

In 2016

How it felt to live in the Arab World
five years after the «Arab Spring»

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INTRODUCTION

By ALBRECHT HOFHEINZ and STEPHAN GUTH

What does baby milk have to do with military might?

We are in Egypt, in Tunisia, the year is 2016. Milk powder and military prowess are important facts of life—on what basis would one, could one judge which is *more* important in the everyday? Garbage and gardens, policemen and pop stars, football and father figures, national pride and LGBT activism—all are aspects in a maze that constitutes the ‘stage’ where people live their everyday lives, trying to orient themselves and make decisions as they move about. What is beautiful, what ugly? How should the young settle down? Is life lived in limbo?

Is there anything that holds all this together?

Yes. These questions, these facets, offer glimpses on what many Egyptians and Tunisians felt and thought about in 2016, to the extent that reflections of their feelings and thoughts appeared and reappeared in public form and in a variety of media that year and may thus be grasped by an outside observer.

That is what the research project *In 2016—How it felt to live in the Arab world five years after the ‘Arab Spring’*, the results of which are collected in this volume, tried to do—to provide prisms onto the discursive and emotional realities of contemporary Arab life worlds.¹ As the ‘Arab world’ is too vast to be covered as a whole, we confined our attention to one country in the Arab East and one in the West: Egypt and Tunisia.²

There is a background to our undertaking. Writing as we do for an Anglophone audience, we situate our work in the landscape of English-language writing about the Arab world. This landscape, we feel, is uneven. Outside observers, not least in the media dominating public perception globally (and given the power dynamics in the mediascape, this largely means: Western, predominantly English-language media), have persistently and long focused on the ‘military’ rather than the ‘milk’. The ‘milk’—standing for everyday concerns of ordinary people—has not been absent from reporting, but general interest has focused much more on violence, religious extremism, political authoritarianism, military coups, or the discrimination of women. This focus has been most prominent in the journalistic media, but it has also left its traces in academic research and teaching where even attempts at deconstructing

1 The project was based at the University of Oslo and was carried out by an international team of over 20 scholars, with financing from the Norwegian Research Council received 2015-2018.

2 For more on the choice of these two ‘anchors’ see below, p. 7 with note 6, as well as p. 14.

lopsided clichés often inadvertently—by consistently focusing on them to the detriment of other issues—contribute to keeping alive imaginaries of a fundamentally and essentially ‘other’ Arab, Middle Eastern, or Islamic world, imaginaries that at least border on what has been termed ‘neo-Orientalism.’³

Our project was devised to take a step back from entrenched ideas about the Arab world and try to listen more closely to what people there express themselves. A study of how it felt to live in Egypt or Tunisia in 2016 could aim to be analytical, to examine structural formations, to uncover hidden causes. This is not our endeavour here. Rather than to *abstract* analytically from the object of our study, “In 2016” provides a snapshot *re-presenting* voices that characterised the atmosphere of how it felt to live in Egypt or Tunisia that year, in order to evoke and *make present* again the *atmosphere* of that year (or better, in German, the “Stimmung/en” evoked and created by the voices, the “Stimmen” of that year).⁴

Why 2016? 2016 was a year as random as any—it was chosen simply because it was the first full year following our research grant. Like any other year, it was evidently connected to its own past, just as it contained elements constitutive of years to come. As we selected it *a priori*, however, we could not and did not wish to regard it as a turning point or threshold year in the course of history.⁵ Coincidentally, 2016 marked half a decade after what at the time was referred to, mainly in Western media, as the “Arab Spring,” and what participants

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- 3 ‘Orientalism’ is a way of juxtaposing ‘the Orient’ to ‘the Occident’ as fundamentally and essentially contrasting entities or ‘cultures’, embedded in and often justifying uneven power relations (Edward W. SAID, *Orientalism*, London: Penguin, 2003 [1978]: 1-2). ‘Neo-Orientalism’ is a perspective that recapitulates “key elements of Orientalism in a contemporary setting” (Zachary LOCKMAN, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004: 220). The term ‘neo-Orientalism’ goes back to the mid-1980s (Youssef M. CHOUËIRY, “Neo-Orientalism and Islamic fundamentalism,” *Review of Middle East Studies* 4 (1988): 55–68) but has been more prominently used in academic debates caused by al-Qā’ida’s attacks on the US on September 11, 2001, and the subsequent US reaction (see <<https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=Neo-orientalism>>). On the ‘unease’ that many researchers on the Middle East felt after the 9/11 attacks, being challenged both by the events themselves and by prevailing neo-/Orientalist discourses in politics and the media, see *Das Unbehagen in der Islamwissenschaft: Ein klassisches Fach im Scheinwerferlicht der Politik und der Medien*, ed. Abbas POYA & Maurus REINKOWSKI (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008); for a recent update, see Stephan GUTH, “A losing battle? ‘Islamwissenschaft’ in the times of neoliberalism, IS, PEGIDA... and Trump,” in *Islam in der Moderne, Moderne im Islam: Eine Festschrift für Reinhard Schulze zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Florian ZEMMIN, Johannes STEPHAN & Monica CORRADO, Leiden: Brill, 2018: 496-525.
- 4 *Stimmung* (“atmosphere, mood, ...”) is a key word in Gumbrechtian thinking that is difficult to translate, which is why the author himself usually prefers to leave it untranslated. See especially his *Stimmungen lesen: Über eine verdeckte Wirklichkeit der Literatur* (München: Hanser, 2011; translated into English by Erik BUTLER as *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012). Cf. also Gumbrecht’s public lecture “The dimension of ‘Stimmung’ in contemporary popular culture,” given on December 13, 2016, in Minsk, available on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/t_dajld2BaA>.
- 5 Such as Jean STAROBINSKI, *1789: Les emblèmes de la raison* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979); Florian ILLIES, *1913: Der Sommer des Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2012); Frank BÖSCH, *Zeitenwende 1979: Als die Welt von heute begann* (München: C.H. Beck, 2019). – On the concept of the “critical moment” in history, cf., e.g., Ingrid GILCHER-HOLTEY, “‘Kritische Ereignisse’ und ‘kritischer Moment’: Bourdieus Modell der Vermittlung von Ereignis und Struktur,” in Manfred HETTLING & Andreas SUTER (eds.), *Struktur und Ereignis*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001: 120-137.

in the events of 2011 in Arabic called, and often still call, “The Arab Revolutions” (*al-thawrāt al-‘arabiyya*). Tunisia and Egypt played a leading role in these events, and this was one of the reasons why we chose them as sites for our research.⁶ In this research, however, the fifth anniversary of the “Arab uprisings” (a term that has become more common as belief in ‘revolution’ has faded) was only significant insofar as the voices of 2016 reflected on it— one example illustrating our effort not to pre-impose interpretative frames on the voices and images emerging in the material we collected.

