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Social Networks as Digital Archives: Videos of the Tunisian Revolution Post-January 14, 2011

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Introduction

We live in a digital ecology,[1] an environment in which previously held boundaries between media, subjects, and the physical world are dissolving. This inherently complex, inclusive, and networked domain is, at the same time, the terrain of my research and the field that I explore here. This dissertation is about how social networks might be intended as forms of digital archives, and specifically, how they function in relation to the empirical case study of the vernacular videos shot during the early stage of the Tunisian revolution, meaning the twenty-nine days between the immolation of street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi, on December 17, 2010 and the fall of the dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, on January 14, 2011. The spectator enacts both archives and content, and for this reason, this figure will be examined as the agent of transformation in regard to these visual testimonies over time. I will approach the cinematic technique of montage as a modus operandi, and I will analyze the active role of the spectator as storyteller of the moving images of the uprising through a series of tools and empirical research.

The main feature of my study consists of inscribing the observation of vernacular videos within a "culture of connectivity" and contextualizing the interaction of the viewer with these digital objects and the platforms that host them in the period post-January 14, 2011. The culture of connectivity is a notion by prominent media studies scholar José van Dijck[2] and recalls a culture invaded by coding technologies, whose implications exceed the digital domain and the architecture of the platforms themselves. This construction is based on neoliberal economic principles that organize social exchanges and interactions, as well as resets boundaries between private, corporate, and public spheres.

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[1] The precise attribution of this term appears arduous. I assume it is the evolution of the notion of "media ecology" coined by Marshall McLuhan and the development of the term by Neil Postman in 1968. "Media ecology looks into the matter of how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival. The word ecology implies the study of environments: their structure, content, and impact on people. An environment is, after all, a complex message system which imposes on human beings certain ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving. […] In the case of media environments (e.g., books, radio, film, television, etc.), the specifications are more often implicit and informal, half concealed by our assumption that what we are dealing with is not an environment but merely a machine. Media ecology tries to make these specifications explicit. It tries to find out what roles the media force us to play, how the media structure what we are seeing, why the media make us feel and act as we do. Media ecology is the study of media as environments." Neil Postman, "What is Media Ecology?," Media Ecology Association, accessed November 10, 2019, https://www.media-ecology.org/What-Is-Media-Ecology.

[2] José van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Therefore, I refer to the culture of connectivity to critically frame social media as a potential archive. I start by giving relevance to their commercial, highly capitalized features and infrastructure, and in particular, to their algorithms. This perspective provides a very specific angle of observation on the tension between the potential role of preservation played by social media, as digital repositories of militant contents in the post-January 14, 2011 period, and the nature of the platforms that store and circulate these items. When I refer to vernacular clips, I talk about the millions of so-called amateur, citizen videos, and visual accounts of the 2010 to 2011 uprisings in Arab-speaking countries, in particular in Tunisia, that have been circulating virally online and offline during the turmoil that occurred between December 17 and January 14. The political and social importance of these revolutionary images is unquestionable because of the messages they carried and for the tight relationships they established with informal media (social networks and the internet), through which they were disseminated. But what about the "long tail" of this footage and related practices of conservation and resignification in the aftermath of Ben Ali's toppling, the revolution, and its ongoing process? In other words, I question what has happened to these extraordinary audiovisual testimonies as the surrounding historical and political circumstances change and affect their transmission across social media. What kind of messages do they still propell? Where have they circulated or remained visible? In what modes do individuals and groups keep them alive? And what role does the inherent bond existing between this footage and social media still play over time? In order to answer these questions, I will observe the changing values and the mutating experience of these clips in the aftermath of the regime's fall, which relates to the function played by users/spectators as agents of transformation in the images in question. These characters are observed through their capacity to enact the archives by challenging the algorithm, manipulating footage, and thus, over time, writing new, untold stories out of these materials.

The post-January 14, 2011 period paved the way for a series of relevant questions that have become increasingly more complex and articulated as our distance from the original events grow. Among them, there is the question of the preservation of these visual accounts. This issue concerns the role played and limits shown by the use of social media as an archive, and as a consequence, the intervention of activist groups or state institutions in the conservation of these historical documents. What kind of archive is social media? This question became urgent when the shift of the footage from hypervisibility to invisibility became evident and threatening.

Related to this issue is a further question about the urgency of creating a national memory alongside the different articulations of pre-existing individual and collective memories, to which grassroots initiatives and national institutions started to give attention. Memory, in my study, is intended to be understood as a tool of resistance against different forces, such as counter-revolution narratives spread by post-revolutionary political parties in power, and the

fragmentation and dispersion—or even obliteration—of both historical traces and civil intentions.

During the unfolding of the revolutionary events between December 17, 2010 and January 14, 2011, traceable or intangible networks bonded local and international citizens and activists together, who took advantage of the use of social networks and the internet to give a global dimension to the struggle; these dynamics suddenly changed after Ben Ali's toppling, and together with them, the manner and form of the participation of users. According to the unfolding of regional politics, emotional traces of engagement expressed globally from users all over the world through likes, shares, and comments are transformed and assume a more local dimension. In the meantime, changing social-network algorithms, together with their media agendas, affects the circulation of the vernacular visual accounts in question. All these issues run in parallel to a growing sense of frustration and disillusionment among citizens, who progressively feel the failure of the political uprising they had begun. This study aims to cross all these issues transversally and to provide evidence and contradictions to help observe all ambiguities embedded in the process of transmission, preservation, and transformation that concern the vernacular videos of the Tunisian revolution post-January 14, 2011.

In Chapter 1, I will address social media, and in particular, YouTube and Facebook. I will go through their significant characteristics as user-generated platforms, their infrastructure, and the functioning of the algorithm they use. This overview is preliminary to the main questions of the chapter, which encompass whether and how these social networks fit with the definition of digital archives, and if so, what these repositories actually contain and to what rules they obey; or conversely, what contradictions emerge in theory and practice. Furthermore, other questions touch on what precisely is a digital archive and in what aspects does it differ from an analog one.

These questions will bring me to a comparison of grounding definitions of the archive by authors such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, along with Wolfgang Ernst's theories of media archaeology and his understanding of digital archives as a time-based repository. This shift of paradigms is of crucial importance within my study as it stresses coordinates such as transmission over storage, time over place, and co-authorship and participation over authority. I also introduce another peculiarity of social media as digital repositories, that of archives of affect and emotional objects.

In Chapter 2, I will define the social-media content specific to my study in regards to social media as a digital archive. I will focus on the genre of vernacular videos, a term coined by journalist, filmmaker, and scholar Peter Snowdon, which stresses the non-professional nature of the clips and their close relationship with social media. The phenomenon of citizen filming can be considered an endemic part of how the civil dissent unfolded in North Africa and the Middle East regions in 2010 to 2011. My study explores specifically the vernacular footage filmed by citizens during the early twenty-nine days of the 2010 to 2011 Tunisian revolution

and raises questions about their persistence and circulation online and offline post-January 14, 2011. In this chapter, I will also reconstruct background political circumstances from which the videos in question stem. In particular, I will present some basic characteristics concerning the phenomenon of the Arab Uprisings, and especially, the Tunisian case.

As chronology of revolutionary events between December 17, 2010 and January 14, 2011, I refer to one outlined by sociologist Jean-Marc Salmon[3] in the book *29 jours de révolution. Histoire du soulèvement tunisien, 17 décembre 2010-14 janvier 2011*, whose area of investigation is close to my study. Salmon's approach is relevant when also considering the 2008 uprising in Redeyef as a forewarning of the January 14 revolution. However, I will complete the picture offered by Salmon by providing a series of definitions that I will use over the course of the research that will serve to distinguish the different accepted phases of the revolution, from before Ben Ali's toppling and continuing in its aftermath. This delimitation will contextualize the time period of the collection of the objects of my empirical case-study, meaning the clips filmed between December 17, 2010 and January 14, 2011 by non-professional citizens and shared on the social networks.

Furthermore, in order to contextualize the objects of my research, I will provide background information on the development of the ITC in Tunisia and on President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's oppressive policies. Within this frame, I will unfold the phenomenon of cyberactivism and its specific evolution in the country, as well as the development and role played by Facebook and YouTube before December 17, 2010 and during the upheaval up until Ben Ali's flight. In addition, I will give overviews of the social-political phase of transitional justice, which started post-January 14, 2011, and especially, to the archives in regard to the Truth and Dignity Commission. Going back to the empirical case study of the research, whereas the definition of "vernacular" videos embeds the practice of the spectator as filmer of the circumstances to which he or she participates physically, I will further extend this definition and also include distant viewers of these videos, who consume them through the mediation of the screen and the internet. I will argue that the engagement and militancy of the user-spectator through the gaze, embedded by the term "vernacular," is an engagement that takes place within the contradictory rules and ambiguities typical of social-media infrastructure. I will question the different forms of engagement of the onlooker with the footage that have risen post-January 14, 2011. These concepts connect directly to the focus on the spectator as an active agent, which I will explore in Chapter 3.

I will start the third section of the dissertation by proposing a shift of terms from "user" to "spectator," which are related concepts. Indeed, I attribute significance within the culture of connectivity to the scopic regime, and within this framework, spectatorship entails a wide

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[3] Jean-Marc Salmon, *29 jours de révolution. Histoire du soulèvement tunisien, 17 décembre 2010-14 janvier 2011* (Paris: Les petits matins, 2016).

range of practices that exceed the simple use of a tool, a device, or a means of communication. Through a brief overview of the most significant implications the term spectator has assumed by the 1960s, I will articulate the approaches of two principal authors, new media and visual culture scholar Michele White and philosopher Jacques Rancière, as theoretical points of reference for articulating my understanding of the spectator as an agent of transformation in the domain in which he or she operates. Within this framework, I attribute relevance to the process of cinematic montage, intended to mean in its broadest sense a *modus operandi* of the way the spectator approaches reality, and from it, creates new forms of storytelling. I will unfold theoretical and practical implications of montage, and I argue that a form of editing can be recognized as the basis also of the creation of individual and collective memory. Indeed, memory is, and as it is understood within this study, a fictional narrative. Therefore, a crucial point of the research is the acknowledgment of montage as a common denominator for the creation of stories both stemming from the remix of items online and offline, and within the domain of memory.

Through the approaches of art curator and critic Okwui Enwezor, as well as media scholar Giovanna Fossati, I broaden the perspective on the objects of my research, which are intended as archival items per se, as well as on found-footage filming as a practice that describes both the activity of filmer and onlooker. In this chapter, I will also argue that practices of watching, displaying, and archiving overlap. All these considerations aim to blur distinctions between acts of the spectator of creating and consuming images, and pave the way for empirical observations, as well as the definition of the subjects that will be analyzed later. I will question how the spectator will approach the vast visual heritage of the footage filmed between the early twenty-nine days of revolution circulating on social networks, and what kind of narratives he or she is able to enact post-January 14, 2011. In this concern, I attribute to the digital items in question the definition of "digital objects of connective memory," and I inquire whether and how this definition might be appropriate to these clips within the domain of the culture of connectivity in which my study moves.

In Chapter 4, I will explore the empirical research, object, and methodology. Alongside the existing literature and the state of the art, I will give an account of the research objects and the expected results, and I will formulate the research question. I will give an account of the research methods, which include the description of the local research background and a series of tools used. I refer, for instance, to the research for online materials on YouTube and Facebook, the interviews, the focus group with the students of the Fine Arts Academy in Sousse, and the content analysis of moving-images products, specifically, the cinematic documentaries *Dégage* (2012) by Mohamed Zran, *Babylon* (2012) by Ismael Chebbi, Ala Eddine Slim, and Youssef Chebbi, and a selection of video episodes of the YouTube channel AnarChnowa. These items are both tools and objects of observation within the research. Within this context, I will also problematize my position as a foreign researcher as well as

discuss the use of translations and a foreign language for communication. In this section, tables will give an account of the materials consulted, from which empirical data emerge.

In Chapter 5, I argue that the results of the empirical data of the research for online materials show that through forms of expanded montage visible online, the spectator's resistance to social-media algorithms becomes evident. Indeed, the progressive invisibility of the clips shot between December 17, 2011 and January 14, 2011 leads to the acknowledgment of the features of hyper-searchability and accessibility inherent in the infrastructure of YouTube as those that make possible an actualization of the footage of the revolution into further unexpected, fragmented, and discontinuous forms of storytelling. User-spectators retrieve clips from online platforms and memory, write apparently random comments about them over time, and create forms of grassroots, personal, or institutional archives. All these findings demonstrate forms of storytelling by means of the montage of clips that constantly but randomly exceed the online sphere or expand to the offline sphere, and vice versa. In parallel, I acknowledge the growing relevance of YouTube in post-January 14, 2011 Tunisia and its emergence during a historical phase for the country in which the fear of loss and obliteration of the audiovisual traces of the revolution turned into a private and national issue. The characteristic of YouTube as an imperfect database and as a time-based archive used retrospectively by Tunisian and non-Tunisian spectators online and offline show its historical function over Facebook when it comes to issues such as preservation and recirculation of footage. Furthermore, whereas the digital vernacular clips shot between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's flight are almost the only documentation materials available of this early phase of the revolution, I stress that for the sake of authenticity, institutional archiving generates a hierarchical order among the visual heritage of citizens' films; it attributes reliability to the offline collection of the same data, while, as a historiographic tool, it gives to YouTube a subsidiary position.

In Chapter 6, I will explore the outcomes of the empirical research concerning the reuse and recombination of clips as archival, found footage in forms of unitary narratives such as moving images, for example, documentaries and video mash-ups. As I showed in Chapter 4, I intentionally overlook the distinctions between different forms of offline or online moving image products. Indeed, the central aspect concerns the formal and conceptual modes in which the creators-spectators recombine clips downloaded from social media, and predominantly from YouTube, in order to react to the revolutionary phase post-January 14, 2011, while they reattribute meanings to the clips shot during the early stages of the revolution. The outcomes from the samples analyzed in Chapter 4 show that vernacular clips challenge the documentary form as a filmic genre. I argue that the videos turn into an aesthetic model of trustworthiness. The spectators embodied the clips, and this act takes two ambivalent directions. On the one side, I made remarks about the emulation of the style of amateur footage by directors. On the other, I noted the emancipation from the hypervisibility of the clips

and their legacy. Alternatively, samples of moving images unveil hidden or untold issues relating to current politics in the country or the transitional justice that has come to light, which turn visible only via the fiction outlined by these filmic narratives. In parallel, the phenomenon of amateur film-making during the revolution appears less popular than I expected. This aspect, together with findings that will emerge in the last chapter concerning the volume of online activity of users during the early phase of the upheaval, change my assumptions concerning the terms of the equation between social media and Tunisian revolution.

In the final section, Chapter 7, I will focus on cultural memory, and specifically, on the outcomes of the empirical research that through interviews and the focus group explore individual and collective memory as a form of storytelling enacted by the spectator. I argue that through what the subject remembers—the corpus of audiovisual testimonies recalled by the subjects interviewed and their mode of remembering (by way of the montage of images, digitally and physically mediated experiences, and emotional phenomena)—two results come up. First, what persisting representations, among many, remain vivid over time, and why. Second, what new stories of the revolution stem from the subjects' reconstructions and narrations seven years later January 14, 2011. Within this frame, I will give an account of the influence of the clips, as digital-memory objects, or as I called them "digital objects of connective memory," have over modes of remembering. Furthermore, I will outline the limits and boundaries of the definition of these "digital objects of connective memory."

By means of this study, I observe the contradictions of the post-January 14, 2011 period in Tunisia; between the call to remember and the desire of looking beyond the events of 2010 to 2011, between frustration and hope, and between the urgency of archiving and the need of imagining the future.

Chapter 1

Problematizing Social Media as Digital Archives: A Focus on YouTube and Facebook

1.1 Preliminary Questions

Social media can be defined as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content,"[4] state scholars Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein. "Since at least 2004, the internet, and more specifically the web, has witnessed a notorious and controversial shift away from the model of the static web page toward a social web or Web 2.0 model where the possibilities of interaction by users have multiplied," claim media theorists Tiziana Terranova and Joan Donovan. "For example, it has become substantially easier for a layperson to publish and share texts, images, and sounds. A new topology of distribution of information has emerged based in 'real' social networks, but also enhanced by casual and algorithmic connections,"[5] they continue. "The network is the actual shape of the social,"[6] states media theorist Geert Lovink, and the network is precisely what distinguishes informal media from formal or traditional ones, such as television and radio.

The relevance and impact of social networks in people's lives is undeniable and evident. The obsessive use of these platforms to post and share videos, photos, comments, directly or indirectly, and to interact with other individuals online, confirms the deep penetration of social media in the lives and habits of users. Social networks have caused a radical change in global society and have transformed how individuals see and present themselves and their life experiences, expose themselves to others, and connect to the world. In turn, the massive amount of data shared by users—in the form of visual and textual materials and metadata: likes, shares, emojis, and views—has become a gold mine for companies and advertisers. The existence, value, circulation, and obliteration of this excessive volume of user-generated content over time have increasingly become a matter of interest to researchers due to the widespread nature of social media, especially because knowledge about how the algorithms

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[4] Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, "Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media," *Business Horizons* 53, no. 1 (February 2010): 60, accessed March 12, 2017, http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0007681309001232#sec4.1.3.

[5] Tiziana Terranova and Joan Donovan, "Occupy Social Networks: The Paradoxes of Corporate Social Media for Networked Social Movements," in *"Unlike Us" Reader: Social Media Monopolies and Their Alternatives*, ed. Geert Lovink and Miriam Rasch (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2013), 297.

[6] Geert Lovink, "What Is the Social in Social Media?," *e-flux Journal*, no. 40 (December 2012): 3, accessed April 3, 2017, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/40/60272/what-is-the-social-in-social-media/.

used by companies functioned and the infrastructural mechanisms that determined the visibility of images and their disappearance from circulation were kept as corporate secrets for such a long time.

As a direct consequence of the increasing understanding of profit-oriented platforms and the commercial exploitation of the behavior of users, a series of inquiries have emerged concerning the accumulation and conservation of user-generated content for the platforms in question. For instance, can social media safely store audiovisual and textual materials, or is it possible to organize their collections for conservation and archiving? And if so, by what criteria? Furthermore, in what capacity does the infrastructure of the platforms and their algorithms contribute to creating and shaping individual and collective memory about personal and historical anecdotes? In fact, definitions of social media have never mentioned subjects about the conservation of these platforms, but rather, present their vocation as the transmission of content. Therefore, the grounding questions revolve around if and why it makes sense to interrogate social media as repositories. And if so, repositories of what? In what ways do social networks respond to the definition of an archive? Furthermore, what exactly is a digital archive, and in what aspects does it differ from an analog one?

In my study, I will focus specifically on two social networks, YouTube and Facebook. I will explore their main characteristics and how they fit within the definition of digital archives, or conversely, what contradictions emerge in relation to the definitions and uses of these tools. As a second layer of my investigation, I will focus on the objects of the archives, that is, the vernacular videos of the twenty-nine days of the Tunisian revolution that occurred from 2010 to 2011, questioning whether and in what ways social media is or can be considered as repositories of these visual testimonies post-January 14, 2011. I will reflect therefore on the influence of social media and on the preservation of its materials and further transmission. These questions are at the center of the current debate and touch on a broad terrain of exploration that is currently very much discussed within the fields of visual culture, media, memory, and affect studies, to name a few. The tasks of "Keeping track, recording, retrieving, stockpiling, archiving, backing-up, and saving are deferring one of our greatest fears of this century: information loss,"[7] says media theorist Joanne Garde-Hansen.

As scholar Diana Taylor argues, the new digital era is obsessed with the archive as a metaphor and symptom. The term archive has become interchangeable with inventory, collection, and museum, while archiving is a synonym for uploading, saving, and so on. Accuracy, authenticity, expertise, and truth are underwritten by faith in the object found in the archive. However, digital archive practices can be profoundly anti-archive, as the politics of the

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[7] Joanne Garde-Hansen, *Media and Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 71 quoted in Joanne, Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins, and Anna Reading, *Save As . . . Digital Memories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 5.

archive is not the politics of the digital. We have the need to store not only objects but also ways of thinking and knowing, affect, emotions, and processes, including the way we select, transmit, and preserve. The reason why the archive has become such a contested subject in the digital age might be due to the fact that technologies offer a twenty-first-century update to Marx's promise that the individual can control the production and circulation of information.[8] It seems that archive fever or archive-mania has been growing proportionally with the exponential increase in the quantity and typology of repositories and platforms online, as well as the massive volume of visual material and accounts that exceed the possibilities of being seen by any one individual.

Jasmina Metwali and Philip Risz, artists and members of the former collective Mosireen,[9] raise a crucial reflection concerning the reasons that led to the necessity of a grassroots archive comprised of amateur visual documentation produced by citizens during the aftermath of the uprisings that shook North Africa and the Middle East from 2010 to 2011. Their questions, "What do we expect from an archive?" and "When is a repository urgent?"[10] are imperative in reconsiderations of alternative forms to institutional archives and help to redefine the figures and the roles of those in charge of writing chronicles, which then influences the ways in which we construct collective memory. Understanding in-depth the nature, characteristics, and driving rules of the digital platforms where the citizen-videos shot by "locals," that is, amateur film-makers during the early twenty-nine days of the Tunisian revolution, are disseminated, stored, liked or disliked, commented on, or deleted is crucial in this research. This initial comprehension will pave the way for unfolding the subject of digital archives and mediated memories, a continued focus of this and the following chapters.

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[8] Diana Taylor, "Save as … Memory and the Archive in the Age of Digital Technology," filmed September 30, 2010 at The Doreen B. Townsend, Center for the Humanities, University of California, Berkeley, video-recorded lecture, 1:09:52, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGurF1Rfj0U.

[9] Mosireen is a non-profit media collective in Cairo, born out of the explosion of citizen media and cultural activism in Egypt during the revolution. Mosireen worked intensively for three years (from 2011 to 2014) in Cairo and other cities in Egypt, both to train citizen journalists and to create an archive for amateur videos of the Egyptian revolution. Today, Mosireen no longer exists, but the archive of videos that it built is reorganized under the name 858.ma.

[10] These questions came up during the lecture held by Jasmina Metwaly and Philip Risz, titled "Performing Moments of an Archive," on occasion of their participation to the conference "Archival Constellation" as part of Forum Expanded Think Film No. 5, at silent green Kulturquartier, Berlin, February 16, 2017. See http://www.arsenal-berlin.de/en/print/berlinale-forum/program-forum-expanded/forum-expanded-think-film-no-5.html.

1.2 YouTube as a Web-Video Sharing Platform: An Overview of Its History, Structure, and Function

I start by tracing the nature and the functioning rules and structure of YouTube, a web-sharing platform that emerged in the United States in 2005. YouTube was invented by Steve Chen, Chad Hurley, and Jawed Karim, three former employees of the American e-commerce company PayPal, with the intention to either create "a video version of an online dating service"[11] or to enact "the idea that ordinary people could share their 'home' movies."[12] "Broadcast Yourself"—the initial slogan of YouTube—rapidly exploded as an extraordinary social and cultural phenomenon. This is why after a failed attempt at launching a similar video service in 2005, the American search engine company Google Inc. bought YouTube in 2006 for US$1.65 billion and operated the newly acquired site as one of its subsidiaries. According to web-traffic analysis company Alexa Internet Inc., in April 2017 YouTube was ranked the second most popular website in the world.

Alongside other social media platforms today, YouTube represents a controversial and continually changing product and cultural subject that responds to several definitions, sometimes integrated with each other, while at other times contradicting each other. It is a shared space governed by a clear business-oriented mission where individuals, communities, and corporate interests converge and interlace in complex and unequal relationships of power. YouTube is undoubtedly a product of our time, a result of the most advanced form of capitalism that we are experiencing today, that is, biocapitalism, a term coined by sociologist Vanni Codeluppi[13] in 2008. As a virtual space that records 1.5 billion logged-in users[14] who share hours of their private stories, YouTube has brought incontrovertible and ongoing changes to the conditions of how we perceive and represent ourselves, and our environment.

By definition, "YouTube would appear to be a medium insofar as it remediates TV," states Richard Grusin;[15] it is a user-generated content platform; it is a database, as suggested

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[11] "YouTube*,"* Wikipedia, accessed March 15, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YouTube.

[12] Anna Rita Popoli, "Are Google's Executives Liable for Uploaded Videos? The Italian Case," in *Social Media and Social Movements: The Transformation of Communication Patterns,* ed. Barış Çoban (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 193.

[13] Vanni Codeluppi, *Il Biocapitalismo: Verso lo Sfruttamento Integrale di Corpi, Cervelli ed Emozioni* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008).

[14] Danny Vena, "The 10 Most Popular Social-Media Networks (Bet You Haven't Heard of No. 5)," *The Motley Fool*, September 2, 2017, https://www.fool.com/investing/2017/09/04/the-10-most-popular-social-media-networks-bet-you.aspx.

[15] Richard Grusin, "YouTube at the End of the New Media*,"* in *The YouTube Reader*, ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 61. It is worthwhile to stress that scholars Richard Grusin and Jay David Bolter use the term "remediation" in a specific way. "Remediation" is the

by Geert Lovink;[16] it is a "hybrid system of information management,"[17] claim Frank Kessler and Mirko Tobias Schäfer; it is "a laboratory registering [the] behavior [of users],"[18] say Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau; it is an archive,[19] states Henry Jenkins; and it is a social network and an ideal form of repository,[20] claims Rick Prelinger. All these descriptions by media theorists not only give an account of the complexity of the subject of YouTube as a topic of research, they also show the slippery nature of the web-sharing platform and the insufficiency of ascribing to it one single meaning.

User-friendly characteristics such as free and open access to the medium for subscribed and unsubscribed users has brought great success to YouTube as a user-generated platform. This has occurred through the services it has offered to its community, which include wide bandwidth, lack of filters for uploaded material (apart from restrictions related to graphic, offensive, racist, and terrorist-related content), the possibility for users to embed videos in other web pages and reuse them, as well as the (temporary) conservation in the cloud of these visual accounts.

Of course, online videos existed before YouTube, but uploading, managing, sharing, and watching them was more difficult due to a lack of an easy-to-use integrated platform.[21] By 2015, the site had made use of HTML5 video as standard in Chrome, Internet Explorer 11,

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process according to which" new visual media achieve their cultural significance precisely by paying homage to, rivaling, and refashioning such earlier media as perspective painting, photography, film, and television." See Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin, *Remediation Understanding New Media* (Cambridge MA,The MIT Press, 2000). I will use the term according to this definition throughout my study.

[16] Geert Lovink, "The Art of Watching Databases: Introduction to the Video Vortex Reader," in *The Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, ed. Geert Lovink, Sabine Niederer (Amsterdam, Institute of Network Culture, 2008).

[17] Frank Kessler and Mirko Tobias Schäfer, "Navigating YouTube: Constituting a Hybrid Information Management System," in *The YouTube Reader*, ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 287.

[18] Pelle Snickars, Patrick Vonderau, "Introduction," in *The YouTube Reader*, ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 16.

[19] See Henry Jenkins, "Nine Propositions Towards a Cultural Theory of YouTube," in *Confessions of an Acan-Fan*, May 27, 2007 http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/05/9_propositions_towards_a_cultu.html; Robert W. Gehl, "YouTube as Archive: Who will Curate this Digital Wunderkammer?," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12, no.1, (2009): 43-60, DOI: 10.1177/1367877908098854; Michael Strangelove, *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010)

[20] Rick Prelinger, "The Appearance of Archives," in *The YouTube Reader*, ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009).

[21] Xu Cheng, Cameron Dale, Jiangchuan Liu, "Understanding the Characteristics of Internet Short Video Sharing: YouTube as a Case Study," *eprint arXiv:0707.3670* (July 25, 2007), https://arxiv.org/pdf/0707.3670.pdf.

Safari 8, and in beta versions of Firefox, as this allowed it to be "used in smart TVs and other streaming devices and it had benefits that 'extend beyond web browsers.'"[22]

Access to YouTube's content is extremely easy: to watch a video, a user does not need to register to the site, unlike other social networks. However, in order to broadcast content, the creation of an account is compulsory. YouTube allows registered users to upload, view, rate, share, add to favorites, report and comment on videos, and subscribe to other users. Subscribed users can decide whether to publish their videos publicly or privately (whereas only invited viewers can watch them). Any subscriber can upload visual material of up to fifteen minutes in length, and by 2016, the platform was able to support HDR resolution videos.[23] Scholars Jiangchuan Lui, Xu Cheng, and Cameron Dale have described the platform as containing the following characteristics: "Each video contains the following intuitive meta-data: user who uploaded it, date when it was uploaded, category, length, number of views, number of ratings, number of comments, a list of related videos. [These latter characteristics] are links to other videos that have a similar title, description, or tags, all of which are chosen by the uploader. A video can have hundreds of related videos but the webpage only shows at most 20 at once."[24] YouTube also offers users the ability to view its videos on web pages outside their website. Each YouTube video is accompanied by HTML code that can be used to embed it on any page on the web. Embedding, rating, commenting, and response posting are all options that can be disabled by the video owner. YouTube does not usually offer a download link for its videos, especially the commercial ones, and it intends videos to be viewed through its website interface. Nevertheless, "users can easily share videos by emailing links to them, embedding them on web pages, or in blogs.[25] Of course, this increases the circulation of videos exponentially. Furthermore, "users can also rate and comment on videos, bringing new social aspects to the viewing of videos. Consequently, popular videos can rise to the top in a very organic fashion. The existing social network on YouTube further enables communities and groups. Videos are no longer independent from each other, and neither are users. This has substantially contributed to the success of YouTube and similar sites."[26]

In looking at YouTube as a hybrid media space where commercial, amateur, governmental, non-profit, educational, activist, and other players interact with each other in ever more complex ways, Henry Jenkins has coined the term "convergence of culture," which exemplifies the collaboration between corporate and grassroots media in producing and

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[22] Rich McCormick, "YouTube drops Flash for HTML5 video as default," *The Verge*, January 27, 2015 https://www.theverge.com/2015/1/27/7926001/youtube-drops-flash-for-html5-video-default.

[23] "YouTube*,"* Wikipedia.

[24] Cheng, Dale, Liu, "Understanding the Characteristics of Internet Short Video Sharing: YouTube as a Case Study," 2.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

circulating media content. On the one hand, the large amount of channels and videos uploaded by ordinary users, split into several sub-genres (that will be discussed later), somehow constitute the most personal typology of content. On the other hand, there is the branded or corporate content, posted by mass-media broadcast channels, music, and film and entertainment industries,[27]and over time we have become accustomed to the increasing use of video clips by these outlets. From the perspective of the news, YouTube has revealed itself to be an important platform used by mass-media broadcast channels to double their coverage in the online sphere, while they also exploit material found on the web, shot by anonymous sources, to integrate into their news agenda. Over the years, the use of YouTube by these outlets has affected not only the way users become informed, but it has also changed the value and reliability of grassroots clips, which now enter the sphere of mass-media information, although they constitute largely unverified (and non-professional) footage. Lastly, advertisements over time have been deployed through different marketing strategies in order to make them effective.

Although investors had initially made a deliberate decision not to allow advertising as part of the site (funding was provided by Sequoia Capital, which had previously funded Apple, Google, and other Silicon Valley companies), when Google bought YouTube, it showed interest in developing the site's potential for attracting advertising revenue.[28] Monetizing became necessary not only because YouTube is and fully behaves as an enterprise, but as economists like Hal Varian argue, partnering with other companies could allow YouTube to continue giving its services to users for free.[29]

1.2.1 Algorithm Politics: WatchTime and Recommendation Systems

One of the most debated constituent parts of YouTube and all other social media is the *algorithm*, an internal series of procedures that contribute to the organization of content on the platform. This covers a crucial role, for it is the algorithm that is considered responsible for the circulation, persistence, and visibility of videos online. As an organization's system, the algorithm manages the functioning of the platform and influences the way content is offered to viewers.

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[27] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

[28] Janet Wasko and Mary Erickson, "The Political Economy of YouTube," in *The YouTube Reader*, ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009).

[29] Hal Varian, "A Conversation with Google's Hal Varian*,"* transcription of interview by Peter R. Orszag, Robert, *B. Menschel Economics Symposium,* February 7, 2017, https://www.cfr.org/event/conversation-googles-hal-varian.

In February 2018, an investigation conducted by the *Guardian* newspaper in collaboration with Guillaume Chaslot, a former software employee at Google, revealed and dramatically made evident how YouTube's recommendation algorithm promotes divisive clips and conspiracy videos with the effect of influencing user choices and opinions.[30] Aside from the astonishing revelations about the role played by the platform in affecting the 2016 presidential election results in the United States, one of the key points this investigation made public was the influence of Watch Time, the primary metric on which the algorithm's functioning is based.[31]

Before that moment, very little was known about Watch Time or the structural changes implemented over time by the company. By 2012 system-wide changes to the website were made to encourage people to spend more time watching, interacting, and sharing with the community. In 2012, Eric Meyerson, head of creator marketing communications at YouTube, stated: "Our video discovery features were previously designed to drive *views*. This rewarded videos that were successful at attracting clicks, rather than the videos that actually kept viewers engaged. […] Now when we suggest videos, we focus on those that increase the amount of time that the viewer will spend watching videos on YouTube, not only on the next view, but also successive views thereafter."[32] The reason for the shift at that time was mainly related to YouTube's interest in reaching its predominant goal of becoming the most important medium of its time and fulfilling the same iconicity that television once did.

Of course, YouTube's goal to be as popular as television, in addition to the advantages of offering content "on demand," influenced the functionalities the platform gave to its users: for example, the name of the website embeds the word "tube," which refers to the cathode tube of television, "channels" are the playlists organized by subscribers, and the "recommendations" section (found in the Home page) functions as a broadcast but with a substantial difference that the video is produced by users instead of by the company. From an aesthetic point of view, the screen format of videos produced is horizontal, in opposition to videos on other social media platforms, such as Instagram for instance, which are shot in a vertical format in reference to the technological device of the smartphone.

And how does YouTube try to reach its goal? It does this by making users aware of their power in attracting other viewers, keeping them glued to the platform, and engaging them. YouTube apparently reiterates the cruciality of the "you"—as prosumer, curator, filter, interpreter, storyteller—embodied by the content's consumer-generator.

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[30] See Lewis Paul, and Erin McCormick, "How an Ex-YouTube Insider Investigated Its Secret Algorithm," *Guardian*, February 2, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/feb/02/youtube-algorithm-election-clinton-trump-guillaume-chaslot for a more detailed reading.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Eric Meyerson, "YouTube Now: Why We Focus on Watch Time," *YouTube Creator Blog*, August 10, 2012, https://youtube-creators.googleblog.com/2012/08/youtube-now-why-we-focus-on-watch-time.html.

Over the years video publishers have been driven by YouTube to develop a series of skills and expertise for the improvement of their channel and videos, and through YouTube Analytics and YouTube Creators, for controlling a series of functions related to the performance of their products.[33] Alongside the engagement requested of subscribers for the creation of content able to garner thousands of views, YouTube offers a recommendation system. On their Home page, a series of recommended videos and channels are presented alongside the Watch It Again and Recently Uploaded sections. As reported in the online page, "YouTube, Lesson: Search and Discovery on YouTube," "YouTube tries to match each viewer to the videos they are most likely to watch and enjoy. With over 400 hours of video uploaded every minute, that can be a challenge." YouTube's recommendation systems provide a real-time feedback loop to cater to each viewer and their varying interests. It learns from over eighty billion instances of feedback from the audience daily to understand how to serve the right videos to the right viewers at the right time. "Our goal is to get people to watch more videos that they enjoy so that they come back to YouTube regularly. […] Our systems have no opinion about what type of video you make, and doesn't favor any particular format." Rather, they try their best to follow the audience by paying attention to things like what they watch, what they don't watch, how much time they spend watching, likes and dislikes, and "not interested" feedback. YouTube's pages further states, "Instead of worrying about what the algorithm 'likes,' it is better to focus on what your audience likes instead. If you do that and people watch, the algorithm will follow."[34]

Therefore, if the user content-generator is able to catch the interest of other viewers and translate this into watching activity, the algorithm records these results. As a consequence, it responds through the recommendation system, proposing in the Home page a selection of all content that successfully fits its criteria. Among the algorithm's several variables, Time, and in particular Watch Time, predominates and is of highest interest. Although initially it seemed that the time devoted by the onlooker regarding the consumption of videos was proportional to the viral dissemination of clips, further updates of the website's

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[33] All the information found throughout several pages of YouTube's website are written for and directed at "you," the creator.

[34] On YouTube's web page "Lesson: Search and Discovery on YouTube," a clear statement explains that "The algorithm prioritizes videos that lead to longer overall watch time or viewing sessions, rather than videos that get more clicks. If viewers watch your (the creator) videos beyond the first click, those videos are likely to be suggested more often. The idea behind the algorithm is that viewers can see more enjoyable content suggested to them, and creators can cultivate more engaged audiences. […] Watch Time is the amount of time that a viewer has watched a video. It can give you (i.e., the creator) a sense of what content viewers actually watch (as opposed to videos that they click on and then abandon)." YouTube, "Lesson: Search and Discovery on YouTube," accessed November 15, 2017, https://creatoracademy.youtube.com/page/lesson/discovery?hl=en#strategies-zippy-link-1.

pages and research conducted by audience developers such as Matt Gielen made clear that "Watch Time corresponds to Views x Average View Duration," so "when YouTube says *Watch Time* it doesn't actually mean Minutes Watched. […] What YouTube really means by *Watch Time* is this: How often and for how long do your videos bring people to YouTube and keep them there?" Furthermore, "there are four additional metrics beyond Views and Average View Duration that are factored into Watch Time: Session Starts: how many individual YouTube viewing sessions your videos create. Session Duration: the total amount of time someone spends watching YouTube as a platform (not just your videos and channel) and how that relates to your videos. Session Ends: how many YouTube viewing sessions your videos end (i.e., when viewers click off YouTube). Upload Frequency: how often you're uploading videos."[35]

The centrality of Watch Time—alongside hundreds of features not revealed—was made even more evident in the paper presented in September 2016 in Boston by Paul Covington, Jay Adams, and Embre Sargin, three senior software engineers at Google, titled "Deep Neural Networks for YouTube Recommendations."[36] The publication of this paper is considered revolutionary as, for the first time, Google illustrated how the entire YouTube recommendations algorithm works, and it tried to give an answer to the question of why and how a video is successful.[37] Gielen assumes that the reason that Google's engineers revealed details about the functioning of the algorithm—kept hidden for years—is that between the end of 2016 and 2017, YouTube had changed it significantly. This radical modification might explain why at one point YouTube was ready to disclose the functioning of the old model. From the paper, it emerges that Watch Time and the recommendation system seem to cooperate as a coherent mechanism. While the former captures the engagement of the viewer, YouTube responds to the input given by Watch Time by suggesting other videos, with the attempt to foresee further interest or searches by the viewer. This system seems to work much more effectively to reach YouTube purposes. Indeed, as Covington, Adams and Sargin claim, "Machine learning systems often exhibit an implicit bias towards the past because they are trained to predict the future behavior from historical examples."[38]

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[35] At that time, Gielen added an important disclaimer to his analysis regarding the reliability of the information he was spreading. Admitting that there was not much out officially from YouTube at that time, he rather confirmed that he repeatedly heard YouTube personnel talking about these additional metrics and their variations.

[36] Paul Covington, Jay Adams, and Emre Sargin, "Deep Neural Networks for YouTube Recommendations," Conference paper, at RecSys, Boston, MA, September 16, 2016, http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2959100.2959190.

[37] This paper has been commented and elaborated upon by Gielen in an article dated February 2017, and in another that followed on June 22, 2017.

[38] Covington, Adams, Sargin, "Deep Neural Networks for YouTube Recommendations," 3.

In the paper, the three Google engineers continue by stating that they "observe that the most important signals are those that describe a user's previous interaction with the item itself and other similar items, matching others' experience in ranking ads. As an example, consider the user's past history with the channel that uploaded the video being scored—how many videos has the user watched from this channel? When was the last time the user watched a video on this topic? These continuous features describing past user actions on related items are particularly powerful because they generalize well across disparate items."[39]

Therefore, YouTube tries to predict the expected time of consumption of contents and use of the platform, proposing recommended videos that, if viewed, send back data into the neural network. In this way, the algorithm can use that data for future viewers. But, when videos offered are not clicked, then they probably won't be shown again to that viewer, nor to the same typology of user. According to these considerations, it seems surprising that YouTube is interested in homogenizing its audience instead of guaranteeing its diversity and peculiarities. Might this be a primary goal or a collateral effect of its attempts to anticipate people's desire for experiences?

According to the biocapitalist system typical of our current society, YouTube's exploitation of people's lives and its strategy concerning the observation of time spent by consumers looking at products, alongside all other collateral behaviors, completely fits into well-rooted marketing tactics. As artist, geographer and scholar Trevor Paglen states, "In the consumer sphere, outfits like Euclid Analytics and Real Eyes, among many others, install cameras in malls and department stores to track the motion of people through these spaces with software designed to identify who is looking at what for how long, and to track facial expression to discern the mood and emotional state of the humans they are observing."[40] Therefore, in the logic of "surveillance capitalism" as defined by scholar and author Shoshana Zuboff as the "emergent logic of accumulation in the networked sphere,"[41] YouTube, like other social networks, works as an intermediary between users and their current and predictable personalities and life as sources for data for YouTube's partner companies, who are interested in absorbing them without any reciprocities. Therefore, Zuboff continues by stating that "subjectivities are converted into objects that repurpose the subjective for commodification. Individual users' meanings are of no interest to Google or other firms in this chain. In this way, the methods of production of 'big data' from small data and the ways in which 'big data' are valued reflect the formal indifference that characterizes the firm's relationship to its populations

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[39] Covington, Adams, Sargin, "Deep Neural Networks for YouTube Recommendations," 6.

[40] Trevor Paglen, "Invisible Images (Your Pictures are Looking at You)," *The New Inquiry*, December 8, 2016, 4, https://thenewinquiry.com/invisible-images-your-pictures-are-looking-at-you/.

[41] Shoshana Zuboff, "Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization," *Journal of Information Technology*, no. 30 (2015): 75, doi:10.1057/jit.2015.5.

of 'users.' Populations are the sources from which data extraction proceeds and are the ultimate targets of the utilities such data produce."[42]

The analyses of the structural functioning of the platform and the understanding of its inner goals allows us to look at YouTube with more aware and attentive eyes, far from the fascination that characterized the explorations of the platform a few years after its launch. Before Chaslot's revelations, all details concerning the functioning of YouTube's algorithm were kept hidden and the writing of this paragraph required long and accurate research through specialized literature, circulating among and written only for technology enthusiasts. Conversely, since 2018, the effects of the recommendation's system on the creation and consumption of content, the mode of addressing content to targeted audiences in order to increase the watching time and the subsumption of data, have progressively become much clearer and well known. Similarly, the way the algorithm links apparently disconnected content, feeding the interest of a certain category of users and creating the so called effect of the "rabbit hole" show how dangerous the system can be when, for example, simple family clips of kids in bathing costumes playing in swimming pools are associated clip-by-clip with others, which move progressively into inappropriate and more explicit sexual content. The millions of views that these videos are able to meet depend on the interest of a wider pool of users whose satisfaction is fed by content that increasingly becomes more shocking, disgusting, or explicit.[43]

The attention devoted by mainstream media today to these extremely important issues has grown widely. The effect has been a positive increase in information awareness and understanding about the nature and risks of these tools. Although this is currently a much-debated topic, and additional considerations on this matter would exceed my area of research, I consider it necessary to give an insight into them in order to outline the dark aspects users confront and are unconsciously fed on a daily basis. It is also relevant to contextualizing my upcoming considerations about preservation and memory.

In a recent article, Chaslot has stressed the engagement of the audience as the only means for improving the system that YouTube has employed in order to boost its profits, along with those of its advertisers.[44] I will return to these remarks about the responsibility of the users online and his or her role as a prosumer in the next sections and extensively in Chapter 3, where these issues will be broadly developed and expanded.

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[42] Zuboff, "Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization," 79.

[43] Max Fisher, Amanda Taub, "On YouTube's Digital Playground, an Open Gate for Pedophiles," *The New York Times*, June 3, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/03/world/americas/youtube-pedophiles.html.

[44] Guillaume Chaslot, "The Toxic Potential of YouTube's Feedback Loop*," Wired*, July 7, 2019, https://www.wired.com/story/the-toxic-potential-of-youtubes-feedback-loop/.

1.3 Facebook as the Most Popular Social Network: An Overview of Its History and Functioning

To begin, Facebook was founded in February 2004 in the United States. Launched by then-Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg together with co-founders Dustin Moskovitz, Chris Hughes, and Eduardo Saverin, it was born as a directory service featuring photos and personal information of the Harvard student body. Its original name was TheFacebook, and it was initially only available for Harvard students. The service soon expanded to other universities, such as Columbia, Stanford, Yale, and later, all the Ivy League colleges. In 2005, the name of the company changed to Facebook (without "the"). From 2006, it became available to high-school pupils and global users aged thirteen and above.[45] Facebook has added several other services to its core functionality over time, as is evidenced by its corporate acquisitions of WhatsApp, Instagram, Oculus, and GrokStyle. Furthermore, it developed independently operated apps, services, and brands such as Facebook Messenger (messaging app and platform), Facebook Watch (video-on-demand service), and Facebook Portal (brand of smart displays and videophones).

With 2.1 billion active monthly users as of the second quarter of 2017, Facebook, Inc. is, as sociologist Christian Fuchs writes, the biggest and "the most popular social networking site (SNS) [in the world]."[46] In defining an SNS, Fuchs goes on to say that "SNSs are web-based platforms that integrate different media, information and communication technologies that allow at least the generation of profiles that display information describing the users, the display of connections (connection list), the establishment of connections between users displayed on their connection lists, and communication between users."[47]

When one considers the worldwide impact of the service, "Facebook is the largest social network site in the United States and Europe, with the highest penetration among Internet users,"[48] writes media theorist José van Dijck. But, its diffusion is also high in non-Western countries.[49] Indeed, "as of October 2018, [outside the United States,] India and

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[45] Jessica Clement, "Number of Facebook Users Worldwide 2008–2019," *Statista,* August, 22, 2019 https://www.statista.com/topics/5323/facebook-usage-in-the-united-states/.

[46] Christian Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction* (Washington, DC: Sage, 2014), 428, quoted in Christian Fuchs, "Social Networking Sites and the Surveillance Society: A Critical Case Study of the Usage of studiVZ, Facebook, and MySpace by Students in Salzburg in the Context of Electronic Surveillance," Salzburg/Vienna: Research Group UTI, 2009.

[47] Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction,* 428.

[48] van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, 110.

[49] Penetration rates correspond to 41.7% in Europe, and 72.4% in North-America. "Facebook Penetration Rate by world geographic regions—June 2017," Internet World Stats, accessed September 9, 2019, https://internetworldstats.com/facebook.htm. We see that Asia registers a penetration of 17.7% and Africa of

Indonesia rank first in terms of Facebook user base size."[50] This popularity is also because, in areas where bandwidth is limited, this technical restriction does not prevent users from posting, uploading photos and videos, and sharing on the platform. Such an infrastructural aspect is one of the grounding factors that brought not only a broader diffusion of the service and a more extensive geographical penetration compared to YouTube, but it also contributed to the misunderstanding that Facebook is actually the internet.

"Facebook's mission is to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together. People use our products to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them,"[51] states the company website. To get and stay connected, as well as to become well-connected[52] are the essential characteristics that decreed the platform's success among users all over the world. As the Introduction section in the Community Standards page of the platform claims, "Every day, people come to Facebook to share their stories, see the world through the eyes of others, and connect with friends and causes."[53]

The preservation and protection of the community around the platform is of crucial importance, an aspect that Facebook is conscientious of. On the same page mentioned above, it reports that "the goal of our Community Standards is to encourage expression and create a safe environment." The policies of the company are rooted in "Safety: People need to feel safe in order to build community. […] Voice: Our mission is all about embracing diverse views […]. Equity: Our community is global and diverse. […] Everyone on Facebook plays a part in keeping the platform safe and respectful. We ask people to share responsibly and to let us know when they see something that may violate our Community Standards. […] We also give people the option to block, unfollow, or hide people and posts, so that they can control their own experience on Facebook."[54] Similarly to YouTube, Facebook's policy and apparent mission clash with the reality of things when, for instance, the algorithm responsible for opinion manipulation increases hate speech, racism, alt-right extremism, and so on.

12.9%, whereas countries such as Angola and Liberia register a peak over 80% of penetration rate, followed by Mauritius (55.1%), Tunisia (54.9%), Libya (53%3) and Algeria (44%). "Facebook, Subscriber Stats as of June 30, 2017," Internet World Stats, accessed September 9, 2019, https://internetworldstats.com/facebook.htm.

[50] Clement, "Number of Facebook Users Worldwide 2008–2019."

[51] "Facebook Newsroom," Facebook corporate website, accessed August 22, 2019, https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/.

[52] Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*.

[53] "Introduction," Facebook Community Standards webpage, accessed August 22, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/.

[54] Ibid.

Concerning the interaction of users on the platform, similarly to YouTube, Facebook users have to register and create a personal profile to access the site, exchange with other users, and add them as friends. Facebook's configuration and interface is centered around the homepage field at the top of the page entitled Search. The button allows people to look for contacts. It is worthwhile to remark that, while what one searches for on Facebook might appear redundant, it is of the highest importance, as it is the characteristic that ultimately distinguishes Facebook from YouTube. In fact, the primary content of Zuckerberg's platform is the user, and consequently, his or her daily life that he or she shares online. Users are the objects searched for. This difference is of crucial relevance and will be a subject of discussion in Chapter 5, when the interviewees will show the limits of the search function in relation to my case study. Next to Search, the user finds his or her name, which allows access to his or her page; there are two other buttons: Home and Create (pages, groups, etc.). Home corresponds to the Wall, the display that users employ for communicating and sharing content with other friends.

The platform addresses users with the direct question, "What's on your mind, [...]?" This is followed by "Create post," which seeks an immediate contact with the user and invites him or her to write status updates or upload texts, photos, videos, or links to other pages. In each user's profile, one can find the following options of Timeline, About, Friends, Photos, Archive, and More, located below the picture's profile. The Timeline was created in 2012, and it is a reverse-chronological feed of user's posts, including status updates, photos, interactions with apps and events. When Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg presented the feature, he described it as a way to "share the story of your life on a single page." The advantage of the Timeline is that it allows the user "to post about stories," rather than relying completely on a chronology for all shared content and Facebook activity. These stories[55] to which Zuckerberg refers "can be starred or hidden, and there are online privacy controls to check exactly who sees what. Apps will be able to hook into the Timeline as well and allow you to share things that you like to do on your personal page. Timeline is meant to be completely customizable and mobile-friendly as well."[56] The importance of this interface is considerable, especially when it comes to analyzing Facebook as a possible repository for storing or displaying memories.

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[55] The term "stories" in this context is not to be confused with "Stories" as a feature available on Facebook since March 2017. This latter function indicates "short user-generated photo and video collections that can be viewed up to two times and disappear after 24 hours" (Ash Read, "Facebook Stories: Everything You Need to Know About Facebook's Latest Feature," *Buffer Library* website, accessed Auguts 20, 2019, https://buffer.com/library/facebook-stories).

[56] Jacob Schulman, "Facebook Introduces Timeline: 'A New Way To Express Who You Are,'" *The Verge*, September 22, 2011, accessed August 20, 2019, https://www.theverge.com/2011/9/22/2515670/facebook-introduces-timeline-a-express-are.

Indeed, the term "story" applied to a chronology of posts displayed one after the other in a row seems to suggest a continuity that ties together fragmented episodes, links, and images shared by users that result from the different possibilities of rewatch them. In this way, the configuration of the interface formally and substantially changes the relationship of the user with his or her past. These considerations are of the highest relevance within my study and will be further developed in this chapter. About contains all personal information made available and accessible by the user and the list of friends. Photos gathers together Photos of You, Your Photos, and albums. Archive allows the storing of stories, meaning the updates that disappear in twenty-four hours. Facebook Stories is a service started in 2017 to imitate a similar feature on Snapchat and its sibling, Instagram. The section called More includes uploaded videos, film, or music, as well as television programs, sports, games, apps, and so on. Started in 2008, Facebook Pages was launched for celebrities and brands to interact with their fanbase.[57] By then, users could create group pages, which can be private or open access. "By implementing various coding technologies and interface strategies, Facebook inscribed how online social interaction should be conducted,"[58] states Van Dijck. One of these interfaces is the Timeline mentioned above. Another one implemented previously is the News Feed. Introduced in September 2006, it is the grounding feature of Facebook and is massively relevant. The News Feed selects, filters, and organizes the content that the user visualizes in her or his Home. It appears on every user's homepage, and its purpose is to show all information concerning friends, such as profile changes and upcoming events. News Feed has evolved over time. Top News (today, Top Stories) and Most Recent are the main filters that the user can set, and which can be refined by parameters in "Preferences," through which you can "take control and customize your News Feed."[59]

As van Dijck argues, "users, from the very onset, countered this steering with a mixture of compliance and resistance."[60] If they would want to react to the logic of the algorithm and its effects on the mode of accessing or consuming contents and relations among users, they would need to contend with the infrastructural rules and functioning of the platform—such a radical reaction by the user is obviously not possible, however. Concerning the topics of interaction and experience of the platforms and its contents, the implementation of the Like button is also of great importance. The command was introduced in 2010, and with it, users can interact and express their interest in companies or the posts and comments of friends in the news feed. As noted by Christian Fuchs, "Facebook advances an ideology of liking in the form of its 'Like button.' This feature is a way of connecting people, things, and ideas, and its

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[57] "Facebook," Wikipedia, accessed August 20, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook.

[58] Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, 111.

[59] "Preferences," Facebook Preferences webpage, accessed August 20, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/.

[60] Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, 111.

relevance goes beyond the possibility offered to users to express their agreement or pleasure. It is only possible to like pages and posts, but not to dislike them. Facebook wants to spread an affirmative atmosphere, in which people only agree and do not disagree or express discontent and disagreement."[61] This is an aspect that the scholar sees directly linked with the negative effect a dislike can create on a clients advertising on the platform. As van Dijck states, "Facebook records any user's presence on a site with a 'Like' button, including nonmembers and logged out users; a Like box allows Facebook to trace how many users and which of their friends have pushed the button. The visible part of the interface calls attention to user-to-user interaction, suggesting that information stays within the first meaning of sharing. However, invisible algorithms and protocols execute the programmed social task of 'liking.'"[62] Later, users have had the chance to refine their expression of agreement and to include a series of Reactions, which have been associated with the Like button to express disagreement. The user can indicate reactions by selecting emojis, which better communicate emotional states, such as love, hate, rage, and sadness. Alongside this, the Comment button, implemented in 2010, and the Share button, introduced around the same time, allow users to respond via text, images, links, and reposting posts to other users.

Among the several new implementations, the "Facebook Live" feature is also remarkable. Launched in 2015, the feature is the result of the implicit competition among companies, specifically with YouTube, for improving and broadening its video services to gain larger audiences. Facebook Live "brings your viewers behind-the-scenes in a way that feels different than any other form of media. It gives viewers the opportunity to seamlessly interact with publishers and build community around video."[63] It is remarkable that behind the obsessive attempt by Facebook and YouTube to provide tools for leading the users through increasingly different experiences, to keep him or her progressively more connected, is the promise of a community centered around images that circulate at great speed.

1.3.1 The Algorithm's Politics: News Feed and Interaction

As in the case of YouTube, the algorithm plays a crucial role in Facebook determining the visibility and invisibility of content on the platform, the creation of filter bubbles, and the extraction of data necessary to Facebook's company business from likes and shares. According to technology writer Will Oremus, "every time you open Facebook, one of the

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[61] Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 444.

[62] Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, 118.

[63] "Solutions," Facebook Media webpage, accessed August 22, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/facebookmedia/solutions.

world's most influential, controversial, and misunderstood algorithms springs into action. It scans and collects everything posted in the past week by each of your friends, everyone you follow, each group you belong to, and every Facebook page you've liked. For the average Facebook user, that's more than 1,500 posts. If you have several hundred friends, it could be as many as 10,000. Then, according to a closely guarded and constantly shifting formula, Facebook's news feed algorithm ranks them all in what it believes to be the precise order of how likely you are to find each post worthwhile. Most users will only ever see the top few hundred."[64]

Until 2013, the name of Facebook's news-feed formula was called EdgeRank ("Edge" being synonymous with "story"). The page "New Tool Measures Your Facebook Page EdgeRank Score" in Facebook's notes section gives an insight into its operations: "Facebook created a three-pronged algorithm that scores each and every piece of content on Facebook— whether made by a personal profile or fan page. The content with the highest EdgeRank score gets shown in the 'Top News' News Feed filter. The first is the affinity score between viewing user and edge creator: affinity is the relationship between you and each individual fan. In other words, how often a fan views and interacts with your Facebook page and individual posts. Plus, how much you engage with your fans: Facebook rewards you for building relationships. The second is weight for this edge type: typically, photos receive the highest weight, followed by videos, links, status updates, and apps. Manual posts receive more weight than posts by apps. The third is the time decay factor based on how long the edge was created: the more recent your post, the higher your EdgeRank score. A popular piece of content will stay for a longer period of time in the News Feed of your fans."[65] EdgeRank was a way of providing users a more personalized NewsFeed, but the increasing number of posts, users, and pages needed to be managed by a much more complicated system. For this reason, alongside this three-pronged algorithm, one hundred thousand other factors influence the News Feed.[66]

A colossal scandal that involved Facebook in 2017 revealed the profound influence of algorithms in creating bubbles of fake news and misinformation, which directly affected the 2016 United States presidential race. Concerning this, an interview by British investigative journalist Carole Cadwalladr with former Cambridge Analytica employee Christopher Wylie

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[64] Will Oremus, "Who Controls Your Facebook Feed," *Slate*, January 3, 2016, accessed August 20, 2019, http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/cover_story/2016/01/how_facebook_s_news_feed_algorithm_works. html?via=gdpr-consent.

[65] "New Tool Measures Your Facebook Page EdgeRank Score," Facebook website, January 31, 2011, https://www.facebook.com/notes/mari-smith/new-tool-measures-your-facebook-page-edgerank-score/10150143562051340.

[66] Matt McGee, "EdgeRank Is Dead: Facebook's News Feed Algorithm Now Has Close To 100K Weight Factors," *Marketing Land*, August 16, 2013, https://marketingland.com/edgerank-is-dead-facebooks-news-feed-algorithm-now-has-close-to-100k-weight-factors-55908.

published in 2018 in the *Guardian* newspaper leaked how it was possible for Facebook to hijack the profiles of millions of Facebook users in order to target the US electorate.[67]

As in the case of YouTube, Facebook's functioning and interaction with users is based on monitoring user experience and predictions. Oremus remarks that Facebook's algorithm "doesn't just predict whether you'll actually hit the like button on a post based on your past behavior. It also predicts whether you'll click, comment, share, or hide it, or even mark it as spam. It will predict each of these outcomes, and others, with a certain degree of confidence, then combine them all to produce a single relevancy score that's specific to both you and that post. Once every possible post in your feed has received its relevancy score, the sorting algorithm can put them in the order that you'll see them on the screen. The post you see at the top of your feed, then, has been chosen over thousands of others as the one most likely to make you laugh, cry, smile, click, like, share, or comment."[68]

Predictions are based on the degree of interaction of the user with other users' content, and the platform adjusts progressively according to the user's response. Interaction is precisely the signal generated by the human, which indicates to the algorithm that something has attracted the user's attention from a set of related practices, such as clicks, shares, likes, and virality[69] which, in turn, creates forms of connectivity as well as economic revenue. Therefore, the grounding aim of Facebook as a company is to facilitate and increase user interactions, and this is the driving force of the social network's algorithm. However, interaction concretizes in different actions, but it doesn't limit those just mentioned. It includes the time that users spend on the platform, even just reading without liking. In 2018, Facebook announced a major overhaul of their News Feed algorithm that would prioritize "'meaningful social interactions,' meaning posts by users' friends and family, over 'relevant content,' which includes viral videos or posts, or those materials shared by business and media outlets,"[70] remarks journalist Julia Carrie Wong. This shift enforces an understanding of Facebook's politics oriented toward providing users with content that mainly satisfies their expectations or overlaps with their ideas, and ultimately, increases their interaction in terms of actions and time spent on the platform. This policy of interplay increases the raising of the filter bubble, whose effect at a planetary scale has been already presented above.

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[67] Carole Cadwalladr, "'I Made Steve Bannon's Psychological Warfare tool': Meet the Data War Whistleblower," *Guardian*, March 18, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/data-war-whistleblower-christopher-wylie-faceook-nix-bannon-trump.

[68] Oremus, "Who Controls Your Facebook Feed," 6.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Julia Carrie Wong, "Facebook Overhauls News Feed in Favour of 'Meaningful Social Interactions,'" *Guardian*, January 12, 201, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/jan/11/facebook-news-feed-algorithm-overhaul-mark-zuckerberg.

1.4 Digital Archives vs. Analog Archives: The Shift of Paradigms

It is worthwhile to introduce at this stage the question of the archive, alongside definitions and inherent characteristics that distinguish analog and digital forms of repositories. I will start from this latter typology because it is the one that best fits with the objects of my observation, meaning social networks. The term digital archive includes a broad range of objects that starts from a repository of digitized documents or artifacts to a computer, because the archive occurs in the RAM memory of the computer as a precondition for any calculable process.[71] The challenge of framing the digital archive is in tracing the essential changes that the digital— intended as a technical, infrastructural, and conceptual way of creating and organizing content—provides in comparison to a traditional configuration of the archive. We have always lived in a mixed reality, virtual and sensorial,[72] and as media theorist Geert Lovink states, "there is no evidence that the world is becoming more virtual. Rather the virtual is becoming more real; it wants to penetrate and map out our real lives and social relationships."[73]

For further understanding the similarities and differences among analog and digital repositories, I begin with a definition of the archive. The essential reference for defining the fundamental traits of an archive is first and foremost the 1969 book *The Archeology of Knowledge* by Michel Foucault. Here, the French philosopher defines the archive simply as "a system of statements (whether events or things)." He comments further:

> The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events. But the archive is also that which determines that all things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity, nor do they disappear at the mercy of chance external accidents; but they are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities; that which determines that they do not withdraw at the same pace in time, but shine, as it were, like stars, some that seem close to us shining brightly from afar off, while others that are in fact close to us are already growing pale.[74]

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[71] Wolfgang Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

[72] Diana Taylor, "Save As … Memory and the Archive in the Age of Digital Technology," September 30, 2010, video-recorded lecture at The Doreen B. Townsend, Center for the Humanities, University of California, Berkeley, 1:09:52, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGurF1Rfj0U.

[73] Geert Lovink, *Networks without a Cause: A Critique of Social Media* (Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press, 2011), 13.

[74] Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 146.

Foucault states that the archive is a system that creates an order, a hierarchy, and a taxonomy according to the rules embedded in the epoch and the culture that has produced them. This aspect highlighted by the philosopher is of crucial relevance because when one thinks of the archive, one considers the objects it contains instead of the set of rules applied to select and organize the items. For this reason, "it is not possible for us to describe our own archive, since it is from within these rules that we speak, since it is that which gives to what we can say—and to itself, the object of our discourse—its modes of appearance, its forms of existence and coexistence, its system of accumulation, historicity, and disappearance."[75] If this is true, are we as users/creators currently able to decode social networks such as YouTube and Facebook as a complex product? Or conversely, does our immersion in the culture of Big Data exploitation, digital surveillance, media capitalism, and biopolitics submit us unconsciously to the dynamics of power unfolded by such a massive and all-encompassing archive of our contemporary times? What is the order created by YouTube and Facebook against accumulation, unbroken linearity, or oblivion?

In his essay *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Jacques Derrida describes the archive in the time of the breakdown of memory and in the physical space of power, attributing power to those who ensure the maintenance of the archive, and are allowed to use it. Recalling the etymology of the word, Derrida starts from the Latin meaning of *archivium*, or *archium*:

> The meaning of *archive*, its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek arkheion, initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded. The citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to possess the right make or to represent the law. On account of their publicly recognized authority, it is at their home, in that place which is their house (private house, family house, or employee's house), that official documents are filed. The archons are first of all the documents' guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives. Entrusted to such archons, these documents in effect state the law, they recall the law and call on or impose the law. To be guarded thus, in the jurisdiction of this stating the law, they needed at once a guardian and a localization. […] It is thus, in this domiciliation, in this house arrest, that archives take place. […] The archontic principle of the archive is also a principle of consignation, that is, of gathering together.[76]

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[75] Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, 147.

[76] Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," trans. Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (Summer, 1995): 10-11, accessed March 12, 2017, http://www.jstor.org/stable/465144.

Here, Derrida mentions more clearly than Foucault the need of an authority in charge of organizing, filtering, interpreting, and attributing value to content. By stressing that "there is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without an outside,"[77] the philosopher introduces the necessity to protect documents in a specific place.

The borders of Foucault's and Derrida's seminal definitions concerning place, authority, preservation, and the role that these factors play in the creation of memory are put into discussion and broadened when referring to digital archives. "Instantaneity and pervasiveness […] constitute the fundamental contradiction of the digital archive."[78] Within his media archeology (as a specific mode of media theory), theorist Wolfgang Ernst considers in his essay "The Archive as Metaphor"[79] precisely the pillars that define an archive and distinguish traditional repositories from other metaphorical archives, meaning "dynamic, temporal forms of storage in streaming media,"[80] in which the cultural deposit "is being replaced by the emphasis on transfer."[81] Conventional archival space is grounded on hardware, a physical apparatus, rather than a metaphorical corpus of memories. "Its operating system is administrative; upon its stored data narratives (history, ideology and other kinds of discursive software) are being applied only from outside,"[82] states Ernst. Furthermore, non-discursive practices also enter the archive by means of the transfer protocols or codes behind computer software—similarly to what happens on the internet. According to Ernst, the internet—here considered the broadest example of a digital repository—extends the classical space of the archive, library, and museum by an extra dimension. However, the supposedly largest digital archive is actually a collection, an aggregate of unpredictable texts, pictures, data. Primary materials, intended as archival documents, are trackable on the net, but the real archive, or *arché*, in Foucault's sense, meaning "a generative, algorithmic, protocol-like agency, literally programmatic,"[83] is instead a system of technological protocols.[84] This understanding of the internet points out a crucial differentiation that the infrastructure in which ephemeral items are experienced by the user is the real content of a repository. Conversely, that which is real information archived

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[77] Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," 14.

[78] Andrew Hoskins, "Media, Memory, Metaphor: Remembering and the Connective Turn." *Parallax*, no. 17 (November 2011a): 26, accessed November 12, 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2011.605573.

[79] Wolfgang Ernst, " The Archive as Metaphor," *Open*, no. 7 (2004), accessed April 21, 2018, https://www.onlineopen.org/the-archive-as-metaphor.

[80] Ernst, " The Archive as Metaphor," 1.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ernst, " The Archive as Metaphor," 2.

[83] Ernst, "The Archive as Metaphor," 6.

[84] Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive.*

remains in the mathematical topology. This perspective draws near to the culture of connectivity theorized by van Dijck, within which I positioned this study.

The grounding relevance of Ernst's perspective remains in the shift he sees between "the static residential archive as permanent storage […] replaced by dynamic temporal storage, the time-based archive as a topological place of permanent data transfer."[85] I find the notion of the time-based archive of the highest importance for several reasons. First is that, by questioning "the place" as the coordinate that makes an archive exist, it emancipates the notion of archiving from a whole set of embodied practices and logistic circumstances as gateways for access. More importantly, the "time-critical perspective" of Ernst, as new media theorist Jussi Parikka defines it, recalls the importance of time, which is also a primary coordinate in the social-media algorithm.[86] Within the time-based archive, Ernst deconstructs further the function of storage and focuses on the capacity of transmission of the digital archive. According to Derrida, the need to archive is connected to the fear of loss, but to archive something it must be fixed in time,[87] and thus, as artist Mariam Ghani states, "to archive is also to kill the very thing you fear to lose."[88] Conversely, Ernst sees cyberspace as an intersection of movable elements that can be shifted by a series of algorithmic operations, therefore "in electronic, digital media, the classical practice of quasi-external storage is being replaced by dynamical movements 'on the fly' as a new quality."[89] However, as I will show later, transmission entails a form of storage, but Ernst stresses the volatile status of the elements in the stream rather than their immobility and fixity. Ernst's perspective finds an echo in the manifesto titled "10 Thesis on the Archive" written by the initiators of the online archive Pad.ma.[90] The statement suggests that an archive is a circulation of contents rather than the constitution of a location for them. As point three of the Pad.ma manifesto reports: "Henri Langlois, founder of the Cinémathèque Française, stated that 'the best way to preserve film is to project it,' he hinted at the very opposite philosophy of archiving: to actually use and consume things, to keep them in, or bring them into, circulation, and to literally throw them

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[85] Ernst, "The Archive as Metaphor," 4.

[86] Jussi Parikka, "Archival Media Theory: An Introduction to Wolfgang Ernst's Media Archaeology," in Wolfgang Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 15.

[87] Derrida, "Archive Fever."

[88] Mariam Ghani, "What We Left Unfinished," in *Dissonant Archives: Contemporary Visual Cultures and Contested Narratives in the Middle East*, ed. Anthony Downey (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 54.

[89] Ernst, "The Archive as Metaphor," 4.

[90] Pad.ma—short for Public Access Digital Media Archive—is an online archive of densely text-annotated video material, primarily footage and not finished films. The entire collection is searchable and viewable online, and is free to download for non-commercial use. Pad.ma was initiated in 2010 by a group consisting of various characters operating in the intersections among arts, politics and technology, such as CAM , from Mumbai, 0x2620 from Berlin, and the Alternative Law Forum from Bangalore.

forth (Latin: *proicere*) into a shared and distributed process that operates based on diffusion, not consolidation, through imagination, not memory, and toward creation, not conservation."[91] This argument seems to respond to the very nature of social media, but what if the recommendation system dominates the circulation of content in combination with user behavior—in other words, when the diffusion of content is submitted to a capitalistic logic?

"Archives have long been seen as the external and institutional basis for the remembering and forgetting of societies at different stages of development across history, and as an ultimate storage metaphor of memory,"[92] claims theorist Andrew Hoskins. Whereas Ernst considers the notion of an archive in so-called cyberspace already an anachronistic, obstructing metaphor,[93] Hoskins supports the fact that "the potential of the digital archive, however, is realized in the experience of more complex temporalities of self and others. Online environments afford a more visceral sense of the self as a node in media and thus in connective memory."[94] These reflections touch the matter of preservation critically, contradicting the common understanding that an archive is supposed to preserve documents for an indefinite amount of time or, to temporarily ban access to items, for guaranteeing their accessibility for later, unexpected uses. In most cases, the digital turn of analog objects is conceived as a promise for eternal life. But digital storage can be instantaneously erased,[95] insomuch as the physical place storing a repository can be destroyed.

These reflections bring to consideration the notion of memory in the digital archive. Operating more in digital software culture, new media scholar Wendy Hui Kyong Chun draws a separation between the concepts of memory and storage, whose conflation is usually at the basis of the newness of digital media. From content to purpose, from hardware to software, from CD-ROMs to memory sticks, from RAM to ROM, the principal characteristic of digital media is memory, meaning the capacity to store information. It is worthwhile to clarify that the concept to which Chun refers has nothing to do with the human function of remembrance. Memory, intended as a storage location, makes digital media an ever-increasing archive in which no piece of data is lost. In this sense, Chun sees memory as the predominant content of the internet and its services. The scholar outlines a parallel between Google and state security intelligence in their activities of collecting data and further says that Google can be interpreted as a Stasi-like resource of the twenty-first century.[96] But according to Ernst, "from a media-

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[91] "The Direction of Archiving Will Be Outward, Not Inward," point 3, Pad.ma, 2010, https://pad.ma/documents/OH.

[92] Hoskins, "Media, Memory, Metaphor," 25.

[93] Ernst, "The Archive as Metaphor."

[94] Hoskins, "Media, Memory, Metaphor," 25.

[95] Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive.*

[96] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "The Enduring Ephemeral, or the Future Is a Memory," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (Autumn 2008), accessed April 20, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1086/595632.

archaeological view, instead of 'narrative memory,' a digital culture deals with calculating memory. The evidence of files in archives knew it already: data-based memory cannot tell but only count, in accordance with the administrative logic, which produces such files. Narrative may be the medium of social memory; the medium of archives, though, is the alphanumerical mode in conjunction with materialities (of data support) and logistical programs (symbolic operators). Power is the area where narratives don't take place; the rest is interpretation. The archive registers, it does not tell. Only metaphorically can it be compared to human memory— unless taken neurologically."[97] Through these considerations about memory, Ernst introduces a third element of the time-based archive, which is the subject-user. According to scholar Alice Yaeger Kapln remarks, this is the person who, from outside the space of preservation, fills the gaps through human imagination and provides a narrative,[98] which is the medium of social memory. Indeed, the non-narrative describes the status of the archival regime and the logic of the database that replaces the narrative in the digital archive.[99] The archive registers instead of telling. We as users are all mini-archivists in what we can call the information-management society.[100] The role of the user is of the highest importance within the domain of social media as digital archives and throughout my study. Indeed, the user-generated structure typical of social media has contributed to further changing the notions of authorship and authority within the internet domain.

