

WHAT

HAPPENED

IN

SID

BOULDER:

“A FURTHER READING”

BY RODRIGO MARCONDES

✱ The “FURTHER READING” section of Wikipedia articles is a list of links to other works on a similar subject. Usually abbreviated, or a reasonable number of works which a reader may consult for additional and more detailed coverage of the subject, the list of links may include brief, neutral annotations. Some articles may also or instead have an External links section; editors will occasionally merge the two if they contain similar information. The article contains both sections, some editors prefer to list websites and online works in the External links section, while others list the Further Reading section. The Further Reading section is often used in the citation style. Used by the rest of the article. Source http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Further_reading

“The opening quotation”^❶

“The fiction of the aesthetic age defined models for connecting the presentation of facts and forms of intelligibility that blurred the border between the logic of facts and the logic of fiction... Writing history and writing stories come under the same regime of truth.”^❷

“Doubting documentary representation is of course nothing new. It is as old as the documentary form itself. Its truth claims have always been questioned, deconstructed or called arrogant. The general relationship towards documentary claims has always been one of a disavowed impasse. It oscillates between belief and incredulity, between trust and distrust, hope and disillusionment.

This is also the reason why the documentary form has always presented its audiences with philosophical problems. Whether or how they represent reality has forever been contested. The main argument runs between proponents of realism and constructivists. While the former believe that documentary forms reproduce natural facts, the latter see them as social constructions. Realists think that reality is out there and that a camera can capture its essence.”^❸

“Since the emergence of bourgeois society and the raise of modern democracy, journalistic and documentary-based practices have been accepted as a radical form of criticism and truth-telling, without questioning the aspects of power and authority brought in with images and texts. To a certain extent, journalism has been (and still is) considered a body guarantor of public assets, a ‘more or less cohesive institution, consisting of distinctive values, practices and relations’. Journalism makes a point rather than tests hypothesis. The journalist searches selectively and focuses on statements that support the point s/he is trying to make. The stories often include several people’s testimony in support of the point but exclude others whose statements might blur the issue or raise doubts. The point to be made largely decides the further course of their work. It guides not only the choice of people to interview but also the nature of the questions asked.”^❹ [...] “Investigative journalism is a form of storytelling. Coherence is produced when facts are inserted into a narrative that has a structure that is familiar to the viewer. When facts are embedded in a coherent narration that appears to be real and authentic, they become plausible and convincing.”^❺

“Sidi Bouzid, a town of 40 thousand, doesn’t get so much as a mention on the Tunisian guide books. Tourists don’t come here. On Friday morning, December 17, 26 years old Mohammed Bouazizi was selling fruits from a cart as he did every day to support his family. He didn’t have a license, but very few of these vendors did. A municipal official, a woman, came by and confiscated his scale right here. It was worthy a 100 bucks and Mohamed Bouazizi knew he would have to pay a bribe to get it back. It had happened to him many times before, but this time he got mad, he complained and the woman [pause] slapped him. One slap in the face, and that’s how the revolution began.”^❻

“‘60 Minutes’, the most successful television broadcast in history, begins its 44th season on September 25, 2011. Offering hard-hitting investigative reports, interviews, feature segments and profiles of people in the news, the broadcast begun in 1968 is still a hit in 2011, regularly making Nielsen’s Top 10. Over the 2010-11 season, ‘60 Minutes’ continued its dominance as the number-one news program, drawing an average of 13.36 million viewers per week – a 1 percent increase over last season and more than twice the audiences of its network news magazine competitors and more than five million viewers ahead of the most-watched daily network evening news broadcast. The average audience for a “60 Minutes” broadcast still dwarfs the biggest audiences drawn by cable news programs.

About a million more people listen to the “60 Minutes” radio simulcast in several major cities and tens of thousands each week experience “60 Minutes” online. The broadcast’s segments can be watched at 60Minutes.com, while a new sister site, 60MinutesOvertime.com, offers content originally produced for the Web only, including behind-the-scenes video about the production of “60 Minutes” stories and timely archival segments. The broadcast’s content can also be watched on the iPad; its application is one of the most popular paid apps in the App Store. “60 Minutes” has won more Emmy Awards than any other primetime broadcast, including a special Lifetime Achievement Emmy. It has also won every major broadcast journalism award over its tenure, including 18 Peabody and 13 DuPont Columbia University awards for excellence

^❶ Nash, Mark. Reality in the Age of Aesthetics – Frieze Magazine, first published in Issue 114, April 2008 (p1)

^❷ Rancière, Jacques. The Politics of Aesthetics – Continuum, London, 2006 (p38) apud NASH (2008)

^❸ Steyerl, Hito. Documentary Uncertainties – Re-Visiones, 2011. <http://re-visiones.imaginarar.net/spip.php?article37>. Accessed May 26, 2012

^❹ Cramerotti, Alfredo. Aesthetics Journalism. How to inform without informing. UK and USA: Intellect, 2009 (p25)

^❺ Ekström, Mats. ‘Epistemologies of TV journalism: A theoretical framework’, in Journalism Vol. 3 (3), pp. 259-282, London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage Publications, <http://jou.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/3/3/259>. Accessed 24 November 2007, apud CRAMEROTTI (2009).

^❻ 60 minutes CBS – Fragment of video report by Bob Simon aired in December 2010.

^❼ 60 minutes CBS ‘About us’ http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-18560_162-13503.html Accessed May 03, 2012.

^❶ Cramerotti, Alfredo. Aesthetics Journalism. How to inform without informing. UK and USA: Intellect, 2009 (p25)

^❷ Foucault, Michel. ‘Wahrheit und Macht. Interview mit A. Fontana und P. Pasquino’ in Dispositive der Macht. Michel Foucault über Sexualität, Wissen und Wahrheit. Berlin: Merve Verlag 1978.

^❸ Steyerl, Hito. Documentary Uncertainties – Re-Visiones 2011. <http://re-visiones.imaginarar.net/spip.php?article37> Accessed May 26, 2012

^❹ Orotty, M. 1998.The Foundations of Social Science Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process, Sage. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructivist_epistemology#cite_ref-2 Accessed May 26, 2012.

^❺ Cramerotti, Alfredo. Aesthetics Journalism. How to inform without informing. UK and USA: Intellect, 2009 (p72)

^❻ Nash, Mark. Reality in the Age of Aesthetics – Frieze Magazine, first published in Issue 114, April 2008 (p7)

^❼ Steyerl, Hito. Documentary Uncertainties – Re-Visiones 2011. <http://re-visiones.imaginarar.net/spip.php?article37>. Accessed May 26, 2012

in television broadcasting. Other distinguished awards won multiple times include the George Polk, RTNDA Edward R. Murrow, Investigative Reporters and Editors, RFK Journalism, Sigma Delta Chi and Gerald Loeb Awards for Distinguished Business and Financial Reporting. “60 Minutes” was created by the late Don Hewitt and premiered on CBS September 24, 1968. CBS News Chairman Jeff Fager is the program’s executive producer. The correspondents and contributors of “60 Minutes” are Anderson Cooper, Steve Kroft, Lara Logan, Scott Pelley, Byron Pitts, Morley Safer, Bob Simon and Lesley Stahl. “60 Minutes” airs Sundays at 7 p.m. ET/PT. Check your local listings.”^❶

“In the US and elsewhere press tabloids and radio talk shows, to name the evident cases, use the long tail of journalism respectability to present truth in a very problematic manner. Far from making the representational process more transparent, in this case the whole approach is disguised as objectivity; the personal, collective or institutional agenda behind it remains undeclared. It becomes increasingly frustrating, for the average viewer or listener, to understand which sources to grant credibility, and how to distinguish between information and manipulation. It is now rare to experience the verification, disclaiming of or apology for mistaken or misleading news given the day, week or month before.

Journalism acts between two poles: on one side, politically correct, or even the ‘optically correct’ language, used as a standard form of communication by respected broadcasters and newspapers. This ‘serious’ attitude might actually swap an actual episode (and its effectiveness) for its symbolic reading; that is, taking for real what is only a way of telling things. On the other side, a whole branch of the news industry, popular and stimulating for the audience, takes advantage of the influence and authority of journalism without taking on board the responsibility that we think is implied by that profession, something that David Foster Wallace points out extremely well in his essay ‘Host’ (2005).”^❷

“Constructivists stress the function of ideology or understand truth as a function of power.”^❸ “According to constructivists the documentary form does not represent ‘reality’ but the ‘will to power’ of its producers.”^❹ “It holds that truth is constructed by social processes, is historically and culturally specific, and that it is in part shaped through the power struggles within a community. Constructivism views all of our knowledge as “constructed”, because it does not reflect any external “transcendent” realities (as a pure correspondence theory might hold). Rather, perceptions of truth are viewed as contingent on convention, human perception, and social experience. It is believed by constructivists that representations of physical and biological reality, including race, sexuality, and gender are socially constructed.”^❺

“Two prominent figures of modern philosophy and critical thinking, Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault, based their studies on the notion that a document constructs a historical scenario, rather than merely representing it. For centuries documents were the expression of powerful people who controlled the means of political, economical and social structures. The work of Benjamin, who in a certain sense was the observer of ‘the becoming’ more than of ‘the being’, attempts to understand when, and how, things become the way they are, and how they are about to transform into something else. He consistently worked on the idea that accepted views are formed by the organization of documents in systems of truths that are established no matter how verifiable or real the content may be. In the words of historian Hayden White historiography is less a discovery of events and objects than their construction through narratives.”^❻

“The codes of documentary realism and the development of documentary (sub-) genres mean that footage shot on location is anything but neutral.”^❼ “Most obviously, it is not consistently objective, whatever objectivity might mean in the first place; it contains facts without ever being able to be entirely factual. While it might aim to represent the truth, it usually misses it, at least according to its own standards.

