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REAL TIME MEMORIES OF A REVOLUTION
The '18 Days in Egypt ' interactive platform as instant archive
Ludovica Fales

 # 1. Memorising in real time

From 2009 Green revolution Iranian protesters to 2011 Arab Spring movements, from global Occupy movement to recent groups which have been supporting the thousands of people who lost their homes during 2012 Hurrican Sandy in New York City[1], many grassroots movements of our recent times have been using the Internet as a universal platform to connect people across the planet during uprisings, climatic upheavals and dramatic political changes[2].

Contemporary digital users have been relying more and more on the internet, reaching out to their own communities in ways that were unimaginable even five years ago. Grassroots movements have been able to enlarge their support networks by using social media in increasingly more creative and expanded ways, in many cases bypassing authority surveillance and local censorship devices[3]. The practice of audiovisual footage's self- production which has been employed massively in the form of self-narratives and testimonies during political changes or events - reaching an unprecedented peak in Tunisia, Egypt and Turkey between 2011 and 2013 - has become increasingly more valuable as a collective political tool, especially because of the very possibility of real time sharing through social media like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

This new dimension of widespread, collective and liquid communication modes has brought some writers to the conclusion that a new era of 'humanist revolution' was at the doorstep – an era where a new level of individual and collective freedom could potentially take shape through the combination of high technological development and adequate access to technology for as many people as possible around the world[4], an era where the state of alienation many individuals are locked in due to social exploitation, lack of social and political rights, lack of freedom of speech and poverty could be brought to an end by new media communication.

As Manuel Castells observes, fifteen years into the communication revolution, the web has already started to produce new attitudes and behaviours which can find a correspondence in real life[5]. A pattern has already started emerging, drawing a relationship between autonomy of individuals' life projects, digital interconnectedness to others and 'weaker ties' to space[6]. Many of us have

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

2 P.aul Mason, *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere,* Verso, London, 2012

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

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

5 Manuel Castells, *Communication, Power and Counter-Power in the Newtork Society*, International Journal of Communication, ijoc.org, 8 February 2007. 'The more an individual has a project of autonony (personal, professional, socio-political, communicative), the more she uses the Internet. And in time sequence, the more he/she uses the Internet, the more autonomous she becomes vis-à-vis rules and institutions'. On the changing status of media reception and the evolving concept of 'audience': Ian Christie, *Audiences : Defining and Researching Screen Entertainment Reception*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2012

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

experience of using more than one screen at the same time or seeing somebody making their way through a 'multiple screen' experience- for example watching a film on a screen, tweeting about it on their mobile phone and having a Skype conversation with someone in another country on their Ipad, all at the same time[7].

The future implications of this new conceptual landscape are obviously quite unpredictable, but we might not be fully aware of how this new constellation is already influencing the way we interpret our own past, the way we are constructing our relationship to our present time, the way we read into our own history and in to our time perception[8]. The main question of this essay is, in fact, whether this new universe we are surrounded by in our everyday life is influencing the narratives of the present time as well as the way in which we archive, organise, store, and explore information about our own current time. Non-professional documentary-making practices performed by individual users *(prosumers)[9],* combined with massive messaging distribution strategies moving through social networks' highways are creating a hybrid narrative landscape, where real spaces and communication channels are proceeding in parallel, creating new forms of interaction between documentation, archiving and history narration practices[10].

Real time footage collection practices through mobile phones as well as digital sharing practices are providing social media users with unprecedented access to events in the making - creating real-time maps of the history-making process. Following Habermas' approach to communication and its centrality to subjectivity, society and ethics[11], it becomes apparent why the implications of this process are extremely relevant to Media and Cultural Studies, opening key questions related to the impact of emerging media practices on viewers and culture. In particular, this process opens questions related to truthfulness, authenticity, access, participation to the process of witnessing, documenting and archiving historical events as well as freedom of speech, identifying the web – and new narrative forms which are native to the digital era– as a crucial arena for current historical narratives. On the other hand, this same impact has possibly limiting effects on originality of utterances, active inventive processes and non conventional thought patterns, implying slightly more problematic scenarios which need to be taken in account. Moreover, it maybe noted that developments into day-by-day war situations such as e.g. in Syria seem to be accompanied by an huminous silence of the media- both trational and digital.