In this sense, theorist Ariella Azoulay traces the social essence of repositories built thanks to the collective engagement of citizens, and she shifts the attention from the contents of the archive to those who are responsible for the very existence of the collection: those who are the creators. "What do we look for in an archive? […] That which we have deposited there. Not necessarily you or I personally, but you and I as those sharing a world with others: we who are beyond borders of a certain time and place, 'we' who do not converge into a collective of national or ethnic identity; 'we' who ought to have been regarded as the reason and the sense of the archive, but were instead replaced by 'history'—as if at the end of time history itself would come knocking on the gates of the archive, demanding to settle the accounts."[101] Three main points emerge from Azoulay's considerations. First is that by stressing the plurality of the subjects, both in creating and accessing an archive, Azoulay deconstructs the concept of authority enacted by a single entity. Second, she interprets the creators of the archive as if they are also contents among the artifacts within the archive. Third, these plural subjects, who

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[97] Ernst, "The Archive as Metaphor," 3.

[98] Alice Yaeger Kaplan, "Working in the Archives," *Yale French Studies* no. 77, "Reading the Archive: On Texts and Institutions" (1990): 103, accessed March 25, 2019, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2930149.

[99] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

[100] Parikka, "Archival Media Theory."

[101] Ariella Azoulay, "Archive," in *Dissonant Archives: Contemporary Visual cultures and Contested Narratives in the Middle East*, ed. Anthony Downey (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 197.

exist in transition beyond fixed time and space, are those who make sense of the archives and, therefore, keep it alive by actualizing it across history.

These considerations seem to claim that, beyond the technical infrastructure that distinguishes a traditional form of archive from a digital one, it is the plurality of authors and users of an organized collection that is precisely the key for its endless actualization. Therefore, this authorial multiplicity should not be considered as an exclusive feature of the digital archive. Indeed, there are interesting samples of collectively constructed analog repositories, which have contributed to subverting the structure of power inherent to the archive.

Azoulay also interprets the massive flow of images that surround us 24/7 in relation to the tools that produce them and the subjects who consume them, an aspect very much debated when one considers "what" a digital archive like the internet contains. As the theorist says, "The production and the archiving of an excessive quantity of digital images, which greatly exceeds the capacity of its producers to ever consume so much as a portion of them, should be understood as a new kind of archival contract among images and producers, mediated by their cameras, cell phones, and entire technology of the internet."[102] The clash between the impossibility for the viewer of consuming the massive amount of materials available online, in relation to the borderless possibility to produce content, seems to lead to some essential questions and considerations. Does this contract mentioned by Azoulay imply that the acts of creation and sharing images are more valuable than the final gesture of watching them? Here, the production and transmission of items seem to prevail over the act of consuming them. Conversely, being watched is apparently no longer the ultimate purpose of images and texts. For whom and for what purpose do we take and share dozens of photos and videos, then? Through this perspective, archiving might be the only way to see a specific object for the first time. And ultimately, are we sure that there would even really be an audience interested in seeing them?

This overview through Ernst's perspective on the digital archive and the structural shift of the paradigm suggested by the concept of his media archeology provides a basis for approaching social media as a repository and, when concerning my specific case study, provides a problematic that is raised by this definition.

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[102] Azoulay, "Archive.".

1.5 Social Media, Digital Archives: The Consistencies and Contradictions of YouTube and Facebook as Archives

"Social networking is experienced in terms of an actual potentiality: I could contact this or that person (but I won't). [...] The social is the collective ability to imagine the connected subjects as a temporary unity."[103] This remark by Geert Lovink works as a *trait-d'union* between the considerations above and the presumption of social media as an archive. On the one side, the scholar refers to the transience of the subject within the network, in which time translates user engagement, and in turn, data. On the other hand, by recalling "potentiality" regarding social media, Lovink's position raises an issue that also concerns the repository, whose creation is similarly based on the forecast and hypothesis that the artifacts gathered together and classified could be meaningful and valuable for someone.

Within this frame, and especially considering the nature of the digital platform in question, it is worthwhile analyzing how the commercial nature of YouTube and Facebook, which is evident in the algorithm's functioning, influences the "institutive and conservative, revolutionary and traditional"[104] nature of the archive at different levels, as long as these characteristics also persist in digital repositories. In fact, beyond the initial appearance and fascination of the profit-oriented nature of social networks such as YouTube and Facebook, their embedded dark edges have increasingly become more evident. The extraordinary services provided by these social networks—as media for free representation of the self and the social and political environment, as well as a source for the unlimited and often unrestricted access to knowledge, information, and forms of entertainment—do not come without a price. This doesn't represent an obstacle in itself for considering YouTube and Facebook as digital archives; rather, it makes light of the entangled nature of the products that I am observing.

Yet, although YouTube and Facebook's mission is not one of preservation, people consign fragments of their lives to them. Uploading videos on YouTube can definitely be interpreted as an expression of the necessity to secure specific moments in history. This urgency of making images survive finds a correspondence every time other spectators click that document, watch, or re-post it, contributing to its dissemination through its consumption. But in opposition to Facebook, which reveals episodes of the past to users, YouTube always requires active research by the user, who might use the "archive to actualize his memories."[105] Thus, I question what exactly social networks store while they transmit. On the one hand, as

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[103] Lovink, "What Is the Social in Social Media*?,"* 7.

[104] Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," 12.

[105] Jens Schröter, "On the Logic of the Digital Archive," in *The YouTube Reader*, ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 340.

Lovink clarifies, "these devices of capture are totally indifferent to the content of what people say—who cares about your views? That's network relativism: in the end it's all just data, their data, ready to be mined, recombined, and flogged off. 'Victor, are you still alive?' This is not about participation, remembrance, and forgetting. What we transmit are the bare signals indicating that we are still alive."[106] This perspective, which looks at content simply as data, is a view that was confirmed by Chaslot during a brief Twitter exchange I had with him.

However, data carries different kinds of information, such as emotions, affect, and so on. In this sense, it is worthwhile to reflect on social media as repositories of a wide range of data— whatever the objects they transmit are, or for whoever they are meaningful. Within the framework of the specific empirical-case study of my research, namely the vernacular videos of the Tunisian revolution post-January 14, 2011, which will be explored extensively later, I will remark on two issues. The first is that this exploration of the algorithms and infrastructure of social networks are not important for looking back at the specific moment in 2010–11 when footage documenting the early stage of the revolution was uploaded and circulated. Indeed, the focus of my study regards the post-January 14, 2011 period and not the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution. Secondly, an analysis of the functional infrastructure helps to define what kind of digital archive social networks can be, that is, according to the grounding rules through which they currently exist and operate.

Archivist, theorist, and filmmaker Rick Prelinger starts his text, "The Appearance of Archives," with an intriguing question, which specifically concerns YouTube (but in principle also applies to Facebook): "YouTube is not itself an archive. Preservation is neither its mission nor its practice. But what good does it do us to insist on this point? When hardly anyone remembers the distinction between film and video; when a soon-to-be-majority of younger people have grown up in an environment where video is born digital; and when degraded, low-resolution and immersive, high-quality media coexist without conflict, the fine points of archival definition disintegrate in the noise."[107] Prelinger focuses on the ideal form of the archive that YouTube embodies, as well as on the internal problematization of the canonical definition and mission of repositories. Offering the illusion of comprehensiveness, YouTube appears to be a complete collection of videos; it is open for use without permission or credit; user contributions to content for adding coherency and value to the undifferentiated stream of commercial videos is an extreme effort; in opposition to established archives, it offers instantaneous access with very little restriction; and it offers social-networking services with the understanding that archival access can be inherently social.[108] Broadening the borders of classical classifications,

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[106] Lovink, "What Is the Social in Social Media?" 9.

[107] Rick Prelinger, "The Appearance of Archives," in *The YouTube Reader*, ed. Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 268.

[108] Prelinger, "The Appearance of Archives."

Prelinger's considerations stand alongside those of other scholars, such as Frank Kessler and Mirko Tobias Schäfer,[109] who, inspired by definitions of the database by media theorists Lev Manovich[110] and Lovink,[111] identify YouTube as such. Aside from it being a collection of items performed by the user,[112] Kessler and Schäfer remark that "YouTube, as well as other services generally referred to as Web 2.0, offer the possibility of adding items of databases, improving the information management through user-generated meta information, as well as synchronizing them through so-called Application Programming Interfaces (API).[113] […] YouTube as a database is more accurately described as an infrastructure, as its scope goes well beyond the YouTube Internet site proper."[114] The embedded links, the metadata (likes and views), titles, and descriptions added by the authors of videos, and the comments added by the reader, define a set of interactions between human and machine, which is central for the functioning of the database and the management of its information. These few perspectives provide an insight into the multiple lenses through which to observe social networks.

Media scholar Henry Jenkins employs the term "archive" in respect to YouTube, claiming that "it represents a site where amateur curators assess the value of commercial content and represent it for various niche communities of consumers. YouTube participants respond to the endless flow and multiple channels of mass media by making selections, choosing meaningful moments which then get added to a shared archive."[115] Concerning Facebook, José van Dijck recognizes the Timeline feature as a significant upgrade toward the direction of the accessibility of contents.

As I already mentioned above, the Timeline is the field where every single piece of data that the user has ever uploaded on Facebook is recorded. It includes reverse-chronological details, organized by year, of a user's Facebook history, with crucial life points, including for instance birthdays, weddings, and other major events that create a more visually global profile.[116] Timeline reorganizes all stored user information for display, rather than to

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[109] Kessler, Schäfer, "Navigating YouTube."

[110] Manovich, *The Language of New Media.*

[111] Lovink, "The Art of Watching Databases."

[112] Manovich, *The Language of New Media.*

[113] "An application-programming interface (API) is a set of programming instructions and standards for accessing a Web-based software application or Web tool. A software company releases its API to the public so that other software developers can design products that are powered by its service." David Roos, "How to Leverage an API for Conferencing," *Howstuffworks*, https://money.howstuffworks.com/business-communications/how-to-leverage-an-api-for-conferencing1.htm.

[114] Kessler and Schäfer, "Navigating YouTube," 278.

[115] Jenkins, "Nine propositions Towards a Cultural Theory of YouTube."

[116] "Facebook Timeline," *Techopedia*, accessed September 24, 2019, https://www.techopedia.com/definition/28406/facebook-timeline.

archive. In previous Facebook incarnations, it was more difficult or impossible to view outdated events, photos, and comments. As noted by van Dijck "Timeline's format is organized as a narrative biography, a story chronicling life up to the present day by rearranging bits and pieces uploaded previously. The resulting narrative is a construction in hindsight, a retroactive ordering of life events at one moment in time."[117] The timeline works, therefore, as an ordering principle that allows looking at uploaded content through a very classical and standard categorization: the retroactive order of upload. These ways of reconnecting with the content and activity of the past history of the user and their network through a structure provided by the platform—a structure recognized by Dijck as narrative instead of a database—also changes the way users reinterpret and perceive this "past" via images.

In 2009, new media scholar Robert W. Gehl further raised the question about whether YouTube and Facebook might be considered participatory archives by focusing on the role of both commercial enterprise and users in the curation of contents for these apparently democratic platforms.[118] YouTube, "as a site for personal expression [...] comes from and is taken up by specific communities of practice and is thus in that sense a form of cultural collaboration," states Jenkins.[119] It gave ordinary people the chance of "participating in an ancient form of representational power, the one to tell their own story."[120] Here, the term "story" used by scholar Michael Strangelove encompasses moments belonging both to private and shared spheres where events and experiences, once distributed only within a circle of closely related people, have suddenly turned into images spread online openly across the public domain. These considerations are valid also for Facebook as increasingly, the role of these stories simultaneously as mundane anecdotes and grassroots counter-voices, as well as emancipatory messages and narratives from the ground, have become crucial to the cutting-edge identity and nature of the platform.

In fact, as user-generated platforms, they have always promoted the apparent refusal of hierarchies of a sort, and instead, they strive for a medium accessible by everyone. This allows users to make public their private stories, which probably would not be shared anywhere else if not on the site. For instance, YouTube claims that it has the "mission to give everyone a voice and to show them the world. […] We believe that everyone deserves to have a voice, and that the world is a better place when we listen, share and build a community through our stories."[121] Four essential freedoms define the values that YouTube is based on:

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[117] José van Dijck, "Connective Memory: How Facebook Takes Charge of Your Past," in *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies*, ed. Lucy Bond, Steff Craps, Pieter Vermeulen (New York: Oxford Berghahn), 160.

[118] Gehl, "YouTube as Archive."

[119] Jenkins, "Nine Propositions Towards a Cultural Theory of YouTube."

[120] Strangelove, *Watching YouTube*, 9.

[121] "About YouTube," YouTube, accessed March 20, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/yt/about/.

freedom of expression, information, opportunity, and to belong. Users are those in charge of self-regulation, but when this does not happen, the company, through its algorithms, filters inappropriate videos and erases them. For instance: "A video posted by a citizen journalist capturing footage of protesters being beaten would likely be allowed if it includes relevant context."[122] Meanwhile, "it is important to be able to share experiences with a global audience to educate and inform each other. However, we want to make sure that YouTube is not a home for glorifying violence or promoting hate. YouTube strictly prohibits content intended to recruit for terrorist organizations, incite violence, celebrate terrorist attacks, or otherwise promote acts of terrorism. We also do not permit terrorist organizations to use YouTube."[123]

Of course, the algorithm is fallible, and relevant videos with an evidentiary value of atrocities and violations of human rights can be easily removed by the system with little regard for their contribution as valuable testimonies.[124] Or as in the case of Facebook, the filter bubble produced by the News Feed was responsible for a vortex of misinformation and fake news, which heavily influenced the US elections race in 2016. Within this framework, the user's engagement is intended to be tightly bonded with the algorithm and the recommendation system. In other words, the authority of the user on the platform is never independent of the algorithm. On the contrary, while the user manages the platform, he or she explicitly and implicitly feeds the system, which exploits him or her economically. The power of the user as the "you"—who keeps the platform alive, manages the content via uploading personal materials, comments, and views the materials of others[125]—is free to select audiovisual materials to share as well as to invigilate other users' items in terms of appropriateness. These are often the elements on which several scholars have focused on, attributing the authority of managing the platform's contents, as an archivist, to the user. Although these considerations remain valid, the algorithm as a manipulative and profit-oriented, capitalistic mechanism is the hidden authority through which the user acts and with whom he or she interacts as a producer and consumer.

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[122] "The Importance of Context," *YouTube*, accessed March 21, 2017, https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/6345162?hl=en. The quote was originally from the page "Context is King." I last accessed it on June 13, 2017, and while I was revisiting these thoughts on October 21, 2017, the page I was referring to was discontinued and replaced with the page titled "The Importance of Context." In the latter, I found two very important additional paragraphs, specific guidelines for uploading content.

[123] "The Importance of Context," *YouTube*.

[124] Avi Asher-Shapiro, "YouTube and Facebook Are Removing Evidence of Atrocities, Jeopardizing Cases against War Criminals," *The Intercept*, November 2, 2017, accessed January 12, 2018, https://theintercept.com/2017/11/02/war-crimes-youtube-facebook-syria-rohingya/.

[125] Schröter, "On the Logic of the Digital Archive."

1.5.1 Social Media as Archives of Affect and Emotional Objects

In the previous sections, the ambiguous nature of the content stored in and transmitted by social media has emerged clearly. Therefore, from the points of view of companies, everything is reduced to data, the most straightforward and essential entity to which any grassroots or commercial photo, video, or text, as well as emotional reaction, expressed via likes, shares, or views, can be traced back to. Data is profitable, storable, spreadable, predictable, and trackable, and companies operate quite undisturbed at the border of privacy policies.

On the other hand, it would be wrong to ignore the typology of contents circulating via social media, as this is what the users care about the most. Indeed, audiovisual and online communications that are shared online are expressions and exposure of the self. In this sense, YouTube is not only a collection of millions of home-made videos, "it is an intense emotional experience,"[126] says Strangelove. Furthermore, together with Facebook and other social networks, it can be defined as archives of *affect*.[127] Affect regards both the subscribers who produce content and the viewer who watches it. These two categories—the sender and the receiver—involved in a fluid process of communication, do not operate independently. To what extent might affect be the real and only content exchanged? As Gehl states, "In the hegemonic Web 2.0 business model, users are encouraged to focus on the new and the immediate. They are expected to process digital objects by sharing content, making connections, ranking cultural artifacts, and producing digital content, a mode of computing I call 'affective processing.' In essence, this business model imagines users to be a potential super processor."[128] In agreement with this statement, the "affect" at the basis of the Web 2.0 business model (which includes YouTube and Facebook) is based on the free labor of its users, according to Terranova.[129] Together with Jenkins and others, Gehl stresses the power of users who also act as curators in the process of storage, categorization, and classification through the process of adding titles, descriptions, and tags to their videos. "For the most part, users do all the curatorial work which is typically done by the archive: gathering, editing, uploading, classification as well as retrieval and exhibition. […] Like objects sitting in the shelves, the videos one encounters within the YouTube browsers are decontextualized, chaotic and flattened."[130] Therefore, Gehl continues by saying that, "what social media site users are interacting with is an archive of affect, digital objects that have meaning within the context of social connections. They are processing this digital archive: sorting their contacts

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[126] Strangelove, *Watching YouTube*, 4.

[127] Robert W. Gehl, "The Archive and the Processor: The Internal Logic of Web. 2.0," *New Media & Society* 13, no. 8 (December 2011): 1228–44, accessed January 11, 2017, doi:10.1177/1461444811401735.

[128] Gehl, "The Archive and the Processor," 1229.

[129] Tiziana Terranova, *Network Culture* (London: Pluto, 2004).

[130] Gehl, "YouTube as Archive," 48.

into lists, liking this status update, commenting on that photograph, or sharing a virtual gift."[131] The scholar later mentions that with the term "archive of affect," what he means is "archives of emotional objects," as what has been saved on Facebook or YouTube are statements and media objects tied to emotional states and capacities.[132] The difference between "affect" and "emotion" is significant in the field of affect studies. Nonetheless, among scholars, there is no consensus on the interpretation of single terms nor on the distinctive characteristics or the similarities among them. I will position my understanding of affect and emotion in a pragmatic but also creative area between the poles, embracing the perspective on the topic provided by scholars Christian von Scheve and Jan Slaby, who look at emotions as "part of an integrated conceptual field that encompasses affect, emotion and feeling. Whereas affect stands for pre-categorical relational dynamics and feelings for the subjective—experiential dimension of these affective relations," [133] emotions signify "inherently relational categories."[134]

Therefore, the emotional objects described by Gehl, or "statements and media objects tied to emotional states and capacities," imply that all audiovisual materials and communication express users' states of fear, anger, embarrassment, disgust, shame, and so on. But affect (intended as intensity) and emotions are also operational for the creation and sharing of content as well as all related forms of storytelling in user-generated platforms.

Within this logic, I argue that affect (including emotion) works as a *modus operandi* of the user. Indeed, as claimed by theater and performance scholar Doris Kolesch and sociologist Hubert Knoblauch, "Audience emotions, like most other emotions, do not represent an 'inner' state of being, but are an action, a dynamic activity. Audience emotions are thus an important element of the audience's activities and of their involvement in an event."[135] Through this perspective, if audience emotion represents an action, social networks such as YouTube are the site where all the emotions of users take place as performance. In this sense, social media are territories where documenting and communicating are not the only activity. Instead, they entail "a way of relating bodies to imagined, experienced, remembered spaces, in a way that charges, detects, re-circulates the affective intensity of this space."[136]

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[131] Gehl, "The Archive and the Processor," 1239.

[132] From an email exchange with Robert W. Gehl, September 4 to September 21, 2017.

[133] Jan Slaby, and Christian, von Scheve, "Emotion, Emotion Concept*," in *Affective Societies: Key Concepts*, ed. Jan Slaby and Christian von Scheve (New York: Routledge, 2019), 43.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Doris Kolesch and Hubert Knoblauch, "Audience Emotions," in *Affective Societies: Key Concepts*, ed. Jan Slaby and Christian von Scheve (New York: Routledge, 2019), 253.

[136] Christoffer Kølvraa and Carsten Stage, "Street Protests and Affects on YouTube: Investigating DIY Videos of Violent Street Protests as an Archive of Affect and Event Desire," *Culture Unbound*, no. 8 (2016): 129, http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se.

By coining the term "affective publics," communication scholar Zizi Papacharissi defines "networked publics mobilized and connected (or disconnected) through expressions of sentiment, as these expressions of sentiment materialize discursively through the medium of Twitter."[137] In this way, Papacharissi's notion frames not only the objects circulating but also the users involved in their diffusion and the relation of the subjects with the algorithm. However, affect as a modus operandi in turn produces and makes public the individual's emotional states and conditions, understood in a broad sense, which are ultimately formed as data.

Following Gehl's intuition, YouTube, Facebook, and other social media fit the notion of repositories of affect, meaning storage of all audiovisual and textual content resulting from human interaction, which are at the core of the user-generated nature of the platforms. Indeed, scholar Ann Cvetkovich describes archives of feelings as "repositories of feeling and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practice that surround that production and reception."[138] Emotional phenomena as dynamic activity, and affect as the modus operandi of social-network users within the digital archives that these media represent, will be inherently present and unfold over the course of my research

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[137] Zizi Papacharissi, "Affective Publics and Structures of Storytelling: Sentiment, Events and Mediality," *Information, Communication & Society* (2015): 11, accessed January 10, 2017, DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2015.1109697.

[138] Ann Cvetkovich, "Introduction," in *An archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 7.

Chapter 2

The Vernacular Videos of the Arab Uprisings as Digital Objects

2.1 Vernacular Videos as a Visual Genre: Conceptualizations and Practices

In this chapter, I will focus on a specific typology of digital and emotional objects: vernacular videos, whose nature and value is tightly related to their transmission by social media networks. At the center of the debate is the political and historical relevance of the genre and phenomenon to the civil dissent that began in North Africa and the Middle East in 2010 and 2011. My study specifically explores the footage filmed by citizens during the twenty-nine-day phase of the Tunisian revolution, between Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation, on December 17, 2010, and President Ben Ali's toppling, on January 14, 2011. In addition, it focuses on and raises questions about the transmission and circulation of the footage, and status as testimony in the years to come.

I will contextualize the genre and its background within amateur practice, which I see as located closer to the infamous 2004 Iraq War Abu Ghraib prison photos and 2005 London bombing selfies than to the phenomenon of home videos popularized by the launch of YouTube, and within the attribution of the term "vernacular," which specifies the nature of the relationship of this footage with the social-media platforms that diffuse them. I argue that the term vernacular describes not only the genre of videos but concerns also the practice of the spectator, which includes both the filmers of the clips and the distant viewers of these videos, who consume them through the mediation of the screen and the internet. I will provide some background information about the Arab Uprising, the specific case of the Tunisian revolution, and its chronology as it was outlined and validated by French sociologist Jean-Marc Salmon. The perspective of Salmon is corroborated by Tunisian experts and historians, who referred to his reconstruction of facts for both the creation of the archives of the revolution and the conceptualization of the pedagogic exhibition *Before the 14th, instant Tunisien* (curated by Houria Abdelkafi), which took place at the Bardo Museum in Tunis (January 14–March 31 2019), and traveled to Mucem, Marseille (March 20–September 30, 2019). This chronology of the turmoil between December 17, 2010 and January 14, 2011 will gather together the political events of this phase of the Tunisian revolution and will give an account of the inherent ambiguities and complexities that the very definition of revolution entails. Through this reconstruction, I will explain the specific use of the expressions "twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution," and "post-January 14, 2011." This demarcation of boundaries will mirror the borders of my observation as well as clarify the reasons that brought me to focus on digital objects, such as amateur videos, produced within this specific time frame of December 17, 2010 and January 14, 2011. Later, I will frame the overall debate across issues of

online transmission, persistence, and memory, which all concern vernacular videos post-January 14, 2011. I will also question in what directions this bond between the footage, digital archive, and spectator has evolved and in what shape it has taken over time. The theoretical exploration in this chapter will be followed by a research for online materials that will be elaborated in Chapter 4. The results that emerged contributed to the basis of the questions of my exploration during my research on site in Tunis.

Starting in 2010 as a broad phenomenon, the specific genre of so-called vernacular videos attracted the attention of users, academic researchers, and artists. With the term "vernacular," filmmaker, journalist, and author Peter Snowdon has defined an unprecedented typology of videos that are non-commercial, non-professional, shot by anonymous citizens during protests and collective gatherings in public space, and are shared via YouTube and other social networks with no or only minimal post-production. Although videos as such were already circulating via Facebook during the protests in Iran in 2009, it was with the unfolding civil uprising in Tunisia, which turned quickly into a revolution on December 17, 2010, that this category truly emerged, attracting huge attention. From then on, the civil demonstrations that swept across the regions of North Africa between 2010 and 2011; the social-movement protests, such as Indignados in Spain, others in Greece, the Occupy movement in the US; and all protests around the globe that came after that have become highly documented events witnessed by millions of spectators worldwide through the mediation of the screen.

Other common terms attributed to these types of videos are, for instance, "amateur," a term stressing the non-professional background of the filmer; "citizen-journalists," which highlights the intention of the citizen-filmer in engaging in a quasi investigation with the aim of providing visual evidence; and "*vidéos citoyennes*," or citizen-videos, the predominant term used in Tunisia for this genre, which emphasizes the sense of citizenship of the subjects as the trigger for engaging in the capture and distribution of this footage. Although I will use all these terms as synonyms, I am particularly attached to the term "vernacular" by scholar and filmmaker Peter Snowdon as it carries the deep bond that this specific typology of video clips has with social media and its capitalistic infrastructure.

Aesthetically, this shaky, blurry, pixelated footage taken by anonymous filmers with smartphone cameras all look very similar. This is not only due to the technical development of phone cameras and the low resolution of the audiovisual material but also due to the films' subject and purpose as well as the conditions and dynamics in which the clips are shot. According to theorist and artist Hito Steyerl, it is precisely because of the uncertainty of its low resolution that the footage gains an affective power, [139] which is a characteristic I would define as

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[139] Hito Steyerl, "Documentary Uncertainty," *Re-visiones #One*, 2011, accessed August 30, 2019, http://re-visiones.net/anteriores/spip.php%3Farticle37.html.

mobilizing. I will argue that it does not matter what the clip documents, but rather, what matters is the act of testimony and the whole set of participatory practices they entail. The filmed records often don't show much, also because they are deprived of points of reference or temporal-spatial coordinates, and the page layout and interface of social media in itself emphasizes the footage as decontextualized fragments. Once uploaded online, they need the support of metadata, such as titles, descriptions, and locations, which contribute to making them meaningful, searchable, and trackable. The filmer's voice-over sometimes allows one to deduce additional details, but most of the time, the overlapping of voices, slogans, or environmental sounds are those that resound in these recordings.

These clips witness moments of collective gathering and actions that leave a trace of the struggle of people, or they expose episodes of violence and cruelty, and for this reason, they have been recognized as testimonies with almost legal value. Either as rough or edited videos, the footage is the outcome of the urgency to record and track. They are embedded audiovisual materials, taken from the point of view of those directly involved in the uprisings or, occasionally, also those from a safe distance, either from above, like a balcony, or far away from the clashes. The smartphone camera functions as the prosthetic eye of the shooter, meaning that it follows the gaze of the filmer and the way he or she sees reality and, as a result, produces images by improvisation rather than premeditation. The image recorded does not exist before the eyes can see it. In this concern, Lebanese visual artist, actor, and playwright Rabih Mroué is the first artist to explore the scopic regime inherent in this specific typology of amateur footage. Through the mediation of the screen, the artist looks at the first-person filmer's way of seeing. Analyzing the case of the uprising in Syria, he states, "The eye continues watching without understanding that it might be witnessing its own death."[140] Here, Mroué makes clear the absurdity experienced by the filmer, who perceives himself or herself as alienated from the scene and protected by the smartphone camera, whereas he or she is actually immersed in the scene and exposed to the unfolding reality. As a consequence, not only is the shooter involved in the scenario he or he is watching, but so is the spectator, who watches through the eyes and lens of the filmer. Mroué considers both figures as engaged in the reality *in fieri* that they are watching.

The genre of amateur, non-professional images has existed long before social media and the internet and is not a new category in and of itself. Amateur videos are intended as home-made audiovisual materials focusing on mainly personal anecdotes that cover a variety of topics but which remain private or are shared within a limited and restricted circle of family and friends. The launch of YouTube as the broadest online video-sharing platform has exponentially increased this phenomenon of amateur video production in terms of volume and typology and has

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[140] Excerpt from the script of the lecture-performance, Rabih Mroué, *The Pixelated Revolution* (2012), Staatstheater, Kassel, documenta 13, June 7, 2012.

brought a definitive break to the boundaries between private and public self-exposure. Home videos are thus a reference for contextualizing the background of the vernacular footage in question.

Another fundamental rupture in the understanding of amateur images I would like to consider is the provocation invoked by photos of the torture of Abu Ghraib prisoners during the Iraq War, which were first made public in 2004 in the United States. At that time, Facebook had existed for only a few months and YouTube was yet to be launched one year later, so the news of the torture of Abu Ghraib prisoners was broadcast via CBS's *60 Minutes,The New Yorker* and then spread like lightning around the globe via the internet and other news media. As art and media theorist Jorinde Seijdl reported: "what was especially shocking about the Abu Ghraib photos was that they were not journalistic photos but amateur snapshots, personally made by the American soldiers as part of the torture, as a souvenir of the war, to mail to family and friends."[141]

Furthermore, as claimed by theorist Susan Sontag in the renowned article "Regarding the Torture of Others" that appeared in 2004 in the *New York Times*, the value of the Abu Ghraib photos lays in their circulation rather than as objects to be saved. These last two aspects, that the photographs were part of a performative action and that they were produced for circulation rather than to be preserved, correspond with the case of the vernacular videos in question. In what way? I argue that the common element that bonds the Iraq prisoner photos and the amateur clips of my study is their nature as leaked images. In other words, the Abu Ghraib photos and vernacular footage of the Tunisian revolution were able to escape both the Bush administration's censorship and President Ben Ali's ban. They are images that challenge the power of the state and take advantage of the online network for escaping its control.

Another historical use of mobile-phone recordings as a performative act can be dated back to 2005. Scholar Anna Reading recalls the London bombings of July 7, 2005,[142] and the resulting forms of witnessing through selfies taken on mobile camera phones that were spread by non-journalists and ordinary citizens.[143] These audiovisual materials belong to the category of grassroots content and might be considered close to "subcultural." However, "a true subculture would have to resist the logic of attention and competition at all. Yet, when such content attracts

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[141] Jorinde Seijdel, "Wild Images: The Rise of Amateur Images in the Public Domain," in "(In)visibility," *Open*, no. 8 (2005): 73, accessed June 19, 2018, https://www.onlineopen.org/download.php?id=426.

[142] The July 7, 2005 London Bombings were a series of coordinated terrorist suicide attacks in London that targeted commuters traveling on the city's public transportation system during the morning rush hour.

[143] Anna Reading, "Mobile Witnessing: Ethics and the Camera Phone in the 'War on Terror,'" *Globalizations* no. 6 (2009): 1, 61–76, accessed June 21, 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14747730802692435.

attention it will only be a question of time until the 'subculture' is exploited by the entertainment or cultural industry,"[144] states Jens Schröter.

As it will be clarified in depth later, although the videos of the Tunisian revolution are militant in purpose and grassroots in nature, they are subject to the same rules and conditions as commercial ones. However, they are less relevant commercially, and advertisers do not invest in them. Amateur videos have thus been recognized as part of emerging practices taking place online in strict relation with the offline sphere and with the dynamics of representation and self-representation of users on social networks. They are "poor images," according to the term coined in 2009 by Hito Steyerl, a notion which describes low-res, copied, non-fetishistic, manipulated, and appropriated visual material in circulation that reappears online in the aftermath of a process of decline and marginalization of certain experimental videos and films that are forgotten and remain unseen until they enter the free downloadable, pirate circuit.[145] But the category of poor images has limits based on hierarchies and have also turned into what Steyerl calls "power images," according to a 2018 revisitation of her famous term: "Poor is no more related to quality, rather to the degree of entertainment."[146] The surface of the images (which is their content) and the amount of power (intended to mean energy but ambiguously used by the author on purpose) that produced them are not correlated. Power as energy is a medium.[147] This shift stressed by

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[144] Jens Schröter, "On the Logic of the Digital Archive," in *The YouTube Reader*, ed. Pelle Snickers and Patrick Vonderau (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009), 342.

[145] The poor image as such takes its genealogy in cine-tract agitprop films, carbon-copied pamphlets, underground video magazines, and other non-conformist materials using poor images. It resulted from DIY culture, in which copying, editing, and sharing by prosumers have been at the basis of the existence of these materials. See Hito Steyerl, "In Defence of the Poor image," *e-flux Journal* no.10 (November 2009), accessed January 25, 2017, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defence-of-the-poor-image/.

[146] From my notes taken on the occasion of the lecture "Invisible Images," held by Hito Steyerl as part of the symposium "Art/Politics," May 12, 2018, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin.

[147] Shifting from poor to power images, Steyerl focuses on the value of images, which is not content but, rather, energy, and it doesn't concern only the digital but also the analog sphere. "Image power is the amount of power embodied by the image. […] The power image is the "operational image" (see previous note). Here Steyerl recalls the definition attributed by Harun Farocki to those images that do not represent an object but, rather, are part of an operation. Analysing war pictures of the Gulf War from 1991, Farocki stressed that "operational pictures conjure up the image of a cleanly led war, and they are stronger than the pictures of the dirty war, like the pictures of an air raid shelter in Baghdad in which a couple of hundred civilians were torn to pieces. The television spectators were supposed to appreciate the war technicians and to sympathize with the technology of war through the images of aerial photographs, which were actually made only for the eye of the war technicians." This text by Harun Farocki is based on a talk delivered at ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany, 2003. See also Farocki, "Phantom Images," *Public*, no. 29 (2004): 21, accessed January 8, 2018,

Steyerl runs parallel to the increasing awareness of the role content plays in social networks, and it simply underlines the tension between the human side of the digital, the emotional objects of expression of users, and the machine-learning systems that process their behavior into data. What these two contradictory perspectives have in common is that both users and machine-learning systems care about this footage, each one in their own ways.

2.2 Arab Uprisings are Revolutions: Definitions, Contexts and Common Characteristics

As I mentioned above, the digital objects of my observation are a specific typology of amateur audiovisual materials that were produced and exponentially circulated within a precise historical time frame of the political turmoil that exploded in Tunisia on December 17, 2010. This upheaval can be considered the starting point for a phase of civil dissent between 2010 and 2011 that swept across the regions of North Africa and Middle East. In the aftermath of President Ben Ali's toppling in Tunisia, an intense period of protests also began in Egypt and Syria. Conversely, the civil turmoil in countries such as, Libya, Morocco, Bahrain, Yemen, and Sudan occurred on a smaller scale. This was not due to the lack of pre-conditions for protests, but rather, to the repression by the local governments of these latter countries, which put an end to them quickly.

What is the so-called Arab Uprising, and what are its main characteristics as a transnational and social phenomenon? According to researcher and political risk analyst Primoz Manfreda, "The Arab Spring was a series of anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions that spread across the Middle East in early 2011. But their purpose, relative success, and outcome remain hotly disputed in Arab countries, among foreign observers, and between world powers looking to cash in on the changing map of the Middle East."[148] I start with the labels used to describe this phenomenon of the Arab Uprising because the way these extended episodes of civil dissent have been described over time needs attention. This overview on definition also gives the sense of the stereotypical, Western-centric perspectives through which the political event in question has been framed. Initially, Arab Spring was the most commonly used term to describe these events.[149] As Manfreda reports, however, this term refers originally to the revolutions of 1848. In this year a series of political upheavals occurred in many countries

https://public.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/public/article/view/30354/27882.

[148] Primoz Manfreda, "What Is the Arab Spring? An Overview of the Middle East Uprisings in 2011," *ToughtCo*, August 28, 2019, https://www.thoughtco.com/definition-of-the-arab-spring-2353029.

[149] For the sake of accuracy about the use of the term, I acknowledge that also Tunisian activist and blogger Lina Ben Mhenni employed it in the title of her renowned book *Tunisian Girl: blogueuse pour un printemps arabe* (2011).

throughout Europe, and their effects were the overturning of old monarchical structures and their replacement with more representative forms of government.[150] Arab Spring also seems to imply the awakening of dormant communities, which might be a misleading interpretation when it is applied to the Tunisian society. The term "Arab Uprising," and the plural, "Arab Uprisings," emerged in parallel during the wave of unrest that spread across the region and has turned into one of the most widely used descriptions of the events. However, from my perspective, the use of the term recalls specific ideologies that embed persistent, generalized understandings of the geography, culture, and politics of the region. "Arab" refers to Arab World, an artificial political construction that homogenizes national entities that are, actually, extremely different socially, politically, and for historical backgrounds. Another term used for this phase of demonstrations is "Arabic-speaking countries' uprisings." This term identifies the common language of Arabic as the only aspect shared by the communities in agitation. I will mainly refer to this wave of protests by using "Arab Uprisings" and "Arabic-speaking countries' uprisings" with the intention of stressing the plurality, and therefore, the multiple specificities of the rallies, instead of intending them as a united, cohesive movement.

According to scholar George Lawson, the Arab Uprisings are different from the "revolutions from above" pursued by republican regimes in Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Iraq and Syria in the post-colonial phase of these countries, during the 1950s and 1960s.[151] The first aspect of these uprisings to consider is their main characteristics and causes. As scholar Gilbert Achcar claims, when a revolutionary movement is not an isolated phenomenon ascribable to the political conditions of a specific country, but it "constitutes a shock wave that goes beyond the merely episodic to initiate a veritable socio political transformation in a whole group of countries with similar socioeconomic structures,"[152] it begins an era that Marx would define as a social revolution.

Achcar analyzes the economic system that characterizes the Arabic-speaking regions and remarks that the social situations confronting the Arab region's populations can be summarized in

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[150] Manfreda, "What Is the Arab Spring? An Overview of the Middle East Uprisings in 2011."

[151] "The 'revolutions from above' pursued by republican regimes in Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Iraq and Syria were pragmatic, and implemented in a step-by-step manner. [...] By intervening directly in the economy, by instigating widespread land reform in the name of national development, the republican regimes directly attacked the foundations of the ancien regime and replaced those formerly empowered by colonial state building." George Lawson, "After the Arab Spring. Power Shift in the Middle East?," *LSE Ideas Special Report*, (May 2012), accessed January 30, 2020, http://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/reports/LSE-IDEAS-After-the-Arab-Spring.pdf, 6.

[152] Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want. A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2013), 7.

three words—poverty, inequality, precarity.[153] In this sense, the slogans that resonated all over the demonstrations across the regions of North Africa and Middle East give a good understanding of the causes of the turmoil. Linguist Nabiha Jerad mapped the leitmotif of the demonstration slogans and most repeated chants in Tunisia, such as *Al-Châab yourid shoghl, horriyya, karama wataniyya* (The people want work, freedom and citizen dignity); or *Al-Châab yourid is- qât an-nidham* (The people want the fall of the regime); *Khobz w mé w ben ali lé* (Bread, water, and Ben Ali no longer); *a-ttashghîl istihqâg ya 'issabat a-ssurak* (Labour is a right gang of thieves). These slogans convey the real needs and political desires of the people in 2010 who, on all levels, experience marginalization, economic instability, poor living conditions, unemployment and the effects of political corruption daily. Lawson recognizes among the causes of the Arab uprisings a diffused weakening of state effectiveness, and in this vulnerability was the legacy and evolution of the "revolutions from above," which these states experienced during the 1950s and 1960s.

A second common denominator that bonds these protests is their bottom-up nature. Indeed, social movements are generally leaderless, and the uprising didn't follow a premeditated structure. "The people" (according to the meaning attributed by philosopher Judith Butler, which will be clarified later) started to perform their citizenship spontaneously. I will look at this aspect again in the next paragraphs. In the example of Tunisia, these spontaneous reactions and protests were supported by a form of coordination operated by labor unions across the Tunisian regions. These unions contributed heavily to the spreading of the outrage town by town, as outlined by both Salmon, through the reconstruction of occurrences and phases of the Tunisian revolution, as well as the director Mohamed Zran, in his documentary *Dégage*. Salmon also remarks on the absence of direction in the uprising, and, in the specific case of the Tunisian revolution, a lack of a national spokesperson and textual references. Indeed, only politicized networks of leftist cyberactivists, lawyers, and teachers structured the unfolding of the turmoil.[154]

Another crucial aspect that concerns mainly countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria is the pivotal role played by the internet and social networks. The strong employment of the latter for communication among protesters brought mainstream channels to proclaim the civil turmoil as the "Facebook/Twitter/YouTube Revolution." This was made according to the predominant use in each region of one specific network, for example, of Facebook in Tunisia, Twitter in Egypt, and YouTube in Syria. Or generically, terms such as the "2.0 revolution" or "e-revolution" were also very common.[155] This internet-enthusiastic perspective demonstrated its limits quickly, however.

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[153] Poverty is a relative notion. Achcar refers to the way the World Bank revised its 1993 assessment of poverty in the world in 2005. By using a new method to determine purchasing power parities, the World Bank produces striking results that change the estimation of poverty in some countries.

[154] Salmon, *29 jours de révolution*: *histoire du soulèvement tunisien, 17 décembre 2010–14 janvier 2011*.

[155] Yves Gonzalez-Quijano, *Arabités numériques: le printemps du Web arabe (*Arles: Actes sud/ Sindbad, 2012).

In fact, this angle of observation on the role played by the virtual in the development of the turmoil erroneously identified the internet and social media as tools that made the revolution possible, whereas, they were instead a major means for organizing the civil struggle. However, this disproportionate focus on the influence of the internet on the unfolding of the political occurrences hides a truth to a certain extent. Indeed, as Salmon importantly remarks, the fall of the authoritarian regime in Tunisia was intrinsically connected for the first time in history to the use and mediation of the internet.[156]

Whether these transregional uprisings that started in 2010 can be considered revolutions or not is still a highly debated topic. As the term revolution is generally intended as a radical transformation and overturn of the status quo, many actors at the grassroots level, including some of my interviewees, refuse to consider the turmoil across the regions of North Africa and Middle East as such. Scholars worldwide, however, generally recognize the overturning of regimes that occurred in Tunisia and Egypt as revolutions. More specifically, Tunisia appears the most successful example of revolution because the toppling of former President Ben Ali on January 14, 2011 opened the way to the still-ongoing transition of the country to democracy.

However, as Hanna Arendt[157] remarks, it is crucial to any understanding of revolution in the modern age that the idea has always been concerned with liberation, emancipation, and new beginnings. Where the pathos of novelty is connected with the idea of freedom, there is a revolution. In this sense, revolutions are very different from a coup d'état or civil war. Nonetheless, these concepts are not embedded in the original use of the term. Arendt recalls the employment of the word in astronomy, which was due to Copernicus. The revolution is a movement; the terminology comes from the Latin *revolutio*, which means "to turn around" and whose locution indicates a recurring, cyclical movement. Therefore, revolution originally meant restoration, a return to the point of departure through a movement. Conversely, aspects of newness and violence that are directly associated with our current understanding of revolution were originally absent both in the astrological meaning and in the political use of the term. In his book *Le Royaume des Citoyens: Pour une nouvelle philosophie politique* (2018), political analyst, MENA Senior Programme Officer at Impunity Watch, and writer Hosni Mouelhi refers implicitly to the interpretation by Arendt. He establishes a parallel between astronomy and the political domain, and remarks upon two crucial aspects. The first aspect concerns the cyclical repetition of movement in general, which follows a trajectory that always comes back to its point of departure. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the phenomena that constitutes a revolution in the political sphere in order to understand it. The second aspect concerns the scope of the time of

[156] Gonzalez-Quijano, *Arabités numériques: le printemps du Web arabe*
[157] Hanna Arendt*, On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006). Ebook.

observation of the movement that constitutes a cycle. Therefore, Muehli suggests considering a broader historical time to extend the time of observation in order to understand a full cycle.[158]

These remarks are pivotal because they shift the attention from the mere achievements of a revolution, which can be arguable when observed in short term, to a more complex set of results that can be evaluated only in the long term and in relation to other variables. In this sense, Arendt also claims, "For revolutions, however we may be tempted to define them, are not mere changes."[159] Conversely, Mouehli stresses that a political revolution implies a wide and all-encompassing overturn of society. At the basis of this social structure are two main systems of distribution: the distribution of wealth and the distribution of roles. As a result of a revolution, economic power shifts from a group to another; similarly with political power. Furthermore, the groups in power dispossessed by the revolution rarely disappear; rather, they restructure their relationship with the new dominant groups. In this sense, Mouheli recognizes the revolution as the mechanism that makes a political system turn and that shifts a society from one phase to another but rarely generates something new. This annotation is crucial in my study. It clarifies that the phase of uprisings that brought on the revolution, which might be considered as having started by December 17, 2010 in Tunisia, needs to be understood as a whole and in its complexity. In other words, the main aspects of the revolution to observe are the itinerary accomplished by the actors involved and the circumstances that unfolded over the course of the process, rather than simply the results achieved. This awareness entirely shifts the attention to the on-going and in-progress process, while it implicitly sheds light on the arbitrariness of selecting and delimiting one specific period of observation instead of another.

2.3 The Tunisian Revolution: the Difficulties of Defining a Chronology

Jean-Marc Salmon starts the introduction of his book *29 jours de revolution* published in 2016 by claiming that the first revolution of the twenty-first century occurred in Tunisia. The reconstruction of events and the chronology of the revolutionary phase outlined by the sociologist, turned into points of reference for this research for two reasons. First, he gives a daily account of the events that pushed the uprising into a revolution by gathering together more than ninety testimonies from different actors, such as activists, bloggers, members of unions (UGTT), students, lawyers, journalists, the unemployed, and so on. In doing so, Salmon provided a detailed reconstruction of the chronology of the phase between Bouazizi's self-immolation and Ben Ali's toppling. Second,

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[158] Hosni Mouehli, *Le royaume des citoyens: Pour une nouvelle philosophie politique* (Independently published: 2018).

[159] Hanna Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 70. E-book.

Salmon's process of on-site research brought to bear another very important initiative, which was the gathering of videos and photos from the several citizens-filmers who documented demonstrations and events across the country that occurred between December 17, 2010 and January 14, 2011. This recollection responded to the fear of loss of these materials, and it has contributed both practically and historiographically to the creation of the archive of the revolution, which is now hosted at the National Archive in Tunis, and also at the National Library.[160] As I will describe later, this seminal archival project stems from the collaboration between the civil association, Réseau Doustourna, and other institutional partners. However, the title of the book and the opening statement by Salmon mentioned above raise two main problems that I need to unfold: Is it accurate or legitimate by the sociologist to frame the twenty-nine days before the fall of the Tunisian regime as "the twenty-nine days of revolution"? And in relation to this question, if a revolution needs to be observed over a broader amount of time and not only through the lens of its immediate results, as I stated above, is it appropriate to name these twenty-nine days of turmoil a "revolution"? Tunisian scholars now use a variety of terms to describe the period between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's toppling and its aftermath, such as "the revolution of January 14,"[161] or the "post revolution,"[162] just to mention a few.

A revolution occurs through a precise time-lapse. Simultaneously, the extended, all encompassing and in-progress nature of this event makes it inherently a problematic concept. Hearing that this or that was not existing or happening before the revolution was a leitmotif during the months of research on site that I conducted in 2018 in Tunis. For instance, "Before the revolution we only had three bars in the whole capital to go and hang out in the evening," or "Clubs offering a variety of music genres, such as techno or hip hop, opened only after the revolution," one friend said; "Teens react more violently after the revolution," another friend claimed, and so on. The upheaval is a turning point that raises very concrete and visible effects in people's everyday life. However, the revolution as a phenomenon is a processual and ungraspable flow, difficult to delimit.

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[160] Thierry Brésillion, "Retour aux sources pour l'histoire de la révolution tunisienne," *La Croix,* December 27, 2016, accessed February 14, 2018, https://www.la-croix.com/Monde/Moyen-Orient/Retour-sources-lhistoire-revolution-tunisienne-2017-12-21-1200901257.

[161] Moez Triki, "Réseaux sociaux et enjeux sociopolitiques. Étude des pratiques et des usages politiques sur Facebook après la révolution du 14 janvier," in *Les réseaux sociaux sur Internet à l'heure des transitions démocratiques,* ed. Sihem Najar (Paris, Tunis: Éditions Karthala et IRMC, 2013), 13.

[162] Racha Mezrioui, "L'insulte dan le discours post révolution des "cyberactivistes": cas type de Jalel Brick, Ben Arfa et Takriz," in *Les réseaux sociaux sur Internet à l'heure des transitions démocratiques,* ed. Sihem Najar (Paris, Tunis: Éditions Karthala et IRMC, 2013), 12.

The beginning of the turmoil and the chronology of the events that compose it have been contextualized by scholars within the recent or less recent history of Tunisia in different ways. The perspective on the portion of the so-called "twenty-nine days of revolution" outlined by Salmon is the major point of reference in my study. Indeed, he begins his book by introducing the development of ICT in Tunisia between the end of the 1990s and 2010. Within this framework, he contextualizes the 2008 uprising in Gafsa, but he also rightly considers the demonstration against web censorship by cyber dissidents (on May 22, 2010 in Tunis) and the gatherings against the land's expropriation (on July 15, 2010 in Sidi Bouzid).

The timeline of the "twenty-nine days of revolution" on which Salmon focuses runs through different phases. It begins with the reconstruction of Mohamed Bouazizi's biography, the dynamics of the self-immolation, and the rally of the citizens as a spontaneous reaction, on December 17, 2010 in Sidi Bouzid. It follows up with the daily demonstrations, sit-ins, and strikes of lawyers that occurred between December 18 and 26, 2010 in the same town, as well as across other regions, in Kasserine, and Médenin, while the first casualties of the revolution occurred in Menzel Bouzaiane. Activist and journalist Sofien Chourabi documented these early stages in Sidi Bouzid through a video report, which he uploaded on YouTube. Between December 25, 2010 and January 6, 2011, gatherings in support of Sidi Bouzid were organized by the collective of cyberactivists Takriz and labor unions in Tunis, where these latter groups continued to organize rallies. President Ben Ali addressed the nation for the first time about the events in Sidi Bouzid (December 28) after visiting Bouazizi at the hospital in Ben Arous. In the same days, for the first time the issue of corruption and censorship in the country emerged as a topic of debate during a television broadcast on Nessma TV. 2011 began with "Operation Tunisia" by the cyberactivist movement Anonymous, which, in solidarity with the protests, targeted a number of Tunisian state-run websites. A march staged by students and joined also by groups of unemployed on January 3, 2011 in Thala turned violent after the police tried to stop it. Mohamed Bouazizi died on January 4, while demonstrations and strikes continued to spread across the regions. Authorities arrested six bloggers on January 6. Meanwhile, on Facebook, posts and messages by protesters support the agitation. Dissidence is expressed by means of poems in Tunisian dialect inciting the struggle that were translated in French by other activists; bloggers such as Z uploaded a caricature depicting the country as a volcano ready to explode that he reused in different other occasions over the years. Facebook pages and email accounts of cyberactivists like Lina Ben Mhenni, Azyz Amami and Sofien Chourabi were hacked and censored, just to name a few.

The massacre of civilians by the police and snipers between January 8 and 10, 2011 in Thala and Kasserine shocked the country, while violent clashes spread throughout the suburbs of Tunis. On Facebook, amateur photos of deaths virally circulate, and mass media channels such as *Al-Jazeera* and *France 24* broadcasted the same testimonies, and in doing so, they guaranteed the circulation of information locally and internationally. General strikes in Sfax,

Kairouan, and Tozeur, as well as in Sidi Bouzid, Jendouba, and later in the area called *Grand Tunis*, characterized this phase of widespread agitation, which occurred between January 12 and 13.

Demonstrations by Ben Ali's supporters occurred in Tunis during the curfew, in the aftermath of the President's last televised address, on January 13. However, a video circulated on Facebook that aimed to reveal the true nature of the demonstration in support of the regime, a political maneuver orchestrated to confuse the citizens. On the occasion of his last speech, Ben Ali announced unprecedented concessions. He pledged to institute reforms and investigate the killings of protesters during demonstrations and open access to formerly blocked or banned websites, such as YouTube. Nevertheless, rallies continued, starting from the morning of January 14, 2011, in front of the Ministry of Interiors, in Tunis where the crowd gathered asking for Ben Ali's resignation. By the evening of the same day, the President had fled to Saudi Arabia, and Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi took over an interim government. The date of the toppling of Ben Ali on January 14, 2011 forms the conclusion of Salmon's observation.[163]

Salmon's reconstruction of the events occurred during the "twenty-nine days" and the scheme of periods have been primary points of reference for the development of my study for two main reasons. First is the accuracy in tracing the daily unfolding of the events that constituted the uprising, from the beginning of the revolution until January 14, 2011.

Second, the reconstruction follows the development of social movement and revolves around the context of labor unions by means of interviews. In the words of Salmon, these live materials "render the improvisation of the uprising, but also remembrances of the individual and collective struggle."[164] In parallel, the cruciality of his approach stays in providing a constant, detailed account of what was happening online, as well as the role played by formal and informal media in supporting the revolution in multiple ways.

These aspects are central in my analysis from a theoretical and practical angle. As the case study of my research constitutes amateur clips shot during the specific timeframe of the "twenty-nine days" between December 17, 2010 and January 14, 2011, the reconstruction of the events from the perspective of the citizens is consistent with the nature of the videos of my study. Practically, I broadly used Salmon's angle as one of the major sources that helped in orienting myself during the phase of the research for online materials, which I conducted to assess the distribution of the clips of Bouaziziz's self-immolation and Ben Ali's fall in post-January 14, 2011. I will extensively describe this stage in Chapter 4.

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[163] For the detailed chronology, see Salmon, *29 jours de révolution*: *histoire du soulèvement tunisien, 17 décembre 2010–14 janvier 2011*, 325-328.

[164] Salmon, *29 jours de révolution*: *histoire du soulèvement tunisien, 17 décembre 2010–14 janvier 2011,* 15.

Another important reference for defining the timeline of the revolutionary events is the pedagogical exhibition *Before the 14th, instant tunisien instant tunisien*, mentioned before. The show does not stop on January 14, 2011, but rather its reconstruction continues until October 2013, on the date of the first democratic election in the country.

It retraces the so-called "twenty-nine days" of the Tunisian revolution from the spark set off in Sidi Bouzid to the fall of President Ben Ali. It is based on a vast archive made up of videos, photos, blogs, sound recordings, and also poems, slogans, songs, and civil society dispatches— all collected by the Doustourna network in collaboration with several Tunisian national public institutions. The exhibition divides the contextualization and timeline of the revolution in three parts. The first section is *Le feu sous le cendre*, and it sums up Bourguiba to Ben Ali's time (1956 to 2010). The second section is *The 29 days of the revolution*, which includes the unfolding of the uprisings across the regions and the major episodes of the revolution in the way Salmon has outlined them. In the Tunisian iteration, this section unfolds through six cubes installed in the space. On their external surfaces, these boxes display extensive texts that describe the most important events that occurred on specific days or phases of the revolution, while they contain in one or two screens in which a montage of amateur clips in loops edited by videomaker Selma Zghidi show the most representative or pivotal moments filmed by citizens for that phase. The third section of the timeline concerns the period of January 14 to May 2011, which covers Ben Ali's toppling through to the temporary government of Mohamed Ghannouchi, the formation of a national unity government, and the constitution of three independent commissions to ensure the democratic transition; the popular protests and sits-in across the country (Kasba I-II) demanding the resignation of the provisional government, the dismantling of the RCD, and a constitutional reform and establishment of a parliamentary regime; the provisional government's resignation on March 1, 2011; the succession of Beji Caid Essebsi to rule the country until elections in July 2011; the transition to democracy through three independent commissions (the National Commission for the Establishment of Malpractice and Corruption cases, chaired by Abdelfatteh Amor, the Bouderbala Commission on the Abuses of Power, and the Commission for Political Reforms and Democratic Transition, chaired by Yadh Ben Achour). The section ends with the Independent Elections Commission chaired by Kamel Jandoubi, which fixed the date of the first democratic election on October 23, 2011.

However, if revolution is a long duration process, what are the elements in the timeline a researcher uses to delimit a time frame of observation? The demarcation of the beginning of the so-called revolution appears an easy or at least less contentious task when it comes to outlining a timeline of observation. The immolation of the twenty-six-year-old street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi on December 17, 2010 in front of the governor's office in Sidi Bouzid is considered the official flashpoint of the Tunisian revolution. It is worthwhile to stress that Bouazizi's gesture was not spontaneous and isolated; it was in fact the result of his treatment at the hands of a local

police woman and the consequence of repeated humiliations and seizures. In addition, Bouazizi's act is simply one of more than two hundred episodes of self-immolations that occur every year across the country. The documentary *Dégage* (2012) by Tunisian director Mohamed Zran, which I will analyze later in Chapter 6, focuses in-depth on Bouazizi's background. It reconstructs the architecture of fiction and lies by Mohamed's uncle, Ali Bouazizi, and the labor unions. These actors, with the help of Al-Jazeera, were able to grow the civil dissent and spread it locally and nationally until the point of no return.

The awareness of the origin of the revolution in events dating back to uprisings in 2008 in Redeyef, a city in the Gafsa region at the Algerian border, is increasingly and more broadly being acknowledged. After the events of the "révolte du pain" in January 1984, this outbreak of turmoil in a poor phosphate mine area is considered among the most important protest movements in Tunisian history. The protests, which started in January 2008 and continued for six months, included the participation of different levels of society, such as jobless graduates, precarious workers hired in the construction sites of the municipality, high school students, and families of workers injured in the phosphate mine area. The reasons that brought on the dissent are economic in nature, with the plight of unemployed graduates at the basis of the protests.[165] Indeed, starting in the nineteenth century, the main economic activity of the area has consisted of the exploitation of the phosphate mine by the public company Compagnie de phosphate de Gafsa, or CPG. Despite the income generated by this natural resource, the region has remained underdeveloped, and none of the phosphate wealth has ever been invested into local infrastructure nor benefitted local citizens. In comparison with those living in other relatively wealthier territories of the country, communities of this area have found themselves marginalized. Furthermore, corruption, conflicts of interest, and clientelism that have involved, among others, members of President Ben Ali's political party, RCD, who held positions of leadership at the regional L'Union générale Tunisienne du travail (UGTT), were seen as a cause of the broad unemployment of graduates living in the region. Within this context, the manipulation of the results of a public call for recruiting became the incident that sparked the 2008 uprising in Gafsa. The relevance of these protests in Tunisian history is multiple, but in the context of my research, the most important aspects concern the form this wave of dissent took, its (limited) geographical spread, and its media coverage. I refer especially to its representation through mainstream channels and the resulting national and international echo.

The demonstrations in Redeyef were started spontaneously, partially, without a united leadership, and this characteristic makes them similar to a social movement. One branch of the UGTT labor unions, that of teachers in particular, guided by the general secretary Adnane Hajji,

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[165] Salmon, *29 jours de révolution: histoire du soulèvement tunisien, 17 décembre 2010–14 janvier 2011*.

provided limited coordination. This branch stood against the regional direction of the UGTT and the union of miners (who didn't participate in the demonstrations). Conversely, in other towns, the protests were more similar to riots. However, this embryonal sample of a social movement emerged in 2008 was too weak to become a long-lasting entity.[166]

The repression by police and army against the protesters and the activists was violent: brutality during the demonstrations, incarcerations, tortures, and extremely heavy penalties for the organizers of the protests were all measures applied by President Ben Ali to stop the wave of dissent. The confinement of the turmoil by the government, together with the limited distribution of images and information about the events in Gafsa, probably restricted the spread of demonstrations to other towns and regions. However, in solidarity with the cause, Associations of Tunisians living abroad (for example, in Nantes or Paris) have supported the break of the block imposed by Ben Ali. But these initiatives were revealed to be very limited and were not enough to empower further mobilization. Instead, it is worthwhile to stress the role played by the internet in this historical phase, which was used by activists for distributing testimonies of the movement online via photos and videos taken with their mobile phones. However, the virtual sphere still served this struggle in a limited manner in comparison with the relevance that it took on in 2010–11. Indeed, activists brought CDs containing documentation by car to the local satellite channel Al-Hiwar Attounsi and in this way contributed to the production and the generation of news and information, as some of my interviewees (e.g., Selma Zghidi) reported. Correspondent for this channel Fahem Boukaddous had the credit of distributing the only professional images of sits-in and gatherings in Redeyef, and for this act he was later condemned to six years of prison.

In this concern, the documentary *Maudit soit le phosphate* (2012) by director Sami Tlili is a very important historical document and acknowledged because it gathers together dispersed and fragmented materials (i.e. audiovisual materials, testimonies, and interviews) that reconstruct the events in Redeyef, the mobilization of movement of protest, and the demonstrations as well as provides evidence of the police brutality and repression against the activists. *Maudit soit le phosphate* therefore facilitates the creation of an archive and functions as a form of archive itself. If the claim that the revolutionary process has continued in the aftermath of January 14, 2011 is legitimate, it is equally correct to consider that it had started in 2008 with the uprising in Redeyef.

The observation of the reactions online by Tunisian and non-Tunisian users contribute to circumscribing the question of this debate. Indeed, the acknowledgement of the date of December 17, 2010 is celebrated yearly via Facebook posts. For instance, in 2018 on the

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[166] Larbi Chouikha, Eric Gobe, "La Tunisie entre la 'révolte du bassin minier de Gafsa' et l'échéance électorale de 2009" *L'Année du Maghreb*, no. 5 (2009): 387-420, accessed August 23, 2019, http://journals.openedition.org/anneemaghreb/623.

occasion of the eighth anniversary of Bouazizi's act of self-immolation, the renowned caricaturist Z reposted some of his old drawings mocking ZABA, the nickname of Ben Ali, showing the dictator making fun of Bouazizi's suicide. In response, cyber activist AnarChnowa wrote on his Facebook Wall "Remember, remember the 17th December" and uploaded a funny picture with the text "I love Sidi Bouzid," (Figure 1) while Syrian journalist, filmmaker and activist Amer Matar shared a drawing of Bouazizi accompanied by his comment: "On this day, Bouazizi burned himself, because of injustice. Then the Arab Spring started," and in the photo we read, "Bouazizi Fire" (Figure 2). Similarly, every January 14 over the last nine years, users on Facebook and YouTube remember and commemorate the anniversary of the revolution through posts and comments. Messages like "Happy revolution;"[167] "Happy Revolution Day"[168] pop up, while on one occasion director Nasredine Ben Maati has also shared a Vimeo link of his documentary *Génération Maudite – Wled Ammar*. In addition, thoughts and feelings of pride, joy, and sadness by users for the current political situation, the achievements and struggles, and the remembrance of beloved activists and artists who lost their lives after January 2011 can be seen through the variety of public posts and comments.

Obviously, other dates have also been crucial in the history of the country post-January 14, 2011 and have been repeatedly commemorated on social networks over the years or have spontaneously emerged from the memory of the subjects I interviewed. For instance, one relevant date is February 6, 2013, when lawyer and politician Chokri Belaïd, who was an opposition leader with the left-secular Democratic Patriots' Movement, was assassinated.

All these contradictory considerations about what chronicles or dates to pick in order delimit the observation of the revolutionary process have the purpose of giving account of the evidence that the events occurred between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali toppling, over the so called twenty-nine days, are merely a small portion of a much longer and articulate timeline. In this sense, the title of the pedagogical exhibition *Before the 14th, instant tunisien* mentioned earlier rightly gives relevance to the term "instant": twenty-nine days are nothing but a flash in the flow of history. Yet, the fate of Tunisia irreversibly changed precisely within the time of the blink of an eye. Consistently with the considerations above, I will use the terms "twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution," or alternatively, "the instant," to refer to the time frame between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's fall in order to acknowledge that I am considering only one phase of the whole revolution, which is actually still ongoing. Conversely, I will use the terms "revolutionary process" to indicate the current stage of the upheaval that started in the aftermath of Ben Ali's toppling and the end of its regime.

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[167] See Azyz Amami, January 14, 2019, Facebook profile.

[168] See Samah Krichah, January 14, 2019, Facebook profile.

I need to clarify, now, why I consider especially the amateur clips shot during this precise time frame. As Salmon says, Tunisian modernity caught the attention of citizens across North Africa and the Middle East regions, but also beyond, internationally, as the images associated with the Tunisian upheaval worked as a sample for other uprisings. The case of Tunisia turned into an iconic example: as a result of the unrest, it demonstrated a collective performing its "citizenship," or *citoyennité*, in offline and online public spaces. Amateur videos and photographs of the revolution started to spread by December 18, 2010 (or, perhaps even by the same day of Bouazizi's self-immolation). Their circulation via social networks supported the local growth of dissent and filled the void left by mainstream information and broadcast channels. Furthermore, the instant and the values that this phase carried worked as a sample for other close and distant communities and inspired the uprisings in Egypt, the Indignados movement in Spain, Occupy in the United States and beyond.[169]

Three main reasons bring me to focus specifically on the events that occurred during the phase between December 17, 2010 and January 14, 2011. First, the undoubtable conditions that created, over this period, circumstances that instigated a chain of changes that have altered the history of the country. I acknowledge here the massive, spontaneous, non-coordinated but systemic activation of citizen-filmers as main witnesses of the uprising, a phenomenon of which I find an embryonal version already in 2008. Second, I recognize visual representations that circulated online over the twenty-nine days as tools that are able to foment the spread of protests across the country. Third, I endorse the influence of audiovisual materials distributed locally over this time frame as well as the impact of these images beyond national borders, thanks to the support of Tunisian activists abroad along with the millions of anonymous onlookers-users who have contributed to the transmission of these visual testimonies. As it emerged from the interviews conducted during the research on site, the end of censorship on social networks such as YouTube in the post-Ben Ali era made the activism of Tunisian militants living abroad less necessary in the aftermath of January 14, 2011. In addition, the growing understanding of the mobilizing role of the images spread online and the increasing understanding by citizens of their power through and thanks to images brought a sort of normalization of the practice of documenting everyday circumstances, demonstrations, and so on through photos and videos. This normalization also concerned the use of social networks to receive and share information. This does not mean that these aspects make the investigation of the post-January 14, 2011 moment less relevant, but rather, that my intention is to focus on the video production of the most intense and improvised phase of the ongoing revolution and to observe the life of these very images within the revolutionary process. Concerning the historical accuracy of the term "twenty-nine days of revolution" used by Salmon, I consider it valid because the intention is not to state

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[169] Salmon, *29 jours de révolution*: *histoire du soulèvement tunisien, 17 décembre 2010–14 janvier 2011*.

that the revolution lasted only twenty-nine days. Rather, it is to observe in detail the period between December 17, 2010 and January 14, 2011 as one instant of a revolutionary process, which started in 2008 and is still ongoing in Tunisia.

2.4 Enacting the People via Vernacular Videos as Digital Object in Social Networks

The research and film productions of scholar, journalist, and filmmaker Peter Snowdon[170] and the studies of scholar Ulrike Riboni[171] were the first in-depth analysis of the production of amateur footage of citizens in the uprisings in Arab speaking countries. Their studies paved the way for a close observation of the nature of the footage in direct relationship with the platforms that diffuse them and the filmers who produced them. This structural observation states that image and medium are complementary to the existence of this typology of image. While Snowdon is credited with defining the video genre and the revolutionary nature of both the footage and platform distributing them, Riboni focuses on the act of sharing and the subversiveness this gesture entails.

Applying Ivan Illich's political conception of the vernacular of the early 1980s to online videos, Snowdon employs the term "vernacular" in order "to refer to the proliferation of user-generated content provoked by video-sharing services such as YouTube."[172] Therefore, vernacular videos are expressions of the collision between a repressive political environment and the possibility of accessing technology (smartphones) and infrastructure (the internet and social media) to represent a condition *in fieri* of the people, independent from repressive control.

Philosopher Judith Butler attributes great importance to the actions of bodies in relation to the technological devices that report on them when she says, "What bodies are doing on the street when they are demonstrating is linked fundamentally to what communication devices and technologies are doing when they 'report' on what is happening in the street. These are different actions, but they both require bodily actions. The one exercise of freedom is linked to the other

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[170] Peter Snowdon,"The Revolution *Will* Be Uploaded," *Culture Unbound*, no. 6 (2014): 401–29, accessed February 23, 2017, http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se.

[171] Ulrike Riboni, "Filmer et Partager la Révolution en Tunisie et en Egypte: Représentations Collectives et Inscriptions Individuelles dans la Révolte," *Anthropologie et Société*, 40, no. 1, (2016): 51–69, accessed January 21, 2017, https://doi.org/10.7202/1036370ar. Ulrike Riboni, "Représentations mobilisatrices et stratégies visuelles pour convaincre et fédérer dans les productions vidéo de la Tunisie en révolution," in *Quand L'image (Dé)mobilise! Iconographies et Mouvements Sociaux au XXe Siècle*, eds Bénédicte Rochet, Anne Roekens et al. (Namur: Presses universitaires de Namur, 2015), 95–110.

[172] Snowdon, "The Revolution *Will* Be Uploaded," 406.

exercise, which means that both are ways of exercising rights and that, jointly, they bring a space of appearance into being and secure its transposability."[173]

Influenced by Butler's understanding of "the people" as those who are the subject of history and who are essentially a performative event rather than a pre-existing entity,[174] Snowdon considers "the people" as a performance featuring diverse sets of practices of self-representation and diffusion via YouTube. This composite entity, the people, started to accompany their individual and collective public actions with a massive production of pictures and videos, which allowed an incredibly wide audience to be able to experience events through the internet and the mediation of the screen. For the first time in the history of cinema, as Snowdon states, citizens have not delegated other filmmakers to record the unfolding of their history nor have they postponed its reporting. Rather, they have reacted by filming while performing in public space, making evident in this way that the videos produced were part of the same political action.[175] Tunisian cinema critic Tarek Ben Chaabane states that these amateur images "have put in place a process specific to the capture of events by filmmakers/citizens/insurgents. An approach in which the uncertain gesture of the gross recording of events is doubled by a dramatic charge which, in its shortcomings and insufficiencies, speaks of the tension of the situation lived and brought to life."[176]

As Snowden writes: "These videos are vernacular, then, not simply because they are non-professional and non-commercial. They are vernacular because they belong to the multiple series of gestures and actions through which individuals gather, both online and offline, to enact the people as the possible subject of *another* history."[177] Footage by citizens have not only influenced but also made imaginable the existence of another counter history in twofold ways: first, directly, by functioning as a trigger and affecting civil organizations and participation in the unfolding of events; and secondly, by producing a hectic though recognizable visual documentation, which will be the raw materials for the writing of the chronicles of the revolution in the years to come. The

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[173] Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," *eipcp* (2011): 10, accessed December 13, 2017, http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en.

[174] Snowdon, "The Revolution *Will* Be Uploaded," 401.

Judith Butler, "We the People: Thoughts on Freedom of Assembly," in *What Is a People*, ed. Alain Badiou, Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, Georges Didi-Huberman, Sadri Khiari, and Jacques Rancière (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). E-book.

[175] Snowdon, "The Revolution *Will* Be Uploaded," 402.

[176] Tarek Ben Chaabane, *Le cinéma tunisien, d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* (Tunis: Édition CNCI, 2019), 38. My translation from the French.

[177] Snowdon, "The Revolution *Will* Be Uploaded," 411.

"people" succeeded in creating the basis for a grassroots documentation and transcription of the turmoil. They will either embody the victors, who normally write history, or the oppressed.

The power of this footage also has to be recognized for its wide resonance. In this concern, Butler claims that "the media images from Tunisia prepared the way for the media events in Tahrir, and then those that followed in Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and Libya, all of which took different trajectories, and take them still."[178] The American philosopher emphasizes the empowering transnational function that the Tunisian vernacular, mediatized footage played. However, this is not the first case in history where mediatized images have empowered other faraway struggles. Meanwhile, the circulation of the footage in question is also not exempt by state control and censorship on the internet. Yet, their accelerated and grassroots distribution, across not one but several platforms, channels, and networks, and released from official state media by the internet, made it possible that this footage, more than other footage, paved the way for global distribution and power.

All these remarks—which touch upon the immediate value and use of this footage, the visual and historical heritage they deposited for reconstructing the revolutionary events themselves, as well as the history of the country, in combination with the perspective of storytelling to come—concern precisely the preoccupations of my research and the questions that I aim to unfold. At the core of Snowdon's analysis is the crucial role played by YouTube, which is not simply a platform where videos are uploaded. Rather, it is a digital object, medium, and tool that turns revolutionary itself because it both embodies and spreads the revolution. Similar considerations can also be extended to other social-media platforms used at that time, such as Facebook and Twitter.

> These videos do not just make use of the existing repertoire of YouTube's functions to broadcast the Arab revolutions. They are also a revolution in the way YouTube itself is conceived and used. By unsettling the opposition between public and private, objective and subjective, collective and individual, they bring about an irrevocable change in the potential of the online database, because that database is not just an infrastructure or an algorithm, but is inextricably enmeshed with practices, experiences and desires without which it cannot make sense, and which exist only offline—not only in our heads and hearts, but in the simplest, least explicable of our bodily gestures, too.[179]

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[178] Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," 9.

[179] Snowdon, "The Revolution *Will* be Uploaded," 411–12.