But both positions are problematic. While realists believe in an objectivity that, more often than not, turns out to be extremely subjective and which has nonchalantly passed off hideous propaganda as truth, constructivists end up not being able to distinguish the difference between facts and blatant misinformation or, to phrase it more directly, between truth and plain lies. While the position of realists could be called naïve, the position of constructivists runs the danger of sliding into opportunistic and cynical relativism. What do we make of this impasse?”^❽

“Everyone was watching”

Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia – Mohamed Bouazizi spent his whole life on a dusty, narrow street here, in a tiny, three-room house with a concrete patio where his mother hung the laundry and the red chilis to dry. By the time Mr. Bouazizi was 26, his work as a fruit vendor had earned him just enough money to feed his mother, uncle and five brothers and sisters at home. He”¹⁵“was 10 years old when he became the main provider for his family, selling fresh produce in the local market. He stayed in high school long enough to sit his baccalaureate exam, but did not graduate. (He never attended university, contrary to what many news organisations have reported).”¹⁶“Mohamed Bouazizi dreamed about owning a van.”¹⁷

“He applied to join the army, but was refused, as were other successive job applications. With his family dependant on him, there were few options other than to continue going to the market.”¹⁸“The country’s official unemployment rate is 14 percent, concentrated among young people, but the rate is much higher in Sidi Bouzid, say local union leaders, who put it at higher than 30 percent. Neglected by successive central governments, bereft of factories, seized with corruption and rife with nepotism, Sidi Bouzid and the small towns surrounding it are filled with idle young men, jobless, underemployed or just plain poor.

Faida Hamdy, a 45-year-old municipal inspector in Sidi Bouzid, a police officer’s daughter; was single, had a “strong personality” and an unblemished record, her supervisor said. She inspected buildings, investigated noise complaints and fined vendors like Mr. Bouazizi, whose itinerant trade may or may not have been legal; no one seems to know.”¹⁹

“On the morning of Dec. 17, as Bouazizi pulled his cart along the narrow, rutted stone road toward the market,”²⁰“other vendors say Ms. Hamdy”²¹ “confronted him on the way to the market. She”²²“tried to confiscate Mr. Bouazizi’s fruit,”²³“but he refused to hand them over. They swore at each other; the policewoman slapped him”²⁴“in the face in front of about 50 witnesses”²⁵“and, with the help of her colleagues, forced him to the ground.”²⁶“Bouazizi wept with shame.”²⁷“She humiliated him,” said his sister, Samia Bouazizi.

Mr. Bouazizi walked a few blocks to the municipal building, demanded his property, and was beaten again, they said. Then he walked to the governor’s office, demanded an audience and was refused. With no official willing to hear his grievances, the young man returned to the two-lane street in front of the governor’s high gate, [...] drenched himself in paint thinner then lit himself on fire.”²⁸“The fire burned and burned. People ran inside and grabbed a fire extinguisher, but it was empty. They called for police, but no one came. Only an hour and a half after Bouazizi lit the match did an ambulance arrive.”²⁹

“Yet when Mohamed Bouazizi poured inflammable liquid over his body and set himself alight outside the local municipal office, his act of protest cemented a revolt that would ultimately end President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali’s 23-year-rule.”³⁰“Bilal Zaydi, 20, saw the vendor’s relatives and friends outside the governor’s office that afternoon, throwing coins at the gate. ‘Here is your bribe’, they yelled. Over the next day and half the protests grew and the police ‘started beating protesters, and firing gas,’ he said. Mr. Zaydi, a high school student, slept during the day, and then he and his friends would take on the police at night.”³¹

“The uprising that followed came quick and fast. From Sidi Bouzid it spread to Kasserine, Thala, Menzel Bouzaïene. Tunisians of every age, class and profession joined the revolution.”³²“Students, teachers, the unemployed and lawyers joined forces in Sidi Bouzid and neighbouring towns, braving torture and arrest.”³³

“It took Ben Ali nearly two weeks to visit Mohamed Bouazizi’s bedside at the hospital in Ben Arous. For many observers, the official photo of the president looking down on the bandaged young man had a different symbolism from what Ben Ali had probably intended.”³⁴

“Three weeks after he set himself on fire, Bouazizi died in the burn unit.”³⁵“After Bouazizi’s death, the protests became widespread, moving into the more affluent areas and eventually into the capital.”³⁶“Protesters took to the streets with ‘a rock in one hand, a cell phone in the other,’ according to Rochdi Horchani – a relative of Mohamed Bouazizi – who helped break through the media blackout.”³⁷“The Tunisian authorities in the region tried every means possible to thwart the flow of videos. There were internet and power outages in Sidi Bouzid and neighbouring towns.

Yet even if a muted majority did not actively share news of the protests online until mid-January, Tunisia’s 3.6 million internet users – a third of the population, one of the highest penetration rates on the African continent, according to Internet World Stats – were able to follow news of the uprising on social media thanks to a solid core of activists.”³⁸

“Mr. Bouazizi’s self-immolation also sparked uprisings and vital change in other Arab countries such as Egypt and Lybia, collectively known as the ‘Arab Spring.’”³⁹

“A concept of aesthetics as something other than a state of contemplation. It is rather the capacity of an art form to put our sensibility in motion, and convert what we feel about nature and the human race into a concrete (visual, oral, bodily) experience. This way, documentary, photo-text reportage, archival research and interviews give new relevance to the contemporary art environment, almost as if art – also thanks to the technology of the digital image – had a privileged access to a non-censored form of communication. It is not that the urgency of certain issues has only gained visibility in the arts; rather, this urgency is currently so high that artists cannot leave it outside their practice, and feel the necessity to ‘inform’ the public.

¹⁵ “Everyone was watching” is a remix of news. It assembles material of 7 different sources about the beginning of Tunisian Revolution and represents the coverage of the international mainstream media on that particular story.

¹⁶ Fahim, Kareem. NYTimes.com: Slap to a man’s pride set off tumult in Tunisiahttp://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/22/world/africa/22ad1.htm?_r=2&pagewanted=all Accessed February 16, 2012

¹⁷ Ryan, Yasmine. Al Jazeera: The tragic Life of a Street Vendor. Al Jazeera goes to the birthplace of Tunisia’s uprising and speaks to Mohamed Bouazizi’s family http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/201111684242518839.html Accessed February 16, 2012

¹⁸ Fahim, Kareem. NYTimes.com: Slap to a man’s pride set off tumult in Tunisiahttp://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/22/world/africa/22ad1.htm?_r=2&pagewanted=all Accessed February 16, 2012

¹⁹ Ryan, Yasmine. Al Jazeera: The tragic Life of a Street Vendor. Al Jazeera goes to the birthplace of Tunisia’s uprising and speaks to Mohamed Bouazizi’s family http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/201111684242518839.html Accessed February 16, 2012

²⁰ Fahim, Kareem. NYTimes.com: Slap to a man’s pride set off tumult in Tunisiahttp://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/22/world/africa/22ad1.htm?_r=2&pagewanted=all Accessed February 16, 2012

²¹ Fisher, Marc. The Washington Post: In Tunisia, act of one fruit vendor unleashes wave of revolution through Arab world http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-tunisia-act-of-one-fruit-vendor-sparks-wave-of-revolution-through-arab-world/2011/03/16/AFfsueB_story.html Accessed February 16, 2012.

²² Fahim, Kareem. NYTimes.com: Slap to a man’s pride set off tumult in Tunisiahttp://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/22/world/africa/22ad1.htm?_r=2&pagewanted=all Accessed February 16, 2012

²³ Ryan, Yasmine. Al Jazeera: The tragic Life of a Street Vendor. Al Jazeera goes to the birthplace of Tunisia’s uprising and speaks to Mohamed Bouazizi’s family http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/201111684242518839.html Accessed February 16, 2012

²⁴ Fahim, Kareem. NYTimes.com: Slap to a man’s pride set off tumult in Tunisiahttp://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/22/world/africa/22ad1.htm?_r=2&pagewanted=all Accessed February 16, 2012

²⁵ Ryan, Yasmine. Al Jazeera: The tragic Life of a Street Vendor. Al Jazeera goes to the birthplace of Tunisia’s uprising and speaks to Mohamed Bouazizi’s family http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/201111684242518839.html Accessed February 16, 2012

²⁶ Fisher, Marc. The Washington Post: In Tunisia, act of one fruit vendor unleashes wave of revolution through Arab world http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-tunisia-act-of-one-fruit-vendor-sparks-wave-of-revolution-through-arab-world/2011/03/16/AFfsueB_story.html Accessed February 16, 2012.

²⁷ Ryan, Yasmine. Al Jazeera: The tragic Life of a Street Vendor. Al Jazeera goes to the birthplace of Tunisia’s uprising and speaks to Mohamed Bouazizi’s family http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/201111684242518839.html Accessed February 16, 2012

²⁸ Fisher, Marc. The Washington Post: In Tunisia, act of one fruit vendor unleashes wave of revolution through Arab world http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-tunisia-act-of-one-fruit-vendor-sparks-wave-of-revolution-through-arab-world/2011/03/16/AFfsueB_story.html Accessed February 16, 2012.

