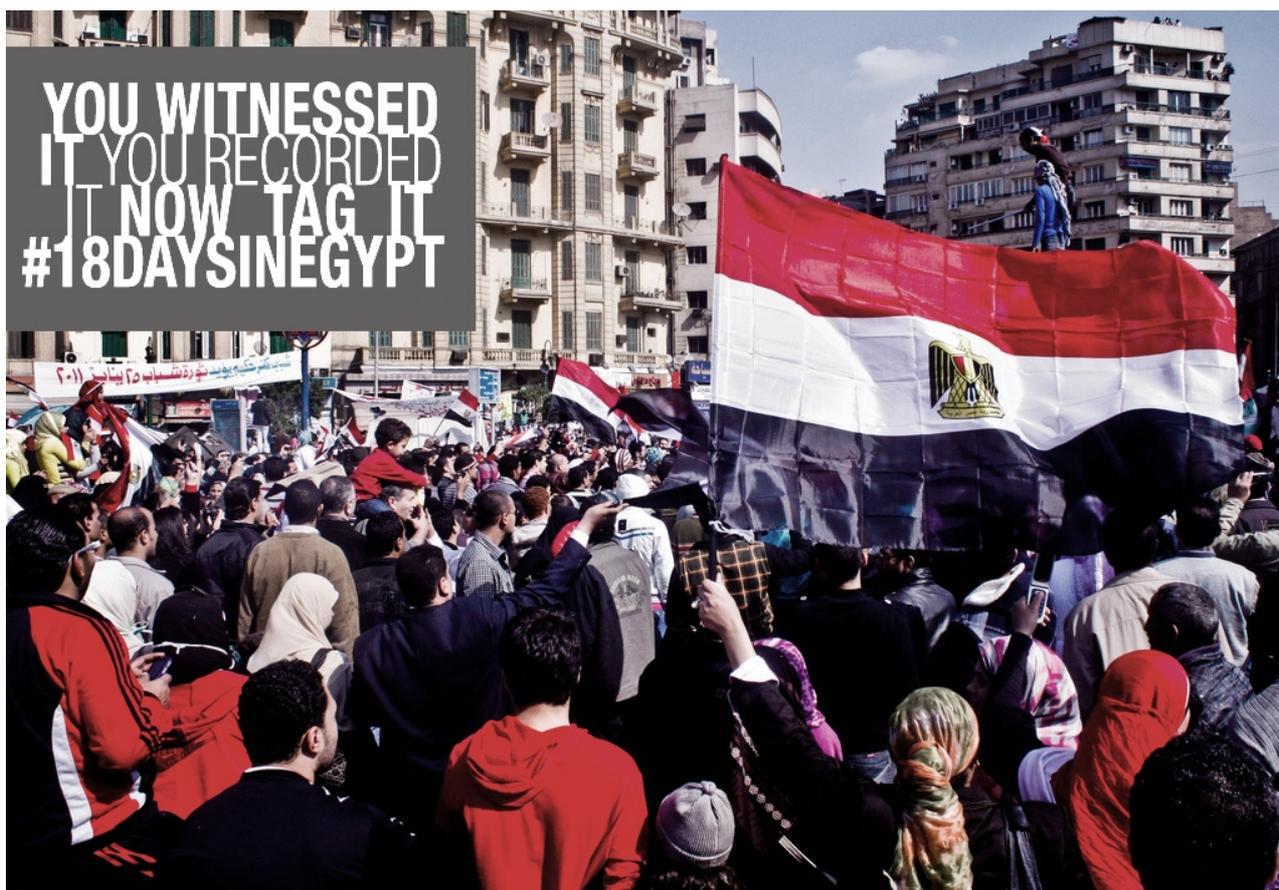
³⁸⁰ Reddit,http://www.reddit.com/r/activism/comments/1fnbj6/fullpage_nytimes_ad_project_what_should_we_do/

³⁸¹ Indie Go Go campaign, *Full Page Ad For Turkish Democracy in Action*, available at

As the decision made seem only to push back a more structured plan on the use of money, it is interesting to see how the campaign was used by participants and donors as a chance to launch proposals for new forms of online direct democracy and interactions between new media and traditional media. It is especially interesting to see how the discussion was based around ways to get the message out which could reach out to the maximum number of people – even in deep Anatolia where the use of internet is very limited – maybe by even creating new platforms which could be shaped on the need of open 'collectives' like this one to develop their discussion online.

Activists' interest for shaping new platforms for political campaigns seem to be increasing and the practice of voicing discontent and building participation seem to be developing a progressively stronger relationship to the media which are used for each action, shaping the message of the campaign through the functioning modes of each platform. The question remains whether, in the re-territorialisation of the traditional crowd funding dynamic into the territory of political communication, which invests the 'object of desire' in its shift from being a product into being a political event, the geometry of the 'crowd' is changing and so are the power relationships involved in this configuration.

2.1.2. 18 Days in Egypt and the use/interaction of different social/ collective media



Picture 21. A screenshot of #18Days in Egypt (2011)³⁸²

Memorising in real time

From 2009 Green revolution Iranian protesters to 2011 Arab Spring movements, from global Occupy movement to recent groups which have been supporting the thousands of people who lost their homes during 2012 Hurricane Sandy in New York City³⁸³, many grassroots movements of our recent times have been using the Internet as a universal platform to connect people across the planet during uprisings, climatic upheavals and dramatic political changes³⁸⁴.

³⁸² A screenshot of #18Days in Egypt (2011), available on the web at <http://beta.18daysinegypt.com/>, 2011. Retrieved May 2015

³⁸³ A good example of how the internet has been used by Hurricane Sandy victims as a communication tool for collective storytelling and information sharing is the *Sandy Storyline* transmedia project. In the words of its own creators, the project's main goal was the creation of 'a participatory documentary that collects and shares stories about the impact of Hurricane Sandy on our neighbourhoods, our communities and our lives'. The project is available at <http://www.sandystoryline.com/>

³⁸⁴ Paul Mason, *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere*, Verso, London, 2012

Contemporary digital users have been relying more and more on the internet, reaching out to their own communities in ways that were unimaginable even five years ago. Grassroots movements have been able to enlarge their support networks by using social media in increasingly more creative and expanded ways, in many cases bypassing authority surveillance and local censorship devices³⁸⁵. The practice of audiovisual footage's self- production which has been employed massively in the form of self-narratives and testimonies during political changes or events - reaching an unprecedented peak in Tunisia, Egypt and Turkey between 2011 and 2013 - has become increasingly more valuable as a collective political tool, especially because of the very possibility of real time sharing through social media like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

This new dimension of widespread, collective and liquid communication modes has brought some writers to the conclusion that a new era of 'humanist revolution' was at the doorstep – an era where a new level of individual and collective freedom could potentially take shape through the combination of high technological development and adequate access to technology for as many people as possible around the world³⁸⁶, an era where the state of alienation many individuals are locked in due to social exploitation, lack of social and political rights, lack of freedom of speech and poverty could be brought to an end by new media communication.

As Manuel Castells observes, fifteen years into the communication revolution, the web has already started to produce new attitudes and behaviours which can find a correspondence in real life³⁸⁷. A pattern has already started emerging, drawing a relationship between autonomy of individuals' life projects, digital interconnectedness to others and 'weaker ties' to space³⁸⁸. Many of us have experience of using more than one screen at the same time or seeing somebody making their way through a 'multiple screen' experience- for example watching a film on a screen, tweeting about it on their mobile phone and having a Skype

³⁸⁵ Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, Fouth Estate, London, 2012

³⁸⁶ Paul Mason discusses the rise of the 'networked individualism' Port Huron Declaration of 1968: 'We regard men as infinitely precious and possessed of unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom, and love. In affirming those principles we are aware of countering perhaps the dominant conceptions of man in the twentieth century: that he is a thing to be manipulated, and that he is inherently incapable of directing hos own affairs' (*Port Huron Statement of Students for a Democratic Society*, 1968) in P. Mason, *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere*, Verso, London, 2012

³⁸⁷ Manuel Castells, *Communication, Power and Counter-Power in the Newtork Society*, International Journal of Communication, ijoc.org, 8 February 2007. 'The more an individual has a project of autonomy (personal, professional, socio-political, communicative), the more she uses the Internet. And in time sequence, the more he/she uses the Internet, the more autonomous she becomes vis-à-vis rules and institutions'

³⁸⁸ Barry Wellman et al. *The Social Affordances of the Internet for Network Individualism*, Journal of Computer- Mediated Communication 8, April 2013

conversation with someone in another country on their Ipad, all at the same time³⁸⁹.

The future implications of this new conceptual landscape are obviously quite unpredictable, but we might not be fully aware of how this new constellation is already influencing the way we interpret our own past, the way we are constructing our relationship to our present time, the way we read into our own history and in to our time perception³⁹⁰. The main question of this essay is, in fact, whether this new universe we are surrounded by in our everyday life is influencing the narratives of the present time as well as the way in which we archive, organise, store, and explore information about our own current time. Non-professional documentary-making practices performed by individual users (*prosumers*)³⁹¹, combined with massive messaging distribution strategies moving through social networks' highways are creating a hybrid narrative landscape, where real spaces and communication channels are proceeding in parallel, creating new forms of interaction between documentation, archiving and history narration practices³⁹².

Real time footage collection practices through mobile phones as well as digital sharing practices are providing social media users with unprecedented access to events in the making - creating real- time maps of the history-making process. Following Habermas' approach to communication and its centrality to subjectivity, society and ethics³⁹³, it becomes apparent why the implications of this process are extremely relevant to Media and Cultural Studies, opening key questions related to the impact of emerging media practices on viewers and culture. In particular, this process opens questions related to truthfulness, authenticity, access, participation to the process of witnessing, documenting and archiving historical events as well as freedom of speech, identifying the web – and new narrative forms which are native to the digital era– as a crucial arena for current historical narratives. On the other hand, this same impact has possibly limiting effects on originality of utterances, active inventive processes and non conventional thought patterns, implying slightly more problematic scenarios which need to be taken in account.

