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1. Introduction

“*[There] exists a specific sensory experience – the aesthetic – that holds the promise of both a new world of Art and a new life for individuals and the community.*”¹

Jacques Rancière’s epigraph intimates a promise, immanent to aesthetic practice that this thesis intends to analyze in the work of the multidisciplinary Tunisian artist Souad Mani. Due to the transitory phase Tunisia finds itself in since the political uprisings in 2010, a contextual elaboration precludes the analysis. The importance of setting the ground issues from the complex interweaving of different dynamics in present-day Tunisia and becomes evident in the length of the introductory chapter. Political, social, economic, cultural, and religious certitudes have been called into question ever since. As a result, artistic production stemming from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has experienced a representational crisis that oscillates between the need to reflect on socio-political events while trying to liberate itself from the constraints in expression that derive from despotic governments and find a place in the artworld, aside from being marginalized as “other.” This thesis attempts to contribute to an art history that refuses to accept this confinement on non-European artistic production. Conversely, drawing upon the postcolonial theory of Homi Bhabha, this study intends to demonstrate the potential of Mani’s acts of *postcolonial translation*, which appropriate the Western tradition of art merely as a point of reference.

Mani’s oeuvre has not yet had a systematic, critical, elaborative, and descriptive assessment to this extent. The classically trained painter, who refers to herself as a “research plastician”,² devises projects – human social experiences in different realms – that dissolve the border between the artist and audience, the producer and receiver. Although artistic production from Tunisia and the Middle East has been treated by several international scholars,³ it is the topicality of Mani’s practice and the attempt of setting it in relation to a postcolonial frame that renders this study both long overdue and challenging.

This master’s thesis sets out to investigate how Mani’s interventions in real and virtual public space can foster debate, engagement, and participation. Moreover, it seeks to examine the nature of the ‘spaces’ these works conjure up, both in virtual reality and the public sphere.

¹ Rancière 2002, p. 133.

² My translation from: “*plasticienne chercheur*”. The term can be found in the interview with the artist, p. 143 in appendix 7.2.

³ Anthony Downey, Christine Bruckbauer, and Patricia K. Triki.

Assuming that deploying technological devices as choice of artistic medium is an intentional and political decision, I am investigating the emerging role of new media art in the context of a transitional Tunisian cultural sphere. An additional objective is to ascertain how a reconsideration of notions – such as, the artist and his/her oeuvre, the oeuvre in relation with technology and within the virtual realm, the atelier and the tools of the (new media) artist – contribute to an altered perception of modernism in the Tunisian context. Another aim is to observe how Mani tackles the notion of the postcolonial physical and discursive site. The respective research questions are based on several works produced between 2010 and 2017.

1.1. Literature Review

Mani's research methods and her resulting aesthetic practice manifest the transgressing of academic disciplines. Interdisciplinary in embedding her practice, Mani co-opts theories, models, and ideas stemming from the tradition of art history and the achievements of science. In addition, she tackles the specificities of different artistic media and appropriates socio-political concepts from the 20th century. As a result, my body of literature oscillates between the academic disciplines of art history, media studies, politics, sociology and philosophy. More precisely, I apply theories issuing from the intersecting territories of new media art, socially engaged art, interactive and participatory art, post-colonial studies, and theoretical models of public space and democracy.

The following synopsis of relevant literature maps out a brief outline of the primary sources of information concerning Souad Mani's practice, the contextual grounding in terms of the current state of geopolitical, socio-political and cultural affairs in Tunisia and the theoretical foundation, i.e. previous studies within this field of research and the main ideas emerging from the applied theories. What is more, at the same time, this outline highlights the gap in the scholarly field of research that this thesis attempts to fill.

One of the most instrumental sources of information, "*Traces... Fragments d'une Tunisie contemporaine*", published in 2015 by the Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (MuCEM), Marseilles, offers insight into Mani's methodological approach and artistic inquiry. Therein she articulates the artistic intentions behind her techno-poetic experiments, which are to test out and ultimately uproot the conditions of time and space through repetition as well as by shifting technologies into an artistic sphere of performative abstraction. The artist asserts that she deliberately relinquishes the modernist idea of authorship, and of the ingenious artist, for the sake of emancipating the spectator. The featured interview with Wafa Gabsi also attests to a claim regarding the ambition for aesthetic expression in new media forms.

Anthony Downey – the most instructive source on critical practices from the Middle East to date – argues that historical inconsistencies or, as he describes it, an “inconsistent relation of the subject to history”⁴ very often encourage artists to work with new technology.

⁴ Downey 2014, p. 17.

Technologically supported media aids in immediately responding to historical and current socio-political events.⁵ In regions of conflict, visual culture suffered a crisis in both representation and interpretation, yet it has become a ‘key interlocutor’, and new media, due to its instantaneousness, has become a primary means of expression. New media technologies allow the critical negotiation and realignment of “the aesthetic, political, social and historical co-ordinates of their time and respective global locations.”⁶ Besides, the convoluted networks of digital media offer countless possibilities for procedures such as repetitions, multiplications, and the storage of information and images so that artists also resort to the medium in order to establish idiosyncratic archival forms.

Downey also points out the urgency to liberate local artistic positions from what he calls “victimization”, as discussed in his 2014 publication, when tackling contemporary art from the MENA. He asserts that the predominating image of the MENA is still a misleading one since it presents a region of conflict and upheaval. In the same breath, it is important to mention Maryam Khalid (2015) who warns that victimizing *peripheral* groups is a method of labeling that denies agency.⁷ Instead, it is essential to prioritize female artists and activists and shed light on their agency and aims. Especially in the case of female positions, tackling their work from a critical perspective could be a start for subverting gender roles, duties and agencies, especially in Muslim societies. In this regard, it is important to emphasize that art history took a part in the creation of racist and derogatory tropes by – in the course developing Orientalism – devising an image of the Middle East that has produced a “default image of Arabness from Delacroix’s time up to and including Western media images and Hollywood-inspired imagery.”⁸ Downey demands that putative provincial artistic ambitions and detrimental “colonial ambitions to prescribe the culture of the Middle East to a set of problems that revolve around atavistic conflict and extremist ideology”⁹ ought to be refuted. That contemporary art history writing can contribute to the decolonization of non-Western art is further explained in the methodological section of this thesis.

That the creation of an archive correlates with artistic production in particular areas of the world is affirmed by Downey in his 2014 volume. Downey outlines the motives by referring to Jacques Derrida who claims that without archival knowledge, *institutional archives* or

⁵ Downey 2014, p. 17.

⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

⁷ Khalid 2015, p. 162.

⁸ Downey 2011.

⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

historical traceability there is no future as the archive is by no means a concept of the past. In “Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression” (1996), Derrida commences his elaboration by delineating the instructive origin of the term. The Greek work ‘arkhe’ describes both, a commencement and a commandment – two principles: one sequential, the other one jussive. The key here, however, is that that they both recall essential principles for a society; commencement, as “*there* where things commence – physical, historical, or ontological principle” and commandment, as “the principle according to the law [...] *there* where authority, social order are exercised, *in this place* from which *order* is given – nomological principle.”¹⁰ Derrida’s ontological clarification illustrates why artists would occupy the concept of the archive since it waits on the structural premises of a society, whose manipulation could also interfere with tomorrow’s possibilities.¹¹ Contemporary art generates methods and means to aesthetically co-opt the archive, be it as a device for structure, as resource or to retrieve previously formed models.¹²

Mani produced several series of photographs – “*Souvenirs du present (Memories of the present)*”¹³ (fig. 1, 2), “*Sur la route de Gafsa (On the road to Gafsa)*” (fig. 3, 4), “*#weeklylandscape*” (fig. 5, 6), “*Paysage en devenir #onyvoitrien (Nascent landscape #wecannotseeanythinghere)*” (fig. 7, 8) and “*#captureshaptiques (#hapticcatches)*” (fig. 9, 10) – that can be classified as aesthetic appropriations of new media technology serving the purpose of archiving in a digital environment. Kamel Lazaar considers the desire to tackle the concept of the archive to emerge out of two recent phenomena concerning knowledge production.¹⁴ On the one hand, visual knowledge grows exponentially due to globalized networks of information and, on the other hand, the quality of that very knowledge regresses. As a result, our understanding of cultural production has become confined and compartmentalized.¹⁵

With regard to Lazar’s claim, this thesis is going to show that engaging in the archive means more than opening up spaces where access has been previously denied and exceeds the endeavor to produce qualitative knowledge. It can be motivated by the attempt to reconstruct individual and collective histories, by the intention to “[engender] archives that are troubled

¹⁰ Derrida 1996, p. 9.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 36.

¹² Downey 2015, p. 13.

¹³ All translations of the titles of works are mine.

¹⁴ Kamel Lazaar is the founder of the Kamel Lazaar Foundation in Tunis.

¹⁵ Lazaar 2015 in Downey 2015, p. 11.

and contentious spaces haunted by their own repressions and occlusions.”¹⁶ Experimentation in archival knowledge production, Downey continues, arises in a “series of ruminative gestures that give rise to non-definitive narratives and tentative forms of suppositional knowledge.”¹⁷ These artistic gestures can manifest the exploration of the mechanical conception of the archive as an apparatus, an approach that will be touched on again later. Generally, Downey claims that the gaps in the official and/or institutional archives can be considered an aperture for artists to approach the concept interrogatively, fictionally, ethically, radically, or personally.¹⁸

Apart from Downey, there is a general lack of contemporary research on new media art in the MENA. The possible reasons for this are amongst the issues that Farah Makni Hendaoui’s article, “*The Crisis of Art in Tunisia*” (2013), broaches. She sheds light on the local, Tunisian understanding of contemporary art and the current state of the cultural sector. Hendaoui contends that the shortage of scholarly research on critical contemporary Tunisian art originates from a lack of platforms for discourse as well as state interference with the cultural sector and cronyism. This impairment is to blame for the paucity of academic research on critical practices and the widespread incomprehension of contemporary art in general. Certain critics, artists, and gallerists with close ties to the Ministry of Culture consolidated their forces and interests for their own benefit and defamed the criticality and independence of artistic practices. To pave the way for critical writing and independent platforms for discourse, Hendaoui suggests alternative voices to infiltrate the Tunisian art scene. What Tunisian civil society lacks are forms of agonism and opposition that counter the dominant, elitist groups. She suggests that the salvation for Tunisian contemporary art may be “original aesthetic propositions, far removed from the post-revolutionary opportunism of our days.”¹⁹

Hendaoui’s answer to the representational crisis of contemporary art is but one option of what Christine Tohme calls “civic pockets.”²⁰ By that, Tohme understands “small pockets that exist outside of the system and outside of the public spaces where national discourses dominate; where you find a seepage between the artistic and the civic.”²¹ The gap that community-

¹⁶ Downey 2015, p. 15. For another example of a contemporary Tunisian artist dealing with the concept of the archive see the interview of Wafa Gabsi with H la Ammar “The Woven Archive. H la Ammar in conversation with Wafa Gabsi” (2014), online <https://www.ibraaz.org/interviews/119> [last accessed: 29 November 2018].

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Downey 2015, pp. 14-15.

¹⁹ Hendaoui 2013, p. 6.

²⁰ Tohme 2012, n.p. in Downey 2012.

²¹ Ibidem.

based, non-state-funded and independent initiatives, be they cultural or otherwise, attempt to fill can bring critical and oppositional artistic practices into a wider discourse. For these initiatives to flourish, however, the understanding of contemporary art in the local society has to be expanded with engaged artistic interventions that initiate disagreement and dialogue. The still very tenuous understanding of the contemporary art scene becomes evident in the events surrounding the exhibition “*Printemps des Arts*” in 2012, when religious fundamentalists brought the exhibition to a halt without shying from violence and destruction.²²

Focused efforts to promote contemporary art and to reappropriate public space have been documented by Christine Bruckbauer and Patricia K. Triki in two publications. In “*connect: Rosige Zukunft – Aktuelle Kunst aus Tunesien /connect: Un Avenir En Rose – Art actuel en Tunisie*” (2013), Bruckbauer and Triki, Rachida Triki, Aurélie Machghoul, Houcine Tlili, Hamdi Ounaina, Selima Karoui and Mohamed Ben Soltane provide insight into the powers at work since the second half of the 20th century in Tunisia and precisely how they have affected the cultural sector. The seven essays provide a vast contextual understanding of the Tunisian public sphere in terms of restrictions in artistic production. The volume dedicates one section to the documentary and archival work done in virtual environments and by doing so stresses the role of video as a documentary medium in time of political turmoil, giving weight to Downey’s claim that a specific choice of medium is charged with revealing particular conditions of artistic production.

Prior research on socially engaged artistic practice in the Tunisian public sphere has been done by Bruckbauer and Triki as well as by Michael Anranter, Megan Barry, and Heidi Dumreicher in the exhibition catalogue accompanying “*The Turn. Art Practices in Post-Spring Societies*” (2016). Whereas Bruckbauer and Triki explicitly single out the distinctiveness of local artistic practices, namely by their efforts to promote participation, preferably in newly reclaimed public space, Anranter, Barry, and Dumreicher emphasize the political significance of public space for the community. By referring to Judith Butler’s concept of bodies and politics, they posit an equally accessible public space as the key for sustaining a democratic public sphere that allows the exchange and experimentation with expectations and values.²³

²² Hendaoui 2013, pp. 1, 7.

²³ Anranter, Barry, and Dumreicher 2016, pp. 116-120. Judith Butler’s concept of bodies and politics is further explained on pages 92-93.

Their claim correlates with the role of popular culture in public space as a means of contestation, which has been researched by Tilia Korpe. Her instructive thesis “*Artivism in Tunis. Music and Art as tools of creative resistance & the cultural re: mixing of a revolution*” (2013) explores the term *artivism*²⁴ in the context of the Tunisian youth subculture, precisely in in situ artistic interventions, music, and performance art and how these practices reference post-revolution themes. Korpe addresses the creation of new cultural spaces and the status of artistic freedom of expression. By means of the concept of *artivism*, Korpe delineates an analysis of five Tunisian artists, combining political and artistic expression. The concept of *artivism* is a compound of artistic activism and “developed specifically since the collapse of the Berlin wall, while simultaneous anti-globalization and antiwar protests emerged and proliferated around the world. In most of the cases, activists attempt to push political agendas by the means of art and especially, but not only”²⁵ Korpe continues that, for example, street art artists, such as Banksy, JR and ABOVE are all considered *artists*. By studying Korpe it became obvious that the artists she treats Korpe’s are concerned with agitational forms of protest and resistance whereas in Mani’s work different intentions, far from post-revolutionary opportunism, prevail.

The palpable excitement of the uprisings is well documented in Korpe’s study and highlights the indispensable artistic genres of performance, music, and street art. Resulting from the lack of critical studies on artistic production at that given time and space, Korpe’s account provides an instructive insight into another form of artistic expression that began flourishing from 2011.

Despite the importance of artistic reappropriation of public space in formerly totalitarian regimes, such as in Tunisia, evidence in scholarship remains scarce.

Evidently, there is an urgent need to contribute to an art historical discourse, not only to pave the way for critical forms of expression within wider society but also to antagonize neo-orientalist temptations. The obsolete, neo-colonial image of Arab society is still prevalent in many global discourses, associating Muslim societies with a “line of separation between modernity and archaism, where Islam is voluntarily reduced, simplified, condemned to immobility and authoritarianism, contrary to a dynamic, modern and emancipated

²⁴ For a full history of the term “artivism” see Korpe’s master’s thesis “*Artivism in Tunis. Music and Art as tools of creative resistance & the cultural re: mixing of a revolution*” (2013), pp. 3-4.

²⁵ Korpe 2013, pp. 3-4.

Occident.”²⁶ We must dispel the caveat that Muslim societies are not equally open for pluralistic structures as Western societies because this understanding of Muslim civil society is misleading and inaccurate, as emphasized by Hasan Hanafi. While the concept of civil society originates in Western tradition, its key components are also part of the constitution of Muslim societies.²⁷ Additionally, Muslim civil society, according to Tariq Ramadan, does allow for an active engagement with Islamic heritage.²⁸ Groups autonomous from the state (albeit forming a bond between the state and the individual) rendered Muslim societies pluralistic, allowed for the discussion of Islamic heritage and characterized an active part of Muslim societies.²⁹ To their detriment, historic despotism hindered the constitution of an active civil society so that Islamic modernism, secular nationalism, and the Pan-Arab project failed. This, in turn, led to the aggravating emergence of fundamentalism and conservatism.³⁰ Evidently, the development of civil societies was and is not threatened by the religion of Islam *per se*, but by the societal consequences and socio-political heritage of totalitarian politics. This heritage can also be held responsible for the fact that not all public spaces expanded and were liberalized to the same extent.³¹

Certainly, contemporary artists strive to counteract this stigmatization and, at the same time, vie to contribute to the development of a diverse, modern and democratic civil society. Trying to accomplish these aspirations without subjecting oneself to the dictum of international markets has led to a representational crisis in art, as stated by Hendaoui and Downey.³² Alongside the Tunisian art critic Rachida Triki, Hendaoui affirms that artistic choices in contemporary Tunisian artistic production have become confined to only two paths. Either, artistic production narrows itself to a hermetic genre that relinquishes aesthetic value for the sake of the spectacle and the sensational and ultimately becomes institutionalized. Or technology takes the lead – like photography, for example, which has experienced an exponential growth after 14 January 2011. Triki, however, insists that this shift to technology – partly originating from the immediacy of contemporary artistic engagement it exemplifies – be treated with caution because other more traditional media such as painting and sculpture

²⁶ Hendaoui 2013, p. 7.

²⁷ Hanafi 2002, pp. 171-189.

²⁸ Ramadan 2012, p. 91.

²⁹ Hanafi 2002, p. 174.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 171-189.

³¹ Kamel and Huber 2015, p. 274.

³² Hendaoui 2013, p. 10 and Downey 2014, p. 14.

have been overshadowed as a result. The dilemma of artistic choice presents itself as a rather wretched one and calls for a profound reconditioning of the current positions in Tunisia.

We are not capable of fully grasping the motives for choosing new media art as a form of expression without going the long way via a detour through some milestones in media studies. Marshall McLuhan's "*The Medium is the Message*" (1964) has been instrumental in formulating the relation between technology and the human and has been a point of reference for Mani herself. Luhan's theory proved to be an elementary contribution to the understanding of the implications of technology in a society for which he considers media and technology to be staples, i.e. *fixed charges*, around which our entire life is arranged.³³ By asserting that we become what we surround ourselves with, crudely put, McLuhan's theory renders it possible to comprehend Mani's own perception of media and technology and the social relations they (re)produce. With his claim that artists alone can encounter technology with impunity for they, exclusively, are aware of changes in sense perception, McLuhan partakes in describing how this thesis considers Mani's role as creator of enunciative spaces. Interestingly, McLuhan maintains that the way technology and media are used determines their value; they are not immanently 'good' or 'bad'.³⁴ He posits that "the "message" of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs."³⁵ This is the personal and social consequences of any medium that extends our being.³⁶ Therefore, the message of a medium is not *what* it transmits, i.e. the content, which is yet another medium, but *how* it alters human association and "sense ratios or patterns of perception," which it does as McLuhan continues, "steadily and without any resistance."³⁷

In relation to social media and today's globally networked world, McLuhan's observation appears more poignant and current than ever before. Especially, when regarding the work "*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*", we can observe how Mani implements McLuhan's claim to "stand aside from the bias and pressure exerted by any technical form of human expression [and] visit a society where that particular form has not been felt, or a historical period in which it was unknown."³⁸ That McLuhan calls for experimentation where one group of people is confronted with modern technologies that are not part of their daily life renders

³³ McLuhan 1964, p. 22.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

his theory crucial for this thesis. How this juxtaposition unfurls, will be elaborated in chapter 4.2.1.

Along with the virtual realm where Mani presents some of her works, the public sphere plays an essential role for her installations. Evidently, the public space is connoted with different values for the community in Tunisia than it is in Europe. There is the concept of public space as elaborated by Anranter, Barry, and Dumreicher, who consider equal accessibility and the freedom to experiment with expectations and values to be pivotal elements for sustaining a democratic public sphere.³⁹ And there is the abstract, theoretical ideal of a democratic public sphere that serves the individual subject and its relation within this environment. For Nancy Fraser (1990), for example, public spaces are “arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities”,⁴⁰ and they host the “formation of discursive opinion.”⁴¹

Instructive to our understanding of the dynamics within a public sphere is Geoff Eley’s (1992) claim that “the public sphere was always constituted by conflict.”⁴² In line with Eley’s dismissal of the notions of consensus, harmony, and homogeneity, is Claire Bishop’s concept of antagonism, which is formulated in “*Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*” (2004). A number of scholars have dealt with the concepts of an active, sustainable, and healthy democracy and democratic public sphere.

This thesis follows a certain path concerning these terms, namely that of antagonism as introduced by Bishop (2004), which is based on Chantal Mouffe’s and Ernesto Laclau’s theory of subjectivity and the nature of democracy. It puts forward the idea that democracies can only function when “relations of conflict are sustained, not erased. Without antagonism there is only the imposed consensus of authoritarian order – a total suppression of debate and discussion, which is inimical to democracy.”⁴³ This definition is particularly significant as too much suppression has taken place in the past and what Tunisia’s artistic scene now needs is the freedom to ‘radically imagine’ and experiment; a freedom that hinges on Mouffe’s idea of art as utopian, as a refuge for experimentation.⁴⁴ In “*Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces*” (2007), Mouffe puts forward that the struggle between different hegemonic structures in the form of the ‘agonistic’ struggle” that “can never be reconciled rationally. An agonistic

³⁹ Anranter, Barry and Dumreicher 2016, pp. 116-120.

⁴⁰ Fraser 1990, p. 125.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Eley 1992, p. 11.

⁴³ Bishop 2004, p. 66.

⁴⁴ Mouffe 2008 in Seijdel and Melis 2008, p. 13.

conception of democracy acknowledges the contingent character of the hegemonic politico-economic articulations which determine the specific configuration of a society at a given moment.”⁴⁵ And when this moment is a transitional one, an aperture, like in Tunisia, the configuration that a future society will adopt is even more directive than in established democracies. So far, Tunisia has been declared a textbook example of a successful political transition.⁴⁶

Concerning the role of art in society and for a community, Bishop’s critique of Nicolas Bourriaud’s theory of *Relational Aesthetics* serves as a specific filter through which one can detect the success or the failure of relational practices. What Bishop claims is that a sustainable relational practice must reflect an idea of subjectivity that is not based on community consensus and social harmony, but instead on friction, awkwardness and discomfort, as in, for example, Santiago Sierra’s work. Bishop’s concept does not predicate a fictitious, “unified subject as a pre-requisite for community-as-togetherness” but addresses “a divided subject of partial identifications open to constant flux.”⁴⁷ As a result, art helps to lay the ground for a fertile and ‘polemical’ base to rethink interpersonal relationships, as we are going to see in the analytical chapter of this thesis. Bishop’s research on participation contributes to understanding the artist’s motives for encouraging participation. By introducing the terms ‘activation’, ‘authorship’, and ‘community’, Bishop alludes to key concepts that must be taken into consideration when reading works of art dealing with participatory features.⁴⁸ They will be discussed respectively in regard to Mani’s works for the festival “*De Colline En Colline. Three Hills.*”

Participation is also a concern in Miwon Kwon’s research in “*One Place After Another*” (2002), which contextualizes site-specific works and their art-historical antecedents. Most relevant for our understanding of Mani’s installations is Kwon’s theory of the site-as-community. Kwon adopts the site “not only as a physical arena but one constituted through social, economic, and political processes,”⁴⁹ stressing the acknowledgement of existent currents beyond geographical and structural obstacles. Due to the perceptive shift “from site to community, or the conversion of community into a site, questions concerning the role of the artist, the public function of art, and the definitions of community are given new

⁴⁵ Mouffe 2007, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Lefèvre 2015, p. 307.

⁴⁷ Bishop 2004, p. 79.

