Arrays of Egyptian and Tunisian Everyday Worlds

An update on the project

*In 2016—How it felt to live in the Arab
World five years after the “Arab Spring”*

edited by

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Introduction: From “Issues” to “Arrays”

STEPHAN GUTH and ALBRECHT HOFHEINZ (University of Oslo)

The following *dossier spécial* is the outcome of a workshop, held in November 2017 at the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS), University of Oslo, to discuss first drafts of entries on the “arrays” in Tunisian and Egyptian everyday life of 2016. The workshop formed part of a 3-year research project, funded by The Research Council of Norway (Norges forskningsråd, NFR) and IKOS, entitled *In 2016—How it felt to live in the Arab World five years after the “Arab Spring”*.

The project’s main idea was to take an analytical “one-year snapshot” of life in two countries of the Arab world that had been of particular importance in the context of the so-called “Arab Spring”—Egypt and Tunisia—and to introduce into Middle East Studies an unconventional, innovative approach to how post-revolutionary everyday-worlds were experienced or ‘felt’: we use fiction (in the widest sense, including cartoons, graffiti, cinema, etc.) and social media ‘buzz’ published or prominent during 2016 to gain a more intimate understanding of the contemporary Arab world and the people living there.¹

The project’s five main methodological features—the one-year snapshot, the focus on the experience of everyday-worlds, the use of data from several spheres of cultural production, the idea to “let the material speak for itself” by not imposing on it pre-conceived analytical categories, and the presentation of our findings in the form of alphabetically arranged entries, suggesting a non-linear reading guided by numerous cross-references the ensemble of which adds up to a kind of rhizome through which the user will, it is hoped, be able to find his/her own, individual access to these everyday-worlds—these features are inspired by Hans Ulrich GUMBRECHT’s seminal “essay in historical simultaneity,” the study *In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time*.² This book provided the model for what our project group was and still is eager to achieve: an approach that allows the reader/user to “jump right into” and move around in the everyday-worlds of the year in question, to pick up its peculiar *Stimmung*³ without too much analytical intervention or interference from the part of those who collected the material. The latter idea seemed particularly important to the designers of the *In 2016* project since our target year, unlike Gumbrecht’s 1926, was, and still is, not separated from the present by several decades but belongs to a more or less contiguous present. This fact is also mirrored in the “dual identity” or double status of some among the contributors: as researchers on the contemporary Middle East they were/are, on the one hand, observers and analysts with a look “from above” at the everyday-worlds studied as “objects”, while on the other hand, they were/are themselves living *in* these worlds, acting as “subjects”, concerned with, involved in, and both formed by and forming these worlds.

Work on the project began in October 2015. During the “target year,” 2016, activities consisted mainly in collecting relevant material⁴ and in assigning preliminary keywords to the data to facilitate search and processing. Towards the end of 2016, in a workshop in November, a first attempt was made to “bundle” pertinent aspects of the extensive data under a number of overarching headings that would have the potential of becoming entries/lemmata in the future publication. These efforts, which were documented in a special dossier of the *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* the same year,⁵ continued and intensified during the current year, 2017. In regular meetings, the project’s core group and associated researchers discussed the collected data in the light of the project’s methodological approach and the publication of the research results in the form of a dictionary- or encyclopedia-like monograph, as the print-version of a corresponding website. The main challenge consisted in narrowing down the long list of over 2,750 keywords and issues observed⁶ and transforming them into a new list of terms deemed to be the most suitable ‘points of entry’ into the world of 2016 and, hence, entries in the future publication.

As in Gumbrecht’s *In 1926*, the entries of our *In 2016*, too, are of three types: “arrays” (French: *dispositifs*), binary “codes”, and “codes collapsed”.⁷ Let us repeat here, for the sake of convenience, the description of these categories as given in the Introduction to last year’s *Living 2016* dossier:

Arrays are ways in which “*artifacts, roles, and activities influence bodies*,” because these “artifacts, roles, and activities [...] require the human bodies to enter into specific spatial and functional relations to the everyday-worlds they inhabit.”⁸ For instance, for the year 1926 Gumbrecht identified the following arrays (my selection):

Artifacts: Airplanes | Assembly Lines | Automobiles | Bars | Elevators | Gomina | Gramophones | League of Nations | Movie Palaces | Mummies | Ocean Liners | Railroads | Revues | Roof Gardens | Telephones | Wireless Communication