³⁸⁹ Paul Mason, *idem*

³⁹⁰ Ryota Kanai, Bahador Bahrami, R Roylance, Geraint Rees, *Online social network size is reflected in human brain structure*, Proceedings of The Royal Society of Biological Sciences, September 2011

³⁹¹ Enrico Menduni, *Prosumer in Enciclopedia della Scienza e della Tecnica*, Treccani, Milano, 2008. D. Tapscott, A. D. Williams, *Wikinomics, How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*, Penguin, London, 2008. A definition of the prosumer is that he is somebody who treats the world 'as a place for creation, not for consumption,' (Tapscott, Williams, 2008 p.128)

³⁹² It would be worth reflecting on the fact that implications in the future of documentation processes might be present in the current practice of holding massive online political gatherings instead of physical ones. An era of virtual ocean looking gatherings is at the doorstep- where the exchange of crucial info, comments, opinions takes place 'in the same place' (the web) as the space in which the info are collected and stored, providing immediate access to the material discussed. The problems related to transparency of the sources becomes even more urgent.

³⁹³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1: Reason and The Rationalization of Society*, Polity, Cambridge, 1984

Moreover, it maybe noted that developments into day-by-day war situations such as e.g. in Syria seem to be accompanied by an ominous silence of the media- both traditional and digital.

The study of this specific subject implies an interdisciplinary textual referencing apparatus which employes sources coming from the field of Media Studies, Semiotics, Cultural Studies, Media Anthropology, Social Sciences and Neuroscience. My specific approach to this will be the integration of this cross-disciplinary conceptual background with a semiotic approach which will allow a specific key-study analysis of *'18 days in Egypt - an interactive crowd sourced documentary project'*³⁹⁴ - a unique example of 'instant archive' documenting the Egyptian revolution .

This transmedia platform collects material related to an event which is still considered ongoing by its own users and which is sadly making the news again in the days in which we are writing³⁹⁵. The web project opened in 2011 with the motto 'You witnessed it, you recorded it. Let's write our country's history' and it's still running today, showcasing footage collected by individual users during the Spring revolution. The platform links people who have been documenting the event on the ground to a wider audience by creating individual features showing multiple individual points of view on the same event. By constantly updating its database, incorporating social media narrative features and employing communication modes mimetic to the sharing culture, the interactive documentary is a unique example of 'instant archive' documenting an event which is still considered to be ongoing.

The web as a square

From a Media History point of view, transmedia platforms in themselves already represent a radical shift in the relationship between space/time and subjective storytelling. Those platforms where 'narrative structure expand through different languages (verbal, iconic etc.) and media (cinema, comics, television, video games, etc.), are not just an adaptation from one media to another'³⁹⁶, but they are spaces where

³⁹⁴ <http://beta.18daysinegypt.com/>, 2011

³⁹⁵ Patrick Kingsley and Martin Chulov, *Mohammed Morsi ousted in Egypt's second revolution in two years*, The Guardian, 4th of July 2013, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jul/03/mohamed-morsi-egypt-second-revolution>. The article is a account of the overturning of the Egyptian situation after Islamist president Morsi was being held by the military in a sudden change of power in the country. In the political politicisation over the interpretation of the event (the former Islamist president considered it as a 'full coup d'etat' while its opponents consider it as a revolution, not recognising his election as democratic), the former president's accounts on Twitter and Facebook have been used as a communication mode to the outside world: 'A statement on the former president's Twitter and Facebook accounts labelled the military move a "full coup", after Morsi was officially deposed from office at 7pm'.

³⁹⁶ Carlos Alberto Scolari, *Transmedia Storytelling: Implicit Consumers, Narrative Worlds, and Branding in*

'many different semiotic modes or sign processes in design of a semiotic product or event' are being used together so that 'these modes are essentially reinforcing each other'³⁹⁷.

Transmedia stories 'are stories told across multiple media'³⁹⁸. Scolari expands, adding that 'in the ideal form of transmedia platform, each medium does what it does best, so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics, and its world might be explored and experienced through game play'³⁹⁹. According to Jenkins, 'each franchise entry needs to be self-contained enough to enable autonomous consumption. That is, you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game and vice-versa'⁴⁰⁰.

The definition of transmedia storytelling focuses itself on the interaction among different media between themselves – considering the different media as providers of different textual layers and vectors of different semiotical apparatuses. Transmedia storytelling analyses the narrative from the point of view of the interaction between textual dimensions which are carriers of different meaning universes. The idea of interactive storytelling is instead more focused on the narratological tools as they are employed in the narration. A very basic notion of interactive storytelling is that this is 'a form of digital entertainment in which users create or influence a dramatic storyline through actions, either by issuing commands to the story's protagonist, or acting as a general director of events in the narrative. Interactive storytelling is a medium where the narrative, and its evolution, can be influenced in real-time by a user'⁴⁰¹. The relationship between the medium and the user is here considered key to the construction of the narrative and the user's intervention in the story is planned and becomes the main action's engine of the whole platform's functioning system.

Whereas most interactive platform are mutating some prescriptive functioning characters from video games – such as the existence of rules which cannot be broken, thus shaping the boundaries within which the user can move itself- in the realm of interactive documentary storytelling the unpredictable breaks in,

Contemporary Media Production, International Journal of Communications 3, 586-606. University of Vic, Catalunya Spain, 2009 available at <http://ijoc.org/ojs/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/477/336>

³⁹⁷ Gunther Kress, Theo Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*, Arnold, London, 2001

³⁹⁸ Henry Jenkins, Ravi Purushotma, Katie Clinton, Margaret Weigel & Alice J Robison, *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century*. The John D. and Catherine McArthur Foundation, Chicago, 2006, available at <http://www.digitalllearning.macfound.org/>

³⁹⁹ Carlos Alberto Scolari, *Ibidem*

⁴⁰⁰ Henry Jenkins, *Transmedia storytelling. Moving characters from books to films to video games can make them stronger and more compelling*. MIT Technology Review, Cambridge, 2003, available at <http://www.technologyreview.com/biotech/13052/>

⁴⁰¹ Julie Portaeus, Marc Cavazza, Fred Charles, *Applying planning to interactive storytelling: Narrative control using state constraints*, 2010 available at <http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1869399>

becoming part of the story. The allowance of user-generated content in what was before considered the 'walled garden' of documentary world was facilitated by Web 2.0 collaborative logic, opening new perspectives in which participation between audience/users and makers takes new unpredictable turns⁴⁰², becoming an open, creative field where the potential forms of participation are multiple and infinite. Gaudenzi's hypothesis that 'participative, situated and locative media can enhance a view of reality, where "doing" is a way of being and of perceiving', becomes extremely useful on a research level for the analysis of the '*18 days in Egypt*' platform.

In the 'ABOUT' section of '*18 days in Egypt*' – a project that was funded by Tribeca Institute, together with Ford Foundation, Sundance Institute and Blip during year 2011- the creators claim that 'for the first time in history, citizens are recording an actual revolution in real time. Throughout the 18 days of the 2011 uprising– in the year since– and now– Egyptians are filming pivotal events on their cell phones, taking pictures, texting, tweeting and facebooking their extraordinary bid for freedom. Now, '*18 days in Egypt*', the collaborative documentary project, aims to capture the events of the revolution right here... in an interactive documentary website that everyone can access now and into the future'⁴⁰³.

This project can be considered a combination of different non-linear narrative features which makes it a very specific, and innovative, kind of platform. On the one hand, '*18 days in Egypt*' can be considered as an interactive platform because it allows different kinds of media – from social media like Facebook, Twitter, Google+ to video content platforms like Youtube and Vimeo – to interact freely with each other and the users, using all sorts of textual artefacts like written diary pieces, pictures and mobile phone videos posted by the users themselves as part of the users' tasks options. But the platform can be also considered as a very specific kind of documentary transmedia platform, where the interaction between different layers is not represented by an actual interaction between different media – like TV, cinema and the web – but rather by a very specific encounter between the web itself and reality.

The events in Egypt have been characterised by massive employment of social media as part of the construction of a political space during the 18 days of revolution - to the point that the virtual space has become a dynamic of the events themselves, an integrated part of reality. Therefore, the form of interaction between virtual and real space displayed by this platform, implies the virtual space as being inextricably linked to the historical real. This plays with the notion that the events of Tahrir Square were appearing 'at the same time' both in Cairo and in the global space of the World Wide Web, where a

⁴⁰² Sandra Gaudenzi, <http://www.interactivedocumentary.net/about/me/>. On her website Gaudenzi shares parts of her in-progress PHD research "*Interactive Documentary: towards an aesthetic of the multiple*" where she discusses the future of interactive documentary narration in the realm of new media.

⁴⁰³ <http://beta.18daysinegypt.com/#/about>

constant stream of information was inundating the rest of the world, incorporating it as a satellite, but integrated, part of the event. In a similar way to the French Revolution – which was followed with intense and participated attention paid to it by supporters across Europe through the reading of newspapers- the Tahrir Square days had become an event (*événement*)⁴⁰⁴ in which the outside audience was acting as a collective subject integrated in the space of the event itself⁴⁰⁵.