⁴⁸ Bishop 2006, p. 12.

⁴⁹ Kwon 2002, p. 3.

urgency.”⁵⁰ What is now considered a sustainable intervention does not intrude into a community realm from the outside, but rather produces integral interventions that are fed by dynamics dwelling within the community.⁵¹ The second point in Kwon’s observation that is relevant to a reading of Mani’s interventions is that today’s site-specific art is characterized by impermanence and transience rather than permanence and immobility. This transition goes along with the instructive shift as site-specific interventions have become “cultural-artistic service provider[s]”⁵² rather than producers of aesthetic objects.

Kwon’s relocation of the notion of site specificity can be considered in tandem with Bhabha’s postcolonial theory, as elaborated in “*The Location of Culture*” (1994). Although it will be further elaborated in the methodological section, the following quote helps to clarify why the focus on audience, the activation of participants, process-orientation, and politically conscious and critical installations, as observed by Kwon, are of such importance here.

*“The people are now the very principle of ‘dialectical reorganization’ and they construct their culture from the national text translated into modern Western forms of information technology, language, dress. The changed political and historical site of enunciation transforms the meanings of the colonial inheritance into liberatory signs of a free people of the future.”*⁵³

Bhabha illustrates the tightrope walk that Mani’s practice attempts: to create a bridge through art, a sustainable bridge between the colonial history of Tunisia, the traditions of – mostly – Muslim community life, and keeping pace with today’s technologies that connect people and places. This thesis accredits several of Mani’s projects with balancing the claims mentioned above. Covering one of them is the publication “*De Colline En Colline. Three Hills*” (2013) which – besides the events’ homepage⁵⁴ – must be considered the only actual source for artist’s statements and the reaction of the local public. As well as expanding on the three sites – which is crucial for someone not familiar with the periphery of Tunisia to understand the dynamics, conditions, and circumstances of the places⁵⁵ – the publication highlights the variety of interventions. Performance, dance, theatre, installations, and collaborations with the

⁵⁰ Kwon 2002, p. 6.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² Ibid., p. 4.

⁵³ Bhabha 1994, pp. 55-56.

⁵⁴ See: <https://3collines.wordpress.com> [last accessed: 19 May 2018].

⁵⁵ Whereas Sidi Bou Saïd can be considered an upmarket middle-class suburb of Tunis, the villages of Takrouna and Chenini must be regarded as rural and peripheral locations.

local primary school and the National School of Architecture and Urban Development were among the projects in Sidi Bou Saïd, Takrouna, and Chenini. The two interrelated installations by Souad Mani required the spectator to actively participate in and interact with new media devices; thus we might argue that the project's contingency was the physical involvement of a subject. Certainly, this hypothesis opens up questions about the concepts of corporeality and virtuality. Caroline Jones' publication "*Sensorium*" (2006) tackles the relation between virtuality and corporeality, and introduces several significant ideas to the formulation of this thesis. In her essay "*The Mediated Sensorium*" she postulates that a rapprochement of body and electronic technologies is necessary for instructive experimentation because "embodied experience through the senses [...] is how we think."⁵⁶

Jones unmistakably resonates with McLuhan's perspective on technology and society. Jones advocates that taking up new technologies for aesthetics is the only way to produce a *technocultural* debate at the speed of technological innovation.⁵⁷ Besides Jones, Catherine Hayles contributes to our reading of the body and technology. By renegotiating the Cartesian split of mind and body within the realm of new media art, she elaborates the intertwinement of body and technology. By demarcating the body, as an externally constructed concept, from embodiment, which she treats as an emotionally charged notion, she adds to a diversified and complex perception of the conventional understanding of the body.⁵⁸ By examining Jones' and Hayles' theories in relationship to Mani's practice, we attempt to arrive at an understanding of the role of the body in interactive new media installations.

The outlined gap in the scholarly field of contemporary critical artistic practices in Tunisia has only recently been appreciated by international scholars. The political transition triggered a profound reflection on aesthetics and politics in the digital age and led to a theoretical rapprochement of artistic practices and civil society. As a result, the role of the net and of new and social media throughout the diverse Arab Uprisings, and of new media as artistic medium, have gained unprecedented attention. What has been accomplished in the scholarly field of contemporary art, namely the status of art as an "arena of exchange,"⁵⁹ a social interstice, and a practice that fosters civic imagination, is worth repeating. Contemporary art in Tunisia today should be understood not only as a form of political protest but as a practice

⁵⁶ Jones 2006, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

⁵⁸ Hayles 2002, p. 297.

⁵⁹ Bourriaud 1998, pp. 17-18.

that opens up possibilities of conviviality. Several scholars have argued that it provides a social network and a safe space for imaging and experimenting. However, if these relations and social networks can be as “detached from political forces, commercial interests and religious edicts”,⁶⁰ as Downey, for example, claims, is subject to discussion.

⁶⁰ Downey 2014, p. 66.

1.2. Importance of Topic

The following chapter provides a comprehensive elaboration of the diverse issues that render the chosen topic important enough to be tackled within the limits of a master's thesis.

Of top priority is the urgency to shed light onto non-European, one might even say *marginal*, loci of artistic production, which have only come into the limelight of art historical debates in recent years. Art historians and theoreticians of other disciplines are called upon to write (art) history in a way that prepares the public for receiving art coequally, regardless of where it was produced.

The public reception of art depends on the theoretician, academic, or curator's contextual grounding, and it is their duty to abjure neo-colonial, 'multicultural' or hierarchical tendencies. To be precise, the art historian is prompted to revert biased views resting on – one would think, obsolete – Eurocentric concepts that still subordinate artistic production from non-European sites. What artists, generally speaking, from non-European, peripheral places, struggle with is that their work has been widely omitted from modernism, from the idea of progressivism, and from the canon of art history. However, there have been attempts to widen the spectrum of art history for more than five decades now. What began with the Sao Paulo Biennale in 1951 was continued by the 'Primitivism' exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 1984, followed by Rasheed Araeen establishing the journal "*Third Text*" in 1987. The seminal exhibition "*Les Magiciens de la Terre*" at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1989 marks another milestone of a process that has placed marginalized artists and cultural artefacts from non-European sites of production in the center of attention. Whether exhibited or written about, this paradigm shift has relocated and enriched art historical debates and is still ongoing as we can observe with – to only name one example – "*Documenta 13*", which took place in Kassel and Kabul.

The crux of the matter here, though, is the methodological approach of writers, curators, and theoreticians when addressing aesthetic traditions and practices foreign to their culture. Bhabha warns that what he has aptly coined "spurious egalitarianism"⁶¹ must be disclaimed at all cost. In reference to Jean-Hubert Martin's exhibition "*Magiciens de la Terre*", Bhabha condemns the curatorial practice that, apparently spuriously, assumed coherence, or rather an

⁶¹ Bhabha 1994, p. 352.

imaginary, metaphysical communality between the objects exhibited, which, according to him, was generalizing. Admittedly, Martin juxtaposed his concept to the “*Primitivism*” exhibition at the MoMA and his curatorial agency exceeded the mere formal assembly in New York. Regardless, the lack of contextual grounding meant the exhibition in Paris also denied artists their individual agency and thus eliminated them from rightful theoretical contextualization. Keeping Bhabha’s warning in mind, this thesis intends to refrain from hastily applying generalizing assumptions that would limit the scope of analysis. Instead, the contextual and theoretical framework that has been built over the above pages is aimed at supplying a rightful ground that does justice to the position of the artist, the power relations and contingencies that Mani’s work is embedded in, and my perspective as the writer.

We cannot assume the conditions of artistic production to be equivalent in both the West – Europe and North America – and regions of the world immersed in political turmoil and confronted with restrictions and censorship (i.e. Ammar 404 in Tunisia). It would be hasty, universalizing, and neo-colonialist to confine the artistic and theoretical discourses of modernism and postmodernism to the industrialized and developed Western countries where these discourses advanced.⁶² From the outset, modernist and postmodernist theories have been absorbed, appropriated, and contested by positions outside the modernist canon and have led to significant theoretical production, as Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Rasheed Araeen, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, to name a few, exemplify. Besides in literature, the postcolonial and decolonial project has also been advanced by artists who, from the farthest corners of the world, have absorbed and implemented discourses and theories into their practice on an aesthetic level. It is paramount that we refrain from imprinting mythical, naïve, parochial, and any kind of *othering* properties onto aesthetic work from sites that differ culturally, politically, economically, and socially from the ones we come from.

The spell of othering and discriminating against artists according to their origin is also reflected in today’s curatorial and institutional practice. Cultural production from countries immersed in political or religious conflict, upheaval, and revolutions is required to be responsive to political events. Legitimation is granted when the art either condemns or defends these events.⁶³ Political events become points of reference and, for example,

⁶² Araeen 2011, p. 373.

⁶³ Downey 2014, p. 17.

pigeonhole the culture of the Middle East as one stuck in parochial conflict and fundamentalist ideology.⁶⁴

Rejecting this perspective, this thesis postulates that visual culture is apt to liberate artistic positions from their local impediments. This is decisive since Mani stands for a generation of theoretically embedded artists who are precisely those susceptible to what Araeen calls the trap of “multiculturalism.”⁶⁵ It means that a work is required to formally and/or aesthetically demonstrate local features, theoretical backdrops, or unambiguous historical connections in order to be discerned as an “other” by the postmodern, liberal, democratic, Western spectator, scholar or curator. According to Araeen this marginalization is simply a neologism of postcolonialism or imperialism⁶⁶ – a burden imposed from the outside that compels artists to be detectable as ‘non-European’, ‘peripheral’, and ‘exotic’ and as a result being given access to the global art market. The indicators of identity or cultural origin legitimate the work for the West’s institutions only when carrying “the burden of culture.”⁶⁷ By constantly re-installing the institutional barrier, the neo-colonial mechanisms of inequality and hegemony are upheld. Today, however, we must ask what forms of aesthetic expression can withstand these mechanisms. First and foremost, through the reception of art. As proposed earlier, non-Western artists have appropriate(d) the histories of modernism and postmodernism with the same intensity as those in Europe and North America, and this needs to be acknowledged. Not in the manner that the postcolonial subject can now jump on the bandwagon and be part of a canon it has been denied in the past, but by way of revaluing the history of modernism. As part of the process of decolonization, it is pivotal to shed light on artistic work that is embedded in *international* theoretical discourses and analyze how theories and notions are appropriated locally.

Through her choice of medium, Mani purposely positions herself in a distinctly international discourse; that is, the ongoing art historical debate about the appropriation of technology as an aesthetic testimony. This debate broaches the issue of how mass media, ‘new’ media devices, networks, and digital prostheses find manifold implementations in conceptual aesthetic practice. The artistic experiments are unified by the intention to aesthetically reflect *on* current media technology and how society is affected by their penetration.⁶⁸ More often than

⁶⁴ Downey 2014, p. 17.

⁶⁵ Araeen 2011, p. 373.

⁶⁶ Ibidem.

⁶⁷ Araeen 2011, p. 373.

⁶⁸ Lehmann 2008, p. 13.

not, new media installations invite spectators to become users. It could be argued that this is why – supposedly an ulterior pedagogical motive – Mani inserts some of her projects in a history of participation and interaction. Reflecting the historical paradigm shift from the artist as the ingenious, modernist master to the artist as mediator of aesthetic processes and experiences, she endows spectators with experiential, knowledge-oriented, perception-oriented functions. By transferring the question of art’s socio-political agency to the audience, the dichotomy of active artist and passive audience is put into question.⁶⁹ The participant becomes the one charged with power, the “beholder in action”,⁷⁰ able to manipulate the structure and/or the outcome of an artistic project.⁷¹ It is in this shift to the active spectator that Jones detects a sense of urgency to aesthetically adopt new technologies. In terms of participation and interaction, it becomes essential to reconsider the “dichotomy between virtuality and corporeality.”⁷²

Instructive for our understanding of this superimposition of realms is the term hybrid art. Victoria Vesna identifies it as residing “in between, around, above and below what is generally accepted as “culture” and usually is experimental and exploring new ideas that require collaboration with other disciplines.”⁷³ What we can observe here is the same motivation to expand the scope of artistic processes through trans- and interdisciplinary experimentation. In tandem, according to Annette Jael Lehmann, hybrid art is deeply rooted in an interdisciplinary tradition that transcends media, genres, and the borders of disciplines such as art and science as well as that of socio-political engagement.⁷⁴ This, however, raises the question of how critical the appropriation of *commercial* (for the lack of a better term) technological devices can truly be, since what cannot be denied is that art supported by technological, especially new media, is prone to being classified as collusive.

Positioning oneself in the postmodern tradition of negating unequivocal artistic authorship and promoting trans- and interdisciplinary working methods must be considered an intentional rapprochement to a tradition of Western practices. Mani harnesses this tradition as a springboard for her site-oriented installations and digital projects. For the writing of Tunisian art history and its legitimation, it is crucial that the interweaving with canonical

⁶⁹ Lehmann 2008, p. 10.

⁷⁰ Almenberg 2010, p. 5.

⁷¹ Lehmann 2008, p. 11.

⁷² Jones 2006, pp. 2-4.

⁷³ Vesna 2015, online.

⁷⁴ Lehmann 2008, p. 14.

discourses is recognized through a critical reception of art. In this regard it is important to refer to the local reception of contemporary art. There is a strong opposition to non-traditional art forms by the local art elite and religious voices that either reject critical practices or who are not familiar with new media art or socially engaged new media projects, as the turmoil surrounding the Palais Abdelliya has demonstrated.⁷⁵ Mani's choice of medium is a delicate but persevering one that must be considered as bold, progressive, and reflected.

It is important to put Mani's practice into context because she co-opts the socio-political aperture that was caused by the "*Jasmine*"⁷⁶ revolution of 2010–2011. Artists, once suffering from censorship and political persecution, became activists who protested on the streets of Tunis for freedom of expression and democracy. Without networking via social media channels, many demonstrations would not have taken place.⁷⁷ Civic empowerment and the mobilization of the masses owe their achievements largely to the democratic power of social media and the discursive and contested nature of digital environments. While Lina Ben Mhenni, a Tunisian blogger and activist, affirms that calling the uprisings in Tunisia in 2010 *Facebook* or *Twitter Revolutions* is misleading, she acknowledges the importance of the net in assisting democratic forces.⁷⁸ Presumably, the convenience and value the net offered during the political transition led to a profound reconsideration of digital networks and social media, with one of the first steps being the liberalization of censorship.⁷⁹

Halim Rane and Sumra Salem (2012) point to a fact paramount to understanding the importance of addressing the topic of (new) media art at this moment in time in Tunisia. The self-immolation of Mohammad Bouazizi received a great deal of attention in national and international media and has largely been considered the trigger of the revolution. However, there had been another self-immolation in Monastir three months earlier but due to the fact that it was neither "filmed, not on Facebook, not widely disseminated [it], therefore, did not inspire collective action."⁸⁰ Self-evidently, the role of digital networks and the power of the images they transport are exemplified. However, the flood of data and images also had its drawbacks. Extensive international media coverage resulted in the geographical area of the

⁷⁵ See chapter 2.1. for a comprehensive summary of the 2012 events.

⁷⁶ Jasmine Revolution was another term for the Arab Spring in Tunisia. The Jasmin flower is the national flower of Tunisia.

⁷⁷ See Rane and Salem 2012.

⁷⁸ Ben Mhenni 2011, p. 45.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

⁸⁰ Beaumont 2011 online in Rane and Salem 2012, p. 104.

MENA being thrust into the limelight from 2011 onwards. According to Bruckbauer and Triki (2016), foreign development organizations began to support and fund critical and anti-totalitarian cultural organizations in order to support new forms of artistic expression, engendered by the socio-political upheaval. Today, however, the international focus has shifted to other areas of conflict, along with the funding for cultural projects, although critical practices would still need a strong lobby in order to guarantee investments and international recognition.⁸¹ For the latter, the image that the international media conveys of the country has been detrimental. As delineated above, regions of (former) conflict are stigmatized and so is their cultural production.

Thus, a country like Tunisia, globally presented as having the specter of conflict and Islamism hovering above it like the sword of Damocles and a youth generation prone to religious fundamentalism, clearly does not appeal to international institutions.⁸² That is also why Korpe's research on Tunisian youth culture must be considered as important contribution to altering the image the international media produce. Because these matters still strongly influence funding and support. Therefore, it is all the more crucial to support local voices and build coequal collaborations.⁸³

The engagement with the local understanding of the dynamics in, and values for, a society is key for recognizing a practice originating from a different cultural environment. Appreciating the re-appropriation and revaluation of the public space in post-totalitarian Tunisia can only be done when its local value is explained. The public sphere as traditional site for festivities, gatherings, art, and discourse, such as the *Kakrouz* tradition, the public storytellers, or the *Boussadias*, traditional dancers, has a longstanding history in the Arab World.⁸⁴ Artistic festivals as assemblies and interventions in public space that foster exchange, contestation, and discourse, and bring together people link with an old-established *Maghreb* tradition. This re-appropriation must be encouraged as it represents a means for interaction and friction essential to a democracy.⁸⁵ Additionally, along with this, "it is necessary to acknowledge that transformative and transitional art in the public space, [...], require the evocation of an arts-related discourse directly connected to debates on the role of public spaces in post-totalitarian

⁸¹ Bruckbauer and Triki 2016, pp. 80-81.

⁸² Lefèvre 2015, pp. 309-310.

⁸³ See: Pinther, Nzewi and Fischer, "New Spaces for Negotiating Art and Histories in Africa" (2015) and Kouoh "Symposium on Building Art Institutions in Africa" (2012). Or the North African feminist art festival "Chouftouhonna".

⁸⁴ Bruckbauer and Triki 2016, p. 78 and Machghoul 2013, pp. 130–131 in Exh. Cat. 2013.

⁸⁵ Bishop 2004, Milevska 2013, Goldenberg and Reed 2008, Stiles and Shanken 2011 in Lovejoy, Paul, and Vesna 2011.

political systems.”⁸⁶ Anranter, Barry, and Dumreicher, once more, emphasize the urgency to decolonize the artistic discourse – an endeavor this thesis is going to partake in.

To this effect, it is decisive to address the fact that the liberation from structures and systems of governing descending from Tunisia’s colonial past, as a French protectorate, is still ongoing.⁸⁷ The task of decolonization is also one of revaluing these relations of power of artistic production and funding. Downey, for example, asserts that “community-based, cooperative-inclined, non-state-funded, and not-for-profit organizations, in whatever form they take (be they cultural or otherwise), are crucial to the development of a common ground upon which a social and political order can fully emerge and actualize real change through forms of disagreement and dialogue.”⁸⁸ Besides the value they boast for local communities, independent non-for-profit events – like “*De Colline En Colline. Three Hills*” – constitute a counterpart to the once adopted centralized French system of cultural governing.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Anranter, Barry, and Dumreicher 2016, p. 120.

⁸⁷ Khalil 2012, online.

⁸⁸ Downey 2014, p. 64.

⁸⁹ Khalil 2012, online.

1.3. Limitations and Key Assumptions

The purpose of this chapter is to define the limitations of the research and the key assumptions drawn as for the works described. As there are numerous filters through which Souad Mani's work, the practice of new media art in Tunisia and artistic production in a post-totalitarian country could be analyzed and interpreted, only several key works are going to be examined. This step is taken in order to ensure comprehensibility and clarity of the claims drawn in this research.

To begin with, it is indispensable to expand on the claim that Tunisia is in a socio-political 'transitional phase' and how this allows that key assumptions about the contemporary artistic scene are drawn. Although for the sake of historical stringency, a chronological and detailed overview of the history of modern Tunisia would be necessary, it exceeds the scope of this thesis. Fundamental benchmark data is briefly touched on here and a detailed chronological overview can be found in appendix 7.1. We ought to begin with the period of the French protectorate that governed Tunisia from 1881 until 1956–1957, and which can be considered the colonial period of Tunisia. It was succeeded by the era of Habib Bourguiba (1903–2000) who ruled for almost 30 years and assumed absolute power. His successor, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (born 1936), who rose to power in 1987,⁹⁰ was no inferior to Bourguiba's despotic reign. Resulting out of the concentration of power and capital, an imbalance in wealth distribution, socio-economic imbalance, and frustration arose. Ultimately, the totalitarian state collapsed due to unrest and the uprisings culminated in Ben Ali's abdication on 14 January 2011.

Since 2011, Tunisia is classified as a democratic state; however, this does not necessarily mean that former power structures are no longer in place. The dynamics within and contributing factors to the political upheaval – internationally coined the Arab Spring because it spread across several countries of the MENA – have concerned many scholars since 2010. Whereas most literature posits the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in December 2010 as the trigger that ignited the upheaval,⁹¹ Daniela Huber and Lorenzo Kamel (2015) contend that the Arab Spring did start with the "Sahrawi tent protests" in October 2010.⁹²

⁹⁰ Müller 2014, p. 38.

⁹¹ Downey 2011, online, Khalil 2012, online and Korpe 2013, p. 44.

⁹² Huber and Kamel 2015, p. 129.

On the contrary, Ben Mhenni (2011) purports that the seminal moment of the uprisings was 22 May 2010, when Ben Mhenni and other cyber activists organized a large-scale demonstration against “Ammar 404”, an error message that would pop up online, better known as a code for censorship. The dissent about the beginning of the upheaval alone demonstrates how diverse the phenomenon has been experienced and reviewed.

According to Huber and Kamel, the term Arab Spring “allows us to see the phenomenon as a broader chain of protests of diverse scales, time periods, geographical locations and issue areas across the whole spectrum of MENA societies which has triggered processes of political, socio-economic and cultural transformation at the local, national, regional and international levels.”⁹³ In the course of this thesis’ research, Tunisia underwent enormous changes and most literature and sources treating the revolution and its consequences were published between 2011 and 2015. As a result, this thesis still considers Tunisia to be in a transitional phase as postulated by Chakchouk, Kehl, Ben-Avie, and Coyer (2013) and Lefèvre (2015), among many others. Lefèvre argues that the unresolved polarization between secular and religious forces – a divide with socio-economic anchoring – stands for a power struggle that is to be held responsible for Tunisia’s political instability. The term ‘transitional’, thus, can be justified due to the power relations of previous regimes that still interfered with elections in October 2011 and in December 2014.⁹⁴ The key assumption of this thesis is that this permanent trial of strength still contributes to an imbalance in socio-economic, cultural, and other aspects of Tunisian life; thus, we approach the cultural sector as being in a transition too.

Moreover, it is necessary to clarify that Mani’s artistic positions are perceived as theoretical standpoints. What appears as a rather hermeneutic approach serves as a methodology that aims at doing justice to Mani’s theoretically embedded practice. In an almost rhizomatic manner of devising her projects, Mani repeatedly alludes to concepts of poststructuralist thinkers, such as Felix Guattari or Gilles Deleuze. While these references are acknowledged and appreciated in their given context, the analysis of the artwork itself does not exclusively adhere to them.

⁹³ Huber and Kamel 2015, p. 129.

⁹⁴ Lefèvre 2015, pp. 307-310.

Concerning the setting of Mani's works in real and virtual public space, the reader should bear in mind the value of *community* in Muslim society. Community as a concept has a different weight in Muslim societies, as highlighted by Anranter, Barry, and Dumreicher, since "[c]ommunity, or *ummah*, is an important part of Islam and heavily emphasized in the Qur'an as applying to all people, Muslim or non-Muslim: 'Let there become of you a community that shall call for righteousness, enjoin justice, and forbid evil. Such men will surely triumph'" (Qur'an 3: 103, translation by N.J. Dawood).⁹⁵ With this in mind, I will approach the concept of community within this thesis, especially when analyzing interventions in public space. Regarding the concept of art throughout this thesis, we remain with Bourriaud's notion, as elaborated in "*Relational Aesthetics*" (1998), which posits art as an "arena of exchange,"⁹⁶ as this understanding bridges the Arab tradition of public space and the assumptions that are drawn for the spaces that Mani creates with her works. By appropriating Marx, Bourriaud refers to the potential of a space to entertain human, social interaction, liberated from commercial activities and forces.⁹⁷ This thesis comprehends the projects for "*De Colline En Colline. Three Hills*" and "*Leurre liquide (Liquid lure)*" as generators of human social interaction and as powerful enough to become spaces of collective perception. Whether, and if so, how, they reject commercial re-appropriation will be subject to discussion.