²⁹ Fahim, Kareem. NYTimes.com: Slap to a man’s pride set off tumult in Tunisiahttp://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/22/world/africa/22ad1.htm?_r=2&pagewanted=all Accessed February 16, 2012

³⁰ Fisher, Marc. The Washington Post: In Tunisia, act of one fruit vendor unleashes wave of revolution through Arab world http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-tunisia-act-of-one-fruit-vendor-sparks-wave-of-revolution-through-arab-world/2011/03/16/AFfsueB_story.html Accessed February 16, 2012

³¹ Ryan, Yasmine. Al Jazeera: The tragic Life of a Street Vendor. Al Jazeera goes to the birthplace of Tunisia’s uprising and speaks to Mohamed Bouazizi’s family http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/201111684242518839.html Accessed February 16, 2012

³² Fahim, Kareem. NYTimes.com: Slap to a man’s pride set off tumult in Tunisiahttp://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/22/world/africa/22ad1.htm?_r=2&pagewanted=all Accessed February 16, 2012

³³ Ryan, Yasmine. Al Jazeera: The tragic Life of a Street Vendor. Al Jazeera goes to the birthplace of Tunisia’s uprising and speaks to Mohamed Bouazizi’s family http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/201111684242518839.html Accessed February 16, 2012

³⁴ Ryan, Yasmine. Al Jazeera: The tragic Life of a Street Vendor. Al Jazeera goes to the birthplace of Tunisia’s uprising and speaks to Mohamed Bouazizi’s family http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/201111684242518839.html Accessed February 16, 2012

³⁵ Ryan, Yasmine. Al Jazeera: How Tunisia’s revolution began. From day one, the people of Sidi Bouzid broke through the media blackout to spread word of their uprising. http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/2011126121815985483.html Accessed May 26, 2012

³⁶ Fisher, Marc. The Washington Post: In Tunisia, act of one fruit vendor unleashes wave of reaction through Arab world http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-tunisia-act-of-one-fruit-vendor-sparks-wave-of-revolution-through-arab-world/2011/03/16/AFfsueB_story.html Accessed February 16, 2012.

³⁸ OCCUPY HOUSTON Why we are here occupyhouston.org/forum/.../why-we-are-here-1/#\$%&(-)+,-,mo-named-bouazizi/ Accessed February 16, 2012.

³⁷ Ryan, Yasmine. Al Jazeera: How Tunisia’s revolution began. From day one, the people of Sidi Bouzid broke through the media blackout to spread word of their uprising. http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/2011126121815985483.html Accessed May 26, 2012

³⁸ Ryan, Yasmine. Al Jazeera: The tragic Life of a Street Vendor. Al Jazeera goes to the birthplace of Tunisia’s uprising and speaks to Mohamed Bouazizi’s family http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/201111684242518839.html Accessed February 16, 2012

³⁹ FEDERATION OF ISLAMIC ORGANIZATIONS IN EUROPE – The Arab Spring wins the Sakharov Prize http://www.foe.org/ShowNews_en.php?tid=46 accessed on February 17, 2012

⁴⁰ Cramerotti, Alfredo. Aesthetics Journalism. How to inform without informing. UK and USA: Intellect, 2009 (p28)

⁴¹ Nash, Mark. Reality in the Age of Aesthetics – Frieze Magazine, first published in Issue 114, April 2008 (p2)

⁴² Steyerl, Hito. Documentary Uncertainties – Re-Visiones, 2011, www.visiones.imaginarianet/spp.php?article37 Accessed May 26, 2012 (p2)

⁴³ Nash, Mark. Reality in the Age of Aesthetics – Frieze Magazine, first published in Issue 114, April 2008 (p6)

⁴⁴ Cramerotti, Alfredo. Aesthetics Journalism. How to inform without informing. UK and USA: Intellect, 2009 (p22)

⁴⁵ Berg, Mariska van den. Redrawing the Boundaries – 2009 Valiz, book and cultural projects; Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan, authors (p9)

⁴⁶ Nash, Mark. Reality in the Age of Aesthetics – Frieze Magazine, first published in Issue 114, April 2008 (p2)

⁴⁷ Baudrillard, Jean. Forget Foucault – 2007 Semiotext(e) (p89)

However, in order to go beyond the linear way of proposing a ‘true’ version of the real, it is also necessary to invent a new language to tell the urgent story. The point is that art is not about delivering information; it is about questioning that information.”⁴⁰

“In 1921 Roman Jakobson pointed to a central feature of any discussion of realism: avant-gardes were forever breaking with the established codes of realism – to which the conservatives held as a rule – in the name of a greater realism which their art provided. Realism, in other words, needed constant renewal. In current discussions, artists’ work with documentary has the potential to inject a new realism into contemporary art. Many artists embrace the documentary form because they see it as the latest technique for the renewal of aesthetic language.”⁴¹

“In comes the field of art

“The more we try to pinpoint the essence of the documentary, the less we are able to comprehend. The reason is that the notions used to describe them are just as ill-defined as the pictures. Let us take an obvious example: the role of the documentary in the field of contemporary art. Talking about this is complicated by two facts. The first is that there is no viable definition of ‘documentary’. The second is that there is no viable definition of ‘art’ or even the ‘field of contemporary art’. And if we still want to reflect on the connection of both, we have to face the fact that we barely know what we are talking about. In the 1990s, documentary forms became popular again after a twenty year long hiatus induced by Reaganism and the artistic dumbing down which came with it. During this time, the field of art suffered the same onslaught in the public sphere as the field of documentary production. Since the documentary mode was automatically associated with publicness, state funding and the arena of communicative rationality, in many cases, it was advocated by reflex within the field of art. Art also partly tried to assume the role of an alternative media circuit.This aspect has been pointed out by Stefan Jonsson, who argued, that the field of art could become some sort of alternative CNN, which would elucidate the blind spots of corporate journalism and of globalization in general.”⁴²

“Artists often take an indirect route when engaging with issues that have an important political dimension. The idea of commitment can be uncool. Instead, the increasingly conventional aesthetic is minimalist, refusing to tell you what to think about what you are seeing. Rather, you have to make up your own mind, based on a very fragmentary mosaic (in linguistic terms there is no meta-discourse). Few artists are willing to consider the complex moral and ethical lessons to be learnt from contemporary anthropology about the politics of these engagements and the necessity to reverse the ethnographic gaze, empowering the other (‘reverse anthropology’, in the words of Jean Rouch).”⁴³“Content is – and stays – important, but it is very hard for an artist to live up to the research capabilities of a standard newspaper or TV station. Therefore, the artist has to play his or her cards by disclosing a universally accepted aesthetics of truth, that is: using another aesthetics, which reveals the former as such.”⁴⁴

“Within a broader framework, the current reorientation of the art to the documentary is considered a re-evaluation of the relation between art and reality. Stimulated by a renewed need for social expression in art, artists are exploring new forms of realism.”⁴⁵“What does it mean when artists create scenarios that rely on existing social realities, or when they actively enter a social realm in order to generate works of art?”⁴⁶

“For example,”⁴⁷ “in his new book Deconstructing Osama, [the] master of hoaxes Joan Fontcuberta takes on [...] the history and introduces the air of conspiracy theory surrounding 9/11. According to Fontcuberta, in November 2006 two photojournalists with the Qatar-based news agency Al-Zur; Mohammed ben Kalish Ezab and Omar ben Salaad, were following the trail of the leader of Al Qaeda’s military wing Dr. Fasqiyta Ul-Junat when they uncovered the truth about this shadowy figure. It was revealed that this dangerous man was in reality an actor and singer named Manbaa Mokfhi who had appeared in soap operas on Arab television networks and was the public face of a MeccaCola advertising campaign that ran in Algeria and Morocco. Shortly after the discovery of his real identity, Mokfhi

admitted he'd been hired to play the role of the terrorist. His current fate remains unknown as shortly after his admission he has disappeared after being subjected to an act of “extraordinary rendition.” The conspiracy theory deepens as Fontcuberta explains that the attacks on September 11 may have been orchestrated in order to create a pretext for increases in spending for the weapons industry and in particular to push forward with a “missile shield.” Intelligence services then invented the figure of Osama bin Laden and his associates in which to create the face of terror. In the face of Dr. Fasiqiyta Ul-Junat we may see Fontcuberta's –they look suspiciously alike. Throughout Deconstructing Osama we follow Ul-Junat/Fontcuberta as he shows up in photographs fighting in Afghanistan and in the company of bin Laden. The photographs, obviously doctored and very tongue-in-cheek, propel us through Fontcuberta's audacious claims and bring to mind his usual concern with truthfulness in photography.”⁴⁸

“Contemporary artists need not observe the guilt-induced prohibitions of the ethnographer – who no longer feels comfortable with the insinuations of subjectivity nor the cold detachment of objectivity – but they might learn from the impact of these modes within the tradition of art and journalism. Creativity and information are no longer distinct, as Alfredo Cramerotti explains, therefore we must think of how to inform with a light touch, how to yield pleasure while maintaining a political grasp, how to know and to dream at one and the same time.”⁴⁹

“Many [of those] questions arise from the cross-fertilization of journalism and art: is an aesthetic approach a viable path to bring in critical potential? Can art reinforce investigative journalism, which today has to struggle against lack of time? Are artists and filmmakers, who adopt archive research, interviewing and documentary, able to counter-balance the effect of media manipulation, using the same mechanisms?”⁵⁰

“Let me suggest that this uncertainty is not some shameful lack, which has to be hidden, but instead constitutes the core quality of contemporary documentary modes as such. The questions which they invariably trigger; the disavowed anxieties hidden behind apparent certainties, differ substantially from those associated with fictional modes. The only thing we can say for sure about the documentary mode in our times is that we always already doubt if it is true. Thus, an ambiguous situation has been created within the field of art. Superficially, or on the content level, many documentary articulations seemed to erode or even attack unfair power structures. But on the level of form, by relying on authoritative truth procedures, the conventional documentaries have intensified the aura of the court room, the penitentiary or the laboratory within a field of art, which was already quite saturated with these mechanisms. The institution of the so-called White Cube has been criticized for providing a clinical constellation of gazes with aesthetics and social values, which are actually quite similar to the ones deployed within conventional documentary modes. As is well known, documentary production has taken on forensic duties for a long time, and has functioned in the service of a large-scale epistemological enterprise that is closely linked with the project of Western colonialism. Reporting the so-called truth about remote people and locations has been closely linked to their domination. Not only mainstream documentary truth procedures, but even the features of the photographic technology, based as they are on military technology, testify to this historical link. Jacques Rancière has recently described the importance of these structures of seeing and knowing as the ‘distribution of the sensible’. According to him, the political component of any aesthetic endeavor is precisely located in the way in which certain aesthetic regimes enable certain visibilities or articulations and disable others. Thus, the political importance of documentary forms does not primarily reside in their subject matter, but in the ways in which they are organised. It resides in the specific distributions of the sensible implemented by documentary articulations.”⁵¹