The study of this specific subject implies an interdisciplinary textual referencing apparatus which employes sources coming from the field of Media Studies, Semiotics, Cultural Studies, Media Anthropology, Social Sciences and Neuroscience. My specific approach to this will be the integration of this cross-disciplinary conceptual background with a semiotic approach which will allows a specific key-study analysis of *'18 days in Egypt - an interactive crowd sourced documentary project'[12]* - a unique example of 'instant archive' documenting the Egyptian revolution .

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7   Paul Mason, *idem*

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

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

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

11   Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1: Reason and The Rationalization of Society*, Polity, Cambridge, 1984. For a wider debate, Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1990

12 http://beta.18daysinegypt.com/, 2011

This transmedia platform collects material related to an event which is still considered ongoing by its own users and which is sadly making the news again in the days in which we are writing[13]. The web project opened in 2011 with the motto 'You witnessed it, you recorded it. Let's write our country's history' and it's still running today, showcasing footage collected by individual users during the Spring revolution. The platform links people who have been documenting the event on the ground to a wider audience by creating individual features showing multiple individual points of view on the same event. By constantly updating its database, incorporating social media narrative features and employing communication modes mimetic to the sharing culture, the interactive documentary is a unique example of 'instant archive' documenting an event which is still considered to be ongoing.

#2. The web as a square

From a Media History point of view, transmedia platforms in themselves already represent a radical shift in the relationship between space/time and subjective storytelling. Those platforms where 'narrative structure expand through different languages (verbal, iconic etc.) and media (cinema, comics, television, video games, etc.), are not just an adaptation from one media to another'[14], but they are spaces where 'many different semiotic modes or sign processes in design of a semiotic product or event' are being used together so that 'these modes are essentially reinforcing each other' [15].

Transmedia stories 'are stories told across multiple media'[16]. Scolari expands, adding that 'in the ideal form of transmedia platform, each medium does what it does best, so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics, and its world might be explored and experienced through game play'[17]. According to Jenkins, 'each franchise entry needs to be self-contained enough to enable autonomous consumption. That is, you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game and vice-versa'[18].

The definition of transmedia storytelling focuses itself on the interaction among different media between themselves – considering the different media as providers of different textual layers and vectors of different semiotical apparatuses. Transmedia storytelling analyses the narrative from the point of view of the interaction between textual dimensions which are carriers of different meaning universes. The idea of interactive storytelling is instead more focused on the narratological tools as

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

14 Carlos Alberto Scolari, *Transmedia Storytelling: Implicit Consumers, Narrative Worlds, and Branding in Contemporary Media Production,* International Journal of Communications 3, 586-606. University of Vic, Catalunya Spain, 2009 available at http://ijoc.org/ojs/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/477/336

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

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

17 Carlos Alberto Scolari, *Ibidem*

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

they are employed in the narration. A very basic notion of interactive storytelling is that this is 'a form of digital entertainment in which users create or influence a dramatic storyline through actions, either by issuing commands to the story's protagonist, or acting as a general director of events in the narrative. Interactive storytelling is a medium where the narrative, and its evolution, can be influenced in real-time by a user'[19]. The relationship between the medium and the user is here considered key to the construction of the narrative and the user's intervention in the story is planned and becomes the main action's engine of the whole plaftorm's functioning system.