Public space cannot be discussed without expanding on the notion of the site. Within this research, the term *site* is understood as a community, as a "network of social relations",⁹⁸ rather than the mere geographical, physical site, as postulated by Kwon. Our understanding of the site conforms with Jones' proposition that "Aesthetic practices locate how bodies are interacting with technologies at the present moment and provide a site for questioning these locations."⁹⁹ Assuming that the unexpected occurrence of the sound of water generated by loudspeakers, as in "*Leurre liquide (Liquid lure)*" or the reflection of one's body heat in "*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*", serve as a trigger, the *unexpected* serves as a momentum for the audience. Presumably, these situations elicit interpersonal exchange and discussion. The resulting key assumption is that Mani's interventions pave the way,

⁹⁵ Anranter, Barry, and Dumreicher 2016, p. 119.

⁹⁶ Bourriaud 1998, pp. 17-18.

⁹⁷ Bourriaud 2002, p. 45 in Downey 2007, p. 268.

⁹⁸ Kwon 2002, p. 6.

⁹⁹ Jones 2006, p. 2.

*“to create an active subject, one who will be empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation. The hope is that the newly-emancipated subjects of participation will find themselves able to determine their own social and political reality. An aesthetic of participation therefore derives legitimacy from a (desired) causal relationship between the experience of a work of art and individual/collective agency.”*¹⁰⁰

Bishop’s claim serves as a point of reference that will be revisited in the analytical section of the thesis. Staying within the scope of participative practices, it is also worth mentioning Berys Gaut who proposes that the performance role of the participant strongly contributes to the aesthetic appreciation of the work.¹⁰¹ We therefore assume that the interaction with Mani’s works not only startles participants due to their technological intricacy and/or unexpectedness but also leads to an aesthetic appreciation of the work. This is entirely in keeping with Rancière’s assumption of the aesthetic, as affecting the sensory of the human, which entails the promise of new possibilities for art, individual, and community life.¹⁰²

Lastly, having mentioned participation as an artistic choice, we ought to distinguish between techniques of participation and interactive practices. This should aid at discerning and understanding the mechanisms Mani employs in her projects for *“De Colline En Colline. Three Hills.”* Participative techniques enable interfaces across various degrees of participation with the objective of “the activation of certain relations that is initiated and directed by the artists and often encouraged by art institutions, and that sometimes becomes the sole goal of certain art projects.”¹⁰³ Interactivity, on the other hand, describes a concept “wherein the relations established between the members of the audience or between them and the art objects are much more passive and formal (usually directed by certain formal instructions, given by the artists, that are to be followed during the exhibitions).”¹⁰⁴ A clear understanding of both terms serves the sensitization for their use hereafter. While the artist’s work oscillates between both concepts, we are going to observe that the concept of

¹⁰⁰ Bishop 2006, p. 12.

¹⁰¹ Gaut 2010, p. 143.

¹⁰² Rancière 2002, p. 133 in Downey 2014, p. 66.

¹⁰³ Milevska 2006, online.

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem.

participation accounts for a decisive aspect of the public projects created for “*De Colline En Colline. Three Hills*”.

1.4. Research Questions and Hypothesis

The main research question guiding this MA issues from a systematic examination of Mani's practice since 2008. A clear, relevant, and manageable question has been methodically formulated by detecting the most pertinent questions Mani's art posed for a non-Tunisian scholar.

These were developed in accordance with two questions Downey raises when addressing new media and critical practices in North Africa and the Middle East.

He asks "how does new media, in its relatively nascent practices and dispersed networks, produce social formations and evolving ways of reimagining the often prescriptive and reductive rhetoric of political, historical and cultural debates? [And,] can cultural production, in opening up how we understand (or fail to understand) the world in which we live today, not only reflect upon existing events but offer ways for communities to engage in discussions about the meaning and undoubtedly profound impact of those events on their lives and futures?"¹⁰⁵ With regard to the distinctive selection of works chosen for this thesis, the issues Downey raises, are set in relation with the oeuvre of the artist, Souad Mani. The question of her choice of medium, the role of public space (both real and virtual), and the implications of excavating local, colonial histories were amongst the most urgent issues. Due to the diversity of the issues her practice broaches, it is imperative to draw up a set of questions that follow up on and complement the main research question, and to answer the questions that each individual body of work raises.

This, in turn, supports the formulation of a hypothesis that is both feasible and that does justice to Mani's body of work over a period of almost ten years.

As further outlined in the methodological section, this thesis is deeply embedded in the postcolonial thinker Bhabha's understanding of culture. To Bhabha, culture is a hybrid, heterogeneous and discursive concept, in flux, constantly renegotiating its values and codes. This notion is far from the traditional understanding of a tangible, existing and stable entity, i.e., *cultural essentialism*. Bhabha considers the articulation of social and cultural difference as the locus from where social realities and entities, meanings and values are deconstructed,

¹⁰⁵ Downey 2014, p. 28.

where ultimately “strategies of selfhood – singular or plural – that initiate new signs of identity”¹⁰⁶ can come alive.

Bearing this in mind, the following questions are aimed at observing whether Mani’s installations and projects have the potential to activate the negotiation of cultural difference. The main research question is formulated as follows: What kind of enunciative spaces can Mani’s interventions open up in real and virtual public space? By analyzing her works, I consider the nature and potential of the transitory, often arbitrarily constructed spaces and explore what kind of interpersonal communication they engender. More precisely, this MA thesis tries to examine whether cultural difference within the heterogeneous audiences could elicit interpersonal dialogue, which is pivotal for interpersonal discussion and negotiation. For, with her images and installations, Mani ventures forward into spaces where she does not know how they will be received, let alone if they will work. This analysis, however, assumes that phenomenological spaces start to burgeon when different users react to virtually disseminated images or when spectators face audio-visual interventions in public.

According to Bhabha, negotiation takes place during the *process of enunciation* and uproots traditional systems of reference. Enunciation, for Bhabha, “is a [...] dialogic process that attempts to track displacements and realignments that are the effect of cultural antagonisms and articulations – subverting the rationale of the hegemonic moment and relocating alternative, hybrid sites of cultural negotiation.”¹⁰⁷ Thus, following Bhabha, this thesis makes a claim for the dynamic and agile qualities of Mani’s sites of enunciation, which is important because only an open scope of action allows the articulation of new possibilities for a community.

The processes of subversion and relocation – acts of *postcolonial translation* – lead us on to the first sub-question. To subvert and to relocate can only succeed when traditional conceptions of *modern* culture, society, and community are questioned in their root. We should therefore ask: Based on the dynamics present in the real and virtual spaces of Mani’s practice, how are modalities of engagement, such as discussion, dialogue, resistance, and civic imagination enacted? Based on the idea of cultural difference as fertile ground for civic imagination, this is also a quest for friction. Fissures or tension, indebted to models of an

¹⁰⁶ Bhabha 1994, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Bhabha 1994, p. 255.

antagonistic public sphere as proposed by Bishop and Eley, are instrumental in this context since they trigger processes of action; processes evolving around the confrontation with iniquitous one-sided histories, the empowerment of the public to contest forms of identity and political orders, the question of who has access to political decision making and to unearth what has been buried for a long time. Broadly speaking, we are assessing if Mani's spaces are capable of uprooting entrenched conditions of living, which provoke "the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present"¹⁰⁸ to become unveiled. And ultimately, generate platforms of opposition.

The keyword 'opposition' introduces another aspect worth examining: How might site-specific installations in public space, such as "*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*" (fig. 11-13), "*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*" (fig. 14-16) and "*Leurre liquide (Liquid lure)*" (fig. 17, 18) contribute to the expansion of the Tunisian democratic public sphere? This question targets the potential of socially engaged, community-based, non-state-funded, not-for-profit initiatives. Are they capable of serving as fertile platforms for engagement and debate, and can they add to a sustainable civil society in that they enrich – though limited in time and space – the public sphere? We are interrogating whether site-specific interventions can provoke conflict, division, and instability as decisive elements for a democracy.¹⁰⁹ As a healthy democratic sphere ideally contains is a parallel, oppositional and independent cultural milieu.

As mentioned above, Mani's practice is split into three bodies of work that necessitate individual sub-questions. From 2010 until 2014 the body of work is embedded in interrogating digital aesthetics and established methods of artistic production and reception. Alongside our main research question, we attempt to broach the subject from a different angle: In consideration of Bhabha's acts of postcolonial translation, how can Mani's digital projects contribute to a revaluation of the history of modernism in Tunisia? Certainly, the answer can merely be suggestive. Nevertheless, Western modernism has omitted artistic production from certain geographical reasons from the canon of art history and denied it the idea of progressivism and modernity. Furthermore, artistic production from non-Western countries has become trapped in multiculturalism, as mentioned before. Discussing the role of

¹⁰⁸ Bhabha 1994, p. 18.

¹⁰⁹ Deutsche 1996, pp. 273-274.

the non-Western artist in relation to modernity opens up the question of the conditions of modernity's evolution. Without doubt, modernism needed the 'other' for its emergence.¹¹⁰ This thesis, however, claims that Mani refrains from appropriating modern, Western concepts, and argues that she re-codes them instead. According to Bhabha, acts of postcolonial translation can only work when the time lag, the distance between Western modernity and Tunisia today, allows the contemporary artist to re-code modern signs with the local value of what is at stake there – be it a redefinition of civil society, the community, public space, or Muslim traditions today.

The second body of work confronts the audience with a partially interactive and participative practice that invites the spectator to become a prerequisite and even a condition for the in situ projects of "*De Colline En Colline. Three Hills*". Without doubt, given the location, the projects "*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*" and "*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*" stretch art's boundaries by digitally enhancing sensory perception and encouraging human social encounter as well as by visualizing interpersonal relations and communication. It is important to observe how Souad Mani engenders different degrees of participation in her works, "*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*" and "*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*". Since participative practices irrefutably interrogate the dynamics within a certain community, it is key to discover how 'spaces of appearance' come into being. This thesis poses the question following Butler's concept of bodies and politics that analyzes collective dynamics in public space. Prepending the claim of equality, it is crucial to discover whether Mani's spaces allow equal human social interaction. Ideally, civic empowerment and individual emancipation derive from the symbolic and/or physical participative experience that subsequently encourages individuals and collectives to determine social, political, and cultural realities themselves.

Following the hypothesis that the correlation of new media art, the public space, interactivity, and participation give way to idiosyncratic artistic forms of expression, we assume that they exceed a mere playful encounter with technology. Mani's practice goes beyond the point of artistic spectatorship, because of her theoretical embeddedness, sincere agency, and artistic intricacy. She cultivates the return of the voice on diverse dissemination platforms as well as the emergence of different publics and opinions, and considers the in-between spaces of

¹¹⁰ Araeen 2011, pp. 372-373.

cultural translation as part of her work. Without venturing into discourses of conflict or unearthing ambivalent histories, one might argue that Mani merely exploits technological novelties to attract curious publics. Au contraire, she welcomes the articulation of new cultural meanings and strategies as practices, as acts of consent or even as acts resistance.

It must be noted that all research questions can only be answered hypothetically and this thesis by no means attempts to appropriate a Tunisian perspective.

1.5. Contributions to Knowledge

The research on the artist Souad Mani sheds new light on Tunisian contemporary art by outlining the potential of new media art interventions, using the oeuvre of Mani as an example. The notions of new media art, the public sphere, participation, and modernism stemming from the context of Western art history are going to be set in relation to a Tunisian context. Offering important insights into familiar and predominantly Western concepts the critic and art historian's duty to acknowledge the local understanding of concepts and how they are embedded in local value systems is disclosed. What is more, it is crucial to painstakingly assess the motivations for applying and rejecting certain concepts. Only by doing so can we refrain from falling into the traps of "spurious egalitarianism"¹¹¹ or "multiculturalism."¹¹² Therefore, the findings of this MA thesis should make an original contribution to the field of non-Western forms of aesthetic expression, which are still prone to being stigmatized and categorized under misleading points of view.

This decolonial proposition is elaborated by setting Mani's practice in relation to the postcolonial theory of Bhabha. Understanding the link between a country's colonial past and contemporary artistic production helps clarify to what extent totalitarian regimes affected aesthetic expression and suppressed the emergence of an independent cultural sphere. The aftermath of despotism is still discernible in today's Tunisia and impedes the development of the concept of art in a post-totalitarian civil society, as chapter 2.2. illustrates.

Undisputedly, this study is operating on thin ice, for the work of a Tunisian artist is approached from the perspective of an outsider. After all, one major aim of this research is to contribute to the diversity of the international canon of contemporary art. Without arrogating a Tunisian perspective for myself, I acknowledge the blind spot of being anchored in the tradition of an art historical training in Europe. This thesis partakes in a growing body of literature that recognizes the importance of clarifying non-Western stances towards modernism that outline how its theories and models were appropriated in loci that have been excluded from the grand, selective canon of modernism. Art of the Middle East, for instance, did not emerge out of an ahistorical vacuum. By updating recent research on non-European contemporary art, this first longitudinal investigation of several works by Souad Mani reveals

¹¹¹ Bhabha 1994, p. 352.

¹¹² Araeen 2011, p. 373.

her solid embeddedness in European art history. As previously mentioned, the lack of available comparative data for this thesis revealed a gap of literature of Mani's oeuvre. By meticulously observing Mani's social media presence, interviewing her in Sousse, and consulting her via Facebook and email throughout the course of research, this thesis also provides an opportunity to advance our knowledge of the constraints, motivations, and urgency of artistic production surrounding the Arab Uprisings in the MENA since 2010–2011.

1.6. Overview of the Thesis

The overall structure of this thesis takes the form of six main chapters, including an extensive introduction, one chapter dedicated to contextualizing the research field, a methodological section, the major analytical part, a suggestion for further research, and the conclusion.

Chapter one, the introduction, begins by outlining the current state of research, the consulted literature and considers the gap in the scholarly field that this thesis attempts to fill. The importance of the research topic precedes the key assumptions and limitations, which aim at defining the scope of research. The remaining part of the chapter is composed of the research question and corresponding hypothesis, the contributions this thesis strives to add to the scholarly field of knowledge, and this summarizing section.

The second chapter has been divided into two parts. The first part – “Civil Society, Public Space, and Contemporary Art in Tunisia” – establishes the current narratives, discourses, obstacles, and hopes for the contemporary artistic scene in Tunisia. Referring to the disturbing events surrounding an exhibition in 2012, this section demonstrates the dichotomy of civil society itself and in relation to contemporary art. The second section expands on the oeuvre, working methods, and agency of Souad Mani. Several projects that unfortunately would exceed the scope of this thesis are briefly touched upon.

Chapter three is concerned with the methodology used for this study. It begins with a particular, precluding section on “methodological grounding” that outlines the significantly strong interrelation between the artistic medium and the contextual conditions of Mani’s work. Subsequently, the methodological approach is elaborated in great detail.

The fourth chapter constitutes the quintessence of this MA thesis since it presents the findings of research and analyzes the results, focusing on three key themes. Beginning with a theoretical contextualization on the current and most relevant tendencies within the discourse, this introduction lays the ground for thorough the analysis of each work. At the outset, Mani’s practice from 2010 until 2014 is investigated, and an enquiry into her contribution to a revaluation of modernism is attempted. This section is succeeded by a reflection on Mani’s two interrelated and participative projects, “*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*” and “*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*” for “*De Colline En Colline. Three*

Hills” in 2013. Lastly, the question of how Mani broaches Tunisia’s postcolonial heritage via in situ installations is explored by addressing the public project “*Leurre liquide (Liquid lure)*”.

Chapter five should be considered as a springboard for further research since it tackles Mani’s recent projects, such as the ongoing transdisciplinary investigation “*Under The Sand*”. Moreover, it is concerned with a work, “*Entre elle(s)...#tunisiennes (Between them...#tunisians)*” that raises the issue of the veil and its status as a historically charged symbol for Tunisian women. A brief reference to Frantz Fanon suggests one reading of this project.

The concluding chapter reiterates the main findings, and touches upon the obstacles encountered during the process of research and analysis.

2. Contextualization: Tunisia and Souad Mani

2.1. Civil Society, Public Space, and Contemporary Art in Tunisia

“Art, [...] can re-imagine that which often remains unimaginable in political terms.”¹¹³

Outlining the contemporary art scene of Tunisia at this moment in time unfortunately exceeds the scope of this thesis. Having said that, this chapter aims to give a cursory encapsulation of the present narratives and currents of present-day Tunisia by consulting the accounts of theorists and practitioners in the artistic field. Paradigmatic as it has been, the previously mentioned exhibition *“Printemps des Arts”* (2012) reflects the disunity and dichotomy within Tunisian civil society, especially towards contemporary art.¹¹⁴ Therefore, what this chapter intends to provide is an explanatory aid to answering the question of whether Tunisian society and contemporary artistic ambitions are able to join forces in order to expand public discourse and foster “civic imagination.”¹¹⁵

In order to pose the questions of agency and acceptance of contemporary art in post-revolutionary Tunisia, it is key to unravel the mechanisms of control and access. Who controls the civil, religious, cultural, public, private, and political spaces in Tunisia; what is allowed to be shown and done in these spaces; and who has access to them?¹¹⁶

Downey proposes that it was not primarily the right to vote – as an instrument of democracy – that led to the uprisings in the MENA, but that the people envisioned the constitution of a strong civil society as their primary goal. By virtue of reinvigorating citizenship and strengthening local communities – alongside cultural but also other social parameters – countries like Tunisia can preserve the momentum of the uprisings and progress to the establishment of a functioning civil society. Ramadan adds that a “process of reform, democratization and liberation cannot take place without a broad-based social movement that mobilizes civil society as well as public and private institutions.”¹¹⁷ Moreover, he introduces two essential notions that allude to thriving artistic institutions as well to other civil formations, i.e. those of “opposition platforms” and “pluralism.”¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Downey 2014, p. 60.

¹¹⁴ See Rachida Triki “Freedom to Express: The Abdellia Affair” (2012).

¹¹⁵ Downey 2014, p. 66.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 53.

¹¹⁷ Ramadan 2012, p. 126.

¹¹⁸ Ibidem.

Before returning to the questions, it is noteworthy to clarify two caveats as pertinent to the European comprehension of Tunisian civil society. Civil society in Tunisia, probably to a greater extent than in “Western” societies, can be identified as a space of acrimonious exclusion. As elaborated in appendix 7.1., a rather small elite had dominated socio-political decision-making processes until 2011, and still today we can discern a large group of disenfranchised people who have been left out in the restructuring of the political sphere.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, civil society in Tunisia is an informal and dynamic space. As a realm – ideally – detached from the state and market forces, this social body enables independent cultural and political self-representation between the public and the private where values and ideologies are called into question, common concerns can be expressed and the dynamics of social movements can be maintained. As a result, artistic practices, just as any other form of symbolic gathering and self-identification, are key for the renewal of civil society because “they act, in sum, as autonomous spaces that promote participation in society and its structures.”¹²⁰

Secondly, as explained by Hendaoui, art and culture in general existed under the influence of the government. Their instrumentalization as state-sponsored tools impeded the emancipation from neo-orientalist tendencies and for artistic practices to disobey the Ministry of Culture’s free ticket for subvention, namely “political allegiance.”¹²¹ Thus, in Tunisia, where progressive and critical art was either met with proscription or was absent altogether, it is evident that when it suddenly entered religious or political, i.e. formerly private spaces, art triggered a powerful reaction. For the purpose of illustrating the reactive trajectories we now turn to June 2012 and to the controversy of “*Printemps des Arts*.” Among the selection of works on display, primarily the work “*celui qui n’a pas*” (“*Anyone who has not*”) that refers to the practice of stoning and the veil, broached a contentious subject since the end of Ben Ali’s regime in 2011.¹²² Deemed to be “religiously offensive [and] touching on holy issues,”¹²³ the installation ignited ferocious reactions and the rancorous collision of religious fundamentalists with members of the cultural sector, which culminated in conflicts with the police, the destruction of artworks, and the call for resignation of the Minister of Culture,

¹¹⁹ Merone 2015, p. 75.

¹²⁰ Downey 2014, p. 60. See Jürgen Habermas “Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeoisie Society”, Cambridge 1991.

¹²¹ Hendaoui 2013, pp. 6-7.

¹²² Bouzouita 2012, p. 3.

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 2-4.

Mehdi Mabrouk.¹²⁴ Certainly, the exhibition was bound to cause controversy, as indicated in the curator's statement, by evoking germane issues regarding the status of religion in the state, access to public space, and "secular self-determination."¹²⁵ With the Minister of Culture condemning the exhibition in the strongest terms,¹²⁶ leading to the closure of the exhibition space¹²⁷ and Jelassi facing a five-year prison sentence,¹²⁸ these events rendered visible how art was considered a *political* threat, just one year after the first democratic elections. With artistic expression being a 'political battleground,'

*"[t]he events surrounding Printemps des Arts highlight a key sociopolitical element in the post-revolutionary landscape of Tunisia, a factor that is crucial to understanding fundamental aspects of what is happening in other countries that underwent revolution across the region: we are effectively witnessing the re-emergence of institutions associated with civil society. If we understand civil society as an attempt to reconcile public and private mores without resort to state control or governmental decree, then these open, often rancorous confrontations are not only inevitable but, in the name of free speech, necessary."*¹²⁹

What Downey alludes to is the re-emergence of a space of diverse enunciation, of conflicting perspectives, of public discussion – that is, a space of civil engagement. And, as seen above, artistic practices can autonomously trigger precisely these situations of debate and discussion. Most importantly, besides strong publics and popular public opinion, a civil society must also allow the existence of what Tohme calls 'civic pockets' or Downey titles 'mini-publics' because they "form part of larger organizations and informal networks [and] are an indelible part of civil society and the public sphere."¹³⁰ In this way, critical artistic practices broaching socio-political issues imply the expansion and extension of art's identified boundaries and a blurring of the boundaries between public and private. Thus, artistic production *is* political, even though the Tunisian politician Mehdi Mabrouk considered beauty and decorative value to be sufficient for art and denied it any political value. Revolutionary claims, on the contrary,

¹²⁴ Downey 2014, p. 53.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 54.

¹²⁶ Bouzouita 2012, p. 4.

¹²⁷ Downey 2014, p. 54.

¹²⁸ Bouzouita 2012, p. 4.

¹²⁹ Downey 2014, pp. 54-55.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 55.

Mabrouk asserts, do not belong to the Tunisian cultural sphere.¹³¹ This, however, is a striking paradox because this denial of the political value of art precisely illustrates *how* political critical artistic interventions can be. By disallowing interference in political issues, he demonstrated the fear that artistic work certainly can manipulate popular opinion. Returning to the epigraph, the reactions to artistic interventions in public space testify to the urgency to “entertain disagreement and engage discussions about public and private space, the rights of the individual, freedom of expression, the [...] meaning of the term ‘sacred’, secular determinism, the role of religion in the workings of state, ...”.¹³² Evidently, there is a lack of public spaces that permit culture to disclose societal fissures, to become a site for identification and imagination, and a means of civic self-determination.¹³³

Before concluding we must return to the question we began with; i.e. whether Tunisian society and contemporary artistic ambitions are able to join forces in order to expand public discourse and foster civic imagination. Artistic practice, regardless of its geopolitical constraints, is immanently political and embedded in relations of power. In short, a critical practice automatically strains the order and established power relations, be it a change in how people interact, what they see or hear, and how they perceive. We conclude with Downey’s quote,

*“[a]ny expansion or retraction of the political order, and who has access to it, is an interjection into the syntax and logic of producing meaning and sense. In the moment of redefining the realm and scope of the political, and the core debate about what constitutes public, private and civil space within that order of the political, new forms of subjecthood, in sum, can be articulated, as can new forms of protest.”*¹³⁴

The 2012 affair has shown that what is at stake here is to preserve opportunities for civic engagement, resistance, and imagination as well as their maintenance.