These practices, experiences, desires, and emotions (this latter term defined by Kolesh and Knoblauch as action, a dynamic activity[180]) do not remain only a matter of the user and the videos but seem to be transferred to YouTube's function as a database. The circulation of content, and to a certain extent, the functioning of the algorithm, are enforced by affect and all the forms of connectivity emerging from the use of the platforms that the former generates. In this sense, whereas emotions co-participate in the mobilizing action of these videos online and offline, in the act of filming and sharing, I question if and in what capacity this dynamic activity does not exhaust. Whether emotions remain latent or transform or disperse over the course of time, what effect does it produce in the user-onlooker and the platform hosting them?

2.5 Vernacular Videos and the Embedded Performativity of the Onlooker's Gaze, Online and Offline

As said above, vernacular videos do not only enact performance in public space but are the performance itself—which both takes place offline, where physical bodies act, and online. Through her analysis, Ulrike Lune Riboni looks closely at the gestures of citizens who filmed and shared online visual testimonies made during the civil uprising in Tunisia in 2011. In particular, Riboni has deciphered the mobilization of representation and visual strategies used to convince and group people together:

> From the gesture, trying spontaneously to give the feeling of the quantity through the composition of the image, to the montage or the mise-en-scène, the limits of the intention remain blurred. In those who define themselves as militant, the practices evolve and seem to professionalize. The aesthetic question becomes more important, the devices are less rudimentary, and the reflections that lay at the basis of the footage deepen. [...] Filming also means self-filming and making oneself visible is a response to the confiscation of one's own images, as an individual and collective. The mobilizing potential of the videos does not stay only on the images themselves but also on sharing online. [...] It is not the message but the messenger. Sharing is a gesture that might be subversive in itself.[181]

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[180] Doris Kolesh and Hubert, Knoblauch, "Audience Emotions," in *Affective Societies: Key Concepts*, ed. Jan Slaby and Christian von Scheve (New York: Routledge, 2019), 253.

[181] Riboni, "Représentations Mobilisatrices et Stratégies Visuelles pour Convaincre et Fédérer dans les Productions Vidéo de la Tunisie en Révolution," 13.

Questioning the crucial point of how to measure whether a video will produce a real effect or mobilize people in the act of sharing, Riboni recognizes the militancy of intention and gesture. It might be that the act of filming was accomplished for the purpose of personal record, which comes before the desire for sharing,[182] but I support the idea that the primary need was for distributing information, mobilizing local citizens, and reaching international audiences.[183] Sharing is embedded by participatory culture, which has its basis in a broad understanding of the concept of performance. By referring to performance studies, sociologists Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst recall the study of theorist Richard Schechner,[184] which contributes to conceiving performance as any situation, staged or integrated into everyday life, in which the subject, as audience, moves.[185] This angle identifies the performance as linked with various forms of ritual as well as sorts of roles covered by the actor and the observer. It also supports the idea that the performance builds the audience and that different modes of performance are related to diverse types of audience experience. According to this perspective, sharing has to be understood as a performative collective practice that defines and is determined, in turn, by the context of civil turmoil and those who shape it.

However, I argue that Riboni's considerations exclude, or at least do not consider another actor enough. If the role of performer and audience overlaps, then the act of sharing involves the amateur videographers filming the circumstances where they were immersed and also those who were informed and had access to the events through the filter of a technological device. This refers to millions of onlookers—physically or culturally distant from the occurrence—who witness the events through the mediation of the screen and the internet and who contribute to the circulation of videos and attribute meaning to them by commenting or simply making views grow by watching YouTube's playlist or Facebook's News Feed.

The awareness of the active involvement of this spectator in the visual dynamics of the struggle is of the highest importance, as it is also reiterated in the script of Rabih Moué's lecture-performance *Sand in the Eyes* (2017). The topic of the work differs as it questions, among other

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[182] From my notes, during the lecture titled "Performing Moments of an Archive," held by Philip Risz and Jasmina Metwaly on the occasion of the seminar "Archival Constellation" (as part of Forum Expanded Think Film No. 5, at silent green Kulturquartier, Berlin, February 16, 2017). The two former members of the Mosireen collective revealed that at the time of the protests, there was not a clear understanding about the future of the images taken in the streets and that the only purpose was for representing the present to reach actual, immediate effects.

[183] The first video existing of the twenty-nine days is the one-shot by Ali Bouazizi, uncle of Mohamed Bouazizi, in the aftermath of his self-immolation. Chronicles say that the video was immediately shared with Al Jazeera.

[184] Richard, Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988).

[185] Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: A sociological theory of performance and imagination* (London: Sage, 1998).

things, the politics inherent in dealing with Islamist recruiting videos from the point of view of the state and society. Within this context, Moué raises fundamental issues about how the spectator's gaze influences the watched object, and he states that "the act of viewing makes us the target of the image," and so, "by watching we are operating in the same machine."[186] Therefore, following these considerations, I argue that a subject who in reality might not have filmed the events *in medias res* but who did witness and experience them through the mediation of the eyes and screen takes part in a whole set of practices that make this figure vernacular, insomuch as the videos themselves do. In doing so, I stress the spectator as one of the main figures embedded in the phenomenon of vernacular footage of the Tunisian revolution, and the same could be assumed for any other political event.

By taking part in the practices and relations that unite social media, clips, and the filmer by the act of watching, the spectator enacts a form of militancy, which unfolds through boosting the circulation of videos via the online behaviors of sharing and commenting. This claim touches upon a highly debated issue that has become more urgent in the last few years concerning media and cyberactivism as effective forms of militantism compared to "real" activism. The terms "couch activism" and "slacktivism" coined by Dwight Ozard and Fred Clark in 1995 were used extensively by activists, journalists, and writers such as Evgeny Morozov to discredit individual and collective actions, forms of solidarity, affect, and empathy, as well as the "feelings of community"[187] that emerge from the internet.

A dichotomy that focuses completely on the presence versus absence of the body from a certain context privileges a narrow category of results that excludes a wider typology of forms that activism can take. In this sense, I aim to contribute to this debate by blurring the boundaries between what actions can be considered forms of activism and by expanding the narrow interpretation of militant action. However, in this concern, although I find stressing the inclusion of distant spectators within the phenomenon of the vernacular videos of crucial relevance, I do not aim to further underline the border between those who film and share and those who watch and share, as according to Jacques Rancière, whose thoughts will be examined in the next chapter, there is no substantial difference between the engagement of the former and the latter. Spectators are always involved in the spectacle they are observing, and the mediation of the screen is only one of the possible filters that mediate the experience of an image or an event.

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[186] From my notes, taken from the script of the lecture-performance, Rabih Moué, *Sand in the Eyes,* Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, October 7, 2017.

[187] Jodi Dean, "Affective Networks," *Media Tropes* eJournal, no. 2 (2010): 22, accessed May 13, 2017, https://www.academia.edu/859046/Affective_Networks.

2.6 The Development of ICT in Tunisia during Ben Ali's Regime until December 17, 2010: Cyber Dissidence and the Role of the Diaspora in the Struggle against Censorship

While the internet and social media have always proposed themselves as borderless transnational platforms, media scholars such as Evgenij Morozov,[188] Geert Lovink,[189] and Jan van Dijk,[190] just to name a few, have contradicted these arguments. Infrastructurally, the notion of the "digital divide" focuses on "the gap between those who do and do not have access to computers and the Internet."[191] It stresses fragmentation and inequalities, which can also be extended to "the quality and speed of connectivity, services available to the user, services actually used, and available information and communication technology (ICT) training or resources," claims scholar Rasha A. Abdulla. "On a micro level, the digital divide also refers to the haves and have-nots of information technologies within the same country, who are perhaps affected by their race, gender, education, socioeconomic status, or a combination of these factors," she continues.[192] And even looking at YouTube or Facebook as one unique object, it has to be questioned, as music journalist and author Simon Reynolds says, the "coexistence of myriad micro-cultures, as we might all be on YouTube, are all looking at different things." And in this way, "there are *YouTubes* instead of YouTube."[193] The notion of the digital divide as well as the awareness of the fragmentation and geopolitical connotations of internet products, which make social media totally different tools from one place to another, are particularly important for introducing and contextualizing the digital landscape of the phenomenon of vernacular videos developed in Tunisia.

The development of social media in this country is inscribed in a digital context that was subject to state control and censorship[194] in which bloggers and cyber-activists, frequently anonymous individuals or in collectives, living in the country but more often abroad, have developed an intense activity of the contestation and elusion of censorship through the internet

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[188] Evgenij Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011).

[189] Lovink, *Networks Without a Cause: A Critique of Social Media*.

[190] Jan van Dijk, *The Network Society: Social Aspects of New Media* (London: SAGE Publications, 2006).

[191] Van Dijk, *The Network Society*, 178.

[192] Rasha A. Abdulla, *The Internet in the Arab World: Egypt and Beyond* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), 34.

[193] Simon Reynolds, "Broadcast Yourself: YouTube Micro-fame and the Phenomenology of Digital Life" (English version), in *After Youtube: Gespräche, Portraits, Texte zum Musikvideo nach dem Internet*, ed. Lars Henrik Gass, Christian Höller, Jessica Manstetten (Cologne: Strzelecki Books, 2018), 1, accessed on August 29, 2018, https://www.kurzfilmtage.de/festival/sektionen/muvi/simon-reynolds/.

[194] As a caricatural representation of the censor, the iconic figure of "Ammar" the old man mirrors this situation.

since the 1990s.[195] In this section, I will provide an overview of ICT development in Tunisia during the Ben Ali government, the functioning of censorship on the internet and social networks, and as well, I will go through the most important phases of the unfolding of cyber dissidence in Tunisia, which involves Tunisian actors abroad. The insight into this type of militancy is particularly relevant in my study as it provides a background context to locate and understand the broad phenomenon of vernacular videos.

Tunisia was one of the first African countries to open to the internet, which occurred between 1989 and 1991. When it came to information and communication technologies, the authoritarian Ben Ali government remarkably had modernizing ambitions.[196] In fact, the state attributed a function of the highest importance to the internet as one factor instrumental to the economic development of the country.[197] The Tunisian government opened the internet in 1996 to large audiences, and in the meantime, it accompanied this act with the concentration of all connections abroad in the ATI (Tunisian Internet Authority),[198] a firm in which the state was the major investor. However, in parallel with the digital progress and the growth of the volume of communications, the Tunisian state apparatus also reacted by adding an increasingly sophisticated system of control and surveillance. For this purpose, it equipped the Ministry of Interiors with hackers[199]and cyber police as well as devices for spying. In 2005 Tunisia hosted the second part of the Sommet Mondial sur la Société de l'Information (SMSI) to demonstrate internationally the economic development of the country, while at the same time, the government adopted direct and indirect measures to repress freedom of expression, control communications, and ban access to any website or page in opposition to the regime.

Yet, the diffusion of the internet in Tunisia brought predictable results, similar to what was already observed over the decades in several other repressive or democratic countries: public space online gave individuals and groups possibilities for autonomy and expression outside of state control. The internet facilitated the visibility of independent environments of contestation

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[195] Romain Lecomte, "Révolution Tunisienne et Internet: Le rôle des médias sociaux," *L'Année du Maghreb*, no. 7, (2011): 3, accessed January 24, 2018, http://journals.openedition.org/anneemaghreb/1288.

[196] Salmon, *29 jours de révolution*: *histoire du soulèvement tunisien, 17 décembre 2010–14 janvier 2011*; Beatrice Hibou, "Domination and Control in Tunisia: Economic levers for the exercise of authoritarian power," *Review of African Political Economy*, Taylor & Francis Journals, 33 no. 108: 185-206, https://doi.org/10.1080/03056240600842628.

[197] Romain Lecomte, "L'anonymat comme 'art de résistance'." *Terminal* 105 (2010): 1-11, accessed February 3, 2018, http://journals.openedition.org/terminal/1862.

[198] Andrea L. Kavanaugh, *The Social Control of Technology in North Africa* (Westport: Praeger, 1998).

[199] Jean-Marc Salmon, "Numérisation et soulèvement. Une enquête en Tunisie," *Mouvements* 79, no. 3 (2014): 28-37, accessed March 13, 2020, https://doi.org/10.3917/mouv.079.0028.

created by Tunisians living abroad that addressed fellow citizens in their home country. The development and distribution of internet technologies also accompanied another broader process of advancement that includes the privatization of television channels and the introduction of satellite dishes. These latter devices facilitated the investment by Tunisians in exile in media channels, such as El Mopustiquilla and Al Hiwar Attounsi, animated by opponents to Ben Ali, which broadcasted from abroad in order to reach Tunisian audiences.[200]

Sociologist Romain Lecomte frames the development of online activism in Tunisia during and against Ben Ali's regime and the tight relation of this form of militancy with the development of technologies, new devices, and infrastructure. He recognizes three main ages: the "age of the cyber dissidence" (end of the 1990s to 2005), the "age of the citizen blogosphere" (mid-2000s to 2008–9), and the "age of the social networks" (2008–9 to the revolution).[201] These three phases share one characteristic, which is particularly important in my study. I refer to the complementary role played by the diaspora in the online activism and criticism of the regime. Indeed, Tunisians living abroad took advantage of the internet to provide their fellow citizens with access to different positions, perspectives, and ideas that would have otherwise remained hidden to them. This aspect will connect later, directly and indirectly, with the central interest of this research in investigating and understanding the use and users of YouTube during and after the timeframe of the twenty-nine days of the revolution.

Starting in 1995, newsletters, mailing lists, forums, online magazines, and blogs have been launched and have grown. They were mainly initiated by Tunisians living abroad, but also by or in collaboration with non-Tunisians. The launch of *Takriz* is considered to be the origin of cyber dissidence. Takriz was a mailing list and later an e-mag that still exists today. It was founded by two Tunisian militant students, Foetus and Waterman, and, in 1998, gathered together around twenty members living in Tunisia and abroad.[202] *Tunezine* was a forum created in 2000 by Zouhayr Yahyoui (*Ettounsi*), a pioneer of cyber activism and open opponent to Ben Ali; *RéveilTunisien*, which was linked to *Tunezine*, worked as an e-mag and allowed users to write comments or propose articles (it was founded in 2002, and was mostly managed by non-Tunisians);[203] *Nawaat.org* was a forum initiated in 2004 by Sami Al Gharbia, exiled in Belgium,

[200] Larbi Chouikha, *La difficile transformation des medias: des années de l'indépendance à la veille des élections de 2014* (Tunis: Editions Finzi, 2015).

[201] Romain Lecomte, "Expression politique et activisme en ligne en contexte autoritaire. Une analyse du cas tunisien", *Réseaux* 5, no. 181 (2013): 51-86, accessed January 22, 2019, DOI 10.3917/res.181.0051.

[202] Romain Lecomte, "Internet et la reconfiguration de l'espace public tunisien: le rôle de la diaspora," *tic&société* 3, no.1-2 (2009): 1–20, accessed January 30, 2019, URL: http://journals.openedition.org/ticetsociete/702.

[203] Lecomte, "Internet et la reconfiguration de l'espace public tunisien: le rôle de la diaspora."

with other Tunisian and online friends (after January 14, 2011, the forum turned into one of the two most crucial and trustworthy information platforms and online magazines in the country).

Media studies scholar Larbi Chouikha outlines three relevant observations about the proliferation of counter-regime sites, e-magazines, and news. The development of a free, independent cyberspace in Tunisia is the reaction by specific layers of the society to the lack of (plural) information and the need of communication and exchange. The initiators and founders of the sites mentioned above are mainly students, universitaries, and freelance professionals frustrated by the impossibility of access to more varied information through traditional media, which was controlled by the state. However, until the 2000s, internet users and bloggers belonged mostly to an elite class[204] mainly based in the capital Tunis or abroad (e.g., Canada, France, and so on); they have an internet connection at home[205] and they have IT skills, which allows them to use proxies to circumvent the ban. Chouikha stresses that within this elite, the militants of the Ennhada movement, renowned for their Islamist positions, were the most exposed to repression as the movement was banned by Ben Ali in Tunisia and all its affiliates lived as political refugees abroad. So, the very members of this group are among the main actors who initiated and increased forms of cyberactivism. In that sense, the case of *Tunisnews* is emblematic. It started as a mailing list launched in 1999 by five people residing in Sweden,[206]among them there were Islamists in exile and also Tunisians who had for a long time been residents abroad. The mailing list was sent daily and aimed to gather together the widest possible points of view and plurality of voices concerning relevant questions for Tunisians inside and outside the country. Finally, counter-regime sites were all created abroad and shared the main goal of facilitating the possibility for individuals and activists to take advantage as well as to appropriate the internet and its potential in order to create a network of informal connections between the Tunisian diaspora and citizens in the country.

The landscape of blogs that proliferated in opposition to censorship is varied. A very common characteristic among these platforms, which distinguish this tool from previous cyber dissidence, is the employment of different forms of anonymity (e.g. anonymity of identity or of a technical nature, via proxies) or the use of veiled criticism via irony and sarcasm. Bloggers like Lina Ben Mhenni initiated her first site, named *Nightclubeuse*, in 2007. Fascinated by the freedom that a tool like a blog could allow, she later initiated a website using the pseudonym nali83, in collaboration with a militant journalist, to post wrightings.[207] Z (an anonymous caricaturist based in

[204] Chouikha, *La difficile transformation des médias: des années de l'indépendance à la veille des élections de 2014.*

[205] Lecomte, "Internet et la reconfiguration de l'espace public tunisien: le rôle de la diaspora."

[206] Salmon, *29 jours de révolution*: *histoire du soulèvement tunisien, 17 décembre 2010–14 janvier 2011*.

[207] Viviane Betteïeb, *Dégage, Tunis et Asnière-sur-Seine* (Tunis et Asnière sur Seine: Editions du

Paris) launched *DEBATunisie* in 2008, a blog intended to respond to political and social issues by means of iconic sarcasm. These ironic caricatures, the so-called *image contrariée* (or, the disappointed image), as art historian Rachida Triki defines them,[208] mocked Ben Ali (Roi ZABA), his wife (Princess Leila), and the whole political circle (the court). Big Trap Boy (anonymous) criticizes by means of humor and writing in Tunisian dialect,[209] while the collective blog *Boudourou* developed a parody of the Pulitzer Prize for mediocre journalists criticising them. In addition to these major characters, there are Fatma Arabicca (active since 2007), Carpe Diem, Sami III, Astrubal,[210] and Sami Ben Abdallah (based in Paris), who started their activities online in different ways and with diverse aims. Anonymity by the use of pseudonyms as well as humor and irony turned into the main tools and forms of contestation in the given context.

Interrogations of cyber activists were constant between 2002 and 2010, as the interactivity that the internet allowed represented a threat for the state's status quo. Bloggers face often imprisonment and trials, as Slim Amamou, Azyz Amami and others tell in the documentary *Génération Maudit–Wled Ammar* (2013) by Nasredine Ben Maati. The most emblematic case is that of cyberactivist Zouhayr Yahyoui, imprisoned in 2003 for his militancy, who a few months later his release in 2005 died of cardiac-related causes, probably as consequences of the hard treatment and pain suffered during his detention. However, it is worthwhile to stress that, within the Tunisian context, cyberactivism did not necessarily mean political engagement or an affiliation with any political party. Actually, bloggers considered it slippery to write their thoughts about politics, or sometimes they didn't even have a specific position themselves in this regard. As reported by cyber-dissident Hamadi Kaloutcha in the documentary *Génération Maudit–Wled Ammar*, cyberactivists were most of the time uniquely engaged with the struggle against the censorship of the internet and for freedom of expression.

Authorities by 2002 allowed the flourishing of internet points called "publinets," but not without exercising various forms of control and restrictions to freedom of expression at all levels, and on several actors, such as providers of internet access, managers of publinets, and admins of forums and websites.[211] Keywords and black lists compiled by ATI filtered contents. However, as Lecomte reports, another entity directly linked to the Ministry of Interiors was apparently the actual one in charge of the filtering. Central organs were in charge of blocking of pages through software, such as Websense and Smartfilter. The filter was applied arbitrarily to several websites,

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Patrimoine et Editions du Layeur, 2011) in Salmon, *29 jours de révolution*: *histoire du soulèvement tunisien, 17 décembre 2010–14 janvier 2011.*

[208] Rachida Triki, *L'image. Ce que l'on voit, ce que l'on crée*, (Paris: Larousse, 2008), 76.

[209] Lecomte, "Internet et la reconfiguration de l'espace public tunisien: le rôle de la diaspora."

[210] Lecomte, "Internet et la reconfiguration de l'espace public tunisien: le rôle de la diaspora."

[211] Lecomte, "L'anonymat comme 'art de résistance'."

for instance an NGO for the defense of human rights, such as Amnesty International, online newspapers such as *Libération*, or pages of private citizens expressing counter-regime opinions. To bump into "403 Access Denied Checker" or "404 Error" messages during searches was so common for internet users that a fictional character named *Ammar* the censor was invented to personify the block.[212] Z represents *Ammar* as a paunchy old man, wearing glasses and sexually obsessed.[213] Furthermore, private emails are also under control and blogs often experience blocks. So, self-censorship worked also very effectively, aside from the restrictions imposed by the government and its apparatus both during the regime and partly also during the early stages of the revolution until the fall of Ben Ali, in the offline and the online sphere. "Walls had ears," one of my interviewees (Samah Krichra) declared, while another (Manel Souissi) described the fear of sharing the contents of her Facebook friends list when it came to distributing videos and photos of the demonstrations and uprising during the twenty-nine days of the revolution.[214] The dissent towards Ammar and the oppressive apparatus intensified when a new wave of repression brought on a series of reactions by bloggers: some started to coordinate on Skype and Twitter with the idea of organizing a demonstration in Paris; in Tunis a closed group, unaffiliated with any political parties and associations, self-organized on Google and decided to protest against Ammar. Slim Amamou, Yassine Ayari, Lina Ben Mhenni are the initiators of the demonstration slot to happen in May 22, 2010, but the arrest of Amamou and Ayari pushed Ben Mhenni and other bloggers, in collaboration with the group of Nhar 3la 3ammar (meaning "a day about Ammar")[215] to activate an alternative plan. This latter scheme concretized with the exposition of white T-shirts from the balconies of Avenue Bourguiba.[216]According to Lina Ben Mhenni, demonstrations against web

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[212] Lecomte, "L'anonymat comme ' art de résistance'."

[213] Salmon, *29 jours de révolution*: *histoire du soulèvement tunisien, 17 décembre 2010–14 janvier 2011*.

[214] Talking about self-censorship during the twenty-nine day phase of the revolution, Manel Souissi declares that "Même sur Facebook, il y a certaines vidéos qui ont été supprimées après un ou deux jours. On galérait pour voir quelque chose. Tu sais que la révolution a commencé déjà le 17 décembre et du 17 au 13 [janvier] on a galéré pour voir des vidéos. Lorsqu'on voit des vidéos on a fait des coups de téléphone, entre amis, avec des messages codés. C'est l'autocensure, je crois. Je ne sais pas, est-ce que vraiment Ben Ali a la machine pour voir des messages codés? Avec des messages codés on va voir Facebook. Et on partageait vraiment des pages. J'ai eu, par exemple, un problème pour le partage. Mes amis m'ont appelé, ils m'ont dit 'Ne partage pas, s'il te plaît. Pas de problème,' pour les manifestations de Sidi Bouzid, le 17 décembre. Donc j'ai supprimé plusieurs, mais pas tous" (Manel Souissi, interview, June 15, 2018, Tunis).

[215] The expression indicate also the whole set of procedures related to the preparation of the public action in May 22, 2010, including a mobilization campaign, the process followed by the organizations to legalize the gathering, and so on (Romain Lecomte, *"*De l'expression de soi à l'engagement citoyen*,"* in *Les réseaux sociaux sur l'internet à l'heure des transitions démocratiques*, ed. Sihem Najar (Paris/Tunis: Éditions Karthala et IRMC, 2013)

[216] Salmon, *29 jours de révolution*: *histoire du soulèvement tunisien, 17 décembre 2010–14 janvier 2011*.

censorship in May 2010 can already be considered an early stage of the Tunisian revolution.[217] The growing use of social networks transformed these informal media into a domain of control by the state, which started to fear them.

Facebook appeared in Tunisia in 2007. It allowed an increasingly larger number of users to communicate with "friends" through the platform and create public pages. Facebook turned into an online environment where users felt they could express their opinions less anonymously,[218] but it also developed complementary to the blogosphere as a space for virtual criticism and dissent.[219] However, until 2008, users conceived of Facebook mainly as an entertainment, identity construction, and amusement tool, rather than as a means of spreading dissent and political opinions. Scholar Moez Triki underlines the importance of the relational factors among Tunisians. For instance, they use Facebook to keep alive, look for, create or develop human connection. But it is not uncommon for the factor of curiosity and emulation of other friends present on the platform. Messages concern the areas of love and intimate subjects, sports (videos of national and international competitions), videos or unusual images, private videos and photos of users and her or his relatives, and news or socially relevant information.[220] New languages, dictionaries, forms of self-expression, and self-exposure emerge on Facebook. Initially, communications of the majority of Tunisian's Facebook's users were often in French, as this allowed them to reach a wider audience. Later, the so-called Arab Chat style turned into the one most used, as well as a language that mixed French and Tunisian dialects in the same sentence, though this latter is not used normally in written communication.[221] Later, the 2008 Redeyef uprising brought increasing numbers of citizens to employ the platform for expressing critique against the regime,[222] a behaviour that caused the block of Facebook for some weeks in August 2008 and the surveillance of the platform. The ban of social networks such as YouTube, Dailymotion, and Twitter occurred even before, in 2007, which, when compared to the use of Facebook, led to a

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[217] Lina Ben Mhenni, *Tunisian Girl, blogueuse pour un printemps arabe* (Montpellier: Indigène, 2011).

[218] Salmon, *29 jours de révolution*: *histoire du soulèvement tunisien, 17 décembre 2010–14 janvier 2011*.

[219] Lecomte, *"*De l'expression de soi à l'engagement citoyen.*"*

[220] Moez Triki, "Réseaux sociaux et enjeux sociopolitiques. Étude des pratiques et des usages politiques sur Facebook après la révolution du 14 janvier," in *Les réseaux sociaux sur Internet à l'heure des transitions démocratiques,* ed. Sihem Najar (Paris, Tunis: Éditions Karthala et IRMC, 2013), 337.

[221] Miriam Achour-Kallel, "La parole sur Internet: quelque pistes en anthropologie du langage sur Facebook," in *Les Nouvelles Sociabilités du Net en Méditerranée*, ed. Sihem Najar (Paris/Tunis Éditions Karthala et IRMC, 2012).

[222] At the beginning of 2008, Facebook counted 16.000 Tunisian subscribers, while the amount reached 1.800.000 in January 2011 out of 3.600.000 internet users. Romain Lecomte, "Expression politique et activisme en ligne en contexte autoritaire. Une analyse du cas tunisien", *Réseaux* 2013/5 (n° 181), 51-86. DOI 10.3917/res.181.0051, accessed March 10, 2020, https://www.cairn.info/revue-reseaux-2013-5-page-51.htm

lower level of familiarity for these platforms among Tunisian users. According to the Open Net Initiative, free access to YouTube was possible until November 2, 2007,[223] whereupon former President Ben Ali imposed a ban as a reaction to a video caricature that was distributed on the platform of Tarak Mekki, a Tunisian living in Canada, that mocked him and his wife, Leila Trabelsi.[224] However, as reported by one of my interviewee (Vipa), users were able to access YouTube via proxies. For many Tunisians, YouTube was mainly a platform for consuming entertainment, checking what was happening, and watching shared content by other users; they did not have real access to it in the sense that, due to government restrictions, it was very difficult to upload videos (one could see windows open on the screen, but functionally, the only thing that was allowed was video streaming).[225]

2.6.1 The Performativity of Facebook and YouTube Videos during the Twenty-Nine-Day Phase of the Revolution

As I mentioned above, the performativity of the user-viewer on specific social media relate directly to the given geopolitical conditions. Despite slogans like "Facebook revolution," "Revolution 2.0" and "e-revolution" (mainly spread by Western media), which erroneously praised the function of Facebook and other networks during the twenty-nine-day phase of the upheaval, scholars soon provided a counter, more balanced description of the phenomenon to reframe the roles and limits played by the internet and social networks on local and international levels.

In this paragraph I will give an insight into the use of Facebook and YouTube during the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution. As explained by videomaker Selma Zghidi, digital censorship concerned all platforms and the whole internet without distinction during the uprising, so citizens communicated using any tool available, depending on what was possible in any given moment.[226] Locally, Facebook was effective also because it only required a low bandwidth for uploading content. It was also widely used by activists living abroad for aggregating images dispersed throughout the internet or across the walls of users.[227]

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[223] Fabrice Epelboin, "Les petits secrets de la censure tunisienne," *fhimt.com*, August 17, 2010, https://www.fhimt.com/2010/08/17/les-petits-secrets-de-la-censure-tunisienne/. Rebekah Heacock, "YouTube Censored: A recent history," *OpenNet Initiative*, July 21, 2011, accessed May 10, 2019, https://opennet.net/search/node/youtube?page=2.

[224] Walid Mtimet, Skype conversation, February 14, 2017.

[225] Vipa, interview, July 10, 2018, Tunis.

[226] Selma Zghidi, informal conversation, June 19, 2018, Tunis.

[227] Lecomte, "Révolution Tunisienne et Internet," 8.

As it will be clarified later, the rich literature concerning the role played by Facebook during the time period in question is counterbalanced by almost absent literary references concerning YouTube. Nonetheless, this latter user-generated platform also contributed in its specific way during the initial phase of the revolutionary process. The following reflections will provide some background information to better comprehend my interest in understanding how the use of diverse social media has differentiated over time in Tunisia post-January 14, 2011. Due to the absence of literature concerning YouTube, I could only reconstruct the function and the role of YouTube predominantly via interviewees.

Facebook has developed into a growing platform of critique and contestation that has been widely used by Tunisians. Its importance increased significantly during the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution but its use was very specific. As scholar Moez Triki reports, Tunisians were not used to sharing political information—even on Facebook—due to effective state and self-censorship.[228] Therefore, "the share of documents (videos of demonstrations, martyrs' photos, etc.) during the time-period of December 17, 2010 and January 12, 2011 occurred via personal messages; posts uploaded on the Walls turned into a common practice after January 12, 2011."[229] Scholar Amor Ben Amor writes:

> Facebook became the locomotive of the protest movements and accompanied the protests in the street. It became […] one of the major information platforms of the formal media. On the internet, some users also became *bricoleurs d'information*. They find the information, they transform it, and provide a context, not always for stated or justified purposes. When the platform was conceived, this use was not planned among the functions of Facebook. It's necessary to reconsider the value of this social network as a technological tool among many others.[230]

Indeed, Ben Amor here stresses the plurality of networks and platforms that allow ordinary citizens, as improvised journalists, to diffuse videos and photos, often uploaded or shared without comment to better escape state control on the internet. Therefore, the predominance of Facebook is a matter of fact, as users were in practice more familiar with it. Furthermore, locally, Facebook

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[228] Moez Triki, "Réseaux sociaux et enjeux sociopolitiques. Étude des pratiques et des usages politiques sur Facebook après la révolution du 14 janvier," in *Les réseaux sociaux sur Internet à l'heure des transitions démocratiques,* ed*.* Sihem Najar (Paris, Tunis: Éditions Karthala et IRMC, 2013), 337.

[229] Moez Triki, "Réseaux sociaux et enjeux sociopolitiques. Étude des pratiques et des usages politiques sur Facebook après la révolution du 14 janvier," 337.

[230] Amor Ben Amor, "Cyberdissidence Tunisienne," *Communication*, 32, no. 1 (2013): 6, January 2014, accessed May 17, 2019, http://journals.openedition.org/communication/4707.

was effective also because it only required a low bandwidth for uploading content. It was also widely used by activists living abroad for aggregating images dispersed throughout the internet or across the walls of users.[231]

As Triki claims, the uprising overturned the relation of the user with the platform. By January 2011, Facebook shifted from a medium for amusement and entertainment to being an essential center where information received, commented upon, and distributed. As an effect, this began to marginalize traditional media, but conversely, videos uploaded to the walls of Facebook users also became material available for use by foreign broadcast channels.[232] Yet, Facebook was not the only platform used and it was accompanied, though on a considerably smaller scale, by Twitter, YouTube, and DailyMotion, each covering one specific role.

It is precisely but not only within the activity of activists supporting the revolution from Europe (e.g., France, Germany, Belgium) that YouTube—despite being a subsidiary to Facebook in Tunisia, where it functioned with restrictions—became increasingly relevant. YouTube's role during the early stages of the revolution was important, although, pre-January 14, 2011, Tunisian censorship, limited bandwidth, and a lack of basic technical skills by users meant it was an underdeveloped platform.

Yet, YouTube worked as an incredibly effective worldwide mouthpiece[233] for spreading documentation of the uprising, in part due to the Tunisian diaspora, such as activist Sami Ben Abdallah (whose channel pseudonym was "TheTunisietunisia"), or Centrist,[234] just to name the most relevant protagonists, who had much easier access to the platform from abroad. Alongside users in the diaspora, local Tunisian users that were able to bypass the ban also took advantage of its potential as a tool for global visibility.[235] A transnational diffusion of millions of onlookers

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[231] Lecomte, "Révolution Tunisienne et Internet," 8.

[232] Moez Triki, "Réseaux sociaux et enjeux sociopolitiques. Étude des pratiques et des usages politiques sur Facebook après la révolution du 14 janvier."

[233] As reported in detail in the analysis provided by Romain Lecomte, "most of the video collectors/distributors located abroad used to upload videos to YouTube and/or Dailymotion, censured platforms in Tunisia that could offer an important international visibility." My translation. See Lecomte, "Révolution Tunisienne et Internet: le Rôle des Médias Sociaux," 8. Moez Triki also mentions Facebook as a tool used by users abroad for spreading videos widely. See Triki, "Réseaux Sociaux et Enjeux Sociopolitiques. Etude des Pratiques et des Usages Politiques sur Facebook après la Révolution du 14 Janvier," in *Les Réseaux Sociaux sur Internet à l'Heure des Transitions Démocratiques,* ed. Sihem Najar (Paris/Tunis: Éditions Karthala et IRMC, 2013).

[234] Lecomte, "Révolution Tunisienne et Internet," 8.

[235] It's worthwhile to remark that the influence on the information circulating in and outside the country by Tunisian media activists in diaspora is not a phenomenon that concerns only the use of YouTube during the revolution. As reported by Larbi Chouikha, Tunisian cyber dissidence started in the mid-1990s, and one

have watched the videos and, in solidarity with someone else's cause, further reposted, shared, re-titled, and translated the contents, contributing to the broad circulation of the footage. Among them are users known by the pseudonyms hetzgegenislam, canadacanada1981, and MegaSmith8888, to name a few. Significantly, one of the last promises of Ben Ali's regime also involves YouTube as an object of political negotiation: during his last public speech on January 13, 2011, Ben Ali addressed the nation in turmoil and, although he was too late to preserve the political status quo, in a last desperate attempt to calm down the uncontrollable dissent, he promised to unlock the platform for use.

In view of the more detailed though fragmented exploration of social media as an archive, this overview of Facebook and YouTube's role and development during the revolution aims to provide some preliminary knowledge. In the aftermath of January 14, 2011, the use of all social media was forcibly transformed. The end of the dictatorship, freedom of expression, and all the new social and political challenges that the country faced have all influenced the expectations and daily use of social networks by ordinary Tunisian citizens as well as militants and institutions.

As I will clarify later, my study will take into consideration the evolution and specific role played by YouTube in the recollection of vernacular videos of the revolution post-January 14, 2011. Therefore, the changing experience and use of a previously banned tool, like YouTube, will be one of the structural questions of the fieldwork interviews, and it will also allow me to observe YouTube's relationship with videos of the revolution, with insight of the specific bond that ties the footage and the tool during the revolutionary process.

2.7 The Challenges of Vernacular Videos Post-January 14, 2011: Between Archiving and Re-writing History

Post-January 14, 2011 we find ourselves immersed in the time and context, forecasted by Peter Snowdon, expressed as *another history*, on which vernacular videos will shed light. Today, the in-progress evolution and configurations of this footage that marked the recent chronicles of North Africa and Middle-Eastern countries include various traditional and non-traditional forms of preservation that go beyond the intention of documentation. Furthermore, these audiovisual materials have been re-signified as the footage has entered further narratives created by mass media, artists, and activists. These practices are at the center of a complex debate that has already started a few years ago and critically considers social media and their possible historiographic function as well as limits as digital archives. For this reason, the purpose of my

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of the most prominent examples is *Tunisnews*, a newsletter founded in 1999 mostly by Islamist refugees and displaced Tunisian citizens. See Chouikha, *La difficile transformation des médias: des années de l'indépendance à la veille des élections de 2014* (Tunis: Éditions Finzi, 2015).

study is to find out what model of repositories social media are, can potentially be, or, in reference to the specific category of the vernacular videos of the Tunisian revolution in post-January 14, 2011, if one can even consider them as such. In this sense, for instance, I intentionally excluded from my investigation the exploration of any potential existence of software alternatives to corporate algorithms.

Storing, ordering, preserving and making accessible digital documents with the purpose of avoiding the dispersion or the obliteration of digital testimonies have become very important goals post-January 14, 2011. In this sense, extremely important initiatives are, for instance, the pedagogical exhibition *Before the 14th, instant tunisien* mentioned earlier, and the creation of a formal archive of the revolution, located at the National Archive and the National Library in Tunis. These samples—be they either temporary or enduring—must be credited with also creating a base for the search and retrieval of the digital documents in question, to the benefit of scientific research. In Chapter 5, I will provide a deeper insight into the archive of the revolution, but merely circumscribed to one of the leading findings of my research on site, that is the existing link between YouTube and this official, national repository.

The initiatives of display, circulation, and conservation, as well as the re-signification of the audiovisual materials in question that will be analyzed later, need to be contextualized in the new era of post-January 14, 2011 as Tunisia embarks on a process of transitional justice. This term defines "the legal measures adopted by a country to ensure the transition from dictatorship to democracy."[236] In her book *Tunisie Deuxième République. Chronique d'une Constituante 2011-2014* (2018), constituent Nadia Chaabane questions what transitional justice ultimately is. Chaabane acknowledges that it is inscribed in a process of reconstruction that aims to allow a country to consider its future and deal with a heritage of systematic abuse and infringement of rights. For this reason, the acknowledgement of the truth is a grounding aspect of transitional justice. Reparation follows this important phase, while the final goal is to guarantee that what happened in the past does not repeat again, and this paves the path for reconciliation.[237] Therefore, a seminal part of this complex operation consisted of uncovering the truth about the events that unfolded as a result of Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation on December 17, 2010. I will review this historical phase of the revolutionary process later in Chapter 6 when I analyze the video mash-ups of YouTube channel AnarChnowa, one of the moving-image examples I explore in my study. Here, the reuse of one of the clips shot during the so-called instant will contribute to mirroring the complexities and ambiguities of this period.

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[236] Nadia Chaabane, *Tunisie Deuxième République. Chronique d'une Constituante 2011-2014* (Tunis: Déméter Editions, 2018), 140. The quote originally comes from an article of the same author appeared on *La Presse*, March 23 2013 that I couldn't retrieve.

[237] Nadia Chaabane, *Tunisie Deuxième République. Chronique d'une Constituante 2011-2014.*

The transitional government set up three national commissions in the aftermath of President Ben Ali's removal, with the purpose to address different aspects of the transitional justice process. I'll mention here the two most relevant in my study. One commission had the task of finding and verifying those episodes and forms of human rights violations and corruption between 1955 and 2013. The Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD - Instance de la vérité et de la dignité) was established by law as an independent tribunal founded in December 2013. It was launched publically by then-president Moncef Marzouki in 2014. During a mandate of four years that could be prolonged for one additional year, the commission had the task of investigating and exposing the truth publicly and proposing sanctions as well as measures for reparation and rehabilitation.[238] The commission finished its work in December 2018 and made public a five-volume report on March 26, 2019. This document analyzes and exposes the institutional networks that enabled human rights abuses over five decades. It gathered together thousands of hours of victim's complaints, hours of audiovisual recordings of stories of abuse (rapes, torture, police violence, harassments, human rights violations, blackmail, unfair trials, inhuman prison conditions, and so on) that occurred during the French occupation as well as during the Bourguiba and Ben Ali governments. Ten thousands boxes of archives from Tunisia's truth commission containing these materials as well as documentation of the whole work carried by the commission during its mandate have been deposited at the National Archives in Tunis, a decision that itself has raised several controversies.

The second national commission that the transitional (interim) government set up as soon as Ben Ali escaped had the purpose of investigating abuses committed during the 2010 protests. The investigation occurred through the causality-recording process.[239] However, the digital materials in question are testimonies of the protests that also have pertinence regarding issues of justice and reparation, and therefore, their preservation and archiving becomes of crucial importance.

The Bouderbala Commission (derived from the name of President Taoufik Bouderbala) is a fact-finding commission on abuses committed from December 17, 2010 until the end of its mandate on October 23, 2011, the date of the elections of the National Constituent Assembly. As reported in the *Annual Report: Tunisia 2013* by Amnesty International: "This [report] described the events during the uprisings which overthrew former President Ben Ali's government, and listed

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[238] "Tunisie: L'Instance Vérité et Dignité décrit des abus commis durant des décennies," *Human Rights Watch*, April 5, 2019 accessed August 8, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/fr/news/2019/04/05/tunisie-linstance-verite-et-dignite-decrit-des-abus-commis-durant-des-decennies?fbclid=IwAR0yv57sHk2YOjzoygKu.

[239] Ian Patel, Annabelle Giger, "Casualty Recording in Tunisia. Responses to the 2010–2011 Uprisings," *Every Casualty*, September 2015, accessed February 12, 2020, http://ref.ec/tunisia.

the names of those killed and injured. However, it failed to identify the individuals responsible for the use of lethal force and human rights violations."[240] In 2018, the commission "drew up a list of 338 cases of deaths, out of them 86 were prisoners, 14 law enforcers and 5 from the army. According to the report of the commission, the number of injured increases to 2,147, out of them 62 were prisoners and 28 law enforcers."[241] In April 2018, the complete list of killed and injured victims was issued by the Bouderbala Commission to former President Béji Caïd Essebsi, who apparently never publicly released it. As Taoufik Bouderbala reported in an interview, the commission is intended to function as a repository, which has already been made available to investigative judges as well as to the members of Tunisia's Truth and Dignity Commission.[242] The amateur audiovisual testimonies shot between December 17, 2010 and January 14, 2011 work as forms of testimonies to shed light on the dynamics of violence and abuses against victims. Therefore, they have been analyzed and partly validated by the judge within this investigation.[243]

These initiatives of inquiry and archiving not only outline the bigger picture of the different contexts where the clips in question turn into materials of social and legal relevance post-January 14, 2011. They also open a series of pivotal questions about the potential shifts of sense, status, and values of the digital items when they enter the procedure of archiving, or are turned into pre-proof in trials. Furthermore, what is their meaning when remediated or edited with excerpts of the present, or when entered into cultural memory, years later? Looking at the current evolution of social movements in Morocco since 2011 during the talk "Are you a government or a gang?"[244] anthropologist Miriyam Aouragh focused on the practice by activists of revisiting archives as a tool to connect the past, the present, and the future. Furthermore, looking at how the current phenomenon of dissent is manifested in Morocco, her native country, it is possible to see how the past is present again and again, and how images and slogans or expressions of militancy are reinvented today by young activists who might not have directly experienced the uprising of 2011 but who can take advantage of the large amount of video content online. The videos of the turmoils of 2011 in North African regions function as crucial traces of which communities are in

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[240] "Annual Report: Tunisia 2013," *Amnesty International*, accessed April 22, 2019, https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/annual-report-tunisia-2013/.

[241] Wafa Samoud, "La liste définitive des martyrs et blessés de la révolution transmise à BCE," *HuffPost*, April 2, 2018, 3, accessed April 25, 2019, https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/la-liste-definitive-des-martyrs-et-blesses-de-la-revolution-transmise-a-bce_mg_5ac248cce4b0f112dc9df26a. My translation from the French.

[242] Patel, Giger, "Casualty Recording in Tunisia. Responses to the 2010–2011 Uprisings."

[243] Hatem El Hattab, informal interview, March 27, 2019, Tunis; Olfa Belhassine, call with Facebook Messenger, April 6, 2020.

[244] From my notes, on occasion of the workshop "Arab archives: mediated memories and digital flows," John Cabot University, Rome, May 24–25, 2018.

need. And I add to Aouragh's questions: What role, if any, does the figure I identified as the vernacular spectator continue to play in determining the persistence and re-signification of the footage in the flow of history?

As I will show in Chapter 4 and 5, devoted to the research for online materials in which I empirically observed the online behavior of the videos and spectators post-January 14, 2011, the invisibility into which vernacular videos have fallen has also suddenly conveyed the fear of the dispersion of testimonies. This has been reinforced especially by the occasional erasure of clips from YouTube by the platform's algorithm, mainly due to changing policy on violent or graphic content or the shutting down of the channel. These aspects soon raised doubts among activists and historians about the real possibility for social media as repositories, especially for non-commercial and non-monetizing types of videos, which, according to algorithms, falls short as mere data, in contrast to their value as visual documents of great and unique historical relevance.

For instance, in this concern due to the recognized validity of the footage in question as testimonies, or at least pre-proof in a court trial, their potential disappearance from online repositories threatens the possibility of justice. Yet, despite the threat of the algorithm to the preservation of the videos in question, and alongside examples of the institutional or personal grassroots digital archive initiatives flourishing in Tunisia (or independent archives, in the case of Egypt and Syria), social media still remains the widest network and vehicle for these audiovisual materials. All these projects began with the aim of keeping track of these clips to serve as memories. In this sense, archiving the vernacular videos soon turned into a compelling issue. It is worthwhile to stress that Tunisia is a unique case in the Arab world where this process took place with the support and the involvement of state institutions. However, the creation of a repository is not the only way to keep these materials alive, available, and transmissible.

Therefore, in my study, I question how the spectators of these videos continue to experience them in the digital ecology, such as by collecting them, recalling them in individual and collective memory, or re-signifying them in other forms of narrative, such as films. And turning the question the other way around, I inquire whether and in what ways this large volume of amateur visual testimonies that have circulated virally as never before have influenced the telling and remembrance of the 2010 to 2011 Tunisian revolution. If it has, in what ways? Within this framework, understanding the role of social media in relation to these inquiries becomes crucial. Disillusioned as we are about how social-media algorithms function—particularly the little relevance they attribute to vernacular videos, such as militant footage—can we say that post-2011, the function of these networks concerning the existence of this footage has been accomplished, or do they still have roles to play? If so, what? Or, at the end of the day, do they merely function as a traditional corporate archive does?

Chapter 3

Spectatorship and the Experience of the Online and Offline Image

3.1 Users as Spectators within the Digital Ecology

In the first chapter, I stressed that the digital archive introduces a different form of authority in terms of selecting and organizing the contents of the repository. The user's power is in constant tension with the machine-learning algorithm, which intervenes and determines visibility, and therefore, the circulation of content. The user thus contributes to the existence of the digital archive through the contradictions just explained. In the second chapter, I defined vernacular videos as a genre, and in particular, those produced by ordinary citizens during the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution as the empirical case-study within my analysis of digital archives. Within the term vernacular videos, coined by Peter Snowdon, I include the onlooker as the protagonist who might not have filmed the events but who has witnessed them through the mediation of the screen. I argue that this protagonist is activated by watching and enacting a series of practices that entail a form of militantism and involvement of the viewer. The onlooker is of the highest importance in the phenomenon of citizen-videos, and his or her role (as creator, witness, and voyeur versus activist within the unfolding political events) has been a matter of debate in the last years. More importantly, I argue that the spectator is an agent of transformation in the images he or she looks at, including those stored in the digital archive post-January 14, 2011. But what exactly do I mean with the concept of the agent of transformation? I aim to raise the question of in what capacity the spectator participates to resignify the found footage of the Tunisian revolution, and in particular, that of the so called instant, while he or she provides untold narration in the digital ecology. This enactment of footage implicitly embeds the contribution by the viewer, who creates additional forms of archival structures that convey preservation and transmission of the clips.

In what domains do I observe the transformation of the videos by the viewer? I will take into consideration the following terrains of observation that will be unfolded in the next chapters. The starting point is social media as digital archives. Whether and how the spectator keeps contributing to make social media—where the visual accounts in question are still potentially accessible and transmissible post-January 14, 2011—as repositories for the footage of the instant in the aftermath of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution. In the previous two chapters, I have already unfolded these topics when I introduced the participation of users both in supporting and facilitating the circulation of items in the digital archive and in contributing through watching and sharing to create content. In Chapter 5 I will clarify the outcomes of the empirical research for

materials online. The second domain of observation consists in moving-image narratives online and offline, which includes cinematic documentaries and video mash-ups on YouTube (discussed in Chapter 6). They will function both as items of analysis for the empirical research and as tools. The third domain of observation is cultural memory (in Chapter 7) and its outcomes, explored through interviews using the guidelines of specific questions that lead the interviewees to share their remembrances. However, social media, moving images and cultural memory should not be intended as separate and isolated terrains, as I just presented them. Rather, they fluidly intersect and their boundaries always blur.

In order to explore these issues, I will start this chapter with the concept of the viewer-user and expand the previous considerations, moving toward the active engagement of this agent with vernacular footage within the digital archive and beyond it, post-January 14, 2011. Due to the relevance that the scopic regime and the act of viewing assumes in the transmission and conservation of digital objects, I argue that, within the digital ecology, talking about spectatorship rather than usership allows us to include a much broader spectrum of possibilities around the subject's actions that are excluded by the term "user" and its associated field of references.

As I will explain later, spectatorship recalls a contested space of spectacle that I interpret as a scenario in which the subject is immersed with his or her body and senses, rather than a scene that one attends from faraway. One's experience of events is always mediated, either through the body or through the filter of technological devices. Therefore, in the next paragraphs, I will articulate the notion of the spectator in this study by referring to media and visual culture scholar Michele White and philosopher Jacques Rancière. Through the perspectives presented by these two authors, I will explore the engagement of the spectator with the images he or she sees, by means of the gaze. Montage will be presented as the tool through which the spectator as an agent of transformation in the images recombines audiovisual materials, thoughts, and memories and produces unprecedented narratives. In particular, I argue that montage is a tool used by the user-spectator to recontextualize the displaced audiovisual materials of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution, and therefore, create new meanings, which allow the preservation and transmission of clips. In other words, I claim that conservation and circulation of these digital items are tightly connected with reattribution of sense to which videos are subjected over time and historical circumstances. The spectator is the actor/catalyst within this process.

The process of cinematic montage is embedded in Rancière's definition of spectatorship. However, this study aims to emphasize the relationship of the user-spectator to the audiovisual materials of the so-called instant when they become *objets trouvés* in the flow of social media. In this sense, the perspective of film studies of scholar Giovanna Fossati, which generally overlaps with Rancière's position, adds an interesting point to the debate. She claims that the preservation of films occur through their presentation, for instance, by means of screenings (this is a concept

expressed also by initiators of Pad.Ma, as mentioned in Chapter 1). In this sense, the user-spectator is the author of a form of film archiving, that the scholar names "crowd film archiving." The clips as *objects trouvés* are digital objects of memory once they enter cultural memory post-January 14, 2011. More precisely, I argue that the amateur footage might be defined as *connective memory objects*, as I apply the angle of scholar José van Dijck, who refers to connective memory in defining a social memory influenced by the principles of connectivity.[245]

In the next chapters, I will empirically investigate how the viewer of the clips of the twenty-nine-day phase of the Tunisian revolution performs the digital archives and, in the post-January 14, 2011 period, keeps alive the clips shot during the so-called instant by means of montage, meaning by selecting, retrieving, and recombining these film items.

3.2 Spectatorship as a Contested Space

In relation to the internet, the term "user" has come to be the most widely distributed expression of the figure operating online who uses web services, companies, and products. Its political connotations, however, "are conveniently ambivalent, suggesting both active participation and dependency, a figure under the influence of some kind of pleasure-giving system."[246] Correlated to old media, the user is a passive recipient; within new media, the user is instead interpreted as an active participant.[247] As acknowledged by scholar Michele White, "usership" is intended to mean the "interactive agency of spectators."[248]

By leaving comments or sharing posts, the user interacts directly with the content of various platforms or other users. However, even though he or she simply clicks links, visits websites, or scrolls through someone else's posts, in the culture of connectivity it is the gaze that matters: this is evident in the counts of views, Watch Time metrics, and the News Feeds of social-media platforms, all of which have an economic value. Similarly, flagging videos and pictures interpreted as inappropriate reflects the power of the viewer upon the content in circulation but also limits his or her space for maneuvering within the capitalistic space of the internet and its commercial products.

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[245] van Dijck, "Connective Memory: How Facebook Takes Charge of Your Past."

[246] Espen J. Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspective on Ergodic Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 174.

[247] José van Dijck, "Users Like You? Theorizing Agency in User-Generated Content," *Media, Culture & Society* 31, no. 1, (January 2009), accessed May 25, 2019, http://mcs.sagepub.com/content/31/1/41.

[248] Michele White, *The Body and the Screen: Theories of Internet Spectatorship* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 36.

Therefore, the viewer's responsibility of what to watch, through which platform or display, having time to devote to this act, and all related gestures are today urgent and incontrovertible issues. Obviously, the inhabitation of either a sensitive or virtual space by the onlooker is neither neutral nor passive. Thanks to the online and offline performativity of consuming images, perceivable or latent presence produces effects that are directly or indirectly evident in terms of visibility, diffusion, persistence, monetization, and archiving. The most crucial question is: How does the physical or virtual presence of a viewer contextualize an event, change its nature, or contribute to reshaping its understanding? Who this observer is, the mode of defining him or her specifically out of an abstract entity, and the tools to develop the analysis of these issues are the questions I will now address.

Viewers or audiences have increasingly been subjects affected by capitalism since the beginning of neoliberalism, when each individual is understood mainly as a consumer of goods and, therefore, a subject able to generate economic profit. We see the increasing exploitation of the individual in his or her way of observing, using, consuming. In the 1970s, Michel Foucault defined biopolitics as the political rationality that takes the administration of life and populations as its subject.[249] Biopolitics evolved into "biocapitalism" as developed by scholars Vanni Codeluppi,[250] Andrea Fumagalli, and journalist Cristina Morini. The concept refers to a process of "accumulation that not only is founded on the exploitation of knowledge but of the entirety of human faculties, from relational-linguistic to affective-sensorial."[251] As sociologists Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst claim,"The process of commodification, for instance, begins to treat individuals simultaneously as consumers and as members of an audience. Alternatively, again, people's pastimes and hobbies are increasingly constructed as events in which the participants are more like members of an audience."[252]

Within this all-encompassing process of commodification, one can recognize the emergence of the figure of the prosumer, a term coined by the futurologist Alvin Toffler in the 1980s. In his renowned book *The Third Wave* (1980), Toffler envisions a new post-industrial civilization in which the role of the nation-state has been reduced, which has given rise to semi-autonomous economies in a post-imperialist world. Within this landscape, Toffler outlines the

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[249] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–79*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Michel Senellart (NewYork: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[250] Vanni Codeluppi, *Il Biocapitalismo: Verso lo Sfruttamento Integrale di Corpi, Cervelli ed Emozioni* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008).

[251] Andrea M. Fumagalli and Cristina Morini, "Life Put to Work: Towards a Life Theory of Value," *Ephemera* 10, no. 3/4 (2010): 235, accessed May 10, 2019, http://www.ephemeraweb.org.

[252] Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (London: Sage, 1998), 36.

restoration of the breaches between the producer and consumer, giving rise to the "prosumer" economics of tomorrow. The prosumer is at the center of economic activity, which in *The Third Wave* is tied with high technology.[253] However, the figure of the prosumer, who is imagined to evolve within the fields of labor, market, and economy, is not an entirely new concept in the 1970s and 1980s.

The do-it-yourself trend started with "the zines of the political and cultural avant-garde of the 1970s and '80s and was closely tied to the growth of punk rock and the emergence of Riot Grrl feminism. They were also part of a much larger history of amateur publishing. In the case of the science-fiction fan community, this could be traced back to the 1920s,"[254] states Jenkins. These examples demonstrate the abolition of hierarchies in the production of culture, the rise of horizontal relationships among producers and consumers, and even the overlap of these two figures. As a result, the proliferation of a so-called participatory culture as part of "the emergence of 'Do-It-Yourself' cultures of all kinds over the past several decades paved the way for the early embrace, quick adoption, and diverse use of new media,"[255] continues the scholar.

Artist and film curator Ali Hussein Al-Adawi states that "we have moved from the aspiration of 'the author as producer' to the reality of 'the viewer as author and producer,' ending the division of labor between the viewer and the artist, as the viewer becomes infinitely more involved in the process: a participant and an artist who produces images that could even be exhibited in artistic contexts as works of art, or as parts of artworks that are discussed by experts, specialists, artists, writers, journalists, theoreticians and curators."[256]

Indeed, the topic of spectatorship and the full range of related implications, including mediation, engagement, and the position of the observer regarding the object observed, have constituted for decades a highly contested space of discussion. In avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century, and specifically since the 1960s neo-avant-garde, the position of the observer has been a matter of consideration. Situationist Guy Debord has conveyed the most definite interpretations of the term through his renowned book *The Society of the Spectacle*. Written in 1967, it has deeply influenced the field of art throughout the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries:

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[253] Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980).

[254] Henry Jenkins, "What Happened Before YouTube?," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, June 25, 2008, accessed January 12, 2017, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2008/06/what_happened_before_youtube.html.

[255] Jenkins, "What Happened Before YouTube?"

[256] Ali Hussein Al-Adwai, "Harun Farocki: Dialectics of Images," *Mada Masr*, February 23, 2019, accessed March 1, 2019, https://madamirror10.appspot.com/madamasr.com/en/2019/02/23/feature/culture/harun-farocki-dialectics-of-images/?fbclid=IwAR006TlL73Tr5Ds9dKB97Ly0OhGQI3hyb-_3-ZfJXTdptD7uQxVE0Cqn-SA.

The spectator's alienation from and submission to the contemplated object (which is the outcome of his unthinking activity) works like this: the more he contemplates, the less he lives; the more readily he recognizes his own needs in the images of need proposed by the dominant system, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires. The spectacle's externality with respect to the acting subject is demonstrated by the fact that the individual's own gestures are no longer his own, but rather those of someone else who represents them to him. The spectator feels at home nowhere, for the spectacle is everywhere.[257]

Debord links spectatorship with accumulation and capitalism, the two elements that make the spectator an alienated subject. Rightly, scholar Jonathan Crary further confronts the substantial heritage and implications of the passivity and alienation associated with the word "spectator"; he instead prefers the term "observer," which remains within the domains of "noticing," "saying," and "respecting rules,"[258] and frames the act within cultural and historical borders.

Nevertheless, in the last decades, insightful studies of the processes of reception within communications media have probed, through different empirical methods, the groundlessness of the idea that the recipients of media products are passive subjects.[259] In particular, sociologist John B. Thompson understands the reception of media products as a practical activity. He states that "reception should be seen as an activity, […] individuals make use of symbolic materials for their own purposes, in ways that may be extremely varied but also relatively hidden since these practices are not confined to a particular locale."[260]

Within cultural studies, in the social sciences and humanities, for instance, sociologists like Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst have explored the agency of readers, spectators, and audiences in co-creating a text or work of art and completing it through interpretation. Scholars

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[257] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Metro, 1995), 25–26. E-book.

[258] "Unlike *spectare*, the Latin root for 'spectator,' the root for 'observe' does not literally mean 'to look at.' […] *Observare* means 'to conform one's action, to comply with,' as in observing rules, codes, regulations, and practices. Though obviously one who sees, an observer is, more importantly, one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a system of conventions and limitations. And by 'conventions,' I mean to suggest far more than representational practices. If it can be said there is an observer specific to the nineteenth century, or any period, it is only as an effect of an irreducibly heterogeneous system of discursive, social, technological, and institutional relations. There is no observing subject prior to this continually shifting field." Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 11.

[259] John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

[260] Ibid., 39.

investigate links between notions of spectacle and narcissism. They propose a new "performance paradigm," which states that audiences are diffused and that the extension of this entity results in the extension of the performance. According to the idea that everyone becomes an audience member, a state that is constitutive of everyday life, Abercrombie and Longhurst claim:

> Diffused audiences are both local and global, local in actual performance, global in that imagination—not restricted in space and time - is a crucial resource in the performance. Performances for diffused audiences are public and private. Indeed, they erode the difference between the two. The potential for erosion of the distinction between private and public inherent in diffused audiences performances suggests a general characteristic of this audience form - the breaking of boundaries.[261]

In parallel, by critically interpreting the Debordian perspective, Abercrombie and Longhurst somehow nullify it. Indeed, they claim that there is a direct connection between the creation of a diffused audience and the process of commodification because, as the world becomes a diffused audience, this latter turns into the consumer. The effect is, therefore, that audiences become markets, while markets turn into constructed audiences.[262]

3.3 The Spectator as Engaged Actor

The shift from user to spectator is symptomatic of the importance I attribute to the paradigm of vision, and this latter as a potentially creative act. In this sense, the approach by scholar Michele White is central within my study. Indeed, rethinking how the internet/computer viewer is engaged, rendered, and regulated, White borrows the term "spectator" from film studies, an appropriation of lexicon and meaning that is quite unusual in internet settings.[263] She starts from the definition given by theorist Judith Mayne, who states that "spectatorship indicates the processes of watching and listening, identification with characters and images, the various values with which viewing is invested, and how these ideas continue even after the spectator has stopped viewing."[264]

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[261] Abercrombie and Longhurst, *Audiences*, 76.

[262] Ibid.

[263] Michele White, *The Body and the Screen: Theories of Internet Spectatorship* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

[264] Judith Mayne, "Spectatorship as Institution," in White, *The Body and the Screen*, 6.

This extension of the formation of ideas beyond the very moment of vision is of crucial importance and finds a link with Thompson's understanding of reception. Stating that reception is a situated[265] and routine[266] activity, as well as a hermeneutic process,[267] Thompson employs the word "appropriation" to indicate the incorporation of a message by the individual that one assimilates and adapts to his or her own life. The subject, aware or not, is involved in the process of self-formation and self-understanding, which goes through the message, the medium, and the geopolitical environment where one lives.

White extends Mayne's perspective on the viewer as a figure who acts and interacts with the images he or she sees on the internet, a domain where looking or visiting websites is considered a passive action because there is no visible contribution by the side of the subject. Conversely, White stresses that "references to Internet and computer spectatorship should highlight how individuals spend time reading and viewing as well as writing and interacting,"[268] broadening the spectrum of possibilities for the viewer to be identified as an agent and not only when he or she comments or likes.

White analyzes the primary interaction between the user and the internet. She claims that internet sites and computer interfaces address the individual and encourage him or her to interact and participate. Clickable buttons, personalized commands that address the subject through the use of the pronoun "you," instructions like "enter," and links to open other pages are cues that allow the user to experience and control his or her presence online, whereas, in the offline world, cues might be implicit or less evident. In the meantime, internet sites and computer interfaces depict the types of bodies that are expected to engage, and in doing so, they configure and regulate the spectator. Therefore, spectatorship influences how settings and interfaces are understood and helps to form broader conceptions of self and society. This aspect implies that a subject enacts and is enacted in turn by the medium or device that he or she employs.

Looking at the participation of the viewer through another perspective, van Dijck reflects upon the participatory culture facilitated by the development of YouTube,[269] Facebook, and other social networks as increasingly demanding room for ordinary citizens to wield media technologies (that were once the privilege of capital-intensive industries) to express themselves and distribute

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[265] "Media products are received by individuals who are always located in specific social-historical contexts." Thompson, *Media and Modernity*, 39.

[266] Routine activity is "an integral part of the regularized activities that constitute everyday life." Ibid., 39.

[267] "The individuals who receive media products are generally involved in the process of interpretation through which they make sense of these products." Ibid., 40.

[268] White, *Body and the Screen*, 8–9.

[269] Henry Jenkins, "Nine Propositions Towards a Cultural Theory of YouTube," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, May 27, 2007, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2007/05/9_propositions_towards_a_cultu.html.

those creations. Trying to deconstruct the opposition between passive recipients and active participants inhabiting the digital environment, van Dijck underlines that "what is different in the digital era is that users have better access to networked media, enabling them to *talk back* in the same multimodal language that frames cultural product formerly made exclusively in studios."[270] However, as van Dijck also states, "it is a great leap to presume that the availability of digital networked technologies turns everyone into active participants."[271] Conversely, the opposite might also be true, meaning that countable reactions, such as views, online comments, or shares cannot be the only signals of participation.

The reconfiguration of the spectator operated by new technologies[272] is at the center of my study, and I will develop it further in Chapter 7 when I unfold mediated memories and the influence of social media on individual and collective memory. It seems significant to link White's understanding of the spectator in the internet domain and the approach borrowed from film studies to the perspective of another fundamental author, philosopher Jacques Rancière, who coined the notion of the emancipated spectator. Rancière states:

> Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident fact that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions.[273]

Rancière has developed his perspective on spectatorship through references to theater—especially the seminal experiments by Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud—and the attempts to obliterate it through performance. Whereas the latter aims to abolish the separation between stage and auditorium, theater is inherently a community site. This distribution of positions at the core of Rancière's emancipated spectator echoes scholar Diana Taylor's interpretation of the viewer within the field of performance studies and the subject acting and enacting his or her point

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[270] Van Dijck, "Users Like You," 43.

[271] Ibid., 44.

[272] Alain J-J Cohen, "Virtual Hollywood and the Genealogy of Its Hyper-Spectator," in *Hollywood Spectatorship: Changing Perceptions of Cinema Audiences*, ed. Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 152–63.

[273] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London, New York: Verso, 2009).

of view within the frame or the scenario[274] of which he or she is part. This perspective finds some similarities with how Marc Augé defines the anthropologist who, as an agent of the situation that he or she observes, is never neutral.[275]

The video installation by artist and scholar Sharon Hayes titled *10 minutes of Collective Activity* (2013) provides a relevant perspective through the particular configuration of audience collectivity, and it seems to provide an aesthetic outcome to these positions mentioned above. The work consists of an experiment: the artist gathered together an audience of twenty-two people and videotaped them watching archival footage of a ten-minute speech by Connecticut Senator Abraham Ribicoff from the 1968 Democratic National Convention held in Chicago.[276] The work created a cage, where multiple audiences, including the spectators of the artwork in the exhibition spaces, were simultaneously addressed. Apparently, by the self-reflecting act of watching other people watching, those in the exhibition space turn into external onlookers of the scene. Meanwhile, at the same time, they turn into potential objects of observation for other viewers, immersed within the artificial space of the exhibition environment.

By recognizing that "every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action is the spectator of the same story,"[277] Rancière legitimates the spectator as a performer moving across non-existing stages and boundaries. Observing, being observed, acting, and experiencing compose vision's paradigm.

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[274] The term is borrowed by Diana Taylor from Vladimir Propp and his renowned book *The Morphology of the Folktale* (1928). See also Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

[275] Marc Augé, "Le Rivage des images," in *L'expérience des images*, by Marc Augé, Georges, Didi-Huberman, Umberto Eco (Paris: INA Editions, 2011).

[276] As stated by the artist: "The speech was the principal nomination for Senator George McGovern, a vocal opponent of the U.S. war in Vietnam and marked the contestation and discord present at the convention as well in the country at that time. During the five day convention, Mayor of Chicago Richard Daley called in the National Guard to assist the Chicago police in containing the large demonstrations outside the hall. Footage of the police beating protestors on the evening of the third day of the convention was played on national television. The events outside of the hall led to great confusion and debate amongst participants, several motions were made to suspend the convention altogether and Ribicoff, speaking on this third day, departed from his prepared speech to acknowledge the ongoing turmoil." Sharon Hayes, "10 Minutes of Collective Activity," artist's website, accessed June 29, 2019, http://shaze.info/work/10-minutes-of-collective-activity/.

[277] Rancière, *Emancipated Spectator*, 17.

3.4 The Spectator as an Agent of Transformation in Images through Montage

The notion of montage, typical of the field of cinema, can be used here to describe the mode by which the spectator recombines images of reality, the present, the past, and the time to come. Following a description of montage as a process of viewing by the onlooker, the proximity to Rancière's definition of the act of seeing and of the emancipated spectator is clear. In the words of the French philosopher:

> The spectator […] observes, selects, compares, interprets. She[278] links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages in other kinds of places. She composes her own poem with the element of the poem before her. She participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way—by drawing back, for example, from the vital energy that it is supposed to transmit in order to make it a pure image and associate this image with a story which she had read or dreamt, experienced or invented. They are thus both distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them.[279]

As implicitly articulated by Rancière, by stressing the act of seeing as a selective, connective, performative production of links among existing thoughts, ideas, memories, and the external world, he relates to the generative, narrative power of the spectator. "It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world. […] The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled,"[280] says art critic and novelist John Berger. I argue that it is precisely this gap between what we see and what we know that is the interstice available for the viewer for intervening in his or her own storytelling. In what way?

If seeing is not separated by re-assembling, "montage intensifies the image and gives the visual experience a power that our visible certainties or habits have the effect of pacifying, or veiling. The first and simplest way to show what escapes us is to make a montage of its figural detour by associating several views or several time periods of the same phenomenon,"[281] claims philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman. This definition retraces precisely what I am going to observe through this study by means of tracking and analyzing the audiovisual materials of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution as edited and reused in different contexts,

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[278] Rancière's use of the pronoun "she" is unlinked to any gender identification. Rather, it is referred to as the figure of the spectator, in a general sense.

[279] Ibid., 14.

[280] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 1.

[281] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2008), 134.

narratives forms, and stories in post-January 14, 2011. As I will clarify later, these contexts of observations concern basically two fields. One is the context of moving images, the other is that individual and collective memory.

The process involving the viewer thus is similar to director Jean-Luc Godard's idea of montage, which considers the primacy of editing as the "organising thought (la pensée organisatrice) of plans and their meanings."[282] For Godard, the whole political value of montage as an aesthetic invention, and therefore of cinema, revolves around gathering together things that are not meant to be juxtaposed.[283] In this sense, both the director and the observer invent a fiction. Through editing, the former transforms images of reality into fiction, which play out according to the rule of the director. The viewer, on the other side, is able to create an individual and unique montage out of the fragmented, diverse, and disconnected visual materials that he or she consumes, and it is precisely these stories that contribute to the existence of a plurality of bottom-up narratives, all equally plausible. In the ability of the viewer as the entity who provides different kinds of accounts rests her or his engagement with the narrative that he or she proposes.

As scholar James S. Williams reports, for Godard, "montage, or the connective act of creating relations between people, objects and ideas, is of itself a form of history […] Cinema *qua* montage is for Godard a metaphor for the world"[284] Montage constitutes the heartbeat of the film; it is a vital pulse.[285] Philosopher Gilles Deleuze recognizes montage in three different phases of film creation: prior to shooting, through the selection of the different kinds of materials that are going to interact and come into dialog together; during shooting, defined as the intervals occupied by the camera/eye; and after shooting, both in the editing room, where points of view and materials confront each other, and in the spectator's space. In this way, "la vie telle quelle est […] la vie dans le film […] et la vie du film," or, the life as it is, the life into the film, and the film's life unfold, one into the other.[286] This insight into montage shows an all-encompassing and expanded approach to the act of filming and, therefore, storytelling.

By referring to the technical function of film editing, director Sergei Eisenstein puts into light the non-linearity and non-sequentiality of this narrative process, similarly to other forms of fiction employed for the construction of reality. Eisenstein says:

[282] Julien Pallotta, "'Camera eye' de Jean-Luc Godard: Un essai politique filmé," *Sens Publique* (2008): 6 accessed January 20, 2018, http://www.sens-public.org/article.php3?id_article=558.

[283] Pallotta, "'Camera eye' de Jean-Luc Godard: Un essai politique filmé," 4.

[284] James S. Williams, *Encounters with Godard: Ethics, Aesthetics and Politics* (New York: SUNY Press, 2016), 10.

[285] Ibid., 10

[286] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: L'Image-Mouvement* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983), 60.

Placed next to each other, two photographed still images result in the appearance of movement. Is this accurate? Pictorially—and phraseologically, yes. But mechanically, it is not. For, in fact, each sequential element is perceived not next to the other, but on top of the other. For the idea (or sensation) of movement arises from the process of superimposing on the retained impression of the object's first position, a newly visible further position of the object.[287]

The argument raised by Eisenstein is not merely "spatial." We are now familiar with multiple viewpoints and overlapping windows typical of web pages, desktop interfaces, and interactive applications.

However, already in the nineteenth century, the traditional notion of linear perspective—intended as "the central viewpoint, the position of mastery, control, and subjecthood"[288] established in the early Renaissance and "unique to European art"[289]—was put into discussion. Painter J. M. W. Turner is probably one of the first who experimented with a shifting perspective in which the horizon is tilted, where parallels do not converge at a single vanishing point, and where the viewer loses his or her stable position.[290] Alongside twentieth-century painting's historical transformation of the linear viewpoint, for instance in Cubism and cinema, "montage becomes a perfect device for destabilizing the observer's perspective and breaking down linear time."[291] A deep reflection upon time is at the core of Gilles Deleuze's analysis of montage. The philosopher states that this technique is a rhythmical alternance, and time is observed compared to movement, either time as a whole, which gathers together movement in the universe, or time as an interval that marks the smallest unit of movement or action. Russian pioneer of documentary film Dziga Vertov remarks that the interval of movement is the perception, the glance, and the eye of the camera. Deleuze claims that the idea, this indirect image of time, rises from montage, or from the composition of movement-image. Time remains an indirect image that emerges from the organic composition of the movement-image; therefore, the interval and the whole take on new meanings.