'During the eighteen-days Egyptian uprising, Tahrir Square was often referred to as a microcosm of Egyptian society – albeit a euphoric, romanticized version of it' states journalist Soraya Morayef. 'When Hosni Mubarak was toppled, thousands of Egyptians took to the Square, where they swept the streets clean and painted the wall with slogans. It was the first time that many felt a sense of ownership over this country, and believed that they would have an equal say in deciding upon Egypt's future'⁴⁰⁶. Tahrir Square was a symbolic space which enclosed both the violence of the repression and the hopes for a future, a space where sense of belonging, self-representation and the possibility of having a voice were taking place after decades of dictatorships and silencing of political opponents. Tahrir was the place where both the dramaturgy of the conflict and the map of the new society were created - and the image of which was projected into the outside space every day through social media⁴⁰⁷. This notion of 'I was there' is reproduced by the '18 days in Egypt' platform, the main question being one of the presence as something to be constantly recreated, reenacted and re-founded on a symbolical level, in a world where storytelling reflects the notion that 'human experience... is in a constant state of becoming'⁴⁰⁸, as a process of participation involving the interaction between an event happening in a physical space and the complex of reactions, stories, personal accounts and comments reflecting on it in real time.

Henry Jenkins defines participatory culture as 'a culture in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content', contrasting 'with older notions of

⁴⁰⁴ Michael Foucault, "*Qu'est-ce que les lumières?*" (1984), in Id., *Dits et écrits*, II, 1976-1988, Gallimard, Paris 2001, pp.1381-1397

⁴⁰⁵ For a wider debate on the concept of 'civil liberty' at the time of the French Revolution and the complex relationship between audience and history which displays itself for the first time at the time, J. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1962, pp.132-140

⁴⁰⁶ Soraya Morayef, *The Seven Wonders of the Revolution*, Jadaliyya, 22 March 2012

⁴⁰⁷ '18 days in Egypt' in one of the several projects that are trying to facilitate collective recording and framing history by reproducing the diversity of Tahrir Square people through archive material. An account of this 'civic media' movement can be found in H. Stuhr-Rommerheim, 'Tahrir cinema displays revolutionary power of archives', *Egypt Independent*, 20 July 2011 and *A year review, when art becomes history*, 29 July 2011, *Egypt Independent* available at <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/year-review-when-history-becomes-art>

⁴⁰⁸ R- Shief, a knowledge management system available at <http://twitterminer.r-shief.org/hq/> quoted in *A year review, when art becomes*, *Egypt Independent*

passive media spectatorship...we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understand⁴⁰⁹. This is where, according to S. Gaudenzi, participation differs to simple interaction⁴¹⁰. In this sense '18 days in Egypt' can be considered a fully participative experience, where the relationship to the creation of historical memory is moving along highways where compelling personal stories are made available using the streamline inaugurated by social media.

But are the '18 Days in Egypt' users just crowd -producers or co-authors? Crowd sourcing as 'the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call'⁴¹¹, is a new mode of media production which counts on people's full involvement in the production process. But, as some contemporary examples show⁴¹², there is a difference between crowd-producing and co-authoring a platform – this depending on the level of collaboration allowed by the platform's design itself⁴¹³.

The participation performed by '18 Days in Egypt' users displays itself the form of videos and/or different materials contribution, coming from people's own personal archive. This project is based on the idea that sharing memories is a potentially infinite process- thus extending the collection process to the length the platform will stay online. The process of co-authoring with users on the ground is therefore defined by the openness of the platform itself, both on a time and a space level. On the one hand, the platform extends its boundaries way beyond the space of website itself, overflowing into social media as its natural extension. On the other hand, it is open time wise to the extent of the memory-making process, therefore becoming a proper archive which is planned and designed to be updated at any given time.

⁴⁰⁹ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, NYU Press, New York, 2006, p.3

⁴¹⁰ Sandra Gaudenzi, *cit.*, Ch. 7, p.4

⁴¹¹ Sandra Gaudenzi, *Ibidem*

⁴¹² Sandra Gaudenzi explains the example of *Life in a day* by Kevin McDonald where the process of video crowd sourcing has the director's unique direction as final destination

⁴¹³ Sandra Gaudenzi, *cit.*, Ch. 7, p.17 ' Content, ideas, technology and form can, in theory, all be crowd-sourced. Furthermore the collaborator does not have to be the "user" (intended as the audience, the final consumer of an interactive artefact) as it could also be the documentary subject (the one that the documentary is portraying). I am claiming that the complex granularity of "who does what and where" in a participative documentary is what makes all the difference between content-collaboration and co-authoring... the author is not anymore the one that shoots and edits video content, but the one that enables participation and "stages a conversation" (Dovey and Rose, n.d: 18) through the concept of an interactive interface' (Gaudenzi, *idem*, p.17)

Story of an instant archive

Creator Jigar Mehta said during an interview that at the time of the Egyptian revolution 'he was struck by the image of people documenting themselves (...). Even if people were participating (to the event), they were also recording it and sending it out to the world'⁴¹⁴ - all at the same time. The main question of the creator was whether it was possible to create a larger narrative as carved out of the million of individual testimonies coming out of the revolution. How was it possible to collect all those 'media fragments' (' a Tweet here, a photo there, an article..) and combine them together? Was it possible to assemble thoughts coming from somebody's Facebook update together with someone else's Tweet as a way to tell a story that could remind us of a mosaic composed by all sorts of different tiles? Was it possible to create a platform storing the whole of these disparate elements in one place? Was it possible to preserve them for people to be able to watch it in 20 years time?⁴¹⁵

The initial project was based on the making of a 90 minutes linear documentary. But as the creators started approaching the material, they realised the way people were contributing content wasn't allowing a straight forward linear storytelling technique⁴¹⁶. The solution was instead 'to create a platform that could bring people and social media together. And by adding the media, that would immediately bring in the context' - meaning that, as social media were intrinsically part of the time-space experience of the revolution times, the use of certain features related to the media would create a narrative experience mimetic to the one experienced on the ground. Moreover, the thorny question related to the truthful reconstruction of historical events was confronted by the creators through the idea that in front of multiple versions of a similar event experienced by as many spectators as were gathered at the event itself, it was possible to shape a space of togetherness where the individual stories could find a home in a collective interspace.

By bringing together all testimonies it was possible to create a common ground where the truth 'can be found in the space between us'⁴¹⁷ and where the possibility of cross-checking the information was intrinsic to the platform itself. So, not only the platform was collecting all sorts of different material as primary

⁴¹⁴ *Jigar Mehta in conversation with Hey Mr. Film at Berlinale* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoIhVXP_rFM

⁴¹⁵ During Talent Campus Masterclass at Berlinale 2012, Jigar Mehta declared that one of the purposes of '18 days in Egypt' platform was to be able to rescue all footage and disparate materials which was stored in hard disks and laptops all across Egypt. This material could potentially be damaged or lost. It could also be dangerous material which could expose people to potential retaliation by authority forces.

⁴¹⁶ *Jigar Mehta in conversation with Hey Mr. Film at Berlinale* http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoIhVXP_rFM

⁴¹⁷ *Ibidem*

source, but it was also allowing space for an immediate collective representation of the event, reproducing that feeling of togetherness in a square which Tahrir had sculpted in everyone's imagination forever.

By that point Jigar Mehta's co-creator, Yasmin Elayat, had moved back to Egypt from the United States and worked locally to put a team together. They partnered with a local tech company to build the storytelling platform and started looking for funding to bring the project to life. It was the year in which Tribeca had launch the New Media Fund and Sundance Film Institute had created a one-week lab for transmedia projects. Yasmin took part in both projects and looked for seed fundig and other support⁴¹⁸. The project, after months and months of collecting data, was finally launched on the web on the 25th of January 2012, on the one year anniversary of the first protest.

In the correspondence between form and content lies the secret concealed by '*18 Days in Egypt*'. The form of 'instant archive' created by Mehta and Group Stream brings together a number of different functions, combining multiple tasks which are mirroring the ways the platform functions as well as the possible ways in which it can be used in the future. The tasks reflect in a mimetic way the relationship between the archive and its own users as a horizontal, leaderless community reproducing both the experience of Tahrir Square itself, and the philosophy of history which it reflects – the hope for a future, horizontal society in which all voices can be heard and listened to.

The archive⁴¹⁹, as a collection of sources and random artefacts that have been found, implies a decision-making process and a will to store and rescue material according to a certain system and/or rationality. In the case of the first archives of Modern Age – like the Ottoman Archive⁴²⁰ or the Venice Republic one (Archivio di Stato di Venezia)⁴²¹- the idea of preserving the papers of the empire and building a place to store them for everyone to access them in the future, was indeed a decision made by an archival authority reflecting the governmental point of view. The strength of the archive in the classical sense lies in its ability to accumulate evidence. The archive of Venice saved public cards belonging to ambassadors as well as private house contracts - a mixture of private and public documents. This choice was reflecting a decision made by a specific authority, which established the overall truth, and was not at all interested in the

⁴¹⁸ M. Jamshidi, *The Future of the Arab Spring: Civic Entrepreneurship in Politics, Art, and Technology Startups*, Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann, 2013, p.106. See also <http://muftah.org/the-future-of-arab-spring-civic-entrepreneurship-in-politics-art-and-technology-startups/>.

⁴¹⁹ For a problematisation of the concept of archive, see J. Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*, Chicago, London, University of Chicago Press, 1995

⁴²⁰ The Ottoman Archives are a collection of historical sources related to the Ottoman Empire. They are considered as a national treasure in Turkey. Check <http://www.turkishculture.org/general/museums/ottoman-archives-190.html>

⁴²¹ Archivio di Stato di Venezia available at http://www.archiviodistatovenezia.it/index.php?id=46&no_cache=1

question of individual testimonies.