¹³¹ Artsfreedom 2012, online in Downey 2014, p. 60.

¹³² Downey 2014, p. 60.

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 66.

2.2. Souad Mani

Souad Mani (born 1978) lives and works in Sousse, Tunisia as a contemporary multimedia artist. Mani received classical training in painting at the *École des Beaux Arts* in Sousse, where she teaches today.

A photographic self-portrait taken in the Centre Pompidou in 2008 (*position in sentence?*) during a research residency in Paris lay the foundation for her ongoing artistic journey, which could be described as a quest for the nature and types of relationships with people and territories, both locally and globally. The project in 2008, “*Elle M’aime (She loves me)*” (fig. 19), constitutes the first project of a processual development of intersubjective relations through modes of multiplication, sharing and pollination. In “*Elle M’aime (She loves me)*”, Mani tests to what extent the work and its accompanying instructions can provoke fertile relations between people, regardless of national borders.¹³⁵ The intention to discover if she can connect people via an online project and how, at the same time, a photo can become a unique and multiple world at the same time indicates the kernel of Mani’s critical artistic practice: transdisciplinarity. As a recurring characteristic of her work, transdisciplinarity very often takes the shape of techno-poetic experiments that create relational, interactive, and participatory situations. Influenced by theoretical contemplations of sociologists, philosophers, art historians, and scholars of other disciplines, Mani’s practice sparks off multiple performative processes that question the status of the art work and the subject in the era of global networks. Intricate reflections and circuitous experiments with new media devices allude to a wavering between the notions of accumulation, traceability, control and mapping that are all constituents of the process of archiving oneself and setting oneself in the rhizomatic relations of our globalized world.

Mani’s work has been exhibited in Tunisian institutions (*B’Chira Art Center, Dar Sébastien, Belvédère Living Art Area, Passengers, Debo52, Talan, Loukala, Maison de France*, and the Municipal Gallery of Sfax) as well as publicly (in Sidi Bou Saïd, Chenini, the Marine Cemetery of Mahdia, Hergla beach, and the city of Gafsa). Internationally, her works have been shown in France at the *Musée des civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée* (MuCEM) in Marseille, *La Halle Roublot* in Fontenay-sous-Bois, *Manicle* in Le Havre,

¹³⁵ The instructions she equipped the work with, envisaged participants – regardless of their location – to take a photograph with “*Elle M’aime (She loves me)*”, add date and location and email it to the artist. See: <https://souadmani.wordpress.com/projets/elle-maime-archeologie-du-germe/> [last accessed: 28 June 2018].

L'Atelier in Nantes, *ALMA art space*, and the *Institut du monde arabe* in Paris, as well as at the *Dakar-off* in Dakar and in the *Carlo Bilotti Museum* in Rome.

In 2015, Mani participated in the exhibition “*Traces... Fragments d'une Tunisie contemporaine*” at the MuCEM in Marseilles. On that occasion, the curator, Wafa Gabsi interviewed Mani about the projects “*Souvenirs du présent (Memories of the present)*” and “*#capturehaptiques (#hapticcatches)*”. The artist describes these works as oscillating between theory and techno-poetic experimentation while enacting the notions of time and space through repetitive practice. Explaining the intention behind deploying geolocation via interactive maps and experimenting with Bridge cameras, tablets, and digital codes such as hashtags,¹³⁶ Mani highlights the aspect of experimentation as a guide for occupying spaces, time, and tools.

While she refuses to follow a definite methodological path, Mani asserts that she cannot work outside her habitat, by which she understands the intense occupation of a certain space and time. Although photography traverses her entire oeuvre, Mani does not consider herself a photographer but the camera to be her tool for unlimited expressions. Instead, she asserts that she only owns the idea of its happening (*‘la pensée de son événement’*). To differentiate between the concept and the final result alludes to a contiguity to conceptual art that she commenced with her research project “*L’art, tautologie et abstraction du réel, à partir d’une pratique personnelle (Art, tautology and abstraction of the real, from a personal practice)*” (2005). Starting from Joseph Kosuth’s “*L’art est la définition de l’art (Art is the definition of art)*”, Mani began to strip off the layers of meaning from consumer items; firstly their semiotic coat, then their linguistic one in order to arrive at their binary form.¹³⁷ Mani extracted the terms ‘trace’, ‘erasure’, and ‘reinscription’ from this project and started to apply them methodologically, like in “*Souvenirs du présent (Memories of the present)*” and “*#capturehaptiques (#hapticcatches)*”, where they keep recurring in a tautological manner. When galvanizing tautological allusions for displacing consumer goods into a sphere of abstraction, one question here remains: can Mani’s appropriations of media withstand commercial and capital-oriented purposes? We will revisit this question in the analytical section.

¹³⁶ Mani 2015, pp. 36-37.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Intelligent machines, intricate technology, and astute media devices serve Mani's practice and her attempt to transcend the borders of reality and virtuality by means of ludic and creative performances. Her performative concepts create links between the human and the digital through interaction and participation. The recurring term 'pollination' tellingly describes her practice as it exemplifies the process of intersection and intersubjective discourse that she galvanizes with both ephemeral in situ installations and her placeless long-term projects.¹³⁸ Thus, for Mani the virtual world – in which her thumb acts as her brush – and the channels of Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr that she frequents and that entail the possibility of disseminating images, is a haptic space ('*espace haptique*'). On another level, she considers them to be traces of her territories, memories, histories, chronologies, and topographies.

Concerning her stance towards artistic authorship vis-à-vis her online digital archive, she asserts that she has no authorship or ownership of her works, and that this idea is misleading. In "*De Colline En Colline. Three Hills*" she declares: "*Réalisé avec, pour et dans l'univers de l'autre, mon travail ne m'appartient plus. Je ne peux être propriétaire que de son événement.*"¹³⁹ Her data is with everyone, accessible to everyone, and accessible from all around the world. It is precisely this dimension of a scattered reality ('*réel dispersé*') that constitutes her sculptural ('*plastique*') processes because it enables a reflection on the functioning of a distant world. As a digital archaeologist, as she calls herself, she intends to create a generative memory with a digital trace that is open for multiplication, actualization, or archiving. By following this path, Mani enters a process of tracing emergences, which entitles her to become one member of the vast society of digital archaeologists.

¹³⁸ See: <https://souadmani.wordpress.com/about/> [last accessed: 15 July 2017].

¹³⁹ Mani 2015, p. 38. My translation: "Realized with, for, and in the universe of the other, my work no longer belongs to me. I can only own its event."

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Methodological Grounding: Why New Media Art in Tunisia?

In “*Uncommon Grounds. New Media and Critical Practices in North Africa and the Middle East*” (2014) Downey explores the ways in which the political events from the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 to the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, respectively, the events of 11 September 2001, and the protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and elsewhere have led to a predicament of representation and interpretation for artists, art institutions, and critics alike.¹⁴⁰ Because of the quandary which compelled artists to give their view on recent political events, visual statements were susceptible to getting stuck in representations of conflict instead of broaching the reality of conflict. Downey suggests that this dilemma is not regional but shared by artists from all over the world since digital technologies have accelerated access to and the reach of happenings, regardless of their location.¹⁴¹ This exemplifies that visual culture acts as a ‘key interlocutor’ due to its immediacy in terms of reproduction and reception.¹⁴² As opposed to other, more traditional forms of aesthetic expression, artists nevertheless deliberately opt for new media due to its capability of critically exploring and negotiating the “flux of historical events and their impact upon the global politics of representation.”¹⁴³

Artists, it seems, are morally obliged to react to such events. And this obligation is not new to the question of identity and representation within the discourse of contemporary art from *peripheral* regions, as Araeen stresses in “Art and Postcolonial Society” (2011). He identifies the postcolonial artist as forced to cover migration and the diaspora, thus encumbered with “cultural baggage,”¹⁴⁴ in order to be accepted by the art market and institutions. This, however, Downey warns, is a trap since it implies the production of “media-friendly symbolism of conflict”.¹⁴⁵ The dilemma is one that, presumably, can only be resolved by a critical new media practice.

¹⁴⁰ Downey 2014, p. 14.

¹⁴¹ We must remember that Mohammed Bouaziz self-immolation was not the first act of ‘martyrdom’ in Tunisia but it was the first visually recorded one. Therefore, the visual material led to the digital dissemination of the event and to a certain extent also to the so-called “Arab Spring.” Beaumont 2011 online in Rane and Salem 2012, p. 104.

¹⁴² Downey 2014, p. 14.

¹⁴³ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁴ Araeen 2011, p. 373.

¹⁴⁵ Downey 2014, p. 17.

Since neo-colonial ambitions pervade both the reception and legitimization of works from areas of political conflict, to write about non-European, non-Western aesthetic positions, as a European, Western art historian, is of tremendous significance for, we ought to be alert to how conflict and the spectacle of conflict are delivered to non-local publics. As art historians, we are compelled to act against the “subservience of the aesthetic to the spectacle of conflict.”¹⁴⁶ New media as an artistic field provides alternatives for engaging socially and politically while expanding the scope of cultural engagement, political activism, popular protest, and social participation.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Downey 2014, p. 18.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

3.2. Methodological Approach

The crux of writing about contemporary art is that what might one day become history is still in flux, an erratic juxtaposition of events and people today. We cannot refer to a defined, and most likely *confined*, social, political, economic context based on scarce facts and riddled with ‘great events.’ On the contrary, we are amid a decentralizing process. It means in effect, that the context that will once frame the practice of prospective writers and artists is what is being written here today. And this thesis vies to keep the art historical frame it establishes as decentralized as possible. For this reason, the reader is facing cross-references and indications to other artistic projects as well as to diverse theories. Serving the purpose of providing a theoretical and practical springboard for further research balanced between theoretical and practical accounts – from Tunisia and the rest of the world – we strive to accomplish a kind of diversified art historical writing that attempts to avoid a narrow canon and abandons the linear skein of events, people and places.

Patently, the task of exploring North African artistic practices from a European viewpoint is a highly sensitive and delicate one and requires the constant reflection of the writer’s – social, cultural, in regard to theory and discourse – location. It testifies to a venture, in the truest sense of the word, to address the issue of cultural production of a community one does not belong to or, even more, one that has been marginalized in the art historical canon for decades. I not only risk simply projecting Western theory – conterminous to a Eurocentric perspective – onto a site of artistic production that is facing different struggles than I am, but I am also prone to assuming that issues are addressed in the same way regardless of their nature. The methodology of this thesis, however, sets out to prevent a Eurocentric approach. What ought to do be done instead is to first carefully observe local currents, i.e. what it is at stake *there*, in order to contextualize local artistic practices. And secondly, we must discern common interests, common struggles,¹⁴⁸ and utilize theory as kind of *lingua franca*¹⁴⁹ for the purpose of locating regional Tunisian artistic production in a global art historical context.

The first part of the methodological approach of investigating local currents takes the form of a literature analysis and, in part, an interview with the artist, Souad Mani. The research data is drawn from several recent papers that assess the political transition, its precursors, its actors

¹⁴⁸ Laclau 2005, pp. 77-78.

¹⁴⁹ Rajchmann 2017, workshop in Vienna June 22nd 2017, 10-12am.

and its implications for society.¹⁵⁰ Gathering contextual knowledge is directed towards developing a holistic and current image of current Tunisia that can act as a hypothetical context in which Mani's projects can be examined. Unquestionably, this context is presumptive and contains indications that expose the writer as someone not local to Tunisian culture. However, it is indispensable to assume and necessary to explore at best the local implications of Mani's practice. The introductory chapters of this thesis reflect the first part of the methodological approach. Primarily, they set the ground for exploring Mani's practice alongside the research questions proposed.

For assessing Mani's work, a mixed methodology was chosen that included the in-depth examination of the photographic evidence and literature documenting the temporal installations and ongoing projects. Without doubt, an analysis of photographic evidence is limited and not having experienced the public installations in situ restricts both analysis and interpretation. To rely on forms of recording, such as a manifesto, a project description, a protocol of the event, post-event reflections, pre- or post-event correspondence, or "a retrospective survey in the form of a third-person narrative"¹⁵¹ impairs an objective examination of the works discussed. Therefore, the interview with Souad Mani, carried out personally, was also incorporated in the study of her works. It sheds light on how she witnessed the events of 2010–2011, and where she locates the obstacles and advantages of being a contemporary female artist in Tunisia. The personal encounter with the artist is assessed as 'context data' that primarily serves as a source of information for comprehending her artistic aspiration and can be considered, quite literally, as a site of enunciation. The hypothesis of this thesis – liberating artistic production from hasty stereotyping all so popular with artistic production from certain regions of the world – would bear no scrutiny if the artist herself did not get a chance to speak.

Beyond that, Mani's online presence on Facebook, Instagram, WordPress, and Tumblr was steadily consulted in order to collect a wider scope of post-event evidence. The claims of this thesis are set in relation to a larger art historical debate because they are based on questions of the prospects of interactivity in new media art and of authorship in participative installations, issues of criticality in a techno-sensual discourse, and the problem of civic empowerment in socially engaged projects.

¹⁵⁰ See chapter 9, bibliography.

¹⁵¹ Bishop 2006, p. 15.

The aim of tackling these prevalent art historical discourses is to set up a relation between the concepts Mani alludes to and negotiates in her practice and the art historical discourses corresponding to them.

Bhabha's postcolonial theory acts as the framework for understanding the implications of Tunisia's colonial and despotic history. In "*The Location of Culture*" (1994) Bhabha articulates a postcolonial theory that proposes a specific duty: the decolonization of a discourse that allowed the '*third-worlding*' of voices.¹⁵² Asserting that culture must aid at paving the way for the translation and transvaluation of cultural differences, hybrid identities ought to be created that allow for new political subjects to be formed.¹⁵³ Deriving from his theory, this thesis assumes that Tunisia's transitional phase can be considered a socio-political rupture that has given way to new currents and has shifted what was at stake 'pre-revolution' and today. Questions of identity can now be renegotiated since new freedoms, such as unlimited access to the World Wide Web, facilitate new forms of interpersonal relationships and lead to questions of virtual and real identities. Bhabha's claims are further elaborated in the following chapter and are set in relation with the conducted interview.

¹⁵² Prakash 1990, p. 403.

¹⁵³ Bhabha 1994, p. 361.

3.3. The Interview with Souad Mani

To appropriately contextualize the work of a living contemporary artist poses extraordinary possibilities and presents a major challenge, especially when regional dynamics prevail that the critic is not familiar with. This chapter therefore seeks to explain how a decolonial agenda can be pursued in academia and what has to be taken into consideration when addressing these kinds of issues.

At the core of the discourse about (once) marginalized centers of cultural production is the acknowledgement of the writers' position. The postcolonial critic must admit the asynchronicity of cultures.¹⁵⁴ Bhabha demands that postcolonial criticism tackles “unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation [...] within the modern world order, [the perspectives that] emerge from the colonialist testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of ‘minorities’ within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South.”¹⁵⁵ Essentially, Bhabha argues for a critical discourse that “contests modernity through the establishment of other historical sites, other forms of enunciation.”¹⁵⁶ While we attempt to fulfil his predicament theoretically within the course of this thesis, we can practically vindicate its claim due to the interview conducted with Mani.

Bhabha warns that mere theory reaches a deadlock in the discourse in which it is embedded.¹⁵⁷ Instead, testimony should be given to what is at stake locally and how modernity's aftermaths impinge on countries with a colonial history. Travelling to Tunisia represents a crucial aspect of this thesis since it supports its overarching claims. In May 2017, Mani was interviewed in Sousse in the format of an open discussion about her artistic agency and a debate about discourses touched upon within her oeuvre. Since the research scope of this thesis is limited to a work analysis, the interview was not part of the investigated data but intended to complement the findings. The interview served as impetus for further research since Mani tackles several issues that would exceed the research agenda of this thesis.

Being on site also served the purpose of exploring several artistic initiatives in Tunis, such as the “*Association L'Art Rue*”, an association arranging artists' residencies in Tunisia, holding

¹⁵⁴ Bhabha 1994, p. 312.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 245.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 365.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 309.

pedagogical programs and organizing the festival “*Dream City*” in the medina of Tunis, which is famed far beyond the country’s borders.¹⁵⁸ A transcript of the interview conducted on 3 May 2017 in Sousse can be found in appendix 7.2.

¹⁵⁸ See: <http://www.larttrue.com> [last accessed: 19 May 2018].

4. Analysis of Results

4.1. Opening Up Virtual Spaces: Mani's practice between 2010 and 2014

The objective of the following theoretical elaboration is to discover if sites of enunciation, in Bhabha's sense of the phrase, find a virtual equivalent in the projects that this chapter examines. The performative task of postcolonial translation consists of establishing historical narratives of alterity. They ought to do justice to underrepresented forms of social antagonism and transitional identities by transvaluing cultural differences through a projective past.¹⁵⁹ If we decode Bhabha's claim, it implies to "confront the concept of culture outside *objets d'art* or beyond the canonization of the 'idea' of aesthetics, to engage with culture as an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value, often composed of incommensurable demands and practices, produced in the act of social survival."¹⁶⁰

Culture and artistic production, therefore, must be scrutinized alongside their power to produce meaning and value within the given social conditions. The traditional limits of the social, which Bhabha proposes, ought to be pushed even farther in order to discover the *unthought* of political and personal agency, and to discover spaces from which to begin.¹⁶¹

Notably, civic engagement, interpersonal communication, opinion formation, and strategies of mobilization and opposition have shifted to the net, or rather the virtual world of social media; thus, we must assess – as McLuhan proposed many years ago – the structural impact on human social interaction this entails and the opportunities arising from it.

The virtual site is herein understood as a realm pervaded with social, economic, and political dynamics; one that has become as significant in accommodating human relations as public space. Besides, virtuality as a perceptual filter aids at exploring the nature of the social space produced by a digital environment, including modifications of consciousness and corporeality.¹⁶² At the same time, it is a space for experimentation, discussion, and contestation; however, without the same geopolitical constraints that are very often imposed on interpersonal encounters in real space. Without praising the virtual space as constraint-free and equal, it is necessary to take a closer look at the way Mani activates this site in her works.

¹⁵⁹ Bhabha 1994, p. 361.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 246-247.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 93.

¹⁶² Dunning and Woodrow online, 2009.

In line with Bhabha's proposal to start from the boundary between fixed identifications, Mani appreciates this *third space* as a springboard for an experimental and empowered present,¹⁶³ by harnessing prevalent information and communication technologies and social media channels. They become a space for social and cultural experimentation.

Digital communication, as we know it, becomes subverted as it reveals unidentifiable landscapes, stylistically repetitive photographs, and motifs that can be neither inscribed into a quest for constant updating, as on social media, nor do they feed into the modernist pursuit of progress. "*Souvenirs du présent (Memories of the present)*" (fig. 1, 2), "*Sur la route de Gafsa (On the road to Gafsa)*" (fig. 3, 4), "#weeklylandscape" (fig. 5, 6), "*Paysage en devenir #onyvoitrien (Nascent landscape #wecannotseeanythinghere)*" (fig. 7, 8) and "*#captureshaptiques (#hapticcatches)*" (fig. 9, 10) reveal that Mani does not try to utilize virtual reality and its digital resources in a way that aligns with Western practices of acceleration and progress. Rather, it is her ambition to investigate the place from which she 'speaks', the 'act of enunciation itself', its contingency and its (art) historical burden. One can consider this endeavor an 'act of newness' that conflates past and present, and builds upon a projective past. Newness, for Bhabha, implies a certain degree of insurgency in processes of cultural translation and articulation that take place in the borderline spaces between past and present.¹⁶⁴ Social media occupies three time frames – the past, the present, and the future – and although it is rather new as a method of human, social interaction, it traverses a timeline. We can therefore assume that choosing social media as the medium for her contemplation is a calculated decision because in a performative manner, Mani charges the medium with imagery that disclaims a precise and temporal determination.

Art produced in-between refrains from representing the past, neither as social cause nor as aesthetic precedent, but *performatively* and *deformatively* "renews the past [and] innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living."¹⁶⁵ Bhabha advises that while reflecting on the past is essential for postcolonial translation, one must be careful not to become absorbed by a past that is infused with ethnocentric value systems that engender prejudice and stigmatizations.

¹⁶³ Bhabha 1994, pp. 5-6.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁶⁵ Bhabha 1994, p. 10.

In her projects “*Souvenirs du présent (Memories of the present)*” (fig. 1, 2), “*Sur la route de Gafsa (On the road to Gafsa)*” (fig. 3, 4), “*#weeklylandscape*” (fig. 5, 6), “*Paysage en devenir #onyvoitrien (Nascent landscape #wecannotseeanythinghere)*” (fig. 7, 8) and “*#captureshaptiques (#hapticcatches)*” (fig. 9, 10) Mani performatively interrogates and subverts the representation of landscape as well as the tools and conditions of artistic production. Certainly, all concepts are laden with vast ethnocentric value and history if one thinks about the aura surrounding the modern atelier of the artist. By interrogating these Western concepts of art history and demystifying their value system, she aims to demonstrate the conditions that were necessary for the evolution of Western modernism and its barriers to entry.

Mani addresses the issue by producing landscapes and scenes that reject the impeccable depiction of an orchestrated ensemble of flora and fauna. Rather, she presents digitally altered and distorted images of sites somewhere between Sousse and Gafsa. Challenging the certitudes of temporality and spatiality, they are no longer identifiable representations but become a point of reference for Impressionist mechanisms of in situ *plein air* painting that substitutes accuracy with the emotional contingency of light and atmosphere. In Mani’s projects mentioned above, as well as in the Western tradition of Impressionism, unidimensional associations are almost eliminated and fixed identifications become subjects of interpretation. Thus, the spectator adopts the role of the interpreter and their imagination replaces that of the modernist artist who represents a clear separation between activity and passivity, thus domination and subjection.¹⁶⁶

But Mani goes further than to re-appropriate the code of values of traditional painting. She challenges and even collapses the use of the tools of artistic production. By digitally appropriating the brush, paint, canvas, atelier, and exhibition space, she uproots the ethnocentric value system accompanying these concepts. We can no longer identify a unique authorship or the inimitability of an artwork produced in the studio shrouded in myth. Instead, Mani has revalued her contra-modern “paintings” and occupied their value system with the notion of the digital archive. She has deconstructed the sign of the grand narrative.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Rancière 2009, p. 12 (original version: 2008, p. 18).

¹⁶⁷ Bhabha 1994, pp. 249-250.

In Mani's performative discursive practice of deploying mechanisms and tools of digital image production we can identify a rapprochement to Bhabha's appeal to appropriate the myths and methods of modernism and to rewrite the associated value coding.¹⁶⁸ By taking local histories into account, new narratives arise in their very own individual and singular postmodern language. If the grid, the dichotomy of spectator and artist, and the segmentation of our human senses marked modernism, postcolonial contra-modernity negates this rigid system of values.

Instead, the archive, especially the digital archive, proves to be of primary value at this given moment in time in transitional Tunisia. The repetitive sharing of images and the multiplication of images on her social media channels steadily forms a digital archive that accumulates Mani's images. For, although being an accumulation of *past* data, the archive is by no means an obsolete concept. The archives that Mani compiles can be considered idiosyncratic traces. They trace a path from a subjective past to the present without which there would be no future, as Derrida suggests.¹⁶⁹ An archive also serves as a primary source for contemporary art since it satisfies the need and desire to individually and collectively recreate histories.¹⁷⁰ Experimentation in archival knowledge production can engender new and unseen narratives and forms of knowledge. It manifests the exploration of the mechanical conception of the archive as an apparatus.¹⁷¹

The relationship between geopolitical circumstances and choice of artistic medium can be explained by the media theorist, Friedrich Kittler's conception of the discourse network. As noted above, the archive's seminal value for a culture accounts for the high number of new media works tackling the concept of the archive from historically precarious regions facing a lack of, or inconsistent, archival knowledge. Correspondingly, Kittler's '*Aufschreibesysteme*' denote a "network of technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store, and process relevant data."¹⁷² One might argue that Mani's repetitive working manner demonstrates the contemporary retrieval of colonial histories and the assumption of responsibility for demonstrating that there are still histories and stories to be unveiled today, which were unrepresented in the past.