To re-evolve the “Stimmung/en” of 2016 presented the challenge of writing as if one did not know what came after. As best we could, we tried to ‘dive into’ 2016, to immerse ourselves in the material, the voices made public in 2016, to shut ourselves off from taking note of voices emerging later, to systematically exclude anything published subsequently. Methodological inspiration for this undertaking came from Hans Ulrich GUMBRECHT’s seminal study *In 1926: Living on the Edge of Time*.⁷

The Gumbrechtian model

Gumbrecht (emeritus professor of comparative literature, Romance and German cultural studies at Stanford University) wrote his book to make the reader “feel ‘in 1926’” by conjuring “some of the worlds of 1926, to re-present them, in the sense of making them present again.” He did this by putting together, in alphabetical order just as in an encyclopaedia, a non-linear and non-argumentative selection of “entries” (= entry points) to the “worlds of 1926 [...] meant to bring out dominant surface perceptions as they were offered by certain material phenomena, and dominant world views as they were produced by certain concepts during the year” in question. Refraining “from in-depth interpretations, and from diachronic contextualizations,” the entries try as much as possible to be “completely referential”; depending on the material they reference and aim to make ‘speak’, they therefore may reflect both converging and diverging moods (*Stimmungen*) without trying to produce the illusion of a single “coherent and homogenous picture. Nevertheless, and perhaps paradoxically, [Gumbrecht’s book] suggests the existence of a ‘web’ or ‘field’ of (not only discursive) realities that strongly shaped the behavior and interactions of 1926.” To re-present this web of realities, the ‘entries’ are connected to each other in a multitude of ways, represented in print by copious cross-references that readers are encouraged to follow to establish their own individual path into and through the worlds of 1926. As a caveat, Gumbrecht notes that the entries used to present the worlds of 1926 do not aim to distil any specificity distinguishing the year in question from the worlds of the years preceding or following it; at least some of what appears in the one-year snapshot may well be found in years prior or subsequent as well, and “the author would not be disappointed if he learned

⁶ Apart from being the first two cases of the 2010/11 uprisings where popular demonstrations led to the deposition of decades-old Arab autocrats, Tunisia and Egypt stand for the two ‘hemispheres’ of the Arab World (the Maghrib and the Mashriq), and they were countries where academic fieldwork was possible to undertake for our research.

⁷ Hans Ulrich GUMBRECHT, *In 1926: Living on the Edge of Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

that the worlds of 1925 or 1927 (and so forth) were not much different from those worlds that he reconstructed for 1926.”⁸

Gumbrecht’s work provided the model for our project in several respects. Like him, we aimed to take a snapshot of a random year, deemphasizing chronological sequentiality and narrative linearity for the sake of making present the manyfold “everyday-worlds” experienced by and reflected upon by Egyptians and Tunisians in 2016. Like him, we included both fictional and non-fictional material (texts, images and video) dating from the snapshot year, often finding that fictional texts (in the widest sense, including cartoons, graffiti, cinema, etc.) presented a particularly high “density of those concerns and perspectives”⁹ that appeared pertinent to that year. Like him, we strove to refrain from imposing an analytical frame upon the material collected, aiming instead for “maximum surface-focus”¹⁰ in re-presenting the voices palpable in our material. We tried to approach, as far as this is possible in a textual genre, the display form that has become common in museums that have “abandoned the taxonomic principle which traditionally structured their exhibits, and now tend to organize them as a reconfiguration of historical environments [...] in which visitors can literally become immersed.”¹¹ And like Gumbrecht, we present our findings as a range of alphabetically organized entries connected by numerous cross-references the ensemble of which “mimic[s] the non-systematic character” of what people experience in their everyday-worlds and that constitute “an asymmetrical network, [...] a rhizome rather than [...] a totality.”¹² Since there is no ‘beginning’ to such a rhizome, readers should not look for one; instead, they are encouraged to jump into whatever entry point catches their particular interest and thence follow the web of cross-references opened up by that entry, thus finding their own individual paths through the worlds described and hopefully approximating how it felt to live in Egypt or Tunisia in 2016.¹³

Evidently, there are some differences between Gumbrecht’s work and ours. First, we chose not a year in the past, separated from our own time by several decades, but opted to collect material over the course of a current year during which we also could physically travel to the field. Second, while Gumbrecht worked alone, we operated as a collective. Third, even though Gumbrecht acknowledges that his “pictures of the world in 1926 are de facto confined to Western culture” (circumscribed by the Germanic and Romance languages he reads), he entertains the belief that his pictures contain “suggestions of openings toward non-Western

8 All quotations in this paragraph are taken from the “User’s Manual” in GUMBRECHT, *In 1926*, ix-xv. A detailed discussion of his approach can be found in the book’s penultimate chapter, “After Learning from History,” 411-36.

9 GUMBRECHT, *In 1926*, 429. – For more details on the ‘added value’ of fiction, see below, p. 11, with note 27.

10 *Ibid.*, x.

11 *Ibid.*, 419-20.

12 *Ibid.*, 435.

13 Parallel to the publication in *JALS*, the majority of the entries is published as a website which is perhaps even better able than the journal version to mirror the interlacing character of the *In 2016* rhizome (though the *JALS* version, too, uses hyperlinks, both within the full-text version and, via DOI, among the individual entry-articles, published separately). The website is hosted at <<https://folk.universitetetioslo.no/albrech/In2016/>> and shows the state of affairs as of October 2018 (no longer updated).

worlds.”¹⁴ *In 2016*, on the other hand, makes a deliberately less global claim, limiting itself to two countries from the Arab world.