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[287] Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1949), 141. E-Book.

[288] Hito Steyerl, "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective," *e-flux Journal*, no. 24, April 2011, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/24/67860/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/.

[289] Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 19.

[290] Steyerl, "In Free Fall."

[291] Ibid., 6.

In a characteristic also common with cognitive memory, montage unfolds (which does not follow a linear process) through the overlapping of mental images thrown together, but also, with cultural memory. Intending this latter in the broadest sense to mean "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts,"[292] memory does not consist of rescuing episodes from former times. Instead, it is a projection of the present to the past, a complex, multilayered intersection of time, experiences, and knowledge that produce narratives. Montage is, therefore, only apparently a method for ordering the existing; it is a tool for creating *ex novo* meanings and ideas.

Film theorists and directors have distinguished and classified different typologies of montage according to the kind of effect that the director aims to reach out of the visual excerpts. Deleuze recognizes in Griffith the category of parallel montage, in Eisenstein the montage of oppositions and the category of a montage of attractions; Rancière splits dialectical montage and symbolic montage, while Wees separates notions of compilation, collage, and appropriation. Nonetheless, I will not go into these specifications as my approach to editing in this study does not mean to enter the specificities of the technique *per se*. Rather, I argue that montage is a *modus operandi* of the spectator, and I will consider it as a way of seeing and manipulating the complex variety of elements that surround the onlooker. Referring to this method of film editing in a broad sense, I can say that it regulates the subjects' cognitive process, their understanding of reality, and their action into it. In this sense, montage also leads actions of the spectator online. For instance, uploading, sharing, searching for contents, or leaving comments have to be understood as generative creative acts able to shape new contents. Obviously, put it in this way montage encompasses a large amount of practices, and the variety of their concretizations might be difficult to grasp as the spectator does not necessarily produce a recognizable, unitary account as filmmakers do.

Within the digital repository, how does the viewer actualize this montage of clips? Similarly, what forms does this operation take when it occurs beyond the digital, for instance, in unitary filmic narratives, which film theorist Cosetta G. Saba defines as "concrete *dispositifs*,"[293] or "technical expressions"[294] of the archive? What is the result of the same process within individual and collective memory?

[292] Astrid Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An international and interdisciplinary handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 2.

[293] Cosetta G. Saba, "Archive, Cinema, Art," in *Cinema and Art as Archive. Form, Medium, Memory*, ed. Francesco Federici and Cosetta G. Saba (Milan: Mimesis International, 2014), 44.

[294] Ibid.

3.4.1 Retrieving Findable Footage and Remixing *Objects Trouvés*: The Practices of Montage, Watching, Displaying, and Archiving Overlap

Seeing is, according to Rancière, a tool of participation and for composing new stories. Therefore, I follow up on the questions outlined at the end of the previous paragraph and I focus here on the exploration of the modes of engagement of the spectator with the clips in question. I argue that this involvement becomes evident when the videos are retrieved from the digital archive, reused and remixed within it, when they are edited in other archival devices, such as moving images, or when the footage enters individual and collective memory. As I mentioned before, I have presented these domains where I observe the clips as separate spheres, but it is actually impossible to consider them as such. The interdependence of dynamics occurring online, in cultural memory and creative products in a broad sense, is indissoluble.

In this section, I consider the relationship of the user/spectator to the clips of the twenty-nine days of the revolution as *objets trouvés*. These visual materials can be considered ready-made in the flow of social media, available to the viewer, who participates in the practice of film archiving by retrieving, reusing and remixing them. I will further explain why one can state that editing, watching and displaying found footage can all be identified as an archiving gesture enacted by the spectator, which consequently blurs the theoretical borders between the definitions of filmmaking and watching.

Scholar Miriyam Aouragh's considerations concerning the importance of the re-activation and re-performativity of the slogans and photos of the Arab Uprisings across different contexts, times, and occasions reported in Chapter 2 overlap with this exploration on the spectator's engagement. The role that this latter character plays in the actualization of videos and the narratives that they carry in the aftermath of the Arab Uprisings, and in my specific case, post-January 14, 2011 in Tunisia, are topics at the centre of the debate. As art critic and curator Okwui Enwezor states, if we can assume that the "camera is literally an archiving machine,"[295] therefore "every photograph and every film is *a priori* an archival object."[296] This remarks stresses the autonomy of the footage from its potential recipient and the characteristic of the image of being an autonomous entity. Conversely, my argument highlights the phase of recontextualization in which the archival object acquires new meanings.

Enwezor focuses on the photographic archives, and he borrows the notion of the "surplus value of images" by W. J. T Mitchell, through which the American media theorist describes how photographs enter the world of commodities. He recognizes that the traffic in this specific

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[295] Okwui Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* (New York: International Center of Photography/Steidl, 2008), 12.

[296] Ibid.

repository rests on the assumption that an image can generate surplus value, and the proliferation of domestic photographic production mirrors precisely this process. This statement overlaps with the perspective of my study. Indeed, as I already mentioned, the videos in question are a commodity in that the algorithms that drive social media platforms extract data from them and exploit their proliferation as well as their emotional value ultimately for economic purposes.

As explained in Chapter 1 and 2, the interactions between user-spectator and algorithms, alongside other external contingencies and factors, remain the basic functioning of social media. Whereas the distinction between amateur and professional as well as private and public have blurred, everyday users become distributors of archival contents across an unregulated field of image sharing.[297] By framing social media as a type of digital archive, I stressed the value of the circulation of content as one of the main characteristics of the digital archive as well as of the social media infrastructure. I have argued thus far that the function of the spectator within these networks is that of facilitating the transmission of footage, which according to Ernst implicitly implies storing it in the digital archive. Therefore, the spectator is an agent of transformation in the images first and foremost by means of contributing to transmission and preservation processes over time and in different circumstances. On its part, the digital archive turns into the tool that makes it possible.

What does montage have to do with circulation and conservation? I argue that montage works as an operational tool of the spectator through which circulation and conservation of clips become possible, with the ultimate effect of contributing to the transformation of these items. But, how does this mutation take place, and what does it entail? I argue that the videos in question have to be observed also through another lens, meaning as both found and findable footage within the digital archive. In fact, if the repository "does not only accumulate, give new functions, capitalize 'memory' on a certain device and in its certain dedicated place, […] it is also about the […] 'technical structure of the *archiving* archive'," states Saba by recalling Derrida.[298] This means that it configures the skeleton of the potentially archivable item in its growth. This aspect of possibility embedded in the archive is extremely important.

Indeed, referring specifically to videos on the internet, scholar Gabriel Menotti states that, "After Duchamp it could be said that the internet videos are *objects trouvés* within the media ocean—refound each and every time they are re-watched."[299] These remarks stress two crucial

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[297] Enwezor, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*.

[298] Cosetta G. Saba, "Archive, Cinema, Art," in *Cinema and Art as Archive. Form, Medium, Memory*, ed. Francesco Federici and Cosetta G. Saba (Milan: Mimesis International, 2014), 44.

[299] Gabriel Menotti, "Objets Propagés: The Internet Video as an Audiovisual Format," in *Video Vortex Reader II: Moving images beyond YouTube,* ed. Geert Lovink and Rachel Somers Miles (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011), 74.

aspects. First is the active function of the viewer, who by watching, increases the circulation of the videos and their potential to be found. The second point concerns precisely the inherent characteristic of the digital objects in the flow, not only as *objets trouvés* in social media but also as implicitly retrievable once they are online.

By definition, "found footage is a filmmaking term which describes a method of compiling films partly or entirely of footage which has not been created by the filmmaker, and changing its meaning by placing it in a new context."[300] Found footage means the use in film of footage previously made for another purpose. The denotation of the term focuses on the appropriation and reuse of the materials. But, the wide circulation of the vernacular videos of my study and their online, public presence make them, so to say, *findable* footage. Their being retrievable and available for appropriation not only by their authors, but rather, by anyone else who searches and finds them in digital or analogue archives, collections, and technological devices or in the stream, is a characteristic of the highest importance. This aspect will emerge much more clearly in Chapter 5.

There is more: whereas archival film, in the form of found footage film or essayistic remontage, always aims to be repeated, transformed, adapted, and rewritten,[301] Giovanna Fossati recognizes that presenting a film and making it accessible to an audience are inherent aspects of the practice of archiving, together with collecting and preserving it. Moreover, Fossati stresses the blurring distinctions between the filmmaker, as a creator of images, and the spectator, as consumer. In this sense, she recognizes the category of found-footage filmmaking as a classification that describes two practices: that of the filmmakers, who creates new meanings by appropriating and assembling footage taken by someone else; and the practice of the spectator who, by remixing, turns into an author and creates what Fossati calls "crowd film archive." According to this logic, I can state that the subject—regardless of being a filmmaker or spectator—archives the material simply by the act of watching.

Reflecting on home videos on YouTube, Michael Strangelove also gives great attention to the viewer-consumer and their power in editing. The author claims that we as users/onlookers

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[300] This definition is a quote by Giovanna Fossati, for her text "Found Footage Filmmaking, Film Archiving and New Participatory Platforms," taken from Wikipedia (2011). This definition no longer exists online and has been replaced with many others, more precise and fragmented at the same time. I find it relevant to report this small apparently useless detail because of its consistency with the topic of my investigation. Giovanna Fossati, "Found Footage. Filmmaking, Film Archiving and New Participatory Platforms," in *Found Footage: Cinema Exposed*, ed. Marente Bloemheuvel, Giovanna Fossati, Jaap Guldemond (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press/EYE Film Institute Netherlands, 2011).

[301] Christa Blümlinger, *Cinéma de seconde main. Esthétique du remploi dans l'art du film et des nouveaux médias*, trans. Pierre Rusch and Christophe Jouanlanne (Paris: Klincksieck, 2013), 84.

have always constructed stories from fragments and co-authored them by combining what we see and hear with our own imagination; any narrations only partially resides in the text and is co-produced in our act of reading and viewing. Nevertheless, what a story is, is a question that Strangelove keeps open.[302]

Remixing clips and presenting them to an audience are all modes of retrieving images that are, in turn, forcibly decontextualized. Precisely these practices of recombination of incongruous, displaced items give origin to new connections and narratives. For instance, I think of the historical displacement of the videos in question, which were taken pre-January 14, 2011 and have been reused by filmmakers, activists, and politicians in the aftermath of Ben Ali's toppling. This type of decontextualization appears natural and obvious, because it is consistent with the passing of time, but it is still a subject to consider. Conversely, more practically, decontextualization can also concern extrapolation from narratives and devices and recomposition into another story. Therefore, going back to the gap left by Strangelove, who doesn't define what a story is, I assume that in exploring the potential power of a story to enforce or subvert an existing narrative, the point of view from which a story is told and whose story is narrated are more important than defining what a story itself is.

Therefore, by echoing previous remarks by Ernst about transmission as one of the coordinates for a digital archive to exist, as well as Pad.ma's statements about public presentation as a tool of conservation, I can state that archiving overlaps in a broad sense with the processes of editing, watching, and circulation. More importantly, editing, watching, and archiving all share the functions of preserving documents in three ways: by making transmission of footage possible; in recontextualizing it by means of the juxtaposition of heterogeneous materials; and by resignifying the audiovisual materials as a result of the previous two processes. These considerations will bring me later to analyse cinematic documentaries and video mash-ups, which function as tools of the resignification of the videos in questions.

3.4.2 Memory and Montage of Digital Memory Objects

Memory is the second domain where I observe montage as a *modus operandi* used by the spectator for creating new, untold narratives out of the audiovisual materials in question once he or she retrieves them from the digital archive and remixes them. Memory, intended in the broadest sense as the preservation of testimonies, fragments, and traces against human and

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[302] Michael Strangelove, *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

cultural obliteration and technological erasure, is a grounding topic of my entire research, despite it has been a secondary theme in this dissertation thus far.

In this section, I will give an insight into the definition of memory, precisely cultural memory, and its relationship with technological devices, the means of communication, and the spectator. In particular, I see an overlap between the functioning of cinematic montage and memory. This correspondence materializes, for instance, in the relation of the items—images, emotions, thoughts—with time, past, present, and future; the recombination of these different objects of various natures; and the new stories that stem from this process. I previously described the vernacular clips in question as archival objects and potentially retrievable footage as well as *objects trouvés* once the spectator-user appropriates them. Within the frame of the cultural memory, these very materials assume the status of digital-memory objects that contribute to an individual and collective narrative that sheds light on past and especially future projections.

I will go further and argue that the audiovisual items in question might be observed as *connective memory objects*, a term that I introduce to specify the special relationship between these visual materials and the commercial nature of the social networks as digital archives. Furthermore, one of the aims of this study is to test individual and collective memory through an analysis of the influence of technological infrastructure—for example, social media—upon the process of remembering. In other words, how does the nature of social media affect memory? This question implies the assumption that digital objects of memory that circulate in social networks might be different from other objects of memory, such as photographs or TV footage.

Memory is a vast concept, which has been developed deeply in different fields, as well as transdisciplinarly. The area of memory studies is enormous and extremely articulate. This scholarship examines the social, cultural, cognitive, political, and technological shifts affecting how, what, and why individuals, groups, and societies remember and forget. Cultural memory can be intended, in the broadest sense, to mean "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts."[303] It can be individual and collective. Literature on this subject is abundant as the field is open to the exploration of different ways of remembering, which include non-narrative and bodily forms of memory. A prominent figure within cultural memory is German scholar, Jan Assman, who says:

> Memory is the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level. Identity, in its turn, is related to time. […] This synthesis of time and identity is effectuated by memory. […] On the *inner level*, memory is a matter of our neuro-mental system. This is our personal memory, the only form of memory

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[303] Astrid Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 2.

that had been recognized as such until the 1920s. On the *social level*, memory is a matter of communication and social interaction.[304]

Cultural memory is molded by symbolic heritage embedded in texts, objects, monuments, rites, celebrations, sacred scriptures, ceremonial communications, mediated formalized languages, specialized carriers of memories, hierarchically structured, and other media that serve as mnemonic triggers to initiate meanings associated with what has happened. Furthermore, cultural memory looks at mythical history, solidifies collective experiences of the past, and can last for millennia. Conversely, collective memory entails living and embodied memory, communication in vernacular language, and history in the context of autobiographical memory and the recent past.[305]

Collective and individual memory always intersect. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs coined the term "collective memory" in the 1920s and stressed the dependence of memory on socialization and communication, claiming that memory can be considered a function of social life. According to Halbwachs, the individual is never alone, and memory develops through a path, which necessarily relates the individual with his or her context.[306]

Memory is not an instrument; rather it is the means for a recognition of the past. More precisely, as Andrew Hoskins claims, "Memories should not be considered as fixed representations of the past in the present, but, rather, they exist across a continuum of time. The same memory will be different tomorrow, as it is different today from yesterday."[307] Memories are generally borderless and are as well the results of perspectives that intersect in creative, fictional narratives. Indeed, people consciously manipulate their memory storage, intended to mean in the broadest material sense, over time, by erasing images, destroying their diaries, or changing the orders of pictures in their albums. Memory storage is always subject to modification because their owners continue to reinterpret them.[308] In this sense, "memory is entirely reconstructed by the machine of memory, by the process of writing; it retreats into a prosthetic experience, and this experience in turns retreats as we try to locate it."[309] This fictional architecture mentioned by

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[304] Jan Assman, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, 109.

[305] Jan Assman, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 109.

[306] Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Les presses universitaire de France, 1968); Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Les presses universitaires de France, 1952).

[307] Hoskins, "New Memory," 335.

[308] José van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

[309] Belinda Barnet, "The Erasure of Technology in Cultural Critique," *Fibreculture* I (2003), 3, accessed February 24, 2020, http://journal.fibreculture.org/.

media theorist Belinda Barnet is one of the main aspects that support the correspondence between memory and montage. More importantly, it is worthwhile to stress within my study that, "Memory is not an archive and, at the same time, is capable of putting time and history and the relation between present and past back into play."[310]

I see a similarity between the definition of collective memory by writer and philosopher Susan Sontag and the concept of the "single story" by novelist Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi. In particular, collective memory, as outlined by Sontag, can create homogenous realities as much as single stories, as articulated by Ngozi. According to Sontag "all memory is individual, unreproducible—it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulation: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds."[311] The term "stipulation" stresses the power structure behind the creation of memory, and I see this aspect as connected to Ngozi's notion of the "single story." In her famous TED Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," Ngozi describes single stories as the univocal use of one perspective, one narrative, or one aspect to determine another person or a country. Indeed, she says, "It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. […] The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."[312]

The self intertwines with society and the media to produce memory.[313] But what precisely is the media? With this term, José van Dijck includes writing, photography, film, and television, and to this, we can also add the body. However, she has also provided a comprehensive paradigm of mediated memories, which "are the activities and objects we produce and appropriate by means of media technologies, for creating and recreating a sense of past, present and future of ourselves in relation to others."[314] Films, texts, photographs, and songs interfere with the creation of memories, and they are called objects of memory. The theorist goes on by saying that "Memory objects serve as representations of a past or former self and robust materiality seems to

[310] Saba, "Archive, Cinema, Art," 66.

[311] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, Ferrar Straus and Giroux, 2003), 86.

[312] Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi, "The Danger of a Single Story," July 2009 at TEDGlobal 2009, video, 18 min. 34 sec., accessed August 10, 2019, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?utm_campaign=social&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_content=talk&utm_term=humanities&fbclid=IwAR3bnlL7rF2mMIcqmoC6PvEsW2z46sSY0866RhDtclLG9Slh3cBDeqA-bAo.

[313] Andrew Hoskins, "New Memory: Mediating History," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 21, vol. 4 (October 2001), accessed November 20, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1080/01439680120075473.

[314] van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*, 21.

guarantee a stable anchor of memory retrieval – an index to lived experience."[315] People have always employed materials objects to anchor their memories but also to destroy them or reattribute meaning to them. The vernacular videos in question are digital memory objects that form a recent past in its daily manifestations (they are different items, in comparison to public commemorations or monuments), especially post-January 14, 2011. Digital culture has radically overturned modes of seeing, collecting, storing, and sharing, not only at a practical level but also at a conceptual one. Connectedness, networking, and sharing, which are operations at the basis of the interaction of users of the internet, necessarily influences individual and collective memory as they affect their relations with objects, the present, and the future. As Andrew Hoskins claims, electronic media's technologization has not influenced the rise of longer-lasting forms of collective memory, and similarly, one can say concerning technology, in general.[316] Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to investigate the specificity of digital objects, spectator, and social networks in relationship with memories.

Concerning the first item, in a most recent approach, van Dijck refers to connective memory in defining a social memory influenced by the principles of connectivity.[317] Therefore, adopting the concept of connective memory, I argue that the amateur footage that people remember can be identified not only as a simple digital memory object. Instead, we can call them *connective memory objects*. I find this definition appropriate to the items in question for two reasons: it embeds the tension that the videos entail as spontaneous, amateur, grassroots clips, whose value is tightly interconnected with the digital, time-based infrastructure. Second, its profit-oriented rules have influenced their transmission and, therefore, persistence in memory. Furthermore, the progressive, infrastructural obliteration to which the algorithm brings the spectator leads this latter to engage even more intensely with the visual testimonies in questions and their actualization, online and offline.

According to scholar Marita Sturken, "the blurring boundaries between the image of history and history as an image, between the still and moving image, between document and reenactment, between memory and fantasy, and between cultural memory and history is evident in the construction of national memory."[318] Within this fluid landscape, what places do these *connective objects of memory*, characterized by their hybrid nature, in between private and public documents, cover in the national memories and storytelling of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution and present times post-January 14, 2011?

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[315] van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*, 37.

[316] Hoskins, "New Memory."

[317] van Dijck, "Connective Memory: How Facebook Takes Charge of Your Past."

[318] Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The AIDS Epidemic, and The Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 24.

Indeed, one of the questions inherent in this study is in what capacity do online platforms, digital memory items, and their intrinsic peculiarities contribute to the persistence, resistance, or dispersion of their contents within the digital archive as well as in the memories of people? Or, as media theorist Joanne Garde-Hansen inquiries, "Do digital and online media speed up or slow down our memory-making? Do they create amnesia, or do they prevent us from forgetting?."[319] However, the question of whether the so-called digital memory objects and the embedded, related performative practice have influenced the mode of remembering, the persistence of the images, or the re-shaping of memories in subjects, is not new. It belongs to the range of inquiries already raised by Sturken, who asks whether the photographic image allows memory to come forth or actually creates the memory.[320] As claimed by Hoskins, "Forming or perhaps rather 'capturing' images do result in a preserved framing of a particular moment, yet it is through re-contextualization in new television moments that shape what is to become the definitive version of history."[321] Whereas television provides immediacy and continuity in dealing with time as if it is an "extended present," what is social media behavior? What is the relation of social networks and the content they mediate with time? Within this framework, I observe the spectator as the catalyst that operates between technological infrastructure and the items that this latter stores and circulates. As Barnet states, "Archival technology produces not only the event it records, but also the entire *institution* of the archivable event. Like psychoanalysis, historiography or the practice of writing itself. Our memories, our selves."[322]

So, I will observe, through the use of tools such as interviews and a focus group, the forms of appropriation through memory enacted by the spectator of the vernacular footage of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution post-January 14, 2011. I will observe the montage operated by this character by means of recalling and reassembling the digital objects of memory. I will analyze the reattribution of meanings that remembrance produces, and the resulting narratives. This analysis aims to look at the engagement of the viewer, who performs the clips in question across memory. In parallel, how does he or she take advantage of the digital archive to create new narrations? Or, conversely, in what capacity do the digital archives restrict or impinge on the spectator's engagement with its contents? Other related questions to explore are, for instance, the influence of technology and videos as digital objects of memory in the process of individual and collective remembrance.

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[319] Joanne Garde-Hansen, *Media and Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 70.

[320] Sturken, *Tangled Memories.*

[321] Hoskins, "New Memory," 339.

[322] Belinda Barnet, "Pack-rat or Amnesiac? Memory, the archive and the birth of the Internet," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 15, no. 2 (2001): 224.

Chapter 4

Empirical Research. Object and Methodology

4.1 Literature and the State of the Art

The thesis brings attention to social networks—and specifically YouTube and Facebook—and their potential function as digital archives. It proposes the observation of the empirical case of the videos shot during the twenty-nine-day phase of the Tunisian revolution post-January 14, 2011. Within this context, the user of this informal media, as spectator, plays the role of an agent of transformation in the audiovisual materials that he or she consumes online and contributes to the processes of conservation and the resignification of the clips over time. This topic touches directly on issues of archiving, preservation, and memory and their direct articulations both in relation to social networks and beyond.

Rightly, Derrida referred to an "archive fever:" indeed, over the last fifty years, archiving and the implications that it carries, have turned into a growing obsession for contemporary societies. We see a paradox today, which the internet and social media exponentially emphasizes. On one side, the incredible possibilities given by technological devices and the digital of endlessly copying, transmitting, and saving any kind of digitized documents are accompanied by a proportionally increasing fear of dispersing information, erasing traces, and forgetting.[323] On the other, when "to be forgotten" was proposed in 2010 as a fundamental right,[324] it became even more evident that technologies as well as the internet and its product were responsible for provoking a change on issues of memory, preservation, and obliteration. However, as in the words of Derrida, "the archive, […] is neither memory nor anamnesis as spontaneous experience, alive and internal experience."[325] Rather, it takes place within the structural weakness of memory.

The attempt to define univocally what an archive is and what is not is a failure *per se*. Sociologists, historians, literary critics, philosophers, anthropologists, geographers, political scientists, as well as cultural producers, artists and institutions have approached the issue in

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[323] Diana Taylor, "Save as … Memory and the Archive in the Age of Digital Technology," filmed September 30, 2010 at The Doreen B. Townsend, Center for the Humanities, University of California, Berkeley, video-recorded lecture, 1:09:52, accessed July 12, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGurF1Rfj0U.

[324] Rolf H. Weber, "The Right to Be Forgotten: More Than a Pandora's Box?," *JIPITEC* 120, no. 2 (2011): para.1, accessed January 22, 2020, https://www.jipitec.eu/issues/jipitec-2-2-2011/3084/jipitec%202%20-%20a%20-%20weber.pdf.

[325] Derrida, "Archive Fever," 22.

countless different ways and developed possible concretizations that aimed to critically explore, deconstruct, and revisit the concepts and the forms of an archive to be defined as such. Therefore, it must be admitted that the archive is a composite social phenomenon,[326] and for this reason, it can be defined only by means of a kaleidoscope of perspectives that are functional considerations that serve to expand the area of observation and the dynamics that take place in there. Indeed, archives today also often include films, "artworks, installations, museums, platforms, and media environments, including ones created through social media, that may be more or less interactive, immersive, and pervasive. These may be interconnected, which means that the archive today often consists of a plurality of technologies, practices, documents, and media,"[327] states new media scholar Gabriella Giannachi.

The impossibility of delimiting the notion of an archive is accompanied by another failure, when it comes to attempting to frame the internet and the social networks as digital repositories. Indeed, there is no agreement among media theorists, who appear to be uncomfortable using the term repository in relation to the web and its products: YouTube is an ideal form of the archive;[328] it is a database;[329] the internet is not an archive,[330] to name a few ambivalent positions.

Obviously, digital archives don't always entail the involvement of the internet. Nonetheless, linking the internet and its products in the exploration of the digital repository means to focus on how the web and the technological devices that are directly connected to this infrastructure, such as smartphones, influence the creation of a collective and national memory, and furthermore, how they operate in the domain of the conservation and transmission of documents and historical fragments. In relation to these issues, there are other questions. For instance, about how digital users contribute and participate in creating or selecting the narratives to be preserved, and how algorithms influence what stories will be conserved in these digital repositories, or will be part of these memories or will be forgotten.[331] Additionally, "does Facebook transform the way individual memory is shaped in the public mind?,"[332] inquiries José van Dijck.

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[326] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 22.

[327] Gabriella Giannachi, *Archive Everything. Mapping the Everyday (*Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), 28. Ebook.

[328] Prelinger, "The Appearance of Archives."

[329] Manovich, *The Language of New Media.*

[330] Geert Lovink, *Social Media Abyss, Critical Internet Cultures and the Force of Negation*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016, p. 166.

[331] Gehl, "YouTube as Archive;" Strangelove, *Watching YouTube*; Paul, Erin. "How an ex-YouTube insider investigated its secret algorithm."

[332] van Dijck, "Connective Memory. How Facebook Takes Charge of Your Past," 151.

The attention towards the preservation over time of specific digital objects such as amateur, citizen videos shot during the Arab Uprisings have been a topic of exploration by scholars of different disciplines over the last years. Indeed, research and art centers as well as foundations that promote solidarity and democratic values located in Europe and North Africa have observed both the Arab Uprisings and its consequences in the different territories with great attention.

As historian Leyla Dakhli claims, "Archive fever in the Arab Middle East today takes two forms."[333] Sune Haugbolle continues, saying, "On the one hand, people seek to excavate and preserve existing archives, be they state archives, private collections, or the archives of institutions such as political parties and newspapers. The retrieval and protection of state archives is often part of a power struggle with authoritarian state apparatuses and therefore, as was the case in Egypt from 2011 to 2013, essentially a revolutionary act."[334] On the other hand, those that Haugbolle defines as archival activists are in charge of creating repositories online through the gathering of predominantly visual material. Exploring the process of archiving the digital flows and the mediated experiences stemming from the Arab Uprisings goes beyond the idea that archiving means documentation of the upheaval. Rather, it puts into question issues of the innocence of the archive,[335] whose stories, at the intersection of the archive of amateur audiovisual materials with the genre of the documentary form,[336] repositories tell.[337] However, the very archiving of tools like social networks and their contents as both operational instruments that conveyed the unfolding of

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[333] Leyla Dakhlia, "Archiving the State in an Age of (Counter)Revolutions," in *Altered States: Remaking of the Political in the Arab World Since 2010,* ed. by Sune Haugbolle and Mark Levine (forthcoming).

[334] Sune Haugbolle, "Archival Activists and the Hybrid Archive of the Arab-Left," in *The Arab Archive Mediated Memories and Digital Flows,* ed. Donatella della Ratta, Kay Dickinson, and Sune Haugbolle (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2020), chap. 1

[335] Mosireen_sourar, "858: No Archive is Innocent. The Attempt of Archiving Revolt," in *The Arab Archive Mediated Memories and Digital Flows,* ed. Donatella della Ratta, Kay Dickinson, and Sune Haugbolle (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2020), chap. 3.

[336] Mohammad Ali Atassi, "The Digital Syrian Archive Between Videos and Documentary Cinema," in *The Arab Archive Mediated Memories and Digital Flows,* ed. Donatella della Ratta, Kay Dickinson, and Sune Haugbolle (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2020), chap. 5.

[337] Donatella della Ratta, "Why the Syrian Archive is No Longer (Only) About Syria," in *The Arab Archive Mediated Memories and Digital Flows,* ed. Donatella della Ratta, Kay Dickinson, and Sune Haugbolle (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2020), chap. 8.

the protests, as well as participation and awareness of citizens as performers-witnesses, are topics at the center of the current debate.[338]

The audiovisual materials produced by non-professional, ordinary shooters during the Arab Uprisings have been recognized thus far as incredibly unique and fundamental materials that progressively challenged and exponentially expanded the notions of truth,[339] militancy online,[340] the acts of witnessing and affective witnessing.[341] Clips shot by unknown filmers assume the value of potential documents for archives,[342] image testimonies, and legitimate proof in trials.[343]

The primary interest of mass media, and then researchers, scholars, filmmakers, artists and activists was in outlining the cause-effect relationship between these audiovisual materials and social networks from which all attributions of the Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube revolution stemmed. The actors involved in this exceptional phenomenon, meaning the crowd of spontaneous, non-professional citizens-journalists, also turned into a crucial aspect that required definition. During the upheavals across North Africa and Middle East areas, the people, by means of their smartphones, have documented their history as they were making it.

A series of seminal transdisciplinary samples that emerged within the art, activist, and research spheres are emblematic in this concern. One of the most well known is the Mosireen Collective in Egypt, who gathered during the uprisings and kept the clips shot by citizens-journalists that documented the turmoil accessible for some years on their YouTube channel. Furthermore, Mosireen, in collaboration with Egyptian-Lebanese artist, archivist and educator Lara Baladi, organized *Tahrir Cinema*, a project of nomadic public screenings of the citizens-videos shot during the protests and circulating online. *Tahrir Cinema* took place during the months of demonstrations in 2011 in squares of Cairo, as well as in other towns all over the country, and aimed to fill the digital divide still evident within the layers of the Egyptian society. The interest in investigating thoughts and experiences of filmmaking in the heady times of the

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[338] Mohamed Ben Romdhane, "Vers l'archivage du web social évènementiel," *Research Gate* (2013), accessed May 21, 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258149221.

[339] Steyerl, "Documentary Uncertainty."

[340] Tina Askanius, *Radical online video: YouTube, video activism and social movement media practices* (Lund: Lund University, 2012); Mark Westmoreland, "Street Scenes: The Politics of Revolutionary Video in Egypt, Visual Anthropology," *Visual Anthropology* 29, no. 3 (2016): 243-262, accessed February 10, 2017, DOI: 10.1080/08949468.2016.1154420

[341] Michael Richardson, *Gestures of Testimony: Torture, Trauma and Affect in Literature* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016); Michael Richardson, Kerstin Schankweiler, "Affective witnessing" in *Affective Societies: Key Concepts,* ed. Jan Slaby and Christian von Scheve, (London: Routledge, 2019).

[342] Hatem El Hattab, informal interview, March 27, 2019, Tunis.

[343] Olfa Belhassine, call with Facebook Messenger, April 6, 2020.

uprisings produced research and projects like *Filming Revolution*, a meta-documentary realized by scholar Alisa Lebow[344] about filmmaking in Egypt since the revolution. The major trait and concrete outcome of Lebow's study is that she identified a specific target of filmers, composed by filmmakers, artists, activists, and archivists, and focused on their approach and perspective, instead of following the mainstream fascination for the phenomenon of amateur citizens filming.

To complete the frame of the predominant areas of investigations of scholars and researchers by 2011, I mention also the debated topic regarding the function and engagement of the spectator of these clips, that is, the millions of onlookers who consume and contribute to the circulation of these historic audiovisual materials through the mediation of the screen, and also by sharing and commenting.[345] In this concern, the delimitation of what actions or non-actions performed online by the user-observer can be considered forms of militancy have been highly debated topics in the last few years. As mentioned before, the terms "couch activism" and "slacktivism" were used extensively by activists, journalists, and media scholars such as Evgeny Morozov in order to create borders among social practices that are actually always intersected and mutually influenced. In this concern, a three-year research project aimed to shed lights on the controversial aspects that feed this debate, which consisted of an exhibition in 2015 I co-curated in Berlin with Boaz Levin titled *Regarding Spectatorship: Revolt and the Distant Observer.*[346] The show concerns the notion of mediated political spectatorship, and it is accompanied by a website titled *regardingspectatorship.net* that functioned as an online platform for discussion. The project grew out of an initial interest in the social protests that took place during 2011 in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, commonly referred to as the Arab Spring. It focuses upon the prevalent mode of vision and the engagement of the distant onlooker in relation to mediated political events, critically exploring the role played by mass and informal media as well as by technological devices in the politics of representation.

The transdisciplinary research and existing initiatives mentioned above have been a grounding reference in the development of my study. On the one side, they look at the filmers, either the intellectual elite or non-professional, amateur citizens, and users/observers as the authors of the massive volume of spontaneous documentation of the civil uprisings. On the other, they are emblematic samples that help to reflect upon the extra possibilities offered by social networks and the internet in terms of facilitating activist practices, citizen engagement, the glocal

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[344] Alisa Lebow, "Filming Revolution," accessed March 17, 2017, https://filmingrevolution.supdigital.org/?_ga=2.223636187.196053741.1593184914-570398830.1593184914.

[345] Riboni, "Représentations Mobilisatrices et Stratégies Visuelles pour Convaincre et Fédérer dans les Productions Vidéo de la Tunisie en Révolution."

[346] See, http://www.regardingspectatorship.net/about/.

diffusion of information, and the empowerment of local and international communities. But they also stress the limits of these tools and infrastructure.

However, scholarship, art, and cultural characters devoted great attention to understanding and contextualizing the persistence of these activist videos online and offline, especially in the aftermath of political achievements (such as Ben Ali's toppling in Tunisia) or during extensions of the revolutionary process (which, in the case of Syria, devolved into ongoing civil war).[347] Highly debated issues by 2011 are, for instance, the fragility and volatility of the digital testimonies in questions, the role played by new technologies, the internet as tools of transmission, the preservation of the testimonies, and the threat of the algorithm, as well as contribution of the audiovisual materials of citizens in writing history and memory of the events from the perspective of the people, and the risk of obliteration.

Within this frame, archiving the revolution as an historic event,[348] through the visual testimonies of the uprisings and revolutionary phases, and how, has progressively emerged as a historiographical aspect of the highest priority. The attention towards this process has increased in parallel with the awareness of the multiple values that these visual accounts assume over time, according to the flow of events that have continued to overturn socio-political contexts in North Africa and the Middle East countries after Ben Ali's flight, Mubarak's resignation, in Egypt, and the beginning of the civil war in Syria. The need to protect and preserve the fragile, volatile, and progressively in-danger digital audiovisual materials filmed by citizens during the protests and the different revolutionary phases has emerged as a reaction to three main threats: counter-revolution narratives developed locally, especially in Egypt and Syria; individual, collective, and national distortions of the events and their obliteration; and the online erasure by social media algorithms. These threats turned into essential issues with which historians, activists, artists, practitioners had to deal with by 2011, and for this reason, started quickly to make use of social networks as archives, meaning as sources with which to find and retrieve the visual materials in need for conservation. Among the most interesting cases there are *Vox Populi - Tahrir Archive*, another relevant on-going initiative by Lara Baladi. Launched in 2011, it includes a series of other media projects, artworks, publications, and an open source timeline and portal into web-based archives of the Egyptian revolution and its aftermath in the global context. *858.ma An Archive of Resistance*[349] by Mosireen is the evolution of their previous YouTube channel. *858.ma* is one of

[347] Marianna Liosi, Guevara Namer, Amer Matar, "Fearless Filming - Video Footage from Syria since 2011," in *Image Testimonies - Witnessing in Times of Social Media*, eds. Kerstin Schankweiler, Verena Straub & Tobias Wendl (London: Routledge, 2019).

[348] Lara Baladi, "Archiving a Revolution in the Digital Age, Archiving as an Act of Resistance," *Ibraaz*, July 28, 2016, accessed February 3, 2018, https://www.ibraaz.org/essays/163/.

[349] "858.ma. An Archive of Resistance," accessed March 23, 2020, https://858.ma/.

the largest video archives related to the political and urban changes in Cairo from 2011–13. The online initiative aims to make public all the clips shot and collected since 2011. It contains some clips already uploaded to YouTube, but most of them are unseen and unedited ones, collected directly from its filmers and never displayed before. *Augmented Archive* (2017)[350] is a digital art project by visual artist, filmmaker, and researcher Kaya Behkalam that takes form as an iOS and Android app, a growing and expanding archive, a topography of the possible, and a map of fragments from a city's manifold present moments. The Cairo edition of the *Augmented Archive* consists of a few dozen videos spread all over the inner city of the Egyptian capital documenting events of recent history at the site of their recording, in addition to a series of short related interviews and performative interactions. The videos are partly taken from the *858.ma* video archive of *Mosireen.*

Syrian Archive[351] is a Syrian-intiated and led collective of human-rights activists dedicated to curating visual documentation relating to human-rights violations and other crimes committed by all sides during the conflict in Syria with the goal of creating an evidence-based tool for reporting, advocacy and accountability purposes. Among the videos collected are also amateur clips shot during the Syrian revolution.

In addition to this variety of grounding samples, I consider the following three also extremely relevant references: they are different in terms of form from the platforms mentioned thus far, but are similar in terms of the usage they make of social networks as an archive, mainly YouTube. I refer to *The Pixelated Revolution* (2012), a lecture performance by Rabih Mroué, and two feature-length documentaries, titled *The Uprising* (2013) by Peter Snowdon and *Silvered Water. Syria Self-Portrait* (2014) by Ossama Mohammed and Wiam Simav Bedirxan. Their relevance comes from the questions that they raise about the reuse of amateur clips of the uprisings downloaded from social media. *The Pixelated Revolution* is considered the first artwork in the present day to reuse videos from YouTube of the Syrian revolution taken with a smartphone. It edits them in a narrative that aims to interrogate the user-observer about the power of images to mobilize and the role played by the witness-filmer and viewer-selector of these moving images in the politics of the creation of meaning.

The Uprising (2013) is a multi-camera, first-person account composed entirely of videos made by citizens and long-term residents of Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Syria and Yemen. The film shows the Arab revolutions from the inside. It uses these clips not to recount the actual chronology of events or analyze their causes, but to create an imaginary pan-Arab uprising that exists only on the screen. *Silvered Water. Syria Self-Portrait* (2014) shows formal similarities but

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[350] "Augmented Archive," accessed March 23, 2020, http://augmented-archive.net/.

[351] "Syrian Archive," accessed March 23, 2020, https://syrianarchive.org/en.

also relevant differences to Snowdon's work. This film is the result of the collaboration between the Syrian director Ossama Mohammed, who has lived in exile in Paris since 2011, and the Kurdish filmmaker and activist Wiam Simav Bedirxan. The film is the story of their exchange. Forced into a distance from his country and the revolution, Mohammed gathered together and edited dozens of amateur clips from YouTube about Syria, while the Kurdish filmmaker embodied Mohammed's camera in Homs, and shot daily life of the Syrian people living under siege.

Both *The Uprising* and *Silvered Water* are composed almost entirely of amateur videos downloaded from YouTube. The aesthetic of these films and the conceptual implications behind the use of videos from the internet by the directors strongly influenced the formulation of my initial inquiries, as well as the delimitation of my topics of investigation on the Tunisia case. Clips from YouTube are used in both cases with specific function and purpose. The former consists of replacing audiovisual materials impossible to shoot directly. Both Snowdon and Mohammed are far away from circumstances and places they want to depict. Indeed, they are both in Europe. The purpose of these samples of found footage filming (as the genre of films produced by editing found footage is called) is to write the chronicles of a Pan-Arab revolution, in case of *The Uprising,* while to tell the atrocities of the uprising and the war in Syria shot by 1,001 Syrians, as Mohammed states at the beginning of his documentary. The aim of the montage in *Silvered Water* is to document the truth through the prosthetic eyes—the camera—of those who are witnessing and experiencing the conflict. Conversely, Snowdon creates a fictional narrative that aims to ideally show the Arab Uprising as a unitary, transnational, borderless movement and action. The use of these amateur, found clips downloaded from the social network challenge both the status of this audiovisual material and the genre of documentaries but also the position of the filmmaker before the representation of reality and the chronicles, which cannot rely anymore on immediacy.[352]

These different samples of cinematic products, art, and activist initiatives have some very crucial aspects in common. First and foremost, they are based on and emphasize the collaborative, participatory dimension as the *conditio sine qua non* for these initiatives to exist. Forms of collaboration unfold among the initiatives themselves by linking each other or functioning as mutual sources to legitimate their co-existence. On the other side, the character of the user-viewer-consumer is always at the centre. Either he or she is the creator of the clips or the documents reused and remixed in other narrative forms, or he or she is invited to contribute directly and indirectly, with comments, links, imagination, or memories, to integrate and complete the contents offered by the authors of the initiatives. In doing so, the projects stress the explicit and implicit engagement of the subjects with the visual accounts, information, or platforms that he or she has come across and consumed. Second, all these initiatives are conceived as forms of

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[352] Tarek Ben Chaabane, *Le cinéma tunisien, d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* (Tunis: Édition CNCI, 2019).

archives for the audiovisual materials in question, in response to threats that might obfuscate and destroy the very existence of these testimonies. As such, these types of repositories not only collect them from social networks, mainly YouTube, but also construct a multi-layered context that recontextualizes them. Third, these initiatives stress their partiality. Each of them underlines that they are simply one of the many repositories possible, and in doing so, they implicitly recall the plurality of perspectives for the construction of the individual, collective, and national memory. Fourth, all these projects are ongoing initiatives with the exception of the films. This particular detail is important because it stresses that both the platforms and the contents are subject to continuous update, an aspect that causes constant revisits of values and meanings. Fifth, all these initiatives are grassroots and independent from state control and legitimacy.

In relation to this last point, there is a very important aspect to mention. The research and projects mentioned above concern strategic rather than chance initiatives that have had an international resonance and regard the revolution in Egypt and Syria, whereas, apparently, we have no samples about Tunisia. This is due mainly to two factors. The deep political instability, accompanied by the climate of oppression, military control, violence, and the war that these two countries have been going through by 2011 have brought the proliferation of militant, independent projects initiated in many cases by Egyptian and Syrian cultural producers predominantly displaced abroad. These initiatives aimed or indirectly revealed to work as tools guaranteeing the preservation of the audiovisual materials in people's memory and proliferated as a reaction to the attempts of the state to historically deny the revolution by discrediting or destroying the related visual testimonies and their authors. These threats contributed to bringing the cases above mentioned to the attention of an international audience and agenda.

Conversely, the development of the Tunisian case post-January 14, 2011 has not reached an international resonance in the aftermath of Ben Ali's toppling as the preservation of the clips has followed a more linear and safer process, in comparison to the Egyptian and Syrian cases. In this sense, the democratic transition of the country made it a completely different case, for some apparently less interesting than others in the region, despite many observing Tunisia as one of the most important political and social laboratories of our times.

Rescuing and conserving the videos of the twenty-nine-day phase of the Tunisian revolution emerged as an essential preoccupation in post-January 14, 2011, fomented by the progressive presumed disappearance of these seminal historical traces from social networks and the internet.[353] Jean-Marc Salmon is the scholar who shared the concern about the occasional

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[353] The "Revisiting Archive in the Aftermath of Revolution" symposium organized in October, 2018 at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin is only one among many of the most recent occasions of debate occurring in Europe that devotes attention to the so-called aftermath of the Arab Uprising and questions what remains of these

erasure of the videos from social networks with other Tunisian militant actors, such as founder of Réseau Doustourna, Hechmi Ben Frej, and activated a process of retrieval of the videos. This operation involved other institutional partners, and it brought forth the creation of the archive of the revolution, which is today located at the National Archives in Tunis.[354] This is a unique case that one can encounter among the countries that experienced the Arab Uprising, in which state institutions support the creation of a precious repository for the sake of the national memory of the upheaval apparently without a hidden agenda. In addition to this historiographical process, the status of the videos changed post-January 14, 2011 when the audiovisual materials turned into legal evidence for identifying crimes against Tunisian citizens over the course of the transitional justice that the country embarked on.[355] The practice of the citizen's filming also changed over time, and together with it, also the use and the mission of social networks, such as Facebook and YouTube. Scholars have widely observed the transformations of the formal and informal media,[356] as well as the development of the public sphere online. This domain includes attention towards new approaches and modes of employing Facebook by Tunisian users,[357]

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revolutions, how we put resistance into archival form, and how must an archive be designed so that we remember such events in the future.

[354] "Séminaire: L'archivage numérique des documents de la révolution," *Kapitalis*, March 7, 2017, http://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2017/03/07/seminaire-larchivage-numerique-des-documents-de-la-revolution/; "Journée d'étude: Fonds numériques de la révolution tunisienne, " December 12, 2017, National Library of Tunisia, http://www.agendas.ovh/journee-detude-fonds-numeriques-de-la-revolution-tunisienne/.

[355] Olfa Belhassine, "Tunisia Truth Commission Report (Part i): Dissected Oppression," *Justiceinfo.net*, April 30, 2019, https://www.justiceinfo.net/en/truth-commissions/41290-tunisia-truth-commission-report-part1-dissected-oppression.html; Olfa Belhassine, "Tunisia Truth Commission Report. Part II: Justice and Prisons, Tools of oppression,"*Justiceinfo.net*, May 3, 2019, https://www.justiceinfo.net/en/truth-commissions/41314-tunisia-truth-commission-report-part-2-justice-and-prisons-tools-of-oppression.html; Olfa Belhassine, "Tunisia: Tensioni s Rising Between Victims and Government," *Justiceinfo.net,* April 25, 2019, https://www.justiceinfo.net/en/truth-commissions/41241-tunisia-tension-is-rising-between-victims-and-government.html; Amna Guelali, "Tunisie: L'Instance Vérité et Dignité décrit des abus commis durant des décennies," *Human Rights Watch*, April 5, 2019, https://www.hrw.org/fr/news/2019/04/05/tunisie-linstance-verite-et-dignite-decrit-des-abus-commis-durant-des-decennies.

[356] Chouikha, *La difficile transformation des médias: des années de l'indépendance à la veille des élections de 2014;* Lecomte, "Expression politique et activisme en ligne en contexte autoritaire; Lecomte, "Internet et la reconfiguration de l'espace public tunisien: le rôle de la diaspora;" Lecomte, "Révolution Tunisienne et Internet: Le rôle des médias sociaux;" Lecomte, "L'anonymat comme 'art de résistance';" Lecomte, "Révolution Tunisienne et Internet."

[357] Moez Triki, "Réseaux sociaux et enjeux sociopolitiques. Étude des pratiques et des usages politiques sur Facebook après la révolution du 14 janvier;" Amor Ben Amor, "Cyber Dissidence Tunisienne;" Sebastiani, *Una città Una Rivoluzione. Tunisi e La Riconquista Dello Spazio Pubblico.*

movements and political parties,[358] and cyber activists[359] whereas researchers overlooked the development of YouTube, which has remained almost undocumented before and after January 14, 2011. Yet, YouTube had a specific role as an activist tool able to connect the Tunisian in diaspora with those still in the home country before January 14, 2011. More importantly, it evolved as an entertainment tool, where cases of militant video and music projects, such as the *AnarChnowa*[360] and *Draw My Science*[361] YouTube channels, and hip hop collectives,[362] find a space for expression and wider diffusion in the aftermath of Ben Ali's fall. Attention has been devoted to the influences of the materials consumed online by Tunisian users on the reappropriation and reconfiguration of the public sphere offline[363] and vice versa.[364]

These issues necessarily intersect with a debate that has been going on over the recent years about the great ambivalence of social networks. The inner ambiguities of these services, which can be considered among the most developed biocapitalist products of our times, do not prevent individuals and communities from using them as the most militant tools existing today. In this sense, questioning the influence of these forms of media and the contents that they spread on the way users experience events or remember is crucial in this research, but these are not new inquiries. These issues come up, instead, any time the broad diffusion of a technological device (for example, radio, television) or new infrastructure has overturned the life or habits of audiences. Therefore, whereas anonymous citizens were responsible for documenting and

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[358] Chirine Ben Abdallah, "Pluralisme en Tunisie au lendemain des élections de l'Assemblée constituante. Quel rôle des mouvements sociaux en ligne dans la consolidation des partis de l'opposition?," in *Les réseaux sociaux sur Internet à l'heure des transitions démocratiques,* ed. Sihem Najar (Paris, Tunis: Éditions Karthala et IRMC, 2013), 303-310.

[359] Racha Mezrioui, "L'insulte dans le discours post révolution des "cyberactivistes", cas type de Jalel Brick, Ben Arfa, Takriz," in *Les réseaux sociaux sur Internet à l'heure des transitions démocratiques,* ed. Naja, Sihem (Paris, Tunis: Editions Karthala et IRMC, 2013), 311-334.

[360] Yassine, Bellamine, "À la rencontre d'Anarchnowa, ce Tunisien dont la web-série cartonne sur Youtube." *HuffMagreb,* October 26, 2016, accessed August 2, 2018, https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2016/10/26/anarchnowa-_n_12654298.html.

[361] Magdalena Mach, "Tunisia: Debunking Stereotypes with Science," *Words In The Bucket*, November 8, 2017, https://www.wordsinthebucket.com/tunisia-debunking-stereotypes-with-science.

[362] Youssef, Ben Ismail, "Tunisia's Hip Hop Artists Are More Than Symbols and Troublemakers," *HuffPost Maghreb,* December 6, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/zomra-a-tunisian-hiphop-c_b_8525332.

[363] Raja Fenniche, "Les réseaux sociaux à l'épreuve du mouvement populaire tunisien: quel rôle dans la reconfiguration du champ social?," *Sciences de la société* 91 (2014), accessed March 16, 2018, http://journals.openedition.org/sds/1385;

[364] As scholar Rym Zayane Afif explained to me during a conversation in which she disclosed the contents of her book, which I could not access because it exists only in Arabic version.

circulating visual testimonies on Facebook and YouTube during the revolutionary events unfolding between December 17, 2010 and January 14, 2011, it is legitimate to think of the active role of the online user as an engaged character in the processes of the transmission, remembering, and outlining of untold narratives after Ben Ali's fall.

As already mentioned in the introduction, we live in a digital ecology, a definition that presumes that boundaries among subjects, media, technological infrastructure, and physical and virtual spheres blur. Sociologist Manuel Castells defines in 1996, eight years before Facebook's launch, that dominant functions and processes in the Information Age are increasingly organized around networks that mirror and create distinctive cultures. He recognises networks as the predominant organizational forms of every area of human activity. They are the key dimension of social practice, where "communication technologies have constructed virtuality as a fundamental dimension of our reality."[365] The concept of the culture of real virtuality developed by Castells is a central one. Real virtuality is "historically specific to the new communication system, organized around the electronic integration of all communication modes from the typographic to the multisensorial. […] It is a system in which reality itself (that is, people's material/symbolic existence) is entirely captured, fully immersed in a virtual image setting, in the world of make believe, in which appearances are not just on the screen through which experience is communicated, but they become the experience."[366]

In a global economy characterized by a flow and exchange of information, capital, and communication, we are dependent on new modes of information flow that allow those in control of them to exercise power on us as well.[367] About these presumptions, José van Dijck constructs a definition of the culture of connectivity, a notion that recalls a culture invaded by coding technologies, whose implications exceed the digital domain and the architecture of the platforms themselves. "Coded structures are profoundly altering the nature of our connections, creations, and interactions. Buttons that impose 'sharing' and 'following' as social values have effects in cultural practices and legal disputes, far beyond platforms proper."[368] The culture of connectivity is based on neoliberal economic principles that organize social exchanges and interactions and develops as part of a longer historical transformation featured by a redefinition of boundaries between private, corporate, and public domains. However, as the notion of the digital divide

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[365] Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. Blackwell Publishing 1996), 59.

[366] Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society,* 653.

[367] Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society.*

[368] van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, 56–57.

explains,[369] the idea of a unifying and homogeneous internet is obsolete and sounds almost absurd, especially when one compares the internet to other mediums, such as television or radio. This infrastructure and its products, which follow specific paths of progress according to geopolitical contingencies and regional politics in the Global South and other areas of the world, needs to be observed through other lenses.

      The study of this specific subject and its broad articulation started in 2016. My research is situated within media studies and benefited from constant references to the horizons of sociology, of which I approached within the limits of my knowledge. The scientific literature used within my study composes of an interdisciplinary corpus of texts from the domains of media studies, film theory, philosophy, sociology in relation to information society, and communication. I broadly benefited from the works of José van Dijck, an author whose interests and research are grounded in cultural and media studies, including media technology, digital culture, social media and cultural memory, and whose approach takes in great consideration the research of sociologists such as Manuel Castells. Van Dijck's theories have shaped a large portion of my research, especially the general context of the culture of connectivity, within which this study inscribes the analysis of videos as memory objects. The work of Wolfgang Ernst as the major exponent of media archeology was a seminal reference for grounding the analysis of social media as digital archive, as well as the perspective of media theorists such as Lev Manovic, Geert Lovink, Hito Steyerl, and Henri Jenkins, to name a few. Theorists such as Andrew Hoskins focused more on the topic of digital memory, while Marita Sturken provided an essential angle on the connection between technology and memory. The perspective of philosopher Jacques Rancière was pivotal in my study for unfolding the topic of the spectatorship, and it combines in tight relationship with seminal theories of sociologists such as John B. Thompson, Nicholas Abercrombie, and Brian Longhurst. The approach of the former on the influence of the media in the formation of modern societies is central within my study, and so is the perspective of the other two scholars on the sociological theory of performance. The work of media theorist Larbi Chouikha, in combination with the research of sociologists Romain Lecomte and Jean Marc Salmon, were essential for

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[369] Infrastructurally, the notion of the "digital divide" focuses on "the gap between those who do and do not have access to computers and the Internet." Jan van Dijk, *The Network society: Social Aspects of New Media* (London: SAGE Publications, 2006), 178, and stresses fragmentation and inequalities. This can also be extended to "the quality and speed of connectivity, services available to the user, services actually used, and available information and communication technology (ICT) training or resources. On a micro level, the digital divide also refers to the haves and have-nots of information technologies within the same country, who are perhaps affected by their race, gender, education, socioeconomic status, or a combination of these factors." Rasha A. Abdulla, *The Internet in the Arab World: Egypt and Beyond* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007), 34.

analyzing the context of Tunisia from the perspective of the historical, technical, and social development of the media landscape, as well as phenomenon of cyberactivism, and the use of social media before and post-January 14, 2011.

Much has been written thus far on digital archives, digital memory, and the archiving and preservation of visual testimonies during the revolutionary processes of the Arab Uprisings, as I mentioned above. In this sense, I am aware that I can cover only a very limited part of the existing literature and follow only some aspects of the current debate. Nevertheless, I might claim that the innovation my research proposes to introduce unfolds on two levels that constantly intertwine. The first level concerns the transdisciplinary intersection of the fields of knowledge mentioned above, through which I approach the tension between algorithm and spectator, a friction that stays at the basis of the functioning of social networks and that results in the politics of archiving and remembering by making use of social media and its contents. The second level of innovation consists of applying this perspective to the specific empirical case-study of the restricted type of documents, meaning videos shot by anonymous citizens between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's toppling, stored online post-January 14, 2011. The several modes in which social media have been used over the years by artists, researchers, practitioners, or ordinary individuals as a content repository from where it is possible to retrieve objects and create other types of formal and informal archives is not a new topic, as I explained above. Conversely, my study explores and tests the preservation, transmission, and influence of vernacular, inherently activist clips documenting the uprising in Tunisia between December 17, 2010 and January 14, 2011, within a critical framework of the commercial and highly-capitalistic nature of digital structures, such as social networks. Within this context, I attribute a central role to the user-spectator. Indeed, by drawing attention to the possibilities and limits offered by social media as digital archives, the research focuses on tensions that make algorithms and users co-authors of these archives post-January 14, 2011. However, the research shows the ambivalences emerging from the issues investigated. Frictions between the two entities in questions sometimes disappear, or each element alternatively prevails over the other.

The broad consideration of the commercial nature of social networks in relation to the growing phenomenon of amateur videos and the filming of civil turmoil has emerged thus far mostly in relation to the fragility of the vernacular videos when they are stored on the platforms. Researchers realized the increasingly lower circulation and progressive dispersion of the videos, in the aftermath of Ben Ali's toppling, in Tunisia, and Mubarak's resignation, in Egypt. But they became worried when it turned out that YouTube and Facebook were occasionally cancelling footage, and in doing so, they were destroying potential evidence of crimes and crucial testimonies. This perspective adds important elements of reflection into the debate. Whereas Guillaume Chaslot's revelations and Cambridge Analytica's scandal show mechanisms of the authoritarianism of the algorithm on contents and disclose the irrelevance of so-called activist,

amateur items within the logic of profit typical of social networks, the shift of attention to the user-onlooker, generator, and consumer of content and its power allows one to rebalance an unequal relationship between human and artificial intelligence in the battle for preservation of history and memory. By 2011, activists and researchers in Arab countries and beyond were all dealing with issues around the archiving of these clips. Their questions focused on how to stem the erasure, destruction, or manipulation of materials related to revolutionary events. In response, the innovation that my angle introduces is that social networks can function as any other traditional archive, thanks to those who make it constantly alive again. Within this frame, pinpointing a narrative technique such as cinematic montage as a *modus operandi* appears to me a very innovative aspect. The spectators-users enact the archive and through it, they challenge the algorithm and intervene in the process of the transmission and conservation, within the archive and beyond. The choice of observing the production of moving images and individual and collective memory as narratives stemming from the retrieval and recombination of vernacular clips taken from social networks is also a perspective that contributes to the ongoing debate around preservation.

Obviously, the subject of montage and its expanded possibilities has been analyzed, interpreted, and explored in depth by prominent scholars within film studies and other disciplines. However, the originality of my approach comes from the intersection of this notion with a study of the behaviors of the observer online and offline, including the process of individually and collectively remembering and making an all-encompassing tool for narrating. I argue that moving images and memory are narratives both result from a montage of clips taken from social media as a digital archive, operated by the spectator, and these areas are functional to verify the transmission and preservation of the vernacular videos in post-January 14, 2011 Tunisia.

To conclude, the study sheds light also on the under-developed topic of the evolution of YouTube after the end of the ban in Tunisia. Thanks to the data and findings that emerged from the interviews, I could trace the progress of YouTube as a tool hosting increasing numbers of activist practices, such as channels by cyber activists focused on specific subjects and hip hop musicians dealing with political topics.

4.2 Research Object(s)

The research object consists of social media as digital archives, and the empirical case-study is the amateur videos shot between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's toppling post-January 14, 2011. In relation to this research object, I identified the spectator as the agent of transformation in these videos within the digital archive and beyond.

Why begin with a consideration of social media as a form of digital archive? The phenomenon of the vernacular videos has always been indissolubly connected with the widespread use of technological devices, such as smartphones and the increasing ease of access to the internet and its products, meaning social networks. These technological and communication facilities accompanied the possibility to document socio-political circumstances, specifically those in which the Tunisian uprising and revolution took place. On the one side, social networks functioned as a transnational, transcultural means that allowed the distribution of these clips. The related affective, relational practices among users and between users and images that took place in these contexts are also important parts of the phenomenon. On the other side, the transmission of documents is exactly one of the main aims of the digital archive. Therefore, questioning the issue of the diffusion of these vernacular clips across social media and beyond post-January 14, 2011 shifts the observation of social networks across a wider historical, political, and social perspective in relation to their infrastructure and actors.

What types of social networks do I consider? In order to explore social media as a digital archive, I started with a narrow perspective: I focused solely on YouTube because the objects of my study are exclusively videos, and in particular, the specific genre of vernacular video. Indeed, I had to consider the material to analyze and use the platforms retrospectively when I started my research in late 2016. In this case, YouTube appeared to be a more logical and systematic tool for searching items than Facebook, despite its inherent imperfections. Yet, YouTube seemed to provide a more complete overview on the available data, given the possibility of searching for videos via keywords in a search engine or a database, thus avoiding the use of user profiles. Aside these more practical and operational motivations, it is worthwhile to add that my literature of reference—namely articles and studies by scholars Ulrike Lune Riboni and Peter Snowdon, which have been seminal guides on the analysis of vernacular videos, especially at the beginning of my research—didn't strictly distinguish between social networks. More precisely, Snowdon referred only to YouTube, while Riboni considered both YouTube and Facebook. This was not intended as a lack of accuracy, but rather, is possibly symptomatic of a moment when the focus of observation did not require dealing with social networks separately. However, Facebook was a pivotal tool used by most Tunisians before and during the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution. Therefore, I expanded my interest to Facebook. Nonetheless, the empirical objects of my research remained the clips, meaning only one category of items, and not even a prominent one, considering the wider variety of contents that circulate on Facebook (e.g., photos, textual messages, links). Furthermore, I intentionally ignored other social networks or online platforms that were also used in Tunisia before January 14, 2011, such as Daily Motion or MySpace.

The decision to focus specifically on the Tunisian case comes from the interest in exploring phenomena that I had already observed across other countries involved in the Arab Uprisings, such as Syria and Egypt. The case of Tunisia post-January 14, 2011 reached

international attention only partly, because of the apparent linearity of its transition to democracy and the apparently unproblematic acknowledgment of the revolution as an historical phenomenon. This brought me to question whether and how different actors in the country—who I framed all within the definition of spectator, according to the theoretical assumptions outlined above—were reacting to the challenges of archiving and remembering by means of social networks as digital repositories. The samples of projects and initiatives that contributed to the so-called continuation of life of amateur clips of Egyptian, Syrian revolutions, and Arab Uprisings worked as seminal points of references.

Furthermore, the choice of selecting merely the videos shot over the specific time frame between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali toppling, and to observe them over time in post-January 14, 2011, can be arguable and need some clarifications. Indeed, as explained above, the revolution has continued in the aftermath of Ben Ali's toppling and so have the production of amateur clips depicting demonstrations shot by citizens with their smartphones. Furthermore, I am aware that other scholars found it more relevant to consider a wider corpus of observation in their analysis. Nonetheless, the clips in question were the first body of digital objects filmed as spontaneous documentation by non-professional filmers of the civil demonstrations that started in one of the most disadvantaged regions of Tunisia. Fascination for these audiovisual materials reached a point of fetishism, especially from the angle of Western researchers. In addition, the filming by citizens has turned progressively into a routine activity of the revolutionary process. Certainly, this aspect has to be acknowledged as a phenomenon of the highest relevance, but it exceeds the angles of observation and the initial intentions of this study.

Furthermore, the crowd of Tunisian citizens is the author of the initial body of clips in question. These ordinary creators had the chance as never before to raise their voices about political and social issues via the individual production and circulation of audiovisual materials. In doing so, they were able to escape from state control and censorship and circulate their testimonies virally online and offline. Furthermore, the unfiltered reality that these videos depicted empowered the people both locally, across North African regions, and broadly, across Europe and the US. In relation to this wide, borderless influence, this same corpus of clips turned into the most widely viewed and shared materials by random onlookers, who engaged through the mediation of the screen and the internet. But the attention towards Tunisia and its political overturn was not unlimited; it rather slowly decreased with passing time. All these aspects make it reasonable to observe only this restricted selection of clips and the different forms that they assume when they are reused, transmitted, aesthetically developed by the spectator post-January 14, 2011.

4.3 Research Questions

The research questions aim to assess two main macro-issues, which unfold on other sub-questions.

The first macro-question is whether and how social networks—and specifically YouTube and Facebook—can play the role of digital archives of the vernacular videos that were produced and circulated between Bouazizi's self-immolation and Ben Ali's toppling.

As sub-questions, I aim to assess the role played by YouTube as a database or archive of clips post-January 14, 2011 in relation to and in comparison with Facebook, which was the main social network used by Tunisians before and during the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution. Furthermore, how does the presumed function of social media as archives of spontaneous, vernacular, inherently activist clips coexist with the commercial nature of these platforms? In connection with this point, the research aims to explore and assess the power and the limits of the authority of the algorithm on content, and therefore, its influences on visibility and circulation online of the non-commercial clips in question.

The second macro-question concerns assessing the role of the spectator, who makes use of social networks and its contents. By identifying montage as a modus operandi of the viewer, I inquire in what capacity and modes this character enacts the archive, challenges the power of the algorithm, and contributes to transmission of the clips as a form of preservation and resignification.

Who is the spectator in my research? This is one of the most articulate but also complex aspects of the study, as I intentionally stretch the boundaries and notions of spectatorship. I mentioned several times thus far the angle of observation of this subject within my research and why I privilege the broad notion of spectator instead of that of user in my study. Furthemore, I clearly state in Chapter 2 that the distinction between the filmer as the subject that produces images, and the observer, as the subject who consumes them, is inconsistent within my study as it contradicts the theoretical references on which my research is grounded. In Chapter 3, I indicate montage as a modus operandi of the viewer that makes him or her a storyteller. Furthermore, I state that the spectator enacts the archive by watching and editing, and also that watching and editing can actually be considered as archival acts. According to these remarks, the spectator who uses social media as digital archive for creating new narratives post-January 14, 2011 materializes in my study in all those subjects who watch and film, leave comments, share, upload contents, as well as reuse, remix found footage online and offline, and in doing so, produce tangible or potential visual narratives out of it. This perspective on the spectator gathers together the anonymous online users (who remain unknown especially on YouTube), as well as other samples of spectators that I can observe in the offline sphere.

Here, an inner inconsistency comes up and this friction has remained unsolved over the course of the research. This apparently all-encompassing definition of the spectator to which I refer works perfectly when I look at and analyze online users, especially those on YouTube. But when it comes to observing dynamics on Facebook, and to select a target of interviewees or the participants for the focus group, the subjects chosen for the investigation turn forcibly into representatives of specific groups. This aspect clashes with the theoretical assumptions as well as innovative perspective on the spectator that I aim to bring through them. Therefore, what groups to include or exclude from this observation and the inherent criteria of this choice are problematic decisions and remain partly unsolved issues in my research.

So, I chose a variety of Tunisian subjects, such as activists, cyber dissidents, artists and film directors, students, cultural professionals or practitioners, whose identities and activities most of the time blur into one another. This selection was certainly influenced by the projects and initiatives mentioned above concerning the Egyptian and Syrian uprisings and revolutions. On one side, these selected individuals belong to a category, which might have a deeper critical perspective on the use of social media and the role of the images and their power in the Tunisian society. On the other, the growing phenomenon of citizens' journalism, accompanied by the growing awareness of the efficacy of visual accounts, show that this consciousness has broadened into other categories of society over time, and it is no longer restricted to artists or activists. This makes the target selected somehow still specific, yet considerably less exclusive and special compared to other potential samples of onlookers. In this sense, I did not find it necessary to connect the results achieved from the empirical research as exclusive or representative of this precise circle of spectators.

Why focus predominantly on Tunisian subjects? In Chapter 2, I stressed the relevance of anonymous, distant onlookers who watch, share, and comment on the amateur clips documenting the Tunisian uprising and revolution through the mediation of the screen, and in doing so, participate as the filmers do to the struggle. The progressive fragmentation and dispersion of the clips online post-January 14, 2011 brought me to observe whether and how the viewers online were contributing to the circulation, persistence, and resignification of the clips, but this angle seemed to me extremely partial. This anonymity, in relation with the dispersion of the clips online, led me also to raise the question of what is the relationship of Tunisians with them post-January 14, 2011? If the unknown, transnational YouTube spectator seems to no longer take part in their transmission—or in a limited way, at least—and therefore preservation and resignification, conversely, what is the reaction of Tunisian spectators on their side, post Ben Ali's toppling? Do they also forget, reject, and hide these iconic images depicting the people's struggle? If so, why? What kind of emotional charge concerns these clips and influences their transmission over the years? Or, on the contrary, where and how do Tunisians archive them? In order to explore all these and other questions, the research for online materials on Facebook, the

interviews and the focus group targeted uniquely Tunisian subjects living in their country, which I approached during the research on site.

Indeed, I was convinced for a long time of the research process that certain dynamics were typical of the transnational online community and that were even more exaggerated within the virtual domain. Conversely, the observation of Tunisian groups could present relevant differences and could provide different findings and results to my hypothesis. According to these assumptions, I found it particularly necessary to accompany the online observation of unknown users with that of Tunisian subjects living in Tunisia.

4.4 Expected Results

My hypothesis revolves around the idea that social media can be considered a digital archive of the vernacular videos of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution post-January 14, 2011. If the preservation of the clips in question—archival objects *per se*—occurs through transmission, then the spectator, in an antagonistic relationship to the algorithm, forms one of the key actors in this process. But in what capacity? The different modes of using social media as a digital archive materializes this need of preservation through circulation in the reactions of the spectator. These outcomes respond to the fragmentation and dispersion of the clips in question. Therefore, one initial expectation of my study is the assessment of this phenomenon and how the unknown spectator reacts to it. And as a consequence, if the videos are dispersed in the online sphere, where is it possible to find them, then? In this sense, I anticipate that the spectator contributes to the preservation of clips of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution by means of recirculating them through montage. This means that this character reattributes meaning to them by retrieving, reusing clips and writing new narratives out of the manipulation of them.

My hypothesis takes into consideration two domains in which the spectator retrieves clips shot during the instant from the digital archives via montage, as well as generates narratives that are able to reactualize and recirculate them. While the value and meaning of these documents have changed, this process ultimately guarantees their preservation. The domains of observation are moving images and memory. Reflecting upon the active contribution of the spectator means also, in turn, considering the influence of vernacular videos on the narratives that emerge from these two domains. These expectations have a precise origin. The artistic, cinematic, and activist projects that concern mostly Egyptian and Syrian uprisings, and the archiving of the audiovisual materials that witness the turmoil mentioned above, have paved the way for the exploration of the reasons and the dynamics behind this progressive disappearance of clips online. So, I started by tracing comparisons and interrogated myself on whether similar initiatives and projects that

developed in relation to and about Egyptian and Syrian uprisings also existed about the Tunisia sample.

Concerning the former, my hypothesis here unfolds in two steps. Firstly, as references, I am using two documentaries, *The Uprising* (2013), by Peter Snowdon, and *Silvered Water. Syria Self-Portrait* (2014), by Ossama Mohammed and Wiam Simav Bedirxan. Both films are composed almost entirely by amateur clips downloaded from YouTube. So, despite at the time of the formulation of my hypothesis I was not aware of films from Tunisia dealing with the revolution, I had anticipated that, post-January 14, 2011, there would have been Tunisian directors that had dealt with the subject. However, the cinematic domain is not the only terrain of observation; I also expected to find similar visual products online. In this sense, I anticipated that, post-January 14, 2011, I would be able to find them on YouTube. Secondly, my hypothesis is that the reuse of clips from social networks by directors or video makers rescues these items and recontextualizes them within the complex situation of a country in democratic transition. I anticipate that the montage of the clips during the ongoing revolutionary process in Tunisia has the purpose of revealing a different understanding of the so-called instant over the years, as well as providing a new take on their function. Furthermore, as the Tunisian upheaval and revolution was the first case of the Arab Uprisings entirely documented by its witnesses and performers, I anticipate that this first experience of the montage and recontextualization of the clips might be an interesting experiment that stems from a certain fascination for this genre of videos. In addition, the montage of clips apparently under threat must say something about the engagement of the spectator in the conservation of historical materials in post-January 14, 2011 Tunisia. However, I anticipate the fascination for these archival found clips shot during the turmoil, retrieved from social networks and then remixed, is still vivid in Tunisia over time.

In strict relation with these aspects, I anticipate that the vernacular videos would come up and play a role in people's memory. I expect that these digital items must have also influenced the individual and collective memory of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution among Tunisians and non-Tunisians years after the unfolding of the events. Why do I consider memory? The assumption at the basis of the exploration of the individual mediated memories is that remembering means narration, and that memory works according to the same rules of montage, or even that memory *is* a montage. As I mentioned above, memory does not simply look back at the past. It is not a fixed representation in the present, but, rather, it exists as borderless across a continuum of time. The same memory will change tomorrow, as it is different today from yesterday. So, I expect to be able to grasp from the subjects interviewed and the target involved in the focus group the narratives that they compose out of their remembrances, while they recall them. This will occur by observing what clips and how the interviewees and the students of the focus group as spectators remember the unfolding of the revolutionary events between Mohamed Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's toppling seven years later. I anticipate that, after seven years,

these spectators will be able to still vividly recall episodes out of the clips, perhaps also accompanied by other live experiences or expressions of the empathic relationship of the subject with those images. If my initial assumption is that the phenomenon of citizen filming, sharing, and then watching online concerned a very wide portion of Tunisian users living in the country and abroad, I also expect that the consumption online of the footage regarded a very broad slice of the population, including indubitably the target selected.