In the 'instant archive' of *'18 Days in Egypt'* – as an example of a new way of archiving in which storytelling is incorporated in the archiving process itself- the operational system reflects the attempt to establish an historical truth based on eyewitnesses' testimonies. Here, the act of witnessing the present represents the message and can be considered as the underlying content of the project. The live performance related to the posting of material and content generation, represents instead the documentary function and can be considered as the realistic context of the project. The divergences of testimonials and its horizontal co-existence on the platform, represents a tool for further analysis and debate, opening the 'instant archive' to his historical and memory-making function. Moreover, the non-preordained nature of archive itself - its lack of formal boundaries and limitations – represents the multi-modality of the archive, an open archive function which can be operated in many different ways by users in the present and future time.

As a form of open archive the platform can be used for different tasks: from written history to documentary-making, to radio documentaries and semiotic analysis. *'18 Days in Egypt'* is potentially a source of information on contemporary life in Egypt as well as being an incomparable account on the facts of the revolution.

The account incorporates videos and pictures – mostly in first person- showing protest videos, weapons attacks on people, massacres, battles, funerals, sexual assaults testimonies, trials, testimonies of people being tortured, people's loss of eyes, ultras interventions, accounts of people being rescued, stories of distribution of medical supplies, advice for post-traumatic stress disorder victims. But the platform collects also rap and pop videoclips, revolutionary art reportages, solidarity messages from abroad and, in some cases , the most intimate stories, desires and wishes of the users who posted their stories.

For example, 'Why I am Wearing a V Mask' is the story of Moody who wears a Vendetta mask because 'it symbolises the anonymous face that always smiles and that does what he wants'. It is the revolutionary icon that Moody feels the closest to him. Moody is a volunteer at the hospital and has seen many people die. He is impressed 'by the fact that so many people are killed that we don't even mourn anymore', thus exposing one of the functions of the archive as memory-making mourning ritual. 'From Queens to Cairo', posted by filmmaker Sherif Sadek is instead the reportage of the author's journey back to Egypt from the States to show his children the one year anniversary after the revolution. 'Taking my children back to Cairo was very important to me..I wanted to make sure they were there during the most important moment of their ancestral homeland ' writes Sherif. The thread becomes a very intimate account of the experience of going back which needs to be shared with the many 'expats' around the world. A good

example of the memory-making function – and its ideological function - is instead the thread 'The Names which will stay for 50 years'. The thread was written and posted by Mostafa Sheshtawy as an anniversary celebration and collects the pictures, stories and names of the memorable people of the revolution as listed by the author itself. The interesting element is represented by the presence of Wikipedia material and a collection of (foreign) newspaper articles explaining each of the characters' biography and stating their role as one of 'heroes' - thus posing questions on the use of traditional sources for subjective editing, where mainstream sources are used to corroborate the status of the author's ideological choice on a platform which somehow questions the 'truthfulness' of traditional media.

The platform can represent a tool for trends analysis, speech analysis of ideological impact, semiotics on various level- from body's language to language – thus cumulating to some extent the effects of the different media - text, social media, photography and cinema. The archive is a source of oral history as well as written history. It also potentially contains some traps which we need to be aware of - the different levels of orality (oral expression), literacy and political awareness must be evaluated when navigating the platform as an archive source. The author is often to be ferreted out through his/her own utterance because he/she usually signs only by his/her name – it is never presented through a ready-made interview. These are utterances from the crowds and it's only through secondary analysis that these levels may be retrieved.

Freedom of speech

Drawing some conclusions on the main function of the '18 Days in Egypt' platform, I would like to quickly touch upon the question of freedom of speech, especially in relation to social media and interactive storytelling platforms. The very fact that some threads which have been created by common citizens through social media were able to create compelling news items⁴²², making their way into mainstream media, has opened a whole new range of possible interactions between citizens and media communication. By entrusting the web to be a 'unique opportunity to bypass corrupt media'⁴²³, contemporary activists and citizen groups have been relying on the limitless snowball effect inherent to

⁴²² Joss Hands, *@is for Activism – Dissent, Resistance and Rebellion in a Digital Culture*, London, Pluto Press 2011. J. Hands discusses the case of newspaper Guardian vs. Carter-Ruck and Trafigurara which represents a specific case of relationship between Twitter users and mainstream media. In this case an attempt to silence newspaper's freedom of speech by a company was played out in real time by Twitter users' comments, *Idem*, p. 3

⁴²³ Dan Hancox (curated by), *Fight Back! A Reader on the Winter of Protest*, Open Democracy, London, 2011

the web as a network provided with 'power of cumulative connections'⁴²⁴ and on its unrivalled outreach potential to connect online and offline communities through flows of informations moving in a new global space⁴²⁵.

Exposing facts as they were seen and witnessed on the field by common people has enabled the shaping up of new historical narratives which were inherently different from the ones accepted by local governments, opening questions related to power legitimacy and control as well as freedom of speech and assembly in modern democracies. In the time of wide spread social media use, new political spaces have been explored, empowering people and making it possible to question those historical truths expressed by official governmental narratives and consent manufacturing. Official historical narratives have been increasingly confronted and questioned by those facts collected by non-profit groups and organisation which were able to unmask controversial truths in a much shorter time than ever before in history. For example, this is the case of the role played in the information world by WikiLeaks, especially during the Iraq and Afghanistan war of year 2010⁴²⁶.

Since year 2009, when social network Twitter postponed a planned maintenance shutdown given the recognition of the role it was currently playing as an important communication tool in Iran⁴²⁷, the 'Twitter revolution' has been widely considered one of the most significant media transformations of our current time. While around 460kt people were joining the social network every day across the globe and Twitter was becoming increasingly important in the everyday current affairs' analysis, the reaction of a number of media historians, journalists, activists and scholars – especially in the Anglo-Saxon world- was one of hope, enthusiasm and surprise⁴²⁸. The scale of the phenomenon and its acceleration were generating a widespread sense of interconnectedness, making it possible to believe that a genuine political change was going to be facilitated on a large scale and in radical new forms by the power of networks⁴²⁹. On the other hand, some conservative mainstream media commentators have been developing negative views on the role played by Twitter in events like the Iranian revolution, underlying the point that the role played by

⁴²⁴ Joss Hands, *Ibidem*

⁴²⁵ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, Wiley-Blackwell, Chicester, 2007

⁴²⁶ In 2010, WikiLeaks published gunsight footage from the 12 July 2007 Baghdad airstrike in which Iraqi journalists were among those killed by an AH-64 Apachi helicopter, known as the *Collateral Murder* video. In July of the same year, WikiLeaks released Afghan War Diary - a compilation of more than 76,900 documents about the War in Aghanistan which were not previously available to the public (*Wikipedia Eng.* available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WikiLeaks>)

⁴²⁷ Twitter, 2009 quoted in J. Hands, *cit.*, 2011

⁴²⁸ Paul Mason, *Why it's Kicking off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions*, Verso, London, 2011.

⁴²⁹ Aaron Peters, Niki Seth-Smith, *The Networked Society: Our Kingdom joins the conversation*, Open Democracy online review, 24 March 2011

the social network in the public sphere was responsible for pushing authorities to action⁴³⁰. The 'almighty internet'⁴³¹ was quickly accepted by mainstream media and political world as a vehicle for examining the global, widespread, multi-cellular flux of informations and it proved to be a meaningful tool for historical events' interpretation but also main stage of a polarisation which has brought government to consider social media regulation in time of civil unrest - even in countries like the UK⁴³².

The consequences of this process have been unravelling since the very beginning of the post-revolution times by raising important political questions to the international community and pushing forward an extremely productive debate on the power of independent media and its implications in the public sphere. Few weeks after Egyptian and Tunisian uprising of 2011, an important statement was issued by a group of United Nations associated independent human rights experts through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva discussing the role of social media for freedom of speech⁴³³ and revealing that the battleground for freedom of expression has now moved towards new media and that the link between new media storytelling, documentary-making practices and historical practices is becoming progressively more and more relevant.

⁴³⁰ Will Heaven, *Iran's crackdown proves that the 'Twitter Revolution' has made things worse*, The Telegraph, 8 July 2009, available at blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/willheaven/100002576/irans-crackdown-proves-that-the-twitter-revolution-has-made-things-worse.

⁴³¹ "North of Moldova TV IS OFF!!! but we have THE ALMIGHTY INTERNET! Let us use it to communicate peacefully for freedom!!!" wrote one Twitter user yesterday afternoon, mirroring the many reports that television networks had been shut down in an attempt to stop the violence. in S. Walker, *Russia Furious with EU over Twitter Revolution*, 9 April 2009 available at www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-furious-with-eu-over-twitter-revolution-1666121.html

⁴³² After the Summer 2011 UK riots, Conservative government has considered banning suspected rioters from social media in time of civil unrest in J. Halliday, *David Cameron considers banning suspected rioters from social media*, The Guardian, 11 August 2011 available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/aug/11/david-cameron-rioters-social-media>

⁴³³ The statement was discussing that
Over the past several weeks, men and women in many countries, including Belarus, Egypt and Tunisia, have expressed grievances related to, among others... the denial of their right to participate meaningfully in decision-making, underscoring the indivisibility of all human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political and social...We are alarmed at increasing limitations on the right to freedom of expression and information imposed by Governments actively seeking to suppress the rising number of voices who wish to be heard...We are disturbed at the major disruptions in communication networks and transmissions of news so essential to the modern world. The freedoms of peaceful assembly and association are among the most fundamental rights underpinning a democratic society.'
(*Gouvernement must pay attention to people's experts*, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva available at <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=10703&LangID=E>)

I would like to underline that, given the very specific nature of the events in Egypt - its massive deployment of social media in the construction of a political space, the virtual space as a dynamic, integrated, active part of the reality of the uprising itself, the space of the square as an embodiment of the dream for a future, better society, there are some conclusions that can be drawn on the level of the interaction between virtual and real space as displayed by the platform *'18 Days in Egypt'*.