The most obvious difference is due to the choice of year. Where Gumbrecht wrote to bridge a distance in time, to make present again what has passed, we had to extract, so to speak, a single current year from the flow of time while we were in it. Nevertheless, extracting and abstracting a year from the flow of time is, in fact, common to both projects, and both cases produced a particular and paradoxical dynamic between closeness and distance where the observer/author puts on the role of participant while at the same time abstracting this position from any active involvement, and abstracting the ‘atmosphere(s)’ captured from the agents experiencing them. What both projects try to ‘present’—and this is important to emphasize—is “a stage without actors,”¹⁵ or more precisely, a stage without actors engaged in performing a plot. It is the attempt to describe the stage framing the acts of actors as they come on stage. This is an essential difference between the Gumbrechtian approach and other recent works focusing on a specific year.¹⁶ Gumbrecht calls his essay “an experiment in historical simultaneity,”¹⁷ pointing out that this not only “allows for paradoxical relations among the phenomena re-presented” but also excludes “the possibility of treating subjects as agents, because actions can be credited with agency only in a narrative, and narratives require sequentiality.”¹⁸ In order to front the *stage* and abstract from the sequentiality of the acting happening on this stage, both *In 1926* and *In 2016* strip the description of any narrative linearity, emphasizing instead the *presence* of the *Stimmung(en)* and the potentially paradoxical simultaneity of the multitude of life-worlds portrayed.¹⁹ In doing so, both projects try to approximate, with words alone (i.e., without recourse to illustrations), the possibility of experiencing the ‘atmosphere(s)’ of worlds not physically present where the reader is.

Gumbrecht himself took inspiration from FLAUBERT’s *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, a collection of commonplaces that Flaubert exposes and deconstructs “by strictly limiting himself to their reiteration,” with “no authorial voice or discourse to comment on them or put them into historical perspective.”²⁰ Putting together an encyclopaedia- or dictionary-like collection of entries, refraining from imposing on them an overall logic or linearity, presenting them in alphabetical order, regarding them as fragments of a reality and not as a whole, renouncing any authorial comment: these are traits Gumbrecht picked up from Flaubert in his effort to achieve

14 GUMBRECHT, 432.

15 Ibid., 432.

16 Other than the works listed in footnote 5, this also includes Jürgen KUCZYNSKI, *1903: Ein normales Jahr im imperialistischen Deutschland* (Berlin: Akademie, 1988).

17 GUMBRECHT, 443.

18 Ibid., 432.

19 If precise dates are indicated in our entries, they mostly serve the purpose of concretisation (for example in describing the consecutive events in a court trial) and hence, the surface-focus of our work. In the world of film, a comparison may be made between our approach and a number of well-received TV series where the narrative plot is subordinate to the attempt at rendering a particular year’s ‘Stimmung’: *Babylon Berlin* (2017-; focus on 1929), *Ku’damm 56* (2016; focus on 1956), and its sequels *Ku’damm 59* (2018; focus on 1959) and *Ku’damm 63* (2021; focus on 1963).

20 Gustave FLAUBERT, *Le dictionnaire des idées reçues* (Paris: L. Conard, 1910); GUMBRECHT, 436.

“the greatest possible immediacy.”²¹ “I don’t know,” he writes, “of any other text that provides latter-day readers with such a powerful illusion of experiencing a past everyday-world from inside.” And even as he conjures up the illusion, he acknowledges its ultimate unattainability, concluding that “the desire for immediacy should not degenerate into the illusion of immediacy.”²² Our project was conducted in the same spirit.

Arrays, codes, and collapsed codes

To describe the year’s ‘atmosphere’, we follow Gumbrecht in identifying three categories of “phenomena and configurations”: “arrays”, binary “codes”, and “collapsed codes.” *Arrays* are “ways in which artifacts, roles, and activities influence bodies” because they “require human bodies to enter into specific spatial and functional relations to the everyday-worlds they inhabit.”²³ Note the focus on the *physical*, the *bodily* as the starting point for investigating how the relations—ultimately, relations of power, if we acknowledge Foucault—are constituted.²⁴

Such arrays coexist, partially overlap and partially conflict “in a space of simultaneity,” and “clusters of arrays are often zones of confusing convergence.” To “provide principles of order” in this space, discourses emerge that aim to “transform such confusion into the—deparadoxifying—form of alternative options”: *binary codes*. Since these codes provide structure and order to the “unstructured simultaneity of everyday-worlds,” Gumbrecht suggests that “one might reserve the concept of ‘culture’ for the ensemble of such codes.”²⁵

These codes, however, “are not integrated into overall systems, and [...] sometimes do not even succeed in maintaining their deparadoxifying function.” They thus turn into *collapsed codes* that “are particularly visible because, as areas of malfunction and entropy, they attract specific discursive attention and, often, specific emotional energy.” Arising from the interference of several different everyday-worlds in which corresponding binary codes continue to function in providing ‘order’, collapsed codes represent not only malfunction but may indicate areas of change and emerging new ways of structuring the ‘world’.

From “In 1926” to “In 2016”

How did we identify the arrays, codes and collapsed codes that expressed the characteristic *Stimmung(en)* of 2016? This was a process that went through many iterations. First, we had to identify our sources. As we were out to capture how Egyptians and Tunisians felt, thought about and interpreted their ‘being in 2016,’ we considered a broad variety of *cultural* productions, i.e., works that reflected and interpreted these thoughts and feelings—reflecting

21 GUMBRECHT, x.

22 Ibid., 436.

23 Ibid., 434 (as all other quotations in this paragraph). Gumbrecht adapted the term “arrays” from FOUCAULT’s “dispositifs.”

24 Relations of power are central to understanding Foucault’s use of the term *dispositifs*. Since Gumbrecht aims to avoid authorial comment, his *arrays*, though inspired by Foucault, do not explicitly front this focus on power, leaving it to the reader to ‘experience’ how various arrays create atmospheres marked by power relations.