“These works [below] are interesting because of the ambivalent way they [...] evoke the possibility of”⁵² “documentary [journalism] form, which is supposed to transmit knowledge in a clear and transparent way, has to be investigated using conceptual tools, which are neither clear nor transparent themselves. The more real documentary [journalism] seems to get, the more we are at a loss conceptually. The more secured the knowledge that documentary articulations seem to offer, the less can be safely said about them – all terms used to describe them turn out to be dubious, debatable and risky.”⁵³ “Hence the enduring paradox of what happens when aesthetic positions become substituted for their referent – reality becomes a fetish and perhaps just another commodity.”⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Whiskets, Mr. Critique of Deconstructing Osama. <http://5b4.blogspot.nl/2008/04/deconstructing-osama-by-joan.html>. Accessed June 7, 2012

⁴⁹ Cramerotti, Alfredo. Aesthetics Journalism. How to inform without informing. UK and USA: Intellect, 2009 (p9)

⁵⁰ Cramerotti, Alfredo. Aesthetics Journalism. How to inform without informing. UK and USA: Intellect, 2009 (p29)

⁵¹ Steyerl, Hito. Documentary Uncertainties – Re-Visiones, 2011. <http://re-visiones.imaginarar.net/splip.php?article37>. Accessed May 26, 2012

⁵² Nash, Mark. Reality in the Age of Aesthetics – Frieze Magazine, first published in Issue 114, April 2008 (p9)

⁵³ Steyerl, Hito. Documentary Uncertainties – Re-Visiones, 2011. <http://re-visiones.imaginarar.net/splip.php?article37>. Accessed May 26, 2012

⁵⁴ Nash, Mark. Reality in the Age of Aesthetics – Frieze Magazine, first published in Issue 114, April 2008 (p10)

⁵⁵ Marcondes, Rodrigo. Interview by Marjolein Van de Water – April 15, 2012

⁵⁶ Marcondes, Rodrigo. What happened on the 17th of December 2010? Welcome to Tunisia – Newspaper published to showcase works by AKV ST Joost students in Tunisia (2012). <http://www.atlab.nl/welcometotunesia/rodrigo.html> Accessed May 26, 2012

⁵⁷ Fisher, Marc. The Washington Post: In Tunisia, act of one fruit vendor unleashes wave of revolution through Arab world http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-tunisia-act-of-one-fruit-vendor-sparks-wave-of-revolution-through-arab-world/2011/03/16/AFIjsueB_story.html Accessed February 16, 2012.

⁵⁸ Ryan, Yasmine. Al Jazeera: The tragic Life of a Street Vendor. Al Jazeera goes to the birthplace of Tunisia's uprising and speaks to Mohamed Bouazizi's family <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/2011116842518839.html> Accessed February 16, 2012

⁵⁹ Fahim, Kareem. NYTimes.com: Slap to a man's pride set off tumult in Tunisia http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/22/world/africa/22a1.html?_r=2&pagewanted=all Accessed February 16, 2012

“My initial idea was to tell the story of this place and this person from a different perspective. Something more in depth than what I could find in the newspaper articles that I was reading.

At first I didn't question my position in relation to this antagonistic character. I wanted to go deeper into the story and I knew that the way facts were being relayed in the media was a bit precarious. If you look carefully at the newspaper articles you realize that they are all very similar. You see that a good part of the story told by them seems to be from a kind of chain reaction. The articles are based on other articles. Therefore I got the impression that there was very little actual research into the story and a lot of reproduction from that initial story.

I think my initial intention when I interviewed her for the first time was actually to try and find some balance in the way that this story had been told up until that moment. The story had only been told from the point of view of Mr. Bouazizi up until that moment, or from the point of view of the victor so to speak. So I wanted to tell the same story from a different perspective. And to draw attention to the voice of Fadia Hamdi and listen to what she had to say, intervening as little as possible.”⁶⁰

“At around 11am, I received orders to go to the square where some illegal vendors had parked their carts to sell fruit. I was supposed to stop their activities and confiscate the products if I caught anyone selling without a license.

When I got to the square all of the illegal venders had snuck away – except for Mr. Bouazizi. I urged him to move on but he refused. He began yelling at me and accusing us (the authorities) of taking bribes from the other illegal vendors, I had the right to confiscate his goods, that was my job and I never felt guilty about that. My colleagues and I started moving his fruit packs from his cart to our vehicle. When one of my colleagues was trying to pass me his scale, Mr. Bouazizi grabbed my uniform badge with both his hands making me feel somewhat threatened. I decided to call the back-up team as the situation was getting worse. At that moment, a passerby asked me whether I had slapped Mr. Bouazizi on the face and this is what ended up being the beginning of the popular story that has now spread all over the world, though at the time, I didn't expect that anyone would believe it.

Mr. Bouazizi continued to shout. He said that he would go to the Governor's Palace to complain even though he knew he would just simply have to pay 20 dinars to have his products back. The police team finally arrived, and my colleagues and I suggested that the officers confiscate Mr. Bouazizi's goods but the Chief of Police refused. There was already a crowd around us, and he wanted to act cautiously due to a mob gathering. He decided to ask Mr. Bouazizi to come to the Police station with all his gear. At the Police Department they confiscated one scale, two boxes of pears, two boxes of apples and three or four kilos of bananas.

When my shift was over I returned home and just after 1pm I got a phone call. It was from work, I was told that Mr. Bouazizi had set himself on fire and that I had to provide them with an explanation. I was shocked! I couldn't believe what I had just heard. I had the feeling that people would blame me for his suicide attempt. At that point people were already gathering at the Governor's Palace front gate. The revolution had started and in the evening, the president sent a special tasks force to Sidi Bouzid to stop the demonstrations. Before Ben Ali was toppled he ordered me to prison. It was the 28th of December and I think it was his way of trying to keep the people on his side. He tried to pretend that he actually cared about Mr. Bouazizi. I was in jail for three months and twenty days and no attorney had dared to defend me or take on my case before Ben Ali fled the country. After Ben Ali left, one attorney adopted my case voluntarily. She didn't charge me anything, still, it took over two months until my situation was cleared and now they have absolutely nothing on me.”⁶¹

“Before dawn on Friday, Dec. 17, as Bouazizi pulled his cart along the narrow, rutted stone road toward the market, two police officers blocked his path and tried to take his fruit. Bouazizi's uncle rushed to help his 26-year-old nephew, persuading the officers to let the rugged-looking young man complete his one-mile trek. The uncle visited the chief of police and asked him for help. The chief called in a policewoman who had stopped Bouazizi, Fedya Hamdi, and told her to let the boy work. Hamdi, outraged by the appeal to her boss, returned to the market. She took a basket of Bouazizi's apples and put it in her car. Then she started loading a second basket. This time, according to Alladin Badri, who worked the next cart over, Bouazizi tried to block the officer.

‘She pushed Mohammed and hit him with her baton’, Badri said. Hamdi reached for Bouazizi's scale, and again he tried to stop her. Hamdi and two other officers pushed Bouazizi to the ground and grabbed the scale. Then she slapped Bouazizi in the face in front of about 50 witnesses.”⁶²

“That morning, it became physical. A policewoman confronted him on the way to market. She returned to take his scales from him, but Bouazizi refused to hand them over. They swore at each other, the policewoman slapped him and, with the help of her colleagues, forced him to the ground. The officers took away his produce and his scale. Publically humiliated, Bouazizi tried to seek recourse. He went to the local municipality building and demanded to a meeting with an official.”⁶³

“On the morning of Dec. 17, when other vendors say Ms. Hamdy tried to confiscate Mr. Bouazizi's fruit, and then slapped him in the face for trying to yank back his apples, he became the hero – now the martyred hero – and she became the villain in a remarkable swirl of events in which Tunisians have risen up to topple a 23-year dictatorship and march on, demanding radical change in their government.”⁶⁴

“In comes history” ⁶⁰

“The atlas Group is an ‘imaginary non-profit cultural research foundation’ established in 1999 to research and document the contemporary history of Lebanon.” ⁶¹ “Following the eccentric logic of the so-called group’s declaration of authorship (in fact the group comprises just one artist, Walid Raad)” ⁶² “one of [the] aims with this project is to locate, preserve, study, and produce audio, visual, literary and other artifacts that shed light on the contemporary history of Lebanon. In this endeavor, [“they”] produced and found several documents including notebooks, films, videotapes, photographs and other objects. Moreover, [“they”] organized these works in an archive, The Atlas Group Archive. The project’s public forms include mixed-media installations, single channel screenings, visual and literary essays, and lectures/performances.” ⁶³

“Described as ‘re-igniting our curiosity in the truth’, the project runs a convoluted line between fact and fiction, replacing unitary power with fragmented assemblage. Raad’s critique of documentary formats” ⁶⁴ “represented in” ⁶⁵ “The Bachelor Tapes (2001), which consists of 53 tapes, only two of which are available outside Lebanon – 17 and 31. Shown by Walid Raad at Documenta 11, they present a man wearing a plain white tank top, speaking to the camera. He is sitting low – so low that he has to look up to the lens, as if he were addressing someone standing over him. The locale is nondescript, though wherever it is, it’s not the man’s home or his office. You imagine, instead, it could be a warehouse on the outskirts of town, or perhaps the basement of some abandoned building designed for purposes other than human habitation. And you wonder, who is this guy talking to you in Arabic? His name is Souheil Bachar, he says, and he tells you that he was held hostage in Lebanon from 1983 to 1993. For three months of that period he was held with five Americans, the last of whom was released in 1991 and all five of whom, he tells you, eventually published memoirs of their captivity – accounts that, despite the common origin, differed substantially. In a similar gesture to theirs Bachar details the conditions of his captivity: the oppressive darkness and dank air; the slow psychological transformation of each prisoner; the gradual shift in the relation between himself and the Americans, in particular the sexual tension that filled the room.

