the entire documentary is a tribute to Shobha Nath’s life, as the concluding dedication demonstrates. Rajive McMullen’s account of his personal vision of Nath tantrism, which until then has been a clarification of the other yogi’s words, is completely transferred to the filmic images.

The documentary itself becomes a reified conceptualization of the transformation of the one into the many and vice versa: Shobha Nath’s dead body releases the soul, which can be imprisoned in other bodies in the future. In conclusion, it is the bearing witness of the old guru’s corpse that synthetizes the spiritual and intimate affection of his disciple, but also contributes to give concrete reality to the words of the other seven yogis. Once again, the one and the many.

References

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There is a scene in *Tahrir: Liberation Square* in which two young protesters sit discussing the future of the revolution. Both are strongly committed to regime change, but one is sceptical about what will follow. Her questions are drowned by the brash assurances of her comrade, filled with enthusiastic certainty that resignation will lead to a representative interim council not unlike the people of the Square, the writing of a new constitution, and the beginning of a new era for the republic.

Watching Stefano Savona’s documentary about the Egyptian uprising that overthrew President Hosni Mubarak simultaneously invokes a deep nostalgia for the energy, unity and hope that fuelled the protesters, and a frustration for their naïveté made all the more poignant by our knowledge of what is to come – but also our uncertainty about what is yet to come.

Shot vérité-style with no narration or soundtrack, or even captions to identify characters, *Tahrir: Liberation Square* shows the events of late January and early February 2011 with an immediacy that makes it a valuable historical document. This is particularly true because its style captures the contingency of the revolution, moment to moment, day-to-day, event-to-event. Unlike many other documentaries of this revolution that was most definitely televised, Savona avoids the temptation to impose clarity and coherence on the unfolding events, choosing instead to embrace the uncertainty, risk and excitement of collective action.
The movie begins on 30 January 2011, the sixth day of the Tahrir Square protests. Much of the film weaves between the activities of three regulars, Noha, Ahmed and Elsayed as they live out their days at Tahrir Square talking, chanting, fleeing, fighting.

Like many other documentaries of the revolution, the film tacks back and forth between chanting throngs and conversations between protesters. But Savona has an eye for intimate glimpses of the unfolding revolution. We watch a young woman, her arms filled with rocks to be used as ammunition, wending her way among streams of the injured and bleeding, who are walking or being carried in the opposite direction. We see a young man engaged in conversation, and subsequently view him later with his head bandaged, limping through the night-time square, urging people to rush to the museum and support its defence.

The film has a comfortable rhythm created by the deft editing of Penelope Bortoluzzi. Footage of angry crowds shouting at a televised speech by Mubarak, fleeing from tanks and tear-gas wielding troops, or pulling up chunks of pavement as makeshift missiles to wield against their assailants, and punctuated with conversations: people sharing their tales about why they have come to the Square, and what they believe will occur when the regime falls.

Above all, the moment-to-moment uncertainty of the protesters is fully captured. Updates trickle in but their truth is uncertain. What is happening elsewhere? Has the president resigned? Is he sending in troops? News arrives as people on the ground learn it, by word of mouth and its amplifier, the mobile phone. And as news filters in – true and false – Savona’s close camerawork captures the quick shifts of emotion from elation to despair to rage to hope expressed by the people in the Square. Social media stands revealed not as a driving force of the revolution but as a tool for people desperately trying to learn the wider contexts to make sense of their own collective actions.

The value of the film for teaching about Egypt and the revolution will depend a great deal on what it is one wants to teach. Its greatest strength, its cinema-vérité style, defies any effort to use it as a didactic tool. But as a tool to engender conversations around significant anthropological questions – how do people construct knowledge in the face of uncertainty? how do people use social media in actual situations of social and political change? how would an anthropologist in Tahrir Square construct an ethnography out of such experiences? – Tahrir: Liberation Square could be a tremendous tool as a source of discussion.

Nowhere is the film’s emphasis on the contingent more powerful for those of us watching the film now than in the final shot. The camera pans up to a poster with ‘the end’ written on it, capturing it through dust and smoke. This shot alone remains accurate and forward looking – the ultimate fate of Egypt is still up in the air, and it is still cloudy.

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