I also anticipate that the most recalled clips by Tunisian spectators can be similar to those that many non-Tunisians online users could remember, as the diffusion of the clips via social networks was a massive widespread phenomenon. In fact, online users accessed literally almost the same audiovisual testimonies that Tunisian citizens did, so I expect to find coincidences. For instance, I expect the interviewees will evoke the most iconic scenes, such as the crowd chanting "Dégage" against Ben Ali on January 14, 2011 in front of the Ministry of Interiors, in Tunis on Avenue Bourguiba; the well-known singer Amal Malthoussi wearing a read coat who performs the song "La Liberté;" or the famous scene of the man fearlessly screaming "Ben Ali hram!" on the night of the dictator's fall in the same main street of the capital. But I also expect that the horrific and painful images of the massacre that occurred on January 8 and 10, 2011 in Thala and Kasserine come up, where bodies were filmed, atrocity wounded and the organs exposed. Of course, my hypothesis concerning what iconic clips could come back was heavily influenced by what scenes turned into symbols of the revolution for me, as a distant, non-Tunisian spectator. The existence of this empathic relation with someone else's history is proved by millions of onlookers all over the world who shared and commented on the clips during the twenty-nine-day phase of the upheaval.

Furthermore, I anticipate what Tunisians could remember but I did not have any knowledge about the mode of confronting with the visual representation of the so-called instant, as well as the relationship of the interviewees with digital objects over the years. I also have to clarify that, whereas feelings of nostalgia and sadness toward the revolution, and the missed opportunity for the people of changing the authoritarian states understandably regarded Egyptian and Syrian communities, the social and political situation in progress in Tunisia in the aftermath of Ben Ali fall appeared to me more successful to a certain extent, yet still problematic. In fact, I was aware of the widespread dissatisfaction across many layers of the Tunisian population exacerbated by the serious economic situation and the bitter feelings towards the low achievements of the revolution. Therefore, on the one side my hypothesis is to find via interviews and focus groups what it was obvious to discover, meaning outcomes that mirrored an atmosphere of wide and general sadness and pain. On the other, I expect to find aside from that a plethora of different articulate, subjective narratives composed by each individual out of the clips, to which spectators reattribute meaning in present time. The volume of perspectives stemming from the amateur films and their reactualization would coexist alongside more official

reconstructions of the national memory of the country regarding the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution post-January 14, 2011.

In tight connection with the remark above, I ultimately expect these remembrances evoked by the interviewees and the students of the focus group contribute to resist the dispersion online and the potential obliteration of the clips. More importantly, the several personal stories produced by the interviewees across the recall of the clips consumed online and all other surrounding elements take part to fill the gaps, or replace episodes that the official chronicles have forgotten, rejected or manipulated over the years, or according to political negotiations.

The expectations regarding the clips as digital objects of memory retrieved from social networks as digital archives imply also two additional aspects, which appear technical, but they are actually essential. I refer to the specific attention I devoted to the digital object, instead of the episode that it represents. Indeed, my hypothesis is that the exceeding amount of clips available and accessible online must have an effect on the way and what people remember. More importantly, this repercussion must be different from the impact of any other mediated objects, such as photographs, or footage broadcasted on television. If the medium is the message, I expect that social networks shape also the mode and the contents of people's remembrances. In direct connection with this aspect, I expect to find connections between the digital object of memory, the commercial platform that circulates them and memory. In this sense I coined the term *connective object of memory* for describing the digital items in question when they enter the domain of memory.

The hypothesis of my research concerns also the use of YouTube and Facebook post-January 14, 2011 as databases, or archives, or both of the audiovisual materials in question, or the prevalence of one medium on the other. According to my initial conjecture, the free use of the platform of YouTube by Tunisian users could bring unexpected developments in terms of new forms of expression, alternative and activist uses, as well as political engagement of this supposed archive post-January 14, 2011. In this sense, I expect to find in YouTube more than Facebook samples of moving images products that can show both the evolution of the platform, the way the user-spectator deals with its potential and contents, once the ban is over.

4.5 Research Methods

The research methods in my study combine several tools. They are used for mainly qualitative data collection. First is the research for online materials, which took place on YouTube and Facebook and over different phases that can be only partially distinguished from one another. Second is the series of structured qualitative interviews, a series of informal conversations and one focus group that took place during my stay in Tunis. The former occurred regularly over the

months, involving a target of different subjects that might be identified as representative of the cultivated layers of Tunisian society. The interviews feature sixteen structured one-to-one interviews, and a series of other informal interviews and conversations. The structured interviews followed two different formats according to the goals that I aimed to reach and the different phases of the research, which corresponded approximately each to one of the long stays. The informal conversations were not structurally organized but played an important role in getting information and extending the knowledge of social and political dynamics, which were difficult to otherwise grasp. The focus group took place on December 10, 2018, in the Fine Arts Academy of Sousse with the involvement of the students of the class of Photography MA, held by professor Souad Mani. These tools worked as fundamental steps that had the embedded purpose of facilitating my understanding of the local political and social dynamics. Third is the selection of moving images as both tools for the empirical research and objects of analysis. Indeed, the two documentary films and a series of video mash-ups represent hybrid items within my study. I was able to approach them thanks to a search in a pseudo expanded archive, which I will describe later among the local resources, as well as my participation as a visitor to film festivals and screenings.

Before illustrating in depth the tools of the empirical exploration, I will outline the local background research, where I will clarify the specificities of the field of observation in Tunisia during my time on site. In this section, I provide some references to understanding this field. I will start by framing the historical situation of the country by means of a general perspective. Through this lens, I will contextualize the sources available that I could access, as well as the characteristics of the social actors in the game.

4.5.1 Local Background Research

In Chapter 2, I provided insights into the historical frame of my study that are considered through the lens of the technological and media developments of Tunisia that began over the long, still-ongoing phase of the revolutionary process.

Tunisia is the only sample among the regions involved in the Arab Uprisings that embarked on the process of democratization, and the country has faced enormous challenges since Ben Ali's flight. The liberalization of formal and informal media, thanks to the end of censorship and other forms of state control, and the plurality of voices, which have increasingly been raised due to the democratic process *in fieri*, are all aspects that demonstrate radical changes. Another sign of this is the participation of civilians in the public political life of the country, for instance, in the continuation of rallies and protests in January 15, 2011 and onward that had the purpose of demanding reforms. The interim government of Mohammed Ghannouchi,

which set the same night of Ben Ali's fall, recognized the formation of new political parties. However, hundreds of Tunisians traveled from the regions of the south in what they call a Liberation Caravan to join the Kasbah I sit-in in the country's capital, where anger at the interim government was continuing to grow. A second sit-in called Kasba II took place in February 2011. Protesters asked for the resignation of Mohammed Ghannouchi and all the figures of the old regime that he maintained as part of his temporary government, as well as the formation of a Constituent Assembly. This latter was elected on October 23, 2011. A few days later, Ennahda, a moderate Islamist party, won the national elections and formed a coalition government with two secular parties.

2012 was a tumultuous year for the country. The new government attempted to control protests and violence across the region due to continuous rallies for and against a more conservative religious government. I find the regrettable episode of the attack by Salifists on an art exhibition in La Marsa, a rich suburb in the north of Tunis, particularly representative of this dark political phase. On this occasion, artworks were destroyed with accusations of blasphemy, and artists were threatened with death. The assassination of two prominent secular politicians—Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi—which took place in 2013, brought another wave of tensions in the country. In January 2014, Parliament approved a new constitution, which guaranteed personal freedoms and rights for minorities, among the other things. In the same year, Nidaa Tounes won the parliamentary elections. Mohamed Beji Caid Essebsi became the head of the new party, founded in 2012. Essebsi, a former prime minister during Ben Ali's regime, was elected president in December, and Ennahda joined the ruling coalition.

Despite political developments, the severe economic stagnation, unemployment, and strong disparities among the regions have torn the country apart for years. In addition, the migration of youth from the region towards Europe was accompanied by the phenomenon of the affiliation of thousands of young Tunisians to ISIS as fighters in Syria and Iraq. As one of the interviewees living in Sousse, Baha Lamji (the initiator of the YouTube channel *Draw my Science*) revealed, the issue was so tangible that he could state that several families of his surroundings had at least one relative who was affiliated with Daesh.

The demands of citizens and new political actors have partly transformed the dictatorial, controlled, and corrupt political space, but the radical rupture from the country's past is not a completed process. This is also how it is perceived by the majority of the citizens. The rise of activist movements such as Manich Msameh (I will not forgive) show the power of civil mobilization, for instance, in response to the so-called Administrative Reconciliation Act, presented in 2015 by Essebsi. This legislation would effectively grant amnesty to pre-revolutionary business elites and officials accused of corruption under dictatorship that Manich Msameh was able to stop. However, starting by 2015, Tunisia has also experienced the tragic season of terrorist attacks. Islamist militants attacked the National Bardo Museum, killing twenty-

four people; they opened fired on a beach resort in Sousse, killing thirty-nine foreigners; and they assaulted a bus carrying the Presidential Guard in Tunis. The government responded by declaring a state of emergency. In 2016, Nidaa Tounes, the ruling secular party in Parliament, broke apart, while Ennahda founder Rachid Ghannouchi declared the Islamist party was abandoning political Islam. In July, Parliament dismissed Prime Minister Habib Essid and a month later, Nidaa Tounes member Youssef Chahed became the prime minister. In 2017, the severe economic situation was still the biggest challenge for the country. In January 2018, protesters rallied in cities across the regions over lower living standards caused by the economic problems and government efforts to reduce the deficit by cutting subsidies and hiking the tax. The rising nostalgia for the euphoria of the pre-January 14 days have over the years coupled with currents of discontent and frustration. In parallel, the regret for times of stability and apparent more equal distribution of wealth guaranteed by Ben Ali's economic strategies is also a widespread feeling. In July 2018, Parliament passed a law to curtail illegal enrichment by forcing senior officials, banks, judges, security forces, journalists, and unions to declare their property. In October 2018, another suicide bombing shook the capital. Nine people, mainly officers, were wounded on this occasion. In November 2018, thousands of civil servants went on general strike against the increasing inflation and government refusal to raise wages. In the meantime, the prime minister had been under pressure from international lenders, who threatened to stop financing Tunisia's economy if the government did not tackle its large budget deficit.[370]

Within this context, I find the exhibition *Voices of Memory* very representative of the historical phase in which I visited the country. It took place in September 2018 at Club Tahar Hadded, in the medina of Tunis. The exhibition was organized by The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), the University of Birmingham, and Museum Lab. It revolves around the presentation of the testimonies of nine Tunisian women—some, victims of the dictatorship, and others, newly engaged in activism—united by their belief in the power of storytelling as a vehicle for change. A place of living history, *Voices of Memory* explores Tunisian women's experiences of repression through "El Koffa," the traditional Tunisian basket used to bring food to prisoners. Aside from a reconstruction of the rooms where the relatives of the prisoners could

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[370] Elie, Abouaoun, "Tunisia Timeline: Since the Jasmine Revolution," *United States Institute of Peace,* July 12, 2019, accessed June 12, 2020, https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/07/tunisia-timeline-jasmine-revolution; Romain, Houex, "Sept ans après, que reste-t-il de la révolution tunisienne?," France 24, December 17, 2017, accessed June 13, 2010, https://www.france24.com/fr/20171217-tunisie-revolution-sept-ans-apres-printemps-arabe-droits-homme-economie; Larissa, Chomiak, "Five years after the Tunisian revolution, political frustration doesn't diminish progress," The Washington Post, January 14, 2016, accessed March 11, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/01/14/five-years-after-the-tunisian-revolution/; Sebastiani, *Una città Una Rivoluzione. Tunisi e La Riconquista Dello Spazio Pubblico.*

encounter their loved ones, and a series of audio testimonies that the visitor could listen to (in Arabic, or probably Tunisian dialect), the exhibition also displayed artworks as the result of workshops and collaborative projects developed by Tunisian artists with women of the local communities. One of the most interesting elements of the show is the final section, where the visitor is invited to write on papers that are hung and visible and share their personal remarks about two questions: What feelings did the exhibition evoke in you? How do these stories from the past relate to today?

These questions addressing the audience show something very important. They shed light on three central aspects that Tunisian society within a revolutionary process needs to investigate: remembering the past from the perspective of the victims as well as shedding light on memories and personal stories of women; healing the wounds and trauma through a visual and aesthetic relational process; sharing publicly emotions, feelings, and memories so that they can go beyond the individual sphere and transform into a collective heritage. My historical contextualization concludes at the end of 2018, consistently with the filmography that I took in consideration within the empirical research, and the end of my stay.

Concerning the specificity of my domain of observation mentioned in the previous paragraph of the period post-January 14, 2011, several factors make the digitally mediated and geographically distant approaches to the evolution of the Tunisian digital context and its articulations difficult. Indeed, the variation of circulation, visibility, and symbolic value of the vernacular videos, which were the objects of my observation, could not be studied only via online samples. Within this context, I considered a period of five months of fieldwork in Tunis as mandatory, which also included trips and brief visits to Hammamet and Sousse. In fact, aside from the findings provided by the interviews, the period of research in Tunis served to assist my search for these apparently vanished and ungraspable clips.

Furthermore, the research on site revealed itself to be a necessary step within the research process, and also in regard to a personal development of knowledge. In this concern, I had to go through a necessary process, which I would define as "self-decolonization." With this term I mean an individual procedure of deconstruction of the pre-conceptions and the assumptions typical of a foreign approach to someone else's culture. This slow but important process allowed me to refine and redefine the main issues around which my research revolved. I could reframe the questions of the revolution and its visual representations as part of the historical flow. Instead of immutable objects, which I perceived as closer to icons, these were cultural and historical products that are normally affected by an endless transformation. Alongside this, I reshaped my understanding of the local development of the internet and social networks in actual Tunisia.

Regarding the preparation of the research on site, I started with the online observation as the primary approach, followed by a reading of the literature. My professional background as an

art curator brings me to look at social, economic, and political dynamics through the lens of image production and creative outcomes. In this sense, I always take the visual as a point of departure for my analysis. The dynamics stemming from the circulation of images and the impact that they create online and offline preempted the exploration of the social, historical, and political context via written sources.

This approach brought me to establish my first contact in the country with the Tunisian Federation of Film Societies, which happened through the mediation of the Arsenal—Institute for Film and Video Art, an institution based in Berlin, and the Network of Arab Alternative Screens (NAAS) organization. During this preparation, I conducted informal conversations with Tunisian activists and students in diaspora in Berlin, Paris, and with the scholar Julius Erdman, who for years had studied Tunisia in the context of topics similar to mine. Facebook revealed itself to be a crucial medium in first approaching potential Tunisian contacts. This social network is considered by many Tunisians, and often users in the Global South, as a synonym of the internet and is used more widely, effectively, and professionally than email for reaching people.

The period of research on site unfolded during two long trips and one short visit. The first trip started at the beginning of June and continued until mid-July, 2018. The second occurred at the beginning of September and continued until mid-December, 2018. This period was partly supported economically by the Contributions for International Mobility Funds, distributed by the University of Ferrara. The short visit lasted one week at the end of March 2019.

Concerning the local resources available, the Tunisian Federation of Film Societies (FTTC) is the entry point that facilitated local background research. The FTTC is a civil association of cinephiles that was founded in 1949 and promotes cinema as a tool for political and cultural activism and social engagement. Its political and cultural relevance within the Tunisian context is indubitable. The federation provided, in turn, the first contact with directors.

My second resource was the National Archive in Tunis, where the in-progress repository of the revolution is located. The visit to the archive was possible through the mediation of Hechmi Ben Frej, the president of Reseau Doustourna, who facilitated my access to a corpus of materials that was available but not yet open to the public. I did not intentionally establish any partnership with academic departments and universities in Tunisia,[371] but I preferred to get in touch with the

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[371] This choice was influenced by a series of exchanges I had with other researchers, such as Julius Erdman and Stefano Pontiggia, who conducted fieldwork in Tunisia before me and discouraged the creation of official partnerships of research with local universities. According to these scholars supporters of the Ben Ali regime were still heavily present in these educational contexts, and therefore, building official connections could even be a disadvantage. Thinking in retrospect, I took this suggestion too radically when I selected my interlocutors in the country. This explains why I approached local academics whose work and research were valuable for my study,

individual scholars from the University of Tunis, the Department of Media and Communication of University La Mandouba, IRCAM, School of Sciences and Technologies of Design (ESSTED), Fine Arts Academy (ISBA) in Sousse,[372] with whom I met for conversations and informal interviews.

Locally, I benefited from cultural events that I attended as a visitor, such as art and pedagogic exhibitions in museums, art spaces, and self-established art institutions. These activities helped me to understand the development of visual culture in the country. They were also a potential terrain of observation for studying the retrieval and transformation of the clips of the twenty-nine-day phase in different domains. In particular, the forum *Les Résistances à la Justice Transitionnelle: Le cas de la Tunisie*, organized by the Hirondelle Foundation in collaboration with the University of Warwick, which took place at the National Library from June 27 to 28, 2018, presented current debates in Tunisia about the role of the media during the country's complex transitional phase, and from the perspective of activists, journalists, media scholars.

The search for cinematic products and moving images as tools and objects of observation occurred through the use of several different resources. Film festivals and screenings functioned also as resources for research. Among them, for instance, there are JCC 2018 in Tunis (Journée du Cinéma de Carthage), the major festival of cinema in Africa; and other festivals, such as *Regards de Femmes*, organized by the Tunisian Federation of Film Societies in Hammamet (October 2018), and *Manarat* (June 2018), in Tunis. In addition, I followed the program of film screenings at La Cinématheque, Tunis. My attendance of these film projections was functional, in the broad sense, to the exploration of moving images produced in Tunisia between 2011 and 2018. More importantly, most of the time a discussion of the director with the audience followed these public screenings. These were, thus, very important occasions for me to understand the general atmosphere, as well as perceptions, interpretations, and thoughts of local spectators in response to, or as a result of the film and the topics unfolded. When I defined moving images as tools and objects of observation, I outlined a temporal range—films produced in Tunisia and directed by Tunisian directors between 2011 and 2018—without defining distinctions between feature films or documentaries. Once on-site, the task revealed itself to be very challenging, if not

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but I completely avoided any institutional contact with the universities or research centers with which they were affiliated.

[372] I include for instance, Sana Tamzini (professor at ESSTED, and art curator), Ikbal Zalil (professor at IRCAM, and cinema critic), Larbi Choukhia (professor of Media and Communication at University of La Mandouba), Adnen Jday (professor of Aesthetic, University of La Mandouba, and writer), Wafa Gabsi (professor at Fine Arts Academy, Tunis, and art curator), Rachida Triki (professor of Aesthetic at the University of Tunis, and curator), Souad Mani (professor of Photography, Fine Arts Academy of Sousse, and artist).

beyond the bounds of possibilities, as I discovered the considerable number of films produced over that time. Despite having conducted previous research on this domain, the very restricted circulation of Tunisian films abroad made me under-evaluate the workload and the number of materials to watch during the given research time.[373] To limit the field of investigation the first criterion I set was to select only the films that concerned or embedded the topic of the revolution, and in addition few others that I found relevant for a wider understanding. Therefore, I watched a total of thirty films (See Table 1), which were mainly documentaries.

Conversely, I found the YouTube channel AnarChnowa during the first period of fieldwork in July 2018 thanks to suggestions I received by other interviewees. As the first two episodes of the first season were subtitled in English, I could easily assess the relevance of the channel for my study. Despite many attempts to reach AnarChnowa himself, it was possible to meet him only during my second trip. After this initial encounter, we were able to hold Skype conversations several times so that I could better comprehend the themes of the episodes, which were very focused on the most debated and controversial political and social questions of the last years in the country—discourses and problematics that I was struggling with reconstructing at that time. These frequent conversations with AnarChnowa were necessary for me to become familiar with contextual specificities as well as public figures within the political, entertainment, and cultural fields to whom he refers and uses for narrative purposes.

Another aspect of the local background research to be mentioned are the several daily accidental encounters with a variety of people (taxi drivers, army officers, professors, a tourist guide, NGO members, local and international researchers and academics, viewers from casual film screenings, and bartenders) who were curious or ready for a chat. These casual encounters added so much flavor and nuance to the framework I was trying to compose during my stay.

In this section, I will problematize the question of language. My study of Arabic gave me a basic level of knowledge. However, it was inadequate for conversation or for translating long sentences. Instead of Arabic, I used French[374] during my research on site (in the interviews, focus

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[373] Indeed, most of the titles I watched have never reached European cinemas. Only a very small number have been screened, for instance, within the frame of thematic festivals such as the last editions of the Arab Film Festival in Berlin in 2017 and 2018. But also when projected publicly, compared to the circulation of Egyptian and Syrian films, Tunisians films appear in considerably smaller numbers.

[374] Due to the language requirements of the objects of my research, in September 2017 I started a class of Modern Standard Arabic at the Volkshochschule in Berlin, which I attended until May 2018. I achieved the level of A1.5 and intended to continue learning the language in Tunis. However, the difficulties of the language, the need for studying the Tunisian dialect alongside Modern Standard Arabic, as well as the deep change of perspective with which I had to confront during my fieldwork made this plan too ambitious. Therefore, as I am fluent in French, which is a second language for Tunisians, I decided to use this language for dealing with daily conversations and

group, and daily communications), and I relied on translations for the viewing and analysis of films, online comments, and the video mash-ups.

Aware of the conceptual problem that lay behind any process of translation, I appropriated the approach of Indian poet, curator, and translator Ranjit Hoskoté, who explores "translation as a medium that can be expansive."[375] The awareness of my position as a foreign onlooker turned into an embedded object of reflection within the process of research and became an essential part of the observation. In addition, the use of other languages other than Arabic brought me to confront cultural issues that exceeded my focus of research but turned into important contextual aspects to understanding the evolution of the society in relation to the linguistic colonial heritage.[376] This very issue is also a topic discussed within the cultural and activist scene,[377] and independent media initiatives are confronted with it daily.[378]

The films I watched in Arabic featured French subtitles. In this case, subtitling is an ordinary process for any film distributed internationally. The YouTube channel AnarChnowa, on the other hand, required a translation from the Arabic/Tunisian dialect to English. Also many comments by users of the videos on YouTube and Facebook were in Tunisian dialect and mostly written in Arabic Chat, the new language typical of the interactions in the internet used mainly by Tunisians and Egyptians.

I commissioned a Tunisian translator, Abir Narsi, for this work, who in the meantime was also able to provide further contextual information about common sayings and specific linguistic expressions employed by youths. The support of the translator certainly led me to overlook the linguistic details and differences among Standard Arabic, Tunisian dialect, and Arabic Chat, as well as the diverse use of each of these options according to the various contexts. Of course, the

interviews. Seventy years after the political independence of Tunisia from France's empire, the dominance of French (spoken as such or absorbed by the Tunisian dialect, resulting in a creole language) remains a colonial heritage.

[375] Excerpt from the lecture "Translation, Anamnesia, Resistance" held by Ranjit Hoskoté as part of *#1 Translating*, June 17, 2019, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/veranstaltung/p_153779.php.

[376] For instance, depending on the preference of each interviewee, interviews and informal conversations were conducted mainly in French, and rarely in English. But I also noticed that some subjects between twenty-and thirty-years old did not speak French, which is the language of colonial heritage, but they could speak English. This is a remarkable detail but it was not generally and indistinctly valid for all social layers and regions of the country. Exceptions depend on the level of education and class as well as the context of origin of the individuals.

[377] See, for example, Willis from Tunis, the renowned satirical character created by Nadia Khiari, circulating virally on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter with comments in French.

[378] The independent platform for information, *Nawaat*, hosts articles written in Arabic, French, and English according to the topic and the target they want to reach.

use of one register or style, even a language, instead of another, is a symptom of a series of communication choices, and it embeds the selection of a target as well as specific meanings to communicate. This aspect is particularly true for the comments by users to the videos, and I make remarks wherever this is significant. However, the variety of languages used, e.g. French, English, Tunisian dialect and Arabic Chat, is a symptom of several intertwined factors and embeds many diverse hidden and explicit implications whose detailed analysis exceeds the big picture of my research. For literature by Tunisian scholars, I was able to access these materials in French. In one case, I accessed a publication in Arabic through the support of its author, scholar Rym Zayane Afif, who discussed with me in French the contents of the book.

Table 1. Films, videos and documentaries selected and watched.

	Title	Year	Director	Length
1	*Babyon*	2012	Ala Eddine Slim, Youssef and Ismael Chebbi	121 mins
2	*El Gort*	2013	Hamza Ouni	87 mins
3	*C'était mieux démain*	2012	Hinde Boujemna	71 mins
4	*Maudit soit le phosphat*	2012	Sami Tlili	82 mins
5	*Hecho en la casa*	2014	Belhassen Handous	78 mins
6	*War reporter*	2013	Amine Boukhris	74 mins
7	*Plus jamais peur*	2011	Mourad Ben Cheikh	74 mins
8	*Pipou*	2018	Manel Katri	15 mins
9	*Un retour*	2013	Abdallah Yahya	59 mins
10	*Pousses des printemps*	2014	Intissar Belaid	23 mins
11	*A peine j'ouvre les yeux*	2015	Leyla Bouazid	106 mins
12	*Thala, mon amour*	2016	Mehdi Hmili	87 mins
13	*Bidoun 2*	2014	Jilani Saadi	92 mins
14	*Revolution under '5*	2012	Ridha Tlili	75 mins
15	*Controlling and punishment*	2014	Ridha Tlili	90 mins
16	*Forgotten*	2017	Ridha Tlili	90 mins

17	*Dégage*	2012	Mohamed Zran	95 mins
18	*The Last of Us*	2016	Ala Eddine Slim	94 mins
19	*7 vies*	2014	Lilia Blaise and Amine Boufaida	57 mins
20	*7 vies et demie*	2014	Nejib Belkadhi	82 mins
21	*Fallega*	2011	Rafik Omrani	52 mins
22	*Emirs au pays des merveilles*	2014	Ahmed Jlassi	74 mins
23	*Foyer et esquisse*	2016	Ismael Bahri	31 mins
24	*Black Mamba*	2017	Amel Guellaty	20 mins
25	*Rouge parole*	2011	Elyes Baccar	94 mins
26	*Fatwa*	2018	Mahmoud Ben Mahmoud	102 mins
27	*Au bout du fil*	2018	Faouzi Djemal	75 mins
28	*Brotherhood*	2018	Meryam Joobeur	25 mins
29	*Une part de moi*	2018	Silvana Santamaria - Bilal Athimni	87 mins
30	*Ecoutons-les*	2018	Slim Gomri	25 mins

4.5.2 The Research of Online Materials

The research for online materials corresponded not only with the starting point of the study but traced the path of the rest of my investigation and continued also later during the fieldwork in Tunis. The process is partly influenced by my physical and cultural distance from the empirical case study, meaning the videos in question and the context where they developed. However, I have also been following the empirical case of the amateur, citizens videos online since 2010, and I have approached them through the focus on spectatorship as well as the perspective of the digital emotions and activism in previous writings and curatorial projects before this study. This is one of the factors that contributed to determining the initial preference over others for the clips shot between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's toppling as objects of exploration. Furthermore, my initial investigation of YouTube over Facebook was precisely due to the practical possibilities of exploring the traffic of amateur videos via tags and keywords instead of via user profiles as required by Facebook.

The observation of Facebook and YouTube developed across the perspective of understanding these tools and the evolution of their use in post-Ben Ali Tunisia. For this reason, I intentionally used Facebook in relative consideration to conduct the research for online materials, to assess the disappearance of the clips, and so on, despite an awareness of its popularity, broad local diffusion, and organizational function before January 14, 2011 in the Tunisian context. Indeed, the fact that YouTube was a banned platform during the Ben Ali era in Tunisia was a given fact that appeared irrelevant at the time of the formulation of my research aims and questions. In fact, by simply searching for videos through intuitive keywords, I could already find a massive amount of clips uploaded to or shared on YouTube that had virally circulated and gained hundreds of views over the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution. In addition to this empirical observation, as I explained in Chapter 2, scholars clarified that YouTube played a specific role during the Tunisian revolution thanks to all those Tunisian residing abroad and the millions of onlookers who consumed the clips through the mediation of the screen. Therefore, the observation of Facebook started at a second stage. I used the data emerging from Facebook as terms of comparison with the results upcoming from YouTube.

The research for online materials started in mid-2017 and has been developed over the course of two years in different phases. Nonetheless, I analytically observed the videos in question, their online activity, and I limited the data finding between November 2018 and May 2019, on YouTube and Facebook. As it is obvious, the infrastructural characteristics of the selected display of observation define the possibilities of observation and the results of the survey. Due to the different typology of platforms, I had to adapt the approach to the search for digital items accordingly. Indeed, on YouTube, I had to search for videos directly, while on Facebook, I located the videos by searching for users. I defined three criteria of research for online materials:

1) the pertinence of the clips to the twenty-nine-day phase of the Tunisian revolution;
2) the dynamism of the videos;
3) the presence of user comments to the videos.

This group of criteria was initially established in consideration of the search operations on YouTube, as my objects of research were the videos, and not users. The definition of the objects of study, through a temporal and typological classification, required the necessity of limiting the field of observation to one case: that of vernacular videos shot and uploaded between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's toppling. Concerning the second criterion, in particular, I referred to views, the fundamental parameter offered by the platform in its measurement of traffic, circulation, and impact. The third criterion, namely online communication by viewers-users as comments to the videos, still belongs to the domain of the dynamism of the clip, but it focuses specifically on

the online interactions occurring among users and between users and image. Other gestures accomplished by the viewer-user online can suggest and interrogate his or her possible engagement, such as titling, subtitling, translating, and describing. My attention however was focused on the comments, as they could tell something more than figures do. In spite of this, I am aware that these delimitations have excluded other interesting objects.

The data finding and a structured analysis of the metadata[379] of the clips were conducted between November 2018 and May 2019 on YouTube. According to YouTube's database-oriented nature, I searched through a series of keywords whose definition changed over time, and for this reason, mirrored the development of the research itself. The initial search began firstly by following the criteria of date and place according to the chronology of events between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's toppling (e.g., "December 17, 2010," "January 14, 2011," "Tunisia," "Tunis," or other towns in the country), then, by using other words that described a relevant episode or attracted the attention of the viewer, and finally, through a selection of languages (such as French, English, and Arabic). The main keywords used for the search were "protests," "manifestation" (and its abbreviation, "manif"), "police," and "violence" followed by "Tunisia" (in English and French) or the names of Tunisian towns (Sidi Bouzid, Kasserine, Thala, and so on), the name of Mohamed Bouazizi accompanied by the words "immolation," "Tunisia," and the date of the tragic event. The words "revolution" and "révolution" were typed in both English and French as I assumed that the act of posting online was motivated by the purpose of reaching maximum visibility, and therefore, would have justified a wider use of both these languages instead of Arabic only. Similarly, I used the same framework for other keywords, such as "morts sur la rue," "martyrs," and "massacre." Later, I discovered some of the keywords used on YouTube by the archivists of the National Archives of Tunis, who have been in charge of creating the archive of the Tunisian revolution, such as "al thawara" ("revolution" in Arabic, and written in Arabic chat characters), "Bouazizi incendie" or "Bouazizi Sidi Bouzidl"—words with typos, and words of a new language that emerged and was spread during the uprising.[380] All keywords and criteria were combined in different ways to give the widest range of potential results.

A note about the use of keywords is necessary: as the intention of this research for online materials was that of monitoring the videos' dynamism over time, the type of keywords employed—either in case of those in English and French, selected according to my criteria, or set by the archivists of the National Archives of Tunis—turned of little relevance. Indeed, as it is well known, the search through keywords on YouTube never produces precise outcomes, but rather, a wide range of different results according to algorithmic settings. Even the use of keywords in Arabic instead of those in English or French did not change the general tendency of the findings.

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[379] Which consists of the number of comments and views for YouTube.

[380] Hatem El Hattab, informal interview, March 27, 2019, Tunis.

Furthermore, the authors of the videos or the users who shared them often titled the videos by mixing these languages so that the clips could appear more often in the search ranks.[381] Or, due to the speed of uploading and the spontaneity of the filmer, many videos have been titled by their authors with numbers[382] or words with typing errors that might be difficult to guess even for Tunisian researchers. These and other specificities make any attempt to gather or even exhaustively observe these objects years after the occurrence of the events very hard.

I searched through the enormous amount of online clips from YouTube via keywords and selected twenty-three videos without distinction, including both raw and post-produced clips (see Table 2).

In regards to Facebook, as I previously claimed, the research of online materials could not function through the search for clips. First, I had to select instead the personal profiles of users, through whom I could seek the materials in question. The analysis of the user profiles and pages on Facebook occurred in December 2018. I decided to observe ten users and three pages, many of whom are activists, or activists' collectives, and bloggers who have been listed by sociologist Jean-Marc Salmon in his book that I mentioned previously,[383] while others are subjects who I met directly during the fieldwork. The profiles and pages observed are those of Azyz Amami, Khaled Amami, Slim Amamou, Shahin Gharbi, Jalel Brick, Big Trap Boy, Ayachi Hammami, Njar 3la 3ammar (page), Zied El-Heni, Manel Souissi, Lina Ben Mhenni, Takriz (page), Nawaat (page). Among these thirteen profiles of users and pages, I analyzed the online materials uploaded to the profile of three users: Manel Souissi (as President of the Tunisian Federation of Film Societies, Tunis and doctor), Azyz Amami (as blogger and activist), Zied El-Heni (as blogger and journalist), and one page by activist group *Takriz*, a collective initiated in the 1990s that fought against former President Ben Ali for freedom of expression and against censorship.[384]

The criteria of how I operated the selection of these specific users instead of others depended on the nature of my contacts among the Tunisian subjects, and this shaped the selection of the profiles to analyze. In fact, the only Tunisians I knew before the fieldwork were public characters, such as activists, bloggers that I read, and only later did I meet people like Manel Souissi, who during the interview, mentioned her interaction with Facebook during the uprising via watching and re-posting photos and clips.

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[381] This is a technique used, for instance, by cyberactivist Sami Ben Abdallah in his YouTube channel. Sami Ben Abdallah, informal interview on Skype, February 8, 2018.

[382] Sami Ben Abdallah, informal interview on Skype, February 8, 2018.

[383] Salmon, *29 jours de révolution*: *histoire du soulèvement tunisien, 17 décembre 2010–14 janvier 2011*.

[384] Racha Mezrioui, "L'insulte dans le discours post révolution des "cyberactivistes;" Chouikha, *La difficile transformation des medias: des années de l'indépendance à la veille des élections de 2014.*

The selected users seem privileged or particular because they have a history of activism and civil engagement, and this might be an important detail and a specificity that can influence the results. However, as I described in Chapter 3, the spectator in my study is theoretically framed by the definitions of Rancière and White, meaning a blurring category of users-viewers that film, upload, watch, and share contents on social networks. Furthermore, the phenomenon of the citizen videos in the way it emerged apparently suggested that during the Arab Uprisings everyone was taking part in these activities on social networks, no matter what his or her role or position within civil society was. In addition, as I will describe later in regards to the interviews, the phenomenon of the vernacular videos expanded the awareness of the power of the image within the society. According to these remarks, I did not consider it necessary to identify the findings of the research as specific to the precise category of spectators selected.

In my research on user profiles, I took advantage of Timeline, the function introduced by Facebook in 2012 that I described previously. Through this media feature, I observed and analyzed user posts uploaded between January 14, 2011 and January 14, 2018. This button does not exist on the pages, so I used the Videos section on the left side of the page. I defined the duration of seven years by taking the anniversary date of the overthrow of the dictatorship as a point of reference. Indeed, this is a day that Tunisian users had remembered and celebrated thus far in different ways by posting messages, photos, and so on. In this case, the number of comments as a category was applied much more flexibly, as the number of textual reactions was much smaller in the profiles and page visited. Similarly to YouTube, it also often happens on Facebook that early comments are not available anymore, although they appear in the comments count.

The criteria of selection applied to YouTube resulted in videos that covered many crucial moments of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution. For instance, the early protests in Sidi Bouzid; the aftermath of Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation; the massacre in Kasserine on January 9 and 10, 2011; the countless clashes of citizens with the police; the story of a martyr, Ben Ali's iconoclasm in public space; Mohamed Bouazizi's funeral; the chanting of Tunisian singer Amel Mathlouthi in downtown Tunis; the crowd in front of the Ministry of Interiors in Tunis, on January 14, 2011, crying out "Dégage" while accompanied by the renowned foam hands waving borrowed from football;[385] and the monologue of the lawyer in the deserted avenue Bourguiba on the night of January 14, who eventually fearlessly screams "Ben Ali Hram!" (Ben Ali has gone!). It is remarkable that, through the criteria set for filtering the search results, this same

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[385] The gesture and the slogan turned into an icon of the peoples' power, and they were also imitated by other countries during the uprising, such as Egypt.

video appeared four times, shared by different sources, including both amateur and formal media.[386]

User comments during the uprising or in its immediate aftermath are full of explicit and indirect information. Two-directional and multi-directional communications, similar to discussion among users, also take place[387] and seem to be quite vivid.[388] On YouTube, the transnational circulation of the videos is more evident. Often the same videos appear with different titles, translated into other languages, or even show some variations or mistakes in date or place. Both

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[386] Although the analysis concerns amateur videos, formal media were taking videos and photos from the social network, as no journalist has ever covered the uprising.

[387] See *tunisie manifestations-sidi-bouzid.mp4* on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6chjIV--QII&list=PLZLv5WCs67LLii9DCPMs0AgeG6SCkmjrm&index=3. Pseudonym hak hakhak writes: "This is the time to established the Khilafah get out all muslims presidents. We have to follow the Coran and Sunna. Thanks the Khilafah no corruption no difference and equality between muslim and no muslim. Stop the differences between muslim we are the same we are one community the Ouma. Regards." A reply by janaveronikazahra follows: "I suggest not to reply to the person bellow."

[388] On YouTube, users from abroad often explicitly indicate their location (e.g., "We are behind you from Palestine;" "Tous les algeriens sont avec vous peuple tunisien;" "We in America cry for you and revere you [Mohamed Bouazizi]). In the video titled *tunisie manifestations-sidi-bouzid.mp4* uploaded by Sami Ben Abdallah, a cyber-activist living in Paris who started the YouTube channel "TheTunisietunisia" in 2010 when his blog samibenabdallah.info was blocked, the reactions of users show a great variety of positions: Ben Ali's supporters, nationalists, Islamists, and all those who disagree with the positions of these latter interact with one another. In other cases, users thank Mohamed Bouazizi and pray for the martyrs. Messages praise the courage of the people—both individuals or collectives express their pride of being Tunisian or analyze the political situation through what they witness through the videos (e.g., "des tires à balle réelle contre des jeunes sans armes??? le régime est secoué par ces manifestations jamais vue en TUNISIE (avec cette ampleur) depuis l'indépendance"). Often users comment specifically on the scenes in the videos, as in the case of the clip of Mohamed Bouazizi's funeral or a clash that occurred between two citizens and the police on January 14, but this was not always the case. In some cases, users leave messages, which seem to go beyond the images and connect or imply a bond with other episodes or moments not depicted in the clip. For instance, a user connects the last public speech by Ben Ali, in which he empathized with the Tunisian citizens and promised to actualize the changes that they were asking, with the video filming an iconoclastic scene toward public representation of the former President (e.g., neamon says "Que des mensonges, ce Ben Ali, depuis maintenant 23 ans Il veut reprendre tout de zéro ? après tout ce qui c'est passé? Quelle audace!!"). Or, in case of the video of Hatem Bettahr's murder, it has been used as a place for announcing a civil gathering in Algers ("Appel aux Algeriens en Algerie, Rassemblement à Alger à 11h à la place du 1er mai le 22 janvier 2011 à 11h, lire sur 3w point algerie-focus point com"). Users also share physical and emotional reactions, which describe their affective participation with the footage they are watching (e.g., "j ai pleure meerci pour mon peuple merciiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii" or "ca me donne de la chair de poule" as comments to the video *Cri de gloire d'un brave tunisien*).

the titles of the videos and the subsequent online communication are in Arabic, English, and French, and this mix often coexists in one single sentence.

The data finding and a structured analysis of the metadata of the clips, confirmed what other scholars already remarked. The view count is revealed to be the most evident and crucial indicator of the limited, almost nonexistent traffic and the distribution that these visual testimonies have reached post-January 14, 2011. The discrepancy between their militant connotation and value, their enduring visibility as well as circulation, emerges clearly. In parallel, as the circulation of videos stopped in the aftermath of the fall of the regime, so did the comments of users.

From observing the selected user profiles and pages on Facebook in the aftermath of January 14, 2011, the number of reposts of the videos shot during the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution was practically nonexistent (see Table 3), and when this activity is traceable, it is mostly limited to the years 2011, 2012, even 2015, but I could hardly find more recent reposts. For instance, in Manel Souissi's profile, I could find the video depicting the crowd chanting "Dégage," January 14, 2011, re-posted in June 2013; a mash-up of photos of demonstrations all over the world, and another slideshow of photos of the revolution (in January 2013). There are few comments and some show a renewed interest in the clips over the observed time period. For instance, one user responds to the clip depicting the public speech of lawyer Abdennaceur Aouini, held on December 28, 2010, reposted by Azyz Amami on December 28, 2011, and she praises the lawyer as "a real men [*sic*]."[389] Zied-El Heni re-posted several times (May, August, November, 2011 and January 2015) the same clip depicting himself holding a speech to the crowd, filmed on January 14, 2011 during the protest in front of the Ministry of Interiors. One user incites him, saying that the struggle must go on, especially in poor areas;[390] others remark upon El Heni's nostalgia,[391] made evident by the repost of the clips, or stress a sense of frustration because the dictatorship is over and those who were corrupt transformed into militants.[392] In the case of Takriz's page, one repost of a piece of footage depicting an episode of police brutality that occurred on January 13, 2011 received several comments. These reactions expressed the

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[389] Ameni BenAyed Harzallah says "j'adore ce mec, c'est un homme un vrai; et chapeau bas pour ceux qui ont dit leur mot avant que le régime s'écroule sans avoir froid aux yeux. Un grand bravo."

[390] Anis Jaber says: "c insuffisant il faut continuer la lutte zied et surtout dans les régions pauvre."

[391] Amjed Zrida says "Ben quoi, nostalgique? :) Je m'attendais à un communiqué condamnant fermement les pratiques et décisions illicites du Gouvernement allant de la fuite de Saida Agrebi jusqu'à la relaxation de Takkeri et Zouari! Dés que l'Ex-Régime aurait repris force, tel un rouleau compresseur il écrasera tous ceux qui ont cru un instant s'asseoir sur leur victoire!."

[392] Gassouma Med says: "sa etai le 14 janvier ya zied ! e nous sommes ou aujourd'hui ??? les pratiks de l'ex dictature sont les mêmes et peut êtres plus graves et les voleurs d'hier sont devenu des militants!!!."

rage of citizens against the police, confirmed by information concerning the injured person and other comments about the situation in the country.

I also remarked that on these user pages and profiles there were surprisingly few clips of the uprising posted during the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution—especially if one thinks that the subjects selected for the observation were mostly activists, in a broad sense. Takriz's page was an exception. This was due not only to the fact that Facebook is used mainly for sharing textual posts and photographs and less for clips, but, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, sharing audiovisual materials occurred normally via private messages and not on Facebook's walls. This was an obvious result of the fear of surveillance.

The online dynamics, and more precisely, the online disappearance reached by the videos in post-January 14, 2011 makes evident that the historical context has changed, and with it, also the approach by users to social networks, the way of understanding social and political engagement through these tools, and finally the new purposes and goals of a society in transformation. I encountered a paradox in this phase: although I could potentially continue to explore the internet and social networks to assess the circulation and transformation of the clips in question, the progressive fragmentation of the materials that I was observing made me think that I was missing something, as if I was not looking for the items in question in the right place.

According to these considerations, the research for online materials had to be accompanied by interviews and focus group, as I will describe in the next sections.

Table 2. Research for Online Materials on YouTube Post-2011 (Updated May 30, 2019)

	Title of the video	User	Views November 1, 2018	Views May 30, 2019	Date of upload
1	ben ali hRAb.flv	wadii chamakhi	59,491	61,250	March 18, 2011
2	Tunisie emeutes, Tunis Vidéo un prof Franco Tunisien tué par l'armée	charles nabubronson	6,636	6,655	January 13, 2011
3	tunisie manifesta tions-sidi-bouzid.m p4	TheTunisietunisi a	194,170	194,394	Decembe r 19, 2010

4	Joie d'un Tunisien - Avenue Habib Bourguiba - soir 14 janvier – Tunisie	rideaudur	32,764	32,798	January 17, 2011
5	Revolution Tunisie - Vendredi 14 Janvier 2011 - Oh Degage !!!	tijani91	33,402	35,245	March 6, 2011
6	cité ezzouhour kasserine ... histoire d un marthyre	mahatma ghandi	8,131	8,187	May 9, 2011
7	révolution tunisienne	TounsiiHor	427,636	435,261	January 29, 2011
8	Deux tunisiens face aux policiers en civil à Tunis- 14 janvier – Tunisie	rideaudur	214,278	215,151	January 17, 2011
9	video: Funeral of Mohamed Bouazizi	Nawaat	36,930	36,954	January 17, 2011
10	TUNISIE 10 01 2011 La marche aujourd'hui sur Tunis centre ville contre la dictature meurtrière de Ben Ali	MegaSmith8888	6,648	6,650	January 10, 2011
11	Cri de gloire d'un	Fouzol	10,244	10,327	January 16, 2011

	brave tunisien...				
12	Amel Mathlouth i - Kelmti Horra (Tunisie centre ville)	Med Ben Saad	9,587	9,981	January 27, 2011
13	tunisie "-Ben Ali on te déteste de tout cœur"'. degage!!!! !!!!!	salima constantini	2,881	2,889	January 14, 2011
14	Devant le Ministère de l'Intérieur - manifesta tion Tunis 14 janvier - Vidéo 4/4 – Tunisie	rideaudur	55,870	55,894	January 17, 2011
15	A Sfax - Tunisie, Le peuple, La police et L'armée (the people, police and the army)	SalomonLeBlan c	64,585	64,713	January 13, 2011
16	La Tunisie se révolte! Sidi Bouzid	James Wright	38,202	38,207	Decembe r 27, 2010
17	Tunisia Tunisie Mother Martyr Kasserine Genocide 10 January 2011.mp4	MrTounsiHorr	21,077	21,081	January 11, 2011
18	Dégage Ben Ali	mouatentn	70,985	71,978	January 15, 2011

19	La Révolution tunisienne kasserine 9/1/2011 تونس بن علي القصرين	Med BMN	13,600	13,443	January 9, 2011
20	Tunesia, Tunis - El Mnihla protest 12/01/2011	anon8ify	2,158	2,159	January 12, 2011
21	La révolution Tunisienne 14 janvier 2011 ثورة تونس	oneclic3	249,006	250,029	February 14, 2011
22	شاهد أقوى فيديو من ثورة تونس: يحيا الشعب.. بن علي هرب (Watch the strongest video of the Tunisian revolution : Long live the people .. Ben Ali escaped)	alwannews	762,082	765,867	January 15, 2011
23	تونس.. ثورة الياسمين	اذا الشعب يوماً أراد الحياة.. (Tunisia .. The Jasmine Revolution If the people wanted life..)	Al Hiwar Tv	77,507	77,801	January 15, 2011

Table 3. Research for Online Materials on Facebook Post-2011 (Conducted in December 2018). Time-slot: January 14, 2011 and January 14, 2018

	User	No. of clips	No. of comments	No. of likes	No. of shares	Date of upload
1	**Manel Souissi:**	2				
	https://www.facebook.com/souissi.manel/timeline?lst=79659862 9%3A12 6740246 6%3A15 7502774 0		0	0	0	January 30, 2011
	"la révolution en images... et le combat continue .."https://www.facebook.com/souissi.manel/timeline?lst=796598 629%3A 1267402 466%3A 1575027 740		0	1	0	January 9, 2013
2	**Azyz Amami:**	1				
	"Un an, jour pour jour" (https://www.facebook.com/azyyoz/timeline?lst=796598 629%3A 1018306 316%3A 1575097 708)		0	7	32	18	December 28, 2011

3	Zied El-Heni:	1 (reposted several times)				
	"Zied EL Heni (Journaliste tunisien). C'est celui qui avait porté plainte contre l'ATI et essayé de faire un Sit-in devant le palais présidentiel (du temps de ZABA)" (https://www.facebook.com/zied.elheni4/timeline?lst=79659862 9%3A10 0000381 758774% 3A15750 69368)		3	11	2	November 2, 2011
	"Zied EL Heni (Journaliste tunisien). C'est celui qui avait porté plainte contre l'ATI et essayé de faire un Sit-in devant le palais présidentiel (du temps de ZABA)"		2	12	0	August5, 2011
3	Zied El-Heni:	1 (reposted several times)				

	"Zied EL Heni (Journaliste tunisien). C'est celui qui avait porté plainte contre l'ATI et essayé de faire un Sit-in devant le palais président iel (du temps de ZABA)"		10	38	0	May 29, 2011
	Zied El Hani – le 14 janvier		4	26	2	January 14, 2015
4	**Takriz**	1				
	Rememb er this! Rappelez vous de celà ! لا تنسى (https://w ww.faceb ook.com/ takrizo/vi deos/165 6159701 69337/)		37	119	10	June 1, 2011

4.5.3 Interviews

One of the most important sources of this research consists of the qualitative interviews that I conducted over the five months of fieldwork in Tunis and Sousse in 2018 between June and July, and September and December, and during a short visit in March 2019. Twelve out of sixteen structured interviews followed a standard format with fixed questions (See Appendices). Conversely, four interviews out of sixteen were more similar to exploratory conversations and revolved around different topics such as montage, affect, and political engagement through the internet in Tunisian society.

Nevertheless, details had to be adapted to the subject I was interviewing. In some cases, these adaptations allowed me to skip one or more sections of the standard format, when, for example, I could infer the answers from the subject's digressions. In other cases,

during informal conversations, I asked similar inquiries, so these also turned into materials for analysis. The questions were formulated before my research trip, and therefore, the way they were structured revealed assumptions that were influenced by my mediated knowledge of the local context.

Most of the interviews took place in Tunis, normally at the most well-known café of the capital, Café du Théatre, on Avenue Bourguiba, and at the Hotel Majestic. On other occasions, they occurred at the workspace of directors, but also on benches in public squares (during Ramadan), popular cafés, and bars. Only one interview occurred in Sousse. Each structured interview lasted between one and two hours, was recorded, and later transcribed. The interviews addressed sixteen subjects, composed of Tunisian journalists, artists, directors, cultural producers, activists, cyber activists, students, academics, and consultants. However, these categories often blur into one another.

Why these subjects? The theoretical frame of my study considers the spectator as the subject who through montage preserves, circulates, and resignifies the clips. This perspective blurs the distinction between the actions of watching, filming, and sharing. However, the interviews involve a target of Tunisians, in response to the interest in understanding and observing how specifically this group relates with the images of the revolution, once the international interest for these images seemed progressively vanished. (The crowd of undistinguished and international users could already be analyzed on YouTube through the comments.)

In addition, as I mentioned above, I developed the interest in the Tunisian case along the lines of and through the comparison with the online and offline projects and initiatives by the artists, activists, and scholars engaged in archiving Egyptian and Syrian uprisings. So, all the interviewees have in common an awareness of the role and power of the image. However, they are no longer the only categories conscious of the dominion of representation online and offline. This group needs to be observed within the context of a general growing awareness of the role and power of the image, that is no longer limited only to those who professionally or politically work and deal with audiovisual materials.

This increasing understanding is proved by the transnational phenomenon of the vernacular videos during the Arab Uprisings and beyond, which does not include only amateur filming but also sharing and watching online as important components of the phenomenon. To describe the sample of interviewees in more depth, they might appear representative of a privileged élite as many of them are middle-class, bar some exceptions. Their level of education was in all cases high. They were also quite mixed in terms of age (nineteen years old and upward). Gender was an exception, as, unintentionally the subjects interviewed were primarily men. Most of the subjects interviewed lived in Tunis. Some of them originally come from the central or southern regions of Tunisia (such as the towns of Hammamet or Sidi

Bouzid), or are settled between Europe (specifically Paris) and Tunisia. Therefore, I am aware of the partiality of these cases selected, and in this sense, it is worthwhile to remark that the set of sixteen subjects interviewed does not assume to be an exhaustive study representative of an entire community or a country.

For what items did I seek? The interviews constituted the first fact-finding tool for exploring and establishing direct contact and exchange with the local social environment, as well as to receive direct and articulate feedback that I could then analyze in order to trace trajectories and verify or contradict my initial hypothesis. The interviews sought to assess whether and how the videos in question persisted post-January 14, 2011. This predominant item articulates and concretizes through the search for samples of uses of social networks as repositories, with a specific attention to YouTube; and what clips specifically have remained in the memories of people after seven years, and in what way have the subjects interviewed confronted them. In order to collect this data, I asked them about the use of social networks and especially of YouTube post-January 14, 2011; what clips of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution did they still remember, and what empathic relation did they feel with these audiovisual materials.

What were the outcomes expected? I anticipated that the free use of the platform of YouTube post-January 14, 2011 could bring unexpected developments in terms of new forms of expression, alternative uses, and political engagement. I expected to find a sample of practices or narratives that would involve the vernacular videos per se or stem from this specific social phenomenon, and also that Tunisian used social networks, in particular, YouTube as a database for retrieving videos. In other words, I anticipated understanding the influence of vernacular videos circulating online and stored on YouTube in the creation of other online visual or activist practices. Furthermore, I anticipated finding what videos of the revolution were still in people's mind over time in order to understand the potential of storytelling and resignification of clips operated by memory and how people's remembrance was contributing to new, untold narratives of the revolutionary process.

The assumptions at the basis of the exploration of these individual mediated memories are that, as the amateur images played such a mobilizing role during the uprising, they also probably have a specific relevance when it comes to remembering the revolution through them. Furthermore, remembrance should provide a transformation in the viewer's perception of the images, and it might contribute to recontextualizing and resignifying the clips, as well as producing new, alternative narratives of the revolution. In turn, I anticipated remarking the influence exercised by social media and videos consumed online on the individual and collective memory of this political revolution seven years after the unfolding of the events

4.5.4 Focus Group

The focus group serves as a tool to explore the sample's individual and collective memory in a very specific way, and it was used as an extension of the interviews, in terms of aims, as well as a magnifying lens on memory and its findings. Indeed, memory is beside moving images the second domain in which to observe the mode of the viewer via montage of retrieving, recombining and resignifying the footage of the twenty-nine days phase of the revolution. The focus group involved students attending the first year of their Master in Photography, held by professor Souad Mani at the Fine Arts Academy of Sousse. Sousse is a coastal town located south of the capital in the central-east of the country. The focus group took place on December 10, 2018, a few days before my departure from Tunis, and therefore, at the end of my period of research on site. The group involved is composed of students aged between twenty-two and twenty-six years old and are predominantly women (thirteen women, four men). The students come mainly from the central-east and central-west regions of the country from the towns of Sousse, Monastir, Mahdia, Moknine, Kairouan, Makthar, and also Tunis. In terms of professional ambitions, they all aspire to work within the film industry or in the creative fields as photographers. The value of the sample consists of pupils who were between fifteen and nineteen years old in 2011, and therefore, who might experience the turmoil in a different way. This characteristic is consistent with the theoretical frame of my study, which blurs the distinction between the actions of watching, filming, and sharing items. From this angle, my study considers the spectator as the subject who through montage preserves, circulates, and resignifies the clips. In addition, they are a specific group, so they are less various as a target compared with the group of interviewees.

In practice, the focus group uses a documentary film as an object with a mnemonic function. The documentary served as a sort of visual frame and a trigger for raising memories, thoughts, and emotional states in the participants, but, specifically, it was also used to verify if and how digital images of the revolution were spontaneously emerging as a typology. In other words, the focus group is a tool to verify whether and how spectators recombine images stored in their memory, through the inputs propelled by a film that recalls the upheaval and the revolutionary process, without providing any visual references of them.

The topic of the questions concerned the students' emotional reactions to the documentary, the raising of any remembrance of the revolution, and the emotional bond with this memory. Questions to the students followed a progressive structure, from the focus on the story of the documentary and its protagonists to the insight into students' personal stories.

The film selected was the documentary *Forgotten* (2017) by Ridha Tlili, a Tunisian director living in Sidi Bouzid. As said, it was chosen because aside from a quick image of the sit-in at Kasba, the revolution was only remembered through words and not by the footage. It

follows the life of four young men, Chafi, Ferid, Abdelhak, and Boujdik, living in Sidi Ali Ben Oun in the region of Sidi Bouzid. They participated in the post-January 14, 2011 protests, full of hope for a new country, like everyone. Two years later they find themselves trapped in a daily struggle with the same difficulties and challenges that they used to face pre-2011, namely unemployment, marginalization, and obstructions to relations with women. They founded a theater group, made music, organized political actions on the streets, and tried to find a way to make their living. Ridha Tlili followed them with his camera from 2013 to 2016 to paint a very sympathetic portrait of his protagonists. Following the sense of dispersion and invisibility of the images of the revolution, the documentary selected for the focus group was chosen not to force the social and artistic context that I encountered in Tunisia in which the clips shot between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's flight were objectively much less present in people's daily life but were still in circulation under other, often untraceable forms. A relevant characteristic of the film consists of its being immersed in the time that it was describing, produced by the director and experienced by the spectators with no historical distance. The film mirrored the present time in the country, with all its complexities and problematics; it was quite representative of the now and the atmosphere typical of the revolutionary process that both the students and myself (in a very limited manner) have lived.

The expected outcomes of the focus group concerned the students' reactions to the film and their capacity through memory to fill the visual gap left by the documentary, by providing historical background. In addition, I anticipated that most probably the students could remember clips, because they might be too young in 2010–11 for participating in demonstrations and experiencing the turmoil directly. In that sense, the mediation of the screen and the videos could have a special value to them, to get information and witness the events. So I expected they would recall videos and images circulating on Facebook, but most probably not on YouTube, as the tool required some IT skills, due to the ban of the platform. I expected that emotions could carry their memories, but I couldn't anticipate whether the feelings of frustration and disillusion could emerge also from their feedback.

As background information about the development of the session, the focus group took place in the morning during an ordinary class. It started with a short introduction of myself as a researcher, a description of the aim of the study, and of my expectations of the focus group. Then, I introduced the upcoming activity. Each student received a form to fill out with basic data about themselves (name, surname, age, sexual orientation, origin, professional aspirations, email or social media contact). After these preliminary formalities, I presented the students the film *Forgotten* (2017). The focus group unfolded during two main activities: a film screening followed by a discussion guided by a series of questions. The documentary was screened in the class with a poor sound system, but the documentary had French subtitles on which the students could rely. The film lasted ninety minutes. At the end of the film and after a

short break, we started the conversation, which was held mainly in French and partly in Arabic, with professor Mani assisting with translation. The conversation followed a structure, which I prepared in advance over the months of fieldwork. The structure consisted of six questions (see Appendices). The whole session lasted around three hours in a single session, including a short break between the two activities. In this setting, I moderated the group discussion between participants and I tried to remain in a peripheral position rather than taking a center-stage role during the discussion. Similarly, the professor, who limited her involvement to that of a linguistic facilitator, only once intervened in the conversation with a comment. Her presence as an authority, aside from the context of the meeting (the university), also represents a variable to consider, but I concluded it did not affect the dynamics of the session.

Students were reactive and engaged, and some were able to articulate elaborated thoughts, while others mostly followed the flow of the discussion. Although brief and simply expressed, feedback from the students was mostly clear regarding their memories, thoughts, and emotions. However, I noticed that it was difficult for them to be introspective. Throughout, I was asked sometimes to express my opinion or thoughts, but I held back my reflections until the end of the recorded discussion. Included in the documentation of the session were some pictures, a fragmented video recording, and a complete audio recording, which was later transcribed.

4.5.5 Content Analysis of the Moving Images: *Dégage*, *Babylon* and Video Mash-Ups by AnarChnowa

The different typologies of moving images studied in my research are hybrid items: they are tools as well as objects of observation within the empirical research. They are approached as unitary narratives produced by the spectator who edits the clips and materializes with the character of the director and the vlogger.

The selection of these specific samples already embeds the problematization of the initial expected results that I formulated beforehand. In this sense, the choice of the documentaries *Dégage* (2012) by director Mohamed Zran, *Babylon* (2012) directed by Ismael Chebbi, Ala Eddine Slim, Youssef Chebbi, and the video web series by cyber activist AnarChnowa already responds to the expected outcomes by contradicting, confirming, or further questioning them.

The documentary *Dégage* was released in 2012 and is the first sample of my analysis in which a selection of online clips of the revolution downloaded from YouTube has been edited in a documentary. Despite it being distributed mainly in francophone areas, it can be credited with chronologically preempting the other sample documentary mentioned above, *The Uprising*

and *Silvered Water*, in assembling videos of the Arab Uprisings downloaded from YouTube. *Dégage* retraces the chronicles of the upheaval, starting with its trigger cause, and seen from the perspective of the main actors in Sidi Bouzid. It shifts between the demonstrations post-January 14, 2011, such as the sit-ins at Kasba, Tunis, and the reconstruction of the escalating events, beginning with a focus on Mohamed Bouazizi and the causes and consequences of his self-immolation, retraced from the perspective of Bouazizi's family, colleagues, and close friends. It connects testimonies by activists with flashbacks of the clashes that spread across the country during the twenty-nine days of the uprising. It looks at the present and provides a testimony to the still ongoing struggle in the capital in the aftermath of January 14, 2011, such as the two sit-ins at Kasbah and the arrival of "la caravane de la liberté."[393] Mohamed Zran aims to retrace the true story of the person who is considered to be the initiator of the revolution, and in addition to that, the real implications of the labor union's leaders, the lawyers, the political parties, and the activist movements that resonated with the civil rage and structured the struggle over the country.[394] Alongside the scenes directly filmed in Tunis in the aftermath of January 14 (until the two sits-in at the Kasba at the end of January 2011) and those in Sidi Bouzid, Zran gathered clips by the personal collections of all those filmers in Sidi Bouzid who witnessed and filmed but did not necessarily upload video testimonies to Facebook. However, he reports that citizens in Sidi Bouzid, like Ali Bouazizi, Mohamed Bouazizi's uncle, were also those who shared audiovisual materials with *Al Jazeera*, via Facebook. In this sense Al Jazeera was a channel of the highest importance, alongside a few others, as Tunisians were connected 24/7.[395] Together with that, he downloaded a small amount of YouTube clips depicting the protests that occurred in Sfax, demonstrations by pharmacists and doctors in Monastir and Sousse, and the dozens of injured at the hospital in

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[393] Thousands of demonstrators arrived in Tunis on January 23, 2011 from the regions, mainly from Sidi Bouzid, to ask for the resignation of the transition government.

[394] "En *Dégage* il n'y a pas une chronologie, il y a plutôt un point de vue historique sur le déroulement de l'affaire de Bouazizi. Plutôt ça. Ce qui est inédit dans ce film est plutôt l'origine des choses à Sidi Bouzid. Avec un parallèle, l'impact de Sidi Bouzid ailleurs. Sidi Bouzid, ce qui s'est passé, la vraie histoire (presque), racontée par les gens de Bouazizi, par les amis de la famille. Un travail d'enquête" (Mohamed Zran, interview, July 3, 2018, Tunis).

[395] "Après en parlant avec des gens de Sidi Bouzid que j'ai interviewé je suis allé sur les pages Facebook de ces gens là, j'ai vu qu'ils ont balancé les vidéos, comme Ali Bouazizi. Ils ont utilisé Facebook pour faire passer ces images. Al-Jazeera par exemple à pris les images de la révolution à partir de Facebook. C'étaient des gens de Sidi Bouzid qui échangeaient des fréquences avec Al-Jazeera. Al-Jazeera était capital, au niveau des médias. Toute la Tunisie est plongée 24/24 sur Al-Jazeera, Al Arabia, les chaînes satellitaires" (Mohamed Zran, interview, July 3, 2018, Tunis).

Kasserine.[396] The director remarks that "YouTube is easier and more direct than Facebook."[397] Through remediation of YouTube clips (an aspect which I observe more in-depth later) and the retrieval of clips directly from the sources, Zran's approach for the editing of his documentary formally follows a path similar to the one applied by the team of archivists and historians for the creation of the official archive of the revolution. The delivery of truth carried by the vernacular video is what attracts the director. As he says, all the televisions in the world at that time showed these images by ordinary people, which were true, not manipulated, and not falsified.[398]

The second item of this study is *Babylon* (2012), a documentary by directors Ala Eddine Slim, Ismael and Youssef Chebbi. The camera eye looks at the refugee camp of Choucha in the south of Tunisia, which received men and women escaping the conflict that blew up in Libya as a result of the fall of Muammar Gaddafi. No dialogue occurs over most of the documentary; except for the few exchanges of communication, whose purpose is not to orient the spectator within this apparent narrative detour; no subtitles translate the indistinguishable mix of tongues that one can hear overlapping. Filmed over the same period as *Dégage*, and also released in 2012, *Babylon* is profoundly different as it is the result of a shift of the gaze and a refusal. In the atmosphere of extreme political instability and confusion following the unexpected fall of the regime and the obvious consequences that this brought, Ala Eddine Slim, Ismael and Youssef Chebbi decided to leave the capital where the civil struggle was still unfolding.

The three directors traveled to the south of Tunisia and started shooting two or three weeks after January 14, 2011. They turned their attention from the saturation of the scenes and the images before their eyes during the twenty-nine days between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's toppling to the invisible and insignificant reality lived by thousands of anonymous travelers in search of safer shelter. However, among the several films and documentaries produced post-January 14, 2011, *Babylon* appears to be a counter-reaction to the overproduction of images, their unexpected, sudden hypervisibility, and relative availability.

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[396] This clip is very well known, it is taken during what is considered today a real massacre of civilians occurred between January 9th and 10th 2011 in Thala and Kasserine. Dozens of injured by the police bullets arrived at the hospital in severe conditions, and the image of a guy injured in the head, whose brain was out of his head, became one of the symbols of the regime's brutality against the protesters.

[397] Mohamed Zran, interview, July 3, 2018. My translation from the French.

[398] "Toutes les télévisions du monde récupèrent ces images des gens simples comme vous et moi. S'en servir de ces images YouTube, c'était le seul moyen, le vrai, pas triché, pas fabriqué, réel. Une vidéo de A à Z qui n'est pas triché et n'est pas truqué. Mieux que tous les autres journalistes… directes. Ce sont des images de citoyens simples" (Mohamed Zran, interview, July 3, 2018, Tunis).

More importantly, the rejection of any visual and narrative reference to the revolution expresses a stance toward the paradigm of reality and how images—either amateur or professional—contribute to it. As Ismael Chebbi claimed, the urgency of the directors was to put into discussion the concept of reality and to transmit to the spectator the idea that what they are watching is not the reality, but rather, that truth is filtered by those who tell it.[399]

The third sample are the video mash-ups that compose the webseries of the YouTube channel AnarChnowa. It will require a longer and articulated description compared to the previous two cases. AnarChnowa is a web-series initiated by the namesake cyberactivist, a young student based in Sidi Bouzid. In considering the aesthetics and aims of the AnarChnowa channel, this geographical element and political background has to be taken into consideration, not only for the sake of contextualization, but because both have a specific influence on the content, narrative, and perspective of the videos.

The name AnarChnowa is a wordplay made up of the term "anarchy" and "Chnowa," which in Arabic means "What is it?." AnarChnowa is a satirical channel grounded on a simple concept—probably unprecedented in Tunisia. Using quick and rich "montage," AnarChnowa summarizes recent events from mainstream media communication such as TV or radio and regularly uploads these videos online. AnarChnowa's aim is to critique at three levels: the present Tunisian political and social context; the mode in which these issues are articulated, represented, or manipulated by the media; and the quality of Tunisian mainstream media itself.

Using the endless potential of the internet as an archive, AnarChnowa intensely searches and selects contents from various fields, remixing them using irony and black humor. AnarChnowa anonymously authors these derisory video montages that deal with the most debated or controversial social, political, and cultural issues in the country, and questions of public interest, which often remain deliberately underdiscussed, misrepresented, or even censored by the media. Consequently, AnarChnowa targets both the most popular means of communication in the country and its actors. Using a caustic and satirizing perspective, it stresses the media's role and limits in providing a mediocre service with opaque information to the local audience. Spread via the internet—in particular on YouTube, Facebook, and Vimeo—AnarChnowa's caricaturist commentary embeds a meta-reflection on the digital, and the

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[399] "Il y a plusieurs partis pris pour justement dire aux gens que ce n'est pas la réalité qu'ils regardent. C'est nous trois qui étions là, qui avons essayé de dire quelque chose de vrai sur cette situation là, pas la vérité, mais quelque chose de vrai telle que nous l'avons vécue, pas telle qu'elle est réellement pour finalement proposer cette version là, qui est et demeure, au final, une construction de la réalité et non pas la réalité elle même. Le paradoxe dans le cinéma, c'est que si l'on fait bien son travail, on arrive à toucher des personnes. On crée un sentiment chez les gens" (Ismael Chebbi, interview, June 18, 2018, Tunis).

function of the abovementioned platforms as possible alternative tools for information, which are, however, not exempt from criticism.

AnarChnowa started the channel in February 2016 and it was regularly kept active until 2017, when it broke off for almost a year, restarting at the end of October 2018. Sources of inspiration for the cyber activist are the American talk program *The Late Show with Stephen Colber*t, which started in September 2015; John Stewart's *The Daily Show*, a satirical news program on the Comedy Central (the American pay television channel), which ran from 1999 to 2015, as well as Egyptian Bassem Youssef's "El-Bernameg," another caustic news program, which ran from 2011 to 2014.

These video mash-ups respond to my interest in observing the retrieval and recombination of the clips shot during the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution with others entirely retrieved online on the internet. In addition, this webseries is an emblematic case that implicitly responds to my question of the evolution of YouTube as a platform in the aftermath of January 14, 2011. The channel is an example of a social-media trend in the aftermath of Tunisia's liberalization of entertainment channels that combined satire, video activism, and political critique. Furthermore, although the activist AnarChnowa operates as a single entity, detached from a collective, he is well connected with the music scene, especially with hip-hop and other activist collectives, such as Manich Msameh (We Don't Forgive).

The videos are conceived as single independent episodes, they are not linked, and they are not required to be consumed in sequence. All videos follow a simple and recurring structure that can be described in three parts. First is the Introduction (Figure 3): here the juxtaposition of symbols, such as the renowned monogram of the capital letter A for anarchy and the iconic picture of V (the anarchist revolutionary dressed in a Guy Fawkes mask), followed by an introductory sentence between the dystopic and grotesque, introduce the desecrating nature of the upcoming narration.[400] The main narrative is composed of a remix of numerous excerpts from a huge variety of online sources.[401] The result is a fast, rhythmical, and delirious montage, which is alternately enlightening and nonsensical. Following the video's

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[400] The videos start with the channel's logo, which is followed by a Siberian husky lying on a white background. "Play" is written on the black screen, anticipating the typing of a text in white, while we hear the typical sound of characters being typed by an analog typewriter. The text reports: "These sections are the only remaining legacy of the Tunisian Civilization after its extinction in 2088. Scientists say that what you are going to watch now may affect negatively on your mental perception. Till now, the reasons behind the suicide of this nation are still unfathomable."

[401] Among the materials are: movies, cartoons, news broadcasts, children broadcasts, TV shows, music clips, amateur videos, vlogs, and memes created by AnarChnowa, which have all been edited together for aesthetic effect using glitches, fades, juxtapositions of different visual and sound extracts, and so on.

mental associations, aesthetic recalls, clashes, similarities, visual and sound excerpts, and dialogue is sometimes like following a script, with lines that respond directly to each other and underline the ridiculousness or the paradox of the situation depicted. In other cases, contradictions are embedded in a single excerpt, which when isolated from its original context speaks more forcefully. The final clip is normally constituted by a slide on which a short message is typewritten. This message aims to conclude by means of an open question,[402] an excerpt of a song,[403] one sentence summing up the content of the videos, offering a moral lesson,[404] or an excerpt from poems.[405]

The principal source of this enormous variety of found and manipulated visual and sound materials from Tunisian, European, and North American culture is the internet.[406] Here, it is important to stress the impressive effort by AnarChnowa of gathering together well-known, iconic audio-visual references, which enable the viewer to be brought back to an epoch, an historical moment, or a remediated experience with alienating, uncontextualized materials united by the single aim of orienting or disorienting the viewer.

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[402] For example, "Where is this leading?"

[403] For example, "Houmani" by Hamzaoui Med Amine and Kafon, Season 1, Episode 4. As reported by a user on the website *quora.com*, "The word has no meaning in Tunisian dialect but was invented by these artists and it means 'The Hooder': anyone who passes most of his time in the hood doing nothing," accessed October 23, 2018, https://www.quora.com/What-are-the-lyrics-of-the-song-Houmani-by-Hamzaoui-Med-Amine?share=1.

[404] For example, "Teach your kids other than what you have learned, and prepare them for a time that is different from yours," Season 1, Episode 9.

[405] See the lines written by Tunisian author Sghaier Ouled Hmed.