The role of Bachar is played by a well-known Lebanese actor, easily recognizable to most Lebanese audiences but unknown outside his country. Walid Raad, asked him to play Bachar because he figured that if Bachar didn’t exist, he nevertheless ‘would have to have been invented’. Among ‘the thousands of documents’ of the Atlas Group archive Bachar is only one of many such inventions. There are many others: for example, Fadl Fakhouri, the ‘foremost historian of the Lebanese civil wars’, who left 226 notebooks and two short films to the group at the time of his death. His films are the result of a curious practice, we are told. From 1975 to 1991 Fakhouri carried two 8mm cameras around, exposing a single frame of film on one of them every time he thought the wars had come to an end, and a single frame of the other every time he encountered a doctor’s or a dentist’s surgery. Two of his notebooks, selections of which were presented at Documenta 11, are available for consultation: volumes 38 and 72. Volume 38 contains 145 cut-out photographs of cars corresponding to the make, model and color of every vehicle used as a car bomb during the 16 years of war, while volume 72 contains photographic documents of Lebanese historians – Marxists, Islamists, nationalists and Maronites – who would go to the races and bet on the exact moment a photographer would snap the picture of a horse crossing the finish line. Another videotape, I Think It Would Be Better if I Could Weep, comprises six minutes and 38 seconds of footage of the sunset, taken by a government agent in charge of monitoring and videotaping Beirut’s La Corniche, a popular seaside boardwalk known to attract ‘political pundits, spies, double agents, fortune tellers, and phrenologists’. The video cost the agent his job but he was allowed, we are told, to keep his videotape.” ⁶⁶

⁶⁰ The History Museum <http://the-historymuseum.blogspot.com/> Accessed May 26, 2012

⁶¹ The Atlas Group Project <http://www.theatlasgroup.org/> Accessed May 26, 2012

⁶² Falconer, Morgan. Witness – Frieze Magazine, first published in Issue 75, May 2003 <http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/witness/>

⁶³ The Atlas Group Project <http://www.theatlasgroup.org/> Accessed May 26, 2012

⁶⁴ Beasley, Marc. Walid Raad/ The Atlas Group – Frieze Magazine, first published in Issue 97, March 2006 http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/walid_raad_the_atlas_group/ Accessed May 26, 2012

⁶⁵ Baudrillard, Jean. Interviews – I Turner, Chris (2004)

⁶⁷ Anton, Saul. A Secret History – Frieze Magazine, first published in Issue 72, January-February 2003 http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/a_secret_history/ Accessed May 26, 2012

⁶⁸ Unknown. Hegel’s Philosophy of History <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/h/lectures3.htm> Accessed June 7, 2012

⁶⁹ Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_materialism Accessed March 02, 2012

⁷⁰ Unknown. Hegel’s http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_materialism Philosophy of History <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/h/lectures3.htm> Accessed June 7, 2012

⁷¹ Kahan, Jeffrey. Historicism. Renaissance Quarterly, vol. 50, no. 4 December 22, 1997, (p. 1202)

⁷² Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_materialism Accessed March 02, 2012

⁷³ Kahan, Jeffrey. Historicism. Renaissance Quarterly, vol. 50, no. 4 December 22, 1997, (p. 1202)

⁷⁴ Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicism#cite_note-0 Accessed June 7, 2012

⁷⁵ Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations: Essays and Reflections. Reprint / Originally published: New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968. (p255)

⁶⁶ Anton, Saul. A Secret History – Frieze Magazine, first published in Issue 72, January-February 2003 http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/a_secret_history/ Accessed May 26, 2012

“Walter Benjamin once wrote that ‘there is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism’. The archives of the Atlas Group perhaps imply the opposite: there is no document of barbarism that is not at the same time a document of civilization. Benjamin’s famous reflection on the relation between art and history has not ceased to trouble art historians. Indeed, it suggests that the relationship has still not been properly worked out, to the extent that it is hard to say which of the two statements – Benjamin’s original remark or its inversion – is the more disturbing. Benjamin implies that all cultural artifacts are the spoils of the victor. As such, the task of a historian is to unearth an image of what was destroyed precisely by the creation of the present cultural artifact, the victor’s art. One can thus ask: if art history is the victor, what did it destroy? What lies buried beneath it? Paradoxically, however, once this history is unearthed, it becomes part of official history, and thus ceases to be a manifestation of what was destroyed. This is what Benjamin meant when he said that ‘the past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again.’ The moment it is seized and becomes a historical artifact, it buries the past rather than reflects it. If it didn’t, then history would never be the history of the victor; but the ‘past as it really was’.” ⁷⁷

“Is it possible for historical knowledge to objectively represent the past? Or are forms of bias, omission, selection, and interpretation such as to make all historical representations dependent on the perspective of the individual historian? Does the fact that human actions are value-laden make it impossible for the historian to provide a non-value-laden account of those actions?

On the one hand” ⁶⁹ [we have] “historical materialism, a methodological approach to the study of society, economics, and history, first articulated by Karl Marx (1818-1883) as the materialist conception of history.” ⁶⁸ “On the other;” ⁷⁰ “historicism, [which] is a mode of thinking that assigns a central and basic significance to a specific context, such as historical period, geographical place and local culture.” ⁷¹ “Historical materialism looks for the causes of developments and changes in human society in the means by which humans collectively produce the necessities of life. The non-economic features of a society (e.g. social classes, political structures, ideologies) are seen as being an outgrowth of its economic activity.” ⁷² [historicism] “as such it is in contrast to individualist theories of knowledges such as and rationalism, which neglect the role of traditions. Historicism therefore tends to be hermeneutic, because it places great importance on cautious, rigorous and contextualized interpretation of information, and/or relativist, because it rejects notions of universal, fundamental and immutable interpretations.” ⁷³

“Since the 1950s, when Lacan and Foucault argued that each epoch has its own knowledge system, which individuals are inexorably entangled with, many post-structuralists have used historicism to describe the view that all questions must be settled within the cultural and social context in which they are raised. Answers cannot be found by appeal to an external truth, but only within the confines of the norms and forms that phrase the question. This version of historicism holds that there are only the raw texts, markings and artifacts that exist in the present, and the conventions used to decode them. This school of thought sometimes goes by the name of New Historicism.” ⁷⁴

“The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. “The truth will not run away from us”.; in the historical outlook of historicism these words of Gottfried Keller mark the exact point where historical materialism cuts through historicism. For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. (The good tidings which the historian of the past brings with throbbing heart may be lost in a void the very moment he opens his mouth.)” ⁷⁵

“Given the plurality of voices within the “philosophy of history,” it is impossible to give one definition of the field that suits all these approaches. In fact, it is misleading to imagine that we refer to a single philosophical tradition when we invoke the phrase, “philosophy of history;” because the strands of research characterized here rarely engage in dialogue with each other. Still, we can usefully think of philosophers’ writings about history as clustering around several

large questions, involving metaphysics, hermeneutics, epistemology, and historicism: (1) What does history consist of – individual actions, social structures, periods and regions, civilizations, large causal processes, divine intervention? (2) Does history as a whole have meaning, structure, or direction, beyond the individual events and actions that make it up? (3) What is involved in our knowing, representing, and explaining history?”¹⁶

“I don’t know, but I get the impression that what we’re dealing with here is a lack of evidence and that no one will ever be able to tell what really happened at that moment. I think something happened, but firstly I don’t think that whether this act of physical aggression happened or not is what’s important or relevant here. I find it very unlikely that this could possibly have happened – the physical aggression. But still, this isn’t even the official version nowadays. Fadia was found to be innocent of the accusations. Charges against her were dropped. According to the Court she never abused or committed any crime against Mr. Bouazizi that day. Therefore I think in that sense the story is quite straight. But, what I think is that... In this particular moment... I can get very close to what actually happened but I will never be able to fully reach the truth and know for sure what exactly happened that day. And perhaps this is the question that I tried to answer over a period of three or four months... and that not having the answer is maybe the final aim of the project. Reaching the non-answer for that question. To have the guts to say that there is no absolute truth. I think this is the project.”¹⁷

“To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was” (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up [...]. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger.

And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another. A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.”¹⁸

“It is implausible, then, to suppose that a single factor – whether material class circumstances, ideology, or other social characteristics – is the sole important causal factor in large historical processes. Historical processes are contingent and conjunctural, so the effort to discover a single key to explain all large historical processes and outcomes is futile. At the same time, it is plausible enough that the circumstances and institutions associated with technology and property have historical effects; and in fact, it is straightforward to describe the micro-foundations through which these institutions interact with ordinary human behavior and choice to lead to social outcomes. This assessment suggests that historians and sociologists are well justified in including the concepts and heuristics of historical materialism in their tool kit, but that they would be well advised to reject the almost metaphysical certainty of the grand hypothesis.”¹⁹

“Glimpses of Truth”²⁰

“Slap that was heard across Arab world ‘didn’t happen”

Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia (Reuters) – They called it the “slap heard around the Arab world.” And it never happened. Or so said on Tuesday the Tunisian policewoman who was accused of hitting a young man in the face four months ago, prompting him to set himself alight and triggering a chain reaction of popular anger against Arab police states that has since unseated two dictators and caused others to tremble.

“I’m innocent. I did not slap him,” Fadia Hamdi, the 36-year-old policewoman, told a court in the provincial city of Sidi Bouzid before the judge dismissed the case and freed her. The mother of Mohamed Bouazizi, the young vegetable seller who felt so aggrieved by Hamdi’s treatment of him that he set himself on fire, forgave the policewoman in a spirit of “reconciliation” and dropped the complaint against her.