¹⁶⁸ Bhabha 1994, p. 351.

¹⁶⁹ Derrida 1996, p. 36.

¹⁷⁰ Downey 2015, p. 14.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁷² Kittler 1990, p. 369.

Seen from this perspective, Mani infiltrates the modernist Western value system and performatively translates the signifying process by appropriating Eurocentric traditions of image making. The subsequent work description is followed by a conclusion that revisits the claims made above.

4.1.1. Introduction

Owing to a teaching position in Gafsa and the resulting weekly commute between Sousse and Gafsa, 2010 marks the onset of a series of works pondering on the notions of temporality and locality as well as the tools of a contemporary artist. The regularity of the commute allowed for an intense analysis of the site and the surroundings of Gafsa and its geographical conditions. The photographic works from 2010 onwards constitute the outset of a process that oscillates between regularity, repetition, and contingency.

4.1.2. “*Souvenirs du présent (Memories of the present)*”

In 2010 Mani embarked on “*Souvenirs du présent (Memories of the present)*” (fig. 1, 2) with the premise to capture the same spot in Gafsa weekly in serial shot function and at the same time of the day. One photo was then selected and uploaded on Facebook. The blurred landscape photographs she began uploading appeared as otherworldly and poetic reflections of the blurry and dim twilight terrain. The contours indicate a street, the horizon, and a building on the left side, and on some photographs lines of trees seem to appear on the horizon, stable and volatilizing elements alternate. To capture the moment, Mani took the pictures with a bridge camera that she carried with her when she walked up to the same spot every time. The regularity of taking photos combined with the repetitive nature of the unvarying motif relocated the focus of attention from identifiable objects to the atmospheric conditions.

With this first episode of serial photographs Mani launched a performative process that discursively investigates the mechanisms and tools of digital image production. What is more, in the scope of this project, we can discern how the predominant concept of the exhibition space is called into question, as the only site where Mani presented her images was Facebook. Regarding the traditional exhibition space, it was not until 2014 that “*Souvenirs du présent (Memories of the present)*” became part of two exhibitions in Tunisia, in “*Under Regard exposition d’arts visuels- Inauguration Debbou 52*”¹⁷³ at Taabir and in “*L’expo Talan /// Circumambulation*”¹⁷⁴ at the AGorgi gallery, both in Tunis.

Now we shall examine if the conclusions drawn in the theoretical introduction to this chapter can be verified in the contra-modern landscape paintings of “*Souvenirs du présent (Memories of the present)*”. While previously focusing on the rhizomatic networks of global connections, addressed in “*Elle M’aime (She loves me)*”, Mani now questions the accumulative nature of exponential visual knowledge in its digital form. By deciding upon a spot with significance at that time, she (re)constructs her individual history¹⁷⁵ along temporal and spatial parameters in order to set up a visual library, a personal historical narrative. A process-orientated aesthetic defines the photographs that is further intensified by the continuous repetition of the image-making process. The aesthetic quality does not rely on the momentum, crucial for the

¹⁷³ See: <https://www.facebook.com/events/734815643242699/> [last accessed: 19 May 2018].

¹⁷⁴ See: <https://www.facebook.com/events/703307966395470/> [last accessed: 19 May 2018].

¹⁷⁵ Downey 2015, p. 14.

photographer striving to capture a certain moment, but, on the contrary, the process and the morphing appearance replace the value of temporal fixities. The processual quality, however, must be considered a deliberate implication resulting out of the scope that Mani has limited her mechanisms of expression to. Most importantly, it also shapes the perspective for the spectator. Mani's epistemological approach creates a space for projection for those who encounter her images that oscillate on a limited color palette due to the vespertine time of day. It is the limited temporal scope of action that Mani chooses in order to intensify the effect of difference from day to day. Since the same spot and the same time are chosen, Mani coerces the spectator to discern even the slightest differences between two images. The more photographs one has seen from the series, the more one becomes sensitive to the affective nuances of the individual colors, the countless nuances of a blue tone or a gray tone.

"Souvenirs du présent (Memories of the present)", thus, represents an alternative historical narration that questions the mechanisms and motives of the creation of an archive. In this regard, we cannot ignore the aestheticization of the image – a process Mani begins with in this project and that is still ongoing. Aestheticizing the pictorial runs the danger of naturalizing the image. What this process entails and why it is relevant with regard to Mani's practice is further elaborated below. Against this backdrop, it is worth noting that Mani conjures up a method of photography that reveals the mechanism behind her processes, i.e. a tool of power is disclosed, power relations are passed on to the audience, the viewer. This means that Mani highlights the significance of narration and documentation, i.e. *that* we narrate and document, rather than *how* histories, things, or events are narrated.

What this narrative requires, however, is an audience, witnesses in order to unfurl. The virtual, public dissemination of *"Souvenirs du présent (Memories of the present)"* enables precisely that, to testify to a very personal narrative. The audience, in this case smartphone or Facebook users, *become* witnesses through their very own projection and inscription into a landscape featuring a line of trees, a hardly identifiable building, or the lights of a passing car. And this inscription has to be considered as partaking in the creation of a greater archive, a joint historical narration, a multi-directional collective memory.

In relation to the following projects, this thesis claims that the introductory project was aimed at a sensitization for a subtle interplay of simple and accessible technology as well as the uprooting of time and space through the processual mechanism of repetition.

As for the duration of the project, which ran from 2010 until 2011, Mani's teaching position limited it to an academic term. The following semester, Mani decided to continue the process, although under slightly different conditions.

4.1.3. “*Sur la route de Gafsa (On the road to Gafsa)*”

The project “*Sur la route de Gafsa (On the road to Gafsa)*” (2011 – 2012, fig. 3, 4) reflects on the reach of digital and networked image production, and it testifies to a distinct interrogation of artistic tools. Mani began using a smartphone, thus extending the functional scope of the previous bridge camera. Without Internet connection Mani – onboard a shared taxi, known in Tunisia as ‘*louage*’ – spontaneously took pictures of arbitrary scenes on the road. Edited with free and simple image-editing applications, on a weekly basis she would share a selection of these on Facebook once she was connected to Wi-Fi.

In comparison to “*Souvenirs du présent (Memories of the present)*”, this project allows for the definite identification of sites and objects. Mani reflects on contemporary aesthetic image production by taking pictures of quotidian scenes that appear as instantaneous as they are poignant, intimate and at the same time anonymous. Although the photographs appear as snapshots, they seem well composed. The digital distortion performed through the alteration of color by means of a green tint, the application of a rounded lense-style frame that attenuates the colors – darker on the borders, stronger and lighter in the middle – and the square format not only unify the series in terms of aesthetic coherence but also testifies to an intentional aestheticization of the image. We can identify the process of aestheticization through the formal modifications and unification that withdraws the elements distinguishing a snapshot from a professionally taken photograph. This process, however, affects the way a spectator receives the aestheticized image. To be precise, to aestheticize implies a manipulation of the perception, i.e. what and *how* the audience is going to perceive. We can certainly observe this process here to greater extent than in “*Souvenirs du présent (Memories of the present)*” because the significant difference to the previous series is that now the technical and mechanical, so to say, operational parameters affect the appearance of the image.

Previously, Mani limited the external conditions of production to a confined spatio-temporal frame; in contrast, in “*Sur la route de Gafsa (On the road to Gafsa)*”, the focus of manipulation has shifted to color distortion, a lense-style frame, and a specific format. The process of aestheticization, however, involves more than mere alterations in the perceptual field because it also cannot, or rather must not, be seen apart from the naturalization or even the financialization of the image. With “*Sur la route de Gafsa (On the road to Gafsa)*” Mani

runs the danger of tapping into the process of naturalization, which entails that the technology and mechanisms immanent to the medium of image production are veiled and thus they become invisible. To render underlying mechanisms invisible can only be in the interest of third parties, propagandistic, and dominating powers that desire to uphold constructed narratives and keep mechanisms of power to a specific group of confidants. It is up to critical voices to question the practice of those engaging in new media if they align their conditions of production with those manipulative powers and perform in the same language or whether they decide to reveal a look at the structures and procedures immanent to the utilized technology.

Material insights and the disclosure of the operational functioning can be considered transfers of power. As Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (2008), claim, “looking involves relationships of power. To willfully look or not is to exercise choice and compliance and to influence whether and how others look. [...] Conscious and unconscious aspects of looking intersect. We engage in practices of looking to communicate, to influence, and to be influenced.”¹⁷⁶ Sturken and Cartwright demonstrate the political significance of looking because, when the underlying principles of image production are revealed, power is disseminated and the power of manipulation is revealed.

Mani uncovers the technology she uses, the procedures she applies, and the media of production; she literally hands over the instruments to the audience – the smartphone as a tool and virtual reality and social media platforms as exhibition space.

Against this backdrop, we must address the financialization of the image as new media art is prone to collude with it. Not only “*Sur la route de Gafsa (On the road to Gafsa)*” but all of Mani’s technologically enhanced projects are susceptible to being absorbed by third-party and commercial interests. The process of financialization implies that financial mechanisms are invested in social networks, thus the media *per se* is not independent from global capitalism. By adopting a technological medium and probing what can be done with it, such as the expansion of data through hashtags or the alteration of visual material through image-editing applications, Mani undeniably participates in the financialization of the digital image, virtual networks, and the virtual self. What distinguishes Mani’s new media projects from those of other contemporaneous projects in Tunisia is that she withstands the pressure, the instrumentalization, the “representational quandary”, as Downey calls it, to react upon the political events via her social media projects.

¹⁷⁶ Sturken and Cartwright 2008, p. 9.

Although social media in and around 2011, was charged with political value and intersected with the political investment in the upheaval, through the appropriation by activists and artists, these platforms also experienced a designation besides the dissemination of political agendas. Mani – probably, against the expectations of what a Tunisian artist in this moment in time should be doing – recuperated the virtual space for a display aloof from upheaval and change. Instead, she removed the timed definition from the images and transferred them into a sphere of an abstract, ostensibly timeless, and otherworldly realm.

The openness of the arbitrarily chosen motives, the immediacy of the moment captured, and the poetic beauty of supposedly banal scenes inspired the French artist and poet Georges Thiéry to react upon “*Sur la route de Gafsa (On the road to Gafsa)*”. Thiéry equipped Mani’s digital photographs with expressive and apposite yet short poems. A sense of improvisation imbued the comments section of the entire Facebook album and even inspired other members of the social network to do the same. The synergy with Thiéry incited an artistic collaboration that became part of the exhibition “*Nano /art*” at B’Chira Art Center in Tunis in January 2013.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ See: <https://www.facebook.com/events/322909824480334/> [last accessed: 19 May 2018] and <https://de.calameo.com/read/000482129075ce4862fa1> [last accessed: 19 September 2018].

4.1.4. “#weeklylandscape”

Mani’s weekly commute between Sousse and Gafsa in the academic year of 2012–2013 served as temporal frame for “#weeklylandscape” (fig. 5, 6). Interrogating the relation between the digital and the real site, the images uploaded online took the format of visual montages featuring an instantaneous landscape caption and a screenshot showing the location on Google Maps.

Whereas the images of previous projects were limited to a temporal determination, they now shifted into a spatio-temporal frame by presenting qualitative information in the form of a spatial indication, arranged in the format of a diptych. The digital collage was then endowed with a diptych-inspired sentence, a poetic phrase, or, what she calls a *cadavre exquis* – although Mani did not specialize if she intended to involve more people into the Surrealist group activity. Other photographs of the series would feature a phrase describing her condition during the journey. Linking the entire series, a hashtag – be it situative keywords, in reference to the imagery or the constant “#weeklylandscape” – accompanies each picture as a caption. It is in the very nature of the hashtag to facilitate the search for keywords which implies that this sign not only opens the work up to a wider audience, but that Mani’s imagery becomes linked to other images featuring the same hashtag(s).

Mani performed with an iPhone and used 3G connection in order to geolocate her position when taking pictures and sharing them online. She posted them instantly before the end of her trip. For the first time, Mani used Instagram and the social media channels Twitter and Tumblr, which she connected to Facebook. She describes her operational method as the transformation of several media – with one tool between two hands – “into a sphere – a heterogeneous fragment of reality – that I project onto the void of the canvas.”¹⁷⁸ By doing so, Mani co-opts several media, technological and social, in order to construct her individual fragment of the present. Interestingly, she does not claim to project her reality onto a screen but onto a canvas. One has to ask, if this is a deliberate insertion into an art historical tradition in order to enqueue her practice with that of Eurocentric precedents, or to set her practice apart from the Eurocentric connotation of the term “canvas” and trigger the process of

¹⁷⁸ My translation. Original text: « Entre deux mains via un smartphone j’enroule ensemble plusieurs médias avec le même outil, pendant un court moment et je les transforme en une sphère – fragment hétérogène du réel – que je projette dans le vide de la toile. » Mani 2013, online, <https://souadmani.wordpress.com/2013/08/31/weeklylandscape/> [last accessed: 24 July 2017].

reevaluation. We will revisit this question further below. Reevaluation is also pertinent in relation to the social media mechanisms that Mani harnesses for reflecting on her own history.

The accumulative manner of creating an archive through the repetitive hashtag can be considered an individual construction of an archive that is a subjective reflection and a prosaic protocol at the same time. The duration of generating the collage is swift whereas the continuance in the virtual world is definite, as, presumably, data is eternally retrievable. In a space where data is accurately and mechanically collected and surveyed, Mani's minute presence is fixed due to a spatial indication and retrievable – regardless of the spectator's location – due to its determination with the hashtag.

Supposedly, a work brimming with contradiction, or rather oscillating between the uniqueness of the moment and the eternity of the virtual image through the subjectivity of a chosen moment and the actual presence of one's mobile device. The diptych that relates Mani's history to a site, to a landscape, at the same time escapes the confinements of accessibility and space by becoming an eternal image online that now lingers within a different matrix of time and space. This strategy of performative evasion subverts the spatio-temporal determination its imagery suggests. This effect is further intensified by connecting the image to social media channels and picture sharing platforms, is hence a further demonstration of the rhizomatic net of connections where visual data floats today. Demonstrating the possibilities for accumulation and mobility of visual knowledge, Mani intentionally intensifies them, presumably, for individual contemplation and reconsideration.

As briefly touched upon, Mani's performative discursive practice also points to her background as a classically trained painter. Firstly, we can identify the Eurocentric rhetoric of traditional art history. She describes “*#weeklylandscape*” as a diptych on canvas and as *cadavre exquis*. Referencing art-historical terminology and Surrealism could be interpreted as an attempt of placing her practice in a tradition, as a strategy to set it apart from it, or simply to create a point of reference. The recourse to European art historical precedents, certainly testifies to a profound attachment to European and Western art history, one that can be interpreted as postcolonial translation in the form of a reevaluation of these signs and value systems. Mani herself considers “*#weeklylandscape*” as an interrogation and reflection on the changed conditions of producing an artwork, more precisely the notions of ‘atelier,’ ‘exhibition space,’ and ‘oeuvre’. In contradiction to the traditional atelier of the artist, a space

charged with an uncanny cult, the car, the road, even her smartphone become an atelier. The exhibition space is relocated to the virtual world, social media platforms, and the audience's smartphone, computer, and laptop; all is collapsed into a mobile device.

In this case, the intangible artwork illustrates the culmination of the evolution from the tangible canvas to performance art, and ultimately to a digital work of unlimited access, which is constituted by and (re-)presented by digital technology networks.

What does this imply for the spectator? First and foremost, the viewers experience the elimination of the border between art and life since the tools are suddenly in everyone's hands. We might think of Beuys here. And, while this is nothing new, Mani takes this evolution a step further by enabling the smartphone user to access, share, multiply and replicate her work into infinity.

4.1.5. “*Paysage en devenir #onyvoitrien (Nascent landscape #wecannotseeanythinghere)*” and “*#captureshaptiques (#hapticcatches)*”

“*Paysage en devenir #onyvoitrien (Nascent landscape #wecannotseeanythinghere)*” (fig. 7, 8) follows the tradition of the previously discussed works – “*Souvenirs du présent (Memories of the present)*”, “*Sur la route de Gafsa (On the road to Gafsa)*”, and “*#weeklylandscape*”. However, it heralds the onset of a new temporal concept within Mani’s oeuvre. Exploring the aesthetic of digital textures and the significance of the detail, the time frame is no longer stretched over the period of an academic semester but the work was completed within a single passage between Sousse and Gafsa on May 27, 2014.

Similarly, “*#captureshaptiques (#hapticcatches)*” (fig. 9, 10) was completed in the course of one day, on June 15, 2014, which is the reason why both projects are treated jointly in this chapter.

We will begin with “*Paysage en devenir #onyvoitrien (Nascent landscape #wecannotseeanythinghere)*”, the second part of the title referring to the becoming of landscape and the hashtag to the eponymous book by French art historian Daniel Arasse. On her blog, Mani introduces the project with Arasse’s exegesis about the value of the detail:

“[T]he detail constitutes, for the historian, the place of an “experience” which is only secondary in appearance. As soon as it is taken into consideration, the rapport of the detail completely renews the established historical problem. [...] unheralded or gradually discovered. [...] a gap or a resistance in relation to the whole picture; it seemed to have the function of conveying fragmentary information, different from the overall message of the work, or indifferent to it. And the pleasure in this connection with the “beauty of detail” merits the historian’s consideration. Very different from the gaze cast from afar, the one who is placed in proximity, the one who, according to Klee, “grazes” the surface, renders visible the feeling of intimacy, whether it is that of the painting or the painter, or the very act of painting.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ My translation. Original text: « [L]e détail constitue, pour l’historien, le lieu d’une « expérience » qui n’est secondaire qu’en apparence. Dès lors qu’il est pris en considération, le rapport de détail renouvelle toute une part de la problématique historique établie. Cette expérience {...} de ces « surprises » que suscitaient tels ou tels détails, vus inopinément ou progressivement découverts. Les étonnements éprouvés étaient d’autant plus forts que le détail se manifestait alors comme un écart ou une résistance par rapport à l’ensemble du tableau; il

Herewith, Mani embarks on a shift in the conceptual composition of her work and deliberately positions this project on a trajectory that exceeds a mere formal interrogation of the conditions of digital image production. Instead, Mani now adds a layer of inscription to the interrogation of the medium of her digital photographs; that is, the motive, the content, the subject *per se*. Whereas “#weeklylandscape” appears to be a work evolving around (‘*autour*’) the parameters of painting, “*Paysage en devenir #onyvoitrien (Nascent landscape #wecannotseeanythinghere)*” excavates that what appeared secondary before; the question of the detail on the surface of the digital canvas. The focus shifts thither, in all probability because one’s sight no longer rests on an identifiable scene but oscillates between detail and structural surface, the micro and the macro. The image appears to be coated with structure, textured like an etching, revealing abstract shapes that require a few minutes of contemplation to identify power poles or buildings. More than that, by blowing up the images Mani obstructs a clear vision which is further aggravated by an impression of disproportion. An objective figurative contextualization becomes almost impossible. The inherent color distortion through the interplay of light and shadow creates mystical, uncanny scenarios that require the viewer to substantially invest his subjective imaginary in order to evoke something.

Whether the magnified detail is considered a placeholder for a sign, a floating signifier, or is perceived as a geometric, abstract or amorphous *id*, the fact that it constitutes something fragmentary sets it in perspective to a larger scale. “*Paysage en devenir #onyvoitrien (Nascent landscape #wecannotseeanythinghere)*” is set in relation to Arasse in order to expose the detail as oscillating between fixed identities and determinations. This art historical reference launches a point of entry for the critic because the detail holds the possibility renew one’s consideration of the established historical dimension (“*problématique historique établie*”), disclose the arbitrariness of its attribution. According to Arasse, the detail demonstrates a crucial element in the contemplative process of interpretation and allocation. Whether it completes or complements a composition, or operates as a visual sign of resistance in relation to the whole, the detail appears to transmit information that is anything but partial. The detail, however, also represents the space between fixed identifications; it stands for itself and, at the same time, is part of the bigger picture. The place of postcolonial translation

semblait avoir pour fonction de transmettre une information parcellaire, différente du message global de l’oeuvre _ ou indifférente à celui-ci. Et le plaisir pris dans ce rapport à la « beauté du détail » méritait que l’historien le prit en considération. Très différent du regard lancé de loin, celui qui est posé de près, celui qui, selon Klee, « broute » la surface, fait affleurer comme le sentiment d’une intimité, qu’il s’agisse de celle du tableau, du peintre ou de l’acte même de la peinture. » Arasse Daniel, le détail pour une histoire rapprochée de la peinture, Ed.Flammaion, Paris 1996, p. 6-7.

between the micro and macro environment is from where the grand narrative of art history is infiltrated by the voice of postcolonial translation that Mani represents. Thus, the art historical narrative is by no means rewritten, but simply revalued by a contemporary Tunisian voice.

Admittedly, to attribute such weight to the detail is Mani's personal directive; however, in relation to Bhabha's theory of postcolonial translation, her statement complements the claim of this thesis that Mani creates spaces for reconsideration and enunciation. Regarding the hashtag "*#onyvoitrien (#wecannotseeanythinghere)*", I claim that it also reiterates this hypothesis since it performatively alludes to an in-between, elusive state. We can see a textured surface; however, in order to contextualize it we need to consider the history (of the notion) of the detail and set the concept in relation to the context Mani has created for it. By endowing her project with the hashtag, Mani opens her work up to the globalized, rhizomatic, and complex virtual environment. Without wanting to go into detail here since the archive has been tackled before, one might consider the hashtag a signifier that docks on different signs because "*#onyvoitrien (#wecannotseeanythinghere)*" was and is not exclusive to Mani's work but has also been applied by other social media users. Thus, the hashtag represents an operational trait immanent to digital environments, the possibility of an infinite chain of signs created by different users, and a point of access for dialogue.

As well as "*Paysage en devenir #onyvoitrien (Nascent landscape #wecannotseeanythinghere)*", the work "*#captureshaptiques (#hapticcatches)*" (fig. 9, 10) is titled with the hashtag and a theoretical reference. Abstaining from disfigurement beyond recognition, the images produced for "*#captureshaptiques (#hapticcatches)*" appear to be swiftly completed landscapes in oil, intensified in color. Only the second glance reveals that the digital photographs are treated with online image-editing applications. The project consists of eleven photographs, located on a virtual map that informs the user about the location where the photos were taken. By doing so, Mani creates a digital memory of the places she visited on June 15, 2014.

The photographs expose topographical contours and figurative elements. Standalone trees, deserted streets, flowing fabrics, and vegetable stalls along the road are among the motives scattered on the digital map illustrating the commute between Sousse and Gafsa. Taken with an iPad and dispersed over 3G connection, the series went online almost immediately after the image was captured. Only the time of editing has to be subtracted from the time display below

the image in order to geolocate the image exactly. Mani outlines the aim behind her project thus: “A series of mobile photographs on the theme of the capture between photography and digital painting and in dialogue with the thought of Gilles DELEUZE on ‘becomings’.”¹⁸⁰ Herewith Mani links her intention to a quote she references (extract): “Becomings are not phenomena of imitation or assimilation, but of double capture, of non-parallel evolution, of a marriage between two kingdoms.”¹⁸¹

Gilles Deleuze’s interview with Claire Parnet provides the title of Mani’s series and provides insight into the artist’s own perception of the performative image map. The link that Mani establishes between her work and Deleuze and Parnet requires us to critically examine the implications of this confluence. With the focus on the two key notions, ‘capture’ and ‘becoming’, it is important to highlight that they oppose in temporal parameters. For, whereas the former marks a momentum, the latter is processual. By setting these terms in relation to photography and digital technology, Mani makes visible the logic she calls digital painting. While photography presupposes the capture of a moment, the dispersion into virtual networks engenders a process, both unpredictable in its outcome and endless in its life span; thus, time and space are split and doubled.