First of all, on the level of the chronicle, function, the specific participation mode displayed by the Egyptian people in the recording of the Revolution events and the behaviour of the platform's users in the creation of individual tags as a way to reconstruct current/historical events on a subjective/ collective level, opens questions related to the witnessing and to the memory making process by providing a formalised space to information produced by a community of non professional journalists on the ground.

In particular, it opens the way to a new problematisation of the concept of audience and to the discussion related to the roles of *'prosumers'* in the circulation of information within a specific *narrative ecosystems*⁴³⁴, where contents fruition is experienced in the context of a pervasive universe where creation and experience are part of a self-contained media world. Moreover, it expands the question to the spreading of the message in an activist context in the eye of a new relationship between witnessing, recording, narrating and participating to a collective historical storytelling event when this action is translated into non-linear narrative features.

On the level of the archiving function, instead, the *'18 Days in Egypt'* platform introduces the concept of *'instant archive'* as a new encyclopedia for the future where storytelling is incorporated in the archiving process itself and the operational system reflects the attempt to establish an historical truth based on eyewitnesses' testimonies.

As already discussed in the essay, the act of witnessing and recording material, the live performance related to the posting of material and content generation, the divergences of testimonials and its horizontal co-existence on the platform and the non-preordained nature of archive itself, represent a multimodal archive, - an open archive function which can be operated in many different ways by users in the present and future time⁴³⁵.

⁴³⁴ Claudio Bisoni, Veronica Innocenti, *Media Mutations*, Mucchi Editore, Modena, 2013

⁴³⁵ Jigar Mehta has recently created (2014) a community crowd sourced news desk called *Alj+* in collaboration with Al Jazeera, available on the web at www.aljplus.net. In the words of the creator this is 'a storytelling start-up', where people can add their voice and their reflection to a story that captured the, by planting a flag through an hashtag. The idea behind the project is that "the truth lies in the space between" people. The technology created is extremely flexible and will transform according to the evolution of the project.

2.2. Interactive collective storytelling of contemporary events

2.2.1. *A journey in space and time with the digital self*

“Today *flâneurs* can practice the neverending play of *flâneurisme* without leaving the settee. One does not need legs to be a nomad”.

(Z. Bauman, *Desert Spectacular*, in K. Tester, *The Flaneurs*, Routledge, London-New York, 1994, p.155)

Following Gaudenzi's main statement that “interactivity gives *agency* to the user”, therefore creating ‘a series of relations that form an ecosystem in which all parts are independent and dynamically linked’⁴³⁶, we can note how this agency is constantly being negotiated with the features designed to work specifically for the platform used - which allow certain functioning paths or patterns and not others- as well as with the whole of the World Wide Web as a almost unlimited memory storage and archive of information concerning humanity.

According to some observers, YouTube users, for examples, are most likely to navigate the platform through a logic that is similar to that of associations, contiguities, casual relationships: “Neither the casual chain of action and reaction, nor the temporal succession of locales, determines the direction or trajectory of the journey, but (...) one is guided by keywords and tags, tag clouds or semantic clusters, embedded links, user's comments and of course, one's own 'free' associations”(Elsaesser, 2009)⁴³⁷. Interesting is the idea that this kind of “digital *flâneurism*” is triggered by the very same character that is inscribed in platforms like YouTube, which is connected to its inherent fragmentation and lack of completeness (Brodasco, 2012)⁴³⁸. This character is also inscribed within the same structure of *media franchise* (Zecca, 2012), in the framework of big narrations conceived to produce a train of thought, in the structure of uncomplete, fragmented, intertextual narration, in the possibility for the subject to build a dialogue which calls into action his/her own *algorithmic/digital self* (Brodasco, 2012, Gaudenzi, 2013).

Interesting examples of interactive documentaries exploring the relationships to the digital self and digital memory as a reflections on new modes of “archiving”, are recent works such as *In Limbo* (2014), Antoine Vivani's most recent web-documentary: “a sensorial experience which allows the exploration of numerical

⁴³⁶ Gaudenzi, S., *The Living Documentary: from representing reality to co-creating reality in digital interactive documentary*, Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Goldsmiths College, January 2013, p.3

⁴³⁷ T. Elsaesser, *Tales of Epiphany and Entropy. Around the Worlds in Eighty Clicks*, in P. Snickars, P. Vonderau (a cura di), *The YouTube Reader*, National Library of Sweden, Stockholm, 2009, p.167/168.

⁴³⁸ A. Brodasco, *Lo Spleen di Hollywood*, in F. Zecca, *op. Cit.*, p.211

memory”⁴³⁹ . “Memory can be deceiving. We forget, we distort and we condense. Efforts to find a more accurate alternative marked the beginnings of the internet. Since the start of the World Wide Web program in 1991 – and especially since it was opened to individuals and businesses in 1993 – an extremely detailed archive has been built up with everything we do. 'The internet knows more about me than my own mother' says one of the experts in *In Limbo*. The scientists, writers, artists and entrepreneurs in this interactive documentary sketch the rapid developments through which humanity – or, better, the big data it produces – is being increasingly integrated with the machine. In the near future, virtual personalities will become a reality. Information technology is becoming all-embracing. 'Internet is my religion' says a computer pioneer, without a hint of irony. In a personal and easy-to-follow way, *in Limbo* clearly demonstrate how our daily lives are becoming enmeshed with the internet. Besides the technical specifications of the film itself, shimmering in the margins, the viewer's own details gathered from Facebook, Twitter or Instagram also go into the mix. GPS-based Street View, YouTube collages of previously watched films and photo compilations from personal albums make clear to what extent we have already been abstracted into a huge amount of data”⁴⁴⁰

But also Jason Zada's *Take My Lollipop* (2013)⁴⁴¹ , a horror documentary which takes informations belonging to the user's Facebook profile (pictures, data, phone number, address, Google) and conducts the viewer into a car journey towards the viewer himself or Lev Manovitch and Mortz Stefaner's *Selfie City* (2014), an exploration into 'self-portraits (*selfies*) in five cities across the world', which becomes a portrait of who we are right now in history through a 'selfies' searched engine⁴⁴² or the most famous *A Journal of Insomnia* (2013) by Canadian transmedia company brand NFB, an interactive exploration into the night's most feared experience, insomnia, through a private one-to-one nighttime encounter with an insomniac and his private story. Other experiments in this respect are New York-based artist Kyle MacDonald's works of arts who, in the last 5 years, has been working relentlessly on exploring various aspects of our relationship with our digital self and the assumption that “everything I am doing could be public one

⁴³⁹ *In Limbo* by Antoine Vivani premiered at IDFA Doclab 2014 in Amsterdam. Quote on “Digital Stories: crowdsourcing et nouvelles pratiques cinématographiques – Table ronde au festival des nouveaux cinémas documentaires #4”, in *Effeillage. La Revue qui met les médias à nu*, available on <http://effeuillage-la-revue.fr>

⁴⁴⁰ A.A.V.V. , *Idfa International Documentary Festival 2014 Catalogue*, Idfa DocLab Competition for Digital Storytelling, November 19-30 2014, p.78

⁴⁴¹ Jason Zada, *Take My Lollipop*, 2013, available online at www.takemylollipop.com. Retrieved March 2014

⁴⁴² L. Manovitch, M. Stefaner, *Selfie City*, available at www.selfiecity.net, 2014

day”⁴⁴³. In *Going Public* (2013)⁴⁴⁴, the artist played with the question: is there an unbreakable connection between my digital profile and myself, being myself in my physical body? If I share my accounts will I still be able to feel my identity safe? Will I be able to be myself even by being with other people all the time? He create an artificial experience of total openness where every single information he shared through technology (from the most private ones – emails, texts, private Facebook messages or direct Twitter messages – to public profiles on various platforms) was going public and that other people could even replicate his identity, if they wanted (which happened).

The artist concluded that 'our personality is a by– product of every other interaction', it is 'impossibly fluid' and that 'more information doesn't mean more understanding' in the noise of constant flow of information. A similar critical discourse is inscribe into the work of art *Postcards from Google Earth* by Clement Valla ⁴⁴⁵(2013) where he finds anomalies among Google Earth images, uncontrolled glitches in the total transparency of the widely represented and photographed Earth, “strange moments where the illusion of seamless representation of the Earth's surface seems to break down”⁴⁴⁶, which actually bring attention to the computational process which, in itself, can produce anomalies, that are “the absolute logical result of the system”. Valla also brings critical attention to the fact that “Google earth is a database, disguised as photographic representation' and that behind there is a network of softwares, algorithms, storage systems, automated cameras and map-makers that generate these data.

Archive reconfiguration, re-mediation and remix practices

As Vivian Sobchack notices in her essay *Media Archeology and Re-presencing the Past*⁴⁴⁷, Media Archeology as a methodology has the unique ability to challenge and change the accepted order of things in the world of media artefacts. This happens through the interception of a trace, a fragment, an element which suddenly proves able to 'pierce an uncanny hole' in the everyday reality and therefore to challenge the continuity of traditionally historiographic approaches. This moment of discontinuity, the sudden sense of the 'being there' of an element that hadn't been considered, seen or outlined before, occurs through the appearance of

⁴⁴³ K. MacDonald presents his work, *Idfa DocLab 2014*, Amsterdam, November 2014

⁴⁴⁴ K. MacDonald, *Going Public*, 2013, available on the web at www.kylemacdonald.net. Retrieved December 2014

⁴⁴⁵ Clement Valla, *Postcards from Google Earth*, 2013, available on www.postcards-from-google-earth.com

⁴⁴⁶ Clement Valla, *Ibidem, Intro*

⁴⁴⁷ Sobchack, V., *Media Archeology and Re-presencing the Past* in E. Huhtamo and J. Parikka, (ed.) *Media Archeology. Approaches, Applications, Implications*, Auckland, University California Press, 2011, p.p.324/5

something that is similar in function to what Barthes calls a *punctum*⁴⁴⁸, something that has the ability to reveal the 'presence' of that particular media artefact, structure, operational system and that proves therefore able to activate the process of recognition which is responsible for the overturning or the suspending of known media history hierarchies and consolidated historiographical paths. This can open the way to the creation of a space of free creative existence in which media, despite their seeming fixed functionality, can often show a forgotten, neglected function which had been obliterated, ignored or had gone unnoticed – or anticipations, proposals for future uses.