Hamdi’s lawyer said she had been made a scapegoat by deposed president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, who had her jailed as he fought to appease the protests triggered by Bouazizi’s death. Three months after Ben Ali’s flight from Tunis, Hamdi’s acquittal provoked jubilation among her friends and Tunisia’s state news agency TAP declared the ruling a proof of judicial independence and a “break with the old regime.”

Manoubia, the mother of Bouazizi whose name has been on the lips of millions who marched to overthrow Ben Ali and Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak, told the court according to TAP: “I leave things in God’s hands. For me, it is enough that Mohamed’s martyrdom has resulted in freedom and the fall of tyrants.”²¹

“RÉCIT – Le printemps arabe, parti de Tunisie, aurait été déclenché par l’agente municipale Fayda Hamdi, responsable de l’immolation d’un marchand ambulant qu’elle aurait frappé. Une version contestée.

Sans Fayda Hamdi, ils seraient encore là, peinauds, à siroter le pouvoir comme un cocktail sous les cocotiers. Au lieu de quoi, c’est le bazar, la révolution, la démocratie, tout ça... Plus encore que Mohamed Bouazizi, ce serait donc elle l’héroïne, qui a mis le feu aux poudres, allumé la mèche d’une révolte trop longtemps contenue

¹⁶ Little, Daniel. Philosophy of History/The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.) <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/history/>

¹⁷ Fragment of video-interview with Rodrigo Marcondes about the work **WHAT HAPPENED IN SIDI BOUZID?**, (18-03-2012)

¹⁸ Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations, Thesis on the Philosophy of History. Originally published: New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968 (p255)

¹⁹ Little, Daniel. Philosophy of History/The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.) <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/history/>

²⁰ Scott, H. Clara. Open My Eyes, That I May See.

²¹ Amara, Tarek. Reuters: Slap that was heard across Arab world “didn’t happen” <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/04/19/us-arab-unrest-idUSTHE798320110419> Accessed May 17, 2012

¹² Ayad, Christopher. Liberación: Le printemps arabe, parti de Tunisie, aurait été déclenché par l’agente municipale Fayda Hamdi, responsable de l’immolation d’un marchand ambulant qu’elle aurait frappé. Une version contestée <http://www.liberation.fr/monde/01012342664-la-revolution-de-la-gifle> Accessed May 27, 2012

¹³ Wyre, Davies. BBC News Middle East: Doubt over Tunisian ‘martyr’ who triggered revolution <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13800493> Accessed June 7, 2012

¹⁴ Cramerotti, Alfredo. Aesthetics Journalism. How to inform without informing. UK and USA: Intellect, 2009 (p72)

¹⁵ Cramerotti, Alfredo. Aesthetics Journalism. How to inform without informing. UK and USA: Intellect, 2009 (p74)

qui a enflé, enflé jusqu’à balayer tout un pays puis une partie du globe. On devrait la féliciter, lui dresser une statue. Au lieu de cela, elle a été traînée dans la boue, traitée de tous les noms, à commencer par la propre mère de Mohamed Bouazizi, une paysanne pas commode, qui nous expliquait en janvier :«Ce n’était pas la première fois qu’on saisissait sa marchandise, mais se faire gifler par une femme, en pleine rue, ça l’a brûlé à l’intérieur. Chez nous, les Hamama [sa tribu], ce n’est pas acceptable.”¹²

“Doubt over Tunisian ‘martyr’ who triggered revolution

Many more would pay with their lives, before Ben Ali finally resigned and fled into exile in Saudi Arabia in mid-January, allegedly with more than a tonne of gold from the Tunisian Central Bank. Ms. Hamdi has since been released from jail and has been completely exonerated. While acknowledging there was indeed an argument between her and the young man she vehemently denies hitting him.

After four months in jail, the 46-year-old municipal inspector said she was only trying to move him along from trading in front of the municipal buildings, in contravention of local by-laws. Ms. Hamdi admits the incident sent Mr. Bouazizi into a rage, but she has no idea why he then set himself on fire, or if he even intended to die in the act.

There is no doubt the subsequent popular uprisings in towns across the country were, in part, promulgated and promoted via social networking sites by driven, savvy young people. But, again, our Mohamed Bouazizi was not the linked-in, internet whizz, you may have read about, who wrote online about his intentions and frustrations.

As it happens it was another college student, with the same name, who posted his poetry and revolutionary song lyrics on the web. It was arguably these posts and the way they spread like wildfire in Tunisia and beyond – which the regime could do nothing to stop – that helped fuel the uprising.”¹³

“It does not matter what actually happened, but what people are made to think what happened. [...]

[...] What can we learn from all this? Today we have a multitude of perspectives rather than a universal truth. The previously posed question “could that be true?” has to be reframed in a more appropriate way, asking ourselves under what conditions this can be true. It is crucial to negotiate anew each time the conditions in which these stories are to be told. The difficulty to assess truth-telling depends not only on the number of sources, but also (or perhaps, rather) on the way information is organized. In our recent history media information processes have increasingly influenced the way we live: in 1951 a photo reportage on famine in Bihar (India) by Werner Bischof for Life magazine influenced the US government’s decision to appropriate a surplus of wheat (136 million tons) to alleviate the disaster. In the case of both the Bosnian War and the Gulf War, documentary reports on US and European televisions and newspapers provoked military intervention, mass panic and humanitarian relief regardless of the fact that accounts might have lacked correspondence with factual truth (Virilio 2004). The examples could go on forever, as the ability to read reality goes hand in hand with the possibility to construct it.”¹⁴

“One thing that an aesthetic approach to information could provide is the transparency of the failures of the representational system, whether artistic or of the media involved. The comprehension of facts is based on one’s active understanding of the world, rather than taking its appearance for granted.”¹⁵

“The idea was less about documentary filmmaking and artistic practices claiming to convey universal truth, than about denouncing the claim to universal truth staked by mainstream journalism. To come full circle, and close my brief detour, the reason why I think it is important to discuss journalism in relation to art is that I have a hypothesis to test. I advance the idea that, with the art world’s fervent grip of the journalistic approach, the production of truths (the question: what is truth?) shifted, and is shifting, from the domain of news media to the territory of art. If this holds true, the next question would be: does aesthetic journalism function as an instrument to provide orientation within the flux of information?

The journalistic position in art responds to an urgency felt by artists and video makers to foreground topics that are absent from mass-media information; it is also part of a tendency to use journalism and documentary methods to persuade the audience on certain issues. With respect to the latter perspective, artists tend to attribute ‘ethical’ value to this particular form of representation, and to exploit its position of power. This is close to Marshall McLuhan’s famous ‘the medium is the message’, the catchphrase that implies how

new forms of media (rather than content) change the perception of society, and move from a linear way of understanding the world (first oral, then written narratives) to a constant and contradictory flux of signs (which are seen and interpreted). The medium that actually carries the content is essentially devoid of any content: the important aspect is not the information but the forms of communication that deliver it. The medium, and not its content, is the element that influences our perceptions and social relations. Here, we can consider the practice as resulting from the interaction of journalism and art as the medium under scrutiny.”⁸⁶

86 Cramerotti, Alfredo. *Aesthetics Journalism. How to inform without informing*. UK and USA: Intellect, 2009 (p69)

“Nothing but the truth” 87

“Fadia Hamdi: It’s all deleted?”

Interpreter: No, but he [the interviewer] wants to record the whole thing in one take.

Fadia Hamdi: On the 27th of December 2010, around 11am I received instructions to get to that spot because of some illegal selling was going on there. When we arrived, we noticed a group of them [street vendors]. Some of them ran away when they saw us. But he [Mohamed Bouazizi] didn't. He had been warned earlier that week. I told him that we would confiscate his goods if he didn't respect the law; I let him go on Thursday of that week, but when I saw him on Friday, I tried to talk to him. But he started yelling. It was an unexpected reaction. So I decided to confiscate all his fruits: there was a box of peers, it weighted nearly 10 kilos. When I just touched the box, he pulled me from my badge. I was wearing the uniform. I was about to cry, after all I'm just a woman. I was so scared. He took the box violently, and he put it back on the cart. We decided, me and my colleague, to go for an other one [box]. But my co-worker told me not to take it and suggested that we should take his balance instead. Since I was closer to the car I took it, but he [Mr. Bouazizi] yanked it from me, injuring my hand. I screamed, and I backed off to ask for back up. He headed to the Governor's Office and we followed him. We stayed there waiting for back up, at the opposite side of the street. That was when a man came towards us and asked me if I had slapped him. He was not alone at that time. I told him that I would never do such a thing. That man turned out to be his [Bouazizi] uncle and I only learnt that some time later, when I was arrested. That same Friday night I was sent to the police station. I read that version of the story in a newspaper on Sunday morning. I saw the photo of his uncle on that newspaper. Anyway, back to the story. We stayed there waiting for the backup to come and eventually they arrived. The chief refused to receive the confiscated goods. He told us to get in the car and to follow him to the Municipal Police Office. Anyway, we did what he told us to do. I didn't want to get inside the office. How could I be blamed for something I didn't do? I was angry at my colleagues who didn't bother to defend me. The sheriff asked me to come and answer some questions about what happened. He [Bouazizi] should've been sent to jail for what he did to me. Anyway, I refused to enter the police office and I remained in the car. My colleagues had the products at that point. It was nearly 2 kilos of apples, 2 kilos of peers and 3 or 4 kilos of bananas and the balance too. According to the chief of police he didn't say that I hit him. He didn't say that I slapped him. Instead he started to repeat the same words he told me when they confiscated the cart... We then took the fruits to a public institution. That was the legal procedure, and we took a receipt for the products. And we took the balance to the municipality. After that I went back to my office, changed my clothes, and I walked out, before the end of my shift. It was nearly 1pm, when my colleagues called me and they told me that this person from whom we confiscated the goods had set himself on fire. I didn't believe him, I took it for a joke. He called me once more and eventually I believed. I went back to the office then because my superiors wanted to listen to my version of the story. I gave them my report and I headed back home. Anyway, they came that night and asked me to go with them. They told me that the regional police direction wanted me to be there to carry on with some investigations lead by the ministry of interior, and do a professional questionnaire. They examined my wounded hand, and asked me questions. They saw the physical and emotional problems that I was facing. Anyway, long story short, I stayed there Friday night and the whole weekend. On Monday they took me to the prosecutor, but he refused to see me, because I was a witness in that case, and not a suspect. He said I was just an officer who did my job, nothing else. I was told then that they were just waiting for instructions to let me go. And so they did. I was free at midnight that day. I was with two other officers. I was there for 72 hours, without any sleep, sitting on a chair. I was the only woman in the office. I saw the gas bombs coming in before I could leave. People didn't know that I was there. They thought that I was in Tunis. And then the police decided to keep me there for my protection. And even though I was free to go, I stayed there for another night. I went home on Tuesday night, it was about 1:30 am. And I was free until the 28th of December, that awful day in which Ben Ali played the hero and visited Bouazizi in the hospital. He was trying to ease the tension and to change public opinion. Anyway, he met Bouazizi's mother and she told him that she wanted to avenge me and he agreed on that. He then gave orders to the special force team to come and take me on Monday night. And we, Tunisians, know very well these people. They said that I attacked and slapped and I had humiliated him. These would have been the reasons that induced him to commit suicide. It is impossible, because if I really had slapped him, he would have sued me, and that's what the chief had told already. Anyway, on December the 28th, they arrested me. They had "presidential instructions" to do so..." 66