The title, “#captureshaptiques (#hapticcatches)”, announces yet another reference to the writings of Deleuze. “Dialogues” (1996) discloses the meaning of ‘capture’ by delineating the marriage of two independent and dissimilar traces of emergence (‘devenir’). The second term of the hashtag ‘haptiques’, originates from “A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia” (1980) by Deleuze and Guattari, whereas the ‘haptic’ – from the Greek ‘haptein’ meaning touch – is charted as an even, smooth space; a space of immediacy, contact, flux, fluidity, and movement, albeit without depth.¹⁸² And, the Internet, according to Mani, is a haptic, even space *par excellence*.¹⁸³ Set in relation to the process of enunciation, “#captureshaptiques (#hapticcatches)”, more than any other project before, manifests Mani’s intention of creating a virtual realm that spans the time lag between a Eurocentrically rooted

¹⁸⁰ My translation. Original text: « Une série de photographies mobiles sur le thème de la capture entre photographie et peinture numérique et en dialogue avec la pensée de Gilles DELEUZE sur les devenirs. » Mani 2014 online <https://souadmani.wordpress.com/2014/06/15/captureshaptiques/> [last accessed: 20 May 2018].

¹⁸¹ My translation. Original text: « Les devenirs ne sont pas des phénomènes d’imitation ni d’assimilation, mais de double capture, d’évolution non parallèle, de noces entre deux règnes. Les noces sont toujours contre nature. Les noces c’est le contraire d’un couple. Il n’y a plus de machines binaires: question-réponse, homme-animal, etc. Ce pourrait être ça, un entretien, simplement le tracé d’un devenir. » Deleuze Gilles avec Parnet Claire, Dialogues, Ed. Champs essais, 1996, p. 8.

¹⁸² Deleuze and Guattari 1980, pp. 614-622 in Mani 2015, p. 38.

¹⁸³ Mani 2015, p. 38.

tradition and a contemporary decolonial site. To be precise, with her allusion to traditional landscape paintings, Mani deceives her audience, yet she unveils a tool that everyone has at hand, a mechanism of power.

4.1.6. Conclusion

Mani's projects between 2010 and 2014 testify to an unrestrained curiosity about the contingency of contemporary digital photography. The camera, operational conditions, and the virtual audience become signs that are appropriated, experimented with and superseded, expanded or amplified in the subsequent project. The instructive difference between "*Souvenirs du présent (Memories of the present)*", "*Sur la route de Gafsa (On the road to Gafsa)*", "#weeklylandscape", "*Paysage en devenir #onyvoitrien (Nascent landscape #wecannotseeanythinghere)*", and "#capturehaptiques (#hapticcatches)" is not necessarily a structural one but that they are positioned in an evolutionary artistic process. Intentional or not, her exploration of digitally altered image production testifies to an indebtedness to Eurocentric art historical concepts and terminology.

The projects' relation to the traditions of Western painting and the ultimate dispersion of the images to a virtual audience give way to metaphysical spaces that oscillate somewhere between the liberation from and the identification with Eurocentric value systems. Nevertheless, the visual inscriptions or digital mappings demonstrate "a doubling and a splitting of the temporal and spatial dimensions in the very act of signification."¹⁸⁴ Bhabha argues that the only locus where this act of signification can emerge is the boundary between fixed identification, an in-between, a *third* space, beyond where cultural differences are simply articulated. This space is created by absorbing the kernel from Eurocentric signs of art history and revaluing it, imbuing it with the intent to create archival knowledge via virtual networks.

Virtual spaces endowed with a freely floating hashtag demonstrate the unrestrained access to and, arguably, the invitation to partake in conjuring up idiosyncratic forms of archives. These archives, however, cannot be looked at without taking notice of the financialization of the image. As mentioned above, social media platforms and the technology they offer are not independent from global capitalism. The financialization of the image is a threat that Mani's projects in virtual space cannot evade. However, as a particular stance – be it a means of isolation or the will to withstand the pressure – Mani chooses to not tackle the political relations invested in social networks. She refrains from asking how politically charged technology and social media became by contributing to the upheavals during Arab Spring. As

¹⁸⁴ Bhabha 1994, p. 262.

an alternative, Mani recuperates both space and media for a different kind of representation and interrogation. She interrogates the tools in the hands of the contemporary Tunisian multi-media artist, questions the legacy of modernism for Tunisian contemporary artists, and represents a niche of artists who – at that moment in time – elude the dilemma of representing the conflict and political events that rend the country asunder.

In addition, the artist's agency to expand the understanding of art is attributable to all her new media projects. By working with tools accessible to everyone, which entails the dissolution of the border between artist and spectator, she revises the prevalent conception of contemporary art as elitist. Transcending this boundary implies the negation of artistic authorship and raises the issues of the obsolescence of the distinction between active and passive subject in a virtually constructed space. The elimination of this dichotomy also reflects the power relations of a society since changes in the sociopolitical order result from how individuals engage with the political.¹⁸⁵ And to change or reflect upon how people interact, engage, and perceive the political – “what they hear (and fear)”¹⁸⁶ – is a political act in itself, according to Downey. We can therefore conclude that Mani's digital interventions, on one side, interrogate the image or role of the artist since she produces work series with tools readily accessible to a wide audience. On the other side, the accessibility of tools exposes the political in Mani's interventions. Beyond that, her interventions construct archives that exemplify the possibilities of connecting with one another as well as the expansion itself of our rhizomatic networks provided by the virtual world and social media in particular.

¹⁸⁵ Downey 2014, p. 65.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

4.2. Opening Up Participative Spaces

The question of participation is explored through different degrees of viewer engagement. Thus, the following pages aim to examine how participative spaces constructed through artistic interventions can contribute to establishing democratic public sphere. In light of the concept of participation, it is critical to consider the role of the subject and the body in the projects conceived for “*De Colline En Colline. Three Hills*”.

We will begin with elaborating the idea of the body in a shared space equipped with digital and technological apparatuses. In “*Missing in Action: Agency and Meaning in Interactive Art*” (2011) Kristine Stiles and Edward Shanken postulate the body as the locus of the formative and instructive encounter of engagement and movement. It is the body where volition is materialized. Shanken and Stiles continue that meaningfulness in art involving the body can only arise when it “sets empathy in motion toward responsible interaction and constructive change.”¹⁸⁷ Thus, augmented viewer perception, as proposed by participative and interactive digital art, stimulates the onlooker’s mind to execute bodily actions; however, it makes a difference whether one participant acts alone or if he interacts in a shared space. For, in many cases, bodies, then, become the center of the picture. The contested question of mind and body and their relation to one another, or rather the subordination of one to the other, becomes a crucial aspect for the conception and execution of participative actions in artistic interventions where people (inter)act.

According to Jones, the body constitutes a locus of mediation,¹⁸⁸ which is why we need to explore the role of the individual body in interaction. Furthermore, it is important to observe how these implications feed back into the atmosphere and equilibrium of the community. In her book “*Sensorium*” Jones suggests how concepts, such as community, network, or contemporary art in general can be called into question at the intersection of technology and art. By identifying terms of rupture – displacement, dislocation, distribution and disorientation – in art at the nexus of corporeality and technology, Jones attributes to them the potential to investigate “the implications of this new technosensual “comfort zone”.”¹⁸⁹ This realm defined by technological prostheses and amenities encompasses the consumer as well as the scientific and health realms of life and stands for innovations on the intersection between science and

¹⁸⁷ Stiles and Shanken 2011 in Lovejoy, Paul, and Vesna 2011, p. 46.

¹⁸⁸ Jones 2006, p. 2.

¹⁸⁹ Jones 2006, p. 2.

technology that are slowly becoming part of our daily lives; for example, cosmetic neurology or bio-computers. Jones adds that, today, our bodies are inseparable from technology, and “are themselves mediating apparatuses, without which there can be no knowledge in the world.”¹⁹⁰

The following analysis of the works designed for “*De Colline En Colline. Three Hills*” will question if art in this context aids at transforming “our sense of what it means to live, to be, in other times and different spaces, both human and historical.”¹⁹¹ More precisely, can “*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*” and “*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*” contribute to uprooting modernist conceptions of the body, the mind, the Cartesian split, and the relation of the viewer and the artist to the work or to each other? It would be interesting to see if we can detect a certain kind of commonality in interactive works within the frame of new media – a commonality that draws on the body and the mind while (re)negotiating these entrenched concepts. Only by abandoning the suppositions of modernism – supposedly universal, but in fact Eurocentric in all its facets – contemporary artistic production can fulfil the postcolonial duty of creating hybrid sites of enunciation that engender their own localized logic. We should bear in mind that modernism and its aesthetics stem from Enlightenment practices of the self, and we need not disclaim their existence but rather question their relevance for today.

This call to interrogate concepts that are allegedly global and universal marks the point where Jones’ and Bhabha’s theories meet. Whereas Jones broaches the implications of interaction with new media, Bhabha articulates a theory for an updated style of history writing. They both set about (re)writing a decolonized postmodernism from the canon of modernism. Since, as aptly put by Jones, “past contingencies become present possibilities,”¹⁹² they begin their methodologies from the directives of modernity. Jones in terms of the modernist segmentation of the senses, and Bhabha by insisting on the appropriation of the time-lag between modernity and postmodernity in order to transcend the previously stipulated loci of enunciation and artistic production. Jones objects to sensory segmentation, because it resulted in the dominance of visibility and also compartmentalized and ultimately commercialized the senses. The European tradition of dividing the senses culminated in the purposeful stigmatization of the “other”, the non-European, the colonial subject, which was neither

¹⁹⁰ Jones 2006, p. 2.

¹⁹¹ Bhabha 1994, p. 367.

¹⁹² Jones 2006, p. 10.

cultivated nor modern.¹⁹³ Becoming the modern subject was conditioned by an opposition that introduced a “system of differentiation which [enabled] the cultural to be signified as a linguistic, symbolic, historic reality.”¹⁹⁴

What is at stake here is the question of how this knowledge is consulted by Mani and how she co-opts this moment in time to articulate her response by means of aesthetics. This thesis accords with Jones’ suggestion that “the aesthetic attitude of this hybrid moment, where modernist segregation of the sense is giving way to dramatic sensorial mixes”¹⁹⁵ can be considered as the intervening space in the here and now. For Mani’s work builds upon what Bhabha titles “to dwell in the ‘beyond’ [...], to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to redescribe our human, historic commonality; to touch the future on its hither side.”¹⁹⁶

Therefore, we ought to read Mani’s relational installations not only with regard to the assumptive implications for the people interacting with them or the nature and contingency of the conceptual spaces that she opens up but first and foremost; we ought also to take into consideration the context, the legacy, and the struggle wherein she begins from.

To take a step further into the tiers of the work, we must ask how she harnesses this moment in time, what is her methodology for the works discussed. As previously mentioned, the concept of participation is very prominent in Mani’s work, especially in the projects “*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*” and “*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*”. Enabling participation must be considered as an intentional stimulus for the audience, subordinate to the artist’s intention. Certainly, they anticipate a resonance in the public space since the public dimension necessitates questioning the current social and the communal dynamics of this space, the mechanisms of influencing it, the motivation for appropriating it and most importantly who has access to it. According to Bishop, this purpose traverses the entire history of the “*social dimension of participation*”¹⁹⁷ in aesthetic practices. Bishop titles these practices as different “intangible experiences,”¹⁹⁸ such as dancing, socializing, discussing, setting up businesses, or agencies. Stiles and Shanken, concurrently, assert that

¹⁹³ Jones 2006, pp. 10-18.

¹⁹⁴ See Bhabha 1994, p. 74.

¹⁹⁵ Jones 2006, p. 3.

¹⁹⁶ Bhabha 1994, p. 10.

¹⁹⁷ Bishop 2006, p. 10.

¹⁹⁸ Ibidem.

“[artists] developed interactivity as a means to widen the social base for art, and as an exercise in active interconnection with cultural and political milieus.”¹⁹⁹ We therefore need to investigate how the temporal activation of the individual viewer or spectator in a community can either backfire or benefit the health and strength of a transitional society.

In a young democratic society, it is up to the individual to experience liminal moments resulting from new freedoms and different allocations of power and capital. In this regard, the intentionality of Mani’s choice of medium and apparatuses should not be dismissed. New media as an artistic medium, as elaborated by McLuhan, is not *per se* negatively or positively charged. On the contrary, it is the contextualization and the use with which it is endowed that determines its value for the user. To equip the audience with technological devices is a deliberate one because she charges her new media projects with the substantial value of approachability. The diversity of citizens that gather around her installations and interact with them creates a space of appearance that only functions and allows participation by maintaining ‘relations of equality.’²⁰⁰ The conditions of equality arise when bodies or embodied intentions that appear together overcome the polarity of *active* and *passive* since this labelling is “an *a priori* distribution of the [...] capacities and incapacities attached to these positions. They are embodied allegories of inequality.”²⁰¹ Instead of an identifiable dichotomy of active and passive, Rancière suggests adopting the concept of emancipation, which discerns that this opposition colludes with the systems of domination and subjection because the spectator also acts, observes, compares, interprets, selects, and links, composes and participates, and hence distantly observes and actively engages.²⁰² What is key in Rancière’s claim is that *every* spectator carries the equal capacity to invent individual translations of a work because “[there] is no privileged medium [nor a] privileged starting point.”²⁰³ This belief is precisely what Mani strives to transpose to the audiences in Sidi Bou Saïd and Chénini. She aspires to activate everyone present there.²⁰⁴ For a community is only ready to experiment with new relations of power and new versions of citizenship as well as to accelerate social change if the arena of exchange created through aesthetic motivation paves the way for equal exchange. It is a noteworthy aspect that relations of equality not only hold

¹⁹⁹ Stiles and Shanken 2011 in Lovejoy, Paul, and Vesna 2011, p. 32. However, this accounts as characteristic of movement of 1960s and 1970s in industrialised countries of the West.

²⁰⁰ Butler 2011, online.

²⁰¹ Rancière 2009, p. 12 (original version: 2008, p. 18).

²⁰² Ibid., p. 13 (original version: 2008, p. 19).

²⁰³ Bishop 2006, p. 16.

²⁰⁴ As far as I was informed the computer scientists Manel Lamine and Chokri Khalifa were present and prepared to help with the devices on site.

true for the community in itself, but also for the boundary between artist and spectator, and ideally, ultimately, participant.

This dissolution of the *modernist* artist brings us right into the realm of relational art. Without getting stuck in the crossfire between Bourriaud and Bishop, as this would lead us too far, the *rapprochement* of Mani's practice to relational art cannot be circumvented for the moment. It is Bishop's critique of Bourriaud's theory of relational antagonism that assists us in understanding the potential of her temporal artistic spaces. For example, Bishop denounces the homogeneous crowd of people present at Rirkrit Tiravanija's performances because their single-sided perspective resulting from a common background creates nothing but a harmonious experience that fails to broach "the political aspect of communication."²⁰⁵ Instead of amalgamating audiences that have nothing in common, neither professional nor social or economic background, Tiravanija remains within the realm of a unitary crowd and hinders the exposure of possible fissures necessary for negotiation and dialogue.²⁰⁶ Bishop cites the concepts of tension, unease, and discomfort as integral ingredients of sustainable discussions that address the self-perception of contemporary art as a field powerful enough to infiltrate social and political systems.²⁰⁷

Mani's projects, this thesis assumes, make provisions for friction because they leave the artistic realm and are placed in a space where the artist does not know if they will work, primarily because the audience consists of people who belong to artist circles and others who are not at all familiar with contemporary art. In a like manner, Stiles and Shanken posit interactivity as a mode of artistic production as "a means to widen the social base for art, and [...] an exercise in active interconnection with cultural and political milieus."²⁰⁸ Both these references allude to how concepts of community, the public sphere, and subjectivity have been put to test in aesthetic experimentation. Are artistic interventions capable of manipulating other domains of life? Certainly, experimentation allows for the testing out of alternative identities and ideas of community or of the body. New media installations, such as "*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*" and "*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*", challenge virtuality and corporeality in new dimensions, and they allow for abstract ideas that "arise from the interplay between prevailing cultural formations and the

²⁰⁵ Bishop 2004, p. 68.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 68-70.

²⁰⁷ Bishop 2004, p. 70.

²⁰⁸ See Footnote 4 in their text. Stiles and Shanken 2011 in Lovejoy, Paul, and Vesna 2011, p. 32.

beliefs, observations, and experiences that count as empirical evidence in a given society.”²⁰⁹ What Hayles’ quote suggests is how new sites of enunciation emerge between different sets of beliefs that stem from different groups of people. While Mani’s temporal spaces allow for relations that are not necessarily harmonious, their discursive and participative nature renders them unexpected and surprising interventions in public space. The body heat in “*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*” and the visualization of networked communication in “*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*” provoke critical scrutiny of the media they represent and of the relations they produce. In terms of media, the capitalistic – for lack of a better term – value inherent in the technology and the relations it produces could be subject to criticism. Downey, for instance, urges to carefully detect whether relational practices critically demonstrate or merely reflect how private and public spheres ubiquitously become privatized and institutionalized.²¹⁰

Unambiguously, Mani’s interventions refrain from simply reflecting the instrumentalization of networks and communication. Mani strives to withdraw the commercial, capitalistic, expedient, target-oriented, teleological, purposive, utilitarian element from the relations she creates by drawing the focus on the interpersonal relationality that social media facilitates. The projects in Sidi Bou Saïd and Chenini demonstrate a certain kind of playfulness, artificial ways of engaging with one another in the realm of new media art and by doing so she creates spaces of exploration and discovery concentrated on interpersonal relationships, if not exclusively. The works do not allow the “privatization and institutionalization of public and private spheres of activity... [and the] commodification of relationships, artistic practices,”²¹¹ but could invite the participant to critically scrutinize these commodified mechanisms and their consequences.

Mani’s interplay between private and public differentiates itself from practices that become absorbed in processes of capital valorization that absorb interpersonal communication because elements susceptible of being recuperated by capitalism – in the artistic realm – are transferred into a sphere of playful abstraction. Yet what we cannot deny is an innate and uncanny critical agency from the side of the artist.

²⁰⁹ Hayles 2002, p. 298.

²¹⁰ Downey 2007, p. 272.

²¹¹ Ibidem.

All the more in the region of the Middle East, where political events induced “a quandary in both formal representation and interpretation for artists, institutions and critics alike,”²¹² critical practices must be sincere and positioned at a neutral point of departure. It is key to keep visual culture separate from the numerous forms of commodification that have begun cropping up as a result of, to name but one, free access to the web in Tunisia. A time of political transition is a moment of critical negotiation of adopted systems, structures, theories, models and methods both in private and public spaces. Therefore, there is a threat but also the potential that artistic practices refrain from being recuperated and neutralized by capitalism because they stand for different oppositional strategies.²¹³

In the present moment in Tunisia’s cultural scene, artistic practices like participation and collaboration must be considered as strategies of opposition that plurally intervene in social spaces, as Mouffe argues. These practices preserve and foster art’s critical power, oppose the value systems that promote competitive individualism and market exchange and highlight the permeation of capital in social networks and media technologies. Presumably the social relations that “*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*” and “*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*” produce penetrate social spaces with the agency “to oppose the program of total social mobilization of capitalism”,²¹⁴ and they retrieve the value of the traditional purpose of social space and of networks, namely that of interpersonal communication. And communication entails discussion, conflict, and different publics. Therefore, the invitation to experiment with and to participate in, new media installations can be considered as an artistic strategy that holds the potential to revalue the notions of living and consuming and to collectively (re)appropriate new common spaces and everyday culture.²¹⁵

To collectively act towards a different future also necessitates sustained dialogue, a proposition immanent to many of Mani’s works. This thesis appropriates Jean-Luc Nancy’s ontological understanding of dialogue which is built upon the understanding that singularity does not precede plurality²¹⁶ as “being-one [...] can only be understood by starting from being-with-one-another.”²¹⁷ Emphasizing the value of plurality, as Nancy does in “*Being*

²¹² Downey 2014, p. 14.

²¹³ Mouffe 2007, p. 1.

²¹⁴ Ibidem.

²¹⁵ Gorz 2004, online.

²¹⁶ Nancy 2000, pp. 132-133 (original version: 1996, p. 122).

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 56 (original version: 1996, pp. 57-58).

Singular Plural’, could have a positive effect on how we understand the connections new media introduces into our personal lives. It could be apprehended as a suggestion to circumvent the singularization that has taken place in parts of the world where democracies collapse, nationalist ideologies arise and individuals no longer join forces in their struggles.

As one strategy to support collective struggles, collaborative and participative agendas in art entail rethinking the concept of authorship. Bishop, for example, insists on reconsidering “authorship so that it is no longer synonymous with capitalism but rather with what Guattari calls ‘resingularisation’, an individual or collective struggle against the banalisation and homogenization of institutional domains.”²¹⁸

If we return to Hendaoui (2013), who blames the contiguity of certain actors in the Tunisian artistic scene to state domains for the lack of critical discourse and practice, we can envisage where Guattari’s ‘resingularization’ could yield fruit. The research of Korpe, Bruckbauer, and Triki also bears witness to the incredible energy Tunisia’s artistic scene displays in its members’ struggle for diversity and acceptance. They demonstrate the will to create sites of enunciation that allow for the voices of all members of a society to be heard and that is precisely what Mani’s installations “*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*” and “*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*” attempt, as the following chapter will try to show.

²¹⁸ Bishop in Barok 2009, p. 4.

4.2.1. Introduction: “*De Colline En Colline (Three Hills)*”

The artistic festival “*De Colline En Colline. Three Hills*” took place on three consecutive weekends in March 2013. The interventions in the streets of Sidi Bou Saïd, Takrouna, and Chenini intended to create temporal encounters between locals and artists from Tunisia and abroad, while paying respect to the “physical and human environment”²¹⁹ on site. Faten Rouissi, the artistic director, deemed the event to be a necessary reaction to the lack of infrastructure for contemporary art and the persisting conception of contemporary art as elitist.²²⁰ Her intention was the formation of a “laboratory for artistic and cultural democratization [...], offering alternatives for equal opportunity between the regions and inventing new strategies for the re-appropriation of public space.”²²¹ The project “turned out to be a real platform for diverse artistic and social actions which clearly demonstrated creativity, polyvalence and the reactivity of the public,”²²² as stated by Rouissi. Unfortunately, the scope of this thesis does not allow for an elaboration of the whole project and must confine itself to Mani’s contributions in Sidi Bou Saïd and Chénini.

The project’s ambition – understanding existing sites as communities – reflects the recent trend in site-specific art that purposefully takes into consideration the local social, economic, and political dynamics. As discussed above, Kwon argues that impermanent and transient site-specific interventions have become providers of cultural and artistic services, distant from the formerly permanent, immobile aesthetic object.²²³ In order to provide sustainable experiences for the local community, interventions must be designed “as an integral extension of the community rather than an intrusive contribution from elsewhere.”²²⁴ Reflecting on what is at stake there – what concerns the local community – might attain a stronger resonance and engagement among the onlookers and participants, and holds the potential to redefine the concept of community.

In order to prevent intrusions that come across as inapproachable and alien to the local community, the organizers and artists of “*De Colline En Colline. Three Hills*” reached out to the communes three months beforehand to assess the expectations and presumptions in situ.

²¹⁹ Triki 2013, p. 18.

²²⁰ Rouissi 2013, pp. 14-15.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 14.

²²² Ibid., p. 15.

