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Towards a sociology of revolutionary situations. Reflections on the Arab uprisings

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'Uprisings have a body with which one can engage in combat. Revolutions, on the other hand, have a lot in common with ghosts.'
Metternich to Guizot, October 31st, 1847

When we contemplate the apparent domino-effect of upheavals precipitated by the rapid and unexpected fall of Ben Ali on January 14th, 2011, the first image that comes to mind is that of 1848's 'Springtime of the Peoples', when a demonstration in the streets of Paris prompted three days of insurrection, the restoration of the Republic and, thanks to the telegraph, the railways and the rotary press, over ten days of uprisings across cities as distant as Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Milan and Venice.

However, just as when considering the revolutions of 1848, we should be wary of overly generalizing interpretations that seek to describe the events of 2010–2012 as the product of a unified wave of insurrections. Aside from the trigger provided by Ben Ali's downfall, the trajectory, and consequently the shape, taken by the Egyptian, Moroccan, Bahraini, Libyan, Yemeni, and Syrian uprisings were all very different. It is only if we do not understand their respective contexts or if we are blinded by a well-meaning enthusiasm that we may collectively refer to them as the 'Arab revolutions'. It is too soon to tell if any of these movements can be labelled as revolutionary. Such a question can only be answered with hindsight, in light of the results produced. Therefore, this is outside the scope of our investigation. We will instead focus on 'uprisings' — a vague term which has the merit of not judging what particularly complex processes may be produced in the end. We are nonetheless aware that certain Tunisians, Egyptians, Libyans, Yemenis and Syrians believe that they are living through a revolution and are currently fighting to make it happen, to encourage or protect it. Likewise, although the descriptive term 'Arab' has many implicit connotations and possible misunderstandings, we have nevertheless decided to use it for ease of reference.

In the fields of political science, sociology and history, countless pages have been devoted to the study of revolutions. The frequency of publications regarding recent events has been particularly high. What would be the rationale, therefore, behind subjecting our readers to yet another of these studies? Two well-founded reasons justify our endeavor. On the one hand, although social scientists are prolix on the causes and consequences of revolutions, they are much less loquacious regarding revolutionary situations specifically, including their characteristics and the processes that lead to them. As we will show in this introduction, recent publications have often fallen into this trap. On the other hand, all of the contributions made by in this volume stem from field surveys carried out at the very heart of the action and which seek to understand how individual and collective actors ‘caught’ in revolutionary momentum perceive situations and adapt their behavior — an approach which is still rare in the existing literature.

In this introduction, we shall return to our justification for this two-fold approach. However, we shall begin with a critical, albeit non-exhaustive, review of the existing literature. Then we shall explain a certain number of our theoretical and methodological propositions, chiefly relying upon empirically documented experiments.

THE PAUCITY OF REVOLUTIONARY SOCIOLOGY

‘To look for false troubles one gets real misery’.

Daniel Desbiens, *My Contemporary Maxims*

Causality and the Nomological Drive

Revolutionary events always strike their contemporaries as radically new, subject to rapid upheavals and full of uncertainty regarding the future. Under such conditions, it is not surprising that few people have been able to ‘face the revolution with one’s mind made up’¹, like Marat, or to claim to have predicted the fall of the Soviet Union.²

Pierre Favre has astutely discussed the issue of the unpredictability of the social order.³ Let us here recall three of his conclusions. Firstly, ‘with regard to the future, we are

¹ Jean-Paul Marat, *Les chaînes de l’esclavage*, 1774, <http://www.uqac.quebec.ca/zone30/Classiques_des_sciences_sociales/index.html>.

² Randall Collins, ‘The Future Decline of the Russian Empire’, in *Weberian Sociological Theory*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 186–209.

³ Pierre Favre, *Comprendre le monde pour le changer*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2005.

faced with an unfinished, on-going process, about which we can naturally only have incomplete knowledge. Predictions are therefore impossible'.⁴ Secondly, 'there exist periods where a political regime possesses an extreme structural vulnerability, and crumbles when confronted with a protest that reveals its lack of consistency'.⁵ Thirdly, unpredictability does not mean that 'all predictions are impossible and will ultimately be disproven. Predictions, which in reality we cannot do without, are only conditional, or in other words probabilistic'.⁶

Among researchers who study the history and the sociology of revolutionary phenomena, an increasingly number have subscribed to this point of view and begun to reject any general theory of revolutions.⁷ In this regard, it is helpful to recall the two conferences organized by the American Sociological Association at the beginning of the 1990s to better understand why the events of 1989 were so surprising.⁸ Although some articles published in those two journal issues still defend certain types of predictability, they are overcome by an increasing suspicion, as Charles Kurzman explains in his straightforwardly titled work, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*.⁹ He criticizes scholarship's never-ending quest to retrospectively reconstruct the causal elements of revolutionary phenomena in order to determine the factors behind their emergence. Rejecting all causality, Kurzman proposes an 'anti-explanation' which abandons all attempts at retrospective prediction and instead focuses on the lived experiences contained within revolutionary situations. In other words, even if one cannot doubt that what really happens is by its very nature *determined*,¹⁰ one must simultaneously recognize the immense difficulty involved in identifying this reality based on a study of its often distant causes.¹¹ Such issues hint at three

⁴ P. Favre, *ibid.*, p. 61.

⁵ P. Favre, *ibid.*, p. 171–173; see also p. 195.

⁶ P. Favre, *ibid.*, p. 198.

⁷ In addition to Charles Tilly's numerous publications, on which we shall comment below, some examples include: Nikki Keddie, 'Can Revolutions Be Predicted?', in *Iran and the Muslim World*, New York, New York University Press, 1995, p. 13–33; Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001; François Chazel, 'La place de la mobilisation dans une révolution inattendue. L'effondrement de l'Allemagne de l'Est', in *Du pouvoir à la contestation*, Paris, LGDJ, 2003, p. 163–192.

⁸ The proceedings of the first conference are published in *Theory and Society*, 23(2), 1993. Those of the second conference can be found in the *American Journal of Sociology*, 100(6), May 1995.

⁹ Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 2nd ed. 2005, p. 5–6 and p. 166.

¹⁰ To echo Pierre Favre, methodological determinism thus involves the opposite of causality: P. Favre, *Comprendre le monde*, *op. cit.*, p. 54 and p. 67–79.

¹¹ See also Charles Tilly, 'To Explain Political Processes', *American Journal of Sociology*, 100(6), 1995, p. 1594–1610, here p. 1601; Jean-Claude Passeron, *Le raisonnement sociologique*, Paris, Nathan, 1991, p. 367.

weak points in the existing research: an etiological illusion,¹² a nomological drive and the absence of a theory of agency and rational choice.¹³

The etiological illusion harkens back to one of revolutionary sociology's most serious dead-ends.¹⁴ Having primarily focused on why rebellions emerge, the discipline has generally stuck to finding distant and remote causes. These causes are often attributed to the disruptive effects of social change or the advent of new opportunities. The focus placed on these factors comes at the expense of considerations on the robustness of the means implemented by the various protagonists or on 'possible causal mediations between the suggested "causes" and the characteristics of their alleged outcomes'.¹⁵ Hence the necessity of clearly differentiating, like Charles Tilly and Rod Aya have done, between revolutionary intentions, outcomes and situations,¹⁶ especially as the latter tend to transcend the conditions of their creation and their outcomes do not allow us to retrospectively comprehend them.¹⁷

The nomological drive — or how to explain historical sequences insofar as an explanation requires laws linking cause and effect, laws which history does not possess — leads to a two-fold reductionism of the model. On the one hand, explanatory matrices are often developed based on a specific historical example; extrapolation is thus compulsory. This can be seen in Crane Brinton's model based on the phases of the French Revolution,¹⁸ or Theda Skocpol's identification of 1789, 1917 and 1949 as genuine social revolutions led by the peasantry.¹⁹ On the other hand, because general theories are by definition on the lookout for recurring causal patterns, they significantly reduce the complexity of

¹² Michel Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 1986.

¹³ Rod Aya, 'The Third Man; or Agency in History; or, Rationality in Revolution', *History and Theory*, 40, December 2001, p. 143–152.

¹⁴ As a matter of fact, this illusion is less widespread among historians. It is clearly condemned by François Furet, *Penser la Révolution française*, Paris, Gallimard, 2009 (1st ed.: 1978), p. 40, 39 and 44.

¹⁵ Michel Dobry, 'Ce dont sont faites les logiques de situation', in Pierre Favre, Olivier Fillieule, Fabien Jobard (ed.), *L'atelier du politiste*, Paris, La Découverte, 2007, p. 119–148, here p. 131.

¹⁶ Charles Tilly defines the revolutionary situation based on the concept of Trotsky's 'dual power', as any situation in which the state's sovereignty is subject to multiple, competing claims supported by a significant portion of the population, and where the aforementioned state power cannot not or does not wish to crush the oppositional coalition (Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Reading, Addison-Wesley, 1978, p. 189–222).

¹⁷ Rod Aya, *Rethinking Revolutions and Collective Violence*, Amsterdam, Het Spinhuis, 1990, p. 20.

¹⁸ Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1953.

¹⁹ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions. A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1979.

phenomena: at best to stylized versions of themselves, at worst to a quest for sole causes. This is notably true in the case of Robert Palmer and Jacques Godechot,²⁰ but also more generally in the field of cultural studies, where Patrice Higonnet's work overemphasizes the impact of the Protestant religion and the role of the 'Anglo-Saxon consensus'.²¹

The absence of a theory of agency becomes apparent when we try to link together micro and macro phenomena. How can we explain a social phenomenon when all we have to rely on is the observation of individual actions? The existing literature answers this question with three different tools: structural conditions (political opportunity structures, the density of horizontal networks and links to the elite, the suddenly imposed grievances, etc.), cultural idioms (cultural frames, *Weltanschauung*, traditions, etc.) and mobilization structures (leadership, material and organizational resources).²² In this tripartite configuration, structures, culture and the availability of resources dictate the course of events; conversely, these events can also provoke changes in existing structures, cultures and resources. And yet, in this framework, 'structure (with an assist from culture) constrains agency to make the events — by violence; and the events constrain agency to change the structure — again by violence. Agency is the Third Man between structure and event who does the killing and coercing. He makes the action happen.'²³

In reality, very few works have avoided falling for the etiological illusion and developing a reductionist model, and most have likewise failed to adopt an explicit theory of agency.²⁴ This no doubt explains the unfortunate fact that studies in this domain, while relatively numerous, have not built upon the findings of their predecessors in order to globally advance research in the field.

²⁰ Robert Roswell Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1959 and 1964; Jacques Godechot, *Les révolutions (1770-1799)*, Paris, PUF, 1963.

²¹ Patrice Higonnet, *Sisters Republics. The Origins of French and American Republicanism*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1988.

²² For an illustration of this sort of tripartite explanation, see Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

²³ R. Aya, 'The Third Man', *art. cit.*, p. 144.

²⁴ We would nevertheless like to take a moment to mention several studies which do avoid these scholarly pitfalls. For example, Wayne Te Brake's *Shaping History. Ordinary People in European Politics, 1500-1700*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998), whose account of the politicization processes of revolutionary groups and the constant gap between initial intentions and subsequent actions in situational logics is remarkable.

Where everything is in everything, and vice-versa

Hot off the presses, recent studies on the 'Arab uprisings' are no exception to this trend. The unpredictable nature of the events in question serves as an almost obligatory introduction to the proposed explanatory frameworks.²⁵ After having spent a long time investigating the 'causalities behind the lack' of democracy,²⁶ it is now time to examine why the events of 2010–2012 have sounded the death-knell of the Arab world's 'exceptionality'²⁷ and heralded a new threshold regarding the universalization of revolutionary action.²⁸ And yet, this development also conversely means that these same 'flaws' and even 'anomalies',²⁹ hitherto highlighted as so many obstacles to democratization, ultimately become the causes of successful revolutionary movements, thanks to the emergence of history.

It is true that the nomological studies no longer propose mono-causal models, but instead now prefer so-called 'combinatorial' approaches.³⁰ But such multi-faceted approaches are often little more than the juxtaposition of various causes, factors and decisive elements, which allegedly present an account, at different levels and moments of observation, of revolutionary intentions, situations and outcomes.³¹

We do not have the space here to analyze in detail this rash of explanatory attempts; the reader may, however, refer to the thematic bibliography at the end of this volume. Instead, we would like to offer a more free-form history and educational classification of the main theories of revolution: Marxist-leaning interpretations, structuralist paradigms, theories of relative frustration and modernization and cultural and diffusionist approaches.