25 GUMBRECHT, 434.

the ‘atmosphere(s)’ of 2016 and, as they were reflecting upon them in public, also forming them. As meaning-making productions, they could and should include both fiction and non-fiction—something that perhaps warrants a brief explanation for readers accustomed to a strict divide between fact and fiction. Fictional writing, cinema, music, and other art forms are often particularly apt at condensing significant sociocultural dynamics,²⁶ and not least reflections on bodily experiences, emotions and affects tend to be more readily accessible there than in other types of sources.²⁷

26 This is especially true for modern Arabic literature where authors tend to conceive of themselves, true to the tradition of the 19th century “Enlightenment” (or “Renaissance”, *nahḍa*), as both “scribes and writers,” as Richard JACQUEMOND had it, i.e., on the one hand, critical observers registering and analysing what is going on around them while, on the other hand, also being authors of fiction: simultaneously writing as historiographers and creative authors, they act as “conscience of the nation” (as the title of the English translation of JACQUEMOND’s *Entre scribes et écrivains* aptly expresses it).

27 It is beyond the scope of this introduction to attempt to summarise the many views and theories regarding the ‘added value’ of literature as compared to reality accounts that lack the quality of ‘literariness’. Suffice it to mention that already ARISTOTLE held that more ‘truth’ about reality may be found in a drama (i.e., a piece of fiction, *poiēsis*) than in a non-fictional account. This is due to the drama’s way of ‘staging’ a situation, a problem, or a conflict (lit., ‘imitating’, *mimēsis*), as opposed to the non-literary mode of describing from the outside, providing facts and data as well as *explicit* explanation and interpretation (*ekphérein*). Obviously, even ‘plain’ reports or descriptions have a *form*, i.e., something that *shapes* the reality they are talking about, adding ‘meaning’ to the otherwise meaningless raw data; and since Hayden WHITE (*Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, 1973) we know that even supposedly ‘neutral’ historiography is no exception in this respect, since also historiographers always tell stories and in so doing apply certain ‘literary’ tropes, make use of ‘literary’ types of emplotment and dramatization, often use ‘literary’ language, etc. Nevertheless, reality tales in the form of a drama, a poem, or a novel typically display ‘literariness’ to a much higher degree, and they do so on purpose, as any choice made by an author about content and form of his/her piece generally is a conscious choice informed by the wish to identify and reveal *representative essential elements* and *basic structures*. In that, a literary author may be compared to a mathematician seeking to find a *formula* that condenses his/her many concrete observations about the world into an abstract model, containing the essential variables and operators needed to describe the totality of all similar concrete cases. For example, to describe the area *T* of any possible ‘real’ triangle, it suffices to know only two variables—the length of a base *b* (any of its sides) and its height *h*—the area can then be calculated using the formula $T = \frac{1}{2} bh$; or, to calculate the volume *V* of any given regular sphere, we don’t even need to know more than *one* single variable, its radius *r*, and we will immediately get the volume by putting the concrete value of a given *r* into the formula $V = \frac{4}{3} \pi r^3$. Of course, the world captured by a literary author is much more complex than these examples, so literary works not only contain many more variables (representative characters, places, events, actions, roles, etc.) but they are also constructed using a more complex ‘syntax’—the way everything is put together to express the relations between the representative elements. This syntax also implies the *form* itself, the literary form that conveys many facets *implicitly* rather than *explicitly*, or, as the eminent philosopher of aesthetics Th. W. ADORNO maintained: art can express many things that other, ‘normal’ discourses are unable to say, but it does so, seemingly paradoxically, “by not saying it” - (*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7: *Ästhetische Theorie*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997 [1970]: 113 / English translation in: ID., *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel ADORNO & Robert Hullot-Kentor, A&C Black, 2004: 94). In principle, however, the ‘added value’ of a literary work does not, in this respect, differ much from that of a mathematical formula: it lies, to large extent, in the ‘beauty’ of abstraction. Yet, while literary works share with mathematical formulae their generalizing dimension, their search for comprehensive representation of a totality, a whole, and therefore also a high degree of abstraction, they are at the same time also highly concrete as well as “multivoiced” or “polyphonous” (BAKHTIN). Moreover, unlike ‘sober’ non-literary discourses, which tend to neglect in their picture the *dynamics of dramatic interaction* and the *emotional* responses people show in certain situations, and the way these affect the course of

We thus dealt with a large and heterogeneous body of sources, from newspaper articles and editorials to cartoons, novels, self-help books, TV series, feature films and documentaries, YouTube videos, Facebook and Twitter posts, as well as field observations. An obvious basic decision was to consider only material dating from 2016, where ‘dating from’ meant either published or prominently discussed in 2016.²⁸ Some exceptions were made for films that came out later if they were filmed in 2016. Compared to Gumbrecht, who “started by concentrating on books, objects, and events that attracted a certain level of public attention during the year in question,”²⁹ we potentially had to deal with a much larger amount of material, not only because we were dealing with an ongoing year but also because publication of written and audio-visual material has grown exponentially since 1926 and has seen a further explosion after the introduction of the internet and the spread of social media. On the other hand, we could make use of indicators such as best-seller and Goodreads lists,³⁰ longlists and shortlists of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (the ‘Arabic Booker’),³¹ titles prominently displayed at book fairs, in bookstores and street kiosks, interviews with

events—and, thus, history—, literature does supply precisely these dynamics and this emotional dimension. It does so in a way that allows us to “relive” the events *as if* they were real and happening *now*. GUMBRECHT speaks of the “concreteness” of literature, adding that literary texts are “particularly good at making the past present,” they “manage to make us feel surrounded by and immersed into the atmospheres” of the worlds they describe, give us a “sensual feeling of being part of and inscribed into” these worlds and their “rhythms’ transformation” (“Shall We Continue to Write Histories of Literature?,” *New Literary History*, 39 (2008): 530). – For concise and engaging introductions to the question of ‘literariness’ and the added value of fictional representations, see further H. Porter ABBOTT, “Narrative and Truth,” = ch. 11 in ID., *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd edn., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008: 145-59, and Samia MEHREZ, “Introduction,” in EAD., *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction: Essays on Naguib Mahfouz, Sonallah Ibrahim, and Gamal al-Ghitani*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1994: 1-16 and 147-48 (notes). For a discussion of the ‘literariness’ also of historical sources and historiography, see, e.g., Martin KREISWIRTH, “Trusting the Tale: The Narrativist Turn in the Human Sciences,” *New Literary History*, 23.3 (1992): 629-57.