Whereas most interactive platform are mutuating some prescriptive functioning characters from video games – such as the existence of rules which cannot be broken, thus shaping the boundaries within which the user can move itself- in the realm of interactive documentary storytelling the unpredictable breaks in, becoming part of the story. The allowance of user-generated content in what was before considered the 'walled garden' of documentary world was facilitated by Web 2.0 collaborative logic, opening new perspectives in which participation between audience/users and makers takes new unpredictable turns[20], becoming an open, creative field where the potential forms of participation are multiple and infinite. Gaudenzi's hypothesis that 'participative, situated and locative media can enhance a view of reality, where "doing" is a way of being and of perceiving', becomes extremely useful on a research level for the analysis of the '*18 days in Egypt*' platform.

In the 'ABOUT' section of *'18 days is Egypt'* – a project that was funded by Tribeca Institute, together with Ford Foundation, Sundance Institute and Blip during year 2011- the creators claim that 'for the first time in history, citizens are recording an actual revolution in real time. Throughout the 18 days of the 2011 uprising—in the year since—and now—Egyptians are filming pivotal events on their cell phones, taking pictures, texting, tweeting and facebooking their extraordinary bid for freedom. Now, *'18 days in Egypt'*, the collaborative documentary project, aims to capture the events of the revolution right here… in an interactive documentary website that everyone can access now and into the future'[21].

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

The events in Egypt have been characterised by massive employment of social media as part of the construction of a political space during the 18 days of revolution - to the point that the virtual space has become a dynamic of the events themselves, an integrated part of reality. Therefore, the form of interaction between virtual and real space displayed by this platform, implies the virtual space as being inextricably linked to the historical real. This plays with the notion that the events of Tahrir Square were appearing 'at the same time' both in Cairo and in the global space of the World Wide Web, where a constant stream of information was inundating the rest of the world, incorporating it as a satellite, but integrated, part of the event. In a similar way to the French Revolution – which was followed with intense and participated attention paid to it by supporters across Europe through the reading of newspapers- the Tahrir Square days had become an event *(événement)*[22] in which the

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

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

21 http://beta.18daysinegypt.com/#/about

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

outside audience was acting as a collective subject integrated in the space of the event itself [23].

'During the eighteen-days Egyptian uprising, Tahrir Square was often referred to as a microcosm of Egyptian society – albeit a euphoric, romanticized version of it' states journalist Soraya Morayef. 'When Hosni Mubarak was toppled, thousands of Egyptians took to the Square, where they swept the streets clean and painted the wall with slogans. It was the first time that many felt a sense of ownership over this country, and believed that they would have an equal say in deciding upon Egypt's future'[24]. Tahrir Square was a symbolic space which enclosed both the violence of the repression and the hopes for a future, a space where sense of belonging, self-representation and the possibility of having a voice were taking place after decades of dictatorships and silencing of political opponents. Tahrir was the place where both the dramaturgy of the conflict and the map of the new society were created - and the image of which was projected into the outside space every day through social media[25]. This notion of 'I was there' is reproduced by the '18 days in Egypt' platform, the main question being one of the presence as something to be constantly recreated, reenacted and re-founded on a symbolical level, in a world where storytelling reflects the notion that 'human experience… is in a constant state of becoming'[26], as a process of participation involving the interaction between an event happening in a physical space and the complex of reactions, stories, personal accounts and comments reflecting on it in real time.

Henry Jenkins defines participatory culture as 'a culture in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content', contrasting 'with older notions of passive media spectatorship...we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understand'[27] . This is where, according to S. Gaudenzi, participation differs to simple interaction[28]. In this sense '18 days in Egypt' can be considered a fully participative experience, where the relationship to the creation of historical memory is moving along highways where compelling personal stories are made available using the streamline inaugurated by social media.

But are the '18 Days in Egypt' users just crowd -producers or co-authors? Crowdsourcing as 'the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call'[29], is a new mode of media production which counts on people's full involvement in the production process. But, as some contemporary examples show[30], there is a difference between crowd-producing and co-authoring a platform – this depending on the level of collaboration allowed by the platform's design itself[31].