[406] Sources include DailyMotion, YouTube channels, Facebook, Vimeo, websites, mainstream commercial television or radio channels. Among the formal media used, specifically in Tunisia, are: *Elhiwar Ettounsi*, *Nessma*, *Al Jazeera*, *Tunisia 1*, *Tunisia 2*, *Tunisia 7*, *Alwatanya 1*; all radio channels that also have a live stream via their website, such as: *Mosaique.fm*, *Shems.fm*, *Jawara.fm*, *Cap.fm*, *Radio Kalima* (which no longer broadcasts). Among the international media sources are: *Nilesat* (communication satellite), *Le Petit Journal*, *France 24*, *NBC News*, *Al Hurra* (*Alhurra* is a United States-based public Arabic-language satellite TV channel that broadcasts news and current affairs programming to audiences in the Middle East and North Africa), Global HD (Canadian-English television network). Among the movies used—those I could recognize— are: *Star Wars* documentary from INA (probably INA France), National Geographic Abu Dhabi, *Ghost Busters* (with the soundtrack of the Tunisian version), *Kill Bill. Vol.2.*, and *Taxi Driver*, IT American drama thriller television series *Mr Robot*, *The Simpsons*, *The Griffith*, *South Park*. Other television series include *Friends*, *Mr Bean*, *The Hunger Games*, *Le grand Tirage*, and *Dlilek Mlak*. Websites include *Tunisscope* and *pros de la com*.

Alongside visual excerpts, music is extremely relevant within the narrative construction proposed by AnarChnowa. Hip-hop musicians and their lyrics, especially, play a crucial function as a tool to denounce, critique, and to socially and politically resist.[407] In each episode multiple topics unfold. Excerpts taken from local materials found online in Arabic are manipulated and edited in dialogue among them, responding one to the other in a way that makes clashes, contradictions, and paradoxes leap out. In the meantime, they are put in conversation with clips (often excerpts of iconic movies or TV shows) in English, French, and sometimes also other languages, which contribute to the creation of a delirious tale.

Language also plays a crucial role in AnarChnowa. Its target audience are Tunisian users and as the narrative is composed by Tunisian broadcasters, AnarChnowa's video montage is predominantly in Arabic. However, clips in English and French, and occasionally German and Italian, are used and put in heated dialogue with those in Arabic. As a result, we see a rhythmical narrative with an apparent glocal taste. Although not the clear target and purpose of the channel, AnarChnowa's future intention is to translate all episodes into English in order to reach non-Arabic speakers. So far, only Episodes 2 and 3 (from Season 1) have been subtitled in English. I have limited my observation to videos from Season 1 and 2, the series "Hors-série" and "Collaboration," totaling twenty-four videos, alongside an overview on the metadata (number of views, likes, and dislikes) (See Table 4). As I have focused on the clips available on YouTube, I did not include those censored by the platform for copyright reasons, and I have excluded the episodes uploaded or visible only on Facebook.

As already mentioned above, the expected outcomes of the analysis of moving images concern three main points. First is stating the very existence of items like moving images products realized by Tunisian directors or filmmakers as spectators out of a remix of clips of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution, produced by 2011. Indeed, I started my investigation with a comparison of documentaries and projects sprouting from the interest in the amateur videos produced during the Arab Uprising, and I suppose that the fascination for the phenomenon of the vernacular videos regarded also Tunisian's spectators.

Secondly, whereas the filmmaker is a spectator, I interpret the moving-image product as a unitary narrative produced by the viewer able to recontextualize the clips over time post-January 14, 2011. This relocation will show a reattribution of meaning to the audiovisual materials, which would tell something about the current social-political situation of Tunisia today. Ultimately, I anticipate the recombination of videos will contribute to supporting the circulation and preservation of the digital testimonies in question, as well as resist any counter-revolutionary, misleading narratives, manipulation, or falsification of the clips.

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[407] Among these music celebrities are A.L.A, EL Castro, Hamzaoui Med Amine, and Kafon. However, other musicians belonging to the mainstream scene, such as Moez Toumi and others, are also frequent characters.

Third, I anticipate that their remix in cinematic or video narratives is a phenomenon that decreases over time, and it mirrors the same trend of progressive invisibility followed by the videos online.

Table 4. YouTube channel "AnarChnowa" (Updated April 6, 2019)

Season/ Episode	Title	Views	No. of comments	Date of upload	Notes
Season 1					
Ep. 1					Blocked on YouTube, visibile on Facebok
Ep. 2	The owners of the palace against kasserine's people	27.888	14	Feb 16, 2016	
Ep. 3	The country of «Hush » and « Shush »	33.191	15	March 1, 2016	
Ep. 4	Kamel and Ben Gardane and the poor seeking the poorer	20.277	18	March 10, 2016	
Ep. 5	Insulting the public taste	39.377	30	March 20, 2016	
Ep. 6	Tunisian circus welcomes you	28.705	42	March 26, 2016	
Ep. 7	My dear father where are we going?	20.793	24	April 9 2016	
Ep. 8	Stand against the walls	21.142	33	April 16, 2016	
Ep. 9	Smoke less Shisha	25.521	45	April 23, 2016	

Ep. 10	Fuck you	24.698	53	April 30, 2016	
Ep. 11	Memes and masturbation	25.436	64	May 14, 2016	
Ep. 12	Garbage in a trash can	27.503	87	May 21, 2016	
Ep. 13	Brains and hearts of stone	28.516	85	May 28, 2016	
Ep. 14	Our company is enjoyable/I love our company	21.643	79	June 11, 2016	
Ep. 15	High up to our necks	23.140	44	June 18, 2016	
Ep. 16	From Tunisia to space	18.331	58	June 26, 2016	
Ep. 17	Our kids did not forget and do not forgive (are against reconciliation)	25.589	88	July 3 2016,	
Season 2					
Ep. 1	This is the beginning, what you still have here	31.503	121	October 23, 2016	
Ep. 2		27.876	off	November 3, 2016	Blocked on copyright grounds
Ep. 3	Old clique (or squad or group of people) and non serious matters	22.075	71	December 3, 2016	
Ep. 4	Where is the fourth episode ? + A message to Elhiwar Ettounsi and Kharabeesh Network	12.061	29	December 18, 2016	

Ep. 5	"Very serious " matters	23.213	52	February 11, 2017	
Ep. 6	Favoritism beguiled you	25.508	119	March 13, 2017	
Hors-series					
Ep. ??		18.010	off	July 25, 2016	Blocked on copyright grounds
Ep. ??	Single loop	19.221	70	September 14, 2016	
Collaboration	"A.L.A x El Castro x AnarChnowa – Celebrate freestyle"	1.135.093	499	June 4, 2016	

Chapter 5

The Spectator Resignifies Invisible Videos by Using Social Networks as Archives

5.1 The Spectator Performs the Digital Archives Post-January 14, 2011

The empirical data emerging from the research for online materials answers the research questions by showing the progressive invisibility of the clips online and the role played by the spectator in reaction to the algorithm. However, the set of rules through which social networks function are not the only cause. The data emerging from the research online show also how the spectators use the digital archive, that is, by commenting on them as well as retrieving and reassembling clips in different forms of archives.

This chapter will unfold the following outcomes of the empirical research, meaning the different ways in which the spectator puts into discussion and reacts to the progressive vanishing, which I define as the invisibility online of the clips in question. When it comes to the recirculation of the videos, the spectator works against the algorithm and its authority. Indeed, these latter items all but disappeared, despite their latency online. This topic will be further developed also in Chapter 6 and 7. In this section, I will focus on the expanded montage of the videos, which come up from the online comments, and further the forms of archiving that occur online and offline.

Precisely, the existence of different types of repositories that aim to rescue the videos from obliteration is one of the findings of the empirical research. However, the cases encountered are very different, for instance, from the sample of *858.ma* and *Syria Video Archive*. The use of YouTube by Tunisians post-January 14, 2011 as a time-based archive that functions in retrospect is another outcome of the empirical research. The features of hyper-accessibility and searchability of contents distinguishes YouTube from Facebook in the process of retrieval of the audiovisual materials.

The research for online materials puts into light twofold debated questions: one concerns the use of social media as a tool for retrieving content from the past, the most common purpose for digital and traditional repositories. The second concerns the fear of loss of the single digital items that compose the huge pool of audiovisual testimonies stored online. These materials have progressively lost appeal and the attention of users and have also been occasionally erased by the algorithm. As it already emerged, the use of YouTube as an imperfect search engine via keywords typed in the search bar produces more effective results, and in a shorter time. It is imperfect, as the keywords searched for often produce results not always pertinent to the search criteria. This characteristic is due to an infrastructural flaw of the

platform, the lack of indexical categorization of contents, which means that users interact with YouTube as if it was an archive, but, in retrospect, it is not adequately structured for scouting. Instead, its purpose is for quickly transmitting content updates. Conversely, Facebook's use of the media feature Timeline in user's profiles provides a holistic, voyeuristic insight into user's activities, lives, and thoughts. Applied to the purpose of this study, a search through the flow of user posts appears entirely artificial, and this is an aspect that also some of the interviewees have confirmed, as it will be discussed extensively later. Using the Videos section, a quick survey on videos is possible, but as the thumbnails of clips gathered together are deprived of any metadata, such a lack of date and place creates a sense of dispersion and confusion, and one is unable to recognize the digital objects that he or she is looking for among all those accumulated items.

The empirical data from the research for online materials shed light on some important background issues in relation to the user-spectator. The first one concerns Facebook, the fact that the need of searching digital objects through personal accounts can't exclude the taking into account of the identity of these users, at least in theory. Nonetheless, the initial purpose of this study wasn't to define how specific targets of spectators interact with and enact social networks as digital archives post-January 14, 2011.

Indeed, the theoretical frame of my study blurs differences among categories of filmers and viewers, as well as differences within the single categories themselves. I argued that shooters and observers are both spectators; both watching and filming entails engagement, and montage is a tool operated by this category of subjects to ultimately transmit and reattribute meaning to clips, post-January 14, 2011.

As already said, on the one side I became aware during the process that I was investigating a group that must have more awareness of the power of the image transmitted online. On the other, the phenomenon of the vernacular videos show clearly that the intellectual and professional intelligentsia are no longer those who are more aware than others of the authority played by the visual representation and the internet. This consideration legitimizes me to consider this group still specific, but less unique or exceptional, and rather more varied and ordinary. In support of this consideration, I must state also that the research of digital objects on Facebook produced the same results that emerged from YouTube, meaning, the attention of the Tunisians naturally moved toward other topics and related images, which produced as a result the almost non-circulation of the clips over the years, and therefore, their dispersion across the internet. In this sense, the outcomes show that there is no difference between observing the diffusion of the videos through a platform as YouTube, that is, a database for searching contents, and examining the same phenomenon on Facebook, where the previous definition of the users through whom to access the observation

of the contents influences the search, as well as the findings. Both YouTube and Facebook show the same results.

In fact, a sense of search for leftovers seems to emerge during the research for online materials that I described in the previous chapter, especially on YouTube.

5.2 From Hyper-exposure to the Invisibility of the Videos Online

Visibility is one of the most important paradigms of our times, times in which human eyes and machine vision might not be connected. However, invisibility is not simply its opposite, but rather, a much more articulated potential and different way for the image to exist.

In her video work *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Educational.MOV File* (2013), Hito Steyerl reflects on the issue of surveillance and disappearance in the sense of how to be invisible to a camera. "[A] resolution target […] measures the resolution of the world as a picture. Resolution[408] determines visibility. Whatever is not captured by resolution is invisible."[409] Further, a machinic male voice states that "around the 2000s, a new standard for resolution target is introduced. This is a pixel-based resolution chart […]. In 1996 photographic resolution in the areas is about twelve meters per pixel. Today it is one-fourth. To become invisible, one has to become smaller or equal to one pixel."[410] Invisibility, therefore, does not concern the objective absence of an image from display, but rather, it is the result of a set of criteria used to define if that image can or cannot be seen. This aspect is not something new if we think of the number of images and related bodies and stories that throughout our lives we will never see because they do not fit the parameters of visibility dictated by the agenda of various media. Similarly, political and economically driven decisions bring technology and algorithms together in providing or withholding the full visibility of an object.

According to these considerations, the inactivity, lack of online circulation, and the consequent non-visibility of the videos of the revolution post-January 14, 2011 should not be a surprise. It can be explained by two intersecting main factors: the first is historical and news-agenda related, and the second one is infrastructural. The unfolding of circumstances in the offline domain impinge on the activities of online users. What does this mean? History unfolds,

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[408] Resolution is "the degree of sharpness of a computer-generated image as measured by the number of dots per linear inch in a hard-copy printout of the number of pixels across and down on a display screen." See "Resolution," *Wordreference*, Random House Unabridged Dictionary of American English, 2018, accessed January 10, 2018, https://www.wordreference.com/definition/resolution.

[409] Hito Steyerl, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Educational.MOV File* (2013), video, 15 min 52sec, accessed January 12, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LE3RlrVEyuo&t=1s.

[410] Ibid.

the turmoils have continued in the aftermath of Ben Ali toppling, the revolution has been ongoing, so users have reacted online accordingly. The clips of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution seem to naturally turn into images among others, to a certain extent. This might sound obvious today, but the fascination for the phenomenon of vernacular videos and the huge symbolic value of these representations led me to heavily overlook this aspect at the beginning of my research. On the other side, the progressive awareness that the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution was just an instant within a much wider flow that increases the interest in understanding what forms preservation, memory and resignification of these clips will take over the years.

The second factor recalls the evolution of the algorithm—in 2011, YouTube initiated the circulation of content via algorithms driven mainly by key-words and view counts.[411] Conversely, in 2013, the algorithm changed, and Watch Time became the primary metric of the recommendations system used by YouTube for suggesting, promoting, and disseminating videos. More importantly, as stated by Guillaume Chaslot, "The value of these videos as commercial for YouTube is pretty small, because they don't have many views, and they can't be effectively monetized. […] [YouTube] they have to use the same algorithms for all types of content. So it means that if IS-friendly videos make the user spend more time on the platform, they'll have to promote them."[412] YouTube was not interested in recommending content that was not monetizable—such as amateur videos, which notably feature view volumes that are comparably lower than those attracted by commercial videos. It follows that amateur videos and vernacular videos, more than others, have become more influenced by the commercial aims and goals of YouTube and even more sensitive to the phenomenon of the media agenda. Similarly, a logic of profit concerns Facebook. Therefore, the combination of historical conditions and algorithmic factors lead one to interpret the footage in question as "invisible images."

The notion of "invisible images" by artist and author Trevor Paglen is significant as it specifically looks at the forms of economic and political power exercised by images.[413] Inspired, like Steyerl, by Harun Farocki's theory of "operational images,"[414] Paglen claims that

[411] Mohamed Houssam Zarrad, informal conversation, January 13, 2018, Berlin.

[412] Guillaume Chaslot, Twitter message to the author, March 9–15, 2018.

[413] With the term "Machine Realism," Paglen defines the aesthetic political mode determined by machines, an autonomous assignation of meanings attributed to images by machines. Interrogating the question of how machines see, Paglen reflects upon the politics of artificial intelligence, which he defines as undemocratic, a system based on bad human labor practices and exploitation. From my notes taken on occasion of the lecture "Invisible Images" held by Trevor Paglen as part of the symposium "Art/Politics," May 12, 2018, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin.

[414] Farocki, "Phantom Images."

"visual culture has changed form. It has become detached from human eyes and has largely become invisible. Human visual culture has become a special case of vision, an exception to the rule. The overwhelming majority of images are now made by machines for other machines, with humans rarely in the loop. […] Invisible images are actively watching us, poking and prodding, guiding our movements, inflicting pain, and inducing pleasure. But all of this is hard to see."[415]

Paglen talks about "invisible images" as images made by machines for machines, and although it is impossible for human beings to really see them, invisible images exercise their power insomuch as they are used by artificial intelligence and algorithms as a basis to create taxonomies. Compared to the kind of images observed by Paglen, vernacular images are very different, as they consist of clips made by humans for other humans. However, their nature is the result of the inextricable, inherent tension between the network, which distributes them and the set of performative human practices that produce them.

Therefore, taking inspiration from the parameters for an image to become invisible, as elaborated by Steyerl as well as Paglen's notion of invisible images, I could consider vernacular videos as "invisible" post-January 14, 2011. The circulation of these videos is slowed down or even stopped due to their non-monetizable nature, and automation is key in making visible or withholding images as data. The autonomous assignment of visibility and circulation to the image given by Facebook's and YouTube's algorithm is related to the profit that the company can make out of it. Therefore, in what capacity does the invisibility of the clips affect the potential of their persistence? If, as claimed by Zizi Papacharissi, "diminished participation in the public sphere, online or offline, reflects a move to newer modes of civic engagement,"[416] where can they be found and what form they assume is the challenge of this study.

In his analysis of four photographs taken in Auschwitz's concentration camp, Georges Didi-Huberman defines the photos as those that existed but have been kept hidden, far from the eyes of civil society for years. These were photos that had been taken in an invisible place, namely the concentration camp, which, for obvious reasons, was not accessible to human eyes.[417] Invisibility and latency have to, therefore, deal with historical junctures, which are subject to changes according to epochs and cultures. These "instants de verité"[418]as Didi-

[415] Trevor Paglen, "Invisible Images (Your Pictures are Looking at You)," *The New Inquiry*, December 8, 2016, accessed March 22, 2017, https://thenewinquiry.com/invisible-images-your-pictures-are-looking-at-you/.

[416] Zizi Papacharissi, "The Virtual Sphere 2.0: The Internet, the Public Sphere and beyond," in *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics*, ed. Andrew Chadwick and Philip N. Howard (New York: Routledge, 2008), 241.

[417] Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All.*

[418] Ibid., 39.

Huberman defines the pictures in question, are photographs that need our imagination as a tool of knowledge—imagining in spite of our inability to look at certain kinds of images. Here, Didi-Huberman talks about fragments from an uncomfortable and deliberately incomplete past that requires us to imagine filling in the gaps of what the onlooker cannot or does not want to see. Imagination means "a mental creation,"[419] "the power of reproducing images stored in the memory under the suggestion of associated images […] or of recombining former experiences in the creation of new images directed at a specific goal […]." So, evidence of the spectators' imagination precisely stems from the analysis of the comments from the selected clips of the study.

5.3 Online Comments of Spectators Show a Form of Expanded Montage

The reading and analysis of the comments from the selected videos of the study reveal interesting signals of awakening. I start from van Dijck's essential assumptions that "social media constitute an arena of public communication where norms are shaped and rules get contested."[420] Within this articulated sphere, I understand social media platforms as the spaces where forms of active participation and civic engagement are possible, and as van Dijck claims "users [as] recipients and consumers, producers and participants of culture; they may be considered amateurs and citizens as well as professionals and laborers."[421] Online communication is normally formed of simple, short, messages written in slang. Rarely do such messages represent a full articulation of thoughts. Most often they are immediate reactions to posts. As stated by Zizi Papacharissi, "A political opinion posted on a blog or a video parody posted on YouTube presents an attempt to populate the public agenda, as a potential, privately articulated challenge, to a public agenda determined by others. In the truest form of democracy, negotiation of that which is considered public and that which is considered private takes place within the public sphere."[422]

This statement opens to a much wider and complex perspective, which concerns, ultimately, the mode in which the public recirculation of images across historical circumstances and the media agenda takes place, as well as the influence of the spectator-user on grounding and growing the collective memory by starting from the individual remembrance. These

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[419] "Imagination," WordReference Random House Learner's Dictionary of American English © 2020, https://www.wordreference.com/definition/imagination, accessed April 13, 2020.

[420] van Dijck, *The Culture of connectivity. A Critical History of Social Media*, 53.

[421] van Dijck, "Users like you: Theorizing agency in user-generated content;" van Dijck, *The Culture of connectivity. A Critical History of Social Media*, 83.

[422] Papacharissi, "The Virtual Sphere 2.0: The Internet, the Public Sphere and beyond," 231

aspects are of crucial importance and will come up again later in the last chapter of this study. Here, I am interested in analyzing the interesting finding of the way spectators populate the online public agenda and the digital archive, where the clips of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution seem to be dispersed among several others, via online comments.

For instance, the video *révolution tunisienne* on YouTube, a montage of the most crucial moments of the revolution[423] had intermittent comments up to February 2019. In the comments users praise the country,[424] express their love for it, and one person, who might not be Tunisian, looking retrospectively, regrets the revolution that toppled former President Ben Ali.[425] Although these recent comments are rare, they are meaningful, as they show time passing and all the contradictory reactions of mostly Tunisian spectators post-January 14, 2011. These reactions include disillusionment or regret for unachieved goals; nostalgia for Ben Ali's regime; or, in an attempt to celebrate the date of liberation from the dictatorship, proud commemoration of the anniversary of the revolution.

The video depicting the lawyer screaming "Ben Ali hrab" shared by *Al Wan* news channel was commented on up to the end of May 2019 (at the time of writing). In March 2019, in response to the same scene but depicted by a video re-titled *ben ali hRAb.flv*, a person with the pseudonym "tell me your secret" hopes that Algeria will reach the same freedom.[426] Considering that the Algerian civil protests against the fifth presidential candidate Abdelaziz Bouteflika occurred in February 2019, the timing of the message indicates that this specific Algerian citizen appropriated this video in support of her or his cause. Post-January 14, 2011, these comments are considerably lower in volume than those of the amateur videos in 2010 to 2011, therefore, we cannot look at these online communications as a widespread phenomenon as they were during the twenty-nine-day phase of the uprising. Nonetheless, they give an account of a certain level of connectivity post-January 14, 2011 characterized by dispersion and fragmentation—due to a new ongoing historical phase with new challenges for Tunisians—and a shifting of the attention of international spectators. Observed in retrospect, the more recent comments to the clips mirror the same contradictions in Tunisian society as the post-January 14, 2011 period. As Hoskins says:

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[423] See *révolution tunisienne*, accessed June 1, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvlPlpWPEFU&list=PLZLv5WCs67LLii9DCPMs0AgeG6SCkmjrm&index=7, uploaded by the pseudonym of TunsiHorr January 29, 2011.

[424] E.g., pseudonym Hdhdh Vdvdvvd: "La Tunisie ses tous. Vive la tunisie;" pseudonym Abou Obeïda: "vive la Tunisie vive son peuple vive la révolution Tunisienne."

[425] E.g., pseudonym CQFD: "Dommage, si les tunisiens avaient su la suite, ils n'auraient jamais voulu d'un autre que Ben Ali."

[426] Pseudonym tell me your secret: "Je suis algerienne et je reve de ce moment <3."

The now much more visible "long tail" of the past is increasingly networked through a convergence of communication and the archive. Smartphones and other highly portable digital devices act as prosthetic nodes that extend the self across an array of communication and consumption networks, personal and public. And the past itself becomes increasingly insinuated by the rapid spread of digital networks and a potentially continuous connectivity. This includes social networking sites, which host a continuous, accumulating, dormant memory, with the ongoing and often unseen potential to transform past relations through the re-activation of latent and semi-latent connections. [...] Here is a kind of digital dormant memory, awaiting potential rediscovery and reactivation—lurking in the underlayer of media life."[427]

Therefore, the reactivation of the "invisible images" that are stored online in latency is always a user-generated process in the digital archive, rather than a machine-generated one. This proves my hypothesis about the spectator-user. In fact, his or her memory, imagination, and experience are also the locomotive of image recirculation online. The comments show not only the mode of interaction with which the spectators engage with the vernacular videos online, but they are also evidence of what I define as an expanded montage between images, remembrances, and present circumstances operated by the spectators. I speak about expanded montage because of the broad range of connections, ideas, experiences, and historical references in play, of which comments are just the ultimate, evident outcome. Indeed, viewers project expectations and forecasts, as well as connect these visual testimonies from online repositories and memories with their present and future. Affect and all forms of connective actions that are generated enforce the circulation of content and, to a certain extent, the functioning of the recommendation system. Furthermore, these specific comments are signals that show that geographic proximity, similar political circumstances, and a sense of belonging carried by the iconic image of someone else's struggle are the most evident triggers that make specific images re-emerge from the flow. As a result, this sense of a common cause can push spectators to reactivate clips that remained for a long time online and in their memories on standby. Such clips can be used for empowerment and, in turn, convey energy. Furthermore, the expanded montage also includes the observer behind the screen, who might have not have directly experienced the events or the circumstances in question but might know them to understand the reactions of users online. However, this activation of videos is random, subjective, and—in the flow of the internet—imperceptible. It does not necessarily develop through recognizable evidence. It might happen through paths, aesthetics, and forms that are difficult to decode. More importantly, the irregular rhythm of the messages

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[427] Hoskins, "Media, Memory, Metaphor: Remembering and the Connective Turn," 26.

shows the distinctive characteristic of the phenomenon that only sprouts discontinuously across an extended time.

Concerning the differences between Facebook and YouTube, there is no essential diversity when it comes to the types of comments for the clips of the revolution that reappear on users' profiles or the frequency of written messages. However, YouTube continues to show a more expanded and global participation of users. The engagement by transnational users to someone else's cause was evident during the Arab Uprisings and also the Tunisian revolution. Now these unknown onlookers have appropriated and embodied the audiovisual materials in question, post-January 14, 2011, and these clips turn into representative traces of causes of these subjects.

5.4 Hyper-Accessibility and Searchability of the Videos as the Main Characteristics of YouTube as a "Time-Based Archive"

In the previous section, I interpreted the comments as evidence that proves not only the historical relevance of the iconic clips shot during the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution over time, but also what occasions, for instance anniversaries of iconic dates or events such as demonstrations in other countries, recall the clips in spectators' memory and bring them to share written comments online. Although these reactions of the unknown spectators via online communications are very volatile and limited, in terms of frequency, they represent a sign of the engagement of users with these representations and their symbolic value over time. I argue that these reactions show the expanded montage of the footage with present and past, operated by the onlooker online. The spectators archive by watching and revisiting the images. They use social networks as displays for these processes of resignification and as a storage that they can access and where they can express their thoughts, feelings, and hopes whenever they want, without limitations. More importantly, in doing so, they activate a form of resistance towards the rules of the algorithm and the commercial norms that lead it.

This level of hyper-accessibility of the invisible videos, latent in social networks, facilitates their potential recall and manipulation by users. The hyper-accessibility, as well as the open searchability of the objects distributed by them, are two crucial factors that distinguish the digital archive from the traditional one. Thanks to the democratization of social-media platforms—in which no hierarchies or restrictions limit their use, and where all non-commercial content remains dormant—it is possible for the spectator-user to go back to the ripped image, again and again, to seek and also appropriate them, making possible the activation of these invisible images in several though unexpected ways.

This characteristic is of primary importance and will be further developed in this paragraph, especially in relation to the further outcomes of the empirical research. In this sense, the interviews allow us to discover that in Tunisia types of repositories for rescuing, storing, and transmitting clips of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution exist and have developed over the years. This finding responds to my hypothesis that experiences similar to *858.ma* by Mosireen for Egypt, and *Syria Video Archive* were present also in Tunisia. However, there is a big difference among these samples: when it comes to considering Tunisian militants, the practice of retrieval and collecting the audiovisual materials in questions emerged as an episodic, rather widespread practice. But in opposition to other countries that experienced the Arab Uprisings, here institutional bodies were able to create official, state repositories. Therefore, the relative political stability of the country (if compared with Egypt and Syria) obviously limited the need of flourishing militant initiatives of archiving that had the purpose of rescuing the clips in question. This finding responds to my initial expectation about the existence of activist projects engaged in preserving the audiovisual materials also in Tunisia. The results confirm the presence of initiatives, which, despite those encountered, either remain personal or did not reach an international audience. Nevertheless, the most organized and acknowledged is the archive of the revolution created with the collaboration of state institutions. In all circumstances, the relevance of these initiatives comes from the kaleidoscope of perspectives of Tunisian spectators on the political events, the testimonies of the uprisings, and the revolution post-January 14, 2011. I will look at these diverse findings that emerged from the interviews through the lens of the mode in which users take advantage of social media as a repository, or put this function into discussion.

The use of social networks as repositories for retrieving the videos is different between YouTube and Facebook, in this historical phase. In fact, the former platform appears more appropriate to archive, compared to Facebook, when the process of searching, selecting, assembling, and conserving audiovisual materials takes place in retrospect. This employment is also emblematic of an evolution in the use of social media platforms, not with the purpose of self-exposing or exposing the reality that one experiences, but to preserve documents and retrace memories.

Searchability and availability of content are the inherent characteristics of social media as a digital archive, but these features do not always present themselves in the same way. For instance, Facebook is accessible but not set up for searching content, meaning clips and images, because the platform's mission is different. As said in the Chapter 1, Facebook's search bar allows one to seek users who are, in turn, the objects that the platform allows one to retrieve. Indeed, as editor-in-chief of *Nawaat*, Thameur Mekki notes, Facebook is not very

functional for archiving; it is too uncertain.[428] Therefore, Facebook was valid for connecting people and sharing during the unfolding of the protests, and its use as a database for saving visual materials worked in synchrony with the events, as the co-founder of the independent media platform *Inkyfada*, Kais Zriba states. Indeed, the personal initiative of archiving that Zriba mentioned is an interesting sample, in that sense. He revealed He revealed his private archive of videos during the interview, which he created by downloading clips during the days of revolution from Facebook. Today he would never be able track them down on Facebook again.[429] Zriba discloses crucial elements, which consist of the fact that his archiving work was developed during the twenty-nine days phase of the upheaval, and not in the aftermath of the event. Therefore, he could retrieve the materials circulating "live" from the active profiles and pages of users and save it from the flow of events. In turn, as Zriba also confirms through his experience, the difficulty of retracing the massive amount of those clips on Facebook years later is objective. Although the initiative is valuable and enriches the landscape of the different archives of the Tunisian revolution existing, I did not investigate the details of this personal repository in more depth because the date of its creation was outside of the period I wanted to investigate.

Conversely, YouTube has the credit of playing a significant role also in the aftermath of Ben Ali's toppling, during the still ongoing revolutionary process. The shift from the use of YouTube to document and share to that of recollection and preservation is one of the most interesting outcomes to emerge from the empirical research. In what ways? YouTube has three different functions that blur into one another: it is an imperfect search engine employed by individuals and institutions for the retrieval of "invisible" videos of the upheaval; it is an archive of spatial and temporal distance; it is a source for the creation, more or less structured, of other forms of repositories of the revolution, within and beyond the web.

Once the fragility of the videos and their progressive lack of circulation became evident, the fear of the loss of these testimonies has pushed institutions and citizens to set both formal and informal practices of preservation. As it also emerged in the research for online materials, the searchability and addressability of content via keywords and tags, and open access to them, has made YouTube the primary tool for retrieving clips when they are invisible, meaning not in circulation anymore, as "only data which are provided with addressable metadata can be accessed in the cultural archive."[430] Therefore, searchability is not only a means. Instead, it is

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[428] "Facebook pour archiver il est encore plus aléatoire moins organisé etc.. C'est pas vraiment l'espace, les plus propices pour archiver des choses" (Thameur Mekki, interview, July 3, 2018, Tunis).

[429] "J'ai téléchargé pendant la période de la révolution une bonne base de donnée de vidéo. Mais pas de Youtube, plutôt de Facebook. Aujourd'hui, je ne pourrais jamais les retrouver encore sur Facebook, c'est très compliqué" (Kais Zriba, interview, June 24, 2018, Tunis).

[430] Ernst, "The Archive as Metaphor," 5.

the main feature that endorses the potential use and function of YouTube for retrieving inert materials from the recent or distant past. Beyond the archive and its archontic essence recognized by Derrida, YouTube "generates, in this sense, a new memory culture, in which memory is no longer located in specific sites or accessible according to traditional mnemonics, and is no longer a stock to which it is necessary to gain access, with all the hierarchical controls that this entails."[431] Searchability thus allows the spectator to interact with and transmit content at any time. This was evident from the empirical data provided by the comments, as I described above. It connects as well with the archiving initiative by *Nawaat*, which is another interesting finding that both confirms and contradicts the considerations above about the timing of the use of YouTube.

Nawaat is an independent online platform that was founded in Tunisia as a forum/blog by Sami Ben Gharbia, Sufian Guerfali, and Riadh Guerfali in 2004 with the purpose of providing a dissident, counter-voice to state information. The blog was banned in Tunisia until January 13, 2011. Its current editor-in-chief, Thameur Mekki, revealed that *Nawaat* created its own archive of the revolution by gathering together videos from YouTube. According to the dates of their upload, the process started during the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution and has continued for years. There are around three hundred videos, of which ninety-one are accessible on *Nawaat*'s YouTube channel. Among the videos stored, some featured violent content, which YouTube erased due to its policies, but which remained on Nawaat's hard disk.

The ninety-one videos collected and uploaded to *Nawaat*'s channel were partly posted during the revolution, while several others were posted later, in June 2013 and two in March 2017.
If one looks into what this archive online by *Nawaat* contains, we see that aside from a variety of clips depicting demonstrations in the street, clashes, fires, gunshots all over the region, often reporting in the title either "Sidi Bouzid" or the hashtag #sidibouzid, which were circulating virally on Twitter during the revolution, one can recognize very few iconic episodes. Instead, the selection of amateur footage of the demonstrations in Paris in solidarity with the Tunisian uprising, some mass media broadcast from *Al Jazeera* and *France 24*, and the declaration of French Minister Frédréric Mitterand, who during the twenty-nine days of struggle denied that Tunisia was a dictatorship, are peculiar choices. Also, some videos disappeared, deleted by YouTube for violating the company terms of service. The playlist ends with the public hearing session organized in March 2017 by the IVD (Truth and Dignity Commission).

This brief insight confirms the chronological extension of what is considered the time of the revolution and the transnational impact—e.g., demonstrations abroad in solidarity—of this political event. Notably, the choice of closing the collection with the public hearing session of

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[431] Howard Caygill, "Meno and the Internet: Between Memory and the Archive," quoted in Ernst, "The Archive as Metaphor," 5.

the Truth and Dignity Commission appears very emblematic. It conveys the understanding that aside from the public gatherings and the clashes that brought the fall of the dictatorship as well as the solidarity expressed abroad for the Tunisian cause, no revolution can take place without the next political, institutional, administrative, and legal steps that make concrete the results of the upheaval. More importantly, no revolution can take place without justice for the crimes committed against Tunisian citizens by the regimes of Habib Bourguiba, his successor Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and their direct executors over the years.

However, once these hyper-accessible clips transit from YouTube to other forms of archives, their accessibility can radically change, as we see in case of the official archive of the revolution. Shifting from independent initiatives to institutional ones, the case of the creation of the repository of the revolution at the Archives nationales de Tunisie (National Archives of Tunisia) is emblematic. In 2016, the process of the systematic collection and organization of video clips, photos, Facebook statuses/posts, graffiti, caricatures, written documents, and blogs of the twenty-nine days of revolution had started, and it is still in progress at the time of this writing. The initiators of the project are the collective/civil association Réseau Doustourna, founded by Hechmi Ben Frej in collaboration with the Institut supérieur de documentation (ISD), which conducted a field investigation based on reports that establish lists of gun-shot victims. Alongside ISD, the National Archives, L'Institut supérieur histoire de la Tunisie contemporaine (ISHTC), and La bibliothèque nationale de Tunisie (National Library of Tunisia) took part of the project. More than seven hundred videos have been collected by the team in each region[432] during the fieldwork. It is worthwhile to repeat that this process of archiving initiated by a civil collective and further supported by state organizations is unique in regions of North Africa that experienced similar uprisings. The storage for these documents is now shared between two institutions, the National Library, which hosts articles from online newspapers, the status of Facebook users, drawings, slogans, graffiti, and caricatures, while the National Archive stores amateur video clips of the revolution. Archivist Hatem El Hattab, who is in charge of the in-progress archive of the revolution, reported in a conversation that the digital sources used by historians and archivists for searching all amateur videos being produced were YouTube and DailyMotion. Mass media broadcast channels such as *Al Jazeera* and *France 24* used these platforms extensively, alongside all the information that they could convey. These clips and the details that they provide about the events of the twenty-nine days between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's toppling turned into necessary integrations to fill the gaps of data left by the audiovisual material taken by the historians or received directly from citizen-filmers and their private collections, materials that constitutes the

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[432] Thierry Brésillon, "Redeyef, laboratoire des révoltes tunisiennes, en plein désarroi," *L'obs*, July 20, 2011, https://www.nouvelobs.com/rue89/rue89-tunisie-libre/20110720.RUE1470/redeyef-laboratoire-des-revoltes-tunisiennes-en-plein-desarroi.html.

backbone of the archives. More precisely, I am referring to all videos gathered from the smartphones of Tunisian citizens, and specifically, activists, families of the martyrs killed by gunshot, labor union workers, and all those private donors who decided to contribute to the repository of the revolution. By now, the time-span covered by the archive is the twenty-nine days of the uprisings. According to El Hattab, whereas Facebook and Twitter are very relevant as storage for photos and caricatures, YouTube is considered much more stable than Facebook for the collection of videos. Thanks to its infrastructure, tags allow one to follow searches independently of the profiles of users, and this makes the search for the objects in question easier.[433]

Till the time of my visit in March 2019 in this latter institution, the archive was available but not open to the public or accessible, at least not without authorization by the archivist in charge, and for no other purposes than research. The collection was offline at that time, but it was meant to be online. To take photos of it and its contents as documentation is forbidden, as with downloading any of the materials. The audiovisual documents are gathered together and accessible via three computer stations located in a small surveilled room in the building. These few notes about the environment where the archive finds itself and the conditions to access it are not just trivia facts. Rather, they aim to raise awareness about the very unique and special condition of the clips while they remain online.

Therefore, by overlapping the processes of circulation and memory with digital archives, "there is, in principle, no more delay between memory and the present but rather the technical option of immediate feedback, turning all present data into archival entries and vice versa."[434] This first consideration connects directly to a second result.

According to Ernst's definition of a digital archive, YouTube is a "time-based archive" that works not only as an imperfect search engine of the footage of the revolution but also has a retrospective function. In other words, in opposition to Facebook, YouTube allows one to actualize the past by searching clips/contents that recall it. Therefore, as a database and source, it facilitates or even makes possible the potential creation of other repositories. As said, YouTube was not the primary platform used by "the people" before December 17, 2010 and between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali toppling, and its relevance is inscribed into a militant, transnational, and technically skilled practice. More importantly, it played a crucial function of circulating information and shortening the physical distance of the viewer from the events, meaning for faraway spectators, local Tunisian citizens, those in the diaspora, or all those millions of international users. It filled the physical separation from the events by transmitting contents globally. Nevertheless, post-January 14, 2011, the platform functioned

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[433] Hatem El Hattab, informal interview, March 27, 2019, Tunis.

[434] Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive,* 98.

across temporal distances, away from the revolutionary events,[435] and moreover, as we saw, often in combination with tangible and physical exchanges and collections of digital objects.

These practices regarding the use of YouTube as a digital archive that concern proximity or distance in terms of the time and space of the spectator from the events confirm Ernst's perspectives on the digital repository, in which all archival data are present data, because there is no more delay between memory and the present. This *presentness* is the result of the addressability of contents but also human interactions with the platform, independent of the algorithm, which actually enacts resistance toward the machine-learning system of diffusion, visibility, and ranking of digital data. The spectator fights social media's priorities of newness, popularity, and the appeal for ads and reformulates them, as memories, testimonies, affective objects, instead of a sequence of signals. This aspect is of crucial importance and resonates with the results of the research for online materials, where the rare recent comments to vernacular videos on YouTube could give account of the affective influence that they played on the online spectator as well as of the kind of visual references that these clips embodied. Therefore, by selecting and uploading to YouTube some clips, storing many more in a hard-disk which saves them from potential erasure by the algorithm, *Nawaat* exposes a form of narrative to other users, circulates the clips again, and confirms the characteristic attributed by Ernst to the digital archive as a tool for transmission that overlaps with memory.

In this way, YouTube provides data and infrastructure for enabling the spectator to potentially create endless, subjective forms of the archive, which can differ in terms of quantity and variety, within and beyond the platform itself. It follows that Youtube, as a database and anti-narrative in itself, is turned by the spectator into one among several archival spaces, where one of the multiple narratives of the revolution can be raised. Ernst considers the repository not narrative in itself, as the archival purpose is an act of crystallization through codes aimed to reduce disorder, and he refers to classical archival memory, stating that the repository has never been interactive *per se.* Instead, he recognizes the documents stored in networked space as time-sensitive to user feedback, and this bond with the user makes, in turn, the digital archive the space of transmission, rather than of storage.

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[435] This aspect, in some way, validates the initial approach to YouTube, as the departing point for the observation of the changing experience of the clips of the Tunisian revolution post-2011. As mentioned above, the initial preference for analyzing YouTube instead of Facebook depended on the unfamiliarity with the Tunisian context. Furthermore, due to the time of the research, which occurred not during but in the aftermath of the twenty-nine days. In this concern, artist Nidhal Chamek confirmed the same road I followed, when during a conversation, he mentioned that his use of YouTube was relevant during the uprising in Greece, because he did not befriend any Greek users on Facebook.

From my perspective, I argue that it does not make sense to think about "what the archive wants" (to readapt W. J. T. Mitchell's question). If I consider the authorities (e.g., an institution, the algorithm) that create the archive, the selection and organization of contents is highly revelatory of a dialectic, a statement, a perspective, and it embeds a pre-narrative. If I consider the consumer of the contents archived, he or she is always an agent through the act of seeing, even though the effects of his or her actions do not generate a change in the archive itself, or are not visible in there. Theorist Joanne Garde-Hansen remarks that "The Internet is distributing memories into personal, corporate, and institutional archives. As more media digitally converge (television, mobile phones, video, and photography), there are increased opportunities for museums, broadcasters, public institutions, private companies, media corporations, and ordinary citizens to engage in what the philosopher Jacques Derrida once described as archive fever. Digital memories are archived in virtual spaces as digital photographs, memorial websites, digital shrines, online museums, alumni websites, the online archives of broadcasters, fan sites, online video archives and more."[436] Concerning that, the spectator emerges as the major actor in this process. Against YouTube's algorithm, he or she recaptures, re-transmits, categorizes, and remediates the audiovisual materials in question.

The characteristic that links the types of social networks with the timeframe in which the recollection, organization and resignification of the clips takes place is essential in my study. The variable of time connects also with changing emotions of the subjects towards the images during the years, feelings that transform according to historical circumstances. In fact, an overall sense of resistance toward these clips over time was evident among the subjects interviewed, and this is an aspect that will be explored in more detail in the next sections. Therefore the archival initiatives primarily show how the spectator-user uses social networks as repositories, but this also reveals how the coordinates of time play a role in the retrieval and conservation of the digital objects.

5.4.1 YouTube in Post-January 14, 2011 Tunisia

This section aims to add some insights into YouTube as time-based archive, and its development post-January 14, 2011. Some interesting findings respond to my expectations about the use of the platform as a militant tool. As remarked in this study and also confirmed by interviewees, it is easy to imagine "that until 2011, there was the absence of [YouTube] channels due to censorship" in Tunisia.[437] Nevertheless, YouTube has unfolded through its

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[436] Joanne Garde-Hansen et al., *Save As . . . Digital Memories*, quoted in Garde-Hansen, *Media and Memory*, 71.

[437] Baha Lamji, interview, July 4, 2018, Sousse. My translation from the French.

own trajectory post-January 14, 2011. As hip-hop singer Vipa reports, it has managed to become a search engine,[438] a characteristic that we have already explored by analyzing YouTube's role in archiving footage of the revolution. This search-engine characteristic mentioned by Vipa is of great importance because it stresses a shift for Tunisian users from watching content "in a storage" to directly interacting with content on the platform.

On the surface, the nature of YouTube in terms of the variety of content and its increasing penetration in Tunisian society appear similar to that of Western countries, with the exception that monetization still discriminates against Tunisian creators.[439] Thameur Mekki provides a very clear insight into the dynamics of development of the platform: content creation on YouTube has grown very fast. Artists have increasingly started to upload their video clips, and thus, they have created a parallel scene to that of television, radio, and traditional media. YouTube has shaken up popular culture in Tunisia post-January 14, 2011, and mass media uses the platform to keep updated and as a source of information about new musicians, trends, and so on.[440]

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[438] "YouTube a su devenir un portail, il est passé d'un support de stockage de vidéos à un portail. C'est ça les portails c'est ce qui intéresse les gens au début, parce qu'il y avait Yahoo. Yahoo c'était quelque chose. Beaucoup de gens étaient sur Yahoo parce que c'est un portail, voir des photos, lire des articles, c'est comme un magazine. YouTube c'est devenu un peu comme ça. A côté ce qu'il y a de nouveau, ce qui est recommandé donc c'est ce qui intéresse le plus les gens. Facebook aussi. L'utilisateur il crée son propre portail sur Facebook et là tu trouves ton propre espace, ton truc, ta salle à manger, ton téléphone, la terrasse ..." (Vipa, interview, July 10, 2018, Tunis).

[439] Jihane, Sliti, "Où en est la monétisation des vidéos Youtube en Tunisie?," *Nawaat*, August 22, 2017, accessed January 12, 2018, https://nawaat.org/portail/2017/08/22/monetisation-videos-youtube-tunisie/.

[440] "La création de contenus sur YouTube a évolué très rapidement d'une manière assez surprenante. C'est à dire que comme par exemple les jeunes artistes mettent de plus en plus leurs morceaux que ce soit un vidéo accompagné par des images, ou de tourner leurs propres vidéoclips et mettre ça en ligne et donc ça a créé une pratique médiatique parallèle à celle de la télévision et celle de la radio, au point où que les médias traditionnels télévision et radio se sont référés à YouTube pour commencer à diffuser la musique à la musique des jeunes Tunisiens, dans le sens où que les morceaux ont atteint des centaines de milliers de vues, voire des millions qui se sont dit, 'On ne peut pas passer à côté de ça.' Nous avons un concurrent et nous avons une plateforme qui nous fournit du contenu et nous on n'utilise pas ce contenu. On ne connaît pas ces artistes, donc c'est une plateforme, à la fois, pour diffuser des œuvres musicales surtout. Mais aussi c'est une plateforme qui permet une prise de contact facile avec ces jeunes artistes là, dont certains aujourd'hui sont passés à la scène commercial. Donc YouTube a chamboulé la culture populaire en Tunisie après la révolution. L'accès à YouTube a permis l'émergence d'une nouvelle culture populaire et lui a permis de s'imposer par rapport aux médias traditionnels qui se sont retrouvés quasiment acculés à la récupérer" (Thameur Mekki, interview, July 3, 2018, Tunis).

Here Mekki stresses a crucial point: in the case of YouTube (as well as Facebook), we see an evolution from the platform as an arena of counter-propaganda and citizen activism to a display of pluralism: where multiplicity is finally possible, where mainstream propaganda and militancy are very much present. Furthermore, YouTube turns into a point of reference for mass media and mainstream trends. In fact, in the aftermath of January 14, 2011, state institutions, politicians, mainstream broadcasts, and cultural institutions understood the role of social media, and alongside Facebook pages, launched their own YouTube channels.[441] Within this framework, YouTube became an entertainment platform post-2011.[442] Soap operas, especially during Ramadan, and porn, became trends.[443]

According to Hosni Mouelhi, YouTube is "apolitical." Influenced also by the evidence of the restricted popularity reached by his YouTube political channel, which never gained more than four hundred views over the years, Mouelhi argues that citizen interest in political channels or videos online is minimal.[444] This remark responds to my expectations by clarifying the different understandings that me and the subjects interviewed have regarding the terms "militancy" or "political use of social media," as well as what kind of site-specific practices my idea of "activism of the platform" did not include, according to the different experiences of the subjects I encountered.[445] For instance, Mouelhi uses the term "political" only in relation to a

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[441] Moez Mrabet, interview, June 21, 2018, Tunis.

[442] "YouTube c'est une plateforme qu'ils [les tunisiens] consultent mais pour voir des feuilletons, écouter de la musique, la rediffusion d'émissions télé. Mais le contenu politique est assez marginale sur YouTube" (Hosni Mouelhi, interview, September 12, 2018, Tunis).

[443] "[When YouTube became free] there was this boom. Everyone watching YouTube and watching porn, also, you know ... lifted the ban, porn raised at the same time […] YouTube is now used more by rap singers. Now, if you access YouTube, you can see the ranking of rap singers. It doesn't represent me personally, but you can sense what is going on in the country. What people are listening to, watching etc. Then, there are Ramadan series [soap-operas] […]. Here, [in the country] while there is a momentum for equality, [in the soap-operas] there is a counter discourse against equality (Samah Krichah, interview, June 13, 2018, Les Berges du Lac 2).

[444] Mouelhi, interview, September 12, 2018, Tunis.

[445] "Moi même, j'ai une chaîne, elle s'appelle La Formoulière, j'ai produit pour une année et demie des vidéos, plutôt sur le modèle français du YouTube politique. C'est à dire des vidéos qui demandent un travail très valable d'écriture et recherche, et puis un tournage, et une post-production qui peut durer plus ou moins longtemps, donc c'est un travail qui est mise à fournir un contenu de qualité, et non pas comme des vlogs, où on parle sans vraiment une structure spécifique. Donc ça va prendre même le code qu'en France a le YouTube politique. Ça n'a pas très bien marché, j'ai essayé pendant une année et demie je crois qu'il y a dix vidéos en ligne, je ne pense pas qu'il est un argument. Il y a des vidéastes sur YouTube qui font des vidéos, mais je ne pourrait même qualifier ça, des vloggers. En principe, ils sont des vloggers qui parlent devant leur caméra. (...) Il y avait une initiative qui s'appelait AnarChnowa, qui prenait des vidéos, des

very restricted range of content on YouTube. Mainly, he refers to vlogs about politics as its primary subjects, where the vlogger talks in front of a camera and provides objective data and information that mass media rarely diffuses.

However, interesting examples of hybrid products take advantage of YouTube's capitalistic nature and start to conceive of it as a business space. Music, and specifically hip-hop music, is one of these cases. Hip-hop is one of the predominant forms of content consumed by Tunisian users on YouTube, and due to the political messages that some of the most active and visible Tunisian hip-hop musicians[446] spread, the local evolution of the platform is strictly related to politics.[447] Another relevant example is *Draw my Science*, the YouTube channel started by high-school student Baha Lamji in collaboration with two friends, Fahd Baaziz and Ahmed Fattoum, living in Sousse—a project imagined explicitly for YouTube, which also has a Facebook page and a website. *Draw my Science* was conceived as a channel to explore a broad range of scientific questions concerning sexuality, religion, and science using scientific data and experts as well as academic literature, rather than religious or popular explanations. Within this context, AnarChnowa plays a significant role, as I will explore later. This channel has the ambitious aim to blur the division between militantism and entertainment, and, as hip-hop music does, to try to take advantage of the possibilities that YouTube allows for using creativity to increase political awareness and empower counter-messages to fellow citizens.

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mixtapes. C'est un montage, celle du contenu politique en puissance, la vidéo raconte une histoire à travers plusieurs plans séquences. (…) J'ai vu un autre youtubeur tunisien, qui a commencé après moi de faire la même chose, j'ai suivi un peu, il est plus connu que moi, mais même ses chiffres, les chiffres de ses vidéos, il ne fait pas beaucoup de views. C'est à dire, je pense qu'il a eu 240 views, c'est vraiment ridicule, et mois quand j'ai vu ce vidéaste là, c'est qu'il a fait, même si il est plus sur le vlog et mois plus sur le contenu politique, enfin ça m'a découragé, je n'ai pas voulu continuer, parce que s'il n'arrive pas même avec sa notoriété et une grand réseau sur Facebook qu'il a à faire valoir un contenu politique… [En plus] sur le vidéos recommandé par YouTube, il n'y en a pratiquement pas des contenu politique, dans le trends la politique en Tunisie sur YouTube n'existe pas" (Mouelhi, interview, September 12, 2018, Tunis).

[446] See, for example, Vipa, Tiga Black'Na, Pazaman, Massi (who co-founded the collective DEBO Tunis), as well as A.L.A, El Castro and others, members of the collective Zomra. Further details can be found in Youssef Ben Ismail, "Tunisia's Hip Hop Artists Are More Than Symbols and Troublemakers," *HuffPost Maghreb,* December 6, 2017, accessed July 23, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/youssef-ben-ismail/zomra-a-tunisian-hiphop-c_b_8525332.html.

[447] " Les rappeurs et les activistes artistes, comme les rappeurs tunisiens qui sont engagés, qui font des choses par rapport à ce qui se passe, Youtube est aussi un espace de travail pour eux, donc il ne suffit pas juste de publier des choses sur Youtube mais d'essayer de bien entretenir sa chaîne Youtube parce que avec le nombre de vues, ils reçoivent à un certain moment de l'argent et c'est un moyen de continuer à produire des choses. On ne trouve pas ça sur Facebook" (Kais Zriba, interview, June 24, 2018, Tunis).

5.5 Hierarchies among the Clips, Which Are Acknowledged Today as the (Almost) Only Official Documentation of the Twenty-Nine-Day Phase

Within the context descrived above, the searchability and addressability of invisible contents turned into the seminal features that in retrospect sanction the use of YouTube. Loaned and diffused by informal and formal media locally and globally, these vernacular videos have a special relationship with the construction of national history, of it being almost the only audiovisual documents that exist of the uprising. Indeed, one of the most important findings of the empirical research is that the digital objects in question are the prevalent audiovisual traces existing for shaping both the national memory of Tunisians and as prosthetic memory. More importantly, they are not counterparts to official items, as non-vernacular representations of the twenty-nine days of the uprising are minimal. This finding is crucial. The people—as spectators, witnesses, and performers—have appropriated both the process of documenting, and they are still, potentially, in full charge of the phase of archiving.

In fact, the significant difference of social media as a digital archive is the state of a "potential network" in which the invisible clips find themselves, meaning this is the highest level of direct interaction of the spectator-user with the content, and his or her participation in the activation, actualization, and appropriation of the latter as a grounding principle. The "potential" within the archive concerns the power of an organized collection "to resuscitate its holdings, bringing them back to life in the present; translations to new formats; circulation to new audiences, new interpretations, order, edits, narratives."[448]

The finding mentioned above is of the highest importance twofold. The shift of value of the clips, meaning from their being simple vernacular, amateur, pixelated items to major testimonies on which Tunisian national memory grounds is an independent historical process. However, it contributes to responding to the question of the role of the spectators in relation to the transformation of the value of the clips in question post-January 14, 2011. But in what way?

On the one side, it demonstrates that the widespread phenomenon of filming and watching as forms of archiving embeds a projection of the life of these clips towards the future. Whereas they are archival objects *in themselves*, as Enwezor states, I see, in theory, a sort of monopolization of the narrative and documentation of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution, whose author is predominantly "the people." Here it seems to be a paradox: the variety of clips from a massive number of anonymous shooters potentially guarantees the widest perspective on the episodes that occurred between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's toppling. Testimonies taken by protesters and supporters of the revolution are mixed with

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[448] Ghani, "What We Left Unfinished," 54.

those pro-Ben Ali in the database of social networks, and sometimes it might not even be easy to understand from what political lens the episode is documented. Nevertheless, aside from some propaganda materials produced by the state, which I was told exist but have never been verified directly, almost no other testimonies or visual evidence counterbalance the perspective of the amateur shooters, as no other television broadcasts from abroad ever reached the country between December 17, 2010 and January 14, 2011. It is as if the genre of vernacular videos have hijacked the historical chronicles, and therefore, the memory of the occurrences between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's toppling.

The second aspect related to clips as almost the only documentation of the instant available concerns the unexpected hierarchic or at least qualitative classification attributed explicitly or implicitly to the amateur, grassroots clips. This happens once they turn into official documents, enter national memory, or are edited as a testimony of truth. In turn, this categorization also concerns the spectator and enforces the difference between narrator and witness. For the creation of the official archive, the process started by the team of historians, researchers, and volunteers involved in the physical collection of the clips of the twenty-nine-day phase created a paradox: in order to avoid manipulated and fake documents, only materials received by hand or retrieved directly from the device of the filmers have the status of the original. Nonetheless, these precious materials are often but not always the same ones which have circulated across social networks and mass media broadcasts. This approach, which implicitly classifies the videos as "original and therefore reliable" and "not original," is not a trait only of the process activated by the official, state archive. The former collective Mosireen has also applied the same criteria of collection for the creation of the digital video archive *858.ma*, which was about the Egyptian revolution. It follows that clips from YouTube taken out of the online flow and its supposedly non-hierarchical nature are not handled as totally credible testimonies. Conversely, they are supplementary to the ones considered as original and reliable, because these latter have not circulated online, despite both holding the same status of non-professional, amateur images. Working as cross-verifications, which completes missing information and fills in details, in parallel, they can still play a role in historical storytelling.

However, it is worthwhile to remember that manipulation is a procedure embedded in digital objects and is tightly connected to their online circulation as such. In other words, subtitling, re-titling, various forms of editing, tags, and all possible distortions were not simple acts of appropriation and engagement of users/spectators. Rather, they fueled the transmission of the footage and the effects of these clips on the viewers. Therefore, by prioritizing moving images deprived of this spontaneous manipulation for the sake of truth and historical accuracy, archivists partly ignore the value of all those expressions of shared and collective performativity that contributed to composing the nature of these specific amateur

audiovisual materials and making these active materials tools of the struggle. On the contrary, the engagement of citizens as filmers and their authorship of the most crucial historical traces of the Tunisian revolution turned into the predominant perspective assumed for the creation of the archive.

This aspect also connects with further considerations. By starting with a recollection from activists, subjects injured by gunshots, and the relatives of martyrs, the core of the archive is composed of visual testimonies of those who can be defined at the same time as both the victims and heroes of the revolution. Conversely, spectators such as Med BMN, canadacanada1981, TheTunisietunisia, to name a few, turn into mere witnesses. This outcome partly scales down the broader understanding presented above of these spectators as participants to the struggle via watching and sharing, and it attributes hierarchies between who produces testimonies and who consumes them. However, by considering these spectators as witnesses, their potential as storyteller is not erased; rather, it is reshaped.

Another important finding appears to put into discussion the phenomenon of citizens filming as a form of archiving, to which I dedicated so much attention thus far, and all its related implications described above. Indeed, concerning the acts of filming, watching and archiving discussed thus far, an interesting outcome came up from the interviews and focus group. Most of the subjects interviewed, regardless they are students, filmmakers, activists, did not take any pictures or clips during the uprising, and only a few of them talked about their engagement through filming or sharing online. Therefore, the target selected accidentally corresponds precisely with the definition of spectator on which I focused since the beginning of this study, meaning those who not necessarily shoot but participated and watched the events.

This finding is relevant because it falsifies an assumption that I considered as given data, and therefore, never put into question. My study approaches theoretically the topic of spectatorship by blurring the borders between filming and watching, producing and consuming contents. Filming, watching and editing are approached as all forms of archiving, as I argued in Chapter 3. Secondly, because my interest concerns the archiving phase post-January 14, 2011, it overlooks the investigation of the specificities of the phenomenon of the amateur filming during the upheaval. In direct connection with this point, I have never questioned the spread of citizen's filming phenomenon, or the idea that it could involve only some layers of the society or categories of people, and therefore I did not formulate a hypothesis about its verification. This remark brings me to discuss the extension of the phenomenon of citizen-journalism, but also the general assumption concerning this. A significant relevance has been attributed thus far to those who fearlessly documented and spread all phases of the civil turmoil in the Arab speaking countries via social media, as well as the amateur, shaky audiovisual materials produced by them for trials, archives, and collective memory. From the data collected, it seems that this target that I selected is a niche, almost totally alien to the

phenomenon of the "people" filming their revolution. Therefore, I assume either that this group might be a minority, or the phenomenon of citizen-journalism was overestimated. Alternatively, it might also be plausible to suppose that the vast attention by local and international activists, Western scholars, and global media to the phenomenon of vernacular videos and citizen-journalism concerns mainly the relevance of the circumstance itself instead of the number of people involved.

Egyptian artist and scholar Lara Baladi gave a sign in support to this hypothesis. She was the initiator of *Tahrir Cinema*, a project of public screenings in Cairo, Mahalla, and the Canal cities, co-organised with former collective Mosireen, that emerged out of the 2011 summer sit-in in Tahrir. Baladi claims, "What the media called the 'Facebook Revolution' was only true for a couple of million out of the 90 million Egyptians who had access to the Internet. I recall the spectators' shock when, one night in *Tahrir Cinema*, I projected a selection of videos of the 18 days in early 2011 from the *Vox Populi* archive. Although they had gone viral, the majority of the audience had never yet seen them."[449] This incongruence between the real number of web surfers and the perception of the massive production, circulation, and consumption of videos online as an overwhelming, all-inclusive phenomenon is, at least in the Egyptian case, a matter of fact.

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[449] Lara Baladi, "Archiving a Revolution in the Digital Age, Archiving as an Act of Resistance," *Ibraaz*, July 28, 2016, accessed February 3, 2018, https://www.ibraaz.org/essays/163/.

Chapter 6

The Reuse and Recombination of Vernacular Videos of the Twenty-Nine-Day Phase of the Revolution in Cinematic Documentaries and Online Video Mash-Ups

6.1 Spectators Reuse the Vernacular Videos Shot Between Bouazizi's Self-Immolation and Ben Ali's Toppling within Cinema and YouTube

In the previous paragraph, I brought to light the changed function of YouTube in post-January 14, 2011 Tunisia. Once liberalized from censorship, YouTube has been used more easily as a database of the clips in question, and it seems to participate concretely in the formation of individual, grassroots, and institutional archiving as well as the articulation of digital objects as visual memories of the revolution. The features of the searchability and addressability of the raw historical documents turned invisible by the YouTube algorithm was revealed to be the most important sign of the level of democratization reached by visual testimonies. Therefore, the spectator is an agent: he or she enacts the footage against their dispersion in the tangle of history and the internet. However, institutional forms of archives put into light hierarchies between filmer and witness, attributing the status of the reliable storyteller to the former and subsidiarity to the second.

This chapter presents the outcomes stemming from the analysis of selected samples of moving images, in particular cinematic documentaries *Dégage* and *Babylon* and video mash-ups of the YouTube channel AnarChnowa. These samples represent unitary narratives and are observed as items that inherently recontextualize their source material, and therefore, resignify the videos in questions. As the issue of the conservation of testimonies is one of the highest priorities of both individuals and institutions in Tunisia, this section will address questions about what kinds of stories the montage of clips of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution produce when these archival objects are recombined with other footage or in different contexts, post-January 14, 2011. I also question what kinds of functions the resulting new stories will have. I argue that these new products possibly resist counter-revolutionary, misleading interpretations as well as manipulation or falsification—of both the footage and the revolutionary events themselves. Consistently with the theoretical approach of Rancière, White, Fossati, mentioned in Chapter 3, the distinction between producer and consumer of visual narratives blurs. Therefore, the character of the spectator here overlaps with that of directors and vloggers.

Aside from the theoretical perspective, it has emerged in the site research that most of the directors I met with, except in rare cases, have never filmed a single scene during the

revolution, neither as citizens nor as professionals. The majority of them focused on living the struggle itself and did not think of or want to engage with the production of the visual testimonies. This was not the case for AnarChnowa, however, who instead did film some of the early protests in his hometown of Sidi Bouzid. There are several reasons on both the conceptual and practical level for the lack of directorial engagement, and most directors have voiced that they preferred to live and experience the momentum. As directors Ismael Chebbi and Sami Tlili stress, to take photos or videos would require an effort that would take away from their urge to fight.[450] In other cases, as Tlili claims, it was even dangerous to film with a camera, as during the dictatorship shooting or taking photos in public space was forbidden.[451] As it has emerged through the observation of online comments, events that specifically occurred to or touched the spectator-user have compelled him or her to recirculate, appropriate, and consequently make content migrate from one context to another, making upcoming connections between the footage and other realities possible.

The aesthetic, political, and emotional legacy left by the vernacular clips post-January 14, 2011 is of massive importance in terms of the quantity of audiovisual material produced, their symbolic value, and a set of performative practices enacted by the spectator. Citizen-filming has become part of everyday culture. Just one example of how far this influence can go in terms of daily gestures is given by Manel Souissi, who reports that the habits of citizen-journalism is now an established one and have not ceased since 2010. Rather, it has exponentially increased, nearly to the level of obsession, according to Souissi. Any aspect of excessive power or injustice is filmed, including restless testimonies of bribes, corruption, and police abuse on civilians and youngsters.[452] It is as if, via this act, citizens-filmers can instigate change.

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[450] "La question qui s'est posée au début de l'insurrection, c'était dans le but de savoir si, en tant qu'individu, avais-je plus envie de filmer ces événements ou de les vivre? Rapidement, j'ai pris la décision de les vivre, de ne pas me prendre la tête à filmer, parce qu'au lieu d'avoir une caméra dans les mains, j'ai choisi d'avoir des pierres entre les mains et de les jeter à la police. C'est une décision que je regrette, parfois, mais à cette époque-là, j'avais envie d'avoir une relation très directe avec la révolution" (Ismael Chebbi, interview, June 18, 2018, Tunis). "En tant que citoyen tu descends dans la rue et moi quand je descends dans les manifs je ne filme pas. C'est très rare que je filme dans les manifs moi quand je descends dans les manifs j'ai envie de profiter de la manif en tant que citoyen. C'est très rare que je filme, c'est arrivé mais c'est très rare. Donc moi quand je fais mon travail dans les manifs, je descend comme citoyen" (Sami Tlili, interview, July 13, 2018, La Marsa).

[451] And still, it is, for instance, when one wants to take a photograph of the external building of the Ministry of Interior, in Avenue Bourguiba, Tunis, or when one wants to take photographs of abandoned architectures, such as former hotels, resorts.

[452] "Avec la technologie et les smartphones chez tout le monde, ce n'est pas comme 2011. C'est devenu un réflexe aujourd'hui. Je pense qu'il est un petit peu une maladif, parfois. Parce qu'ils voient des gens qui sont

Whereas the interviewee stresses the excessive side of the phenomenon, on the other side she highlights the empowerment generated at a grassroots level by the production and sharing of these images, which Tunisians have not abandoned in the wake of Ben Ali's toppling; instead, they intensified it when they understood its potential. Similarly, Thameur Mekki, revealed that the genre of the *image citoyenne* or *vidéo citoyenne* has dictated a narrative style that is in contrast to clean and well-framed propaganda images. Technically, low-quality images by amateur filmers have paved the way for a mode of narrating reality within the logic, problematics, and instincts of the citizen, which *Nawaat* itself has taken as a model for documenting everyday experiences in a journalistic way and for producing videos far from commercial purposes.[453] Therefore, in the post-January 14, 2011 era, vernacular videos have turned into a rooted, formalized style, which despite becoming official, appears to keep its militancy: it has become a genre for speaking out and a symbol of transparency and bottom-up trustworthiness. Nevertheless, these examples mirror one side of the visual and performative influence generated by the videos in the everyday life of the citizen and in the development of new forms of journalism, which has evolved to take advantage of the freedom of expression and the renovated atmosphere of a country in transformation.

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en détresse, ils peuvent les filmer comme ça. Tout est filmé. Les corruptions, les gens par exemple qui entrent dans des administrations et des administrateurs, par exemple, refusent des feuilles et ils les filment et les mettent sur Facebook. Ils filment tout, des photos des séquences vidéo. Ces réflexes, c'est comme si naturelle, comme s'il faisait partie de leur physionomie, des yeux.. ils gardent une mémoire visuelle et font des photos. Peut être ils pensent, qu'ils peuvent faire un changement par une séquence vidéo ou par une photo. Ils n'y croient plus. Peut être que c'est pour ça aussi, que les gens viennent dans les régions toujours dans les ciné clubs, nous avons des adhérents, des cinéphiles, qui viennent parce qu'ils croient encore plus que l'image peut faire le changement. Et qu'ils doivent avoir les outils pour comprendre l'images, pour l'analyser. C'est pas démodé. Ce qui se passait dans les années '60 dans les ciné-clubs se passe aujourd'hui de la même façon. C'est une croyance. On peut changer, simplement en postant une photo. Et même parfois ils font la manipulation par une vidéo, truquée ou par une vidéo prise par un angle de vue, ils peuvent faire toute une manipulation sur Facebook, des campagnes etc… Ça c'est nouveau. C'était justement l'affaire des cinéastes, des réalisateurs et maintenant c'est pour tout le monde. Tout le monde peut faire la manipulation médiatique" (Manel Souissi, interview, June 14, 2018, Tunis).

[453] "Donc à *Nawaat* on s'est dit qu'il fallait tourner plus régulièrement des images dans cette logique citoyenne, dans ce souci citoyen, avec ce réflexe citoyen. Mais qu'on pourrait améliorer leur qualité technique pour mieux transmettre l'information. Pour documenter notre vécu, et par conséquence exercer sa citoyenneté avec de meilleurs outils et donc permettre la propagation de l'information. Et l'adhésion à cette démarche de tourner des images par souci citoyen et non pas par besoin lucratif seulement et c'est comme ça que je pense, que les images tournées durant la Révolution ont influencé *Nawaat.* Sachant que *Nawaat* de l'époque œuvrait à archiver toutes les images qui étaient publiés par des citoyens" (Thameur Mekki, interview, July 3, 2018, Tunis).

As scholar Cosetta G. Saba claims, "art itself, such as film, is 'archive,' or more precisely it is one of its concrete dispositifs." [454] In this sense, I observe the documentaries and more informal online video production as technical expressions of the archive. I have recognized in the narratives that they produce interesting reactions by directors and vloggers post-January 14, 2011 to the exceeding quantity of vernacular videos, and their pervasiveness and the heritage they leave behind. On the one side, the remediation of the clips, such as in the documentary *Dégage* (2012) by Mohamed Zran, confirms the value of these videos as historical traces of the turmoil. Their remix is a characteristic of the video episodes of YouTube channel AnarChnowa. However, AnarChnowa edits only two clips shot during the instant among the hundreds that compose the twenty video episodes analyzed out of the whole web series. On the other side, I see a rejection not only of clips of the most grassroots, essential, and spontaneous documentations of reality but also of materials that are representative of a past glory. This is the case of the documentary *Babylon* (2012) directed by Ala Eddine Slim, Ismael and Youssef Chebbi. Here, the directors, as spectators, are searching for missing images that represent the multiplicity of the country post-January 14, 2011. The result is a deconstruction of notions of reality, truth, and trustworthiness, which are an implicit concern of the clips as historical documents. In *Babylon*, I see the attempts to reconstruct the plural representations and identities of a new country in progress.

In the following paragraphs, I will mainly analyze two aspects for each sample material in order to clarify the outcomes of the empirical research and what hypotheses have been verified and falsified. The first aspect is about how directors and vloggers as spectators treat the footage in question. In a direct relation, the second aspect is about what narratives about the instant, the revolutionary process, were these directors and vloggers able to preserve or, conversely, change.

6.2 Vernacular Videos Challenge the Documentary Genre Post-January 14, 2011

Documentary film is an extremely complex genre. Its definition and boundaries have constantly been questioned and deconstructed. The general difference between this typology of cinematic product and fiction film comes from their respective approaches to reality and truth and their representations. By referring to these categories, the documentary form proposes to transparently investigate and objectively render knowledge. Although Dziga Vertov did not coin the term nor initiate the genre, he is a grounding reference. Vertov started the famous Kino-Pravda newsreel series in the 1920s with the purpose of offering cinematic truth. Vertov

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[454] Saba, "Archive, Cinema, Art," in *Cinema and Art as Archive. Form, Medium, Memory*, 44.

claimed that the camera and its observation of reality would be able to render this "truth" more accurately than the human eye. This understanding of the camera as a tool that mediates immediately shows the ambiguities of the idea of rendering reality as well as the unavoidable artificiality behind the perception of the truth.

I agree with Hito Steyerl, who says that the documentary form is today a potent form of narrative, although one believes less than ever in documentary truth claims. "We identify with victims, heroes, survivors, lucky winners, and the impact of this identification is heightened by the presumed authenticity of the experiences we believe to be sharing. Pictures that appear ever more immediate, which offer increasingly less to see, evoke a situation of constant exception, a crisis in permanence, a state of heightened alert and tension."[455] And actually, the low resolution, pixelated footage, as a visual outcome of a state of emergency, has been able to engage the onlooker in forms of participation and engagement with someone else's cause as well as of the memory of someone else's history, and might be intended as the extreme, most radical form of documentary image.

Furthermore, the phenomenon requires attention because of the exponential development of the documentary genre post-2011, previously underdeveloped in Tunisia. Commonly acknowledged as emergency cinema and a cinema of proximity,[456] the blossoming of this genre is very important in post-2011 Tunisia as it provides a gaze on Tunisian reality and its problematics, topics ignored before the revolution.[457] However, in post-January 14, 2011 Tunisia, this genre of film challenges other problematics.

Cinema critic Tarek Ben Chaabane recalls scholar and cinema critic Kamel Ben Ouanès, who describes the emergence of a typology of films of the revolution in Tunisia. He recognizes three main trajectories in their development: films that interrogate the recent past to understand causes of the upheaval; those that investigate the causes of the revolution and its social and political implications (e.g., *Dégage*); and finally, those that are inspired by the uprising as an event and in search for a new cinematic language in sync with the revolutionary context (e.g., *Babylon*).[458] As Hito Steyerl states, "Since documentarism was automatically assumed to be enlightened and critical, many producers paid little attention to the fact that, on the contrary, documents are usually condensations of power. They reek of authority, certification, expertise and concentrate epistemological hierarchies. Dealing with documents is thus a tricky thing; especially if one aims to deconstruct power, one has to keep in mind that

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[455] Steyerl, "Documentary Uncertainty," 4.