In particular, archives as dynamic and temporal networks and media-technologically informed apparatuses can expose processes of history remediation in which memory becomes an issue of technical possibilities, in the sense intended by Wolfgang Ernst. Some archival processes seem to be able to intercept these interferences in ways that include creative remix/ *decoupage* artistic processes. In this respect, I would like to investigate the changing relationship between past archival, ephemeral and amateur stored material, and current DIY makers, in the way it has been transformed by Youtube's current evolution into a Creative Commons-based site. In the last 3 years thousands of videos have been made available for remix and reuse on the platform – and possibly they will become millions very soon. The result of this transformation is that suddenly up to seventy years-old footage becomes progressively available on Youtube under CCBY licence, boosting remixing and reuse activities by further spreading the practice of content sharing. This has already created a wave of videos that have been created *within* Youtube itself – using the footage found on the platform as 'found footage', to be re-assembled though the internal Youtube Editor tool for the creation of experimental, amateur, art videos that are posted and disseminated on the platform itself.

Transmedia approach promoted by Youtube Creative Common license feature

In the world of digital media – and its analysis – media archeology as an approach can shed a light on 'media's formal and epistemic variety' – in the words of Sobchack - and possibly 'disturb' the teleological discourse dominating the role of the internet in our societies. The *a priori* interpretation of how digital media, new media, social media, participative media are being used and will therefore keep being used in the future, formulations which are often constructed in accordance to the readings provided by traditional historiography, are inevitably informed by techno-pessimistic or techno-ptimistic projections responding to structural features that are being read in the present time, creating a *narrativisation of history* in advance

⁴⁴⁸ R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, New York and Wang, 1981, pp.42-59

as expressed in Hayden Whyte's terms⁴⁴⁹. The innovation brought about by the change in Youtube license we are talking about, can, in my opinion, have the function of "piercing an uncanny hole" in the common readings of the use of internet platforms, opening interesting questions related to the shift from individual memory-making and sharing - *as a movement from the individual to the peer group* - as it was originally practiced on Youtube, to something like a *community ownership of the material* and thus, potentially, *of the memories themselves*. Moreover, the question of what an archive is can also be transformed by *this shift from Youtube as an archive in the sense of 'storage' to Youtube as a 'creative palette'*. Youtube becomes thus a self-referring platform containing all tools DIY artists can use for their creations *and integrating into one self-contained creative system those functions of spreadability and content sharing which had been normalised by social media*.

Terranova states in her recent essay on *Algorithm and Capital* (I am using Terranova's words) that "widely socialised new knowledges and crafts (how to construct a profile, how to cultivate a public, how to share and comment, how to make and post photos, videos, notes, how to publicize events) and 'soft skills' of expression and relation (humour, argumentation, sparring) (...), present a series of affordances or degrees of freedom of expression' that, instead of being absorbed by practices useful in the sense of productivity and profit-making, could instead '*migrate* to new platforms and services'⁴⁵⁰ in order to be part of the foundation of a new 'commons'-based culture and economy. In this same sense, I would like to show some examples in which the supposed effect of homogenization displayed by social media and usage of internet platforms like Youtube is counteracted by new possibility for experimenting with different '*many-to-many interaction*'⁴⁵¹ and therefore of with new, different ways in which individual and collective imagery intersect. This process is potentially contributing to the spreading of open, democratic, creative practices in ways that we are not yet aware of. On the other hand, though, as quite rightly noticed by Siva Vaidhayanathan in his 2011 *book*⁴⁵², we always have to remember that the business model of both Google and Youtube is designed to categorize user-generated content algorithmically⁴⁵³. The Youtube video engine sorts the video by the number of visualisations and how recently has the video been uploaded, creating a strong hierarchy within the platform itself. It requires, in fact, the work of a media archeologist to dig out those works that are not

⁴⁴⁹ H. Whyte, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1973

⁴⁵⁰ T. Terranova, *Algorithm and Capital*, Notes from Seminar held at Goldsmiths College, London, June 2013

⁴⁵¹ *Ibidem*

⁴⁵² Vaidhyanathan, S., *The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry)*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2011

⁴⁵³ Rascaroli, L., Young, G., Monahan, B., (ed.), *Amateur Filmmaking: the Home Movie, the Archive, the Web*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2014

necessarily as popular, but might represent instead new, creative ways of using the platform boosted by the Creative Commons functionality.

The way I would like to go about using media archeology, as a *heuristic* tool for analysing contemporary developments in the use of internet platforms like Youtube, is through the translation in the field of media of a methodology that has been extensively used both in archeology and in geology and which has the name of *stratigraphy*⁴⁵⁴. In particular, in the field of practical archeology the law of superposition is at the basis of the principle through which processes and phases of activities can be observed through the layers that can be observed and found in the soil. The fieldwork in specific archeological sites, though, doesn't always reveal strata belonging to exactly the same age at the same absolute depth in the soil. As we know, the earth moves over time and pits can find their way into the soil, moving older materials into earlier strata. The practice of archeological stratigraphy shows that often, as the 'disturbances' in the soil occur due to anthropic and geological interventions, only the context is key to making hypothesis in the field of periodisation. So, it is the practice of excavating a specific field that can show the relationship between strata which underwent their own very specific process of stratification in time – a combination of linear accumulation with the detritus coming from anthropic and geological 'traumas' that remain as traces that cannot be neglected in the analysis. By means of analogy, when we analyse the way Creative Commons-license based videos deposited on Youtube, we shouldn't forget to analyse all different layers that have been formed over time and which act as different strata in the multi-layered identities of videos.

Back and forth from past to present

First of all, what is a Creative Commons 3.0 license (CCBY, also called Attribution 3.0 Unported)? It is a license that makes the user free to “Share – copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format’, but also “Adapt, remix, transform and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially”. As for attribution, you must “give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license or indicate if changes were made” to the original footage. Let's take now some examples of recent videos made in this way, with a multi-layered identity. *'Different Fable'* by Dreamfallfilter is a found footage film using archive material

⁴⁵⁴ Stratigraphy is a methodology that was initiated in the 17th century by scholar Nicholas Steno, a Danish catholic bishop and scientist who, among other studies in the field of anatomy and paleontology, became famous for his investigation of the the fossils and rock fomations. He lived around the same time as Descartes and Spinoza (whom he met in Amsterdam), travelled through Germany, the Netherlands, France and Italy and worked as in-house physician at the court of Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinand II de Medici. He became famous for his formulation of the *law of superposition* which states that “*at the time when any given stratum was being formed, all the matter resting upon was fluid and, therefore, at the time when the lower strata was formed, none of the upper strata existed*”

available on the Public Domain and audio licensed under Creative Commons 3.0 Share-Alike license on Youtube. The audio is made by a patchwork of music pieces composed by Anitek, a Trip-hop beat music producer from New Jersey and living in Switzerland, who has been active on Youtube for the last two years under the name of 'AnitekMusic'. Anitek has uploaded 463 tracks to Youtube – between videos and audio tracks – and has 2598 subscribers to his channel. He is also active on several other independent distribution platforms -Twitter, Soundcloud, Jamendo, Last.fm, Instagram, Vimeo, MusicBrainz, MySpace, Facebook, Wiki. Softwarefreedomday etc.. He has been releasing something like 17 albums full of music (according to his Twitter account) and some of his videos/music tracks – like '*Cynical beings*' - have reached around 21,000 visualisations. He is a music artist with a medium-strong online presence and who makes large use of all existing free platforms in order to distribute his music. Dreamfallfilter defines himself as an author. He appears on Youtube and Facebook with around 20 videos and some pictures featuring Lego-size miniatures of human beings in everyday life situations and insects magnified– he also works on the relationship between music and images, working on scores. His videos are mostly featuring animation techniques, contemporary footage with a strong retro look made by basic filtering techniques and the use of archive material, mostly 'found footage'. His footage is mainly assembled through the use of montage, creating a new reality out of disparate fragments of footage. He makes strong use of visual rhetoric figures and classical experimental editing techniques – juxtapositions, discontinuity between images, superimpositions, repetitions, visual alliterations that are not bound to chronology, substitution of meanings, abstract analogies and sense of memory as recurring events through cinematic sequences of images that represent movements in themselves. Dreamfallfilter is an experimental filmmaker who doesn't normally declare his footage source, but he recently released this video we are talking about where he has been using material coming from the Prelinger Archives ('*Alchemist in Hollywood*', '*Alcohol and the Human Body*', '*Arteries of New York City*', '*Behind the Lens*', '*To the Fair*' etc..) that, as we know, is one of the biggest collection of free to use footage existing on the Internet, founded in 1983 by Rick Prelinger in New York City and growing over twenty years into a collection of over 60.000 'ephemeral' films (advertising, educational, industrial and amateur material) with around 3,000 titles listed and around 2,000 titles free to download and reuse at the Internet Archive. So '*Different Fable*' might at the first look remind us of a known 'found footage' film if it wasn't for the co-participation of Anitek's music which adds a tapestry of voices to the video (sentences like 'way of life to be free and beautiful' 'we think too much, we feel too little!..'). The video becomes therefore a film internal to the Youtube community at a sort first-level 'many-to-many' interaction – where an amateur artist establishes a relationship with another amateur artist through Youtube, creating a work of arts made out of material that had been made available on Youtube by

the other artist, but also uses creative common material pre-existing to the Creative Common opening process promoted by Youtube.