²⁵ The editors of the issue published by the journal *Mouvements* trace the intensity of this surprise back to a vague orientalism which sees the Arab world as fixed and unchanging (Agnès Deboulet, Dimitri Nicolaïdis, 'Les hirondelles font-elles le printemps?', *Mouvements*, 66, 2011, p. 7–10).

²⁶ Ghassan Salamé, 'Sur la causalité d'un manque : pourquoi le monde arabe n'est-il donc pas démocratique?', *Revue française de science politique*, 41(3), June 1991, p. 307–341.

²⁷ Sarah Ben Néfissa, 'Mobilisations et révolutions dans les pays de la Méditerranée arabe à l'heure de "l'hybridation" du politique : Égypte, Liban, Maroc, Tunisie', *Revue Tiers Monde*, special issue, 2011, p. 5–24.

²⁸ For example, Hamit Bozarslan, 'De quoi la révolution est-elle le nom? Post-scriptum pour poursuivre la réflexion', in Hamit Bozarslan, Gilles Bataillon, Christophe Jaffrelot, *Passions révolutionnaires*, Paris, Éditions de l'EHESS, 2011, p. 169–182.

²⁹ F. Gregory Gause III, 'Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring? The Myth of Authoritarian Stability', *Foreign Affairs*, 90(4), 2011, p. 81–90.

³⁰ Adam Hanieh, 'Egypt's Uprising. Not Just a Question of Transition', *The Bullet*, 462, 2011, <<http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/462.php>>.

³¹ For example, Jack Goldstone, 'Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 4, 2001, p. 139–187.

First and foremost, events in the region have given new life to interpretations of Marxist origin that erect the crisis of global capitalism as its main explanatory variable. In this framework, the authoritarianism of regimes in the Arab world is only ‘the political form of capitalism’ in the region,³² ‘crony capitalism’³³ not being an ‘aberration of the system’ but rather a normal feature of the processes of capitalist accumulation throughout the world. From this perspective, the Egyptian uprising marked the culmination of thirty years of neoliberal reforms imposed by international financial institutions and which exacerbated the country’s vulnerability to the global crisis by concentrating the vast majority of wealth in the hands of a tiny minority and contributing to the growing class divide.³⁴ Such a reading can take different forms. For the editors of *Globalizations*’ special issue, the Arab uprisings are a facet of the ‘global revolution’ against the prevailing liberal economic system, against the exclusions and contradictions produced by this world-system.³⁵ In this light, the uprisings are so many grass-roots attempts to create an alternative world ‘from the bottom up’.³⁶ From a revised dependency perspective, the events of 2010–2012 can be interpreted as a new attempt for countries like Egypt to rise up against their ‘current status as a dominated region’ and against the ‘demands of globalized economic liberalism’.³⁷ These approaches have the merit of not focusing on the region’s ‘exceptionality’ and of proposing a nuanced reading of globalization. Nevertheless, as has already been observed countless times before, such paradigms suffer from their emphasis on the economic: everything automatically stems from what is played out on the economic field, including relations between nations, the state itself, social classes, social movements, etc.

Conversely, a number of other studies subordinate economic determination to the primacy of politics. From a structuralist perspective like that adopted by Skocpol,³⁸ the

³² Adam Hanieh, ‘Egypt’s Uprising. Not Just a Question of Transition’, *The Bullet*, 462, 2011, <<http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/462.php>>.

³³ To use Nader Fergany’s expression in the *Arab Human Development Report (2002–2005)*.

³⁴ Lin Noueihed, Alex Warren, *The Battle for the Arab Spring. Revolution*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2012, p. 112.

³⁵ Anna M. Agathangelou, Nevzat Soguk, ‘Rocking the Kasbah. Insurrectional Politics, the “Arab Streets”, and Global Revolution in the 21st Century’, *Globalizations*, 8(5), 2011, p. 551–558.

³⁶ Jackie Smith, ‘Globalizations Forum on Middle East Protests. Commentary’, *Globalizations*, 8(5), 2011, p. 655–659.

³⁷ Samir Amin, ‘2011 : le printemps arabe ?’, *Mouvements*, 67, 2011, p. 135–156, here p. 139.

³⁸ According to Theda Skocpol, three elements play an essential role: the international context, the financial crisis and the division of the elites, and peasant rebellions (T. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions, op. cit.*).

autonomy of the State is posited as a basic condition; its determining factors, crisis or downfall are at the heart of the analysis. Extending this approach, some authors have attempted to illuminate the contrast between the overthrow of the Tunisian and Egyptian presidents and the resilience of other regimes in the region (in particular Libya and Syria). Such authors identify 'true' and 'false' nation-states, 'moderate' and inclusive monarchies versus republics, fragmented or homogenous societies, oil profits, a past marked by violence, etc.³⁹ Revolutions are thus seen to wash up 'regimes that were too open and too closed, too modern and too anachronistic, too rational and too "insane",' ⁴⁰ from medieval garbage. Placing political conflict at the center of everything, some authors have examined the structural causes of the 'Arab uprisings' under the dual lens of the global economic crisis and the spread of the crisis within the state's sphere.

First of all, in this line of thought and contrary to third-wave democratization processes, the recent 'Arab uprisings' owe nothing to Western democratic struggles. Quite the opposite: these rebellions have emerged despite the 'exceptional' treatment of authoritarian regimes by major world powers, obsessed with the 'Islamist specter',⁴¹ careful to preserve the status quo in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and eager to maintain their influence over oil resources. The tone used is particularly caustic⁴² — some have even gone so far as to point out the means used by Westerners to prevent revolutions.⁴³ Decisive international factors would apparently pertain to the economic realm, in such an interpretation. Some argue that the global rise in food and energy prices prompted the emergence of revolts; 2007's financial crisis was 'the straw (or the bale) that broke the camel's back'.⁴⁴ The spread of the crisis throughout the region was then linked to a drop in

³⁹ For example, Georges Corm, 'Première approche d'une contextualisation des révoltes populaires arabes', *Confluence Méditerranée*, 79, 2011, p. 93–111.

⁴⁰ Hamit Bozarslan, 'Réflexions sur les configurations révolutionnaires tunisienne et égyptienne', *Mouvements*, 66, 2011, p. 11–21, here p. 16.

⁴¹ Luis Martinez, 'Le printemps arabe, une surprise pour l'Europe', *Projet*, 322, 2011, p. 5–12.

⁴² See the critique of the work edited by Foreign Affairs, *The New Arab Revolt*, New York, Council on Foreign Relations, 2011, by Raymond William Baker, 'Understanding Egypt's Worldly Miracles', *The Middle East Journal*, 66(1), 2012, p. 163–170, here p. 165–167.

⁴³ Jeremy Salt, 'Containing the "Arab Spring"', *Interface*, 4(1), 2012, p. 54–66.

⁴⁴ Jean-François Daguzan, 'De la crise économique à la révolution arabe', *Maghreb-Machrek*, 206, 2011, p. 9–15.

exports, a reduction in financial flows towards non-oil based economies, a credit crunch and the defunding of national development programs and developmental aid.⁴⁵

Secondly, rather than allowing for the social foundation of non oil-based regimes to be renewed, these reforms would allegedly have increased the number of malcontents,⁴⁶ the state's withdrawal leading to the breakdown of 'social contracts' hitherto considered as one of the main reasons for authoritarianism's resilience.⁴⁷ The rise in corruption and the predation on national economies by 'cliques' made up of individuals with close ties to the heads of state would likewise have frustrated the marginalized elite as well as the army, in Egypt's case.⁴⁸ Politically speaking, 'deliberalization'⁴⁹ would have translated into the spread of repression⁵⁰ beyond Islamists alone and the opposition's limited access to the institutional political sphere. In Egypt, the constitutional amendments leading up to the November and December 2010 elections — a key step in preparing Gamal Mubarak's rise to power — provoked a large voting boycott; the number of opposition members in the parliament dropped below 2005 levels. As access to institutional political life was blocked, taking to the streets became the only viable alternative.⁵¹

Such interpretations are useful for reintroducing the state into the equation and focusing on relations between social groups, between these groups and the state and between different states. Nevertheless, they are vulnerable to the same criticisms as structuralist interpretations: that is to say, the marginalization of cultural and ideological dimensions, the lack of attention paid to the uprisings themselves and more generally, a certain negligence with regard to process.

In another realm of scholarship, analyzing the recent wave of protests has led a number of authors to employ the mechanisms of relative frustration. As the symbol of the

⁴⁵ For example, El Mouhoub Mouhoud, 'Economie politique des révolutions arabes : analyse et perspectives', *Maghreb-Machrek*, 210, 2011-2012, p. 35-47.

⁴⁶ F. G. Gause III, 'Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring?', *art. cit.*, p. 86

⁴⁷ For example, Béatrice Hibou, 'Économie politique et morale d'un mouvement social', *Politique africaine*, 121, 2011, p. 5-22.

⁴⁸ For example, Vincent Geisser, Abir Krefa, 'L'uniforme ne fait plus le régime, les militaires arabes face aux "révolutions"', *Revue internationale et stratégique*, 83, 2011, p. 93-102.

⁴⁹ Eberhard Kienle, *A Grand Delusion. Democracy and Economic Reform in Egypt*, London, Tauris, 2000.

⁵⁰ George Joffé, 'The Arab Spring in North Africa. Origins and Prospects', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 16(4), 2011, p. 507-532.

⁵¹ L. Noueihed, A. Warren, *The Battle*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

Tunisian uprising, Mohamed Bouazizi was first portrayed as an ‘unemployed college graduate’. This piece of information — no matter how false it was — prompted a whole slew of interpretations that emphasized the loss of social status and feelings of humiliation and injustice.⁵² The media abundantly made reference to such interpretations, interactive graphs and charts in hand: *The Economist Online* even published ‘The Shoe-Thrower’s Index’,⁵³ developed on the basis of a group of statistical indicators.

As we already remarked ten years ago, frustration approaches ‘take several different forms: an economic crisis, “alienation” caused by the rapid transformations experienced by Maghrebi and Middle Eastern societies, be it rural exoduses and accelerated urbanization or “demographic ruptures” provoked by the massive influx of post-independence generations on the job market, the housing market, etc.; the failure of the “imitated State” or the “imported State” [...]; a rise in feelings of being excluded by globalization’.⁵⁴ Likewise, since the 1980s, Arab youth has been observed ‘through the prism of the crisis’ and unemployment among college graduates has been touted as the main argument used to explain a whole host of phenomena: population pressure,⁵⁵ difficulties with workplace integration and feelings of social degradation, as well as housing, marriage, economic and political crises.⁵⁶

These interpretations single out empirically observable and quantifiable phenomena. However, they also elicit the same objections as interpretations that rely on the theory of relative frustration: the ‘volcanic’ nature of the model, the predominance of a psychological, rather than sociological, point of view, a vague description of the connection between objective conditions and tautologically-deduced perceptions, a weak justification of the

⁵² For a critique of these types of interpretations, please see in particular Amin Allal, Youssef El-Chazli, ‘Figures du déclassement et passage au politique dans les situations révolutionnaires égyptienne et tunisienne’, in Ivan Sainsaulieu, Muriel Surdez (ed.), *Sens politiques du travail*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2012, p. 321–336.

⁵³ ‘Arab Unrest Index. The Shoe-Thrower’s Index’, *The Economist Online*, February 9, 2011, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2011/02/daily_chart_arab_unrest_index>.

⁵⁴ Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi, Olivier Fillieule, ‘Appel d’air(e)’, in Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi, Olivier Fillieule (ed.), *Résistances et protestations dans les sociétés musulmanes*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2003, p. 17–42, here p. 34.

⁵⁵ Emmanuel Todd, *Allah n’y est pour rien ! Sur les révolutions arabes et quelques autres*, Loubiana, Arretsimages.net, 2011; Emmanuel Todd, Youssef Courbage, *Le rendez-vous des civilisations*, Paris, Seuil, 2007.

⁵⁶ Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi, Iman Farag, ‘Constitution de la jeunesse dans les sociétés arabes : figures, catégories et analyseurs’, in Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi, Iman Farag (ed.), *Jeunes des sociétés arabes*, Paris, Aux lieux d’être, 2007, p. 11–47, here p. 18ff.

transition from relative deprivation to mobilization, etc.⁵⁷ Not to mention the fact that this notion has traditionally been quite popular in studies of Maghrebi and Middle Eastern societies, whether the latter have sought to explain Islamist movements, urban riots or suicide attacks.