Roles: Americans in Paris | Employees | Engineers | Hunger Artists | Reporters | Stars

Activities: Boxing | Bullfighting | Cremation | Dancing | Endurance | Jazz | Mountaineering | Murder | Six-Day Races | Strikes

What Gumbrecht calls **codes** are *clusters of arrays* that coexist and overlap in a space of simultaneity and “tend to generate discourses which transform [their] confusion into [...] *alternative options*,”⁹ for example:

Codes: Action vs Impotence | Authenticity vs Artificiality | Center vs Periphery | Immanence vs Transcendence | Individuality vs Collectivity | Male vs Female | Present vs Past | Silence vs Noise | Sobriety vs Exuberance | Uncertainty vs Reality

Since such binary codes “provide *principles of order* within the unstructured simultaneity of everyday-worlds, one might,” according to Gumbrecht, “reserve the concept of ‘culture’ for the ensemble of such codes.”¹⁰

When the codes lose their de-paradoxifying function, Gumbrecht calls them **collapsed codes**. Collapsed codes, he says, “are *particularly visible* because, as *areas of malfunction and entropy*, they *attract specific discursive attention* and, often, *specific emotional energy*.”¹¹ Here are the collapsed codes the author identified for his target year:

Codes Collapsed: Action = Impotence (Tragedy) | Authenticity = Artificiality (Life) | Center = Periphery (Infinitude) | Immanence = Transcendence (Death) | Individuality = Collectivity (Leader) | Male = Female (Gender Trouble) | Present = Past (Eternity)

Our discussions regarding which arrays, codes, and codes collapsed should be considered most characteristic for Egyptian and Tunisian everyday-worlds of 2016 are certainly not yet concluded. As of end-2017, we are operating with a list that took shape over the course of our regular meetings and further crystallized during the workshop held in November 2017, which was dedicated exclusively to the discussion of “array” entry drafts. This list contains the following entries:

ARRAYS (“artifacts, activities, or roles that affect human bodies”) [NB: entries contained in the present volume are highlighted in bold here]

ʔAlsh (a parodic technique)	Friends
ʿĀmmiyya (Egyptian Arabic)	Garbage / <i>zibāla</i> / <i>qumāma</i>
Apartment wanted	Gated communities / Compounds
ʿAshwāʿiyyāt	Gyms
Baby milk	High school exams
Celebrities	The Honourable Citizen / <i>al-Muwāṭin al-sharīf</i>
Clash / Polarisation	In Islam...
Conspiracy theories	<i>Kamīn</i> (informal random checkpoints)
Conversions	LGBT
Court trials	<i>Mā-nīsh musāmiḥ</i> (fighting corruption)
Crowdfunding	Memorial days / Commemoration
Dancing: see → Music	Migration
Dérja (Tunisian Arabic)	Mobile phones
Disappearances	The Mother of the Hero / <i>Umm al-baṭal</i>
Disasters	Music (incl. Dancing)
Dollar crisis	New Cafés
Downtown	Prison
Dual identities / Masking	The Police(man) Criminal
Father Figures	Psychiatrists
Football	Red Sea Islands
<i>Francophonie</i>	

Satire (incl. *adab sākhir* and YouTube channels; possibly to be divided into two or more individual arrays)
 Self-censoring
 Self-help (incl. exploring the self, authenticity, self-formation, self-help literature)
 Social media (Facebook, Twitter)
 Suicide
 The Suspect Foreigner
 Tickling Giants / *ʔillit adab*

Transitional Justice
 Tricking the System / Tricked by the System
 Tuk-tuk
 Uber
 Valentine's Day
 The Voice from Above (omnipresent propaganda discourses)
Zaḥma / Crowd (probably including *Asphyxia/Suffocation*)

As for the **CODES**, i.e., those “clusters of arrays” that “tend to generate discourses which transform [their] confusion into [...] alternative options” and as such provide “principles of order within the unstructured simultaneity of everyday-worlds” (amounting to what may be conceived of as “culture”, see above, p. 506), our preliminary list comprises the following pairs. Question marks “[?]” indicate where we still are particularly in doubt; an additional workshop in spring 2018 will be dedicated to further discussion and clarification, both with regard to appropriate terminology and to assigning phenomena and issues observed to the terms agreed upon. In some instances, the reader will find additional information after a vertical line “|”, indicating alternative names under discussion. Parentheses are also used to remind us of a number of issues/phenomena that may “belong” to the code in question.