²²³ Kwon 2002, pp. 3-4.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

Corresponding to Chatterjee's claim that the concept of the community "seeps through the interstices of the objectively constructed, contractually regulated structure of civil society,"²²⁵ the artists were provided with different struggles, stories, and histories for their installations, performances, and workshops. For the community can also be represented alongside subjective and innate dynamics that are in constant flux. Although these bonds intrinsic to a community might be stronger than societal structures, they cannot be measured objectively. Appreciating a community in this manner could potentially demote external, fixed, and identifiable conceptions of class and the imagined homogeneity of both community and nation.²²⁶ The significance of this proclamation is in tandem with Bhabha, who asserts that new sites for contestation and collaboration, and the definition of society exclusively derive from the articulation of cultural differences.²²⁷ Whether Mani's installations could serve as *third places*, as sites of enunciation, will be evaluated in the following pages.

²²⁵ Chatterjee 1990, p. 127.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

²²⁷ Bhabha 1994, p. 2.

4.2.1.1. “*Vous êtes ici... Et ailleurs! (You are here and elsewhere!)*”²²⁸

“*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*” (fig. 14) is a multilayered, interactive multi-media installation that was mounted in a suburb of Tunis in 2013. According to the artist, the in situ installation strives to explore the relations “created by the power of multimedia in a global context by producing art work that sets in place particular social relations.”²²⁹

The interconnected and interactive participant models the global network in that his presence is split and doubled. By doing so, Mani alludes to the postmodernist notion of the split subject, a claim to be revisited. The methodology of splitting and doubling, however, in tandem with the work’s title, also refers to another aspect: “*Ici et ailleurs (Here and there)*”, is the performative title of a film by Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville from 1976. Brutal and unnerving scenes from a pro-Palestinian video intersect with repetitive sequences showing a French family watching TV as well as women and men reading out phrases about war and propaganda. Visual letterings and coordinated voices read out statements about the status of the image as the time-space matrix and identity: “double identity: space and time.”²³⁰ Equally, Mani aims for a suspension of the traditional time-space expectations by transmitting the footage from the pedestrian zone of the coastal town of Sidi Bou Saïd onto screens in several spaces as well as over the Internet. The film interrogates the status of the image, of the almost unbearable photograph, its politico-historical contextualization, the creation of narratives around images and their reception. It does not come as a surprise that an artist from a country that has been sterilized as other, as victim, as fundamentalist decides to establish a genealogy like this one. We are going to investigate the motives behind this alliance.

Within the course of the project “*De Colline En Colline*”, on March 9th and 10th, 2013, Mani, together with computer scientists Manel Lamine and Chokri Khalifa, developed an installation involving several sites in the old town of Sidi Bou Saïd. She claims the intention with her work to be the following: “Realized with, for, and in the other’s universe my work

²²⁸ An eponymous event took place in 2012 in the format of a residence program that travelled to several European cities and evoked questions of interactivity and connectedness through the installation of five larger-than-life interactive and immersive tableaux. Further information can be found at <http://youarehereelsewhere.com> [last accessed: 17 May 2018].

²²⁹ Mani 2013, p. 42.

²³⁰ My translation from the original text: « double identité: espace et temps », in: “*Ici et ailleurs*”, minute 23:01–23:02, Godard and Miéville, Paris 1976.

does not belong to me anymore. I can only be the owner of my work's event."²³¹ In this statement Mani not only relinquishes the humanist concept of artistic authorship but also sets aside the modernist illusion of the privileged artist.²³² Clearly, we are once again confronted with a dissolution of the border between the artist and the audience, the producer and the receiver.

Unequivocally, she exemplifies Lygia Clark's words to Hélio Oiticica in 1968, "[true] participation is open and we will never be able to know what we give to the spectator-author."²³³ Clark's statement, however, depends on determining whether a work is able to fully expand its interactive spectrum the way envisaged by the artist, and whether the public is unrestricted enough to memorably and sustainably exhaust it. If we apply this hypothesis to Mani's work, we ought to elaborate how she designs different kind of participatory spaces. The project(s) "*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*" and "*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*" present a particular challenge in terms of a joint analysis due to their temporal and geographical disparity, so the work(s) will be delineated separately. One has to consider, however, that this methodological approach implies that superimpositions and repetitions cannot be avoided.

If we go along with Mani's claim that she can only be the owner of her work's event, it is our duty to examine the degree of interaction and participation. The main interface consisted of a hidden web camera, mounted behind a larger-than-life glazed mirror which was connected to five screens situated in the village and the net via streaming (fig. 13). Onlookers at the Tam Tam restaurant, Rafrat Café, Sidi Azizi café, the Café des Nattes, the municipal art gallery, the Ammar Farhat gallery (fig. 16), the Dar El Jazik boutique, and the Palace of the Baron d'Erlanger, i.e. the Ennajma Ezzahra, were able to follow what was happening on screens. The installation in a highly frequented area was indicated by a noticeable banner mounted on top of the mirror, which read "*Vous êtes filmés*".²³⁴ Additionally, signs pointed out that artistic interventions were spread out in the village and all passers-by were invited to interact by

²³¹ I would translate "l'univers de l'autre" to "the universe of the other", the translation in the publication, however, reads "the other's universe" Mani 2013, p. 42. Cf. Philippe Thomas (1987) "Les ready-mades appartiennent à tout le monde." ("Readymades Belong to Everyone"), Cable Gallery, New York. Macba, online <http://www.macba.cat/en/exhibiton-philipe-thomas> [accessed 18 July 2017].

²³² Mouffe 2007, p. 5.

²³³ Clark 1996 in Bishop 2006, p. 114.

²³⁴ My translation from "Vous êtes filmés" is "You are being filmed".

communicating with the mirror image as well as with the smaller digital image of themselves, shown on the laptop screen.

We cannot help but draw another line to Godard's and Miéville's film which bears the following statement: "any daily image will be part of a vague and complex system where the whole world enters and exits at every instant."²³⁵

This thesis now raises the question of the locus of this entering and exiting of the world in Mani's space. To be precise, how and where does the artist activate participation, and what role does the mirror image, the photograph, the streamed image play for the individual and for the public. Certainly, the installation aroused attention and curiosity in the public, presumably due to its intricate representation of a digital network. Bruno Latour, interestingly, alludes to another reading of the network which suggests the event to be a network, which he, both, considers to be unpredictable in its outcome.²³⁶ But, more than the event, the network is the structure that turns us into historical and social subjects,²³⁷ it is inherent to all forms of life,²³⁸ and the electronic network extends beyond ourselves,²³⁹ consciously and subconsciously. This thesis argues that through the art work, being both an event and a network, the public is turned into historical and social subjects, because it demonstrates the interdependence of the subject to its environment and, most importantly for this thesis, the intertwining of present and past.²⁴⁰

Exemplified through the image map – an image that she also considers as part of her work – Mani began mapping her location in her earlier works, such as "*Elle M'aime (She loves me)*," "*#weeklylandscape*" and "*#captureshaptiques (#hapticcatches)*." Whereas this tool previously functioned as a digital archive of documentation for herself, this time she renders the mirrored spectator and the observer aware of the invisible net that connects all users. Returning to Latour, the notions of event and network must be considered contingent and dynamic. In "*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*," a project that is simultaneously an event and a network, these notions seem to condition each other since only the presence of a person in front of the screen maintains its function as a network recording

²³⁵ My translation from the original text: «...n'importe quelle image quotidienne fera ainsi partie d'une système vague et compliquée ou le monde entier entre et sort à chaque instant», in: "Ici et ailleurs", minute 33:58–34:18, Godard and Miéville, Paris 1978.

²³⁶ Latour 2005, pp. 128-133.

²³⁷ Larsen 2014, p. 16.

²³⁸ Capra 1997, n.p. in Larsen 2014, p. 13.

²³⁹ McLuhan 1964, pp. 3-4 and Deligny 2013, n.p. in Larsen 2014, p. 16.

²⁴⁰ Larsen 2014, p. 18.

and transmitting data. One might argue that Mani's artistic communication networks refer to a former idea of the network; namely, almost buried in oblivion, the network as a social concept.²⁴¹ Before being connoted with digital purposes, network theory and practice was dominated by different denotations. While Adam Smith considered the network to be represented by the supply chain, Jürgen Habermas defined the public sphere to be a network.²⁴² With both descriptions highlighting a different agenda, the latter description of the network can be considered in conceptual proximity to Mani's representation of the networked, *virtual* public sphere. Kittler, on the other hand, claims that the network has roots in social signification with his concept of '*Aufschreibesysteme*', which describes networks as means to a culture to archive data.²⁴³ What we can observe here is that the rhizomatic structures of the net(work) and its discourse originated in twentieth-century post-industrialism while only recently it has become connoted with digital phenomena. With her installation, Mani provides a network, a tool, for her audience and claims to be no longer in control of it. She is only the owner of her work's event. Mani installs the network as a metaphor that does not need to be filled with further sense than that the people engage in it, that *they* become 'beholders in action.'²⁴⁴

But what does this mean for the community and its understanding of contemporary art? Participative practices are intangible experiences and, according to Bishop, intend to bring art closer to life due to their social dimension.²⁴⁵ In tandem, Stiles and Shanken affirm that the social element not only renders practices open to addressing a great diversity of people, it also interconnects art with other, political realms.²⁴⁶ Due to the medium-specific structure of equivalence that Mani allows for the emancipation of the spectator, these claims become valid for the work. During the event, it is democratic in its existence and features an author-less interface. Equivalence determines the feasibility of participatory artistic interventions because the simultaneous appearance of bodies is the locus where conditions of equality and societal hierarchies in a given political order are acted out. Only by ensuring relations of equivalence does an artist have the chance to "bring the space of appearance into being", according to Butler. A space she describes as "a feature and effect of action."²⁴⁷ Butler's claim – built upon

²⁴¹ Larsen 2014., p. 13.

²⁴² Habermas 1996, p. 360. (original version: 1992, p. 436).

²⁴³ Kittler 1990, p. 369.

²⁴⁴ Almenberg 2010, p. 5.

²⁴⁵ Bishop 2006, p. 10.

²⁴⁶ Stiles and Shanken 2011 in Lovejoy, Paul, and Vesna 2011, p. 32. Noteworthy, this development is referred to as having spread in the interactive realm of Western art in the 1960s and 1970s.

²⁴⁷ Butler 2011, online.

Hannah Arendt's concept of the 'space of appearance' – points to the condition decisive in a work that depends on people stepping forward to engage in spaces and postulates that claims of equality arise in spaces where bodies appear together concurrently. The mirror and the camera are no extraordinary objects, although usually a viewer of art arrives to view something other than himself and the perspective of the camera might appear as odd since one sees oneself. Nevertheless, or maybe, precisely because of that, a metaphorical charge is superfluous and the audience perceives the work as something they can relate to, be it by a playful interaction or the imitation of what others do.

Then again, what must be taken into consideration is that for those who are being filmed it is almost impossible to assume the reception of, and the reaction to, the projected picture on the screen elsewhere. Here Mani makes an uncanny reference to surveillance cameras and the disquieting sensation of being observed or even judged. However, it is up to the participant to decide what they want to share. Accounting for any digital environment, I argue that this aspect is strongly reinforced in "*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*". After all, the work purposefully exemplifies the digitalization of human relations and the networked rhizomatic nature in which they invisibly and unobtrusively permeate human lives. Most concretely it does so with the gaze in the mirror, which, arguably, could also be understood as holding up a mirror to the participant, or even to society.

The mirror recurs regularly in Mani's oeuvre and has played a significant role since 2008 when she photographed herself in Paris in a mirrored room, marking the onset of "*Elle M'aime (She loves me)*" (fig. 19). Back in Tunisia, Mani discovered that the only photograph she had of herself was the reflection in the mirrored room of the Centre Georges Pompidou. On her blog, Mani relates "*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*" to the following quote:

"The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it

exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there ."²⁴⁸

Michel Foucault renders the question of identity an ontological one. Where he *sees* himself is where he is not. The absence renders him an existing subject, albeit somewhere else. Splitting the subject, as vividly exemplified in "*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*", stands for an interrogation of the mirrored subject itself. What is more, by recalling Foucault's concept of the mirror as a utopia, Mani opens up a place without a place, a virtual and metaphysical, an in-between space. This *meta*-space can be considered a perceptual filter for the exploration of altered concepts of consciousness and "the consequent technological colonization of the body."²⁴⁹ Mani points to the technological appropriation of the subject by visualizing the contemporaneity of presence and absence through the screens and the mirror image. It appears uncanny, yet familiar; a certainty that everything one uploads to the net can be retrieved somewhere else, that subjectivity is a split status.

This sense of powerlessness concurs with the shift of the borders of private and public resulting from digitalization. At the same time, it becomes a power to envision subjectivity as an indefinite condition. With "*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*", Mani subtly alludes to how public and private spheres of activity have been commodified, privatized, and institutionalized and how the preservation of criticality in artistic practices becomes more and more of a tightrope walk.²⁵⁰ By connecting places and people, Mani visualized that the rhizomatic networks immanent to our daily communication habits, not only connect humans but also alter our understanding of what was once private and has now become (semi-)public. She illustrates this shift of the borders of the private and the public as she innocuously invites us to repeat our daily habit of connection ourselves with others via the net.

²⁴⁸ Foucault 1984 (1967), n. p. (French original text: «Le miroir, après tout, c'est une utopie, puisque c'est un lieu sans lieu. Dans le miroir, je me vois là où je ne suis pas, dans un espace irréel qui s'ouvre virtuellement derrière la surface, je suis là-bas, là où je ne suis pas, une sorte d'ombre qui me donne à moi-même ma propre visibilité, qui me permet de me regarder là où je suis absent – utopie du miroir. Mais c'est également une hétérotopie, dans la mesure où le miroir existe réellement, et où il a, sur la place que j'occupe, une sorte d'effet en retour ; c'est à partir du miroir que je me découvre absent à la place où je suis puisque je me vois là-bas.»)

²⁴⁹ Dunning and Woodrow online, 2009.

²⁵⁰ Downey 2007, p. 272.

The subtle reference to the private look in the mirror addresses the spectator to reconsider his own subject position and forces one to interrogate what constitutes subjectivity in the private and the public current political order. This consideration about the scopes of private, public, and civil spaces could, according to Downey, ideally articulate new forms of subjectivity and even new forms of protest.²⁵¹ It is true that today emergent social media and the advancing digitalization of human relations lead to an accelerated sharing of information and images. However, no one forces us to do so. For the onlooker of “*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*”, it is impossible to refrain from having one’s gaze reflected in the mirror. If one wishes to participate, one must have their image transmitted and streamed. This shows that the crux of the matter and the condition for interaction, for human social interaction, *is* exposure. And the mirror becomes the metaphor for the constitutive object of the self, here and there.

What renders this intervention instructive for the contemporary Tunisian art scene is that the setting in public space does not limit the audience along any social, cultural, economic, or political characteristics.²⁵² The reaction to the in situ installation can be as diverse as the heterogeneous audience. And, as previously said, friction or tension caused by socio-economic diversity can turn public space into a sphere of discourse, and this is what Mani aspired to here.²⁵³ Due to her personal withdrawal during the event, the visitor is “presupposed as a subject of independent thought, which is the essential prerequisite for political action.”²⁵⁴ The work’s open-opportunity structure does not overstrain or coerce the participant to fulfil any requirements. Autonomy, self-determination, and the splitting of presence encourage civic imagination and animate people to experiment with technology, virtuality, and sensory perception. It is political *precisely* because the participative space interrogates the *real* dynamics and currents within the public sphere of Sidi Bou Saïd. One might argue that this work performatively reveals the global interconnectivity of today’s society while critically, even ironically, submitting its content back into the vast virtual network of the world wide web.

²⁵¹ Downey 2014, p. 66.

²⁵² Milevska 2013, online.

²⁵³ Bishop 2004, p. 79.

²⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 77.

4.2.1.2. “*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*”

The multimedia installation “*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*” (fig. 11) is the second part of the project, that – along with “*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*” – was shown in the course of the artistic festival “*De Colline En Colline. Three Hills*” in Tunisia from March 23rd until 24th, 2013.

Mani and the computer scientists Manel Lamine and Chokri Khalifa²⁵⁵ developed an installation that was set up in two rooms of a rural, cave-like house in the village of Chenini. The entrance room included a laptop, a video projector, and a Kinect.²⁵⁶ While the laptop delivered the data, i.e. screenshots from the pedestrian zone of Sidi Bou Saïd, the video projector caught the visitor from behind and automatically integrated him into the street scene, with the Kinect serving as hand device for flipping through the screenshots (fig. 11). The technical ensemble synergistically projected this amalgamation of different temporalities onto the opposite rough stone wall. By overlapping the actual temporality of the installation in Chenini with images from Sidi Bou Saïd, Mani played with and challenged the traditional space-time matrix and the fixation of presence since the work “*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*” pasted the participant in Chenini into “*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*” that had taken place a fortnight before via the digital street image from Sidi Bou Saïd.

The next room featured a thermo-sensitive camera that projected the participant’s shadows – the color scheme varied according to the body’s temperature – from behind onto the opposite wall (fig. 13). By moving back and forth the participant was able to project different colors onto the wall.

“*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*” was assessed along the same research question as the work conceived for Sidi Bou Saïd, i.e. the question of how Mani creates and shapes participative spaces. The analytical focus of this work, however, slightly differs in terms of the aspects that are going to be investigated in relation to the installation. Given the conceptual contiguity to “*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*”, this analysis is also going to address the concept of the body. This serves the purpose of

²⁵⁵ Bishop 2004, p. 143.

²⁵⁶ A Kinect, a compound of the words kinetic and connect, is a hardware device sensing lines of motion within a specified frame, usually used for video gaming.

highlighting one aspect that has also been enacted, albeit not to the same extent, in “*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*”. Before moving on to the analysis, we are going to briefly outline where the work, as a political statement, must be enlisted.

In 2012, Ounaina claimed that art before the ‘revolution’ was exclusively an aesthetic matter, reserved for a small elite and that since 2011 artistic production is characterized by boldness and courage and the urgency to address the uncomfortable past. The political subversion was not only supported and largely carried by artists but it also empowered them in a sense that audacious statements were attempted in order to establish a healthy, balanced, and sustainable democratic sphere, wherein culture and critical arts can find their rightful place.²⁵⁷ With “*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*”, Mani opts for broaching/touching the human sensorium as a means to communicate a different perspective on contemporary art in Tunisia. By doing so, she taps into the legacy of the modernist sensorium. But, instead of countering the technologizing of the senses, she assimilates with the technological culture of today. In Jones’ reading of this intention it has to be applauded, as she suggests that “dropping in to sample artist’s edgy sensorial art and learn from our own response”²⁵⁸ is what today’s politics demand.

To envision “*alter-topian*”²⁵⁹ narratives through artworks at the nexus of corporeality and virtuality is to provide additional, critical perspectives and modes of being. Today, “alternatives can emerge at the periphery of the carefully cultivated sensory bandwidths we recognize from high modernism, but also from digital abstraction that radically extends, translates, amplifies, or detaches the senses.”²⁶⁰ What unites artists’ endeavors, however, is their aim to produce highly social effects instead of isolating the viewer through, for example, targeted sound at one focal point. To experiment at the nexus of virtuality and corporeality necessitates an open-opportunity structure that allows putting into question familiar types of reality, subjectivity, and traditional patterns or habits. Anranter, Barry, and Dumreicher suggest that participants ultimately arrive at the question: “What is the impact of socio-political [and environmental] changes on my own life?”²⁶¹ Technologically augmented viewer

²⁵⁷ For example, the street artist, JR’s Artocracy project in Tunisia, “Inside Out”, which saw the photographs of ordinary Tunisians replace the monumental depictions of power of Ben Ali. <https://www.jr-art.net/projects/artocracy-in-tunisia> [last accessed: 13 October 2018].

²⁵⁸ Jones 2002, p. 42.

²⁵⁹ Ibidem.

²⁶⁰ Ibidem.

²⁶¹ Anranter, Barry, and Dumreicher 2016, p. 118.

perception aims at forming spaces that invite an independent and self-reflective reconsideration of decisions about technology and society.

Mani invites the participant to reassess the ease with which we allow technology into our lives and how carelessly we allow systems to take over means of control, as previously discussed in relation to the work in Sidi Bou Saïd. In this work, an intimate sensation like body heat, usually invisible, is suddenly visualized and sensorial data becomes visible for everyone in the room. Harnessing heat technology alludes to control and surveillance mechanisms, unmistakably resulting out of its original use in military services. The body, one can see, constitutes the core element from which all associations and interpretations begin.

Our declaration of the body as aesthetic prerequisite evokes Liam Gillick's statement: "My work is like the light in the fridge, it only works when there are people there to open the fridge door. Without people, it's not art – it's something else – stuff in a room."²⁶² It appears as if Gillick's quote describes Mani's installation since "*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*" requires the body's heat for the camera to receive and transcribe data, i.e. the participant's corporeal presence is decisive for the work's completion. The installation in the entrance room also requires the presence and movement of the participant in order to fully unfold its participatory interface. Otherwise, the video projector merely projects a digital photograph onto the opposite wall. The insertion in the digitally augmented scene through the camera from behind and the Kinect to swipe the images show that in Mani's participative spaces the user transgresses the imperative to decode symbols or interpret materiality and is confronted with his emotions towards technological prostheses. Visually and haptically involved, the participant now uses his very own body in the installation as generator and executor of and representation of movement.²⁶³

Art historically, the corporeal involvement in aesthetics prefigured a structural shift in the understanding of the 'viewer in action', with

"Kinetic Art and Nouvelle Tendance collectives (Groupe Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV) in Paris, ZERO in Germany, Gruppo T and Gruppo N in Italy, and many others) [who] researched, practiced, and theorized

²⁶² Gillick 2000, p. 16.

²⁶³ Stiles and Shanken 2011 in Lovejoy, Paul, and Vesna 2011, p. 45.

audience participation in visual art. Nicolas Schöffer's "CYSP I," 1956, for example, was programmed to respond electronically to its environment, and to involve the viewer as a key component, influencing how the work behaved over time."²⁶⁴

This shift signaled a transition in art "from a dependence on metaphor to one of virtual and actual connection"²⁶⁵ that built upon 'empathic projection.'

If the body generates movement and conditions connections, we must question how the body materializes. In order to understand these processes and their implications it is pivotal to demarcate the notion of the body from embodiment. The *body*, as Hayles suggests, is a construction based on cultural assumptions, a blending of different human 'samples' and an 'outside', attempting to culturally represent a general form. External concepts contribute to our understanding of the body, which stem from our culture, experiences, and beliefs; in short, our empirical knowledge.²⁶⁶ *Embodiment*, on the other hand, is a concept resulting from the inside: emotions, feelings and sensations. Although embodiment, too, is culturally constructed, it emerges from the entwinement of the conscious mind and the evolutionary, biological features of our body.²⁶⁷ For our reading of the work, the 'emergent phenomena' of body *and* embodiment, resulting from a constant process, a dynamic flux, to fixed entities, codes or values must be juxtaposed.²⁶⁸

In "*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*", it appears as if Mani blurs the borders between the two concepts because she demands the physical body of the participant to act when swiping through the screenshots and setting oneself in another context. A second glance reveals that in the first and, especially, in the second room the process of embodiment takes place. The installation triggers sensations and emotional responses due to technical intricacy, and webs the participant into a net of external references and virtually augmented experiences that unveil biological features of the human body. In tandem with Hayles' exegesis, Mani's

²⁶⁴ Stiles and Shanken 2011 in Lovejoy, Paul, and Vesna 2011, p. 54. For a comprehensive of the history of kinetic and participatory art see Frank Popper "Origins and Development of Kinetic Art" (1968) or "Art – Action and Participation" (1975).

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 46.