28 Mostly, the latter were novels that, although written and published in 2014 or 2015, still were prominent on the book market, or were awarded a prize, or were the focus of notable controversies.

29 GUMBRECHT, 428.

30 In the Arabic world, “best-seller” is a category that must be employed with caution, as several studies have demonstrated (e.g., Richard JACQUEMOND, *Entre Scribes et écrivains*, see above, note 26; and ID., “Satiric Literature and Other ‘Popular’ Literary Genres in Egypt Today,” *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 16 (2016): 349-67); Tetz ROOKE, “The Emergence of the Arabic Bestseller: Arabic Fiction and World Literature,” in *From New Values to New Aesthetics: Turning Points in Modern Arabic Literature*, vol. II: *Postmodernism and Thereafter*, ed. by Stephan GUTH and Gail RAMSAY, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011: 201-213). Nevertheless, “best-seller” lists issued by large publishing houses or other organisations may be taken as indicators pointing to a certain popularity (or aimed-for popularity) among the reading public, and we triangulated such data with our own observations during visits to the Cairo Book Fair, the books displayed by bookstores and street-vendors, etc. What mattered was that they obviously were deemed significant on the 2016 book market and in public opinion and thus could be regarded as artifacts forming part of those “phenomena and configurations” of a 2016 life-world that had the potential of contributing to the identification of a Gumbrechtian array, code, or collapsed code.

31 Caution is in place also with regard to the literary awards such as the IPAF, as, e.g., Anna Ziajka STANTON has shown (“Eyes on the Prize: The Global Readability of an IPAF-Winning Modern Arabic Novel,” *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 2022). Still, the IPAF undoubtedly is an important media event, and IPAF-winning novels regularly remained prominent on the book market for some time.

booksellers and publishers, and automated tools to harvest what was ‘buzzing,’ that is, met with particular attention on social media in Egypt and Tunisia during 2016. For online material, we relied on the content analysis platform BuzzSumo.com to find out what Arabic-language content concerning Egypt and Tunisia was most shared on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, and Pinterest. Snapshots of the most shared items concerning the search terms ‘Miṣr/ī’ and ‘Tūnis/ī’ were taken for every week during the year.³² Triangulation with other types of sources we drew upon for our project showed that the material collected via BuzzSumo did yield a fair impression of what caught people’s interest in 2016.³³ For films, we included the highly popular Ramadan series on TV as well as Tunisian and Egyptian productions screened at Arab film festivals in Berlin, Oslo, and Tübingen.

All in all, we thus combined both quantitative and qualitative elements in collecting our material, and through a process of iterative comparing and discussing this material among project participants, we extended our breadth of view and eventually arrived at a tenable consensus and a reasonable degree of representativeness. Like Gumbrecht, we could not and did not aim for exhaustiveness or comprehensiveness but strove to attain “a level of documentary density at which the analysis of further sources [would] yield no additional insights.”³⁴

The articles, observations, and other information we gathered were stored in a research notebook in the note-taking application Evernote to which all project participants had access and could contribute. All notes there were supplied with keywords (“tags”), a process in which all participants were able to partake. After collecting data for a few months, researchers from both Norway and abroad gathered for a first workshop in May 2016 to compare initial impressions, discuss theoretical and methodological issues, and review first drafts to establish a model for how to write an entry. Contributions to this workshop were published, including a very preliminary list of 520 keywords/issues/topics that had emerged by then as important enough to be taken into consideration in the work of educing arrays and codes from the multitude of issues.³⁵ After the collection of material stopped with the cut-off date December 31, 2016, the list of keywords and issues, which had continued to grow over the year, was cleaned up (to remove synonyms, plurals etc.) and assembled into an inventory of 2759 items we called *Iḡārat al-qunūṭ bi-mā huwa fī 'l-Evernote* (‘Dispelling despair by what is in Evernote’). This inventory was put on a spreadsheet and divided among Elena Chiti, Stephan Guth and Albrecht Hofheinz (the project’s core group) to come up with prioritised suggestions for arrays, codes, and collapsed codes under which these issues should best be treated. These suggestions were debated, adapted, and expanded upon in repeated group meetings and further workshops, and gradually, a grid of terms took shape that appeared

32 The material collected via BuzzSumo consists mostly, though not exclusively, of articles from online newspapers, other news sites, and YouTube videos, but also some Facebook entries or blog posts. This allowed us to catch what aroused particular attention on social media; we did not have the resources to process, in a systematical manner, social media discussions themselves.

33 To forgo misunderstandings, it needs to be emphasised that ours was not a study of what social media users wrote, but of online media material related to their countries that they shared.

34 GUMBRECHT, 430.

35 This preliminary list is reproduced on pp. 229-33 of the “Introduction” to *Living 2016: Cultural Codes and Arrays in Arab Everyday Worlds Five Years After the “Arab Spring,”* themed issue, edited by Stephan GUTH and Elena CHITI, *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 16 (2016): 221-388.

sound enough to account for “the most frequently observed phenomena and configurations”³⁶ in Egypt and Tunisia in 2016.