As the central player in the 'Arab uprisings', Arab youth is no longer solely portrayed by the figure of the unemployed college graduate, but also by the more glamorous image of the young, educated man or woman who loves modernity, democracy and digital technology — in part because this image is much more attractive to Western commentators. Thanks to this iconic figure, the paradigm of modernization has resurfaced in new garb.⁵⁸ According to such interpretations, because it is progressive and because it is open to Western democratic culture, notably via its cultural products and its access to more and more information, controlled with increasing difficulty, the 'globalized' youth of Arab societies would inevitably produce a democratic awakening.⁵⁹ This refrain is not new. If we exclude the parenthesis marking the 'end of the great developmentalist narrative', when these same youths become 'Islamists', 'fanatics', 'terrorists', we are not far from the aftermath of national independence, when 'the youth' was considered to be 'the motor of social and political change, embodying the values of modernity'.⁶⁰ The only new elements present in 2011's rhetoric are a handful of adjectives: this youth is 'connected' and 'globalized'. Thanks to its creativity, the 'Arab public' has now been put forth as an example for all disenfranchised peoples,⁶¹ demonstrating that 'political innovation can emerge from the outskirts of society'.⁶²

⁵⁷ Philippe Corcuff, 'Frustrations relatives', and Isabelle Sommier, 'Privation relative', in Olivier Fillieule, Lilian Mathieu, Cécile Péchu (ed.), *Dictionnaire des mouvements sociaux*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2009, p. 242–248 and p. 441–448 respectively.

⁵⁸ For Samuel Huntington, revolutions are a component of modernization. They are a response to an overly rapid and poorly controlled process of modernization, for example when there are important discrepancies between sectors' different rates of modernization and, more specifically, when the development of political institutions lags behind social and economic change (Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1968).

⁵⁹ See, for example, the enthusiasm displayed for the 'Wired, Educated and Shrewd, Young Egyptians [who] Guide Revolt' title from *The New York Times*, February 10, 2011, p. 1. See also Farhad Khosrokhavar, *The New Arab Revolutions that Shook the World*, Boulder, Paradigm Publishers, 2012.

⁶⁰ F. Khosrokhavar, *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶¹ Georges Corm, 'Quand la rue arabe sert de modèle au Nord', *Le Monde*, February 11, 2011.

⁶² Yves Gonzalez-Quijano, 'Les "origines culturelles numériques" des révolutions arabes', March 23, 2011, p. 4, <http://www.ceri-sciences-po.org/archive/2011/mars/dossier/art_ygq.pdf>.

In these attempts to decipher recent events in the Arab world, technology has been presented as the active revolutionary agent. Here again, the idea is not new. Theorists of modernization already granted a central role to technology with regard to the implementation of social change. But with the development of new information and communications technologies (NICTs), the frequency of publications on the subject has continued to rise; this fervor is moreover periodically rekindled by specific events, such as the Zapatista insurrection in 1994, various anti-globalization movements, the coalition against the Iraq war in 2003 and of course, the Iranian and Moldavian rebellions of 2009, hastily termed ‘Twitter revolutions’.⁶³ Thanks to the media hype surrounding 2011’s calls for mobilization on Facebook, the expressions ‘Facebook Revolution’, ‘Revolution 2.0’ and, in Tunisia’s case, ‘Wikileaks Revolution’ gained traction. In the minds of ‘cyberphiles’ and ‘cyber-utopians’, the new information and communications technologies would democratize information production and allow for an almost instantaneous diffusion of texts, images and videos within national spheres and beyond, thus sidestepping the monopoly held by traditional media outlets. Moreover, these technological developments would allow for most of the problems linked to mobilization in repressive environments to be solved: ‘This new technology represents, if not the end, at least the death throes of Lenin’s *What is to be done?*. When a simple click allows individuals to get in touch and protests to be orchestrated, the role of organization disappears’.⁶⁴ As for arguments against ‘cyber-utopianism’, they downplay the role played by NICTs with regard to instigating and organizing rebellions, demystify the power of the Internet,⁶⁵ remind us that the public virtual counter-space can also be ‘yet another ruse of the Orwellian regime’⁶⁶ and finally, that technology does not a revolution make.⁶⁷

⁶³ References can be found in the thematic bibliography at the end of this volume. For a comprehensive approach to the relations between the media and mobilizations, see Érik Neveu, ‘Médias, mouvements sociaux, espaces publics’, *Réseaux*, 17(98), 1999, p. 17–86; and more specifically concerning NICTs: Dominique Cardon, Fabien Granjon, *Médiactivistes*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2010.

⁶⁴ Bertrand Badie, ‘Printemps arabe : un commencement’, *Études*, 415(7–8), 2011, p. 7–18, here p. 15.

⁶⁵ Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion. The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, New York, Public Affairs, 2010.

⁶⁶ Roshanak Shaery-Eisenlohr ‘From Subjects to Citizens? Civil Society and the Internet in Syria’, *Middle East Critique*, 20(2), 2011, p. 127–138, here p. 137. On the arguments presented by ‘cyberphiles’ and ‘cyberskeptics’, see, for example, James L. Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings. What Everyone Needs to Know*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 50ff.

⁶⁷ For example, Sahar Khamis, Paul B. Gold, Katherine Vaughn, ‘Beyond Egypt’s “Facebook Revolution” and Syria’s “YouTube Uprising”’, *Arab Media & Society*, 15, 2012,

The double emphasis placed by scholarly and media discourse on 'globalized' youth and the idea of 'Revolution 2.0' revived a certain condemnation of the concept of unilinear, teleological change and progress; it also renewed the debate surrounding neo-Orientalism. Consequently, for Rabab El-Mahdi, the very fact of describing uprisings as 'young' and 'nonviolent' and of establishing social media as the 'champion' of rebellion betrays a 'binary' Orientalist reading which seeks to confirm the West's supremacy by contrasting tradition — associated with obscurantism, violence and all sorts of obstacles to progress — with 'imported', liberating modernity.⁶⁸

The *episteme* of modernity can also partly be found in interpretations that focus on cultural factors 'which also allow for a radical break to be envisioned and desired',⁶⁹ or which deal with changes in the forms of obedience and the cultures of resistance that engender rebellion. Comparing the 'cultural origins' of the French and English Revolutions, Roger Chartier analyzes five different factors previously identified by Lawrence Stone⁷⁰: the transformation of attitudes towards religion; the importance of legal references; a 'cultural ideal' marked by the exclusion of the court and the capital; a state of mind characterized by the gradual erosion of the family, the state and the church's authority; and intellectual frustration tied to 'the excessive development of education'. Recent studies have often implicitly relied upon this five-part analysis.

The epithets used in such readings immediately reveal the capital importance placed on values and ideas: revolutions are characterized as 'modern', 'democratic', 'citizen', 'post-modern' or 'post-Islamist', for example.⁷¹ In a radical departure from previous political generations, which were nationalist and Islamist, the current protestors would thus be the standard-bearers of a cultural and intellectual revolution.⁷² These new men and women have allegedly forged 'a new relationship to the self, a new relationship with others, with the

<<http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=791>>.

⁶⁸ Rabab El-Mahdi, 'Orientalising the Egyptian Uprising', *Jadaliyya*, April 2011, <<http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1214/orientalising-the-egyptian-uprising>>. See also Greg Burris, 'Lawrence of E-rabia. Facebook and the New Arab Revolt', *Jadaliyya*, October 2011, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/2884/lawrence-of-e-rabia_facebook-and-the-new-arab-revo>.

⁶⁹ Roger Chartier, *Les origines culturelles de la Révolution française*, Paris, Seuil, 1990, p. 247.

⁷⁰ Lawrence Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution, 1529–1642*, London, Ark Paperbacks, 1972.

⁷¹ Olivier Roy, 'Des révolutions post-islamistes', *Le Monde*, February 12, 2011.

⁷² Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Performative Revolution in Egypt. An Essay in Cultural Power*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2011, p. 18.

world and in particular with the West',⁷³ as well as with political, religious and familial authorities.⁷⁴ Now is the time for the individual to triumph over denominational, sectarian, or tribal allegiances. This 'democratization of minds'⁷⁵ allegedly has its roots in the elaboration of an Arab public sphere, in large part thanks to Al Jazeera, the latter having helped to mold 'a new Arab public',⁷⁶ to circumvent official demands and to promote unprecedented media pluralism granting space to 'opinions... and other opinions' (*ar-ra'y wa ar-ra'y al-akhar*).⁷⁷ In the same vein, some studies have emphasized the role played by the off-stage discourse of subordinate groups⁷⁸ — rumors, anecdotes — and by a multitude of cultural objects — video clips, films, TV series, essays, novels,⁷⁹ plays, blogs, etc. — in the dissemination of liberal values and the delegitimization of existing authorities by means of the critique of authoritarianism and corruption. The 'leader's disgrace' would thus anticipate his downfall.⁸⁰

Readings like these highlight the impact of ideas and values, otherwise marginalized by a large number of studies. We must still, however, 'update their dynamics and be careful not to overlook their role at the heart of the action, that is to say, their 'effectiveness'. [...] 'Rhetorical logic' is not the same thing as 'a reason for acting'.⁸¹

We shall conclude this rapid overview of the existing literature on 'Arab uprisings' by invoking a leitmotiv in tribute to Dwight Eisenhower. The fall of Hosni Mubarak four weeks after that of Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali instigated a flood of colorful expressions, such as 'domino effect', 'contagion', 'tsunami', 'breaking wave', 'snowballing', etc. Regardless of the

⁷³ F. Khosrokhavar, *The New Arab Revolutions*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁷⁴ Y. Gonzalez-Quijano, 'Les origines culturelles', *art. cit.*, p. 10. On the subject of the democratization of religious matters, see Dale F. Eickelman, James P. Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996.

⁷⁵ Mohamed Nanabhay, Roxane Farmanfarmanian, 'From Spectacle to Spectacular. How Physical Space, Social Media and Mainstream Broadcast Amplified the Public Sphere in Egypt's "Revolution"', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 16(4), 2011, p. 573-603.

⁷⁶ Miles Hugh, *Al Jazeera*, London, Abacus, 2005.

⁷⁷ Claire-Gabrielle Talon, 'Al Jazeera, un objet médiatique original. Une critique des normes journalistiques occidentales', *Les Temps modernes*, 664, 2011, p. 55-62, here p. 59. See also Yves Gonzalez-Quijano, Tourya Gaaaybess, *Les Arabes parlent aux Arabes*, Arles, Sindbad/Actes Sud, 2009; Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

⁷⁸ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1990.

⁷⁹ Alaa El Aswany, *L'immeuble Yacoubian*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2006.

⁸⁰ On this subject, see Michel Camau's groundbreaking article, 'La disgrâce du chef. Mobilisations populaires arabes et crise du leadership', *Mouvements*, 66, 2011, p. 22-29.

⁸¹ François Chazel, 'Les ruptures révolutionnaires. Problèmes de définition', in Madeleine Grawitz, Jean Leca (ed.), *Traité de science politique*, Paris, PUF, vol. 2, 1985, p. 635-646, here p. 652.

causal links evoked, these expressions always referred to the notions of diffusion and dissemination. Here we can make a specific point that departs from the usual debates surrounding this question. The uniting influence of 'Arab' or 'Islamic' causes has often led scholars to posit the existence of 'an "Arab or Muslim public", an "Arab or Muslim voice", ready to mobilize and rise up as an uniform entity, with a single shared motivation, mode of action, and understanding of the stakes'.⁸² While criticizing the illusory homogeneity conveyed by the use of the adjective 'Arab' to describe the 'uprisings', these scholars have nevertheless argued that an 'imagined Arab community'⁸³ has been fashioned. This community has purportedly been constructed thanks to a dialogue encouraged by a shared language and civilization, as well as similar historical experiences; it has been solidified by pilgrimages, travel, labor migration and the media. From this point of view, Al Jazeera's satellite channel is the vehicle for a new grassroots pan-Arabism constructed by individuals,⁸⁴ where Gamal Abdel Nasser's radio station 'Voice of the Arabs', created in 1953, had been the symbol of Arab nationalism supported by Arab states.

If, until now, the transnational character of revolts throughout the region has primarily been understood through the lens of Al-Qaeda and Islamist movements,⁸⁵ today emphasis is instead placed on the role of transnational networks and that of Western foundations and organizations with regard to the dissemination of democratic ideas. If we accept this vision, we do not have far to go before erecting the American scholar and activist Gene Sharp as the instigator of the Arab revolts — a step that many have already taken.⁸⁶ According to Sharp's followers, Egyptians and Tunisians were introduced to non-violent protests thanks to his famous manual, *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, as well as any training they may have received at the Centre for Applied Non Violent Actions and Strategies (CANVAS) founded in Belgrade by the Otpor! movement, or at Qatar's Academy for Change.⁸⁷

⁸² Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi, 'Les conflits du Moyen-Orient au miroir des communautés imaginées : la rue arabe existe-t-elle ? Cas du Maroc', *A Contrario*, 5(2), 2008, p. 147-156.