87 Steyerl, Hito. Documentary Uncertainties – Re-Visiones, 2011. <http://re-visiones.imaginarrar.net/spip.php?article37>. Accessed May 26, 2012.

89 Benjamim, Walter. *Illuminations*. Translation of: *Illuminationen*. Reprint. Originally published: New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968. (p88, 89, 91)

90 Cramerotti, Alfredo. *Aesthetics Journalism. How to inform without informing*. UK and USA: Intellect, 2009 (p72, 74).

“Villemessant, the founder of *Le Figaro*, characterized the nature of information in a famous formulation. “To my readers,” he used to say “an attic fire in the Latin Quarter is more important than a revolution in Madrid.” This makes strikingly clear that it is no longer intelligence coming from afar, but the information which supplies a handle for what is nearest that gets the readiest hearing. Information, however, lays claim to prompt verifiability. The prime requirement is that it appear “understandable in itself.” If the art of storytelling has become rare, the dissemination of information has had a decisive share in this state of affairs. Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories.

This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it.

For storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to. The more self-forgotten the listener is, the more deeply is what he listens to impressed upon his memory. When the rhythm of work has seized him; he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of retelling them comes to him all by itself. This, then, is the nature of the web in which the gift of storytelling is cradled. This is how today it is becoming unraveled at all its ends after being woven thousands of years ago in the ambience of the oldest forms of craftsmanship.”⁸⁶

“A significant number of artists, who work with journalistic methods, merely reproduce the same mechanisms of information adopted by mass media, without questioning their means of production. They pursue an alternative viewpoint for what is represented, but achieve only a sort of ‘inverse’ propaganda for this or that cause. Undoubtedly, we owe respect to counter-information activities, especially those born within specific political or social conditions, such as dictatorship or an extremely regimented society. However, I would argue that relying on the idea of ‘passing’ journalistic knowledge to another type of audience, like the artistic one, does not raise awareness of the mechanisms of information-making, and does not help to constitute critical principles for the future.

Artists who use photo reportage, non-fiction filmmaking and archive-style installation often aim to inform in a realistic manner, with 'a sense of spontaneity in the footage, and an interest in banal scenes from everyday life'. Even with archival construction, which can include fictional archive, combinations of found and new material and the drawing of new meaning from a combination of personal memory, association and imagination, the incorporation of the 'concept archive' itself has much to do with a sense of documentary, the witnessing of the past or evidence of the present. Art's claim to be outside the existing world (in terms of denunciation) is questionable, especially if we compare an artistic act with a political one: they are both 'an arrangement of words, a montage of gestures, an occupation of spaces'. In fact, artistic and political movements share a history of similar tactics in order to achieve a form of public presence and to discuss their presence in society. If artistic, political or journalistic manifestations are equivalent in their structure, what appears as knowledge (awareness of facts and situations) is only knowable through the practices that we use and are familiar with: this position is not outside the existing world, but embedded in it."³⁰

[illegible]

NON-CONCLUSIONS FOR AN EPILOGUE

“An art exhibition can be transformed into a vast journalistic report or a political declaration, with the aim ‘to make the world happen’. However, in order to make that world happen one has to make clear one’s own position in relation to the matter of investigation, exposing the grounds for working on the subject, and what they might gain from it. There is no reason why a viewer should accept more trustfully a journalistic reportage than an art-work; but this is also valid the other way around. I am not suggesting here that journalism is the same thing as art; they differ in essence, the former being a coded method, the latter a practice that constantly questions itself and its means. Whereas in art (and fiction in general) one adds to reality to construct a possible truth, in journalism (and documentary) one detracts from reality in order to represent truth only by a particular (and re-shuffled) segment of it, out of the continuum of life. What I advocate is that an artist who works with journalistic forms and methods is not outside of the process of truth-making. We require from both art and journalism a form to express our lived experience that reflects reality both in content and aesthetics.” 91

WHAT HAPPENED IN SIDI BOUZID? is an experiment in documentary storytelling. It is the result of research conducted for the conclusion of the Master in Documentary Photography program at AKV St. Joost. It aims to contribute to the debate on how journalism and documentary can engage reality, proposing an experimental way of presenting documentary research and narrative.

The project started in October 2011, during a field trip of the Master students to Tunisia. At the time, my purpose was to get a deeper understanding of the event that sparked the Arab Spring. My intention was to visit Sidi Bouzid, a tiny city in the middle of the country to research the story of the fruit seller Mohamed Bouazizi, the first hero of the Tunisian Revolution. I purposefully turned my back on all news coverage of the tale up until that point in order to find a different approach to the story. I wanted to get as close as possible to the truth of the events that unfolded on the 17th of December 2010, the day in which Mohamed Bouazizi and the municipal officer Fadia Hamdi, had the argument that allegedly prompted Bouazizi to commit suicide.

During my first visit to Tunisia, I tried to listen to the part of the story that hadn’t been heard until that moment. Although the event had been exhaustively reported on by news channels all over the world, very few of them had made any real attempt to hear Fadia Hamdi’s side of the story. That fact triggered my journalistic instincts. Consulting diverse sources is a fundamental principle of journalism that had apparently been ignored by most of the main stream media up until that moment. I decided then to subvert the logic applied by the media and do the opposite; I would only listen to Fadia’s side of the story. I thought it could be a way to find balance and a way to reach towards some kind of truth. I even believed that if I presented her side of the story as the absolute true I could change history and bring forth some kind of justice. Part of the outcome of this first visit to Tunisia was published in Welcome to Tunisia, a newspaper that is brought out to showcase works by AKV ST. Joost Masters.

Within this attempt of finding the truth, I stumbled across the argument of Cramerotti, and the first problems of my approach towards that specific story:

“To re-insert documents into other frameworks (I.e. art) without questioning their status, in an attempt to demonstrate their corruption, one might end up proposing another authoritarian reading, like the inverse propaganda mentioned earlier. An artist who tries to undermine an accepted truth, but does not consider what their documents produce, fails in the first instance to change the viewer’s perception of document and truth itself. On his part, the work of Foucault addresses the fact that a subject is able to tell one truth about his or herself, only if they are allowed to do so within certain power relations. The subject, in other words, is formed by the rules that allow them to speak, and that they will exert on others. Modern societies constantly develop these rules into authoritative structures such as the tribunal, the hospital, the professional order, the classroom, etc., to control the activities within what is considered truth and knowledge: a truth-regime. For Foucault, history is like a sequence of fictions, as truths change according to power structures, just as when the media coverage of war and terrorism is ‘fictionalized’. Truth is a function of language (that is, culture), which is created by humans; indeed all truths are created by humans. Every culture constructs its own version of what is true (and what is not), and the system to recognize it. “‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A ‘regime’ of truth’.” 92

“In short, if we consider documentary in relation to the search for truth, we miss the point: the factual quality of a film or video, in which the viewer can recognize a list of facts that supposedly happened, dissolved a

91 Cramerotti, Alfredo. Aesthetics Journalism. How to inform without informing. UK and USA: Intellect, 2009 (p42)

92 Cramerotti, Alfredo. Aesthetics Journalism. How to inform without informing. UK and USA: Intellect, 2009 (p74)

long time ago. We cannot speak about a ‘whole truth’, but only about moments of truth, throughout a variety of means in time and space. What we get from official documents or witnesses are only moments, which can then be articulated in a narrative (past, present or future) by the viewer, and not simply presented by the author as truth. In documentary, aesthetic and investigative journalism alike, the access to visualization (the possibility to obtain visual material) is what determines what is investigated and what is left out. The access to the possibility of image is the watershed for what can fit into a narrative accessible to the viewer and what cannot, or should not, be represented. This becomes evident when such a ‘truth-format’ is brought into another context (like art, or advertising), since it does not necessarily represent a document. As TJ Demos points out, artists reinvented the documentary mode, simply by avoiding the assumptions of objectivity, impartiality and transmission of facts, which documentary shared with its media counterpart – photojournalism.” 93

I started to reflect on my own position as a maker. I was walking the thin line between the belief in the concept of truth and the perception of how difficult its representation is:

“Truth in reporting is a myth: except for a direct involvement in the events of life, only degrees of approximation are possible, those being more or less reliable according to the position of the author; prejudices and obligation towards employers. Only in fields such as law, science and media can one still encounter the presumption of an unbiased representation of facts based on documentation. The artist who uses the tools of investigative journalism in their work adopts techniques like archive and field research, interviewing, surveys; they also employ specific narrative and display formats such as documentary style, graphic visualization, text-based and photo reportage. Ideally, their work offers a grasp on actuality relying on the viewer’s sensibility, therefore helping to develop the skills to ask proper questions; the journalistic approach of the artist is geared more towards the ‘effect to be produced’ rather than the ‘fact to be understood’. One might argue that this very ‘artistic’ information is also ‘consumed’ as an aesthetic product within the art world, but such major questions cannot be confined to the art circuit. We no longer consider artists as specialized craftspeople: to produce sense socially and politically one has to abandon the notion of artisanship in favour of innumerable forms of expression, which include film festivals, newspapers, television, internet, radio and magazines. Also, it has to avoid a certain ‘spectacularization’ of violence and suffering, which may result in an even worse outcome than embedded journalism. There are ways to avoid this and yet still employ fiction as a subversive but meaningful and effective agent of reality, which is precisely one of the aims of this book.