These terms were then shared with potential authors whom we contacted based on their prior experience with the subject matter. Those who were interested and willing to adopt the Gumbrechtian model were assigned one or more entries, occasionally in collaboration with others in order to cover both Tunisian and Egyptian perspectives. Authors’ background varied: some were ‘purely’ academic researchers, while others were themselves at the time ‘living in the worlds of 2016’ in Tunisia or Egypt, and thus not merely observing these worlds but also participating in them, being shaped by as well as shaping them, turning their writing into a form of autoethnography.³⁷ Compared to Gumbrecht’s book, our work is therefore somewhat more polyphonous, although we strove to maintain the common model and subjected all entries to (often repeated) peer review and revision in the light of comments from fellow participants. Our polyphony parallels, in a way, the polyphony of voices apparent ‘in 2016’ and may thus be regarded as enriching rather than streamlining the project’s perspective.

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The multitude and variety of contributors did, however, also pose a number of challenges. A few of those who originally signed up were not ready, in the end, to adopt the “Gumbrechtian” style and to refrain as much as possible from diachronic framing and analytical interpretation. Others were unwilling in their writing to leave their country of fieldwork expertise and include material from the other country, sometimes insisting on what they saw as the specificity of the Tunisian or Egyptian situation where the Gumbrechtian approach would call for an eye to the commonalities appearing in the arrays, codes and collapsed codes we had identified. This caused quite a bit of overhead for the project’s core team, providing extra feedback by mail or during workshops, suggesting additional material, rewriting submissions, etc. In some cases, new contributors had to be found; unfortunately, we did not always succeed in doing so. The process of collaborative writing and redacting the entries was thus considerably delayed, and despite our best efforts, we were not able to fill in all the blanks and find authors for all the entries we had identified as significant.

There remains also a certain imbalance in that voices from Egypt appear more frequently than those from Tunisia. Certainly, Egypt as the more populous country also has a larger output of media and other cultural material; we strove as far as possible to reduce this imbalance but could not escape the fact that the members of the core group themselves have more research experience in Egypt, which at times limited our possibilities to provide additional suggestions for material and collaborators. Experts on Tunisia may thus find ‘their’ country underrepresented and the overall picture too ‘Egyptocentric’ and biased by the Egyptian perspective. As editors we are aware of this imbalance; however, the reader will notice that we also have been eager to *re*-balance the picture by encouraging co-authored entries or, where this turned out to be too difficult to achieve, to mark Egypt-specific articles by the extension “... (EG)” or “... in Egypt,” and ditto for entries with an exclusive focus on Tunisia (“... (TN)”, “... in Tunisia”). – It goes without saying that even a rich rendering of both the Tunisian and the Egyptian cases taken together still cannot fully do justice to “the

³⁶ GUMBRECHT, 434.

³⁷ See Tony E. ADAMS, Stacy Holman JONES, and Carolyn ELLIS (eds.), *Handbook of Autoethnography* (2nd edn., New York: Routledge, 2021).

Arab World” that the reader may have noticed in our subtitle, *How it felt to live in the Arab World...* Clearly, the Arab World is much larger than our two target countries alone, and after Tunisia and Egypt, many other Arab countries, in turn, witnessed their own versions of the “Arab Spring” with more or less far-reaching consequences for both politics and everyday life. Yet, Tunisia and Egypt are the two states where these developments were set in motion, and in hindsight, they may also serve as representatives of two main directions in which things could evolve after the uprisings and during the process of rebuilding the nation, so that the ensemble of the two cases can claim at least *some* representativeness beyond their own confines.

No hierarchy: a rhizome

As noted above, the entries in this publication are (within the three sections: Arrays, Codes, and Codes Collapsed) arranged purely alphabetically. This has an important conceptual reason, namely, to avoid any impression of hierarchical order among the different components of the *Stimmung(en)* we aim to reconstruct. Instead, we want to highlight the countless ways of entanglement between the various dimensions and components, objects, thoughts and feelings of the ‘present’ of being in 2016. This is an attempt to approach the feeling of a present as perceived and professed by those living and entangled in it, representing these everyday worlds *from within* or from below rather than looking at them from a systematizing, analytical perspective. Lest we be misunderstood: the alphabetical arrangement does not imply any claim to ‘encyclopaedic’ comprehensiveness; it is simply the best way we could think of to represent, in the two-dimensional space of a paper or web page, the *rhizome* of arrays, codes, and collapsed codes that informed the ‘present’ of 2016. It is also a reflection of our focus on the *simultaneity* of these arrays, codes, and collapsed codes as elements constituting the *stage* for ‘being in 2016,’ the stage where human beings lived, felt, thought, and acted. Obviously, no year is static; development and change did happen also in the course of 2016. True to GUMBRECHT, however, our focus remained firmly on those elements that formed the stage rather than on narrating the play. Therefore, where an entry contains traces of sequentiality, this should merely be understood as an effect of the surface focus of our approach rather than as the reconstruction of any causal or otherwise logical consequence.

One ordering or classificatory choice we had to make was whether to use ‘emic’ or ‘etic’ titles for our entries. Given our attempt to approach, as closely as possible, the ‘world(s)’ as experienced by Egyptians and Tunisians living ‘in 2016,’ we decided that at least the *array* titles—entries on artifacts, roles, and activities influencing bodies, and thus closest to the *surface* we wished to describe—should, in principle, all be emic. Where a straightforward equivalent exists in English, this was chosen as the lemma, in order not to exoticize the concept in an otherwise English-language publication. In some instances, however (e.g., *’alsh*, *’ashwā’iyyāt*, *centre-ville*, *kamīn*, *manīsh msāmiḥ*, *zaḥma*), such a straightforward equivalent was difficult to come by since possible English terms (e.g., ‘slum’) generally convey divergent connotations; in these cases, the entry title was left in the original Arabic or

French.³⁸ Moreover, some arrays (e.g., “Conversions,” “Dual Identities / Masking,” “Father Figures,” “The Policeman-Criminal,” “The Suspect Foreigner,” “The Voice from Above”) are umbrella terms for a range of kindred phenomena that are clearly palpable in our material even though the sources do not use a unified label for them; the English term here is intended as a condensed descriptive designation allowing us to exhibit these in their association. – As for the *codes* and their *collapsed* correlatives, both of which indicate a greater level of abstraction, we chose to render them in our text’s running language, English.