Affluence *vs* Destitution
 Beautiful *vs* Ugly (incl. Clean-pure *vs* Dirty-filthy, Culture [as Humanism] *vs* Barbarism | re-enchantment; ...)
 Culture *vs* Politics | Healthy *vs* Unhealthy (dehumanisation)
 Center *vs* Periphery (incl. City *vs* Compound, *Ashwā'iyyāt* *vs* Center; Provinces *vs* Big cities, esp. the Capital)
 Egypt/Tunisia *vs* Barra
 Egypt *vs* Tunisia
 Freedom *vs* Constraint
 Hope *vs* Despair
 [?] Idea *vs* Practice (Letter/rules/principles *vs* Application, “Spirit of the laws” *vs* Non-implementation)
 Individual *vs* Collective/Community,

Individuality *vs* Collectivity (incl. “Public morals” and space, freedom *vs* constraint, individual freedom *vs* *al-maṣlaḥa al-ʿamma*, egotism *vs* altruism/solidarity, “Schicksals-gemeinschaft”, sense of duty, ir-/responsibility, etc.)
 Male *vs* Female / Man *vs* Woman
 Normality *vs* Heroism
 Past *vs* Present (Continuity *vs* Change)
 Private *vs* Public (taxi; new cafes; as a space where public and private intersect; street)
 [?] Right *vs* Wrong (moral normativity, *mā-yiṣaḥḥ-ish kidā*)
 Security *vs* Fear | Stability *vs* Freedom/Democracy
 Superiority *vs* Inferiority | Victory *vs*

Defeat	the country?”, Freedom of expression
“The System” vs “The People” (incl.	vs self-censoring, + Rant)
Deep state)	<i>Waṭan</i> vs <i>Ghurba</i>
True vs False	Young vs Settled
Voice vs Silence (“Who has a voice in	

What was said about the Codes—still work in progress—holds true perhaps even more so for the **CODES COLLAPSED**, i.e., those that have lost their de-paradoxifying function and are now “particularly visible because, as areas of malfunction and entropy, they attract specific discursive attention and, often, specific emotional energy” (see above, p. 506). There remain even more open questions here than in the case of the Codes, and the list we shall end up with in our *In 2016* publication later in 2018 will mirror our opinion on how deep the Revolutions really have shattered Egyptians’ and Tunisians’ worldviews: can we really speak of “collapsed” codes, codes that have lost their de-paradoxifying function and point to areas of malfunction? In some cases, it looks as if, in spite of the Revolutions, people in 2016 still conceive of their worlds with categories that are *not* so different from earlier ones. Often, codes still appear to provide meaningful options rather than having become meaningless, “neutralized” by each other. In other cases, however, collapsed codes may indeed have generated new “states of matter,” express new configurations and ways of perception. Here is the list that reflects our current state of discussion (end-2017):

[?] Hope = Despair/Hell (Dystopia) (*ikṭi’āb*; frustration; apocalypse; apocalyptic descriptions of the end of the city, both in novels and in television shows; environmental dystopias: earthquakes, desertification; horror fiction; Trump; global war; dehumanisation; upholding humanity) | Future = No Future (Dystopia). – It seems to be quite clear that we are dealing with a collapsed code here, but we are still undecided on whether it should be merged with, or be kept apart from, the following:

Past = Present (Stuck) (blocked energy/dreams/hope; as in social media and youth’s cultural productions; activists’ *ikṭi’āb*, *ta’ab*, “I can’t leave but I can’t stay”; *maznūqīn* / asphyxia, *ṭarīq masdūd*; *kamīn*; *nafsinā itsaddit*; related also to *Waṭan* = *Ghurba*; frustration / *iḥbāt*, sense of defeat, see Victory vs Defeat; political demobilization, “we withdrew from politics”; also related to rant; cf. also Gumbrecht’s “Action = Impotence (Tragedy)”.

Normality = Heroism (Surviving) (the Ordinary citizen as Hero; Managing / mastering everyday life) | Lack of Resources = Resourcefulness (*Ibtikār*). NB: We may be dealing with a secular(ized?) version of “martyrdom” here, so perhaps the equation is “Defeat = Superiority (Citizen heroism)” or “Powerlessness = Strength (Citizen heroism)”.