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

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

25 '18 days in Egypt' in one of the several projects that are trying to facilitate collective recording and framing history by reproducing the diversity of Tahrir Square people through archive material. An account of this 'civic media' movement can be found in H. Stuhr-Rommerheim, '*Tahrir cinema displays revolutionary power of archives'* , Egypt Indipendent, 20 July 2011 and *A year review, when art becomes history,* 29 July 2011, *Egypt Independent* available at http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/year-review-when-history-becomes-art

26 R- Shief, a knowledge managment system availble at http://twitterminer.r-shief.org/hq/ quoted in *A year review, when art becomes,* Egypt Independent

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

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

29 Sandra Gaudenzi, *Ibidem*

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

31 Sandra Gaudenzi, *cit.,* Ch. 7, p.17 ' Content, ideas, technology and form can, in theory, all be crowd-sourced. Furthermore the collaborator does not have to be the "user" (intended as the audience, the final consumer of an interactive artefact) as it could also be the documentary subject (the one that the documentary is portraying). I am claiming that the complex granularity of "who does what and where" in

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

3. Story of an instant archive

Creator Jigar Mehta said during an interview that at the time of the Egyptian revolution 'he was struck by the image of people documenting themselves (…). Even if people were participating (to the event), they were also recording it and sending it out to the world' [32] - all at the same time. The main question of the creator was whether it was possible to create a larger narrative as carved out of the million of individual testimonies coming out of the revolution. How was it possible to collect all those 'media fragments' (' a Tweet here, a photo there, an article..) and combine them together? Was it possible to assemble thoughts coming from somebody's Facebook update together with someone else's Tweet as a way to tell a story that could remind us of a mosaic composed by all sorts of different tiles? Was it possible to create a platform storing the whole of these disparate elements in one place? Was it possible to preserve them for people to be able to watch it in 20 years time?[33]

The initial project was based on the making of a 90 minutes linear documentary. But as the creators started approaching the material, they realised the way people were contributing content wasn't allowing a straight forward linear storytelling technique[34]. The solution was instead 'to create a platform that could bring people and social media together. And by adding the media, that would immediately bring in the context' - meaning that, as social media were intrinsecally part of the time-space experience of the revolution times, the use of certain features realted to the media would create a narrative experience mimetic to the one experienced on the ground. Moreover, the thorny question related to the truthful reconstruction of historical events was confronted by the creators through the idea that in front of multiple versions of a similar event experienced by as many spectators as were gathered at the event itself, it was possible to shape a space of togetherness where the individual stories could find a home in a collective interspace.

By bringing together all testimonies it was possible to create a common ground where the truth 'can be found in the space between us'[35] and where the possibility of cross-checking the information was intrinsic to the platform itself. So, not only the platform was collecting all sorts of different material as primary source, but it was also allowing space for an immediate collective representation of the event, reproducing that feeling of togethrness in a square which Tahrir had sculpted in everyone's imagination forever.

In the correspondence between form and content lies the secret concealed by *'18 Days in Egypt'*.

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a participative documentary is what makes all the difference between content-collaboration and co-authoring... the author is not anymore the one that shoots and edits video content, but the one that enables participation and "stages a conversation" (Dovey and Rose, n.d: 18) through the concept of an interactive interface' (Gaudenzi, *idem*, p.17)

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

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

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

35 *Ibidem*

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

The archive, as a collection of sources and random artifacts that have been found, implies a decision-making process and a will to store and rescue material according to a certain system and/or rationality. In the case of the first archives of Modern Age – like the Ottoman Archive[36] or the Venice Republic one (Archivio di Stato di Venezia) [37]- the idea of preserving the papers of the empire and building a place to store them for everyone to access them in the future, was indeed a decision made by an archival authority reflecting the governamental point of view. The strength of the archive in the classical sense lies in its ability to accumulate evidence. The archive of Venice saved public cards belonging to ambassadors as well as private house contracts - a mixture of private and public documents. This choice was reflecting a decision made by a specific authority, which established the overall truth, and was not at all interested in the question of individual testimonies.