The second example I would like to show you is the *Bluelight Films channel* on Youtube that has compiled a specific playlist of Creative Commons films curated by BLULIGHT gallery and organised in a collection to “represent the art of video production in the world”. Bluelight Film channel started broadcasting around 1 year ago and is dedicated to the production of independent films, but also to the collection of already existing independent films, making them available for dissemination and, in some cases, for re-use. This channel has, in fact, started selecting creative commons existing films all around the world and has been collecting them into a playlist that makes them available on YouTube – ready to be reused and ingested through the Youtube Video Editor tool. In this case, we have a Youtube user – a channel - acting as facilitator, curator or we could say media archeologist. The user busy in the process of digging up creative common films pre-existing on the web, but which were not organised in existing archives. The Blue Light gallery playlist the becomes an archive in itself - acting similarly to the *Prelinger Archives* and its sub-collections like the Internet Archive or the Moving Image Archive and its Community Video collection. It features films like the well-known anarchic '*Route 66*', a film that is famous as one of the first Open Source films and that was produced by Veb Film Leipzig in 2004, a net label engaged in active participation in free culture of productivity and production, which tries to show how can also make revenue out a bottom-up, participatory way of using the internet and sharing all content freely. It also features the work of Vincent Desmeules and its experimental film '*Transfer*'. Vincent Desmeules is a sculptor who uses iron and other metals to create work that symbolises the idea of transformation. His film '*Transfer*' is posted in two parts on a website called www.transferlefilm.org and it works mainly on the idea of burning and matter transformation. It becomes then interesting also this 'transmedia' aspect of the free-to-share material that actually comes from the idea of transforming something material like the burning of a metal into an audiovisual work which embodies this transformation and which becomes 'editable' 'possible to dismantle'. It also features a documentary called '*Catastroika*', a crowd funded open source documentary made by Katerina Kitidi and Aris Hatzistefanou and following the 2011 '*Debtocracy*' on the Greek debt, which analyses the causes behind the debt both in Greece and other European nations. Another film featuring on the Blulight channel is '*Farewell to arms*', a 1932 film directed by Frank Borzage and taken by the homonymous book by Ernest Hemingway. The film featuring a young Gary Cooper and beautiful Helen Hayes, won 3 Oscars. All this material, together with many other Creative Commons films featuring on the channel, can be potentially re-used into artefacts edited by other experimental filmmakers on Youtube.

Then we have a whole genre of video called *'My Edited Video Creative Commons'*, video whose material has been outsourced on Youtube or that will be made available to be shared. We have examples like the video by Friedel Kessler, made for 2014 New Year's Eve, featuring herself (who knows if it's really herself) in sexy poses. The video was created with YouTube Video Editor tool and can be shared and re-edited on the web. We also have the video by Deviant A, a 14 minutes long partly silent video, featuring words, animated graphics, Skype-like material, stop motion effects – a video blog where the creator talks about the internet, her loneliness, her ways of expressing herself and wasting time. 'Every time I go on the internet I feel I am stupid...I used to go out loads...I feel like I got a computer virus..' This video can be re-edited and shared on the web in other contexts. Then we have a case like the one of *"My Edited Video Cat Mam – Solo Bass"* where we see a guy improvising with his bass for 10 minutes. The video was posted by Purr Dogs and it is now under Standard License, but the "author" says "I have neither created this video nor own this video. As I liked this video and as it was under creative commons license I have shared this video". And it links back to the original source. The editing operation was made through YouTube Video Editor, but when we link back to the video, the video is private and cannot be accessed. If we link into Youtube Editor, we can find all videos that are free and that can be used for remix practices. An example is a video of *'Teaching my Grandma twerking'* by Ryan Thomas Woods who interviews his great-grandma and asks her about Justin Bieber and other slang words. Or the video *"Occupy Love – From Egypt to Wall Street"* which is the clip coming from a documentary that is freely circulating on the web and it is also linked to the interactive project "Found Love" encompassing a photo-sharing app promoting interconnection and a 'deep public yearning for connection in society' through the release of a documentary through an integrated approach including crowd funding, theatrical release and a collaborative art project possible through the app.

As a final example, I would instead like to show is the operation made by *CinemaHistory*, a channel set up in 2013 by a group of people from Nurnberg in Germany, who are interested in bringing back to the audience silent movies and great classics of early cinema in high quality and newly made soundtracks. They also manage several Youtube channels like First Great Movies, The Great Classics, Handy Cinema. In one year and half, this channel had something like 500.000 visualisations. An example of the work made by Cinema History people, can be represented by *"Les Kiriki, acrobates japonais"* by Segund de Chomon (1907) with the soundtrack of a very old and original Japanese 78 RPM or *"Amor Pedestre"* by Marcel Fabre (1914) with the soundtrack made by creative commons artist Kevin MacLeod or *"Lichtspiel Opus 1,2,3,4"* by Walter Ruttmann, the first abstract film screened publicly, again with Kevin MacLeod's music layered over.

The use of Kevin MacLeod's music is particularly interesting if we think that, in the world of internet-based content, Kevin MacLeod is probably the most used royalty-free composer. Through his website Incompetech, MacLeod circulates hundreds of royalty-free tracks. He features on IMDB as the composer of around 1000 movies. Cinema History creators (who by the way use Creative Commons license to source their material out, but do not use it to for the licensing of their own creations) create a re-enactment of early cinema classics, using royalty-free music and directing their efforts to new early classics *cinophilia*, possibly the same kind of audience which enjoys performances like Cabinet of Living Cinema in London or archive festivals like Cinema Ritrovato in Bologna.

CONCLUSIONS

The general focus in this Dissertation revolves around the question of *whether our sense of participation to contemporary historical events is effectively being facilitated or not by the media we are using*. In particular, my question revolved around the kind of agency that takes place in a communication space where offline and online actions contribute in the same amount in the shaping of the constitutional space of the communication exchange. My main examples were the protests in Egypt and other protests of the same time and, in particular, the space of Tahrir Square as *an example of the 'communicating vessels' dynamic between online and offline spaces* which took place there. In fact, if we consider Hayden White⁴⁵⁵, Keith Jenkins⁴⁵⁶ conception of history as *the discourse that is accepted and circulated as history within a particular culture and period*, then we will conclude there is always a good/bad/contested/partial history. It is *'what counts as history'*, rather than what has some special claim to truth, that we should use as a concept to define the context of the historical feature in which we are moving. The question becomes then what *kind* of history does the e.g. Facebook/Twitter record from Cairo represent? Does it produce an evidence of *participation in what* exactly? Should Tahir Square be considered a *'new communication space'* (Odin) which is extended by social media and instant messaging service?

My analysis began on a historical-philosophical communicational basis, since the age of Enlightenment. In an initial section, I focused on the evaluation of historical regard, at the beginning of modernity. I specifically concentrated on the XXth century, where I centred my attention on two main concepts. The first is Walter Benjamin's idea of history as a *multi-vocal discourse*, i.e. not only written by the conquerors, but also by the conquered and as a tale composed of *many discrete fragments and utterances*. Through Benjamin's outlook, which did away with the hierarchical perspective on historiography, the whole postmodern and postcolonial perspective is theoretically traced. There is not only a mainstream history, as previously thought, but history is made of many concurrent voices and testimonials (the winners and the losers, 'Us' and the 'Others'). This, of course, opens the way prophetically to literature and criticism of the postwar and postcolonial age: starting with Fanon, through Said and the concept of 'Orientalism' and finally Appadurai and Babha and the magmatic discourse on *many voices intersecting into history-making*. On the other hand, against the entrenched, traditional idea of historiography as a text that is "true", Hayden White theorises that history is maybe subsumed entirely in the narrative mode. Thus, *history is mainly a story*. The disciplinary barrier breaks down and relativity of judgment/ writing comes again to the fore.

⁴⁵⁵ H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1973

⁴⁵⁶ K. Jenkins, *Rethinking History*, London, Routledge, 1991

This entire theoretical platform, may be perceived as leading to (albeit for the most, unconsciously) to the use of media at present, in describing public actions, initiatives, protests and movements and, especially the way the traditionally defined “public” is called *to participate to the events themselves, and the narration, in its making*.

Tahrir Square is a paradigmatic case because it is the first time that a non-internet-literate-world comes into consciousness of its being and its potential through user-generated media. Tahrir Square is also crucial because it gives rise to a number of subsequent web creations or narrations which concern it and that build upon its features and potential and that are promoted by its multi-vocal and multilayered approach. The set of actions displayed in Tahrir Square all reflect the engagement with a public sphere that was seen as representative only if created by the largest of people belonging to it, according to a *direct participation principle*. The idea that a public sphere can be representative of the real composition of society, only if the largest number of people belonging to it, directly participate and engage in the making of a collective event, is now seen as *directly related to the production of an historical narrative and the creation of the news*.

The technological possibilities offered by digital platforms and digital storytelling features developed with it seem to be not so much a cause, but rather an effect, of an arising awareness that in the field of media exists the possibility of creating a powerful tool of connection between *participation, historical narration and social agency*. What I would argue is that this kind of use of technology leaves a *trace of participation related to the taking part of the events of the present*, which can be found in the stream of information recorded by digital platforms and social media, which already, *in themselves, constitute a form of storytelling of the present* that needs to be understood and analysed.