⁸³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1991.

⁸⁴ For example, Bichara Khader, 'Le "printemps arabe" : un premier bilan', *Alternatives Sud*, 19, 2012, p. 7-39.

⁸⁵ For example, Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam. The Search for a New Ummah*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

⁸⁶ For example, David D. Kirkpatrick, David E. Sanger, 'A Tunisian-Egyptian Link That Shook Arab History', *The New York Times*, February 13, 2011.

⁸⁷ The communities directly affected did not wait longer before retaliating with a humorous counter-offensive

This does not mean that we reject out of hand all diffusionist interpretations. Quite on the contrary, we would like to revive the debate with other researchers who have rejected causality as well as the macro-sociological perspective. In reality, it would be fruitful to connect the study of cognitive processes with network analysis and the sequential analysis of activist trajectories, in order to better reconstruct the 'lived experiences of diffusion', or how ideas, causes and performances are adapted and transformed.⁸⁸

What to conclude from this incomplete and summary literature review? First of all, the scientific community's responsiveness should be commended, especially when it has been faced with major events that have threatened many a theory or now-shaky thesis. We should also highlight the stimulating nature of some of the works cited. However, we have no choice but to admit that almost none of the impasses described above have truly been resolved. Most studies are still plagued by retrospective prediction and the hunt for macro-sociological causation. Several causes are mentioned and often 'everything is in everything', without an undeniable causal ordering being veritably demonstrated. It remains to be seen if this has been caused by the weight of respective research traditions or, more generally, to use one of Pierre Favre's expressions, by the evaporation of evidence in sociology. In another respect, the analysis of revolutionary situations — in the sense of the clarification of the internal processes and sequencing of these situations — remains largely unexplored: individuals are everywhere present, but merely as shadow puppets. What, then, should be done? We argue that researchers should abandon the search for causes and instead focus their attention on situations and individual actions in said situations, and subsequently attempt to delineate the typical processes that lead to them.

on Twitter, under the name of 'GeneSharpTaughtMe'. See Ould Mohamedou Mohammad-Mahmoud, 'La démocratie arabe au regard du néo-orientalisme', *Revue internationale et stratégique*, 83, 2011, p. 85–91, here p. 86.

⁸⁸ Isabelle Sommier, 'Diffusion et circulation des mouvements sociaux', in Olivier Fillieule, Éric Agrikoliansky, Isabelle Sommier (ed.), *Penser les mouvements sociaux. Conflits sociaux et contestation dans les sociétés contemporaines*, Paris, La Découverte, 2010, p. 101–120, here p. 115.

PERFORMANCES AND PROCESSES

'It is the details that theories in history have to grasp if they are to be any good'.⁸⁹

This volume analyzes revolutionary situations, understood as instances of dual power,⁹⁰ in order to identify the *sequences of action* — defined here as *performances*, i.e., the cumulative whole of interactions between all the actors participating in a conflict — that lead to them. The concept of performance (also borrowed from Charles Tilly⁹¹) signifies that participants rely on engrained forms but also re-interpret them, sometimes subverting or abandoning them entirely, depending on their reasoning, whose decisive factors are to be found in situational logics. We propose that the observation of micro as well as meso level interactions must allow us to identify *processes*, which we define as a series of events capable of altering the relationships between given groups of elements, in a similar or identical manner, in a variety of different contexts. These processes may be relational (at the meso level of relations between individuals and groups) or cognitive (at the micro level of individual perception).⁹² Studying performances thus amounts to conserving the most noteworthy features of certain sequences, or significant differences between sequences, and explaining them by identifying robust processes of relatively general scope at work within these sequences. More specifically, beyond establishing the original (i.e. the context) conditions, we must attempt to identify and describe the processes which lead (or not) to a revolutionary situation — as said situation cannot stem directly from its original conditions.

This type of classification is in keeping with the ambitious project launched by Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly which seeks to restructure the political process model around the study of *mechanisms* specific to different kinds of *episodes*.⁹³ Although we

⁸⁹ Arthur L. Stinchcombe, *Theoretical Methods in Social History*, New York, Academic Press, 1978, p. 124.

⁹⁰ See Charles Tilly's definition given in footnote 9, p. 769.

⁹¹ Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁹² We borrow here the distinction introduced by Arthur Stinchcombe in his discussion of the concept of mechanisms, in *The Logic of Social Research*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2005. He adds the level of environmental mechanisms, which we see as referring to long-term processes pertaining to different regimes of plasticity (to use a geological metaphor). Therefore, environmental mechanisms such as the nationalization of political spheres or de-differentiation are long-term processes and, in the case of revolutionary situations, should be viewed as conducive elements (to use Smelser's term) existing outside of the temporal framework of a crisis. Thus defined, this term also includes individual processes (for example, assurance games) and meso sociological mechanisms. We will demonstrate this below.

⁹³ Doug McAdam, Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge, Cambridge University

share their desire for a dynamic approach, it nevertheless seems to us that, its ambiguities aside,⁹⁴ this model remains overtly causalist and structuralist.

Moreover, our approach relies on three postulates which diverge significantly from the assumptions made in *Dynamics of Contention*. First of all, we believe that in order to identify the make-up of revolutionary situations and consequently, to observe and define their processes, we must base our analysis on what actors are, do and say in situ. Macro-social facts are nothing more than the emergent consequences of individual actions, according to an ultimately Weberian reasoning.⁹⁵

On the other hand, in going against a strong trend prevalent in the sociology of social movements that seeks to limit analysis to protest movements, protestors and their relationship to the state,⁹⁶ we believe that processes and performances are built relationally and require that we take into account all the actors present in the space of a given conflict.⁹⁷ Finally, abandoning the search for causes has led us to consider, like Pierre Favre, that ‘the work of science consists in studying two different and successive states of a system, isolating the pertinent traits of each and arriving at the rules governing the transformation between

Press, 2001; and also ‘Methods for Measuring Mechanisms of Contention’, *Qualitative Sociology*, 31, 2008, p. 307–331. In addition, our definition of processes borrows from Tilly’s definition of mechanisms (Charles Tilly, ‘L’analyse historique des processus politiques’, in Pascale Laborier, Danny Trom (ed.), *Historicités de l’action publique*, Paris, PUF, 2003, p. 23–57, here p. 27).

⁹⁴ In particular, the distinction between ‘episodes’, ‘processes’ and ‘mechanisms’ is not consistent, as several critics have pointed out. See specifically the critiques grouped together in *Mobilization*, 8, 2003 and in the symposium on ‘Measuring Mechanisms of Contention’ in *Qualitative Sociology*, 31, 2008.

⁹⁵ R. Aya, ‘The Third Man’, *art. cit.*; William H. Sewell Jr., ‘Three Temporalities: Toward an Eventful Sociology’, in Terrence J. McDonald (ed.), *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences*, Ann Arbor, Michigan University Press, 1996, p. 245–280. In ‘Methods for Measuring Mechanisms of Contention’ (*art. cit.*), D. McAdam, S. Tarrow and Ch. Tilly establish a list of the different means of identifying mechanisms (for them) or processes (for us) which emphasizes the anthropological observation of conflict but also includes ‘protest events analysis’ and the statistical method of indirect measurement — which implies once again a certain theoretical inconsistency.

⁹⁶ See Verta Taylor, ‘Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose’, *Mobilization*, 8, 2003, p. 122–126, and Olivier Fillieule, ‘De l’objet de la définition à la définition de l’objet. De quoi traite finalement la sociologie des mouvements sociaux ?’, *Politique et Sociétés*, 28(1), 2009, p. 15–36, for a more nuanced criticism of this aspect of ‘contentious politics’.

⁹⁷ Considering conflict between the different protagonists in a balanced way is at the heart of several studies which, starting with research on how public order is maintained (Olivier Fillieule, Donatella Della Porta (ed.), *Police et manifestants*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2006), have now spread to other aspects of the social world. On this subject, see the ambitious research project evoked by James Jasper in ‘A Strategic Approach to Collective Action. Looking for Agency in Social-Movement Choices’, *Mobilization*, 9(1), 2004, p. 1–16, elaborated in *Getting your Way. Strategic Dilemmas in the Real World*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2006, and implemented in Jan W. Duyvendak, James M. Jasper (eds), *Players and Arenas. The Interactive Dynamics of Protest*, forthcoming. From another perspective, see also Neil Fligstein, Doug McAdam, *A Theory of Fields*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2012.

these two states'.⁹⁸ Each sequence of actions is modified by processes which lead to its results (new states of equilibrium), which in turn help to define the environmental, relational and cognitive elements that influence the calculations of the following sequence. In this cumulative perspective — which shares some characteristics with Paul Veyne's concept of narrative and intrigue⁹⁹ — previous choices force subsequent choices, as in a game of chess.¹⁰⁰

In what follows, briefly recalling some of the properties of revolutionary situations will allow us to determine the role played by agency. We will then focus on the most emphasized dimension of this volume: performances. This trajectory will allow us to conclude that a certain number of processes exist that imply rules governing transformation between states, and which are likely to lead to revolutionary situations.

The spread of mobilizations and how coalitions are formed

Revolutionary situations depend on a challenge to existing power structures which spreads to a significant percentage of the population and the subsequent breakdown between traditionally more or less airtight divisions between social spaces. The majority of case studies pinpoint a small number of properties shared by all revolutionary situations: divisions or defections within the central bodies of the state; divisions or defections within security forces; the creation of large inter-class coalitions which lead to the spread of the protest movement; and finally, the modularity of the shaping of conflicts (that is to say, how situations are framed as well as tactical repertoires).

M. Dobry has proposed formalizing several of these properties around the concepts of multi-sectorial mobilization and political fluidity.¹⁰¹ Situations of political crisis are thus viewed as the spread of a given mobilization to different sectors of society, to such a degree that the latter's daily functioning is disrupted. Then a window of political fluidity opens up,

⁹⁸ P. Favre, *Comprendre le monde*, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁹⁹ Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire*, Paris, Points Seuil, 1971, p. 51–53. On cumulative causation, see Arthur L. Stinchcombe, *Theoretical Methods in Social History*, New York, Academic Press, 1978, p. 61–63, and R. Aya, 'The Third Man', *art. cit.*, p. 147–148.

¹⁰⁰ For an implementation of this concept of multi-level analysis and causation inspired by symbolic interactionism, see Olivier Fillieule, 'Disengagement from Radical Organizations. A Process and Multi-Level Model of Analysis', in Bert Klandermans, Cornelius Van Stralen (eds), *Movements in Times of Transition*, Minnesota, Minnesota University Press, forthcoming.

¹⁰¹ M. Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques*, *op. cit.*

during which sectors no longer function according to their usual logic: they become much more interdependent and uncertainty prevails, insofar as the usual rules of the game are no longer respected.

Merely describing the properties of revolutionary situations is not sufficient. We must also try to understand the contexts that encourage them and the processes which lead to them. This is precisely what Misagh Parsa endeavors to do when he suggests that attention should first be paid to what allows for the creation of coalitions across class lines.¹⁰² Starting with a study of the strategies employed by students, members of the clergy, blue-collar workers and business owners during the Iranian, Nicaraguan and Filipino revolutions, Parsa identifies both the favorable structural factors linked to the form of the state (more or less interventionist, more or less exclusive) and the shape of the class conflict (more or less polarizing). He also pinpoints the factors that relate directly to the action's momentum, since once the conflict is instigated, the situation's logic may transcend the decisive elements that produced it. For example, depending on the form that it takes, the use of repressive force may speed up or slow down the creation of large coalitions and thus the spread of mobilizations.¹⁰³

All the contributions gathered here underscore the importance of groups that are normally separated from each other momentarily coming together: Islamists and left- and extreme left-wing activists; urban, educated youths and 'slum-dwelling, street-smart dropouts'; the downward-trending middle classes, but also business owners and intellectual professionals excluded from power's inner sanctum. Even in Bahrain, the rebellion was poised to surpass the Sunni/Shiite divide — which overlaps with significant socio-economic

¹⁰² Misagh Parsa, *States, Ideologies, & Social Revolutions. A Comparative Analysis of Iran, Nicaragua, and the Philippines*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000 (see a review of this book below, p. 920–923). Charles Tilly comes to the same conclusion when he analyzes alliances between different classes during the 1830 and 1848 revolutions in France (*From Mobilization, op. cit.*).