Security = Fear | Order = Chaos (Police State)

[?] State = People (Patriotism)

Waṭan = *Ghurba* (Alienation)

We also have a brief list of **ISSUES**, i.e., topics/phenomena that appear important but where we have not yet come to a conclusion on how to deal with them within the Arrays/Codes/Codes Collapsed framework (such as *Azma*; Dream/Imagination vs Reality; Environment, nature and pollution; Escaping/Get out of here; Suez Canal). Further discussions will determine how to deal with these phenomena.

In its current state, our list of arrays, codes, and codes collapsed provides a preliminary snapshot of our discussions that we are publishing here to document our work in progress. We hope that the entries presented below may inspire others to join in the creation of the “encyclopedia of how it felt to live in the Arab World five years after the ‘Arab Spring’”.

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Notes

Introduction: From “Issues” to “Arrays” (S. Guth & A. Hofheinz)

- 1 For a discussion of our approach in the context of others in an “Academia in Transformation” (to quote the title of a research initiative of the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities, AGYA), see Barbara WINCKLER and Christian JUNGE, “Opening Up the Text: Arabic Literary Studies on the Move,” Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) – Transformation Group, Working Paper No. 2/2017, available from <http://agya.info/fileadmin/user_upload/Working_Groups-images/Transformation/WPS_Academia_in_Transformation/Paper_7_Opening_up_the_Text_Winckler_Junge.pdf>.
- 2 Free pdf available from <https://monoskop.org/images/9/95/Gumbrecht_Hans_Ulrich_In_1926_Living_on_the_Edge_of_Time.pdf>.
- 3 “atmosphere, mood, spirit, vibe, ...”—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 Verlag, 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 the public lecture “The dimension of ‘Stimmung’ in contemporary popular culture,” given on December 13, 2016, in Minsk, available on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/t_dajId2BaA>.
- 4 Much of the material was collected in a shared researcher’s notebook, using *Evernote* (<https://evernote.com>).
- 5 The “special dossier” *Living 2016: Cultural Codes and Arrays in Arab Everyday Worlds Five Years After the “Arab Spring,”* edited by Stephan Guth and Elena Chiti, appeared as pages 221-388 of *JAIS*, 16 (2016), and is accessible both at *JAIS*’s previous website (http://www.hf.uio.no/jais/volume/vol16/v16_09_living2016.pdf) and at the new pool of open-access journals hosted by the University of Oslo, see <<https://www.journals.uio.no/index.php/JAIS/article/view/4761>>.
- 6 The list, processed from the data collected in our researcher’s notebook as well as from the studies contained in the *Living 2016* dossier (see previous note), is given on pp. 229-33 of Stephan Guth, “Introduction: *Living 2016* and the *In 2016* project,” *JAIS* 16 (2016): 224-33.
- 7 GUMBRECHT 1997: 434.
- 8 Ibid. (our emphasis, S.G./A.H.).
- 9 Ibid. (dto.).
- 10 Ibid. (dto.).
- 11 Ibid. (dto.).

‘Āmmiyya (E. M. Håland)

- 1 My translation – E.M.H.

Clash (E. Chiti)

- 1 Andeel, “Al-‘adāla li’l-jamī’”, *Mada Masr*, 11 February 2016: <<https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/11/cartoon/u/justice-for-all/>>.
- 2 Fieldwork notes, January-February 2016.
- 3 “Al-yawm... intilāq ma’raḍ al-Qāhira li’l-kitāb,” *Al-Shurūq News*, January 27, 2016: <<http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=27012016&id=fe442bc5-e180-45fa-afaa-745f748240bf>>.
- 4 “Tajribatu-hu ma’a ’l-Ikhwān fī ḍayf al-sharaf,” *Akhbār al-Adab*, February 14, 2016: 6.