[456] Ben Chaabane, *Le cinéma tunisien d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*.

[457] Rachida Triki, informal interview, November 20, 2018, Tunis.

[458] Kamel Ben Ouanès, "A une forme nouvelle, un sens inédit," in "Écrans fertiles," Tarek Ben Chaabane, in: *Guide des films de longs métrages tunisiens de 1956 à 2016* (Tunis: Édition CNCI, 2017), 23, http//:doc.aljazeera.net/magazine.2012/07/20127212627993200/html (since discontinued).

existing documents are—as Walter Benjamin once wrote—mainly made and authorised by victors and rulers."[459]

The case of *vidéos citoyennes* as documents, however, overturns Steyerl's statement because they are the result of a much more extensive, shared, and participatory form of authority and power. This aspect is crucial, especially when it comes to looking at the creation of a collective and national memory. As I described in Chapter 5, these amateur clips are grounding materials for informal and official archives. Especially the fact that a national repository acknowledges them validates the practice of amateur filming, which assumes a historical value. The observation of documentaries and video mash-ups starts from this given data and continues to question what new narratives the montage of the clips produce post-January 14, 2011.

Another remark by Tarek Ben Chaabane focuses on a seminal question, that is, the accidental challenge faced by the genre of the documentary form in Tunisia in the context of the antagonism between vernacular clips and documentary. Indeed, in the words of the cinema critic, "The documentaries of the Tunisian revolution were confronted with an impossibility: that of filming the revolutionary moment. They were forced to deal with 'one who was already there.' This immediately placed them in front of a double necessity: to deal with these emblematic images and fragmentary narratives and to develop a specific point of view on the events, to give them meaning—at the risk of canonization and ideological abuses."[460] Chaabane argues that "these images force directors to elaborate a language, storytelling beyond the chronicles, a configuration which goes over immediacy."[461]

Chaabane's considerations prove that devoting attention to these phenomena is not only a matter of fascination for both directors as well from my side as a foreign researcher. The genre of the clips in question actually destabilizes the aesthetic of truth and an approach of the camera to reality, as I will show later. They challenge the documentary as a genre, and automatically also, the role of the director or artist as spectator.

However, considerations of other Tunisian film critics about the influence of the amateur images shot during the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution on local cinema put into discussion Chaabane's statement, as they all mainly agree on one point. According to Ikbal Zalili, the films that aimed to document the revolution are not interesting at all from the perspective of cinema critique.[462] More importantly, he states that cinematic products that retrieved and recombined online clips did not produce remarkable results, either. Similarly,

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[459] Steyerl, *Documentary Uncertainty*, 4.

[460] Tarek Ben Chaabane, *Le cinéma tunisien d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* (Tunis: Édition CNCI, 2019), 42. My translation from the French.

[461] Ibid., 38.

[462] Ikbal Zalili, informal interview, November 10, 2018, Tunis.

Tahar Chikhaoui argues that it was the posture of the director as a witness, as well as the relationship between filmer and event, that changed, rather than the image itself.[463] In Adnen Jday's top ten best films between 2011 and 2017, published on *Nawaat* in January 2018, the critic does not mention any films that remediate clips of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution.[464] Obviously, these remarks need also to be inscribed within broader considerations about the complex relationship that these individuals, immersed in geo-political circumstances, establish which specific kinds of images through which they represent themselves, and in turn, feel represented. Consistently with these latter positions, it is worthwhile to mention that unlike *Dégage*, *Babylon* is recognized by Tunisian film professionals not only as one of the best post-January 14, 2011 Tunisian documentaries, but also, a cultural product that could exist only as a result of the revolution. This evidence indicates the massive, endemic transformation of society as well as of cinema and art fields. The end of censorship and self-censorship for the artists and intellectuals, the freedom of expression, and the softening of the caste system that had always been in power and limited the access of outsiders to the creative circles are just three of the several reasons that made *Babylon* possible, together with other examples of Tunisian films produced by 2011.

These contradicting perspectives contribute to clarifying the complexity of the phenomenon of the appropriation of clips of the instant retrieved from the social networks, and their recombination in new narratives. But also, these perspectives add necessary articulations to my initial hypothesis and attributed a great importance to the citizen-filming as a widespread and uncontested phenomenon. Indeed, as Chikhaoui remarked during our conversation, documentaries like *Silvered Water* (2014)—which I took as a reference, as I mentioned in Chapter 4—made use of clips from YouTube to react to the physical impossibility of filming. In this sense, the amount of films about the Tunisian revolution that I encountered, in which this very type of videos were remixed prove that the interest of directors in the manipulation of these videos was definitely remarkable, but only to a certain extent.

6.3 Vernacular Videos Forge a Style Post-January 14, 2011: The Embodiment of the Aesthetic Model of Trustworthiness

Dégage might appear as a documentary that nourishes the myth of Bouazizi and his act of despair. However, this is not exactly the case, as its director, Zran, instead aims to show that this single gesture—one among several (as more than two hundred self-immolations occur

[463] Tahar Chikhaoui, informal interview on Skype, November 2, 2018.

[464] Adnen Jday, "Les 10 meilleures films tunisiens (2011-2017)," *Nawaat,* January 15, 2018, accessed February 25, 2018, https://nawaat.org/portail/2018/01/15/les-10-meilleurs-films-tunisiens-2011-2017/.

every year across the country)[465]—could not actually instigate a revolution. As said, the videos from YouTube constitute a minority of the footage in the documentary and were used to recall the demonstrations that happened in the regions, such as those organized by the pharmacists and the doctors in Monastir and Sousse, the protests in Sfax, the dozens of injured at the hospital in Kasserine as a consequence of the massacre of civilians, which happened on January 9 and 10 between this former town and Thala. The director edits videos from online sources alongside others directly collected from their authors and scenes that he filmed in Sidi Bouzid and Tunis. If, according to director Robert Bresson, "an image must be transformed by contact with other images, as is a color by contact with other colors. […],"[466] what kind of transformation is evident in *Dégage*?

The clips from YouTube together with filmed materials taken directly from the hard disks of their authors in Sidi Bouazid act in the documentary as flashbacks to the chronicles, precisely as traditional archival footage does. These documents operate in two different ways: they create continuity with the scenes filmed by the director in the aftermath of January 14, 2011, during the continuation of the revolution; at the same time, they build the historical background of these anecdotes. Furthermore, these documents prove the results of the architecture of fiction activated in Sidi Bouzid by labor unions in the aftermath of Bouazizi's immolation, meaning the chain of lies and mise en scénes devised to instigate the citizens' rage and attract the international attention of the media.

Zran had to resort to clips filmed by others as replacement of footage not taken during the uprisings, as a consequence of the fact that he couldn't reach all the regions where the demonstrations unfolded. In this sense, *Dégage* aligns with the documentaries by Mohammed and Snowdon mentioned in Chapter 4. Indeed, the employment of clips downloaded from YouTube or retrieved from the hard disks of the filmers predominantly respond in all cases to very practical needs, that is, of filling a geographical or historical gap and replacing the impossibility of direct shooting. This aspect is crucial for many reasons because it sheds light on modes of reusing the clips. On the one side, the basic necessity that leads the filmmakers to turn to them appears to reduce their iconic value and aura. This aspect falsifies in part my expectation of Tunisian spectators finding a fascination for this genre of video in the aftermath of Ben Ali's fall. These clips indubitably had a great power of attraction, but ultimately, they have been simply used by the directors in question as any other kind of archival objects. On the other side, the use of these clips to replace an impossibility confirms the role covered by social media, especially YouTube as a time-based archive and database that allows the retrospective retrieval of contents. However, Zran's process of work proves also another important aspect. Indeed, there is less of a need for using social media when items can be

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[465] Salmon, *29 jours de révolution. Histoire du soulèvement tunisien, 17 décembre 2010-14 janvier 2011.*

[466] Robert Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York: Urizen Book, 1977), 5.

shared directly. These operational aspects contribute to changing the perspective on the inherent value and employment of the clips post-January 14, 2011. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to remember that similarly to other examples of Tunisian documentaries that edited amateur clips of the revolution, *Dégage* was produced in 2011 and released in 2012. This cinematic product appears as a cultural item embedded in the moment it represents, but it also must be seen as the direct result and the immediate reaction of the phenomenon of the vernacular videos in Tunisia.

I continue with a remark concerning the mode of the reuse of clips in this cinematic sample. In *Dégage*, the clips are rightly handled as well-known historical accounts, already rooted in collective memory as images whose power and influence are still intense. Their status as citizen testimonies, and thus indisputably trustworthy in and of themselves, carrying emotional and political values, is not put into discussion. Unlike the importance rightly attributed by historiography to the sources of a document, in *Dégage* the characteristics of the clips, as grassroots, unmediated, and militant worth, overlook their origins. Steyerl states that "paradoxically, one can thus say that there is no more truth and certainly not within documentarism. But let us reverse the perspective: what if the contrary is the case and it [is] precisely those blurred and unfocused pictures from the cell-phone camera that express the truth of the situation much better than any objectivist report could? Because these pictures do not really represent anything. They are just too unfocused. They are as post-representational as the majority of contemporary politics. But amazingly, we can still speak of truth with regard to them."[467] Therefore, I question, is the characteristic of illegibility that which makes these images powerful? In other words, is it what the viewer can't see, but that he or she can rather imagine, infer, and presume that, post-January 14, 2011, makes these images "true"?

Nobody has ever asked about the trustworthiness of these images, and I would say that nobody ever will, aside from historiographers, because these representations are a product of the "people." As Zran declares, no other footage exists as more trustworthy than these spontaneous ones produced by citizens, "the real filmmakers of the revolution," whose clips fed mass-media broadcast channels and almost turned into the only official traces of the events. Additionally, millions of spectators behind the screen witnessed the events while they were unfolding thanks to these images. These mostly shaky, pixelated video excerpts taken by a multitude of eyes immersed in reality have progressively become solid evidence of truth.[468] Whereas the amateur clips work as historical testimonies, by using them, *Dégage* aims to retrace the whole fictional side of the revolution. Zran puts into light the narrative architecture

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[467] Steyerl, *Documentary Uncertainty*, 4.

[468] As reported by archivist Hatem El Hattab at the National Archive in Tunis concerning the vernacular videos of the Tunisian revolution, the most of these audiovisuals have been validated by a court as proof and in other cases a commencement of proof (Hatem El Hattab, informal interview, March 27, 2019, Tunis).

constructed by Ali Bouazizi, Mohamed's uncle, the labor unions of Sidi Bouzid, and later, of other regions. In fact, mixing lies and truth, evidence and fabrication, they were able to provoke, progressively increase, and spread people's rage across the regions of the country.[469]

What narratives are revealed from the reuse and remix of clips of the instant in *Dégage,* and on what does it shed light? As in the chronicles, the director edits the testimonies of the demonstrations that brought forth Ben Ali's toppling, while he creates continuity with the events that followed the regime's fall that he started to document by January 14, 2011. Perhaps, beyond the impulse of filming the ongoing struggle, the perception of a missed chance for not having recorded the uprisings also triggered the director. Considering the aesthetic of the documentary, Zran's mode of filming has been heavily influenced by the shaky aesthetics of citizen-videos. It shows the embodiment of the amateur, citizen-style of representing reality by the director. This attitude resonates also in the words of Thameur Mekki, who declared that the model of "citizen-videos" turned into a "style" for the type of journalism that *Nawaat* promotes. According to an overturned logic of re-enactment in which reality and its actors take the images as models and imitate them, consciously or unconsciously,[470] Zran not only retrieves the clips as testimonies and historical documents, but also edits them within a flow of several other similar images that show a revolution still ongoing. In addition, *Dégage* takes their aesthetic as a visual prototype for validating the trustworthiness of his narrative.

Therefore, on the one side, clips of the instant represent and are used as the most trustworthy image possible; on the other side, they support a narrative that aims to shed light on the fictional architecture from which the overthrow of the regime stems. In addition, if emotions are essential vehicles of fiction, the affective side that the clips in question touch is particularly relevant. Not only does *Dégage* aims to dig out the emotional elements that triggered the beginning of the revolution and focus on the human side, which made this

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[469] "Il y a beaucoup de créations. Il y a beaucoup de mensonges créatives. Ali Bouazizi qui est un cousin de Mohamed Bouazizi et qui était porte parole du PDP, parti politique d'opposition à l'époque, et qui était un notable. C'est quelqu'un politisé et commerçant bien installé. Il était en contact avec Al Jazeera, il prend des image, avec son portable, qui sont dans mon film et les envoie à Al Jazeera et il dit, Mohamed Bouazizi était un gamin diplômé, chômeur, il s'est fait agresser par des flics. Ça a fait surgir la grogne des gens, qui disent: 'Il est diplômé, licencié, il pousse la charrette pour vivre, et en plus, le flics l'agressent.' Tout ça pour faire monter la pression. Alors que la réalité Bouazizi n'a pas de diplôme, il n'a même fait son BAC. J'étais au lycée où il a étudié, il n'a même pas été terminé. Il a arrêté avant de terminer. […] Le jour il y a plein de vie, les magasins travaillent. La nuit ils commencent à faire la mise en place. C'est extraordinaire. Dans le film vous avez vu un parallèle. On raconte cet univers de Bouazizi et au même temps, ce qui se passe en Tunisie" (Mohamed Zran, interview, July 3, 2018, Tunis).

[470] Jorinde Seijdl, "Wild Images. The rise of amateur images in the public domain."

unexpected liberation from a twenty-three years dictatorship possible, the documentary aims to react against the widespread sense of disillusion and confiscation that have arisen among the population soon after January 14, 2011. Therefore, I argue that the spectator edits these clips, downloaded from YouTube or the original filmers, to remind one of the iconic, glorious days of struggle that brought the country to topple Ben Ali, as well as reawake emotions and feelings about those moments. On the other hand, Zran embodies the citizen-journalism aesthetic style when he documents the demonstrations at Kasba, the Caravan de la liberté march, and so on. The clips turned into a precisely decoded visual genre of inherently militant images showing the people's power. By creating a *continuum* between pre and post January 14, 2011, the spectator connects present and past in the simplest way possible. However, *Dégage* focuses on an inner contradiction. If on one side, the memories of the glorious days of the instant are darkened by the continuation of protests in its aftermath, on the other, the continuation of civil demonstration mirrors precisely the victory of the people against authoritarianism, as Tunisan activist Bochra Belhaj Hmida states.[471] The narrative stemming from the film shows this inconsistency at the basis of the dissatisfaction and sadness of people that often emerge during my interviews.

Therefore, to answer the question of what different meaning the clips in question assume when recombined via montage into different narrative—the documentary *Dégage*—a varied context—an edited film with a plot, rather than the YouTube platform or the collection of a personal hard disk—and another historical time—the post-January 14, 2011 era— I can argue that *Dégage* speaks of the revolutionary process and all its inherent contradictions. By recombining footage that immediately entered individual, collective, and national memory alongside other footage filmed directly, that show a struggle still ongoing, Zran shows the main characteristics of the Tunisian revolution, meaning the coexistence of a sense of victory of the people, accompanied by the dissatisfaction of unachieved goals.

6.4 The Case of *Babylon*: The Emancipation of the Spectator from Visual Heritage, and the Search for the Missing Image

The embodiment of the images by spectators constitutes the red-thread that links *Dégage* to *Babylon*, despite how it unfolds in opposite ways. Indeed, the sample of *Babylon* apparently starts from completely opposite conditions compared to *Dégage*, that is, the absence of clips of the instant and any reference to the revolution. Whereas my choice of considering *Babylon* as a representative sample to answer the question of the resignification of the videos of the

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[471] From my notes taken on the occasion of the panel discussion "Das Tunesien Paradox: 5 Jahre Verfassung (Diskussion)," February 12, 2019, Heinrich Böll Foundation, Berlin.

instant through their remix might appear absurd, the following considerations may prove something different.

In a time when the citizen has self-represented his or her struggle and has almost been the only reliable author of what Snowdon calls "another history," Ismael Chebbi—one of the directors—raises a very problematic question on the occasion of the interview. The directors discuss reality and the mode of its representation as an absolute, while they film one of several versions of it. They aim to insinuate a doubt about what reality essentially is and what it means in the construction of a narrative—either visual, story-based, or a remembrance. In this sense, Chebbi stresses the value of what he calls the missing image, the one that the director looks for when he or she shoots. Chebbi highlights the relevance of the act of seeking scenes not yet existing. He compares the documentary form to fictional films; whereas the former is based on a search for something not clear in the head of the filmmaker, that he or she recognizes when it is given in the reality at which he or she is looking.[472]

This statement by Ismael Chebbi is crucial. By displacing the gaze, *Babylon* seems to refuse to watch and recombine all images already existing, collectively experienced by the people. It is as if they represent an authority, due to pervasiveness, hyper circulation, and rapid fetishization, from which these spectators aim to escape. It is as if they represent a cage for the imagination, which can prevent further narratives. The refusal of remixing already existing clips brings the directors to reflect on the absent image, the potential one, and the relationship of this projection with emotion.[473] More importantly, the rejection implies a clear distinction of positions, between spontaneous testimonies filmed by citizens and the images by artists as spectators in the aftermath of the turmoil.

In this concern, the thoughts expressed by Afro-American artist and scholar Tony Cokes in his video installation *Evil. 27. Selma* (2011),[474] about missing images and non-

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[472] "Quand on fait une fiction, on a des images en tête qu'on essaie de les réaliser, de les construire avec l'aide du décor, des comédiens, du cadreur. Dans le cas du film documentaire, le processus est plus complexe. On est à la recherche de quelque chose de très vague, très flou et il arrive qu'on n'ait pas toujours le temps de la filmer quand elle se présente à nous. Par exemple, quand on a filmé *Babylon*, il y avait plein de scènes qu'on avait envie de filmer mais qu'on n'a pas eu la chance de faire puisqu'elles étaient déjà passées ou parce que les gens ne voulaient pas être filmés. Ça se construit réellement sur des images qui manquent et je pense que ce qui manque est fondamental" (Ismael Chebbi, interview, June 18, 2018**).**

[473] "L'émotion existe parce qu'il y a quelque chose de l'ordre de l'invisible que personne n'arrive à définir, ou en tous cas pas tout de suite. Il faut passer beaucoup de temps à essayer d'expliquer cet invisible qui est aux antipodes du cinéma, qui justement est sensé montrer des choses. Hors ce qu'il y a de fort aussi dans le cinéma, c'est qu'il est capable de nous transmettre des choses qui ne sont pas là. Ce qui des grands réalisateurs…,c'est qu'ils arrivent à créer de l'invisible" (Ismael Chebbi, interview, June 18, 2018, Tunis).

[474] Tony Cokes, *Evil. 27. Selma* (2011) video installation, 9 min, 10th Berlin Biennale, Berlin, June 9– September 9, 2018, http://bb10.berlinbiennale.de/artists/T/tony-cokes.

visibility as the trigger for the most revolutionary visibilities of all, are very central. The script of the video is an excerpt from the text "Notes on Selma: On non-visibility" by the collective Our Literal Speed, which reflects upon the assumption that the American Civil Rights Movement took hold in a society moving from radio to television, meaning, from a collectivity firmly subordinated to the imagination to one where visibility turned into a significant tool of knowledge. Within this context, the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 and Rosa Park's action of disobedience were completely undocumented. The whole movement was inspired not by an image, but instead, of "an invisible chain of fantasy 'what if' situations: What if we could ride the buses as equals? What if we could eat in restaurants as equals? What if we could be educated as equals? What if we could vote as equals? What if we could live as equals? And so on. […] Knowledge derived from an event that 'has no image' will be the fruit of the imagination. The mind will be forced to supply a plausible sense of what the situation entails. Most of those participating in the Bus Boycott had no established visual referent for what they were doing, and in this sense, even those who produced the Boycott found themselves continually surprised by what they were already causing to happen. They had no way of getting a panoramic overview of the situation."[475]

Conversely, hypervisibility granted by social media was one of the causes that contributed to make the overthrow of the regime possible in Tunisia. However, the awareness that the undocumented Redeyef uprising in 2008 prepared the field for the 2010 turmoil has progressively increased and turned into evidence. So, what about post-January 14, 2011? The question is, for how long and in what capacity will the amateur footage of the revolution continue to symbolize and propel the people's struggle in the aftermath of the end of the dictatorship. Should we consider their power as expired with Ben Ali's toppling? Or, conversely, their abundance might be a factor that creates a cage that stops and becomes an obstacle to a vision for the future, for imagining the continuation of the revolution, a phenomenon still ongoing.

Babylon starts from the assumption that the clips in question have already been inscribed in history and have entered individual, collective, and prosthetic memory. In this sense, the need for new images was necessary for reconfiguring a country that finds itself in the middle of cultural, social and political renovation, whereas clips of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution were representative of just an instant of the glory of the citizens. By breaking with historical chronicles and all those millions of viral images that everyone experienced as pictures and situations, *Babylon* moves forward and looks at the future. It jumps to a faraway elsewhere apparently out of time, yet actual and real, too—a seemingly alienating dimension that describes perfectly the uncertain time to come for the Tunisians.

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[475] Our Literal Speed, "Notes from Selma 'On Non-Visibility'," December 1, 2009, accessed April 30, 2019, https://independent.academia.edu/OurLiteralSpeed.

However, the spectators introject and embody the clips in question, as in *Dégage.* The difference is that the directors keep the footage at a distance in *Babylon* in order to develop new narratives, while Zran takes them as an aesthetic and conceptual model to look at and recombine the fragments of the reality. *Babylon* is not just a documentary that stems from the revolution. It is rather the outcome of the process of assimilation and emancipation from the clips as well as their symbolic and emotional value, whereas for some spectators, their collection, retrieval, preservation, or reuse turned into a priority.

I argue that the narrative outlined by *Babylon* aims to convey a metaphor, that is, of the loss of points of reference experienced both by refugees and Tunisian people in the aftermath of January 14. Therefore, in opposition to *Dégage*, the documentary puts into question the authority of all images—especially the citizen-produced ones—as tools of orientation. They function as visual triggers that empowered the "people" and led them across the uprising, and they have remained as crucial traces of the revolution. Nonetheless, imagination is now necessary for leading the renovation of a country, and artists as spectators can be those who can now contribute to that.

6.5 Nostalgia for the Regime and the Difficult Process of Transitional Justice: AnarChnowa's Videos Show the Contradictions of Post-January 14, 2011 Tunisia

The third sample of moving images is the video mash-ups that comprise the YouTube channel of AnarChnowa. These episodes represent very interesting materials in which to observe the way spectators use the social network as a digital archive: not only as a source for retrieving materials but also as repositories for new narratives. Indeed, the video episodes produced remain online and recirculate on YouTube, Facebook and also Vimeo.

The AnarChnowa YouTube channel and its video contents verify some of my hypotheses. On the one side, the existence of AnarChnowa and the mash-up of all kinds of found footage from the internet, including clips shot during the instant, is an emblematic sample of a product that reflects on itself. The video episodes are the result of the remix of online materials, and they spread in the same domain that originated it. The digital items deal directly and indirectly with preservation through their recirculation online and use social networks both as a source and display. However, while they use social media in a militant way, they are subject to the same dynamics that can bring on an invisibility or obliteration of the contents. In addition, it is a very iconic sample that proves my hypotheses concerning the development of YouTube post-January 14, 2011 as a platform increasingly employed by Tunisian users as an activist tool, as it was the case during the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution, though in a very limited manner.

As mentioned earlier, each video is not devoted to one single topic. AnarChnowa touches on themes such as terrorism, the criminalization of the consumption of cannabis, religious extremism, migration, the economic crisis, and revolution—just to name a few. This seemingly nonsensical juxtaposition of anecdotes spanning time and space is, in reality, based on subtle comparisons that aim to enforce meanings and messages, express agreement, disagreement, and judgement about questions raised. However, connections among topics or mental associations are not always comprehensible. Through these possible gaps and lost meanings, the author plays heavily with two variables: collective imagination and time. Displaying emblematic visual references as well as widely recognizable characters and images from the Arab and Western world, alongside a counterpart of a myriad of anonymous, unknown vloggers, or footage, AnarChnowa deals with what is common knowledge but also his own and his user's imagination and memory.

Another key element in AnarChnowa's narrative is time, which jumps constantly between past and present and back and forth through the history of Tunisia before and after the revolution. AnarChnowa gathers black-and-white archival footage alongside the news of the day; uprisings from 1984 (the so called "Emeute du pain") together with 2016 civil protests (Figure 4); public speeches by former dictator Habib Bourguiba are juxtaposed with the ones of his follower, Ben Ali, former president Béji Caïd Essebsi, and so on.

Within the wider and all encompassing narrations provided by AnarChnowa, what space does the footage of the instant find in here? How does it interact with present images? And furthermore, what kind of transformation has it been subjected to? As media arts theorist Virginia Kuhn says, the "Remix is a form of digital argument that is crucial to the functioning of a vital public sphere."[476]

Watching the selected episodes defined earlier, I could recognize two amateur videos shot during the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution that have been edited within the narrative written by AnarChnowa. The first is footage of the murder of Hatem Bettahar, which occurred on January, 12, 2011, in Douz, a town in the south of Tunisia (Figure 5).[477] The

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[476] Virginia Kuhn, "The Rhetoric of Remix," quoted in "Fan/Remix Video," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 9, 1, accessed May 24, 2019, https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2012.0358, 2012.

[477] Hatem Bettahar was a thirty-eight-year-old Tunisian researcher and professor, working at the University of Technology of Compiègne, France (AnarChnowa, Season 1, Episode 13, "Brains and hearts of stone," accessed April 30, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7JGN2kNllw&t=5s). There are two typologies of clips still circulating on YouTube, which were filmed during the moment of the murder, alongside six others, which serve as tributes to the martyr. In one clip, the camera starts filming when the crowd remarks that there was a situation. Then, the camera follows the movement of the searching gaze to suddenly find the corpse of Bettahar, covered in blood, lying on his side in the street, killed by a bullet. A second video circulated that depicted the corpse lying on its back in the street covered by white fabric by a woman marking the gesture of

episode starts with a display of the frivolity of the media and entertainment environment. At the core of the episode are the shifting alliances of the politicians from Ben Ali's regime, particularly their reshuffle into new parties during the democratic transition and their repositioning toward the revolution. In this intricate landscape, the clip of the murder of Hatem Bettahar brings back a large open wound for Tunisian society, which concerns several martyrs whose exact number is still uncertain and for whom very little has been done to determine fault. Here, there is the closing sentence: "There are two types of people in revolutions: Those who make the revolution and those who benefit from it," which express not only the concerns of AnarChnowa but those of a wider segment of society.

The second clip, that of lawyer Abdel Nasser Laouini screaming fearlessly and proudly "Ben Ali ran away!"[478] is also iconic. It has already been introduced several times in my study in the interviews and the online survey. AnarChnowa's episode unfolds through anecdotes of bribes and police corruption, but the core of the video revolves around the nostalgia for the former regime. Nonetheless, this nostalgia is a different kind of feeling, compared to what emerged thus far, because it does not concern the revolution. In this specific montage, we see nostalgia expressed by a number of citizens—not only privileged layers of society, but also lower ones—for the Bourguiba as well as the Ben Ali regimes. Taking the case of the much debated return of Bouriguiba's statue to Avenue Bourguiba—an extremely expensive operation for an economically collapsing country—AnarChnowa revealed the dichotomy of a state where part of its inhabitants regret the dictatorship and its detriment to democracy. By using a technique that might be defined as overdubbing,[479] AnarChnowa creates a revealing and paradoxical effect: excerpts from *Al Jazeera* depict a noisy crowd in the main road in Tunis hanging posters of Bourguiba and exalting him, while the voiceover describes a crowd gathered together for receiving favors.[480] Here the clip of the lawyer Abdel Nasser Laouini, in

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respect. AnarChnowa took a few seconds from the first video showing Hatem Bettahar's face, at the very moment in which both the eyes of the filmer and the lens of the camera discovered him, sneaking through the legs of the citizens-onlookers.

[478] I found on YouTube three typologies of videos, shot from two different points of view, which depicted this same iconic scene, engraved with the memories of both Tunisians and non-Tunisians: a longer one (3:39 min.) filming the long monologue of the lawyer celebrating the victory of the people. The scene was taken initially from above, from one of the buildings of the avenue and then from down, at close distance in the street. Another video (2:41 min.) filmed from street perspective only circulates both in non-subtitled versions and subtitled in French by a user who commented that he or she felt a duty to do it. AnarChnowa selected a few seconds from this second non-subtitled video.

[479] "Overdubbing is a practice which involves dropping the soundtrack of a film and creating new dialogue or using dialogue from another source" (Horwatt, "A Taxonomy of Digital Video Remixing," 84).

[480] Quoting from the video: (04:49) Voice over: "These people came from long distances to this place which has been designated for them to receive some of the allocations that will be distributed on them from dough

which he yells "Ben Ali ran away!" (Figure 6) is followed by an excerpt from *Tunisvisions*, in which a man with a phone yells in return, "Bourguiba is back!" This scene repeats four times and is followed by nostalgic citizens who still celebrate Bourguiba (Figure 7).

6.5.1 The Genre of the Mashup as a Tool for Expanding History

By attentively selecting the public declarations,[481] comic sketches, dramatic footage, archival excerpts, or funny scenes that pass unnoticed in the flow of information and images, AnarChnowa reveals and exposes all the contradictions, lies, and ambiguities circulating in the Tunisian public sphere in the public debates, political speeches, information, or entertainment. The internet is AnarChnowa's archive, his experience offline and online are his guidelines. However, the cyberactivist revealed in our interview that he follows the path of the renowned American comedian and writer John Stewart and his *The Daily Show*. He says, "I see what happens during that week or during the two weeks before, in every TV, radio broadcast, all mainstream media. Then, I choose a topic, I try to make a collage that would make sense, or play with nonsense. I try my best to connect past to present, in order to be able to comprehend the future, because we have to know what happened before. We need to be aware of how things work. You search, you ask questions."[482]

The creation process enacted by AnarChnowa, its resulting aesthetics, and the agency of the channel surprisingly overlap with another seminal example from 1980s Italian media: the satirical program *Blob*, a TV broadcast authored by Enrico Ghezzi, Antonio Guglielmi, and Marco Giusti that was launched in April 1989 and has since been transmitted by the national television channel RAI Tre. *Blob* consists of a five to fifteen minutes montage of excerpts from television programs broadcast the day before, archival footage, and more recently, extracts

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material (meaning favoritism/nepotism), and the young volunteers—each one as they can—distribute this matter to the people according to the family members of each person and their needs and requirements of this article" (AnarChnowa, Season 1, Episode 14, "I love our company," accessed April 30, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0N8gL3kFOA&t=324s).

[481] Recurring characters from the Tunisian political, entertainment scene featured include: Habib Bourguiba, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Béji Caïd Essebsi (the former President of Tunisia, who passed away in July 2019), Rached Gannouchi (co-founder of the Ennahda Party and serving as its "intellectual leader"), Chokri Belaïd (lawyer and politician who was an opposition leader with the left-secular Democratic Patriots' Movement, he was assassinated in February 2013), Azyz Amami (blogger, activist, his figure was crucial for the civil mobilization during the revolution and post- January 14, 2011), and Jalel Brick (Tunisian cyber-activist, blogger, politician living in Paris), just to name a few.

[482] AnarChnowa, interview, September 16, 2018, Tunis.

from the internet. As television was both the source and the display of these caustic daily commentaries, *Blob* has been a very successful example of meta-television. On the one hand, it aimed to show the country how it appears through the lens of the media, which represents and interprets it; on the other hand, its purpose was to show television's artifice and manipulation of content. *Blob*'s authors have used the same dynamics of search, selection, mash-up, and editing unfolded by AnarChnowa. The approach by Ghezzi and his team toward television's memory is comparable to the one used by French and German Dada art movement toward mainstream culture objects, such as advertising billboards and mass-produced images. Using surprise via montage as a method, *Blob* monitors and interprets the evolution of television as a discursive machine, and in turn, is influenced by any changes that concern it.[483]

AnarChnowa temporally spans past and present, and through the internet and its content, critically approaches Tunisian media and the politics of communication. Conversely, *Blob* is stuck in the present and unfolds both technically and conceptually through very tight time constraints. Technically, daily broadcasts force the selectors to choose, according to presumptions, what television programs might potentially contain interesting excerpts. Conceptually, the show is a product subjected to the parallel life of television.[484]Another interesting coincidence between the two approaches concerns the medium: while *Blob* is a product of the small screen, AnarChnowa is a series conceived for YouTube, which looks at mass media as its main object of criticism. Furthermore, media studies consider YouTube the evolution of television, and one of the platform's primary purposes since its launch has been to become as popular and universal a platform as television. This aim clashes with the systemic effect of audience fragmentation, which results from personalization and customization instead of unification/homogenization of the platform's targets.

Furthermore, both products bank on the spectator as the subject who fills blanks, remembers, and reinterprets through that which they have already watched. Reflecting upon the connection between authorship, which in participatory culture includes spectatorship and the act of sharing, Menotti claims that "the authorship of an internet video becomes diluted through the process of distribution. The more it spreads, creating precedents for remixes, mashups, and alternative versions, the more the video becomes a collective, almost folkloric manifestation."[485] These considerations bring me to analyze the montage footage produced by

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[483] Antonio Magrì, *Di Blob in Blob. Analisi di semiotica comparata. Cinema, Tv e linguaggio del corpo* (Rome: Aracne, 2009).

[484] Ibid.

[485] Gabriel Menotti, "Objets propagés: The internet video as an audiovisual format*,*" in *Video Vortex Reader II: Moving images beyond YouTube,* ed. Geert Lovink and Rachel Somers Miles (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011), 75.

AnarChnowa and resulting comments made by online spectators in terms of an articulated political remix made by a cyber-activist within the process of the construction of fiction. Gilles Deleuze defines montage as the composition and the assemblage (or what he calls *agencement*) of movement images, which constitutes an indirect image of time.[486] These characteristics of montage are heightened and stretched in AnarChnowa's editing.

As mentioned above, the specificity of the AnarChnowa videos lie both in the fact that they are a pop, grassroots, amateur audiovisual product unseen before in Tunisia, as well as in the intense work of cutting, juxtaposing, fading, decontextualizing and (most interestingly), recontextualizing them.

The mash-up is defined as a technique that consists of the recombination of pre-existing heterogeneous audiovisual material as a unique and brand new composition with specific expressive connotations. Film theorist Eli Horwatt observes specifically the articulation of this technique in art: "Mashups are an amalgamation of multiple source materials which are montaged together to produce exquisite corpses from film fragments. The term was first used in conjunction with art to refer to the radical combinations of songs made by Jamaican club DJs."[487] Although the mash-up as a genre has widely proliferated on YouTube as a pop, low-culture product or emblem of do-it-yourself culture, "the politically oriented mashup video subgenre has its roots in the rich and diverse history of left-leaning, often deeply antiauthoritarian, creative traditions."[488] This technique has been employed since the 1920s— for instance by Soviet filmmaker Esfir Shub, who started cutting American Hollywood films in order to provide critical commentary and has since evolved exponentially within the art domain.[489] As Jonathan McIntosh states:

> Five essential features are present in all the [remix works]. (1) Works appropriate mass media audiovisual source material without permission from copyright holders […]. (2) Works comment on, deconstruct, or challenge media narratives, dominant myths,

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[486] Montage is "l'opération qui porte sur les images-mouvement pour en dégager le tout, l'idée, c'est-à-dire l'image *du* temps, […] *une alternance rythmique*, […] le montage, c'est la composition, l'agencement des images-mouvement comme constituant une image indirecte du temps" (Deleuze, *Cinéma 1. L'image-mouvement*, 46–47).

[487] Elie Horwatt, "A Taxonomy of Digital Video Remixing: Contemporary Found Footage Practice on the Internet," in *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and TV Studies*, 2009, 84, accessed May 21, 2019, http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/cultborr/chapter.php?id=8.

[488] Ibid., 80.

[489] Jonathan McIntosh, "A History of Subversive Video Remix before YouTube: Thirty Political VideoMashups Made Between World War II and 2005," *Transformative Works and Culture*, no. 9 (2012): 1, accessed May 21, 2019, http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/371/299.

social norms, and traditional power structures […]. (3) Works transform the original messages embedded in the source material, as well as the source material itself. (4) Works are intended for general audiences or do-it-yourself (DIY) communities rather than elite, […] and thus tend to use familiar mass media formats such as trailers, television ads, music videos, and news segments as vehicles for the new message. (5) Works are DIY productions and rely on grassroots distribution methods such as VHS tape duplicating circles, underground screenings, and, eventually, self-hosted Web sites. Many subversive video makers now put their work on YouTube, or similar sites, since its launch in November 2005.[490]

We can also find all these characteristics in AnarChnowa's video production, whose task, like that of the DJ, "consists of conceiving linkages through which the works flow into each other, representing at once a product, a tool, and a medium,"[491]states curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud.

A short digression concerns the fact that the case of video mash-ups in AnarChnowa channels is more special compared to previous documentaries because the spectators also contribute to the narrative through their online comments.[492] Online communications on Anarchnowa's channel can be partially categorized as "hasty opinions,"[493] rather than "rational and focused discourse."[494] But the reactions of spectators to the clips in question are

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[490] McIntosh, "A History of Subversive Video Remix before YouTube: Thirty Political VideoMashups Made Between World War II and 2005."

[491] Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Postproduction*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002), 41.

[492] The users seem to respond to the micro-narrative created by AnarChnowa's montage by recalling personal memories or references that the clip might raise and do not distance themselves from it. However, I have to state that these more articulate communications are rare in comparison with the larger amount of one-word comments, such as "top," "bravo," "artist," which are seemingly irrelevant, use of dirty language (including swear words), emojis, monograms, for example, "hhhh," or imitating sounds/expression typical of the spoken language, and blessings, or "I bless your mother/parents," which is also typical of spoken interactions. Indeed, looking at the communication's dynamics, comments are not always consistent with the topics raised by AnarChnowa, even if they concern the most problematic and central issues in current Tunisian society. And when they are, as for instance in reaction to Chokri Belaïd's public speeches, and the topics of the Reconciliation Act, Isis and nepotism/corruption at the levels of politics, security, and economics, only a few of them out of many others articulate an opinion in a direct connection.

[493] Jeffrey B. Abramson, et al., *The Electronic Commonwealth: The Impact of New Media Technologies on Democratic Politics* (New York: Basic Books,1988) in Zizi, Papacharissi, "Democracy online: civility, politeness, and the democratic potential of online political discussion groups," *new media & society,* no.6 (2) (London: SAGE Publications, 2004): 270, accessed March 20, 2019, DOI:10.1177/1461444804041444.

[494] Papacharissi, "Democracy online," 270.

extremely limited. Looking closer at the forms and terms of textual reactions, the messages that respond specifically to the footage of revolution within the visual narrative do not emerge in a particular way, neither in terms of content nor in terms of quantity. For example, in relation to the clip of Hatem Bettahar's murder, out of eighty-five comments, only one person, a relative of the victim, writes to ask for the erasure of the clip from the montage as it would be "too shocking for the wife and the children to watch it."[495] Concerning the video of lawyer Abdel Nasser Laouini (who yells "Ben Ali ran away!"), two comments are repeated, which add more emphasis to the textual sequence created by the montage: "Ben Ali ran away Bourguiba is back."[496] It might be worthwhile to consider that satire creates distance from the original work,[497] and this might explain the few or very partially engaged reactions of the viewers to amateur footage depicting such loaded moments of the uprising. According to Azyz Amami, it is a matter of platform. He argues that on YouTube users "show" themselves, but on Facebook they take the time to take a position and interact.[498] However, from comparing AnarChnowa's Facebook page, I could not notice relevant differences within the typology of comments. Amami goes further by interpreting the relation between the clips of Bettahar and the only comment from his relative, who, according to Amami, aimed simply to express his closeness to the person and the emotional involvement with the image. Amami remarks also that the image is already rooted in the Tunian imagination and is featured as a negative connotation. [499]

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[495] See the video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7JGN2kNllw, and the comments by person with the pseudonym "samido": "Bonjour. J'apprécie votre travail mais s'il vous plait enlevez la dernière scène de l'assassinat de Hatem Bettahar. Je suis un parent lointain et ça serait trop choquant pour sa femme ou ses enfants de voir ça."

[496] Here, Abdel Nasser Laouini's footage is interpreted in dialogue with the crowd praising Bourguiba, and not as a separate, self-determined clip, which would recall an iconic moment in recent Tunisian history.

[497] Rebekah Willet, "Parodic Practices: Amateur Spoofs on Video-Sharing Sites," quoted in *Video Cultures*, ed. David Buckingham and Rebekah Willett (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[498] "Quand tu places une ligne sur YouTube c'est clair, c'est comme 'Regardez-moi! On fait connaissance!' c'est juste ça. Par contre, sur Facebook tu va prendre du temps là-dessus et tu poses une position, et tu invites les gens à interagir avec ton interaction sur le contenu" (Azyz Amami, interview, March 25, 2019, Tunis).

[499] "Ça fait partie de l'imagerie qu'on a déjà et que cette image de Hattem Battahr, qui est un prof. universitaire, tué par balle, à chaque fois on sort l'argument que le régime de Ben Ali avait des compétences et que tel est un ministre corrompu […]. C'est une image gifle, et elle fait partie déjà de notre imagerie commune en Tunisie. La photo de Hatem Battahr, allongé avec le pantalon un peu en dessous, avec la tête et tout. Ça fait partie des images qui ont bougé toute la Tunisie. Elle est inscrite au négatif partout. A propos des commentaire, je comprends une seule chose: telle personne a voulu dire devant le gens cette valeur symbolique, elle m'appartient, j'en fais partie. Le commentaire est une capitalisation" (Azyz Amami, interview, March 25, 2019, Tunis).

Indeed, as I also argued, the clips intend to recall some of the most problematic and painful current issues in Tunisian society. In this case, I refer to the process of transitional justice, which includes a report issued by the Bouderbala Commission, whose work and relevance was already described in Chapter 2.

The "Ben Ali Hram!" clip recalls another crucial point, which is the assumption that, despite the end of dictatorship and the democratic transition, there has been no real political change in post-January 14, 2011 Tunisia. However, the widespread sense of nostalgia for Bourguiba and Ben Ali's era that is tangible daily across social layers and class is precisely the signal of a change in society. This feeling for the previous political and social status quo is neither new nor specific to Tunisia's case. For instance, similar nostalgia has concerned former socialist countries post-1989 once the fall of the system was no longer regulating labor and the economy.

My initial preoccupation of to what extent the footage of the revolution has been reused years later in other narratives as a signal of their persistence is no longer the point of discussion. I saw thus far that spectators have progressively attributed values, places, and, especially, borders to this footage over time—in either case, they transmit them or apparently reject them as items. What is important is the kind of manipulation of these audiovisual materials within the narrative written by AnarChnowa as spectator, when compared to the documentaries *Dégage* and *Babylon.* In *Dégage*, the vernacular footage was an aesthetic and political reference for documenting reality through clips that inherently embodied transparency and trustworthiness. In *Babylon*, the directors aimed to free themselves from spontaneous, non-professional representations and testimonies of reality provided by the amateur clips while they, as observers, embodied the images. The new images offer the possibility of telling multiple stories of the country post-January 14, 2011. In AnarChnowa, the footage is selected and used for what it is in the archive of the internet, in other words, as decontextualized fragments in a flow, potentially transmissible from one story to another, and copied endlessly, whose *citoyennité* remains in the background.

Similarly to how the algorithm behaves toward images as data, citizens' clips turn into digital objects among many others. AnarChnowa reuses them alongside found footage of films, news, and entertainment broadcasts, just as images within a flow of images, democratically accessible, available, and as searchable as the objects in the vast digital archive of the internet are. According to film theorist William C. Wees and his perspective on montage of found footage in film, both appropriation and collage use montage to dislodge images from their original context and emphasize their "images-ness," but only collage actively promotes an analytical and critical attitude towards those images and their use.[500] Cinema

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[500] William C. Wees, *Recycled Images: The Art and Politics of Found Footage* (NewYork: Anthology Film Archive, 1993).

historian Christa Blümlinger quotes the Mu Group, which remarks that a characteristic of collage is that it doesn't remove the alterity of the elements gathered together in a temporary composition. Rather, the collage proposes to be one of the most effective strategies for putting into discussion the illusions of representation.[501]

In opposition to what *Babylon* and *Dégage* show, the appropriation enacted by AnarChnowa extends the spectrum of truth, displaying other possible articulations of its unfolding. Furthermore, its contribution to resignification of the footage and collective memory is much more powerful and effective, compared to the narrative composed by Zran, for instance. Juxtaposing the multiplicity of contradictory discourses—the opportunism of politicians and public figures who constantly change positions and opinions in order to achieve their personal advantages; fake or manipulated information that has been circulating for years by the indiscriminate voices of politicians, citizens, journalists, and entertainers around, against, and in favor of revolution—AnarChnowa's montage reveals with great accuracy the confusion that results from the fragmentation of goals, interests, and purposes affecting Tunisian society today. This statement seems to define the game of revelations enacted by AnarChnowa, which is confirmed too by some of the comments. By appropriating and manipulating them, he draws a fiction, which the viewers perceive as the disclosure of the reality, or at least a plausible version of it. Yet, more than this, he shows the failure of having a single, commonly shared narrative that is able to provide an overall historical reconstruction and interpretation of the revolution and history. However, even in the future, would a shared chronicle of events ever exist? AnarChnowa's decontextualization and assemblage of audiovisual fragments, in order to assume new forms as single excerpts within the new narrative, question the pertinence of the term decontextualization within the realm of the internet and social networks.

In fact, in this domain, only titles, short descriptions, and users' online communications can help in framing pictures or clips, which already visually appear as isolated molecules, one next to the other according to the recommendation system ranking. However, Amami's remark concerning the clip of Bettahar makes clear that this specific footage, iconic as that which emerged from the memories of the interviewees, is not only so deeply rooted as to be now invisible but has already been broadly decontextualized by politics and media over the years that it has assumed different meanings according to the ongoing, present circumstances.

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[501] Christa Blümlinger, *Cinéma de seconde main. Esthétique de remploi dans l'art du film et des nouveaux médias*.

6.6 Fiction Carries Truth against Amnesia and Expands the Digital Archive

As I have presented thus far, the samples of the documentaries *Dégage* and *Babylon,* as well as AnarChnowa's videos, relate to the digital archive of the internet by resizing, putting into question, or praising the inherent value of the vernacular videos in question. What concerns of the revolution and beyond do the authors of these samples raise or erase through their stories? How have these events been connected within the historical flow, meaning the past and the future of the country? Now, what do these samples have to do with social media as a digital archive and its preservation and resignification of the footage post-January 14, 2011?

If, as claimed by Godard, montage allows one to see,[502] then Mohamed Zran, the director of *Dégage*, puts on display all the contradictions that emerged instantely in the aftermath of Ben Ali's fall, when the victory of the people who overturned the regime confronted their sense of unachieved goals. But the continuation of the turmoil over time and the occupation of the public sphere by the people is a positive signal and an emblem of civil engagement that shows the results of the first phase of a revolution are still ongoing.

AnarChnowa's approach presents some similarities and differences compared to Zran. AnarChnowa selects found footage from the internet five years later for revealing the bipolarism of his country and the foggy reality as it appears through the lens of the media. Similarly according to Z—the most prominent Tunisian caricaturist and author of the blog *DEBATunisie*,[503] whose drawings regularly intervene "on the *res publica*, representing in a critical and humorous way the national current affairs,"[504] and which can be considered *"fiction critique"*[505]—AnarChnowa targets current affairs, particularly the weak points of his country. However, while Z claims that he "represents what is not seen, making use of imagination, and tries to draw what happens behind the curtains of power,"[506] AnarChnowa stresses, instead, what is visible and flowing at great speed under the eyes of everyone, which turns into invisibility because of its hyper exposure.

In their confrontations with history, *Dégage* deals with an extremely short time-lapse, while the non-linear narrative written by AnarChnowa has the peculiar characteristic of spanning decades of visual media and sound extracts. This implicitly produces a sense of historical continuity and consistency. At the same time, it contributes to re-signifying the present by the means of reconstructing memories, contextualizing the events of 2010 to 2011

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[502] Jean-Luc Godard, "Alfred Hitchcock est mort," 1980, in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, vol. I: 1950–1984, ed. Alain Bergala (Paris: Cahier du cinema, 1998), 415.

[503] Z's Facebook page was initiated in September 2017.

[504] Romain Lecomte, "Internet et la reconfiguration de l'espace public tunisien: le rôle de la diaspora," 14.

[505] Ibid.

[506] Z, interview, March 26, 2019, Tunis. My translation from the French.

with past uprisings, the period of the dictatorship, and post-January 14, 2011. The multiplication and the conjunction of images, however lacunary and relative they may be, constitute just as many ways of showing, in spite of all, what cannot be seen,[507] says Georges Didi-Huberman.

If the decontextualisation of an audiovisual object by the cut and edit can be interpreted as a way of multiplying images and meanings, as Didi-Huberman's observation seems to imply, then the natural loss of connection of the excerpts from their frame of reference as clips in their entirety turns into an extension of possibilities instead of loose meanings. In this sense, editing acts as an agent of transformation, which makes fiction precisely the tool of revelation and conveys the increasing awareness of the social and political context Tunisians have been living in.

The term fiction includes and recalls a variety of meanings, but the definition given by Marc Augé seems most interesting here. As an anthropologist, he argues that "fiction occurs when there is a selection, the selection is already the start of fiction. There are beginnings of fiction when I propose modes of interpretations."[508] Therefore, giving a specific value at the preliminary moment of choice, in Augé's perspective, attributes a crucial value to the research phase, which in the case of AnarChnowa occurs among found footage and visual traces from personal or cultural memories. It is precisely within this moment of research that the construction of expected thoughts, new perspectives, and scenarios take place. As we see in *Camera Eye* (1967),[509] a short film by Godard about the Vietnam War, archival images of Vietnam turn fictional through the editing process. Scenes shot and filmed in Paris, where the director was based, are real, yet in cinema one can reach the truth through artificial means.[510] This statement seems to define the game of revelations enacted by AnarChnowa, which, as we see, is confirmed too by some of the comments.

In this sense, according to Zizi Papacharissi, the reactions of users can be interpreted as "reflective of the high spreadability and virality of the stream. The fairly high volume of mentions could indicate a level of conversationality, indicating that the people participating in the stream were collaboratively co-creating a story about the event."[511] By appropriating and manipulating footage, AnarChnowa draws a fiction, which the viewers perceive as the

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[507] Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*.

[508] Marc Augé, "Le rivage des images," in *L'expérience des images*, by Marc Augé, Georges Didi-Huberman, Umberto Eco (Paris: INA Editions, 2011), 79. My translation from the French.

[509] Jean-Luc Godard, *Camera Eye* (1967), film, 11 min., accessed December 12, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzkzO9jKkgY.

[510] Julien Pallotta, "'Camera eye' de Jean-Luc Godard: Un essai politique filmé," *Sens Publique* (2008), accessed January 20, 2018, http://www.sens-public.org/article.php3?id_article=558.

[511] Papacharissi, "Affective publics and structures of storytelling: sentiment, events and mediality," 6.

disclosure of the reality, or at least a plausible version of it. The interlocutor of AnarChnowa's channel is therefore addressed and invited to enter the conversation by filling gaps in meaning. Yet, the montage leaves little space for imagination. Viewers feel, instead, led by AnarChnowa across a fictional path to the disclosure of the truth.[512]

In this sense, *Dégage* and *Babylon* also deal with invented constructions. The former documentary aims to reveal the fabricated architecture that led the whole country to uprising, and it reaches its purpose by means of the most trustworthy images existing, meaning amateur ones. In *Babylon,* the authors as spectators abstract themselves from the political and social context they live in, in order to show a different face of the current history of the country that unfolds in parallel with the on-going revolutionary process. By selecting another reality, they complete the historical frame outlined by vernacular videos with imagination and provide additional potential representations of a country in phase of reconfiguration.

Documentaries and video mash-ups analysed thus far show that through selecting, filtering, appropriating, and sharing, the creators of these audiovisual materials as spectators enact the circulating of materials in the digital archive. They put these materials in connection with those offline, which might have never circulated; they perform these fragments, according to their experience of observers and citizens, and contribute to catalyzing antagonism and opposition in narratives, that although personal, seems to currently mirror the widest visible landscape of the country. In this sense, Zran, AnarChnowa and the directors of Babylon in specific ways enact social media as a digital archive in its most expanded conception (this aspect already emerged in Chapter 5 through the comments to the apparently vanished videos in the aftermath of Ben Ali's fall). But, as unitary narratives, they display more clearly the dynamics of reappropriation and reattribution of meaning between spectator, social media as archive, and digital items shot during the instant.

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[512] For example, Rtiba salem: "Why don't we see such stories in our media and they tell you that there is no more favoritism and we want to build a country on the basis of freedom my diiiick you are making us suffocate in this country there is nothing to like either you clap or you stay as you are and they wonder why our kids don't like anything how I hate you die extinct." By "clap" he probably means favoritism, he means agree and turn the eye on the wrongdoings for your own interest and clap for those who have the power (Season 1, Episode 9).

Chapter 7

Memories of the Twenty-Nine-Day Phase of the Revolution Post-January 14, 2011

7.1 How and What Do People Remember via Digital Images as Connective Memory Objects?

In the previous paragraphs, I analyzed two documentaries and a series of video-mashups on YouTube that were developed post-January 14, 2011. These items are the products of different forms of reappropriation over time by the spectator that, in practice, take place in opposite ways: by means of the reuse of footage (as we see in *Dégage* and the YouTube channel *AnarChnowa*), or searching for other images (as we see in *Babylon*). The process of empirical observation demonstrates that these images have already entered collective memory before the archive of the revolution officially has legitimized them and are already used as historical traces in moving images. The clips are symbols of truth and evidence of the recent past, as the film *Dégage* shows. Mohamed Zran, the director, aims to shed light on the fictional construction that fomented the revolution. In this case, the clips are used as historical documents and real archival objects, and their remediation aims to provide background references and to stir up new emotions and memories of the events. The director-spectator, using this amateur footage, creates a single acritical flow between past and present by means of editing, fascinated himself by their *citoyennité* and their values of trustworthiness.

The creation of AnarChnowa video mash-ups dated back to 2016. Clips of the so-called instant are used five years later as flashbacks to point out problematic and still unsolved issues in the country, such as justice for the victims of the revolution or alternately, the growing nostalgia for pre-democracy times during the Ben Ali and Bourguiba regimes. As this makes evident, the clips are a contested battlefield, as both politicians and citizens use them as a terrain of debate to confront each other about controversial issues of the country.

Conversely, the directors of *Babylon* react to the hypervisibility of the footage by shifting the gaze elsewhere. They take a stance towards these amateur images by inscribing them into a specific historical time and practice. As a consequence, they embodied the events and visual representations of it but searched for new images able to depict new challenges of the country in the present and future. This perspective questions the power that representation has of creating reality, or better, plural versions of it. Thus, whereas ordinary citizens as spectators were able to offer historical documentation of the revolution through their spontaneous filming, the artists as spectators look for the creation of new iconographies able to depict what comes next in post-January 14, 2011 Tunisia.

In this chapter, I approach individual memories as forms of narratives in which the spectator is engaged and through which he or she contributes to a collective, national memory in the post-January 14, 2011 era. Memory is turned into an empirical domain of observation in order to verify whether and how the spectators reacted to the invisibility of the footage online. The research for online materials has already produced some evidence in this concern. Whereas the distribution of clips in the online sphere drastically decreases, I remarked through the comments that the memory of the footage by the spectator-user allows audiovisual testimonies to recirculate and reappear in relation to other historical contexts or episodes, as the research in Chapter 5 proves. In this sense, the circulation of videos online contributed to the persistence of the occurrences in people's memory. However, the phenomenon studied online appeared too fragmented and ungraspable, also due to the inherent characteristics of the platform on which it was observed.

In Chapter 3 I established a parallel between memory and montage. As I stated above, montage is not only an ordering tool, but it is more importantly a means to deal with times and histories. In this sense, cinematic technique operates similarly to memory. Cosetta G. Saba retrieves Derrida's statement, which distinguishes memory from archives, and makes the claim that the former is able to re-establish time and history as well as, at the same time, the relation between present and past. In this chapter I will outline the results of empirical research, which aim to verify the following: In what capacity are clips still vivid in the memory of the subjects interviewed? And what do these images mean seven years later to them? If remembering means resisting and acting against the progressive invisibility and potential obliteration of clips online, it means also keeping images and events active by constant resignification. So, in direct connection with the previous question, what kind of narrative is being produced by the memories of Tunisians seven years after Ben-Ali's toppling?

In light of the results emerging from this research, I will provide some insights into whether and how the social networks and the digital footage in question have influenced both the way and what people remember of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution. In this concern, I will discuss again also my definition of *connective memory objects* as applied to videos in question.

The progressive, infrastructural obliteration to which the algorithm brings the spectator leads this latter to engage even more intensely with the visual testimonies in question and their actualization, online and offline, as it has emerged thus far and as I clarified in Chapter 5. Nonetheless, it is worthwhile to stress that, as I remarked in the process of the constitution of the official archive of the revolution post-January 14, 2011, vernacular videos and their value have been emancipated to a certain extent from the online sphere. Yet, spectators have started to use the repositories to retrieve, recollect and store the audiovisuals and have started to create additional archives, or archival technical expressions, such as films both online and

offline post-January 14, 2011. In other words, the role played by the internet and social networks in relation to the impact of this footage changes with passing time. All these aspects co-exist, while at the same time they contradict one another and give an account of the multiple challenges of this study.

Indeed, one of the initial questions of the investigation into memories concerned very simply what specific footage of the turmoil have remained in people's remembrances after seven years, and in what ways the subjects I encountered confronted them. However, the results of the interviews and the focus groups show that my focus on the digital objects rather than the events themselves attributed a huge attention to images when it comes to exploring the persistence of experiences in the memory of people. In doing so, I treated the visual items as if they were special objects or carried a different value compared to the events that they depicted, while the subjects remembered details beyond the boundaries of the media through which they experience them.

On the other side, all camera images, including photographic, cinematic, televisual, and documentary, assume great relevance in the development of national meaning by creating a sense of involvement in the nation.[513] As said, this vernacular footage is very likely also the only visual documentation ever created of the Tunisian uprising, produced by the same people who were physically and emotionally engaged with the event. As these digital objects have a minor—if any—official counterpart, namely the state's visual documentation, vernacular clips are the primary and probably only unique references for the construction of the memory of a nation.

Furthermore, it is not possible to observe memory as split from emotions. As scholar Margareth Whetherell remarks, affect and emotions have consequences on and influence the way individuals experience the world.[514] Emotions signify inherently relational categories and are co-constitutive of actors and situations.[515] They are subject to constant social change while at the same time being significant agents of change themselves.[516] In their studies about nostalgia, memory, and political class, scholars Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell recall that emotions[517] are central to remembering.[518] They work to validate what theorist James Wertsch

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[513] Sturken, *Tangled Memories.*

[514] Margareth Whetherell, *Affect and Emotions. A New Social Science Understanding* (London: SAGE, 2008).

[515] Slaby and von Scheve, "Emotion, Emotion Concept," 43.

[516] Ibid., 57*.*

[517] A more appropriate term used in the studies of emotions is "emotional phenomena."

[518] Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell, "'Nostalgia for the Future': Memory, Nostalgia and the Politics of Class," *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 23, no. 7 (2017), accessed April 1, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2017.1321034.

calls "the narrative templates"[519] used in that remembering but also the values that underpin and validate those narratives.

The clips analyzed in the following sections present outcomes of the empirical research and are the most frequently recalled items by the target of interviews and the focus group. These subjects remember episodes in which brave citizens challenge the state's power: women and men who rise from the crowd, standing apparently alone but actually surrounded by the massive participation of fellow citizens. The people gathered together as never before in the streets across the whole country to demonstrate against the dictator and state oppression. The interviewees retrieve from their memories crucial moments turned into symbols of the Tunisian revolution, episodes that nourished and spread the spirit of revolt transnationally throughout the North African and Middle East regions. But they also recall small details, such as moments of togetherness when the interviewees felt a sense of belonging, of being together in the same fate, as one people. The revolution also spread through this spirit, which empowered communities during the twenty-nine-day phase of revolution and then suddenly disappeared post-January 14, 2011.

I shed light on major issues raised by specific clips by going through these most popular connective objects of memory, for instance, the apparent split between live and digitally mediated experiences to which the interviewees give considerably attention, and in connection to that, the impossibility for them of restricting or isolating memories when they recollect episodes, no matter if they watched it online, on television, or if they were present physically on site. Prosthetic memory and someone else's eye are also very important. The interviewees embody someone else's perspective or recall episodes where this aspect was evident or astonishing to them. The memory of non-Tunisians who have experienced the revolution by means of images is an important mirror for Tunisian interviewees in seeing their past from a different perspective. Nostalgia, sadness, regret and similar feelings are some of the most recalled emotional phenomena through which interviewees and students remember. Conversely, some of the subjects simply refuse to remember, due to an individual and collective pain still latent.

7.2 "Ben Ali ran away!:" Clips and Prosthetic Memories

One clip in specific emerges as iconic and seems to carry a fundamental value, not only for the scene it depicts, but especially for its persistence in the online and offline flow of memories

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[519] James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). James V. Wertsch, "Collective Memory and Narrative Templates," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (2008).

and narratives. This clip features lawyer Abdel Nasser Laouini screaming, "Ben Ali ran away!" on the evening of January 14, 2011, on the deserted Avenue Bourguiba, the central thoroughfare of Tunis and the historical, political, and economic heart of Tunisia. It shows a very brave act at a time of great uncertainty, claims Baha Lamji (Figure 8).[520] Describing him as an "old man" holding his long monologue,[521] actor and director of the Institut Supérieur d'Art Dramatique, Tunis, Moez Mrabet reports the contents of this soliloquy. This clip was also mentioned spontaneously by Manel Souissi, whose sound was edited in a film that she remembered.[522] The iconicity of this scene made this clip one of the most popular in terms of comments gathered by Tunisian and foreign users, and in recent times, was an aspect that emerged in the research for online materials above, in Chapter 5. As already disclosed, the mediated experience of the world strictly connects to the mediated memory of the experience that we make of the world.

Memories deal with time, objects, the body, and emotions. This latter, in particular, order and contextualize memories in the present.[523] Thus, they are never disconnected from cultural, historical surroundings. This case is crucial as it mirrors not only the transnational circulation of the clips thanks to YouTube, but also how memory interacts with the social network. Memories are not fixed representations of the past. As part of a continuum, they are recreated each time we remember, but they are also infused with time. As for remembering, we need to reconstruct temporal and spatial points of reference as well as figures for elaborating our recall. The *here and now* is as important as the *there and then*, whereas,

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[520] "Il y a la vidéo de l'homme qui était dans la rue tout seul, et criait 'Ben Ali Hrab, Ben Ali Hrab' (Ben Ali s'est enfui). Cette vidéo là je m'en souviens parce que à cet époque-là, Ben Ali était un monstre, donc le fait de sortir dans la rue et il y a la police et le militaire et crier Ben Ali s'est enfui, pour moi ça demandait beaucoup de courage" (Baha Lamji, interview, July 4, 2018, Sousse).

[521] "Ce vieux qui parle de la révolution, de ce qui vient de se passer avec beaucoup d'émotion, de mouvements avec sa tête pour dire qu'il est vieux et qu'il n'imaginait pas que tout cela allait arriver, il a passé sa vie à attendre un moment pareil. Il y a des gestes, il y a des regards, des expressions de visage, de portrait, de gens anonymes qui ont tout d'un coup envahi notre imaginaire, notre vie" (Moez Mrabet, Tunis, June 21, 2018).

[522] "Je pense qu'il y a des films qui ont utilisé des images pris de l'internet. Il y a par exemple un film qui utilise la voix de l'avocat. C'est une image symbolique pour des Tunisiens. Juste au premier couvre feu, au 14 je ne sais pas si tu la connais pas: il y a un avocat qui est ici à l'Avenue Bourguiba, couvre feu, le Président on ne sait pas… Il est là? Il est parti? Il sort dans la rue il a parlé à haute voix. Il a été filmé par des internautes, comme ça. Il a fait un discours qui jusqu'à aujourd'hui j'ai la chair de poule. Il a dit: "Vous les Tunisiens, aujourd'hui vous êtes tous libérés. Le président a quitté le pays, il faut que vous admettez ça. Vous êtes adorable les Tunisiens, vous êtes courageux. Nous avons fait... " (Manel Souissi, interview June 14, 2018, Tunis).

[523] Hoskins, "Media, Memory, Metaphor: Remembering and the Connective Turn."

present time is hierarchically more relevant than the past.[524] Memory studies scholar Alison Landsberg calls "prosthetic memories those not strictly derived from a person's lived experience. Prosthetic memories circulate publicly, and although they are not organically based, they are nevertheless experienced with a person's body as a result of an engagement with a wide range of cultural technologies. Prosthetic memories thus become part of one's personal archive of experience, informing one's subjectivity as well as one's relationship to the present and future tenses."[525] This definition precisely describes the reaction I observed on YouTube in the analysis of the comments to the videos selected for my observation (see Chapter 5). Indeed, I noticed the case of an Algerian user who, on the clip recently, re-commented "Ben Ali Hram!." This happened in a specific historical phase, that is, during the unfolding of the civil uprising that involved Algeria at the beginning of 2019. Camera images are able to create, interfere with, and influence the memories we hold as individuals and as a nation,[526] but in this case, this audiovisual material overcomes mere national value. It emerges from invisibility. Its circulation persists thanks to the memories of its spectators, who keep it active by resignifying it according to external historical circumstances, both online, via comments and sharing, and offline, by including it in further narratives, either oral or visual. It is worthwhile to mention that prosthetic memories are not a peculiarity of social networks and the internet era.

In this sense, I take electronic media as a reference. According to sociologist John Urry, the "electronification" of media, meaning the shift from printed to electronic media, inherently transforms the mode of creating representations of the past in the present. Indeed, media such as television or computers do not represent the past. Instead, they are tools that enable or produce particular memories.[527] Consistently with this statement, Andrew Hoskins stresses that television and mass media have contributed to the foundation of mediated memories, which in several iconic cases constitute the only memories that we have available. Hoskins here employs the word "mediated" to signify that electronic media, such as television, convey these memories, and he explicitly considers "television the primary mediator of memory."[528] However, referring to television and mainstream mass media, Hoskins considers top-down images, produced by forms of power (mass media, the state) for different purposes, for

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[524] Hoskins, "Media, Memory, Metaphor: Remembering and the Connective Turn;" Rose, *The Making of Memory.*

[525] Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 25–26.

[526] Sturken, *Tangled Memories.*

[527] John Urry, "How Societies Remember the Past," *The Sociological Review* 43, no. 1 (May 1995), accessed March 3, 2019, doi:10.1111/j.1467-954X.1995.tb03424.x.

[528] Hoskins, "New Memory," 345.

instance, the mobilization of the audiences or conveyance of manipulated information. Conversely, the case of the amateur clips that we analyze in this study are substantially different, as they are a massive corpus of bottom-up, grassroots representations taken from "the inside" and shared online by the same people who were filming while watching and struggling. These very representations turn into a prosthetic, in the sense of being collectively created and shared. They shape transnational, transcultural stereotypes, imagination, and the understanding of the Tunisian uprising.

Prosthetic memories might be complementary for shaping memories of Tunisia's own history. This aspect seems to emerge from Mohamed Zran's considerations about the gaze of the other as a counterpart to memories of the revolution by local citizens. He says that Tunisians took the pictures themselves, produced them, and lived within them, and so it is challenging to understand reactions by Tunisians towards these images post-January 14, 2011. Conversely, he is curious about how foreigners react to the images of the revolution years later.[529]

7.3 The Embodiment of Someone Else's Gaze and the Power of Self-Representation

To a certain extent, prosthetic memory relates to another relevant aspect that emerges from the narratives shared by the interviewees. The subjects remember situations in which protagonists embody someone else's gaze, while they act before the smartphone camera. In particular, the scene of the rescue of the Tunisian flag from burning has been recalled on many occasions. Both Sami Tlili and Kais Zriba[530] mention two videos depicting similar situations, and they are touched by the care of the protesters for the symbol of the flag, which they try to protect even to the detriment of their lives.[531]

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[529] "Les tunisiens ont fait eux même des images, ils les fabriquent, ils les vivent y dedans, c'est difficile de comprendre la réaction des tunisiens. Mais c'est plutôt vous, l'autre, par rapport à nous…" (Mohamed Zran, interview, July 3, 2018, Tunis).

[530] "La vidéo que je garde dans la tête c'est quand il y a avait les gens de Gasserine, si je me rappelle bien, qui était en train de monter un poteau là où il y a les drapeau tunisien parce qu'ils avaient mis en feu toute une institution et ils étaient en train de grimper pour enlever le drapeau pour que le drapeau ne se brûle pas. Et ça c'était la vidéo pour moi dans ma tête de la révolution Tunisienne. Donc ils ont mis en feu un établissement ils voulaient le brûler mais pas le drapeau. Bien que les drapeaux et toutes ces choses ne disent absolument rien mais c'était quelque chose qui démontrait un peu ce qui était réellement ces jeunes et qu'est-ce qu'ils voudraient faire et l'intention et tout ça" (Kais Zriba, interview, June 24, 2018, Tunis).

[531] "Les images de Kasserine et Thala m'ont les plus marqué. Il y a une image plus précisément, je ne sais pas si à Thala ou à Kasserine, où on entend les coups de feu, on les voit pas, on voit que la police est en train de tirer, et les gamins répliquent avec des cocktail molotov, et un type qui monte sur un bâtiment officiel

Here, the interviewees also remember the devotion of their fellow citizens to the flag as a symbol of the country. This icon apparently does not have a meaning for the interviewees, but the way people protect it is that which impresses them. Therefore, the interviewees see in these clips identification, patriotism, and a sense of belonging. The icon of the flag comes up again. In particular, more than one interviewee recalls a young man who rises from the crowd in a demonstration and holds a birdcage filled with the Tunisian flag (Figure 9). This specific picture exists in different versions, as I found it online with some variations of the flag in and out of the cage. The unconditional bond of Tunisians with their country, symbolized by the protection of the flag, impresses the interviewees of my sample. As one of them says, the gesture was astonishing because the state had abandoned its people, and especially, certain layers of the society, who have remained marginal for decades. Nevertheless, these same people fought to get their country back.

Another crucial aspect reported by Sami Tlili in the clip concerns the behavior of protesters embedding the viewer's gaze. Indeed, the people seem to be careful about not showing scenes of violence or iconoclasm that could sully the cause of the uprising to unknown spectators. They know they will be watched, and they care about their self-representation, and how other potential onlookers could judge their acts. In this sense, philosopher Slavoj Žižek says that "we are not originally observers, but part of a tableau staged for this existing [and fantasmatic, impossible-to-experience] gaze."[532] Therefore, in reference to the Lacanian notion of visual "drive," he claims that the target of the image, as well as its function and its destination, are embedded in the act of producing an image of which the filmer is part of.

The growing awareness of the power of citizen-videos within the media and beyond emerged both as a reflection expressed by two interviewees, Thameur Mekki, Vipa, and as a video that they recalled. The clip depicts a group of youths in the neighborhood of Jbel Lahmar who organized themselves for security patrol, as all citizens were similarly doing across the whole country. The clips show the youngsters chanting in front of the smartphone camera: "We are being broadcast on the TV news!"[533] (Figure 10). Here, both Mekki and Vipa were

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ouvrant le drapeau nationale, et ses amis qui lui disent 'Protège le drapeau, il ne faut pas que le drapeau brûle, comme ça les gens gardent une bonne image de ce qui est en train de se passer!.' Ça m'a beaucoup touché. 'Protège le drapeau de la Tunisie!' alors qu'on tirait" (Sami Tlili, interview, July 13, 2018, La Marsa).

[532] Slavoj Žižek, "The Spectator's Malevolent Neutrality," Theaterformen festival, Brunswick, Germany, June 8, 2004, video conference,

[533] "Je me rappelle aussi d'une image de plein de gars de Jbel Lahmar, qui un quartier très chaud, très proche le centre ville de Tunis, juste derrière le Belvedere […]. Dans ce quartier là… c'est une image violente, mais que j'aime beaucoup… […] En fait, entre le 14 et le 18 janvier on a dû organiser ce qu'on appelait à l'époque les comités de quartier. C'était des jeunes qui venaient le soir avec un bâton, une barre de fer, des pierres, un

particularly touched by the awareness of these youths about the value of the image and the possibility for ordinary citizens to control their image through the media. The clip reveals a shift in understanding the formal media and people's control of it. As if through a smartphone, these youth could finally find a place in society and have a say.[534] Vipa stresses this shift in understanding a medium such as television, previously under control of the state, as now potentially interested in the cause of citizens.[535] By means of the rapid diffusion of citizen-journalism as a widespread practice, the presentation of the self that social media allowed has changed the relationship of the user with self-representation completely. This is, as the anonymous collective of filmmakers Abounaddara call it, the "right to the image." "The concept of a right to the image […] is as much about individual choice and the dignity of the human person, as it is about the right of a people to freely determine the terms of their political association including issues related to the expression of cultural identity."[536] For this reason, the scene depicted in this clip is representative of an epochal shift from the state control of media and history to when the means of communication—regardless if it is informal or formal—spread narratives, storytelling, and, in turn, memories generated by the citizens themselves.