¹⁰³ This was the case with the Chinese students' uprising in 1989. Authorities blocked inter-class sympathies by treating students and workers differently. The latter were generally punished more harshly and at times were forcibly trapped within their factories during protest activities. To which should also be added the students' lack of appetite for a communal struggle. See Elizabeth J. Perry, 'Intellectuals and Tiananmen. Historical Perspective on an Aborted Revolution', in Daniel Chirot (ed.), *The Crisis of Leninism and the Decline of the Left. The Revolutions of 1989*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1991, p. 129–146. On the ambivalent effects of repression with regard to dissenting groups as well as individuals, see Hélène Combes, Olivier Fillieule, 'Repression and protest. Structural models and strategic interactions' *Revue française de science politique (English)*, 61(6), December 2011, p. 1-24.

cleavages — when its spread was stopped by Saudi Arabia's military intervention.

Defection can be observed at many different levels. First of all, many analysts have elaborated hypotheses regarding the attitude of 'the army' in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria. Four salient factors have emerged: the army's relationship to the government; its involvement in business affairs; its level of training; and finally, its openness to Western armies.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, a detailed analysis still needs to be conducted in order to account for the heterogeneity of institutions, hitherto considered as 'monolithic apparatuses of repression',¹⁰⁵ in order to decode, sequence by sequence, the processes which have underpinned calculations at the different stages and different hierarchical levels of revolutionary phenomena. Secondly, researchers have examined dissension within dominant parties, the crumbling of their clientelist networks and how former supporters of the regime may be swayed to the side of the insurgency (in particular, see the two papers about Tunisia in this issue).¹⁰⁶ Other regimes in the region may have learnt lessons from observing these events, in the hopes of preventing internal divisions and military defection. Such strategies would thus amount to 'complex, multilevel games'.¹⁰⁷ In such situations, regimes try to buy social peace: they create a public discourse that 'aim[s] to influence the strategic calculus of citizens' by highlighting the risks of deep social unrest (*fitna*). They also organize pro-government demonstrations to stem the tide of activist movements; they condemn the sectarian nature of these protests and suggest their manipulation by the West; they observe diplomatic strategies deployed in the region and adapt accordingly. In Morocco, for example, in addition to the aforementioned strategies, the government has offered reforms that are likely to lure citizens led 'astray' back to institutional politics. Furthermore, the Moroccan regime has increased official and unofficial negotiations, as well as exerting

¹⁰⁴ Jean-François Coustilière, 'Les forces armées dans les révoltes arabes', *Confluence Méditerranée*, 11, 2011, p. 67–80.

¹⁰⁵ V. Geisser, A. Krefa, 'L'uniforme ne fait plus le régime.', *art. cit.*, p. 94. See also Anne Alexander, 'Brothers-in-Arms? The Egyptian Military, the Ikhwan and the Revolutions of 1952 and 2011', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 16, 2011, p. 533–554.

¹⁰⁶ For example, Sarah Ben Néfissa, 'Ces 18 jours qui ont changé l'Égypte. Révolution civile et politique', *Revue Tiers Monde*, special issue 2011, p. 227–236, here p. 231. On the subject of how local elites are transformed into counter-elites, see also Guilain Denoeux, *Urban Unrest in the Middle East*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1993.

¹⁰⁷ Steven Heydemann, Reinoud Leenders, 'Authoritarian Learning and Authoritarian Resilience: Regime Responses to the "Arab Awakening"', *Globalizations*, 8 (5), 2011, p. 647–653, here p. 648.

more individual and collective pressure; it has revived networks of local elected officials; it has modified its repressive actions from one sequence of protest movements to another, all the while adapting to perceived regional and international pressures (M. Bennani-Chraïbi, M. Jekhllaly). In Yemen, the current regime has attempted to compensate for early defections by establishing new internal support and rallying its traditional foreign allies — albeit not without brandishing the fear of a security threat (L. Bonnefoy, M. Poirier).

The concept of ‘modularity’ also allows us to highlight one of the properties associated with the spread of mobilizations.¹⁰⁸ This term designates the diffusion of conceptual frameworks and modes of action throughout a national sphere and potentially — as in the case of the ‘Arab uprisings’ — from one country to another. Modularity is of course encouraged by emulation; that is to say, when the success of one particular performance leads others to believe that it would obtain similar success elsewhere. But a certain ‘attribution of similarity’ is still necessary.¹⁰⁹ This identification is produced by institutional or cultural characteristics that are shared or believed to be shared, as Y. El Chazli has shown in his contribution regarding the call to protest on January 25th, in the wake of Ben Ali’s rapid downfall; however, a similar form of identification also occurred when the region’s dictators learnt from their neighbors’ successes and errors when attempting to restore the peace.

The case of the ‘Arab uprisings’ has revealed how the attribution of similarity is largely the product of the sidelining, at least temporarily, of differences regarding methods and objectives and political footwork on the part of courtiers involved in unifying perceptions — footwork which is aided by the shape of the ‘encampment’, which we will address below, and the circulation of slogans within Tunis’ Kasbah¹¹⁰ and Egypt’s Tahrir Square (Y. El Chazli). In the streets of Casablanca, observing the morphology of the demonstrations revealed a great deal of work regarding unification: coordination committees to decide on slogans, communication and logistics— including of course public address systems — and marshalling organization (M. Bennani-Chraïbi, M. Jekhllaly).

¹⁰⁸ Sidney Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989.

¹⁰⁹ Doug McAdam, ‘Pour dépasser l’analyse structurale de l’engagement militant’, in Olivier Fillieule (ed.), *Le désengagement militant*, Paris, Belin, 2005, p. 49–4. The mechanism of the attribution of similarity means that information alone does not suffice to adopt a new idea or practice. In order for diffusion and thus imitation to occur, potential imitators must at least partially identify with the original actors.

¹¹⁰ Choukri Hmed, “Si le peuple un jour aspire à vivre, le destin se doit de répondre”, *Les Temps modernes*, 664, 2011, p. 4–20.

Likewise, in Yemen efforts were deployed to keep objectives broad and vague, thus allowing all kinds of meaning to be attributed to the protests and strong, visible identities to be preserved (L. Bonnefoy, M. Poirier). The work of political unification is nowhere more apparent than when it falls apart, like when a small number of Islamist students in Tunis chanted *la ilaha illa Allah* to counter the left-wing slogans on January 14th (A. Allal), or when, for example, after Mubarak was ousted, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists partnered up with the military. Tahrir Square then became a site of confrontation between secular and ‘religious’ groups, between ‘moderate’ revolutionaries who sought a return to peace and ‘radical’ revolutionaries who wanted to force the army to retreat into its barracks.¹¹¹ Nonetheless, recognizing the work of political unification does not necessarily lead to a strategic bias; with regard to Tunisia, M. Béchir Ayari emphasizes that reducing the number of grievances to a lowest common denominator — ‘dignity’ or ‘get out!’ — was not merely ‘intentional’, but also relates to the country’s much longer history of socio-political conflicts.¹¹²

The Third Man

Not without irony, Rod Aya underscores how although the sociology of revolutions consistently condemns rational choice theory, it does not propose a general alternative theory of human action; even in the most structuralist of revolutionary models, individuals are at one point or another called upon to explain ‘the transition from word to deed’, thus surreptitiously reintroducing the rejected theories through the back door.¹¹³

It is thus not surprising that under such conditions, the existing literature ceaselessly swings between rather unconvincing binary oppositions: the spontaneity of the masses and emotional contagion, versus the calculated and manipulative actions of group leaders;¹¹⁴ the

¹¹¹ Khaled Dawoud, ‘Tahrir Countershow of Force’, *Al Ahram Weekly*, August 11–17, 2011, <<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1060/fr1.htm>>.

¹¹² Michaël Béchir Ayari, ‘Des maux de la misère aux mots de la “dignité”’, *Revue Tiers Monde*, special issue 2011, p. 209–218, here p. 216.

¹¹³ R. Aya, ‘The Third Man’, *art. cit.*

¹¹⁴ On approaches regarding emotional contagion, see the critical synthesis elaborated by Susanna Barrows, *Miroirs déformants. Réflexions sur la foule en France à la fin du 19^e siècle*, Paris, Aubier, 1990. On the opposition between manipulated masses and manipulative leaders, in particular with regard to police reasoning, see Olivier Fillieule, *Stratégies de la rue. Les manifestations en France*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 1997.

prevalence of tactical choices and innovation versus reliance on engrained forms and cognitive shortcuts during situations of structural uncertainty.¹¹⁵

This systematic ambiguity is fostered by both the difficulty of perceiving the structured nature of crowd behavior¹¹⁶ and the ambivalence exhibited in the discourse of witnesses and actors themselves.¹¹⁷ In her reading of the Civil Rights Movement's 'sit-ins' at the beginning of the 1960s, F. Polletta gives us a striking example of this phenomenon, actors oscillating between a feeling of spontaneity and unpredictability, and the simultaneous recognition of the crucial role played by the movement's leaders and their preparations.¹¹⁸ Likewise, the 'Arab uprisings' provide us with a plethora of examples, whether they take the form of participant interviews or journalistic reports, filmed and broadcast by Arab and international media.¹¹⁹

M. Dobry's concept of 'calculation evaporation', which is halfway between the inertia of systems of disposition (i.e. habitus) and the intelligibility break, seems to us quite useful here. By relying on Goffman's notion of 'mutual anticipation', Dobry suggests that during periods of broad desectorization, where structural uncertainty prevails, participants base their decisions to commit or not on the information they gather from the attitudes of other actors — all of this occurring in a structurally determined but malfunctioning normative framework which is about to partially or completely collapse.¹²⁰ 'From this perspective,

¹¹⁵ Michel Dobry has emphasized how the 'heroic illusion' was embedded in works on crisis situations, as well as the dead-ends to which it led. Such criticism can extend to a certain number of interpretations of the event as a 'break in intelligibility', opening up a situation in which invention dominates and frees itself from all structural determination. For example, Alban Bensa, Éric Fassin, 'Les sciences sociales face à l'événement', *Terrain*, 38, 2002, p. 5–20.

¹¹⁶ Clark McPhail, *The Myth of the Madding Crowd*, New York, Aldine/De Gruyter, 1991, p. 158–84; Olivier Fillieule, 'The Independent Psychological Effects of Participation in Demonstrations', *Mobilization. An International Journal*, 17(3), 2012, p. 489–502.

¹¹⁷ We refer of course to Immanuel Kant's reflections on revolutionary enthusiasm in *The Conflict of the Faculties* (11th section). Specifically on the subject of the French Revolution, see also the actors' declarations reproduced and analyzed in Michel Vovelle, *La mentalité révolutionnaire*, Paris, Messidor/Éditions sociales, 1985, and also the pages devoted by Timothy Tackett to the night of August 4th, 1789, marked by 'a utterly unanticipated spirit of enthusiasm and self-sacrifice', in *Becoming a Revolutionary. The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture (1789–1790)*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 167.

¹¹⁸ Francesca Polletta, "'It was Like a Fever...". Narrative and Identity in Social Protest', *Social Problems*, 45(2), May 1998, p. 137–159.

¹¹⁹ For example, Stephano Savona's beautiful film (Tahrir, 2011) and the eyewitness accounts published in Hatem Rushdy, *18 days in Tahrir. Stories from Egypt's Revolution*, Hong Kong, Haven Books, 2011.

¹²⁰ In his book on 'collective abdications', Ivan Ermakoff offers a similar analysis of decision-making processes in these situations of political fluidity. He bases himself on game theory, and thus does not link together the

invention is neither the pure and simple replica of what has been internalized, nor the sudden and mysterious eruption, *ex nihilo*, of innovation'.¹²¹

Admitting this also means that rational choice theories should not be dismissed so quickly. In fact, they should be given credit for having determined that individual actions are the combined result of rational choice (which does not, nevertheless, explain what motivates such choices) and the hope of success (which does not presuppose the 'reasonable' nature of said choices).¹²² Starting with these two premises, which we wholeheartedly accept, it is possible to proceed to a reflection on the micro-foundations of revolutionary action and on aggregation mechanisms in situations of uncertainty.

Those studies which adhere to rational choice theory outline a certain number of processes specific to revolutionary situations that can help us, in an ideal-typical manner, to understand how actors calculate their moves. We refer specifically to critical mass theory, which predicts that one's decision to get involved in an event depends on the expected participation of a sufficiently large number of people,¹²³ and is linked to several other results,¹²⁴ in particular to propositions on the gap between private and public preferences in authoritarian states, a discrepancy which is bolstered by fear of repression.¹²⁵ As a consequence, when a revolutionary situation is triggered and individuals feel like their private preferences regarding a regime change are shared by many others, they may, once a

cognitive explanation with his contextual analysis. In particular, he develops the idea that, in high-stakes situations where the outcome is uncertain until the very end, the processes of alignment among participants constitute a decisive explanatory factor. See Ivan Ermakoff, *Ruling Oneself Out. A Theory of Collective Abdications*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2008 (cf. below for a review of this book, p. 923–926).