Nowadays, Tahrir may seem no more than an episode in a complex magma of *web participation, witnessing, testimoniality* in politics and revolts. One episode in new media development and use for political, social and revolutionary reasons. The final part of my Dissertation presents a series of examples, showing the super-stratification of new media in *narration, creation, and hybridisation* that may arise, building upon a specific event. Some of these examples are laudable, others are very creative in the direction of new styles and formats in relation to user-generated content media, but, of course, the risk is inherently the lack of purpose or connection to a wider political and economic dynamics. Many new questions, such as “truth”, “authenticity”, “direct engagement” and their opposites, such as “manipulation”, “fake authenticity” and “aimless zapping through media” for so-called artistic and political effect.

At the end of the day, the question of whether we as users of a mass of information of primary, secondary, tertiary level of *immediateness* on specific events nowadays through the web, are basically very different from the public receiving revolutionary news in the past whether or two-week-old-newspaper like

Immanuel Kant reading about the French Revolution or through the radios of revolt in 1968, is posed and requires an answer. On the pure semio-pragmatic level, perhaps, the differences between these situations are not particularly striking. But on the level of usability, transferring and recombining of the information, we must admit that a complete new dimension and a un-encompassable horizon has been broached with the projection of these political situations on the World Wide Web. Especially the *feedback* of the message onto the protesters themselves, which was absent two hundreds ago and was only beginning through radio and TV media fifty years ago, represents now a fundamental and discerning analytical factor.

This element must be recorded, noted, mediated upon and can become object of further reflection and action. Whether such extraordinary and unbounded feedback may lead to an enlargement of democratic reflexes, reactions and movements is anybody's guess. However, the novelty is the semio-pragmatic short circuit entailed by this all-over and real-time media usage is a totally unprecedented factor, with which participants, grassroots movements, citizen journalist and artist-creators must absolutely reckon, from now on.

TABLE OF ILLUSTRATION:

- *Picture 1.* Sticker of *Radio Alice*, independent grassroots radio, 1977. The logo shows a group people, with their faces covered by balaclavas, as to underline the anonymous and the subversive aspect of the operation. The group is in the attempt of catching the radio signal under a radio antenna, while one of them had reached the top and managed to plant the “*At full voice*” Radio Alice's motto as a flag. Picture taken from Radio Marconi website, available on the web at http://www.radiomarconi.com/marconi/ancona/valcamonica/amarcord/radio_pag05.html. Retrieved May 2015.

- *Picture 2.* Cover of political subversive communication journal *I Volsci*, Rome, 1977, linked to independent grassroots radio *Onda Rossa*. The motto on the cover “*When Onda Rossa speaks...(everyone shuts up)*” is completed by the picture of a girl whose mouth is shut, as to underline the power of Radio Onda Rossa's voice and message in matters of uncovering the truth. Here again “voice” “speaking” “hearing” are keywords, as interlinked with the radio medium. Courtesy of Radio Onda Rossa.

- *Picture 3.* A grassroots stencil showing the *Indymedia* news production process (around 2000/1). The picture shows the process of news dissemination on the street, “the -getting- the- word- out- process “, as being the beginning of a circle of news production which sees media activists reporting back from the street to the Indymedia desk via mobile phone, in order for the news to be published in the shortest time and without any mediation. Picture taken from C.W. Anderson, “From Indymedia to Wikileaks: What a decade of hacking journalistic culture says about the future of news”, *NiemanLab*, December 9, 2010, available on the web on <http://owni.eu/2010/12/10/from-indymedia-to-wikileaks-what-a-decade-of-hacking-journalistic-culture-says-about-the-future-of-news/>. Also available on <http://www.niemanlab.org/2010/12/from-indymedia-to-wikileaks-what-a-decade-of-hacking-journalistic-culture-says-about-the-future-of-news/>. Retrieved May 2015.

- *Picture 4.* Front cover of *Chicago Sun Times* on September 12, 2001. The title: “OUTRAGE. America is changed forever as terrorists murder thousands” is a good example of the strong emotionally-led rhetoric used the day after the Twin Towers attack. Picture take from Steven Warran's blog, a web platform collecting several pictures taken by Getty Pictures archive on 9/11. Available on the web at <http://stevenwarran.blogspot.it/2014/07/getty-images-9-11.html>. Retrieved may 2015.

- *Picture 5.* One of Giorgio Di Noto's pictures, Arab Revolts, online exhibition, 2011. The pictures have been found on the web and re-edited according to the logic of the “web witness” Di Noto, who became effectively the new author of these found pictures. Available on the web at www.giorgiodinoto.com. Retrieved December 2014.

-*Picture 6.* #Jan 25 hashtag, Cairo, Egypt, January 2011. The picture shows the correlation established by protesters between the act of being in the streets and Facebook as constituting “the Egyptian social network. Picture taken from D. Faarid, “Egypt has the largest number of Facebook users in the Arab world: report”, *Daily News Egypt*, September 25, 2013, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/09/25/egypt-has-the-largest-number-of-facebook-users-in-the-arab-world-report/>. Retrieved May 2015.

- *Picture 7.* People sitting by Tahrir Square, Facebook sign on a shop, Cairo, Egypt, January, 2011. Facebook became such a symbol in Egypt 2011 that “A young man in his twenties wanted to express his gratitude about the victories the youth of 25th of January have achieved and chose to express it in the form of naming his firstborn girl “Facebook” Jamal Ibrahim (his name.) The girl's family, friends, and neighbors in the Ibrahimya region gathered around the new born to express their continuing support for the revolution that started on Facebook. “Facebook” received many gifts from the youth who were overjoyed by her arrival and the new name. A name [Facebook] that shocked the entire world. Picture taken from article C. Smith, “Egyptian Father Names Baby ‘Facebook’”, *Huffington Post*, February 21, 2011 available on http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/02/21/baby-named-facebook-egypt_n_825934.html.

- *Picture 8,9.* Anonymous Pamphlet 'How to protest intelligently' (2010,2011). Picture taken from A. Basu, *Ibidem*, http://www.metamute.org/sites/www.metamute.org/files/u1/Page_1_rev2.jpg.

-*Picture 10.* Facebook Cafe Cairo, Egypt, August 2013, Mohammed Morsi's face that's crossed out on the cafe window. Picture courtesy of BBC reporter Hugh Sykes, http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/radio4/posts/hugh_sykes_with_his_camera_in_tahrir_square_cairo Picture courtesy of BBC reporter Hugh Sykes, http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/radio4/posts/hugh_sykes_with_his_camera_in_tahrir_square_cairo. From an email conversation with Hugh Sykes: “Calling it the ‘Facebook Revolution’ was always an exaggeration,

except that the Jan 25th revolt against Mubarak was largely secular and left-wing, and a lot of activism was organised and communicated via Facebook. The Revolution was hijacked by the Islamists, who were much better led and better organised. So Morsi rose to power. The coup that overthrew Morsi in 2013 was hugely popular in most parts of Egyptian society except for the Islamists of course. So it's not surprising to see Morsi's face defaced on the Facebook cafe window." A face-to-face conversation took place in London, October, 2014, following an email exchange.

-*Picture 11.* Cinema Tahrir organised by Mosireen Collective in Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt, 2011, Photo by Danya Nadar. Mosireen Collective, Tahrir Cinema @ Pres Palace, Cairo in L. Starkweather, 'No one lives here' @ RCA reviewed', *Aqnb*, March 21, 2013, available on the web at <http://www.aqnb.com/2013/03/21/no-one-lives-here-rca-reviewed/>. Retrieved May 2015.

-*Picture 12.* Egyptians in Tahrir Square look at a banner featuring photographs of people killed during political upheavals in 2011. Photograph: Khaled Elfiqi/EPA. Picture taken from J. Shenker, 'The struggle to document Egypt's revolution', *The Guardian*, July 15, 2011, available on the web at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jul/15/struggle-to-document-egypt-revolution>. Retrieved February 2012.

-*Picture 13.* A screenshot of 'Gaza/Sderot – Life in Spit Everything' (2009), available on the web at <http://gaza-sderot.artetv>.

-*Picture 14.* Protester in New York, USA, 2011 in protest against The Hosni Mubarak regime cut on internet access because of the role Twitter and Facebook was playing in organising dissent. The protest went viral on the web in various forms and it took place in the streets in various cities of the US. "From the Egyptian demo in New York: who's afraid of twitter?", *Img.ly*, posted in January 2011 from *Twitterrific*, available on the web at <http://img.ly/2TgS>. Retrieved May 2015.

-*Picture 15.* Protester at Auckland, March for Democracy in Egypt, USA, February 2011, in protest against regime cut on internet access. 'Who's afraid of Twitter', *Flickr*, copyright © & (M) LGD 2011, posted February 2011, available on the web at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/lgd/5493254679/>.

- *Picture 16.* An image from the film Bye bye by Paul Geday, Egypt / Netherlands, 2012.

- *Picture 17.* An image from the documentary 'Rouge Parole' by Elyes Baccar, Tunisia, 2011. Picture taken from C.Savall, "El cine que refleja la vida", *El Periodico*, December, 1, 2012, available on the web at <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/barcelona/cine-que-refleja-vida-1373130>. Retrieved May 2015.

- *Picture 18.* Media Revolutions, Social Media For Social Change, One World Prague 2012.

-*Picture 19.* Headquarters of Mosireen Collective, Cairo, Egypt, 2012. Picture taken from L. Starkweather, 'No one lives here' @ RCA reviewed', *Aqnb*, March 21, 2013, available on the web at <http://www.aqnb.com/2013/03/21/no-one-lives-here-rca-reviewed/>. Retrieved May 2015.

- *Picture 20.* A screenshot of #18Days in Egypt (2011), available on the web at <http://beta.18daysinegypt.com/>, 2011. Retrieved May 2015.

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