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

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

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

For example, 'Why I am Wearing a V Mask' is the story of Moody who wears a Vendetta mask because 'it symbolises the anonymous face that always smiles and that does what he wants'. It is the revolutionary icon that Moody feels the closest to him. Moody is a volunteer at the hospital and has seen many people die. He is impressed 'by the fact that so many people are killed that we don't even mourn anymore', thus exposing one of the functions of the archive as memory-making mourning ritual. 'From Queens to Cairo', posted by filmmaker Sherif Sadek is instead the reportage of the author's journey back to Egypt from the States to show his children the one year anniversary after the revolution. 'Taking my children back to Cairo was very important to me..I wanted to make sure

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

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

they were there during the most important moment of their ancestral homeland ' writes Sherif. The thread becomes a very intimate account of the experience of going back which needs to be shared with the many 'expats' around the world. A good example of the memory-making function – and its ideological function - is instead the thread 'The Names which will stay for 50 years'. The thread was written and posted by Mostafa Sheshtawy as an anniversary celebration and collects the pictures, stories and names of the memorable people of the revolution as listed by the author itself. The interesting element is represented by the presence of Wikipedia material and a collection of (foreign) newspaper articles explaining each of the characters' biography and stating their role as one of 'heroes' - thus posing questions on the use of traditional sources for subjective editing, where mainstream sources are used to corroborate the status of the author's ideological choice on a platform which somehow questions the 'truthfulness' of traditional media.

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

#5. *Freedom of speech*

Drawing some conclusions on the main function of the *'18 Days in Egypt'* platform, I would like to quickly touch upon the question of freedom of speech, especially in relation to social media and interactive storytelling platforms. The very fact that some threads which have been created by common citizens through social media were able to create compelling news items[38], making their way into mainstream media, has opened a whole new range of possible interactions between citizens and media communication. By entrusting the web to be a 'unique opportunity to bypass corrupt media'[39], contemporary activists and citizen groups have been relying on the limitless snowball effect inherent to the web as a network provided with 'power of cumulative connections"[40] and on its urivalled outreach potential to connect online and offline communities through flows of informations moving in a new global space[41].

Exposing facts as they were seen and witnessed on the field by common people has enabled the shaping up of new historical narratives which were inherently different from the ones accepted by local governments, opening questions related to power legitimacy and control as well as freedom of speech and assembly in modern democracies. In the time of widepread social media use, new political spaces have been explored, empowering people and making it possible to question those historical truths expressed by official governmental narratives and consent manufacturing. Official historical narratives have been increasingly confronted and questioned by those facts collected by non-profit groups and organisation which were able to unmaks controversial truths in a much

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38 Joss Hands, *@is for Activism – Dissent, Resistance and Rebellion in a Digital Culture*, London, Pluto Press 2011. J. Hands dicusses the case of newspaper Guardian vs. Carter-Ruck and Trafigurara which represents a specific case of relationship between Twitter users and mainstream media. In this case an attempt to silence newspaper's freedom of speech by a company was played out in real time by Twitter users' comments , I*dem*, p. 3. For the story of grassroots media, A.A. V.V., *Indipendent Media Center*, http://www.indymedia.org/en/static/about.shtml, A.A.V.V., I*ndymedia History* in *Media Activism,* March 2005 available at http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2005/03/11/17262451.php, A.A.V.V., *WikiLeaks* on *Wikipedia Eng. a*vailable at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WikiLeaks
39 Dan Hancox (curated by), *Fight Back! A Reader on the Winter of Protest,* Open Democracy, London, 2011
40 Joss Hands, *Ibidem*
41 Manuel Casstells, *The Rise of the Network Society,* Wiley-Blackwell, Chicester, 2007

shorter time than ever before in history. For example, this is the case of the role played in the information world by WikiLeaks, especially during the Iraq and Afghanistan war of year 2010[42].