¹²¹ M. Dobry, *Sociologie des crises politiques*, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

¹²² R. Aya, 'The Third Man', *art. cit.*, p. 148. Thanks to the work of Evans Pritchard, we now know the degree to which the rationality of actions is always relative to cognitive frames of reference. See Evans Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1937.

¹²³ Gerard Marwell, Pamela Oliver, *The Critical Mass in Collective Action. A Micro-Social Theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993. This theory argues the exact opposite of the Olsonian paradox without, nevertheless, invalidating it, as it only pertains to situations of great uncertainty.

¹²⁴ See Mark I. Lichbach, *The Rebel's Dilemma*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1995, for a very thorough critique.

¹²⁵ Timur Kuran, *Private Truths, Public Lies. The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1995.

certain threshold is crossed,¹²⁶ very rapidly and in large numbers join the cause: thus providing an explanation to the ‘revolutionary bandwagon’ phenomenon.¹²⁷

Numerous personal accounts illustrate this phenomenon. For A. El Aswany, January 25th was a day like any other — until about mid-day. Turning on his television, the novelist saw that a ‘miracle’ had happened, that Egyptians had massively gathered to protest the current regime.¹²⁸ He immediately got dressed to join the protesters on Tahrir Square. In his contribution to this study, Y. El Chazli shows that the discrepancy between the size of the January 25th protests and the intimacy of the usual sit-ins observed by ‘novices’ had a galvanizing effect. C. Hmed notes that in Sidi Bouzid, Ben Ali’s January 13th speech had more of a motivating than demotivating effect on the population, precisely due to this feeling of anticipation. Likewise, in Morocco, many people rallied to the enthusiasm drummed up by the pioneers of the February 20 Movement and the earlier leaders of the ‘Arab Spring’ movement, once preliminary successes were witnessed. On the contrary, however, the ebbing of the movement coincided with a sort of ‘counter-bandwagon effect’: the feeling that the movement had lost the fight and that history was slowing down contributing to general demotivation.

Beyond the mechanisms that it outlines in a stylized manner, however, rational choice theory is of little help when attempting to reconstruct how actors make calculations *in situ*. First of all, rational choice theory is primarily interested in predicting commitment, based on the identification of pre-existing preferences. For our purposes here, all the depth and particularity of events is not accounted for in such an analysis.¹²⁹ In effect, individuals adjust their calculations based on cost/benefit analyses which are indexed on highly volatile circumstances: this is precisely what we must address. In this vein, T. Tackett offers a considerably more convincing approach to calculations in revolutionary situations. He

¹²⁶ Mark Granovetter, Roland Soong, ‘Threshold Models of Diffusion and Collective Behavior’, *Journal of Mathematical Sociology*, 9, 1983, p. 165–179; Thomas C. Schelling, ‘Hockey Helmets, Concealed Weapons and Daylight Saving’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 17(3), 1973, p. 381–428.

¹²⁷ On the concepts of ‘bandwagon’, ‘assurance games’ and ‘de-assurance games’, see Dennis Chong, *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1991, and Rasma Karklins, Roger Petersen, ‘Decision Calculus of Protesters and Regimes: Eastern Europe 1989’, *The Journal of Politics*, 55(3), August 1993, p. 588–614.

¹²⁸ Alaa El Aswany, *Chroniques de la Révolution égyptienne*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2011, p. 13.

¹²⁹ Charles Kurzman, ‘Can Understanding Undermine Explanation? The Confused Experience of Revolution’, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 34(3), September 2004, p. 328–351.

meticulously reconstructs the means by which members of parliament or general assemblies gradually become revolutionaries. This involved studying the transformation of their values and modes of thinking in all aspects of their lives, from theoretical ideas to financial worries, often expressed in their personal correspondence.¹³⁰ Y. El Chazli has similarly shown how Tahrir Square witnessed the gradual birth of a revolutionary psychology and culture.

Secondly, the anthropological foundations of rational choice theory often circumscribe it within the confines of cognitivism, even when attempts are made to 'contextualize' the explanatory models. We are therefore still very far from obtaining an adequate account of actors' socio-cultural anchors, be it concerning the nature and strength of pre-existing ties, of the opportunities and obligations that the latter engender, or of their spatial anchoring in cost/benefit matrices.¹³¹ Furthermore, and here we are in line with the first line of critique, a very large number of historians have demonstrated how the momentum of riots or rebellions also significantly contributes to the redefining of social ties and forms of inter-individual attachment, thus making it futile to try to reconstruct cost/benefit structures by means of static, one-dimensional models.¹³²

By seeking to describe as accurately as possible the practical dilemmas faced by actors at every moment in time and by attempting to reconstruct their motivations by closely following individual actions and thoughts, we can hope to replace the missing 'third man'¹³³ at the center of every explanation with an actor who acts for 'good reasons' (whether these seem rational or not in the eyes of the researcher and the world, and even if they are only loosely linked with, if not downright contrary to, the causes they serve).

¹³⁰ T. Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, *op. cit.*; in a completely different context, see also Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, New York, Harper Collins, 1992.

¹³¹ Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities. Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1995; Karl Dieter Opp, Peter Voss, Christiane Gern, *Origins of a Spontaneous Revolution*, Ann Arbor, Michigan University Press, 1995; Steven Pfaff, 'Collective Identity and Informal Groups in Revolutionary Mobilization. East Germany in 1989', *Social Forces*, 75(1), 1996, p. 91-118.

¹³² For example, William M. Reddy, 'The Textile Trade and the Language of the Crowd at Rouen, 1752-1871', *Past and Present*, 74(1), 1977, p. 62-89, here p. 82-83; Cynthia A. Bouton, *The Flour War. Gender, Class, and Community in Late Ancien Régime French Society*, Philadelphia, Penn State Press, 1993, chap. 5.

¹³³ R. Aya, 'The Third Man', *art. cit.*

Revolutionary performances

Under the guise of unpredictability and collective effervescence, events paradoxically fall within prescribed norms and are fostered by modes of action drawn from select repertoires, which we shall attempt to describe as thoroughly as possible. This is not to deny the potentially transformative nature of certain characteristic elements of revolutionary situations. Quite the opposite: it seems to us that we can best understand the rules governing the plasticity of structures when we recognize their ‘sensitivity to mobilizations, actors’ tactical activity and the blows exchanged’.¹³⁴ From our point of view, although revolutionary situations do amount to exchanges governed by interactional logic, attention must nevertheless be paid to the manner in which observable behaviors are historically established, since the social norms involved therein are and have been the object of gradual, multiple and simultaneous developments.¹³⁵

These comments call for a close observation of revolutionary performances, which are subject to two competing rationales. On the one hand, actors — both protesters and the forces of law and order — often participate in structurally regulated interaction sequences; these attest to the existence of a shared understanding of the situation, and thus of explicit and implicit rules of the game (legal frameworks, social mores) bolstered by local police culture and protest history, with all their attendant tactics and predictable moves.¹³⁶ On the other hand, the multiplicity of actors present and the complexity of the fights for meaning that occur during interactions and interpretations introduce large margins of uncertainty. In other words, only a blow-by-blow contextualized analysis of a situation can allow us to understand how protest dramaturgy can activate and orient a revolutionary situation — so

¹³⁴ Michel Dobry. ‘Le politique dans ses états critiques. Retour sur quelques aspects de l’hypothèse de continuité’, in Marc Bessin, Claire Bidart, Michel Grossetti (ed.), *Bifurcations. Les sciences sociales face aux ruptures et à l’événement*, Paris, La Découverte, 2010, p. 64–88, here p. 79–80. On the relationships between structures and events, see also Marshall Sahlins, *How ‘Natives’ Think. About Captain Cook, for Example*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1995; William H. Sewell Jr., *Logics in History. Social Theory and Social Transformation*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2005. More recently, see Stéphane Latté, ‘La force de l’“événement” est-elle un artefact ?’, *Revue française de science politique*, 62(3), June 2012, p. 409–432.

¹³⁵ Erving Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places*, Glencoe, Free Press, 1963, p. 12; C. McPhail, *The Myth of the Madding Crowd*, *op. cit.*, p. 158–184; Nicolas Mariot, ‘Does Acclamation Equal Agreement? Rethinking Collective Effervescence Through the Case of the Presidential “Tour de France” during the 20th Century’, *Theory & Society*, 40(2), March 2010, p. 191–221; Olivier Fillieule, Danielle Tartakowsky, *Demonstrations*, Winnipeg, Fernwood Publishing, 2013.

¹³⁶ O. Fillieule, *Stratégies de la rue*, *op. cit.*

long as we take into account the actions of demonstrators, the authorities being challenged *and* the forces of order.

Specialists in Northern African and Middle Eastern social movements have remarked how the observable behaviors of demonstrations are historically established and how the social norms displayed therein are borrowed from the knowledge of previous struggles, either directly reused by activists or indirectly transmitted to younger generations.¹³⁷ Whether in Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco or Yemen, the turn being taken by protest movements must be linked to previous demonstrations: actions supporting 'Arabic' or 'Islamic' causes; unprecedented protests in Redeyef and Gafsa in 2008 and in Ben Guerdane in 2010; the growing wave of labor strikes in Egypt, starting in 2004; protests against the high cost of living, such as those occurring in Morocco until 2009; and the development of groups which transcend ideological cleavages (such as Kifaya, the April 6th group and the National Association for Change in Egypt, as well as various human rights organizations across different countries). These protests have allowed for the partial overlap between actors belonging to competing socio-political networks (see the insights contributed by M. Bennani-Chraïbi and M. Jekhllaly, C. Hmed and Y. El Chazli). They have likewise encouraged millions of people to learn how to engage in collective mobilization; in addition, such protests also allow hardened activists to learn from their previous mistakes, to innovate in order to surprise the forces of law and order (see. C. Hmed; Y. El Chazli; M. Bennani-Chraïbi, M. Jekhllaly). In addition, we should not overlook the know-how acquired or the informal networks constructed by the football clubs' Ultras, or more generally, throughout sites of urban dissidence (see A. Allal).¹³⁸ Finally, we must take into account everything that can be gleaned and adapted from one movement to another — including transnationally — for both protestors and security forces.

But actors' behaviors do not, however, solely stem from learnt forms — they also depend on situational logic, marked by a profusion of critical moments. We can see this

¹³⁷ Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi, Olivier Fillieule (ed.), *Résistances et protestations dans le monde musulman*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2003; Joel Beinin, Frédéric Vairel (eds), *Social Movements, Mobilization and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2011. The same goes for the forces of law and order, which have also acquired know-how from past conflicts.

¹³⁸ Ashraf El-Sherif, 'The Ultras' Politics of Fun Confront Tyranny', *Jadaliyya*, February 2012, <<http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4243/the-ultras-politics-of-fun-confront-tyranny>>.

clearly in the ambivalent effects of repression, which can radicalize opponents by establishing binary structures¹³⁹ that accelerate the crumbling of authoritarian legitimacy; this may consequently drive participants to go far beyond their initial goals (see A. Allal and C. Hmed), even though for the authorities in power, indiscriminate violence and savage repression sought to reduce the strength and number of protests.

This phenomenon was especially evident throughout a whole series of cathartic events that acted as 'turning points' (like Egypt's 'Friday of Anger', on January 28th, 2011, see Y. El Chazli), marked by the disappearance of security forces, the ambiguous role of the army and the establishment of neighborhood self-defense committees.¹⁴⁰ In Yemen, on March 18th, 2011, the 'Friday of Dignity' saw security forces intervene to oust protestors from Taghyir Square and more than fifty individuals were assassinated by isolated gunmen, thus spurring on the movement and speeding up the rate of defections. In Manama, although the first protests on January 14th in 2011 only numbered a few hundred, the repression they provoked played a significant part in inciting revolt. The installation of an encampment at the Pearl Roundabout and its subsequent repression transformed the nature of the protest in just two days. First of all, demands became increasingly radical, moving from requests for reform to calls for a regime change. Secondly, having previously been confined to human rights activists, the protest movement spread to students, engineers, professors, lawyers, and even members of the opposition: trade union activists, Shiite religious leaders. This demonstrated that the spirit of rebellion had permeated throughout many different social classes and environments. This handful of examples illustrates the self-propelling dynamics of transformative events. The very strength of events leads participants to go far beyond what they had initially envisioned, let alone dreamt of (A. Allal, C. Hmed, Y. El Chazli). And although the protestors of Sidi Bouzid, Tunis's Kasbah, Tahrir Square and Deraa are remarkably aware of the historical significance of their actions, they are nonetheless still unable of explaining it, as the situation's logic surpasses their individual calculations and expectations.