Mention must be made of a number of other alphabetically arranged ‘inventories’ that exhibit certain parallels to our work. Early on and in Arabic, we find an inspiring precedent in Aḥmad AMĪN, *Qāmūs al-‘ādāt wa’l-taqālīd wa’l-ta‘ābīr al-miṣriyya* (1953)³⁹—not only for the alphabetical order but for the way the author explains his focus in the preface. Called a “dictionary” primarily for the sake of its non-hierarchical organisation, this work resembles our perspective in that it aims to give a taste of (then) present-day Egyptian life in its everyday aspects, from costumes to customs to proverbs—aspects that the author found were often neglected by non-native ‘experts’ writing about Egypt who thus produced a deficient or even flawed image of the country. Another scholarly example for what the authors emphasise “is not a dictionary” but still presented alphabetically is *L’Aventure des mots de la ville*⁴⁰—here, this way of organising was chosen to reflect the lack of hierarchy between the various entries and their multiple entanglements, and to suggest to each reader to find his or her own path into the world(s) described. After the Arab revolutions, the words “inventory” or “archive” appeared more frequently in titles of publications aiming not to analyse but to preserve “raw material” documenting the state of societies or of the ‘present’ as it appeared to those who lived it at a crucial moment in time. Most of these are online archives, for example 858: *Arshif thawrī*—“raw, unedited footage shot and gathered over the years” by the Egyptian MOSIREEN (*Muṣirrīn*) Collective to “present thousands of histories of revolt told from hundreds of perspectives.”⁴¹ In print, we find *L’Égypte au présent: Inventaire d’une société avant révolution*, a book composed of conventionally thematic chapters but that claims to be a register of all aspects of life in Egypt just before they would be upset dramatically.⁴² Other titles try to list the most salient revolution-related vocabulary, like *Qāmūs al-thawra* (Dictionary of the Revolution) for the Egyptian case,⁴³ or the collection *Ces nouveaux mots*

38 Note that “Valentine’s Day” and “Compounds” are emic terms; the first is commonly referred to as *‘Id il-Fālentāyn*; the latter has entered Arabic as *kūmbāwndz*, designating what in English are known as “Gated Communities.”

39 Aḥmad AMĪN, *Qāmūs al-‘ādāt wa’l-taqālīd wa’l-ta‘ābīr al-Miṣriyya* (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta’līf wa’l-Tarjama wa’l-Nashr, 1953).

40 Christian TOPALOV & Isabelle AMESTOY (eds.), *L’Aventure des mots de la ville* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2010).

41 MUṢIRRĪN / MOSIREEN Collective, 858: *Arshif thawrī: An archive of resistance*, <<https://858.ma>>. The name derives from the number of hours of video material the archive had assembled at the time it went public in 2017.

42 Vincent BATTESTI & François IRETON (eds.), *L’Égypte au présent: Inventaire d’une société avant révolution* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2011).

43 <www.qamosalthawra.com> (in Egyptian colloquial Arabic and English translation). On the website, the authors do not disclose their identity, but state that the project received support from the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (*al-Ṣundūq al-‘arabī lil-thaqāfa wa’l-funūn*, AFAC) as well as private contributions to

qui font la Tunisie (Those new words that make Tunisia).⁴⁴ These works share with our project an interest in recording the multitude of intertwined elements⁴⁵ making up every-day experiences, frequently also with a particular focus on emotions and bodily experiences. What distinguishes our project, on the other hand, is its deliberate abstraction from linearity, event, or an eye for historical ‘turning points’; its abstention from explicit analytical comment; its snapshot view, framed by a random year, of pertinent phenomena in their simultaneity; and its Gumbrechtian way of categorising these phenomena as a rhizome of arrays and (potentially broken) codes.⁴⁶

a 2015 Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign; the digital publication was commissioned by Rhizome. The work is described as “a series of 125 texts woven from the voices of hundreds of people who were asked to define the evolving language of the Egyptian revolution. Material for the dictionary was collected in conversations with around 200 individuals in Egypt from March to August 2014. Participants reacted to vocabulary cards containing 160 words that were frequently used in political conversation [specified in the same “About” text as “public political speech between 2011 and 2013”], talking about what the words meant to them, who they heard using them, and how their meanings had changed since the revolution” – <.../en#about>.

44 Ed. by Hédia BARAKET and Olfa BELHASSINE, Tunis: Cérès édition, 2016.

45 On the website of *Qāmūs al-thawra* (note 43), clickable terms are arranged around a circle. On moving the cursor over a term, a diagram appears “that shows its [*sc.* the term’s] relationship to other words in the dictionary. The thicker the line connecting two words, the closer their relationship is. The diagrams are the result of an analysis of the complete text of the dictionary” (<www.qamosalthawra.com/en#about>).

46 To illustrate similarities and differences in approach, compare our entires with those in one of the two ‘dictionaries’ just mentioned (BARAKET & BELHASSINE’s *Ces nouveaux mots qui font la Tunisie*). The latter are:

‘*adāla intiqāliyya* ‘justice transitionnelle’, ‘*afw tashrīṭi ‘āmm* ‘amnistie générale’, ‘*almāniyya* ‘laïcité’, ‘*Ammār 404*, ‘*azlām* ‘hommes de l’ancien régime’, « *Ben ‘Ali hrab* » ‘Ben Ali s’est enfui’, ‘*būlis siyāsī* ‘police politique’, ‘*dawla ‘amīqa* ‘l’état profond’, « *Dégage!* », ‘*harga* ‘brûlure, i.e., migration clandestine’, ‘*hay’a ‘ulyā* ‘haute instance’, ‘*haybat al-dawla* ‘prestige et autorité de l’état’, ‘*himār waṭanī* ‘âne national’, ‘(rawābit) ‘*himāyat al-thawra* ‘[[ligues de] protection de la révolution’, ‘*hiwār waṭanī* ‘dialogue national’, ‘*hiyād* ‘neutralité’, ‘*hizb wasaṭī* ‘parti centriste’, ‘*hudna* ‘trêve’, ‘*humāni*, ‘*hurriyya* ‘liberté’, ‘*hurriyyat al-damīr* ‘liberté de conscience’, ‘*huthāla frankofoniyya* ‘résidus de la francophonie’, ‘*huwīyya* ‘identité’, ‘*ighṭiyāl siyāsī* ‘assassinat politique’, ‘*‘ilām al-‘ār* ‘médias de la honte’, ‘*infilāt* ‘dérapage’, ‘*intiḡāl dīmuqrāṭī* ‘transition démocratique’, ‘*irhāb* ‘terrorisme’, ‘*islām siyāsī* ‘islam politique’, ‘*istiḡāb thunāṭī* ‘bipolarisation’, ‘*i’tiṣām* ‘sit-in’, ‘*i’tiṣām al-raḡīl* ‘sit-in du départ’, ‘*jihād* ‘guerre sainte’, ‘*khābīr* ‘expert’, ‘*kursī* ‘siège, chaise’, ‘*majlīs ta’sīsī* ‘assemblée nationale constituante’, ‘*mrā tūnsiyya* ‘femme tunisienne’, ‘*mu‘āmara* ‘complot’, ‘*mujtama‘ madanī* ‘société civile’, ‘*nukhba* ‘élite’, ‘*Persépolis*, ‘*qannās* ‘sniper’, ‘*salafī* ‘salafiste’, ‘*ṣfir fāṣil* ‘zéro virgule’, « *al-sha‘b yurīd ‘isqāt al-niḡām* » ‘le peuple veut la chute du régime’, ‘*shahīd* ‘martyr’, ‘*shar‘a* ‘sharia’, ‘*shar‘iyya* ‘légalité, légitimité’, ‘*tajādhūbāt* ‘tiraillements’, ‘*tajfīf al-manābi‘* ‘tarissement des sources’, ‘*takfīr* ‘accusation d’apostasie’, « *al-tashghīl istiḡāq yā ‘isābat al-surrāq!* » ‘l’emploi est un droit, bande de voleurs!’’, ‘*tawāfuqāt* ‘consensus/compromis’, ‘*ta‘wīḏāt* ‘indemnisations’, ‘*al-thawra* ‘la Révolution’, ‘*Troika*, ‘*Wahhābiyya* ‘wahhabisme’, ‘*waraqa bayḏā* ‘feuille blanche’, « *yarḥmik yā Ben ‘Ali* » ‘Bénis sois-tu, Ben Ali!’’, ‘*yasār* ‘gauche’, ‘*za‘īm* ‘chef politique/leader charismatique’, ‘*zawāj ‘urfi* ‘mariage coutumier’.

Most of these “new words that make/shape (contemporary) Tunisia” can also be found in our work, without, however, being identified as arrays, codes, or collapsed codes in their own right—either because they were no longer identifiable in our sources as explicitly prominent in the discourses of 2016 (such as many of the original slogans of the revolution, e.g., « *Dégage!* », « *al-Sha‘b yurīd ‘isqāt al-niḡām* », or « *Shughl, hurriyya, karāma waṭaniyya!* »), which had had their heyday five years earlier), or because they

Attempts to ‘archive life’—the social life of a people, or a country, at a moment in time, and in its contingent plenitude—appear to have found renewed interest recently, perhaps related to a growing sense of the volatility of the present. As any archive, such attempts need a minimum of structure to be accessible, even if one aims to avoid hierarchy. Our choice was to follow the Gumbrechtian example, and like him, we conducted our project as a tentative “experiment.”⁴⁷ As any archivist knows, however, an archive is never complete, and our experimental one is a particular case in point. The reader will not fail to notice that a number of entries are left blank in this collection, marked as “in progress” or as “*desideratum*.” The first simply were not fully finalised by the deadline for publication of this themed section of the *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* (January 31, 2022); they will be added as soon as they are ready. The *desiderata*, on the other hand, are entries that we had agreed upon as significant but for which we in the end failed to find an author willing to tackle them in the Gumbrechtian spirit. They are included in the table of contents precisely to indicate that we have identified them and that they should be considered as important nodes in the rhizome of 2016. To give the reader/user of our collection at least an idea of their significance, the *desiderata* entries each contain (a) a list of the entries in which they are cross-referenced, and (b) a listing of those “issues” from our *Iṭārat al-qunūt* list that our team thought would best be treated in the respective Array, Code, or Codes Collapsed article. We wish we could have covered more ground but finally had to accept that the experiment of bringing a large and variegated body of contributors together to compose a work modelled on Gumbrecht’s approach proved more challenging than we had expected. As this approach is a fairly unfamiliar one in our field, it required more tutelage and rewriting than usual, and some potential authors withdrew since they were not willing to bend to the model’s constraints (past as present, no linearity, no analytical explication, etc.). Others were hampered by needs and obligations imposed by their regular (or irregular) academic lives, something particularly pertinent for those with only temporary employment. The *desiderata* are more obvious among the *codes* and *collapsed codes*, due to the fact that these are conceptualised as *clusters* of arrays and that the entries for arrays therefore were not only tackled first but also were ‘simpler’ to write. Without financing available for an extension of the project, we had to contend ourselves with publishing those parts of the rhizome that had grown since the beginning of the writing process. Thus, what the following pages contain reflects the open-ended, unbounded nature of the rhizome—and perhaps, in a curious way, our “experiment” in following a Gumbrechtian approach to re-present how it felt to live in the Arab world five years after the ‘Arab Spring’ yielded a torso that parallels the incomplete, but for some still open-ended, experiment that mushroomed in the ‘Arab revolutions’ a decade ago.

were too specific to qualify as an array, a code, or a collapsed code. Instead, we treated them as “issues,” including them in our *Iṭārat al-qunūt* (see above, p. 13) and thence assigning them to one or more of the arrays, codes, etc. For example, *harga* would be covered in our work under *Migration*; *khābīr*, mostly used for the foreign expert, would be treated under *The Suspect Foreigner* as well as *Inferiority vs. Superiority*; or *mu’āmarā* (‘conspiracy’) would be included in the more general *True vs. False* code entry.

47 “[A]s things now stand, everything is doomed to remain an experiment,” GUMBRECHT concludes his introduction (p. xv).

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