Since year 2009, when social network Twitter postponed a planned maintenance shutdown given the recognition of the role it was currently playing as an important communication tool in Iran'[43], the 'Twitter revolution' has been widely considered one of the most significant media transformations of our current time. While around 460kt people were joining the social network every day across the globe and Twitter was becoming increasingly important in the everyday current affairs' analysis, the reaction of a number of media historians, journalists, activists and scholars – especially in the Anglo-Saxon world- was one of hope, enthusiasm and surprise[44]. The scale of the phenomenon and its acceleration were generating a widespread sense of interconnectedness, making it possible to believe that a genuine political change was going to be facilitated on a large scale and in radical new forms by the power of networks[45] . On the other hand, some conservative mainstream media commentators have been developing negative views on the role played by Twitter in events like the Iranian revolution, underlying the point that the role played by the social network in the public sphere was responsible for pushing authorities to action[46]. The 'almighty internet'[47] was quickly accepted by mainstream media and political world as a vehicle for examining the global, widespread, multi-cellular flux of informations and it proved to be a meaningful tool for historical events' intrepretation but also main stage of a polarisation which has brought government to consider social media regulation in time of civil unrest - even in countries like the UK[48].

The consequences of this process have been unravelling since the very beginning of the post-revolution times by raising important political questions to the international community and pushing forward an extremely productive debate on the power of independent media and its implications in the public sphere. Few weeks after Egyptian and Tunisian uprising of 2011, an important statement was issued by a group of United Nations associated independent human rights experts through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva discussing the role of social media for freedom of speech[49] and revealing that the battleground for

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

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

44 P.aul Mason, *Why it's Kicking off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions,* Verso, London, 2011.

45 Aaron Peters, Niki Seth-Smith, *The Networked Society: OurKingdom joins the conversation*, Open Democracyr online review, 24 March 2011

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

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

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

49 The statement was discussing that

Over the past several weeks, men and women in many countries, including Belarus, Egypt and Tunisia, have expressed grievances related to, among others... the denial of their right to participate meaningfully in decision-making, underscoring the indivisibility of all human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political and social...We are alarmed at increasing limitations on the

freedom of expression has now moved towards new media and that the link between new media storytelling, documentary-making practices and historical practices is becoming progressively more and more revelant.

#6. Conclusions

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

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

In particular, this new form of creation, production and dissemnation of information opens the way to a new problematisation of the concept of *audience*. It opens the discussion related to the roles of *'prosumers'* in the circulation of information within a specific *narrative ecosystems*[50], where contents fruition is experienced in the context of a pervasive universe in which creation and experience are part of a self-contained media world. Moreover, this configuration expands itself to the investigation of the ways of the *spreadability* of the message in activists contexts. In the light of a new relationship between witnessing, recording, narrating and participating to collective historical storytelling events- and its actual translation into non-linear narrative features – a new model of messaging strategies is finding its way.

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

By the way of conclusion, I would like to underline how the act of witnessing and recording material, the live performance related to the posting of material and content generation, the divergences of testimonials and its horizontal co-existence on the platform and the non-preordained nature of archive itself, represent a multimodal archive. This an open archive function which can be operated in many different ways by users in the present and future time, representating potentially a whole new operational mode in future archiving functions.

right to freedom of expression and information imposed by Governments actively seeking to suppress the rising number of voices who wish to be heard…We are disturbed at the major disruptions in communication networks and transmissions of news so essential to the modern world. The freedoms of peaceful assembly and association are among the most fundamental rights underpinning a democratic society.'

(Governement must pay attention to people's experst, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva available at http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=10703&LangID=E)

50 Claudio Bisoni, Veronica Innocenti, *Medis Mutations,* Mucchi Editore, Modena , 2013