¹³⁹ C. Alexander, *Performative Revolution in Egypt*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ J. Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings*, *op. cit.*, p. 46; H. Rushdy, *18 days in Tahrir*, *op. cit.*

Given a certain limited set of circumstances, the choice of one form of action over another stems from both tactical and strategic concerns, and from an attempt at framing undertaken by protestors in order to give meaning to their movement. During the Arab uprisings, heterogeneous modes of action have been observed: general strikes, mass protests, political funerals, manifestations, riots and even guerrilla actions. This variety is tied to the actors' politicization, their pre-existing networks, the places they inhabit and the timing they chose for protest movements. The Tunisian examples in this volume demonstrate this clearly. The 'débrouillard' (or street-smart) youths coordinate thanks to neighborly, friendly or familial relations; they tend to engage (usually at night) in urban guerrilla actions against the police on the streets of their neighborhoods. Union leaders and members of the political opposition, on the other hand, mobilize through their pre-existing activist networks and organize (daytime) events inspired by the lessons of the past: general strikes, sit-ins, solidarity caravans and protests along major city streets. Nevertheless, this variety does not prevent some amount of overlap from occurring.

For example, in the case of the Tunisian, Egyptian, Bahraini, Libyan and Yemeni uprisings, all of the events converged around the physical presence of encampments. This allows us to interpret this mode of action as an effective means for the spread of protest movements.¹⁴¹ Tahrir Square in Cairo is the most evocative illustration of this phenomenon:¹⁴² the 'Egyptian Revolution' symbolically took shape there and its fate now seems completely intertwined with the square's life.¹⁴³ This phenomenon — and the same sentiment — could also be observed in Tunis' Kasbah, Sanaa's Taghyeer Square and Manama's Pearl Roundabout, but also in Benghazi's Al-Shajara Square, in Tripoli's Martyrs' Square, etc.¹⁴⁴ In non-democratic contexts where participating in a street demonstration can

¹⁴¹ See the conclusion to Olivier Fillieule and Danielle Tartakowsky's *Demonstrations*, *op. cit.*

¹⁴² This form of action is so prevalent and widespread that it has often caused other forms of revolt to be overlooked, both in the eyes of outside commentators as well as of participants. It is just as likely that attention was very quickly concentrated on capital cities, neglecting the contribution of other cities to the momentum of protests.

¹⁴³ In the eyewitness accounts collected in *18 days in Tahrir*, the persons interviewed were firmly convinced that everything was staked on Tahrir Square, and that nowhere else in Egypt had much importance.

¹⁴⁴ This form of action was not invented in Tunis' Kasbah or on Tahrir Square and thus merits an explanation. The first example that comes to mind is that of Tiananmen Square in 1989, but we can also recall more recent movements like *Los Indignados* and Occupy in Europe, the US and Israel. Moreover, these spaces did not become epicenters of rebellion overnight: like Cairo's Tahrir Square or Casablanca's Mohammed V Square (Lahmam Plaza), they had very often been construed as symbolic sites of activism well before 2011.

be very risky for oneself and one's loved ones, occupying a public space is a gesture that is both symbolically disruptive and particularly adapted to the limits imposed by a repressive regime (see in particular the cases of Egypt and Yemen). First of all, encampments allow for the establishment of 'liberated' spaces that help to overcome fear and anchor the protest over time (somewhat like the older technique of the barricade).¹⁴⁵ Encampments are also a way to construct a unified image for the movement, supported by a mass — and largely peaceful — uprising of all sections of society against an illegitimate regime.¹⁴⁶ Finally, as Y. El Chazli, L. Bonnefoy and M. Poirier have shown in this volume, encampments are a powerful tool to stoke revolutionary enthusiasm, particularly by strengthening an 'esprit de corps' in small groups.¹⁴⁷ Two elements are crucial here.

First of all, due to its longer timeframe and the nature of the relationships it establishes, camping out in a protest site is likely to have a greater effect than sporadic participation in street demonstrations, no matter how violent or engaged these may be. This is attested to by a number of different elements, including first and foremost Facebook posts and Twitter feeds updated in the heat of the moment. Excepting whatever obstacles may prevent us from collecting such testimonials and analyzing them, these messages are an exceptional opportunity to recreate the hour-by-hour development of participants' spirits, perceptions, and decisions: in other words, 'the emergence of a situational norm'.¹⁴⁸

On the other hand, the intensifying of interpersonal connections, contradictory debates and discussions as well as the 'liberation of political speech'¹⁴⁹ echo the observations noted by historians of the French Revolution when analyzing that revolutionary mindset.¹⁵⁰ In the Kasbah and on Tahrir Square, just like in the Palais Royal in 1790s Paris, individuals can become impromptu orators, ranting at passers-by, and roundtable discussions (*halaqat*

¹⁴⁵ On the nature and the meaning of the barricade, see Alain Corbin, Jean-Marie Mayeur (ed.), *La Barricade*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1997; Mark Traugott, *The Insurgent Barricade*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2010. For an overview, see Michel Offerlé, 'The barricade', in David A. Snow, Donatella Della Porta, Bert Klendermans, Doug McAdam (eds), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, Oxford, John Wiley, forthcoming 2013.

¹⁴⁶ Here, what J. Jasper calls 'the power of negative thinking' is fully engaged (*The Art of Moral Protest*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1997, p. 362).

¹⁴⁷ O. Fillieule, 'The Independent Psychological Effects', *art. cit.*

¹⁴⁸ Ralph H. Turner, Lewis M. Killian, *Collective Behavior*, Englewood Cliff, Prentice Hall, 1957.

¹⁴⁹ C. Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁰ M. Vovelle, *La mentalité révolutionnaire*, *op. cit.*

niqashiyya) are improvised based on pre-existing networks, to which small groups may then adhere. Saturated with political symbols — flags, signs, graffiti — this is also a space for singing and dancing, for sharing food and having fun (Y. El Chazli).¹⁵¹ The occupation of popular sites and the protests that rhythm their daily existence allow demonstrators to ‘witness or participate in the birth of new practices, of new goals and of a new conceptual framework, which reveal a more or less radical transformation of habits and customs and thus contribute to the creation of a new identity’.¹⁵² Initiation to group know-how takes place in a few different ways. Organizers from the lower-middle class may transmit their experiences to ‘novices’; likewise, ‘upper-middle class members may choose to slum it, to open up in a whole new way to urban youth culture, the latter teaching them how to protect themselves and how to procure rare items’.¹⁵³ These observations underscore the importance of the spatial dimension when analyzing social movements; as both a resource and one of the elements at stake,¹⁵⁴ space can potentially provoke sociability and politicization (see C. Hmed and A. Allal).¹⁵⁵

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In this essay, we have put forth an approach which refutes all causality and focuses on revolutionary situations, instead of searching for decisive factors and instigating elements, or reflecting upon the consequences and outcomes of these situations. This is not to suggest that identifying contextual factors to understand the dynamics of emergence is

¹⁵¹ See also Iman Farag, ‘En marge de la révolution égyptienne : écrire l’histoire ou sauver la mémoire ?’, *Mouvements*, 66, 2011, p. 42–47; Iman Mersal, ‘Revolutionary Humor’, *Globalizations*, 8(5), 2011, p. 669–674; Lila Abu-Lughod, ‘Living the “Revolution” in an Egyptian Village. Moral Action in a National Space’, and Reem Saad, ‘The Egyptian Revolution. A Triumph of Poetry’, *American Ethnologist*, 39(1), 2012, p. 21–25 and p. 63–66.

¹⁵² Annie Jourdan, *La Révolution, une exception française ?*, Paris, Flammarion, 2004, p. 142.

¹⁵³ Account given by the political scientist Dina El-Khawaga and collected by the authors.

¹⁵⁴ For example, Choukri Hmed, ‘Espace géographique et mouvements sociaux’, in O. Fillieule, L. Mathieu, C. Péchu (ed.), *Dictionnaire des mouvements sociaux*, *op. cit.*, p. 220–227.

¹⁵⁵ Asef Bayat, *Street Politics. Poor People’s Movements in Iran*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

superfluous,¹⁵⁶ nor that considering the outcomes of revolutionary situations is pointless.¹⁵⁷ However, the lion's share of research has hitherto been focused on these two aspects, and has thus neglected the study of revolutionary situations themselves. The summary literature review we have provided above has confirmed that this is not merely a view of our mind.

This sea change has been accompanied by another, equally important shift in scholarly research. Studies on revolutionary situations, or more broadly on crisis situations, first and foremost attempt to examine and define the *resulting* properties of these situations. Desectorization, the creation of inter-class coalitions, internal divisions or defections within the central bodies of the state and 'calculation evaporation' are all *results* of the opening up of a revolutionary situation. We therefore propose examining the sequences of actions — defined as series of complex but observable interactions — which *lead* (or not) to these results. Two different avenues are possible here. One may reconstruct the various steps of the conflict between all the participants in a given revolutionary situation, in order to isolate the most important elements and outline their momentum. This is the approach adopted by the papers we will read further on.¹⁵⁸ On the other hand, one may also identify a series of relational and cognitive *processes* of general scope operating within the performances that lead to revolutionary situations (this without considering their success or failure). In doing so, the modes of transformation from one state to another which are typical of revolutionary situations may be gleaned. As we have noted above, such an objective is not far from that which drives mechanistic approaches. Nevertheless, it differs due to its methodological determinism and its subsequent rejection of causality, both in terms of the scales of observation used and its focus on the micro-foundations of action. Hence our emphasis

¹⁵⁶ For a critical analysis of the issue of emergence, and of the combination of important external and internal factors at the same time as micro-events, see Stéphane Cadiou, Stéphanie Dechezelles, 'La problématique de l'émergence pour l'étude des mobilisations collectives : pistes et repères', in Stéphane Cadiou, Stéphanie Dechezelles, Antoine Roger (ed.), *Passer à l'action : les mobilisations émergentes*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2007, p. 11-48.

¹⁵⁷ Studies on the outcomes of protest movements are indeed fascinating, whether they are conducted at the level of heavy macro-level social variables (for example, cultural changes), the orientation of public policy, or even the biographical consequences of involvement. For a review of the existing literature on this subject, see, Didier Chabanet, Marco Giugni, 'Les conséquences des mouvement sociaux', in O. Fillieule, É. Agrikoliansky, I. Sommier (ed.), *Penser les mouvements sociaux*, *op. cit.*, p. 145-162.

¹⁵⁸ This is also the approach adopted by the authors of a forthcoming volume which, like this text, will collect various works stemming from eyewitness observations on the ground: Amin Allal, Thomas Pierret (ed.), *Devenir révolutionnaires. Au cœur des révoltes arabes*, Paris, Armand Colin, forthcoming 2013.

above on actors and their decision-making processes *in situ*, as well as conflicts and their potential saliency. The following chart shows the breakdown of the aforementioned elements, divided into two categories.

First of all, we choose to distinguish between conducive elements, processes and revolutionary situations. This diachronic distinction between three different classes of elements is naturally porous and requires a case-by-case evaluation. Firstly, because the processes that lead to revolutionary situations can continue to operate therein as the latter develop; and secondly, because the distinction between starting conditions and the components of change between states are difficult to pin down. This is a classic problem for neuroscientists and biologists, both of whom ultimately make decisions based on pragmatic considerations.¹⁵⁹ To stick to an example, what is important here is to separate, at the environmental level, the more or less exclusive and interventionist character of the state¹⁶⁰ or the predominant forms of social segmentation¹⁶¹. Those elements contribute to frame, at the micro and meso levels, the incidence, the form and scope of processes of emulation and attribution of similarity. Hence generating, among other results, modularity, or the heightened transferability of modes of action and recognizable frameworks across space and time, or the spread of protests to a significant portion of the population. Secondly, a similarly difficult distinction must also be made between the three scales of analysis used. For example, the process of the attribution of similarity (the strategic identification of potential imitators with original instigators) observable at the relational level is linked, at the cognitive level, to emulation (i.e., hope for success). However, this distinction seems useful for the purpose of isolating different levels of observation of these processes, some of which cannot be easily reduced to cognitive processes (e.g., brokerage).¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Carl F. Craver, 'Mechanisms and Natural Kinds', *Philosophical Psychology*, 22(5), 2009, p. 575–594.