The potential of aesthetics in relation to journalism is based on two considerations: first, [...] traditional journalism itself uses a highly developed aesthetic tradition, which in time has gained the mark of objectivity. (In fact, as soon as a language is in use, the user faces aesthetic choices.) Thus, by being ubiquitous and universal, the ‘consumer’ no longer regards it as aesthetics, and accepts it uncritically. Secondly, the implementation of different aesthetics is a way of questioning the hegemony of the status quo. Content is – and stays – important, but it is very hard for an artist to live up to the research capabilities of a standard newspaper or TV station. Therefore, the artist has to play his or her cards by disclosing a universally accepted aesthetics of truth, that is: using another aesthetics, which reveals the former as such. Aesthetic journalism makes it possible to contribute to building (critical) knowledge with the mere use of a new aesthetic ‘regime’, which has the effect of raising doubts about the truth-value of the traditional regime. Not because one is better than the other (or more efficient), but because the appearance of both brings focus to the aesthetics itself, this way denouncing the claim that the system of representation is the same as what it represents (that journalistic representation is the same as the facts represented).” 94

Questions kept popping up in my mind. How close to the truth could I get? Should I actually construct my own truth? And what is truth after all?

The need to find answers to these questions and therefore understand my position as a storyteller sent me back to Tunisia two months later. I wanted to know if my report actually got close to Fadia’s version of the story, and moreover, I needed to listen to more people in that country and figure out the

general understanding of the event. I had listened to the mainstream media and Fadia so far, but what about the people of Tunisia? Once again I was walking in the shoes of the journalist who goes to far-away lands which he barely understands, searching for the truth. The difference being that I suspected the truth to be intangible and unreachable in this case. Steyerl and Cramerotti helped me to understand:

“The lesson is that we should accept the intensity of the problem of truth, especially in an era in which doubts have become pervasive. The constant doubt about whether what we see is consistent with reality is not a shameful lack, which has to be disavowed, but on the contrary is the decisive quality of contemporary documentary forms. They are characterized by an often subliminal, but still nagging, uncertainty, as well as the question: Is this really true?” 95

"If we cannot dissociate the act of reading reality from that of constructing it, perhaps it is time to reverse the process, and simply accept the uncertainty of representation as the core element of any representation of the real. It is the same as when we watch a live TV program broadcast from a battlefield, where a journalist is capturing images with his or her mobile-phone camera onboard a moving vehicle: it is quite possible, actually, not to see anything but blurred pixels. One thing that an aesthetic approach to information could provide is the transparency of the failures of the representational system, whether artistic or of the media involved. In the end, this is what art is supposed to do: to pose questions. Answers are to be sought in design, or science; but questions are definitely pertinent to art. Could an artwork based on journalistic criteria provide a valid account and claim authenticity, could it be a subjective interpretation of what actually happened? Are we able to generate reality through language, interactions, storytelling and performances?"

It is not a matter of substituting journalism with journalistic art, but rather of confronting this public service with a different mode of address. To achieve this, the artist has to work on the inner sensibility of the viewer, and not on their visual capability. After all, literature and artistic experiments have always preceded journalism and popular culture: from avant-garde film aesthetics becoming the norm in TV-editing techniques to the influence of painting iconography on photojournalism, via nineteenth-century realism establishing the visual pattern for documentary making. Far from being perfect, such an aesthetic use of journalistic methods – when produced and delivered to the point – could claim a key function in society.”⁶⁶

The result of my project is precarious, of course. **WHAT HAPPENED IN SIDI BOUZID?** is not a report, because it lacks the basic principles of journalism. It isn't an artistic project either. The work is merely the assumption that the position of the documentary maker is a fragile one, and the recognition of the uncertainty of representation showed as a patchwork of opinions, including mine.

“This entire process is dislocated: the contradictory processes of the true and the false, the real and the imaginary are abolished in this hyperreal logic of the montage. Michel Tort provides a fine analysis of this in his book on the Intelligence Quotient:

The question as such does not determine its response in the form in which it was posed, it is the meaning given to it by the person to whom it was posed and also the idea the interrogated subject forms of the most appropriate tactic to adopt in order to respond according to the idea he forms of the interrogation's expectations. [Le quotient intellectuel, Paris: Maspero, 1974]

Tort again:

The artifact is something other than a controlled transformation of the object for purposes of knowledge: it is a savage intervention in reality, at the end of which it is impossible to distinguish what in this reality arises out of objective knowledge and what results from the technical intervention (the medium). The IQ is such an artifact.

No more true and false since we can no longer find any gap between question and answer. In the light of these tests, intelligence, like opinion and more generally every process of signification, is reduced to the 'capacity to produce contrasting reactions to an increasing range of appropriate stimuli'.

This whole analysis directly reflects McLuhan's formula 'The Medium is the Message'. It is in fact the medium, the very mode of editing, cutting, questioning, enticement, and demand by the medium that rules the process of signification. So we can understand why McLuhan saw an era of tactile communication in the era of

97 Baudrillard, Jean – Symbolic Exchange and Death. Sage Publications, 1998 (p64-65)

95 Steyerl, Hito. Documentary Uncertainties – Re-Visiones, 2011. <http://re-visiones.imaginarar.net/spip.php?article37>. Accessed May 26, 2012.

98 Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Viewer – The Emancipated Spectator* was originally presented, in English, at the opening of the fifth International Summer Academy of Arts in Frankfurt on August 20, 2004.

••• A remix in literature is an alternative version of a text. William Burroughs used the cut-up technique developed by Brion Gysin to remix language in the 1960s. Various textual sources (including his own) would be cut literally into pieces with scissors, rearranged on a page, and pasted to form new sentences, new ideas, new stories, and new ways of thinking about words.

Naked Lunch (1959) is a famous example of an early novel by Burroughs based on the cut-up technique. Remixing of literature and language is also apparent in Pixel Juice (2000) by Jeff Noon who later explained using different methods for this process with Cobralingus (2001). Source http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remix#Remix_in_literature

96 Cramerotti, Alfredo. *Aesthetics Journalism. How to inform without informing*. UK and USA: Intellect, 2009 (p40, 74)

99 Rancière, Jacques. *The Emancipated Viewer – The Emancipated Spectator* was originally presented, in English, at the opening of the fifth International Summer Academy of Arts in Frankfurt on August 20, 2004.

electronic mass-media. In this we are closer in effect to the tactile than we are to the visual universe, where there is greater distance, and reflection is always possible.”⁹⁷

The webpage presented as the final result of my project presents what could be called a “black hole”, consisting of a repository of “truths” that swallow up any attempt at finding one unique answer for **WHAT HAPPENED IN SIDI BOUZID?** Instead, the conclusions are questions. A net of reflections and possible interpretations about one set of events, presented in paths that the viewer can navigate through.

“The work should call for spectators who are active interpreters, who render their own translation, who appropriate the story for themselves, and who ultimately make their own story out of it. An emancipated community is in fact a community of storytellers and translators.

Emancipation starts from the principle of equality. It begins when we dismiss the opposition between looking and acting and understand that the distribution of the visible itself is part of the configuration of domination and subjection. It starts when we realize that looking is also an action that confirms or modifies that distribution, and that “interpreting the world” is already a means of transforming it.”⁹⁸

The work also includes this dissertation, which is produced using the “remix style” ☺. The text translates the limitations of the interpretation of the truth into literary production. The idea of cutting, pasting and reorganizing material, is the same as the one used during the production of the webpage. As a documentary maker as well as a writer, I borrow the “truths” of the others, reshuffle them, and present one of thousands possible interpretations for the facts. The way they lay on the blank paper (or the screen) reflects my – or the viewer’s? – position and interpretation.

This methodological approach aims to destabilize the meta-discourse in which the work itself is hinged. The present textual “black hole” – the one in your hands – goes against the notion of the academic knowledge production, system in which the author is considered the fundamental piece. Instead, in my approach, the author becomes the remixer – just like Rancière’s emancipated viewer –, the one questioning the Establishment of the literary and scientific production. The meta-discourse is questioning the meta-discourse, and the answer, again, is the assumption that there is no easy answer.

For a (non) conclusion, I will, once more, borrow Rancière's reflections on the problem of finding "the title" for a work, and apply that to the problem of composing "the text":

“As I understand it, a title [text] is always a challenge. It sets forth the presupposition that an expression [idea] makes sense, that there is a link between separate terms, which also means between concepts, problems, and theories that seem at first sight to bear no direct relation to one another.”⁹⁹

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[illegible]

● A thesis submitted to the Department of Photography in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (Documentary Photography) under the advise of Prof. Michiel van Opstal

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