- 5 Fieldwork notes, Round Table Al-thaqāfa fī l-muwājahā, Cairo Book-Fair, Main Hall, January 29, 2016.
- 6 Shahira Amin, "Three years on, wounds of Egypt's deadly sit-in dispersals linger," *Al-Monitor*, August 21, 2016: <<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/egypt-three-year-anniversary-rabaa-sit-in-brotherhood.html>>.
- 7 "‘I was terribly wrong’—writers look back at the Arab spring five years on," *The Guardian*, January 23, 2016: <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/23/arab-spring-five-years-on-writers-look-back>>.
- 8 "Ishtibāk: fīlm miṣrī fī iftitāh mahrajān Kān," *al-Ahrām*, May 13, 2016: <<http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/978271.aspx>>.
- 9 Thomas Sotinel, "Clash : après le bus 678, le fourgon de police," *Le Monde*, May 12, 2016: <http://www.lemonde.fr/festival-de-cannes/article/2016/05/12/clash-apres-le-bus-678-le-fourgon-de-police_4917875_766360.html>.
- 10 <<https://twitter.com/moezmasoud/status/730910281442971649>>.
- 11 TV show *Anā Maṣrī*, ḥalqat "Fīlm Muḥammad Diyāb *Ishtibāk*, bi-nakha siyāsiyya wa-thawriyya", May 15, 2016: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiwWQxmp5WQ>>; see also: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmujpDCBA>>.
- 12 "Tom Hanks and Daniel Craig Express Their Love for Egyptian Movie 'Eshtebak'", *Scoop Empire*, July 26, 2016: <<http://scoopempire.com/eshtebak-tom-hanks-daniel-craig/>>.
- 13 Aḥmad Midḥat, "Mā lā ya'rifu-hu Tom Hanks," *Masralarabia*, July 30, 2016: <<http://www.masralarabia.com/المقالات/907-أحمد-مدحت-1180705-ما-لا-يعرفه-توم-هانكس-عن-فيلم-اشتباك>>.
- 14 Sāmih Faraj, "Intibā'āt sarī'a 'an fīlm *Ishtibāk*", *Za2ed18*, July 31, 2016: <<http://www.za2ed18.com/انطباعات-إذا-نشتبك-من-مع-يكتب-فرج-سامح>>.

Conversions (M. Lindbekk)

- 1 "‘Āwiz tighayyir diyāntak fī Maṣr, ibqā qābilnī," *al-Ṣabāḥ*, April 12, 2016, <<http://www.elsaba7.com/NewsPrint.aspx?Id=142416>> (accessed November 1, 2017).
- 2 al-Buḥayrī, Aḥmad, "Shaykh al-Azhar: Ḥurriyyat al-i'tiqād shay' wa-ḥurriyyat al-irtidād shay' ākhar," *al-Miṣrī al-Yawm*, June 16, 2016, <<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/965579>> (accessed November 1, 2017).
- 3 "‘Āwiz tighayyir diyāntak fī Maṣr, ibqā qābilnī," *al-Ṣabāḥ*, April 12, 2016, <<http://www.elsaba7.com/NewsPrint.aspx?Id=142416>> (accessed November 1, 2017).
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 *Egypt Independent*: "Egypt's Jewish community diminished to 6 women after death of Lucy Saul," July 30, 2016, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/egypt-s-jewish-community-diminished-6-women-after-death-lucy-saul/>> (accessed December 15, 2017).
- 6 *Nmisr*: "Quwwāt al-amn ta'zil anṣār al-ikhwān al-muslimīn ba'd tasabbubihim bi-islām thalāth masīhiyyīn bi-Ṭurah," *Nujūm Miṣriyya*, January 29, 2016, <<https://www.nmisr.com/arab-news/egypt-news/قوات-الأمن-تعزل-انصار-الإخوان-المسلمي>> (accessed November 1, 2017).
- 7 'Abd al-Hafīz, Ṣabrī. "al-Aqbāt yatazāharūn li-sti'ādatihā wa'l-muslimūn li-tasallumihā," *Īlāf*, May 7, 2016, <<http://elaph.com/Web/News/2016/5/1087240.html>> (accessed November 1, 2017).
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 "‘Āwiz tighayyir diyāntak fī Maṣr, ibqā qābilnī," *al-Ṣabāḥ*, April 12, 2016, <<http://www.elsaba7.com/NewsPrint.aspx?Id=142416>> (accessed November 1, 2017).

Dual Identities / Masking (S. Guth)

- 1 English *mask* is from Middle French *masque* 'covering to hide or guard the face' (16c.), from Italian *maschera*, from Medieval Latin *masca* 'mask, specter, nightmare,' which is perhaps from Arabic *maskharah* 'buffoon, mockery,' from *sakhira* 'be mocked, ridiculed' – <etymonline.com> (as of 09Dec2017).
- 2 Quoted in: <http://www.venice-days.com/FILM.asp?id=9&id_dettaglio=552&lang=eng>.
- 3 Khadija is a traditional Islamic name in reverence for the Prophet's first wife.

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Satire (on YouTube Channels) (M. Mohamed)

- 1 *yi2allish*, on the other hand, is the common term among Egyptian youth for all kinds of verbal practices that stimulate laughter, like puns, parody, and irony.