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couteau pour faire face à ce qu'on appelait les milices de Ben Ali, qui étaient des flics qui ne voulaient pas le départ de Ben Ali, qui terrorisaient les gens dans les quartiers. Il y avait des pillages, aussi. Donc, ces comités de quartier faisaient le rôle des groups sécuritaires citoyens qui gardaient les quartiers durant cette période très instable. Donc l'image dont je me souviens c'est plein de gars à Jbel Lahmar qui portaient chacun un bâton et un truc comme ça, et qui donnaient un discours au gens, 'Nous sommes là pour protéger nos biens, pour protéger nos familles,' etc… Parce que à la fois, c'était euphorique… c'était une situation bizarre et improbable, mais c'était l'euphorie générale, tout le monde était content, parce qu'on se rassemblait le soir, et puis Ben Ali est parti, donc c'est… c'est… c'est un moment joyeux. Et ils étaient tous sur la protection de biens etc, et ensuite ils se sont mis à chanter […] 'On nous diffuse dans le journal télévisé!.' Avec un téléphone portable ils avaient l'impression d'être au journal télévisé, tu vois? […] Ils étaient vraiment conscients de la valeur de l'image, c'est comme si avec un téléphone portable... c'est comme si on faisait le GT. Et à la fois ils sont des gens que ne voyait jamais dans le GT, jamais à la télé, au delà de la posture misérabiliste. J'aime beaucoup cette image. Elles sont tellement révélatrices" (Thameur Mekki, interview, July 3, 2018)

[534] Mekki, interview, July 3, 2018, Tunis.

[535] "Tellement la télé était destinée à l'état, cause de l'état, des politiciens, de la politique. Mais la cause populaire on l'a passé pas à la télé. A ce moment, ils disaient notre cause passait à la télé" (Vipa, July 10, 2018, Tunis).

[536] Abounaddara Collective, "A Right to the Image for all," 2, accessed February 14, 2017, http://www.veralistcenter.org/media/files/abc8531bb8f73f583170233530137c8e.pdf.

7.4 Live versus Digitally Mediated Experience: A False Antagonism

One of the main outcomes emerging from the interviews and the focus group concerns how the subjects remember the digital objects in question seven years later. Here, the split, sometimes neat and other times blurry, between the live experience and digitally mediated one emerges very clearly. This division was especially evident among the pupils.

One sample is emblematic: the same circumstance, described from the perspective of one interviewee (Manel Souissi) who experienced it via a video online, and another interviewee, projects manager at L'Art la Rue/Dream City Béatrice Dunoyer, who was physically present. The event in question concerns the crowd that gathered on January 14 in front of the Ministry of the Interior in Tunis. There at the time, in unison, demonstrators shouted the slogans: "Dégage!" (Clear off!), and "Employment, freedom, dignity!," while asking for the dictator's resignation (Figure 11). Manel Souissi remembers the demonstration as shocking, especially if one compares it with life during Ben Ali's government, when similar scenarios could not even be imaginable.[537] Although she did not participate in that demonstration, the image of it is engraved in her memory. Here, the interviewee remembers not simply an iconic scene of the Tunisian revolution, which also entered the memories of distant viewers. She remembers it because, in absolute contrast with her experience of public space as well as the performativity of the citizens in it, this comparison between the collective body present in public areas, as it was before and during the revolution, enforces the experience and the empowerment conveyed by the digital image.

The second interviewee, Béatrice Dunoyer, describes circumstances that occurred before and after the scene filmed by the clip from the inside, including details about atmosphere, crowd, expectations, the sense of liberation, and the fear experienced as part of the "people." In both cases, the demonstration by the mass of bodies gathered together at Avenue Habib Bourguiba chanting for the departure of the dictator, watched either via the clip or lived "for real" by the agglomeration of citizens, are elements that vividly merge with memories, regardless of the way this moment was experienced. The power of the "people"

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[537] "Pour des images, oui, certainement les images de la révolution, la manifestation devant le Ministère de l'Intérieur étaient choquantes. Parce que juste il faut fermer les yeux et faire la comparaison avant ce 14, et ce jour de 14. Par exemple, pendant les manifestations pour la Palestine. Si quelque chose se passe en Palestine, tous les pays arabes sortent dans les rues et manifestent. Nous, c'était impossible. Les police lorsqu'ils voient à l'Avenue Bourguiba, trois ou quatre qui sont rassemblés, ils viennent vers eux et ils demandent justement que tous doivent se disperser. Et donc, faire cet agglomérat de personnes devant le ministère de l'Intérieur le 14 janvier c'était quelque chose de magique, vraiment... de la magie. Malheureusement je n'étais pas là mais lorsque je vois... c'est la première image qui a été gravée dans ma mémoire et aussi je pense chez beaucoup de tunisiens" (Manel Soussi, interview, June 14, 2018, Tunis).

was transmitted beyond the apparent dichotomy between lived and digitally mediated experience. The two interviewees co-participate, through their personal contributions, in the narrative from "inside" and "outside" of the event. Indeed, media and memories are not separated entities. All memories are mediated, and the idea of "pure" memory is just an illusion.[538] The topic of proximity versus distance from the events which have already emerged, in relation to the use of YouTube to cover temporal and spatial gaps, comes up again here but re-emerges in regards to the consumption of digital objects. The videos and images consumed online were crucial tools, even "fascinating," when protests were occurring faraway in other towns or regions,[539] and were used for keeping aware and informed about the situation.[540] Otherwise, interviewees stressed that there was no reason to watch videos

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[538] Van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age.*

[539] "Elles étaient importantes pour nous à ce moment-là, surtout pendant les premiers temps de la révolte, c'était encore calme à Tunis et ce qui se passait restait loin de nous, géographiquement. Ces images nous fascinaient parce qu'on ne pouvait pas encore les vivre. A partir du moment où on a pu les vivre, elles ont perdu leur pouvoir de fascination, je parle pour moi" (Ismael Chebbi, interview, June 18, 2018, Tunis).

[540] "D'ailleurs ce n'est pas tant la vidéo, que la réalité parce que qu'on a fait toutes les manifestations et une qui m'a touché parce que je l'ai vraiment vécu c'était Amal Malthoussi qui chantait sur l'avenue Bourguiba avec la bougie. La chanson 'La liberté' et encore aujourd'hui à chaque fois que je la vois, je pleure je pleure je pleure, parce que ça a été un moment qui était tellement fort et une journée qui a été... une journée parce que on est tous arrivés -c'était le jour du départ du dictateur, sur l'avenue. Moi, j'étais arrivé tôt, totalement démoralisé en disant 'Il va y avoir personne,' parce que jusque la veille de son départ Ben Ali a fait une déclaration à la télévision il disait 'Je vous ai compris.' Déclaration d'argent... 'J'invite tout le monde à sortir dans la rue pour faire la fête' alors qu'on était sous couvre feu et dans tous les quartiers on a entendu la fête de tous les gens du coup, pro-Ben Ali. En fait, on s'est rendu compte après que c'étaient des gens de Ben Ali qui arrivaient avec les voitures, où il y avait déjà la musique et ils invitent les gens du quartier. Et du coup, lorsqu'on arrive le 14 janvier le matin, on ne savait pas finalement s'il devait y avoir beaucoup de monde. Et à 10 heures, la rue s'est rempli, pas trop de monde et puis c'est arrivé, c'est arrivé et c'était une ambiance... où les gens crient, j'avais des amis qui me disaient 'Mais, j'arrive pas à crier ça fait 20 ans qu'on me dit de me taire. J'arrive pas à reprendre des slogans, j'arrive pas...' et il y avait une communion et une force et dans l'après midi la police a tiré. La police a tiré dans la foule. Du coup, on est rentré chez nous, on est parti en courant il y a eu des blessés. La police a continué à traquer les gens dans les maisons et on est rentrés. Moi, je me rappelle d'être rentrer chez moi, maintenant tout est effondré, et puis tu regardes sur Facebook, à la radio, et à 5 heures de l'après midi, tu commence à avoir les informations: 'Le dictateur est parti, le dictateur est parti, le dictateur est parti.' Après c'est vrai que c'est ça qui reste, mais après il y a eu tout ce qui a précédé parce que, en fait, toutes les vidéos ont fait… ont été essentielles pour amener cette prise de conscience. Parce qu'en fait c'est un pays qui a toujours été... où il n'y avait pas d'information. On ne savait pas ce qui se passait ailleurs, s'il y avait une émeute ou quoi que ce soit tout de suite avec une image, il n'y avait rien et c'est vrai que vidéo de Bouazizi évidemment ça qui a fait, et les premières émeutes à Kasserine, avec les gens, la demande de la dignité, les marches que il y a eu, ça alimente ça. Et effectivement ce qui

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instead of participating in the demonstrations. The issue of the spatial distance of the subjects from the events of the revolution also emerged in the focus group. One student, Nada, remembers the forced isolation that was experienced. She remained "stuck at her aunt's place for one week," as "it was not possible to go out, to reach home."[541] Another student, Nawrez, remembers the demonstrations, slogans, and the "photo of the bread" (meaning the picture of the single man holding a baguette like a machine gun) through the television channel *Tunis 7*, which was broadcasting news. Among the students, television seemed to be the medium of information.

To talk of "lived experience" in the domain of digital ecology can be very confusing. I use this term in the way sociologist John B. Thompson employs it. He refers to authors within the hermeneutic and phenomenological traditions, such as Wilhelm Dilthey, and he states that lived experience is located experience. This means that it is the experience that one acquires in the practical context of everyday life. It is a continuous, immediate experience, unavoidable to a certain extent. Furthermore, although living experience remains fundamental, mediated experience has increasingly supplemented or even replaced the previous one. In turn, mediated experience is defined by Thomspon as experience spatially and temporally distant from the context of daily life, and by virtue of this distance, is unlikely to directly affect the lives of individuals, who experience them through the media. It is always a recontextualized experience; it has a relevant structure, as "mediated experience is not a continuous flow but rather a discontinuous sequence of experiences which have varying degrees of relevance to the self."[542] It de-spatializes commonality, meaning that unlike lived experience, commonality is not rooted in spatial proximity. This mix of different forms of experiences is what the subject in a connected society and living in a media world encounter, obviously, and they are incorporated reflexively into the process of self-formation and self-transformation. Individuals progressively balance, replace, or supply the body involved with the mediated one, whereas they automatically re-shape and constitute anew the project of the self, which by consequence intertwines with mediated and mediatized memories. However, objects like photos and videos contribute to the founding of individual memories to such an extent that it is hard to distinguish between the two.[543] These items function as "relational acts of memories."[544] In this sense, one interviewee, Ismael Chebbi, reveals that "after a while, the videos and reality mix." What he

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s'est passé à Tunis… je n'est pas d'images vidéos, j'ai le réelle qui me reviennent. Les vidéos, c'est ce qui se passe ailleurs. Ce qui se passait à Sidi Bouzid, ce qui se passait à Kasserine" (Béatrice Dunoyer, interview, June 26, 2018, Tunis).

[541] My translation from the French.

[542] Thompson, *The Media and Modernity*, 230.

[543] Steven Rose, *The Making of Memory: From molecules to mind* (London: Bantam Press, 1993), 327.

[544] Van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*, 24.

remembers are "images a bit misshapen, piled up like a heap; they mix-up."[545] Indeed, objects support the persistence of memories, and the process of remembering is in constant evolution. Therefore, it would be misleading to say that the objects of memories fix them. Instead, these items participate actively in memory's endless reshape.

7.4.1 Not All Tunisians Have Digitally Mediated Experiences of the So-Called Instant: The Case of the Students of the Focus Group

Concerning the apparent dichotomy between different typologies of mediated experiences, it's worthwhile to stress that the students of the focus group never referred to the images watched, but only to experiences lived. The emotional phenomena from the memories of students in the focus group are similar to those remarked upon by previous interviewees and those who will follow in the next paragraphs. They mentioned, "nostalgia"[546] (Farouk) and, more specifically, for someone it is a "nostalgia of the revolution, especially the strikes and demonstrations,"[547] (Amna) to which some of the students participated. But they also mentioned "sadness"[548] (Imen), and in particular, "sadness towards Tunisia as a country"[549] (Raja), and "towards the past, the revolution"[550] (Moez). For another these emotions overlapped with his personal memories, recalling episodes of childhood with his uncle and his friends, and unemployment, with memories that recalled a lack of freedom of speech[551] (Farouk), a comment that links with the revolution's causes, discourses, and slogans.

These outcomes from the students reframe my assumptions concerning the role of social media in the timeframe between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's toppling and resize the influence of these informal networks on the users, at least for a certain generation of Tunisia's spectators/users. Consistently with Lara Baladi's clarification mentioned above, I have to underline that the students of the focus group never mentioned social media as a tool for becoming informed or participating; instead they indicated their use of television as a technology for information, alongside their physical experiences. This omission might be due also to the fact that, while the interviews focused on digital clips guided by specific questions,

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[545] My translation from the French.

[546] My translation from the French.

[547] My translation from the French.

[548] My translation from the French.

[549] My translation from the French.

[550] My translation from the French.

[551] "Le film m'a rappelé mon enfance avec mon oncle et ses amis et les problèmes de chômage. Sauf qu'avant les gens ne pouvaient pas s'exprimer" (Farouk Hachfi, focus group, December 10, 2018, Sousse).

in the focus group, I did not provide this framework of remembrance to the students. Perhaps, the apparent irrelevance of social media for these pupils might be due to generational reasons, as the subjects in question were teenagers in 2010–11 (between fourteen and eighteen years old). Therefore, it is plausible to think that they did not access the internet and social media, and preferably, they were relying on a formal medium, such as television,[552] which, in Tunisia, was and still is the most popular medium. Conversely, perhaps, the use of social media was a matter of fact for them, but if so, they should have a broader range of episodes to share in their memories. Compared to the subjects interviewed, the episodes emerged are quite poor in detail and variety. It is also possible, due to the time distance, that students have flattened the details of the events, with recourse only to residuals—for instance, when they mention "demonstrations" or "slogans" without any other characterizing information. In this case, the medium through which they also consumed information might become irrelevant to them.

However, it is worthwhile to stress that this is the case of digital natives, in theory, but natives who have grown up in a country where access to technological infrastructure and devices was limited, and censorship heavily restricted the use of the internet, as well as forums, blogs, and social media. Therefore, the data collected does not allow me to provide an accurate interpretation for explaining the role of social media and digital images in the memories of the subjects of the focus group. According to what was heard, I can only suppose that social media did not play a significant role for them. They mostly remember events that they could experience physically, both when these episodes are related to the revolution as an effect (e.g., to remain stuck at home for days) and when they are experienced in the same period of the unfolding turmoil (e.g., the departure of a relative). As claimed by Sturcken, "Memories and memory objects can move from one realm to another, shifting meaning and context. Thus personal memories can sometimes be subsumed into history, and elements of cultural memories can exist in concert with historical narratives."[553]

7.5. Cartoon Heros and Pop Songs Work as Memory Triggers

Susan Sontag establishes a sort of hierarchy among objects of memory. She claims that

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[552] During the interview, Manel Souissi provided an insight into the widespread fear among people concerning the circulation and even the download to private hardware of the audiovisual documents of the protests. Under the regime of surveillance and censorship, people feared to store even those images in the computer, as if the government could track them. Within this atmosphere, a very young, not IT skilled subject, living in a family environment, with limited political engagement, might not be familiar with consuming photos and clips of the demonstration through social media.

[553] Sturken, *Tangled Memories,* 5–6.

"nonstop imagery (television, streaming, video, movies) is our surrounding, but when it comes to remembering, the photograph has a deeper bite. Memory freeze-frames; its basic unit is the single image."[554] As Sturken acknowledges, still photographic images are seminal to memory, and still frames of images recall both memory and history.[555]

In this sense, the iconic photograph that depicts the scene of a man single-handedly defying anti-riot police with a baguette held like a machine gun, taken on January 14 on Avenue Bourguiba, is a relevant sample. "There is a photo depicting an old man, maybe mad, who holds a baguette as if it was a rifle,"[556] describes Chawki[557] (Figure 12). Vipa however recalls the scene as a video.

Indeed, both individual recalls and collective memory do not distinguish the object of memory. Instead, certain items, more than others, are more effective or powerful vehicles of memories. The way interviewees remember shows what such elaborated products the objects of memories are. When Vipa recalls images and events, he does not refer to the original visual source but instead to its elaborated version, namely the character Captain Khobza (Figure 13). According to Vipa, this is the most representative video of the Tunisian revolution.[558] Captain Khobza is the cartoon caricature character inspired by the real old man of the baguette photo mentioned above, invented by a group of anonymous communication professionals—four cousins, rumors say (known by pseudonyms such as Baker 1, Baker 2 and so on)—in the aftermath of Ben Ali's toppling.[559] The character of Captain Khobza, inspired by a real, funny,

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[554] Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others,* 22.

[555] Sturken, *Tangled Memories.*

[556] My translation from the French.

[557] Chawki is the main subject of the in-progress film *The Third Camera* by director Abdallah Yahyah. He has a background as a technician in television studios, but lived for years on the street.

[558] "Je crois que c'est la vidéo la plus représentative de la révolution tunisienne. Les autres vidéos peuvent être représentative d'une révolution. Mais tunisienne. Lui il avait le style, un sdf avec un pain qui fait le flingue avec un pain et il rigole, il y a de l'humour, il y a de l'action, il y a de la résistance, il y a de tout" (Vipa, interview, July 10, 2018, Tunis).

[559] "Captain Khobza (bread, in Arabic) wears the traditional fez hat, a red superman cape, and a mask. He has a cigarette dangling from his lips and carries a French baguette everywhere he goes" (Fpif Staff, "World's best political comedians," *Salon*, August 18, 2012, 5, accessed June 15, 2019, https://www.salon.com/2012/08/17/comedians_around_the_world_salpart/. Facebook's "Captain Khobza" page was founded on February 15, 2011, and the video episodes were regularly uploaded by its creators almost every day on Facebook and later on YouTube.The series shifted from the web to formal media one-and-half years after its launch, entering the sacred space of television. Captain Khobza acts together with other politicians and criticizes Tunisian politics and its actors. For the first time, all the problems of the country were openly pointed at, Tunisian politicians and public figures were criticized, and all this disapproval could be spread via the web and television (Rym Zayane Afif, informal interview, June 29, 2018, Tunis).

but also brave person who fearlessly challenges the police (meaning, the dictatorship's arm) alone, is transformed by means of irony and humor into a superhero. By remembering this fictional figure, the interviewee might have also absorbed the set of values of which the cartoon is a vehicle, such as that the utopian vision of a single man—not an ordinary one anymore, though—is capable of changing the corrupted status quo in Tunisia.

Among the recollections I recorded, music was also revealed to occupy a special place in the memories of people. In particular, among the soundtracks remembered was an informal performance by Tunisian singer Amel Mathlouthi[560] singing the song "La Liberté" (Figure 14), to which one of the two interviewees who evoked it assisted, and the emblematic song "Système" by Ben Dir Man.[561] Indeed, music is a vital component of personal and collective memory, and like photographs and diary entries, it carries a mnemonic function.[562] Emotions always accompany the recalling of these specific objects, which still manifest today. One of the interviewees, Béatrice Dunoyer, says: "Still nowadays, when I think about it, I cry, I cry, I cry."[563] More generally, the other interviewee reveals the "great impact" of music on her.

During the revolution, music was an essential means for spreading messages of civil dissent as well as an empowering tool. Paraphrasing neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, José van Dijck claims that the memory of a song is more durable in our memories when we affectively build a connection with it by constructing meaning for and around that object of memory. Unlike van Dijck, who addresses her reflections in particular to recorded songs, meaning compilations that the individual chose on an affective basis, here we are dealing indistinctly with live performance, video clips, and songs as autonomous entities. Nonetheless, songs work as triggers that bring back emotions connected to a precise time, event, or relationship (e.g., in a crowd, holding candles, at Avenue Habib Bourguiba), and memories of songs remain longer when the individual transforms the emotionally charged sound into an internal, intimate narrative. Their evocation goes widely beyond the mere message of subversive lyrics; it entails the way these songs were experienced and the linkage between the extended time before and after the revolution.

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[560] "The highlight is this song by Amel Mathlouthi, and this is a very strong song, even though the people don't like the person. I like this song so much, and it had a great impact on me" (Samah Krichah, June 13, 2018, Les Berges du Lac 2).

[561] "But also this funny song by Ben Dir Man, he is someone who is the leader of leftist political party in Tunisia, he was harassed during the Ben Ali era, he left for Canada. He was singing even before the revolution. He was against the system, and *Système* is an example. Don't touch the system, you will be cut by electricity. […] Songs play a huge role" (Samah Kricha, June 13, 2018, Les Berges du Lac 2).

[562] Van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age.*

[563] My translation from the French.

7.6 Memories Extend the Twenty-Nine-Day Phase of the Revolution in Time and Space

Although my questions concerned the videos shot between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's toppling, one interviewee also spontaneously recalled episodes that describe the general atmosphere, rather than a single event experienced, which seemed to mirror the changes brought by the revolution, for instance, with community moments of solidarity or self-organized citizen security services.[564] Similarly, students in the focus group remembered several lateral moments that were also part of the revolution itself, such as the "citizen mobilization in the aftermath of January 14, when people used to surveil the neighborhood, to protect it from raids, […] people shared the couscous with neighbors" (Meriem). Students remember the sense of community and the revolution as an occasion for Tunisian people to know each other. In this recollection, mistakes or slips also emerge. For instance, the police were mentioned as supporting citizens in this self-organized surveillance. This detail is actually false. On the contrary, it was the police who brutally attacked civilians and acted as the armed branch of the dictatorship, while during the revolution, it was the army that was sympathetic to the cause of citizens and was against the regime. This point is significant as it puts into light the constant renegotiations by which memories as dynamic and relational acts are affected. From the interviews, anecdotes that marked post-January 14, 2011 Tunisian recent history also emerge and which were assisted through online videos, for instance, the election of the National Constitutional Assembly, in March 2011, the speeches by politician Chokri Belaïd (murdered in February 2013),[565] which the interviewee defines as unforgettable and objects of constant attention, or more recently, the diffusion of a report concerning personal freedom, which included gender equality for expressing sexual orientation, heritage, etc.[566] Among the memories, the 2008 Redeyef uprising also emerges, which was the turmoil in the phosphate

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[564] "Et puis, petit à petit, après la révolution il y avait beaucoup de choses. Par exemple, tout ce qui se passe dans les rues, les jours après la chute de Ben Ali... c'est ce sont des choses magiques vraiment. Les gens se respectent beaucoup, ils se rassemblent parce qu'il n'y avait pas vraiment beaucoup de police. Ils font eux mêmes la police dans les rues. Ils y passent la nuit ensemble pour surveiller. Une ou deux semaines... tout le monde... donc ce sont des images qui me restent […]. Voilà on dit... on a fait quelque chose, après la révolution on a fait quelque chose" (Manel Souissi, interview, June 15, 2018, Tunis).

[565] "Il y a des discours faits par ce leader de gauche tunisienne qui a été assassiné en février 2012, Chokri Belaïd. Je regarde souvent ce qu'il a dit. Il a été filmé par des amateurs dans des régions, dans la région minière, il a fait des discours comme ça. C'est émouvant de les voir, de les revoir" (Manel Souissi, interview, June 15, 2018, Tunis).

[566] "L'Assemblée constituante, le jour où ils ont remis la Constitution. […] Jusqu'à ce jours, par exemple, lorsque cette commission qui a fait un rapport sur les libertés individuelles, c'était avant-hier. C'était aussi mémorable pour moi parce qu'ils ont remis un rapport sur tout ce qui est l'égalité des sexes, l'égalité des deux l'héritage, l'homosexualité ne sera plus sanctionnée" (Manel Souissi, interview, June 15, 2018, Tunis).

mine area of the Gafsa region in the south of the country that was discussed in Chapter 2. One of the interviewee notes that the revolution started there in 2008; he remembers the brave women of the region, and he was there in 2011 during the uprising.[567] But here it is not clear whether the interviewee remembers images of the turmoil in Redeyef or the participation in demonstrations in 2011 in the same area, or alternatively, if he refers to the images he shot there for the film *Nous sommes ici* that he directed in 2012. Yet, in the case of Redeyef's uprising, it is worthwhile to remark upon the enormous gap in visual testimonies concerning this turmoil, compared to the hyper-documentation of the twenty-nine-day phase.[568] "There are no collective images of the Redeyef protests, many people have interpreted this as truth in the aftermath of 2011,"[569] states director Mourad Ben Cheikh. It is now well-known that this lack of circulation of information about the 2008 uprising facilitated the brutal repression of the demonstrations and the revolt's movement by the government and was a form of repression that passed almost wholly unnoticed both locally and internationally. However, the question of what people can actually remember of this turmoil, and how they are collectively building the memory of an event of which they saw minimal representations, if any, still remains open. This point is extremely relevant and goes even beyond memory, as it concerns how visual gaps contribute to witnessing history as much as images do. Yahya's recollection shows the intricate intersection of memories with what he has seen, experienced, learned, and imagined.

A highly fictional and creative degree characterizes memory. Memories are not the recollection of the past. Instead, they are actual and ever-changing narratives of the present lived by the subject and a community. Therefore, the evocation of footage that exceeds the twenty-nine days of the uprising and revolution til Ben Ali's toppling is related to the cognitive process of memory, but not only. I argue that this is due also to the diffuse understanding that the revolution is collectively seen as an extended process in space and time and includes many other articulations. This understanding entails, for instance, the progressively diffused awareness that the revolution actually began in 2008 in Gafsa, one of the most marginalized, exploited, and weak areas in the country. In support of the idea that the revolution goes beyond the so-called instant, Thameur Mekki's remarks are very relevant. He claims that the changing of public space during the upheaval, the reflections upon what remained today of it in

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[567] Abdallah: La révolution a commencé à Redeyef en 2008. Je me souviens très bien de l'image des vieilles femmes de Redeyef, qui sont d'un courage.

Marianna: Donc votre mémoire recule à Gafsa.

Abdallah: En 2011 j'étais là dans les manifestations (Abdellah Yahya, interview, July 6, 2018, Tunis).

[568] According to Selma Zghili, the circulation of visual testimonies of the civil dissent was very difficult for activists and journalists, at that time (Selma Zghili, informal interview, June 19, 2018, Tunis).

[569] Mourad Ben Cheikh, informal interview, June 23, 2018, Tunis. My translation from the Italian.

the public domain, or the relation of power with the changing of public space are also very relevant questions, which concern the further articulation of memories of the revolution.

7.7 Refusal of Remembering, Refusal of Rewatching

Alongside memories, the interviewees also reveal "ambivalent feelings"[570] towards the revolution. The images recall big emotions in them but also existential questions, such as "Did we do right?"[571] (Manel Souissi), "Could one do better?" and "Did I make the right choices?"[572] which brings them to raise political questions with an emotional dimension. Director Abdallah Yahya reveals that he couldn't remember any specific representation of the revolution, although during the uprising, many good images were taken, and he took some images as well. Yahya thinks that perhaps, unconsciously, his films might contain these images.[573]

Here, I remark upon a mix of the refusal of remembering, rather than real obliteration, alongside contradictory claims that show the hostility by these interviewees to engage with memory and its objects. These reactions are consistent with emotional phenomena such as disillusionment and nostalgia that the interviewee has highlighted during the conversation, which affect and block the process of remembering. More importantly, Yahya recalls the cathartic role of art, in this case, cinema, as the place where these images have migrated have assumed new meaning as well as aesthetic and conceptual modification. Another interviewee,

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[570] "Comme on dit, quand tu révises, quand tu fais la révision pour préparer un examen, et tu passes l'examen, après tu te dis: 'Merde! J'aurais dû faire ça, ou j'aurais aimé que ça soit fait comme ça.' Mais ça va tu as la moyenne dans l'examen. Tu te dis: 'J'aurais pu faire mieux.' C'est ça le sentiment, c'est bien mais on peut faire mieux. Depuis tout à l'heure, on parle de moi" (Vipa, interview, July 10, 2018, Tunis).

[571] My translation from the French.

[572] "Elles sont toujours des images qui me rappellent cette période, on pouvait faire de mieux, si j'ai fait des bonnes choix, c'est une grande émotion mais ça suscite aussi des remises en question, des reflections. En tant que citoyen, c'est un moment de citoyenneté, par excellence. On ne peut pas diviser le moment personnelle du moment citoyens. Les deux sont indissociable. C'est une forte émotion consciente, c'est un moment je prétend d'être faisant partie de ces personne qui ont longtemps rêvé à ce moment" (Thameur Mekki, interview, July 3, 2019, Tunis).

[573] "Il y a de belles images de la révolution. […] J'ai pris des vidéos même pendant la période de la révolution dans les manifestations mais je n'ai pas vraiment de souvenirs. On peut peut-être trouver ça dans le film *Nous sommes ici* avec un autre contexte. Mais peut-être dans le 3e, 4e et 5e film, les images de la révolution restent. Je crois même que le prochain film, on trouve dans les images. Peut-être que tous les films que je fais reflètent ça. Parce que j'ai commencé à faire des films après la révolution. C'est la révolution qui m'a poussé à faire des films. Après 5 ou 6 films je peux construire une image, je cherche les choses avec les films" (Abdellah Yahya, interview, July 6, 2018, Tunis).

Chawki, also declares that he doesn't have memories of the time of the revolution. He didn't care about the political situation of the country as he was too absorbed by his personal challenges.[574] One of the students revealed that recalling the revolution brings her back to "a sad memory in relation to personal hard times,"[575] that is, the departure of a brother to Europe, who migrated from Tunisia in search of a better life (Cyrine).[576] Here, again, traumatic personal events overlap and overwhelm the memories of a national kind. Similarly to the case of one interviewee analyzed previously, the personal sphere prevails over the public one.

As claimed by Sturken, "national events are often traumatic ones; we remember where we were when it happened."[577] Nevertheless, the amnesia that we saw in the former case is due to the depression in which the interviewee has fallen; in the second one, it probably mirrors the sense of exclusion from the society experienced by this citizen, a feeling injected by his living conditions at the margins as an outsider for several years. The refusal of remembering also prevents them from going back to the digital images in question and to rewatch them. One of the interviewees talks about an initial "sweet nostalgia. […] In the first two or three years, until 2013, maybe early 2014, before the second elections, I used to go back to the videos of the revolution, the songs about the revolution, and all the artist videos also appeared in this period, after 2011, to also fuel my engagement." Then, a "bitter feeling" arises. A sense of depression comes up and brings her to reject the images, as watching the videos "hurt" (Samah Krichah).[578] The bond with the country is felt as "a love relationship, as if

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[574] "La vérité? Rien. Parce que je n'étais pas intéressé. Je n'étais intéressé que par ma situation. Je m'en fous que ce soit Ben Ali ou Benyamin Netanyahou qui est président. C'est pareil pour moi. Mais maintenant, 8 ans après la révolution, je vois que les politiciens sont des voleurs plus que Ben Ali, surtout les islamistes. Donc c'est pareil pour moi. C'est le même niveau, ce sont tous des dictateurs et des voleurs. (Chawki, within the interview with Abdellah Yahya, July 6, 2018, Tunis).

[575] My translation from the French.

[576] "Souvenir triste par rapport à un souvenir personnel. Mon frère a dû partir en France pour chercher du travail" (Cyrine, focus group, December 10, 2018, Sousse).

[577] Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 25.

[578] "In the first two or three years, until 2013 maybe early 2014, before the second elections [...]. But after the elections of 2014, it was a bitter feeling I had. That is why videos do not have traffic anymore, cause it hurts to watch that. At this time, I'm depressed, everyone is depressed concerning what is happening in the country, and going from worse and worse every day. And we had that sweet dream we could change everything and that this could be the best country in the world, and we have much individual freedom from this perspective, we have better conditions for people, and less corruption, every political sensitivity and the right for everyone to speak up, everything from my understanding, to my perspective. I acknowledge that there were huge and baby steps, I would say, in the process. We now have the parliament; we now have two free elections, we have many assets now, since the mentality is not changing and the corruption is going higher. [...] This is my relationship with my country. It is like a love relationship as if I was dating someone who I love so much and I

I was dating someone who I love so much and I still love, that I don't want to see our pictures together, not to be hurt and cry" (Samah Krichah). Here, again, emotional phenomena that involve the individual and the national sphere overlap through the metaphor of love. Also in relation to re-watching the footage after time, Samah Krichah explains that she does not go back frequently to the clips,she feels that they were important in a precise time-frame;[579] the revolution's images carry disarray, Moez Mrabet says. "Those images had a value in a specific moment, when individuals couldn't experience the event, because it was faraway.[580]" Other interviewees note that they don't even have a curiosity for watching them again, as they have played their role;[581] or for another interviewee, Béatrice Dunoyer, it is too painful.[582] Or, when the opportunity to look for these audiovisual materials occurs, it is for research purposes (as for instance, on behalf of artists),[583] says Dunoyer. Conversely, in one case, one of the interviewees, Kais Zriba, states that he still looks at videos. He notes that rewatching the videos conveys some energy.[584] A slightly different form of rejection is expressed by another interviewee, Mohamed Zran, who by claiming that "the revolution has been confiscated," also raises a crucial point. Indeed, he states that the Tunisians created a "shell of dreams" in order to be able to confront their memories.[585]

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still love, that I don't want to see our pictures together, not to be hurt and cry. This is exactly how I feel about this relation" (Samah Krichah, interview, June 13, 2018, Les Berges du Lac 2).

[579] "Le temps passant, on les regarde moins ces images […] elles étaient importantes pour nous à ce moment-là" (Ismael Chebbi, interview, June 18, 2018, Tunis).

[580] "Nous fascinaient parce qu'on ne pouvait pas encore les vivre, […] ce passait restait loin de nous, géographiquement […] à partir du moment où on a pu les vivre, elles ont perdu leur pouvoir de fascination" (Ismael Chebbi, interview, June 18, 2018, Tunis).

[581] "Je n'ai même pas la curiosité de les voir. Il semble qu'ils ont fait leur rôle. Et ça fait partie de notre mémoire, certainement" (Manel Souissi, interview, June 15, 2018, Tunis).

[582] "Personnellement non, sauf… peut être… effectivement j'ai peine, je souffre à en parler" (Béatrice Dunoyer, interview, June 26, 2018, Tunis).

[583] "Du coup on a repris la vidéo, même si par contre ça nous arrive souvent de rechercher pour des artistes. Et du coup en fait, il y a des sites où il y a toutes les vidéos de la Révolution et du coup on a pas mal d'artistes avec qui on a travaillé, qui ont travaillé à partir de ces documents là. Mais pour aller plus loin" (Béatrice Dunoyer, interview, June 26, 2018, Tunis).

[584] "Pas vraiment…Je les regarde parce que je suis en train d'archiver quelques vidéos, je voudrais faire quelque chose mais pas aujourd'hui. Ça sera un projet à long terme. J'ai téléchargé une bonne partie des vidéos pendant la révolution et à chaque fois je les regarde un peu juste pour me redonner un peu d'énergie pour se rappeler un peu ce qui s'est passé" (Kais Zriba, interview, June 24, 2018, Tunis).

[585] "Ces images sont vives, sont là, avec nous [on] les utilisent, je pense qu'il sont quelque chose... Je pense que chacun de nous a fait une carapace des images de la révolution, quand la révolution n'apparaît ici, on port tout un carapace..." (Mohamed Zran, July 3, 2018, Tunis).

It is worthwhile to stress that nostalgia and disillusion have become a leitmotiv to describe a collective, social, and emotional state, a general atmosphere, as well as the symptoms of post-January 14, 2011—and the experience of the revolutionary process, which has stunned the regions of North Africa. Furthermore, nostalgia and sadness are expressed for different moments and episodes, and for different reasons. These emotions get mixed-up, evolve over time, and overlap with other feelings or thoughts, and a single term can embed different meanings according to how the individual uses it. "Nostalgia […] selects particular aspects of the past that are emotionally valued and singles them out for particular attention, if not in some cases fetishization."[586] In this concern, convivial community moments (e.g., sharing food with neighbors), strikes, and demonstrations for students seem to be the loss to which their nostalgia refers.

The narrative constructed by the students mainly reframe the time of the revolution as a glorious time when the people could finally claim their citizenship and show their dissent publicly. However, they do not mention, for instance, the police brutality against civilians or the martyrs whose names or numbers are still unknown. As Azyz Amami argues, people liked the revolution and the excitement that it provoked.[587] In an in-depth analysis of the recovery-memory syndrome in victims of abuse in American society, Sturken questions that if many women are willing to believe that they have been victims of abuse despite not having memories of the experience, this can be considered evidence that these women still identify themselves as disempowered or powerlessness subjects.[588] Through this lens, I argue that, similarly, emotional phenomena emerged both across the interviews and focus group and reflect the general sense of frustration experienced by Tunisians, which has been shaped over the years by the economic crisis, a difficult democratic transition, the exploitation of the country's sources by foreign enterprise, and several other challenges. In this sense, both what they remember and related emotional states are shaped by the present circumstances and feelings.

However, it is worthwhile to stress that these are not the only outcomes, and the landscape appears much more varied, so its interpretation is not that simple. Someone mentions also "optimism"[589] (Meriem), "many things" (Anwar), which I interpreted as "confusion"; a "sense of paradox"[590] (Ichrak) in relation to what has happened after the

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[586] Smith and Campbell, "'Nostalgia for the future: Memory, Nostalgia and the Politics of Class,'" 615.

[587] "La révolution a plu. A plu la sueur, a plus les lacrymogènes, tu peux te laisser dessus par peur. Quand il est vécu il n'y a que le battement de coeur qui est bien" (Azyz Amami, interview, March 25, 2019, Tunis).

[588] Sturken, "The Remembering of Forgetting: Recovered Memory and the Question of Experience," *Social Text*, no. 57 (Winter 1998), accessed August 25, 2019, http://www.maritasturken.org/articles-1/.

[589] My translation from the French.

[590] My translation from the French.

revolution; but also "power" (Nour), "ambition, when the people went out in the streets and gathered together asking for a change"[591] (Rim). These latter comments also show the other side of the coin, opposite to the victimization expressed by the sense of "confiscated revolution" and betrayal that fly around. By claiming that "the emotional is *in situ* and not in retrospect,"[592] Azyz Amami implicitly confirms the *presentness* of the emotions that emerged as an expression of the now, of the present that composes individual and collective memories. Moreover, he considers the emotional evaluations as a way to highlight something.[593]

7.8 The Potentiality for Further Narrative

What do these points just analyzed prove of my initial hypothesis? My research questions concern what narratives come up from the remembrances of the interviewees and the inherent montage of clips that their memory produces seven years later. Further questions concern how the footage changes its meaning through memory, and what these memories as narratives add to them. First, I noticed that the situations captured by clips that emerged in the memories of the interviewees are broad, varied, and vivid. As anticipated, most of the clips recalled by the interviewees are also among the most iconic ones from the perspective of non-Tunisian observers. They have already entered prosthetic memory. For instance, the "Ben Ali hram!" clip also corresponds with the videos more recently commented on by the users, as I showed in Chapter 5. This proves the transnational dimension reached by certain footage. Conversely, other clips, such as the footage of youth from Jbel Lahmar, or the video of citizens protecting the flag, were known for me, and they do not relate to any specific date or episode in the chronicles. The interviewees mainly recall episodes and clips that depict moments of glory when the single citizen or the crowd stood bravely in front of symbols of the state power (e.g. the police, the Ministry of Interior) and challenged and confronted them. The memories also remark upon episodes that stress an evolution in Tunisian citizens, who, from being oppressed citizens, turn into subjects who are able to control their representation in the media. Or, interviewees gave relevance to circumstances where their fellow citizens impressed them for their bond to the country, this latter characteristic being symbolized by a national emblem, such as the flag.

The stories stemming from memories represent the people, who performed their rights as citizens in public against all forms of authoritarianism, abuse of power, violence at any level,

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[591] My translation from the French.

[592] My translation from the French. Azyz Amami, interview, March 25, 2019, Tunis.

[593] "L'évaluation affective c'est une mise en valeur, et mise en valeur c'est une capitalisation par rapport à…" (Azyz Amami, interview, March 25, 2019)

censorship, and marginality. The narratives emerging give visibility to empowering anecdotes or circumstances that show the growing awareness of citizens regarding their individual and collective strength. Conversely, memories of abuse, violence, or martyrs rarely come up, despite my expectations. This result appears to clash with the fact that these audiovisual materials have been at the centre of the debate for years in the country, as in the words of Azyz Amami, which I mentioned in Chapter 6. Indeed, the Bouderbala Commission takes into consideration these materials as testimonies to shed light on the crimes that occurred during the twenty-nine days. Only Thameur Mekki quickly mentions episodes of brutality, for instance the death of Hatem Bettahar, which I already mentioned in relation to the AnarChnowa video mash-ups; or protesters who attack the police. Despite the little attention paid to these remembrances, he also gives a glimpse into the less glorious moments of the people. In this concern, can I state that the clips recalled during the interviews are unrelated to those more often recurring or contested within actual political or media debates over the years? I have only a few elements to support this idea, and it might not be enough for proving this statement. However, the outcomes appear to show that the interviewees replied to my questions by truly digging into the mediated objects or experiences that emotionally involved them the most, instead of reporting images still in circulation and predominant across the public debate.

Recalling images and lived circumstances carry a sense of nostalgia, disillusionment, and bitter feelings towards an apparent missed opportunity. These reactions are in common with citizens in other countries that experienced the Arab Uprisings. Therefore, despite Tunisian success in overthrowing the dictatorship, the democratic transition and its inherent problems, together with severe economic stagnation and related social issues, enforce a sense of defeat as well as the awareness that the revolution is not over. The metaphor that describes the feelings of one of the interviewees towards the country post-January 14, 2011 is also emblematic. Comparing the disillusionment toward the revolution to a broken romantic relationship is symptomatic of a deep discomfort and emotional unease that continues to affect Tunsians seven years after Ben Ali's fall.

The results emerging from the focus group are a bit different, and partly falsify my expectations. The projection of the film as a mnemonic trigger brought them to dig further into emotional phenomena rather than drawing from images. Also, the students were probably too young in 2010–11 to retain more than just sensations and lateral anecdotes related to togetherness, conviviality, and so on. They also connect the time between Bouazizi's self-immolation and Ben Ali's escape with difficult moments of their personal life or their childhood more clearly than the interviewees. Therefore, I can state that the narratives outlined by the students appear to be more emancipated from the visual reference of the footage, and therefore, very personal, broad, and all-encompassing, to a certain extent.

Furthermore, when the subjects recall their memories, they don't distinguish between images and lived experiences. Everything overlaps in one unitary, composite narrative. This is a relevant aspect that puts into discussion my initial hypothesis about the contribution given by social networks and digital objects (or connective memory objects) to shape the modes of remembering the revolution. From the answers of the subjects, I understand that it is not only impossible but also absurd to isolate reactions to "digital memory objects" (meaning the vernacular videos) and "mediated objects" (meaning directly experienced episodes). In fact, the different types of memories mentioned in detail thus far are not diverse in our brain and body. Memories do not lay in separate boxes in the individual; they mix with other knowledge, thoughts, emotional states, gaps, and refusals to remember. Furthermore, as it is evident, both interviewees and students of the focus group remembered similar or common episodes, such as collective gatherings, demonstrations, and slogans, especially when they were directly, physically, and emotionally involved in them. These results from the interviews and focus group bring us to remark that mediated memory, intended to mean the sense of memory of events experienced or mediated by analogue tools, such as television, do not diverge significantly from connective memory in the sense of digital memory objects influenced by the principles of connectivity. However the memories of students of the major episodes come from mediated images watched at the television, when not directly experienced. This aspect appears to falsify my initial assumption concerning the widespread phenomenon of amateur filming insomuch the consumption of audiovisuals testimonies on social networks.

Furthermore, I have stressed thus far that connective memory objects and their value seem dispersed when we consider the outcomes of the students. However, if it is true that nobody aside from the citizens themselves who fed *Al Jazeera* and other mainstream media broadcast networks images informing the world about the turmoil of the region, it follows that the images consumed by the students on television were the same as those circulating online—probably in a considerably smaller quantity, deprived of the contextual practice typical of the consumption of social media, and framed within the typical mainstream news style. Yet, I can argue that the students have also experienced, at least unconsciously, this social-networked, mediated visual heritage but through the process of repetition, re-enactment, and docu-drama, which are the primary elements of television's historicization.

Nonetheless, that which considerably diverges from mediated memory (meaning a memory coming from any form of direct experience) and connective memory is the potentiality that digital objects of connective memory carries for future narratives. As said, memory is not a linear process of rescuing episodes from former times. Instead, it is a projection of the present to the past, a complex, multilayered intersection of time, experience, and knowledge. If so, we can assume that the legacy left by the digital objects of connective memory in question definitely have an impact on the mode of remembering. This influence works regardless of the

footage that comes up consciously as items of memory. But in what capacity?

The digital object of memory proves that the time and space lived by subjects determine their recourse to mediation. As predicted, the subjects participate in events when they are close to them, rather than observing them through the screen or the internet. Conversely, distance has brought citizens as spectators to rely on images and etch them into memory, as no other physical experience can replace them. Nonetheless, the distinction between the different experiences sometimes blur, which reveals that lived reality and images melt. In the case of the focus group, the result is different, as the distance from the demonstrations did not necessarily activate an interest in the students in searching for additional documentation of the events online or through other sources.

One of my hypotheses examines memory as counter-space, in comparison with the online sphere, where clips have become increasingly untraceable. Memory as a factor able to cope with invisibility has partly emerged already in the research for online materials in Chapter 5. In this latter section, it emerges that recent comments to some clips showed appropriation and reactualization of footage in relation to present circumstances by online users. This expectation is confirmed also through the interviews. Remembrances of images and related episodes are still vivid and emotionally charged. The present circumstances lived by Tunisians influence the way of remembering and the related feelings, according to the changing present circumstances post-January 14, 2011. Furthermore, when it comes to looking at what clips they still remember, the answers are the result of an intimate form of recollection, which materializes with clips that show the people in their moments of glory, and in taking back their citizenship as well as the public sphere.

The subjects' remembrances fill the gaps and limits of any archival infrastructure. Indeed, the interviewees vividly remember episodes that impressed them, accompanied by abundant details about the surrounding atmosphere, images from the past, and emotional phenomena. More importantly, in some cases the clips recalled can not be easily retrieved online via keywords. This is the case when, for instance, the title is not easy to guess or does not report logical connections with the event filmed. Memory turns, in this case, into the only tool available against obliteration and loss.

However, the clips are also subjected to invisibility in the domain of memory, and this remarkable outcome contributes to resizing my initial hypothesis concerning memory as a counter-tool against their disappearance. How? In the historical phase when my interviews took place, I saw a refusal to remember and suffer, which prevents the subjects from revisiting these memory objects. In this sense, the apparent dispersion of the footage in the flow online, and potential obliteration, seem to also repeat among some of the interviewees. The difference stays in the cause that determines this process. Pain and suffering bring some subjects to reject recollection, even if within the structured situation of an interview. However, in the future,

emotions will change, and so will relations to the images, their remembrance, and the actualization of them.

Yet, the expectation concerning memory as a counter-space, and in particular, the potential expansion of memories of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution, thanks to amateur digital objects, is also partly verified.

The digital objects extend the episodes recalled by those who experienced the revolution. In addition to that, I argue that the massive amount of memory objects existing as relational acts will work in the long term for those who did not experience the revolution directly, nourishing their imagination, and in turn, furthering memories and narratives about the revolution. In parallel, these digital objects influence the proliferation of prosthetic memories for the distant or foreign spectator (like all Western user-viewers), who, through the mediation of videos, appropriates someone else's history. As I already remarked, amateur clips as "digital dormant memory,"[594] are still potentially transmittable and available for people searching in the archive of the internet and in social media. The considerable difference between the possibility offered by television's archives and social media concerns searchability and accessibility. What Hoskins calls the *mediated* present, that is, the extended present created by electronic media, also persists in informal media, but amplified and with relevant variations, given precisely by these two features.

In other words, the quantity and variety of these clips produced over the twenty-nine days between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's toppling have allowed viewers to reconstruct phases of the protests that would have remained otherwise untold and untraced because neither foreigner nor local mass media broadcasts covered the events. In this way, digital footage has contributed to filling the gaps and acknowledges several events that the subjects could only partly physically experience. In this sense, by distinguishing between remembering the videos or lived experience, the interviewees attribute a crucial role automatically to the former, which are used to replace active presence.

Therefore, I argue that digital objects empower the spectator by means of extending the possibilities of individual memory across physically experimentable space and senses (and not merely time). Digital objects worked pragmatically and conceptually as a prosthesis of the eyes during the revolution, and they function as an extension of memory post-January 14, 2011. They are "material triggers for future recall."[595] However, this characteristic can apparently concern any mediatized image potentially able to create a prosthetic memory. The real difference embedded in the digital objects (or connective memory objects) in question stays in the inherent potential of these items post-January 14, 2011 to be broadly re-watched, downloaded, and manipulated without authorization or intermediation.

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[594] Hoskins, "Media, Memory, Metaphor," 26.

[595] Van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*, 39.

To conclude, the answers collected show interesting and ambivalent results that resize and articulate my definition of *connective memory objects*. Indeed, this latter notion appears to fit into these items circulating on Facebook and YouTube mostly in theory. In practice, memory is not directly influenced by the commercial or profit-oriented nature of the footage. In fact, the capitalistic character of social media as digital archives and databases becomes irrelevant when the images enter individual memory. In addition to that, many memories stem from live experiences rather than images consumed, as the interviewees report. In other cases, mainstream broadcast channels and the formal media were the major sources of information for specific segments of the Tunisian population (e.g. youth, the elderly, those outside digital progress and who do not have access to technological devices, the internet; or those without IT skills). My definition of the vernacular videos in question through the specific denotation of a *connective memory object* stresses the relationship between memory and the capitalist nature of the platforms they circulate in an extreme way. So, in this sense the attribution of *connective memory objects* to the vernacular footage in question might be out of proportion in the specific post-January 14, 2011. This remark is enforced by Guillaume Chaslo's explanation, which highlights that social networks are not interested in boosting militant audiovisuals over time as these materials are not monetizable.

However, as I described in Chapter 1, YouTube and Facebook take advantage of the genre of vernacular videos by ordinary citizens, and in general, of all visual testimonies that escape state power or censorship, filmed and shared by the users living and experiencing extreme circumstances. By providing a space for images and stories that would not find a place otherwise, social networks turn into the most controversial and ambiguous militant tools. Seminal historical testimonies by non-professional citizens have spread globally in a way impossible before the internet era, precisely thanks to these platforms. Therefore, I can argue that splitting the capitalist nature of social media from the videos that they transmit, and the influence that this relationship can create on what, how, and why people remember the clips in question is not consistent with these specific types of videos.

Conclusion

I end this dissertation by tracing a thread through the different questions examined over the research, intending to connect the results that emerged from the empirical data consistently, as well as to stress contradictions and limits of my approach. In addition, I will pinpoint some issues stemming from the answers provided by the empirical data that for different reasons remained under discussed but which could suggest further paths and new scenarios of exploration beyond this study.

My initial questions concern whether and how social networks—and specifically YouTube and Facebook—can play the role of digital archives of the vernacular videos that were produced and circulated during the twenty-nine-day phase of the Tunisian revolution. Furthermore, I inquire how the presumed function of social media as archives of spontaneous, vernacular, inherently activist footage coexists with the commercial nature of these platforms. In connection with this point, the research aims to explore and assess the power and the limits of the authority of the algorithm on contents, and therefore, its influences on visibility and circulation of the non-commercial, activist footage in question online. Within this frame, I also inscribe my initial question about the role of the spectator as an agent of transformation in the clips of the instant, and ultimately the storytelling that he or she is able to provide in the aftermath of Ben Ali's toppling, over the course of the ongoing revolutionary process.

According to the empirical data that the research provides, it emerges that social networks can be considered digital repositories for the clips in question post-January 14, 2011. They fit into the principal characteristics of the time-based archive defined by Ernst, which distinguishes itself from traditional forms of organized collections of digital repositories. The differing characteristics include attributes such as transmission versus storage (or better, transmission as storage), circulation versus place, and co-authorship versus authority. Although these features became common also in other forms of the archive, and not necessarily only digital ones, I can still claim that social media is the most interesting and ambivalent example.

These theoretical presumptions are the starting point in approaching the research for online materials, which shows that the transmission of footage as preservation called into question by Ernst is the first problematic aspect post-January 14, 2011. The non-circulation and invisibility of the clips shot during the early twenty-nine days emerge over time from the diminishing number of views and comments, both on YouTube and Facebook. This basic, objective evidence shows the influence exercised by the profit-oriented characteristic of the platforms on the potential of these internet services in being archives. In fact, the progressively widening distance of users from the historical events in terms of time have indubitably affected the consumption and recirculation of the audiovisual materials. Therefore, the apparent

vanishing of these items is also a consequence of these variables. So what is the point of focusing on the commercial nature of the platforms and to start from this perspective of observing a process of disappearance of images that seem, instead, very endemic, and natural?

The profit-oriented feature of social networks contributes to making these potential repositories much more fragile than any other kind of analogue or digital archive. Indeed, social networks are extremely sensitive to the time distance from contents that they are supposed to transmit, compared to other non-internet based digital archives, especially when it comes to considering non-monetizable objects. Within this category there are obviously the amateur videos in question, despite their militant and historical value. The threat of dispersion of these specific items is, thus, a real problem, and it is accompanied by concrete difficulties to find again and retrieve contents via keywords, or even more through the search for profiles of other users. However, in relation to this aspect, YouTube over Facebook as a time-based archive of the videos in question post-January 14, 2011, emerges clearly as the most functional one. In particular, YouTube is structured to be used by users-spectator retrospectively in this historical phase for seeking contents that are temporally distant but dormant in the flow. Operational features such as searchability of contents and open access to the platform make YouTube an imperfect search engine, which is at the same time also an ideal database and thus source for other, unlimited forms of repositories and storytelling to come. These are possibilities that Facebook cannot offer in the same way that YouTube does. This distinction is extremely relevant in this study, as most of the time the Tunisia case is tightly linked in plural ways to Facebook because of the role that this latter service has had as the predominant and popular medium before as well as during the upheaval of January 14. According to this consideration, I am also aware that the practical phase of the research for online materials started unconventionally, meaning from YouTube rather than Facebook. But as I clarified, in the moment when my study started, the relations among the different social media and the local context were already different, compared to the pre-January 14, 2011 era. Furthermore, I find important to stress that due to the lack of literature about YouTube in relation to Tunisia, my study took the risk to attempt tracing social processes and boundaries between the use of this user-generated content platform and the Tunisian users-spectators only, via tools such as direct observation online and data from interviews.

Therefore, by shifting the attention to YouTube, an underexplored platform when it comes to looking at Tunisia, my research puts into light new issues that broaden the perspective on the use of social media in the country during the revolutionary process. It shows that YouTube works as an archive for retrieving items in the present and from the past, whereas Facebook can only allow the collection of items in the moment, while active in the flow. This achievement overturns the understanding of the function of social media in relation

to past, present, and future. In this sense, it appears that the commercial nature of social media contributes to stressing effects that time, especially the time-distance from certain events, and the historical flow can play on dormant, valuable documents that the platforms in question store.

These remarks lead me to provide some answers to my questions about the modes of the spectators in performing the archive, the videos in question, challenging the power of the algorithm, and ultimately contributing to transmission, preservation and resignification of the clips in question post-January 14, 2011.

The empirical findings of the research online show the limits of social networks, which simply do not exist as repositories per se, as any other form of analogue or digital repositories do.

This means that, if according to Michel Foucault an archive is first and foremost a system of rules, the ordering scheme on which social media grounds their functioning is the algorithm, which cannot run independently from the activity of users, including their interests, emotional states, and preferences, which determine all together their time of consumption of products online. In other words, social networks need the engagement of the user more than any other type of repository, and in order to perform as an organized collection, are nourished out of this human involvement. The user-spectator is the person who enacts social media as archives, makes use of them, and makes their capacity of transmitting contents, while preserving them, possible. This is a significant remark because it shifts the attention from the infrastructural characteristic of social media as a potential archive to the user-spectator and the role played by this character. He or she as a storyteller enacts social networks and its contents by means of montage, while he or she is ultimately the only subject in charge of making social media as archives exist.

These considerations should not overlook the process of transformation already in progress that affects the status of amateur videos post-January 14, 2011. From being individual, grassroots, amateur documentation shared spontaneously by non-professional shooters and users online or kept hidden in private storage, the clips in question turned into official materials of national validity. This is an extremely relevant aspect, as the storytelling of a portion of the history of Tunisia is based on the documents that citizens have produced and that they often shared online. In fact, today, pixelated, shaky audiovisual materials appear to be thus far almost the only testimonies that have documented the twenty-nine-day phase of the Tunisian revolution and on which the entire, official acknowledged storytelling of this crucial historical phase is based. Clips, together with amateur photos, slogans, Facebook posts, and so on are the only grounding materials through which key moments of the Tunisian revolution can be recorded and tracked. Furthermore, the audiovisual materials in question turned into

valid testimonies suitable for use in trials and have been employed as proof within the transitional justice process embarked on by the country.

Within this context and the atmosphere characterized by common emotional phenomena such as nostalgia, disillusionment, and regret as general leitmotif emerging among the people in the aftermath of the Arab Uprising, I observed grassroots initiatives that have preempted or sprouted in parallel with the transformation of status of the clips, and in addition, were propelled, and validated by the institutional acknowledgments mentioned above. These projects mirror the new interpretations concerning vernacular videos and the changing value of these materials post-January 14, 2011. Formally, spectators have spontaneously used social networks as databases, archives, as well as sources to generate other forms of repositories; or to rescue the memory of the footage over the years, by means of forms of narrative more or less unitary, such as documentaries, pop video-mash-ups, or organized collections. Spectators use YouTube as a database in which they find and display the same contents that they recombine, as in the cases of video-episodes in YouTube channel AnarChnowa, and the grassroots initiative of archive produced by *Nawaat*. I argue that these samples can be defined ultimately as meta-archives, for their existence within and in respect of the same rules typical of the social network on which they are on display. In terms of narrative, in the case of AnarChnowa, the remix of footage conveys the whole set of manipulations operated by politicians and media over the years concerning the revolution as an historical event and the steps of the democratic transition of the country. So, the fictional stories stemming from the recombination with other found footage are able to disclose truths that are normally kept aside from public discussions. Conversely, *Nawaat* organizes a collection of video documents shot and uploaded between 2011 and 2017 that are only partially visible on YouTube. The playlist emblematically ends with clips of the public hearing session organized in 2017 by the IVD (Truth and Dignity Commission), and thus, it acknowledges justice and reconciliation as fundamental phases of the revolution. The clips turned into an aesthetic model for trustworthiness for a broad range of users-spectators and established a style in post-January 14, 2011, Tunisia. Also, spectators have embodied them as a visual heritage from which they try to emancipate, in order to go beyond a collective image of Tunisia that is both emotionally overwhelming and obsolete.

Conversely, YouTube functions as a database from where to retrieve items to remix and resignify offline. In this sense, there are samples such as the recall of the mediated memory of the interviewees—both clips and events experienced, the *Dégage* documentary, and partly, the official archive of the revolution located at the National Archive in Tunis. Through these cases, I argue that the mode of using digital items shed light on the online and offline life of the images in question in the digital ecology post-January 14, 2011.

In particular, both *Dégage* and the official archive ultimately use clips from YouTube to fill geographical and temporal gaps or a lack of information. But, there is more. Also during the days of upheaval between December 17, 2010 and Ben Ali's flights, clips served as replacements of the body's presence, meaning the impossibility to participate physically in the events. Therefore, the audiovisual testimonies in question represented crucial items for making distant observations and mediated experience possible, regardless if the user-spectator is Tunisian or non-Tunisian, or resides in the country or abroad. Therefore, whereas the role of the online footage pre and post-January 14, 2011 seems subaltern, this is actually not the case. In fact, it must be acknowledged that the online footage worked as a prosthesis of eyes and corpse, during the twenty-nine days of struggle that led to Ben Ali's toppling, while today these videos serve the fundamental tasks of supporting the accuracy of historiographical reports, a testimony of revolutionary events, and expanding the collective memory of them, in terms of volume and type of episodes.

Therefore, I can argue that the real risk for contents, such as the vernacular videos of the Tunisian revolution shot between Bouazizi's immolation and Ben Ali's toppling, is not the objective disappearance from the internet flow, as it is unlikely that items just vanishes in the internet; neither is it the impossibility to retrieve, or find them, despite the imperfect infrastructure of YouTube. The true danger for these clips is the obliteration from individual and collective memory.

Especially in relation to this point, I can state that, by means of exploring what people remember seven years after January 14, 2011, I accessed different forms of narratives and meta-narratives in which the spectators are literally the storytellers, and as such, serve twofold functions. They keep the clips alive, while contributing to reattribute additional meanings, and thus actualizing them at each reuse or recall. But also, by remembering, spectators blur the borders of digitally versus physically mediated experiences and render unitary narratives that depict the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution seven years later. The highest moments of citizenship experienced by Tunisians emerge from the interviewees' recalls, which include, for instance, instants when the citizens challenge the state's authority; moments in which the awareness of people of the crucial role that the dominion of images have in influencing the fate of the country is evident. In addition, a whole set of emotional phenomena, existential introspection, self-questioning, doubts, resistances to actualize lived scenes emerged and describe the variety of stories that are in progress seven years later. Indeed, through these memories people are not just providing materials suitable from writing untold narratives of the revolution, they are telling their own stories while remembering the upheaval.

In this concern, a deeper analysis of the emotional side in relation to images or episodes remembered, and the storytelling stemming from these memories seven years later, not only would complete the picture, but it actually was among my very initial intentions when I

formulated the questions for the target of interviewees and the students of the focus group. Indeed, I am aware of the crucial function of affect and emotions within the domains of digital performativity of the user, individual and collective memory, as well as actions of archiving (as one of the referees who evaluated my manuscript rightly remarked). However, I had to abandon the ambition of properly exploring these topics, which belong to an extremely vast terrain of study that I did not have time to investigate.

The results mentioned above answer also my sub-questions of the real role played by the digital clips in how and what people remember. By exponentially amplifying the possibilities of the spectators to experience the revolution beyond geographical, temporal, and physical boundaries, the digital mediation of the experience of the upheaval served a bigger role in the current storytelling of those occurrences than what interviewees actually believe.

These considerations lead me to stress the paradoxical position of spectators. They contribute to threatening the very circulation of the contents by stopping to watch, comment, and share. In doing so, they put in danger the persistence of the contents that they have generated, or of which they supported the circulation. On the other hand, by remembering, retrieving them from online spheres, and recombining them, spectators can change the fate of the audiovisuals. Indeed, they are able to make use of social media as archives and participate in the transmission and preservation of the audiovisual materials over time and historical circumstances. In this sense, direct or prosthetic experiences of the events via images allow the recirculation, and thus, the persistence of the audiovisual materials in question as it emerges from the remembrances of the interviewees expressed during the current revolutionary process.

Therefore, whereas Derrida claims that the archive is different from memory, as the former acts within the interstices and failures of the second, I argue that memory conveys and determines the existence of the organized collections of my study. Meaning that, the individual and collective memory of the spectator is that which allows social media to be identified as potential and real digital archives and as well as to perform this function.

Through memory, the spectator reacts by opposing the commercial nature of the repositories in question and establishes its authority over the algorithm and the technical infrastructure. This answer to one of the leading questions of the study is crucial, because it clarifies what is ultimately the tension existing between algorithm and users that I mentioned several times over the course of my analysis. The battle for the authority on the archive is played by the plurality of spectators, either filmers or onlookers, as co-authors, consumers and thus creators of individual and collective memory.

To conclude, the study aims to broaden the debate towards a clearer and more accurate understanding of social networks as very ambivalent repositories for contents, such as the vernacular videos in question. Indeed, the typology of these clips is irrelevant to the real

mission of the platforms, economically, but is instead extremely important from the perspective of the symbolic value that the internet services assume thanks to these militant audiovisuals. In this sense, I find several positions expressed by researchers over the years on the topic, who simply stigmatized the informal media as unreliable storage or dangerous tools in their power for erasing historical traces, as too simplistic. Conversely, my study aims to open new perspectives on advantages and disadvantages that social networks can provide in terms of the conservation of historical fragments. More importantly, my purpose is to stress the counterpart of these remarks. I refer to the real, effective power that any subject, intended here to mean users and spectators, have in contributing to the long-term preservation of traces. The shape taken by these actions of protection of items needs to be acknowledged in different, unexpected, or ungraspable forms, all equally valid and necessary for the continuation of the life of these archival objects. Another sample of great relevance and in line with my research questions is the pedagogical exhibition *Before the 14th, instant tunisienne*, which I mention as a fundamental background material that guided my research. For its seminal importance, I had the ambition to analyze the case, and this intention led me to prolong my stay in Tunis. However, the unexpected shift of the opening date of the exhibition caused a delay that prevented me to investigate this case further.

Furthermore, it is worthwhile to stress that the responses that the empirical data of the research provided pave the path for further possible developments and patterns of investigation beyond this study. For instance, the link that exists between YouTube, distant spectatorship, and the prosthetic memory of the Tunisian revolution is one of the most evident and interesting articulations that emerged in different phases of my investigation. During my study, I decided to focus on Tunisian subjects for both practical reasons, and especially, a sense of accuracy with the topic that I was exploring. However, the storytelling of the revolution coming up from a broad investigation that would consider non-Tunisian subjects will complete the big picture about preservation of testimonies via prosthetic memory, in relation to the Tunisia case. In fact, the extreme exposure of citizens' films at the time of their viral transmission created an intense sense of belonging to someone else's history that probably other onlookers, regardless of if they are local or distant, have experienced before by means of formal media but only very likely on a smaller scale.

Furthermore, whereas Facebook appeared not suitable for exploring the archiving of the footage of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution in retrospect, it does not mean that this social network service is not a tool for memory. Rather the opposite. My study focused on digital items but this delimitation of the field of investigation forcibly brought an overlooking of the contents that Facebook could provide. I mean, for instance, a whole set of textual reactions that could also provide a form of storytelling of the twenty-nine-day phase of the revolution over time.

These are just some of the possible further directions that the research suggests, but there are several others that can still contribute to a debate on the forms of archiving and resignification of vernacular videos of the Tunisian revolution and their transnational, trans-temporal continuation of life within the digital ecology.

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Appendices

List of Interviewees

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2. Azyz Amami, activist, blogger; March 26, 2019, Tunis. Language: French.

3. Béatrice Dunoyer, Department of production at L'Art la Rue/Dream City; June 26, 2018, Tunis. Language: French.

4. Ismael Chebbi, visual artist, director; June 18, 2018, Tunis. Language: French.

5. Samah Krichah, former project coordinator at Maghreb Economic Forum, Tunis; June 13, 2018, Tunis. Language: English.

6. Thameur Mekki, Editor-in-Chief, *Nawaat,* an independent collective platform (formerly a blog); July 3, 2018, Tunis. Language: French.

7. Hosni Muehli, MENA Senior Programme Officer at Impunity Watch, writer, contributor to *Nawaat*; September 12, 2018, Tunis. Language: French.

8. Baha Lamji, initiator of YouTube channel Draw My Science; July 4, 2018, Sousse. Language: French.

9. Moez Mrabet, former artistic director of the International Festival of Hammamet, actor and director of the Institut Supérieur d'Art Dramatique, Tunis; June 21, 2018, Tunis. Language: French.

10. Manel Souissi, president of the Tunisian Federation of Film Societies (FTCC); June, 15 2018, Tunis. Language: French.

11. Sami Tlili, film director; July 13, 2018, La Marsa. Language: French.

12. Vipa, hip-hop musician, member of the collective DEBO; July 10, 2018, Tunis. Language: French.

13. Abdellahya Yahya, director; July 6, 2018, Tunis. Language: French.

14. Z, caricaturist, blogger (DEBATunisie); March 27, 2019, Tunis. Language: French.

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Format of the Questionnaire Used for Conducting the Structured Interviews During the Research on Site in Tunis and Sousse

1) Quels réseaux sociaux utilisez-vous régulièrement aujourd'hui?

-Est-ce que vous utilisez YouTube ?

-Si oui, quels sont les contenus que vous regardez sur YouTube ?

2) À partir de 2011, quand YouTube est devenu accessible sans contrôle, ni censure, est-ce que votre usage de la plateforme a augmenté, par rapport aux autres réseaux sociaux, par exemple Facebook ?

-Quel rôle jouait YouTube par rapport à Facebook pendant les soulèvements de 2011 et de quelle façon l'usage de YouTube a changé pendant les sept dernières années ?

-Quel rôle jouent YouTube et Facebook aujourd'hui, du point de vue social et politique ?

3) À votre avis, est-ce que les vidéos citoyennes tournées en 2010–2011 ont influencé la naissance de nouvelles pratiques sociales ?

4 a) En tant qu'artiste/réalisateur, est-ce que votre travail a été influencé par l'esthétique ou les contenus des vidéos citoyennes tournées en 2010–2011 ?

4 b) En tant qu'activiste/cyber activiste, pensez-vous que les vidéos citoyennes tournées en 2010–2011 ont influencé la société tunisienne du point de vue de la participation politique en ligne et hors-ligne, pendant ces sept dernières années, après le 14 janvier ?

Si oui, de quelle manière ?

5) Parmi les vidéos citoyennes, quelles images vous remémorez-vous de la révolution après que sept ans ont passé ?

-Pendant ces sept dernières années, avez-vous cherché les vidéos de la révolution, sur Facebook ou YouTube? Et si oui, pourquoi ?

6) Quel lien empathique avez-vous établi avec ces images que vous vous remémorez ?

Format of the Questionnaire Used for Conducting the Focus Group

1) Avez-vous aimé le documentaire ?

2) D'après vous, quel type d'émotions émergent dans ce documentaire ?

3) Partagez-vous les émotions qui surgissent dans le documentaire ?

4) Quelle a été votre réaction après avoir vu le documentaire ?

5) Le documentaire a-t-il fait ressurgir des souvenirs?

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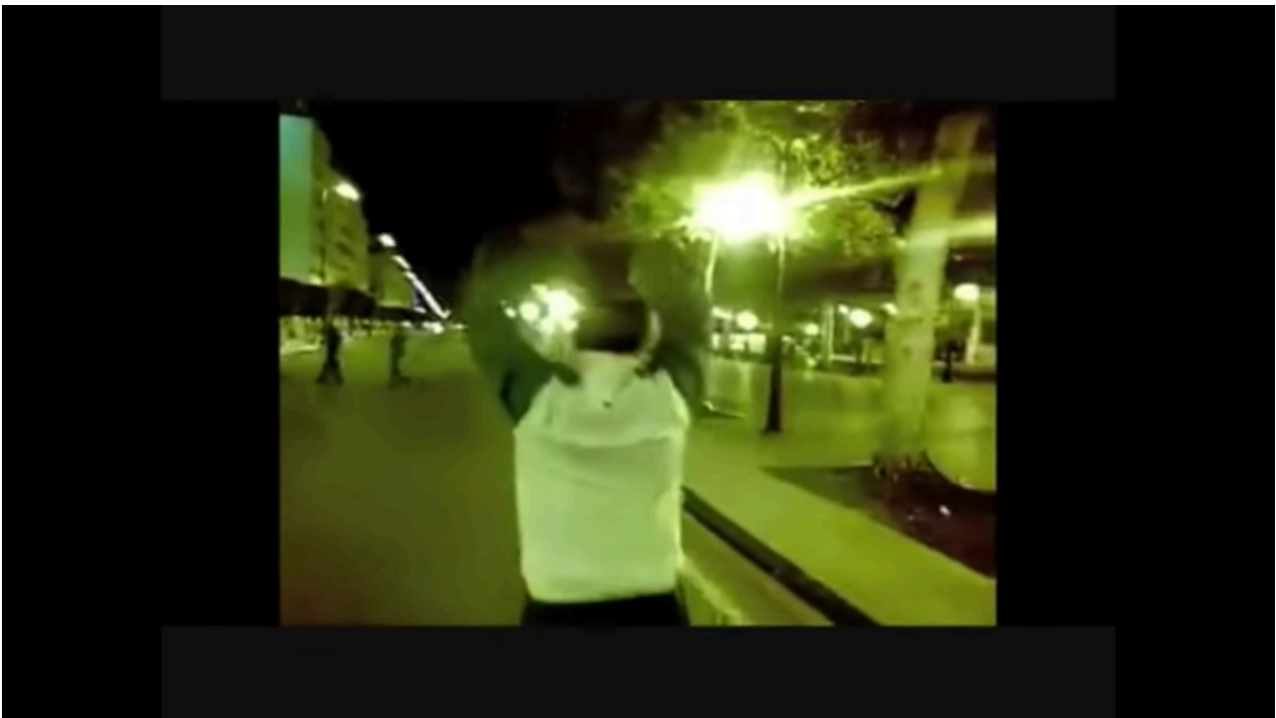**Figure 5.** AnarChnowa, "Brains and hearts of stone," Episode 13, Season 1 "ANARCHNOWA (Un Art Chnowa?," YouTube video, 9:06, May 28, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7JGN2kNllw

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