¹⁶⁰ M. Parsa, *States, Ideologies, op. cit.*

¹⁶¹ Anthony Oberschall, *Social Conflict and Social Movements*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1973.

¹⁶² Tulia G. Falletti, Julia Lynch, 'From Process to Mechanism. Varieties of Disaggregation', *Qualitative Sociology*, 31(3), 2008, p. 333–339.

Some Modes of Transformation of States Specific to Revolutionary Situations

Conductive Elements (present outside of the crisis' temporal framework)	Processes (how conflict develops step-by-step between individual and collective actors)	Revolutionary Situation (dual-power situation)	Scale of the Analysis
<i>Structural</i> Form of the State (+/- interventionist, exclusive) Form of the class conflict (+/- polarized) Vertical/horizontal segmentation Type of international support for the regime De-differentiation <i>Short-term</i> Change in support to the regime Military defeat Coup d'état, 'palace coup' Neighboring revolutionary situation, etc.		Spread of protests to a significant portion of the population Blurring of boundaries between social spaces Large inter-class coalitions Modularity of modes of action and framing	Macro (environmental)
Collective actors' level of resources (organizational, leadership, ideological, etc.) Brokerage ability Collective memory of past struggles	Attribution of similarity Construction of strategic identities Cooptation Concessions Divisions Targeted/discriminatory repression	Division/defections within the state or repressive apparatus Frame simplification and unification of modes of action	Meso (relational)
Individual memory of past struggles Socialization/politicization Social status Growing confusion and uncertainty with regard to expectations	Shift in the balance between public and private preferences Emulation (evaluation of one's chances for success) Assurance/de-assurance games Bandwagon effect and counter-effect Critical mass/free rider	Calculation evaporation	Micro (cognitive)

T1...T2...T3...T4...T5...etc.

T_x



Sequences of action that can lead to the instauration of a revolutionary situation

The list of elements above is tentative and non-definitive; it should be completed by further research. In addition, the distinction between events and processes should be refined. If processes are defined as the succession of moves made by individual and collective actors, then they are composed of, but not reducible to, events. In its current state, the chart above does not specify what we mean by repression as a process (that is, a strategy employed with a specific aim and which is based on predicting the moves of adversaries as well as allies) and repressive events as moves made at a given time.

Finally, it is clear that processes develop in different ways depending on their preliminary conditions; it is likewise possible that they are not all equally central to the emergence of a revolutionary situation. Most importantly, however, processes acquire their power by combining with each other both synchronically and diachronically — with the result that a process, *by itself*, explains nothing. As we know, the authors of *Dynamics of Contention* faced criticism for inconsistently shifting between the production of historical narratives and the identification of mechanisms as explanatory variables.¹⁶³ We believe that studying sequences of actions and thus the *combination of processes* activated and experienced by the involved parties will allow us to unravel the successive stages that potentially lead, here and there, to revolutionary situations. In this fashion, we avoid establishing both the laws governing the development of revolutionary situations and the unique and circumstantial narrative of any particular revolutionary trajectory.

For example, at the beginning of 2011 similar processes were at work in both Egypt and Morocco. And yet, these processes did not produce similar results: in the former case, they led to a revolutionary situation, while in the latter they opened up ‘reformist’ possibilities. Both countries witnessed the attribution of similarity and the construction of strategic identities, which translated into the creation of coalitions transcending pre-existing cleavages and polarizations. On the other hand, the modalities of crisis management combined differently. In Egypt’s case, concessions came too late following lengthy and indiscriminate repression. In Morocco, however, the rapid proposals for reform,

¹⁶³ Pamela Oliver describes this tension well when she remarks that ‘a generalizing strategy focused on one process can never explain a historical episode, and should not try to. But conversely, a research program focused on explaining particular historical events cannot yield a general understanding of any process’ (‘Mechanisms of Contention’, *Mobilization*, 8(1), 2003, p. 119–122, here p. 121). See also Ruud Koopmans, ‘A Failed Revolution – but a Worthy Cause’, *Mobilization*, 8(1), 2003, p. 116–119, here p. 117.

redistribution capacity building — in part thanks to international aid — and the use of selective and timely repression combined to result in the implementation by protestors of organizational tools allowing them to ‘control the streets’ and prevent the kind of ‘spillage’ which in Egypt led to instigators being overrun by their followers. In other words, in Morocco, the protestors’ self-limitation helped to prolong the mobilization’s momentum; unlike in Egypt, the point of no return was never reached, and thus a gradual path towards change remained possible.

In conclusion, we would like to briefly return to the question of how best to study sequences of action. We believe that it is necessary to systematically connect the description of phenomena with the meaning that actors attribute to the actions they take, when they take them. This is the only manner in which researchers can avoid imputing motivations to individuals based solely on the observation of their acts. As R. Aya sarcastically remarks, without meaning that actors attribute to the different steps of a process, the analysis of situations cannot be rooted in evidence or facts but ‘gratuitous assumption — usually some sociological cliché’.¹⁶⁴ The issue is thus how to record explanatory clues: that is, ‘circumstantial evidence for hope of success’.¹⁶⁵ We believe that the authors contained in this volume have contributed several answers and opened up at least two different avenues for future research.

First of all, in order to avoid imputing wild meanings and making homogenous classifications, as well as the groundless guesses of pragmatic sociology, we must attempt to elaborate a precise sociography of participants in all their diversity, by putting their actions and perceptions back into a personal and familial historical perspective. This involves focusing on the main principles of political socialization and connecting the investigation on personal dispositions towards acting with the way in which activist experiences and events transform individuals.¹⁶⁶ In other words, according to a perspective that is neither ‘causal’

¹⁶⁴ R. Aya, ‘The Third Man’, *art. cit.* J. Bohstedt directs this same criticism at E. P. Thompson regarding the concept of ‘moral economy’ which he deems to be a romantic notion, even though greater attention paid to the riots would have allowed him to better understand the role of morality and decorum at the heart of actors’ calculations — both rioters and representatives of law and order (John Bohstedt, ‘The Moral Economy and the Discipline of Historical Context’, *Journal of Social History*, 26(2), Winter 1992, p. 265–284).

¹⁶⁵ R. Aya, ‘The Third Man’, *art. cit.*, p. 151.

¹⁶⁶ Olivier Fillieule, ‘Socialization and Social Movements’, in D. A. Snow, D. Della Porta, B. Klandermans, D. McAdam (eds), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* Oxford, *op. cit.*

nor 'linear', one should measure how 'commitment generates or modifies dispositions towards acting, thinking and perceiving — including self-perception — in continuity or breaking with the previous products of socialization'.¹⁶⁷ To do this, longitudinal studies are necessary. We will of course have to wait several years before being able to answer these questions, but if we hope to address them by means of longitudinal rather than retrospective studies, we must begin today.

Secondly, having recourse to the sociology of revolutionary situations requires instruments and methods of observation that allow for the study of sequences of action in the whole of their eventfulness. From this perspective, the visual materials accessible on the Internet¹⁶⁸, either produced by researchers or collected *in situ*, are precious,¹⁶⁹ in particular in situations where artistic production (caricatures, graffiti, photography, videos) played an important role in the protests.¹⁷⁰ But most of all, as scholars have increasingly realized, ethnographic methods¹⁷¹ are without a doubt the best suited to reconstruct the complexity

¹⁶⁷ Catherine Leclercq, Julie Pagis, 'Les incidences biographiques de l'engagement', *Sociétés contemporaines*, 84, 2011, p. 5–23, here p. 5.

¹⁶⁸ A plethora of resources are available online. Social networks link to a wealth of images and videos on YouTube, while collective national blogs disseminate tracts, calls to action, photos, videos, graffiti (for example, <<https://www.facebook.com/GraffitiEgypt/photos>>), caricatures, interactive maps of protest sites, opinion pieces (for example, Nawaat.org created in Tunisia in 2004 and Mamfakkinch.com launched in Morocco on February 17th, 2011, in relation to the February 20 Movement). In turn, bloggers' networks such as Global Voices, a foundation created in 2004, select, translate and publish articles in 25 different languages. The number of political analysis blog aggregators is growing (for example, <<http://www.arabist.net/>>). The international media has also chosen to put documentaries online. Very rapidly, individual or group initiatives for archiving were taken, both activist and academic (for example, <<http://www.tahrirdocuments.org/>>). An open letter was even posted on Facebook asking for the network to open up part of its archives (<<http://europe-liberte-securite-justice.org/2011/01/27/lettre-ouverte-a-facebook-sidibouid/>>). With regard to Tunisian events, the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Bibliothèque du Congrès collaborated with the American non-profit Internet Archive to archive traditional media sites, information portals, journalists' and individuals' blogs, activists' Facebook pages, etc. In terms of Egypt, these same partners collaborated with Stanford University, the American University in Cairo, the British Library and the Alexandria Library. Moreover, as early as March 28th, 2011, the Committee for Documenting the Revolution was founded by the Egyptian National Library and Archives: <<http://www.aucegypt.edu/newsatauc/Pages/story.aspx?eid=640;http://blog.bnf.fr/lecteurs/index.php/2012/07/02/la-revolution-du-jasmin-sur-la-toile/;http://www.archive-it.org/public/collection.html?id=2323>>).

¹⁶⁹ Alexandre Lambelet, 'Analyser les rassemblements au moyen de photographies ou de films. Pistes et enjeux', ethnographiques.org, 21, 2010, <<http://www.ethnographiques.org/2010/Lambelet>>; Alex Philipps, 'Visual Protest Material as Empirical Data', *Visual Communication*, 11(3), 2012, p. 3–21.

¹⁷⁰ Among others, see Anahi Alviso-Marino, 'Art et révolution : engagement des artistes dans la mobilisation contestataire au Yémen', forthcoming; Cécile Boëx, 'L'engagement des acteurs, des cinéastes et des comédiens dans la révolte en Syrie', in A. Allal, T. Pierret (ed.), *Devenir révolutionnaires*, op. cit.

¹⁷¹ For example, Suzanne Staggenborg, 'Seeing Mechanisms in Action', *Qualitative Sociology*, 31(4), 2008, p. 341–344; O. Fillieule, É. Agrikoliansky, I. Sommier (ed.), *Penser les mouvements sociaux*, op. cit.; Hélène Combes

of conflicts and calculations at every step of a sequence of action. And yet, the existing literature on the sociology of revolutions, and more generally on the sociology of mobilizations, is particularly silent in this department. It is unfortunate that the possibilities for research opened up by authors as diverse as D. Snow and L. Anderson, B. Roy, A. Peterson and of course P. Lichterman and J. Auyero¹⁷² have not prompted a widespread move towards an ethnographic approach to the sociology of social movements and revolutions, barring a few rare but notable exceptions.¹⁷³

Finally, when faced with such an overabundance of sources, it is evident that dissecting the sequences of action that lead to revolutionary situations is beyond the capacity of a sole researcher: this objective instead requires the creation of multidisciplinary research teams, endowed with linguistic and IT skills,¹⁷⁴ but also with a deep understanding of the historical nature of the areas studied. We hope that the essays which follow will fully demonstrate this need. From this point of view, we must stress that focusing our observations on revolutionary situations does not mean neglecting an understanding of the socio-history of practices and the sociology of activist careers.

When asked for his opinion on the French Revolution in 1789, Zhou Enlai is said to have cleverly responded that it was too soon to tell. As we conclude this introduction to the current and on-going Arab uprisings with this wise anecdote, we must therefore concede that we are only now in the first stages of this journey.¹⁷⁵

et al., 'Observer les mobilisations', *Politix*, 93, 2011, p. 7-27.

¹⁷² David A. Snow, Leon Anderson, *Down on Their Luck. A Study of Homeless Street People*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993, on protests regarding the issue of Austin's homeless population; Paul Lichterman, *The Search for Political Community. American Activists Reinventing Commitment*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996, on community activism in California; Anna L. Peterson, *Martyrdom and the Politics of Religion. Progressive Catholicism in El Salvador's Civil War*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1997, on progressive Catholic movements in El Salvador; Javier Auyero, *Contentious Lives. Two Argentine Women, Two Protests, and the Quest for Recognition*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2003, on the politicization processes of two Argentine women.

¹⁷³ In particular, Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2003; Ann Mische, *Partisan Publics. Communication and Contention Across Brazilian Youth Activist Networks*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008.

¹⁷⁴ For example, if sociologists studying mobilizations and revolutions hope to engage with the virtual realm, they will need to face new technical and methodological problems, regarding access to sources and the ability of collecting them, but also the different ways of treating 'big data'. A group of researchers from the 'Digital Humanities' department of Lausanne University is currently addressing some of these issues (<<http://www3.unil.ch/wpmu/digitalera/>>).

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