²⁶⁶ Hayles 2002, p. 298.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 297.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 298.

participative spaces refuse “to grant embodiment a status prior to relation”,²⁶⁹ which means that

*“changes in the environment are deeply interrelated with changes in embodiment. Living in a technologically engineered and information-rich environment brings with it associated shifts in habits, postures, enactments, perceptions—in short, changes in the experiences that constitute the dynamic lifeworld we inhabit as embodied creatures.”*²⁷⁰

The constant exchange is the generator of dissent and agreements with conceptions about the body. McLuhan emphasized this phenomenon in 1964 when he claimed that to observe changes in the environment is to observe our use of technology, namely how we utilize it and how much space and control we allow it. We must bear in mind that technological environments produce flows of information that shift “habits, postures, enactments, perceptions—in short, [change our] experiences that constitute the dynamic lifeworld we inhabit as embodied creatures.”²⁷¹ This statement, in my interpretation, justifies the conclusion that the dynamic and relational contingency of “*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*” broaches the senses and emotions of the participant in order to observe technology’s paths and implications in our very own lives. Endless possibilities and uncanny mechanisms are exemplified in the specific metaphysical artistic realm that requires the audience to engage inter-subjectively and responsibly in order to benefit from the unusual participatory interface.

How the aspect of participation unfolds must be considered in relation to the given, local context. Thus, the peripheral location of the old Berber village – far from the cultural and political power centers of Tunis, Sfax, and Sousse – is a significant aspect for a site of artistic intervention. Chenini, in the south of the country, typifies an ancient Tunisia, seemingly isolated and bearing living conditions unimaginable for younger generations. That the local conditions also rendered the mounting of “*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*” a difficult venture reiterates the work’s entrenchment in today’s conception of site-specific art. It seizes locational impediments and makes them part of the work, as opposed to the self-referential modernist works of the late 1960s and early 1970s in the European and North American contexts. In this regard, we need to ask what it implies when a participative new media installation is mounted in the local, peripheral site of Chenini. Terminologically, *periphery*

²⁶⁹ Hayles 2002, p. 299.

²⁷⁰ Ibidem.

²⁷¹ Ibidem.

evolved out of dependency theory, and thus is rooted in a theory permeated by domination and subjection. However, the term has to be understood in a different way throughout this thesis. Within this research context, peripheries are comprehended as “geographically remote or socially singled-out areas,”²⁷² as suggested by Huber and Kamel. Stein Rokkan (1999) provides a distinction of the three domains of peripherality of social life: political, economic, and cultural dimensions.²⁷³

With respect to the scope of this thesis, the dynamics beyond the established power centers proved to be decisive for the outcome of the Arab Spring in the MENA, which is why the periphery of Tunisia carried and still carries historical value. The geographical as well as societal peripheries were ascribed a central role in the political events of 2010 and even earlier,²⁷⁴ according to Khaled Elghamry (2015), Huber and Kamel (2015), and Kamel and Huber (2015). Huber and Kamel author a decentering research agenda implying that rural populations articulate in a specific manner strategies of opposition and mobilization linked to their experience of marginalization and exclusion. By means of mobilizing international connections, aligning with social movements, and utilizing media as ‘periphery-empowering tools’, the people of remote areas of the MENA redefined civic empowerment. In this regard we must open up the issue of the periphery to a global one.

For the research of Huber and Kamel also encompasses the relations of different geographical areas of the world to one another, thus an excursion to the double-periphery enacted in this work. Blaming the West for, rather than intervening in, the ‘resilient regimes’ of the MENA, spending time analyzing the dynamics within them that allowed despotic rulers to govern whilst the marginalization of those regions went ahead. In tandem, to impose forcibly a neoliberal market agenda onto these countries resulted in these regions being ‘othered’ by the industrial nations.²⁷⁵ I would even go further and argue that neocolonial structures could result out of the imposition neoliberal capitalism. Whereas Huber and Kamel assert that these countries have been declared as ‘hinterland’ in opposition to a civilized humanity, this thesis

²⁷² Huber and Kamel 2015, p. 128.

²⁷³ According to Rokkan 1999, p. 114: One could further differ between a horizontal periphery, signifying “an outlying area within the territory controlled by a centre,” i.e. geographic and a vertical periphery referring to a “space as the totality of a system of interaction, within which the centre consists of a set of key decision-makers, while the periphery is composed of those sets of participants in this interaction system who have the least influence upon the central group and upon the making of decisions.” (Stein Rokkan 1999, p. 114)

²⁷⁴ Ben Mhenni 2011, pp. 42-43.

²⁷⁵ Kamel and Huber 2015, pp. 275-276 and 278-279.

affirms that this, alas, can be considered one of the barriers Western critics and curators imposed on cultural production from those regions.²⁷⁶

If we now return to Chenini and the space that Mani's installation shaped through enabling interaction and participation, we need to consider the artwork, the artist, and the public in certain peripheral contexts; that is, the local community, a community – most presumably – foreign to contemporary artistic discourses and positions on participatory or site-specific art, as one part of the audience present. Artists and visitors from Tunis and other cities accounted for the rest of the assembled public in Chenini (fig. 12). Implying that a heterogeneous audience jointly experienced Mani's new media installations without being gathered along any economic, cultural, or political parameters, a presumed diverse set of opinions and perspectives ensured that the reception of the participatory interface and the operational structure of the work varied.

Curious onlookers were invited to discover technology *de-coded* from original and *re-coded* with new uses. "*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*" allowed for experiencing the ambivalence of the digitalization of social relationships and showed how temporal and spatial matrices can easily be subverted by simulating a temporal and spatial proximity through the means of digital technology. Presumably, spectators encountered the subverted use of heat technology through Mani's lens of artistic de-coding by redirecting the original use of heat technology for military purposes which undoubtedly triggered a critical or equivocal sentiment in one or another member of the audience.

To de-code these systems, re-appropriate the uses of networks and technology and scrutinize the place from which one speaks can only happen when both audience and artist allow subjective and individual experiences and emotions to enter the work. Mani modelled a space in which new sites of enunciation might be created. To arrive at a consensus about the work's agency is irrelevant. On the contrary, "*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*" served to sustain debates and tensions on an inter-subjective level. A participative space inevitably evokes Nancy's claim that dialogue sustains a sense of "being-together."²⁷⁷ I argue that the idiosyncratic structure of equivalence implemented in "*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*" allowed for the emancipation of *every* spectator because of its democratic and open structure.

²⁷⁶ Kamel and Huber 2015, p. 279.

²⁷⁷ Nancy 2000, pp. 132-133 (original version: 1996, p. 122).

One might even argue that Mani promoted civic empowerment through site-specific art by attempting to eliminate reluctances towards contemporary art and technological prostheses by fostering involvement “in a sensory immediacy.”²⁷⁸ The postcolonial task of postmodernity, as proposed by Bhabha, is to enable new narratives and this was fulfilled with “*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*”.

²⁷⁸ Kwon 2002, p. 11.

4.2.1.3. Conclusion

Mani's decision to employ digitally enhanced technological devices that invite spectators to interact and participate needs be considered an intentional positioning in an art historical tradition. As we have seen above, inquiring how new technologies are capable of manipulating our lifeworld of humans by opting for a medium extrinsic to the traditional aesthetic service is a political choice.

The site-specific, transitory, and participatory scenarios created during "*De Colline En Colline. Three Hills*" contribute to the maintenance of a contested public sphere in that they allow for debate and dissent. But more importantly, they amalgamate audiences that differ in economic, political, and cultural status, and both strong and weak publics become facilitated to envision a democratic sphere that is neither separated from the state nor a mere autonomous opinion maker. With her works for the festival "*De Colline En Colline. Three Hills*" Mani partook in the ongoing process of the democratization of (contemporary) art in Tunisia. While "*Vous êtes ici... et ailleurs! (You are here... and elsewhere!)*" precisely locates the observer and the observed by means of digital technology, it simultaneously splits his or her presence, and hence interrogates the certainty of presence. The first part of "*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*", too, strives to distort time-space relations. With disorienting perceptions, the visitor faces the opposition of the ancient rural setting and new media devices that communicates both a certain kind of playfulness and the possibility to escape into a colorful yet uncannily digitalized and networked world.²⁷⁹

The second part of "*Temps augmenté (Augmented time)*" introduces a technology extrinsic to the traditional aesthetic service, creating a space for exploring the original use of heat camera technology. By transferring the power to perform to the public, Mani invites the audience to debate jointly the techno-cultural status quo, its consequences for interpersonal conviviality, and communication at the speed of innovation.²⁸⁰ Thus, these ephemeral spaces, presumably served as sites of transient, but not necessarily short-lived, experiences for diverse groups of people to discuss, evolve, and develop together. What is more, potentially, the festival also benefitted the establishment of an independent cultural sphere and a diversified understanding

²⁷⁹ Rokkan 1999, p. 114.

²⁸⁰ Jones 2006, p. 2.

of contemporary art on site, a venture that certainly depends upon the creation of oppositional platforms such as the event “*De Colline En Colline. Three Hills.*”

4.3. Opening Up Postcolonial Spaces

*“When historical visibility has faded, when the present tense of testimony loses its power to arrest, then the displacements of memory and the indirections of art offer us the image of our psychic survival.”*²⁸¹

As previously stated, Bhabha’s postcolonial theory is crucial to our understanding of the main claims of this thesis. In the following chapter, the term ‘postcolonial’ is applied in a twofold way.

Firstly, methodologically it holds true for the entire analysis of Mani’s practice since it delineates a set of heterogeneous critical methods, that – broadly speaking – refute Western or Eurocentric claims as universal. Addressing art works from non-Western regions, particularly, necessitates a profound examination of these methods, because postcolonialism in art history denotes a historical, moral, and political problem. Capturing foreign cultures as formal repositories for the enrichment of Western artists styles – just think of ‘primitivism’, the ethnographic approach to foreign cultures, and the failed attempts to exhibit non-Western and Western artefacts together – originally arose hand in hand with colonialism.²⁸²

Reducing the particularity of individual artistic inscriptions erases cultural differences and depreciates regional specificities on a historical, political, and conceptual level. For our reading, Bhabha’s terminological demarcation is key as he replaces cultural *specificity*, which “may be pursued to a point where an outsider is disallowed from speaking, either through insufficient knowledge, or because of the ethical problems incurred when one person decides to speak on behalf of someone else”,²⁸³ with cultural *difference*. The processes and moments emerging out of the articulation of precisely those cultural differences constitute spaces “for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.”²⁸⁴ In that sense it is the postcolonial critic’s task to abstain from neo-colonialist typifying and attempting to speak for someone else. Instead a postcolonial approach “challenges or questions the authority of some voices, and demands that others be heard.”²⁸⁵

²⁸¹ Bhabha 1994, p. 26.

²⁸² Hatt and Klonk 2006, p. 225.

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 236.

²⁸⁴ Bhabha 1994, p. 2.

²⁸⁵ Hatt and Klonk 2006, p. 223.

When we attempt the examination of works of cultural production beyond our own culture we must internalize Nicholas Thomas' postulation: "While an account may aspire to offer a global theory ... any text on colonialism will be deeply shaped both by the positions from which we speak and by the particular kinds of texts and histories we feel compelled to address."²⁸⁶ Thomas urges the writer, critic, curator, and spectator to take his own blind spot into consideration, and to make all efforts to do justice to the place from where the artist speaks.

Secondly, the term 'postcolonial' also stands for a multi-level struggle in countries and regions where uneven power relations still affect the social, political, economic, and civic life of communities. To be precise, "postcolonial theory is inextricably related to political struggles in various parts of the world, the decolonization of many countries after the Second World War, and the fight for racial and ethnic equality around the globe."²⁸⁷ Michael Hatt and Charlotte Klonk allude to an ongoing endeavor in many regions of the world. It is indispensable for this master's thesis to embed the critical methods that postcolonialism provides as we are dealing with the cultural production of a country that was under a foreign protectorate for more than seventy years. Beyond this aspect, "*Leurre liquide (Liquid lure)*" (2014) necessitates that the term postcolonialism is tackled as a substantial element of the work. Bhabha's understanding of postcolonialism, as elaborated in "The Location of Culture" (1994), is instructive for assessing how Mani's acoustic intervention in the historically charged city of Gafsa constructs postcolonial spaces.²⁸⁸ He proposes a reevaluation of culture as the

*"shift from the cultural as an epistemological object to culture as an enactive, enunciatory site opens up possibilities for other 'times' of cultural meaning (retroactive, prefigurative) and other narrative spaces (fantasmic, metaphorical). [Bhabha's] purpose in specifying the enunciative present in the articulation of culture is to provide a process by which objectified others may be turned into subjects of their history and experience."*²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ Thomas 1994, p. 27.

²⁸⁷ Hatt and Klonk 2006, p. 225.

²⁸⁸ See the following chapter for an extensive account of the history of Gafsa.

²⁸⁹ Bhabha 1994, p. 255.

By calling the locus of culture into question, Bhabha instructs to appropriate the history of modernity as a sign because it is inextricably linked to colonialism. The significance of *post*modernity is that the boundaries of ethnocentric ideologies become obvious as the in-between space, the site of enunciation for “dissonant, even dissident histories and voices – women, the colonized, minority groups, the bearers of policed sexualities.”²⁹⁰ Bhabha articulates that the past must become a repository, a projective past that can be harnessed for postcolonial translation that comprises the repetitive practice of enunciating the signs of modernity from a new position. As a result, according to the contingency of the place of utterance, a new site of enunciation is created. A projective past sublates the ‘progressivist myth’ of modernity – owing its success to colonialism – that is based on polarities and binaries, and it rejects the notion of progressivism resulting from the ideology of a regressive past in opposition to the forward-looking present. Postcolonial translation refutes the belatedness of subjects of oppression and dispossession.²⁹¹ More importantly, the time-lag between modernity and the present must be considered a projective past whose systems, codes, and merits can be revalued in new, different, and local contexts. Without attempting to rewrite modernity, postcolonial voices ought to co-opt the time-lag, the split subjectivity, because “[t]he possibility of inciting cultural translations across minority discourses arises because of the disjunctive present of modernity.”²⁹² Culture, therefore, should capitalize on the time-lag in order to provide alternatives for psychic survival through “the displacements of memory [or] the indirections of art”,²⁹³ as stated in Bhabha’s writing.

Art approaching postcolonial issues, I argue, partakes in precisely this task of sustaining alternatives that disclaim amnesia or the forgetting of the past. Certainly, the provocative and critical interventions affect on an emotional level. However, the re-appropriation of public space in Tunisia, a space previously reserved for monumental depictions of power is charged with emotions and memory. Historically laden space should become equally accessible, a site for the contestation and renegotiation of the boundaries of the private and the public. Mani here infiltrates contingent processes by intervening in the public sphere as she interrogates current socio-political orders and the attitudes towards the colonial past. A public setting can nourish the emergence of different perspectives on established historical narratives and might

²⁹⁰ Bhabha 1994, p. 6.

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 355, 363-364, 366.

²⁹² Ibid., pp. 354-355.

²⁹³ Ibid., p. 26.

even allow formerly subaltern or disenfranchised, hence mute, voices to become audible, individually or collectively.

4.3.1. “*Leurre liquide (Liquid lure)*”

“Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction.”²⁹⁴

The title “*Leurre liquide (Liquid lure)*” (fig. 17) intimates the conceptual polyvalence of this site-specific installation installed in Gafsa. For one day, on 8th January, 2014, loudspeakers produced the sound of water and children playing in a previously highly frequented public site of Gafsa. Aimed at broaching the issue of the still palpable colonial past of the city, the sound installation alluded to the uneven power relations once established by the colonial rulers during the French protectorate. By approaching the public in pre-installation discussions, Mani intended to address the local community with a matter relevant to their lifeworld. By evoking both a memory and a desire, Mani accepted and probably considered that “*Leurre liquide (Liquid lure)*” would touch people on a highly emotional level.

Building upon the long cultural history of Tunisia, the site for the work were the *piscines romaines* (Roman pools) in Gafsa, a legacy of the Roman sieges (fig. 18). The pools used to supply the village with water and were a public site for local communities. As opposed to other traditional Muslim cities where the mosque acts as the civic and social center, the pools represented intergenerational spaces for social gathering and public debate, as well as for swimming and play. The period of the French protectorate (1881–1956/57) saw changes in the geopolitical landscape in and around Gafsa as phosphate resources were discovered and the CPG (*Compagnie des Phosphates et de Chemin de Fer de Gafsa*) was founded in 1897. As a result of the high water demand for the mines, the Roman pools were drained. Placated by the fact that the CPG provided reliable employment and allowed the formation of unions, the residents of Gafsa acquiesced to the disruption caused by their suddenly curtailed community life. Presumably, this was also due to the fact that the CPG affirmed ever since that the water will eventually come back. In this regard, it should be noted that Gafsa and the CPG are also considered a crucial factor contributing to the political upheaval of 2010.

Research by Kamel and Huber (2015) on the role of the Tunisian peripheries before, during, and after the Arab Spring has shown that the societal and political equilibrium had already

²⁹⁴ Bakhtin 1984, p. 110.

started to lose its balance in and around Gafsa in 2008. Bloody protests in Redeyef, a commune in the governate of Gafsa, lasted for almost one year and were eventually suppressed by President Ben Ali and his police apparatus. They were the result of a manipulated call for positions at the state-run CPG in which the available positions were all filled by government supporters of Ben Ali. The ratio of 80 vacancies to 1000 applicants illustrates the local community's despair and their unbridled will to revolt against the prevailing conditions.²⁹⁵

This historical backdrop aids in illustrating how the site-specific soundscape that immersed the streets of Gafsa with the sound of water affected the local community and how Mani's work created specific transient conditions for dialogue, touching on an ongoing collective search for truth and justice.

Mani's research on the site of Gafsa preceding the installation was largely built upon the question of what worried and preoccupied the local community; she appreciated the site as constructed by social, economic, and political dynamics.²⁹⁶ Today's site-oriented art subordinates the actuality of a location to "a discursively determined site that is delineated as a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate."²⁹⁷ Arguably, Kwon's assertion appears to be conceptually implemented in "*Leurre liquide (Liquid lure)*". For to study what is at stake locally testifies to a kind of burrowing and excavating of histories, stories, and relations that can be considered characteristic of this work.²⁹⁸ Discussions and debates in Gafsa eventually revealed that the aftermath of the colonial protectorate, i.e. the empty Roman pools and the functioning of the CPG, still enormously concerned the communities and that its implications were by no means a matter of the past.

With loudspeakers on the bottom of the empty Roman pools, the installation promptly attracted the public who came to see whether the water really had come back. During the interview, Mani explained that people began to recount childhood stories, of better times when the water was still there, and how vital the site had been for civic life. Upon arrival, people even started crying. By touching upon a sore point with "*Leurre liquide (Liquid lure)*" the artist anticipated and provoked emotional reactions, and devised her equally accessible

²⁹⁵ Kamel and Huber 2015, p. 278 and Ben Mhenni 2011, pp. 42-43.

²⁹⁶ Kwon 2002, p. 3.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 26.

²⁹⁸ This claim is further corroborated by the fact that she refers to herself as a *plasticien chercheur* ("research plastician").

installation as a trigger for responses. However, it is precisely the question of affect that renders an artwork sustainable for a community, as Anranter, Barry, and Dumreicher assert.²⁹⁹ It is the acoustic trickery of water that alluded to an unspoken, yet haunting past, which was re-appropriated through the means of contemporary art. By performatively constructing a phenomenological space, Mani provoked the exchange of expectations on a postcolonial past, and exposed the community's powerlessness and its subordination to former institutional structures still in place today.

As Bakhtin's epigraph reminds us, the truth can only be uncovered collectively and in dialogue. It is not necessarily a consensus resulting out of interpersonal exchange that matters but the fact that dialogue and debate take place. For dialogue, as Nancy postulates, builds the ground for a community.³⁰⁰ Artistic interventions alter how spaces and the social are perceived in relation to specific sites, Anranter, Barry, and Dumreicher argue. Ultimately, a sustainable site-specific installation could, or rather should, lead to the audience asking: "What is the impact of socio-political and environmental changes on my own life?"³⁰¹ Hence, it can lead up to increased self-reflection, as long as it is built upon the local history, as an integral issue arising out of the community.³⁰²

By relating her work to the history of Gafsa, Mani explicitly illuminated a dark part of Tunisia's history. The artist acted as the postcolonial critic who accepted the responsibility for those who were not heard, not represented, and whose shadows and histories haunt today's historical present.³⁰³ Evidently, Mani co-opted the 'indirections of art'³⁰⁴ and allowed her installation to responsibly reflect the present by redirecting the gaze to a postcolonial space that still affects the local community. In this context one question cannot be denied: Is art here harnessed in the service of community engagement, exploited as a means for civic recuperation? Not necessarily, as this would be an allegation stemming out of Western, European art history criticism. For the role of art and culture in Tunisia is connected to the public space in a historical tradition.

²⁹⁹ Anranter, Barry and Dumreicher 2016, p. 119.

³⁰⁰ Nancy 2000, pp. 132-133 (original version: 1996, p. 122).

³⁰¹ Anranter, Barry and Dumreicher 2016, p. 118.

³⁰² Kwon 2002, p. 6.

³⁰³ Bhabha 1994, p. 18.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Therefore, to let an artwork publicly address a community matter must be viewed as a statement of opposition and of engagement, and especially as a creative act. “*Leurre liquide (Liquid lure)*” provided a space and a trigger for debate, and temporarily introduced “another locus of inscription and intervention, another hybrid, ‘inappropriate’ enunciative site”³⁰⁵ wherein a postcolonial amnesia was evaded by an artist who accepted the role of an archaeologist who unveiled one aspect of Gafsa’s uncomfortable past. The work’s provocative and disruptive presence enabled the production of a contra-modern postcolonial space by re-appropriating the public space – and at the same time, a move towards democratizing the public sphere in Gafsa.

³⁰⁵ Bhabha 1994, pp. 346-347.

5. Further research

The methodological approach for this thesis is one of many possible angles to embrace the subject. Several works have been eliminated from a thorough examination, two of which are briefly going to be touched upon in this chapter.

The photographic work “*Entre elle(s)...#tunisiennes (Between them...#tunisians)*”³⁰⁶ (2013, fig. 20), inquires into the role of the woman in Tunisia today by addressing the controversial sign of the veil. The second project, “*Under the Sand*”,³⁰⁷ came to life in collaboration with Wilfried Nail. In its course, Mani acted as the curator as well as an artist. The project expands the idea of capturing a site, physically and discursively, by virtue of a transdisciplinary method of excavating the aspects of its past. Both projects testify to a deep interest in the people, the transitory society, the geography, and history of Tunisia. Mani neither limits her artistic approach to certain media nor to specific subjects, which allows researchers to address her oeuvre through very different readings.

“*Entre elle(s)...#tunisiennes (Between them...#tunisians)*” was a project that evolved out of an encounter with one of her students at the Académie des Beaux Arts in Sousse in 2012. After the abdication of President Ben Ali in 2011, religious symbols, such as the veil for women and the beard for men, were allowed (again) and one of her female students attended class in a niqab. As her teacher, Mani was not allowed to forbid her student from wearing it, but she invited her to discuss its significance for her and learn about the motives for wearing it. Mani tried to share her concerns about not being able to see her face when she taught her. Ultimately, without Mani forcing this outcome – she only asked her to show her face when she taught her – her student changed from a niqab to a hijab.³⁰⁸

The informal encounter yielded a photographic experiment in which Mani and her student took photos of each other whilst holding up a mirror. A doubled reflection appeared – Mani holding up the camera reflected in her students’ hands and vice versa. Demonstrating the artist’s methodological peculiarity of meticulously absorbing her surroundings, “*Entre elle(s)...#tunisiennes (Between them...#tunisians)*” merits a closer examination. Further

³⁰⁶ See: <https://souadmani.wordpress.com/2012/08/13/entre-elles-tunisiennes/> [last accessed: 11 May 2018].

³⁰⁷ See: <https://m.facebook.com/notes/under-the-sand/under-the-sand/319674198406271/> [last accessed 15 July 2017].

³⁰⁸ Interview with the artist, p. 131 in appendix 7.2.

research could be pursued regarding Mani's stance on the role of the contemporary female artist. As the space between border conditions constitutes the prolific space of translation, the confrontation Mani provokes in "*Entre elle(s)...#tunisiennes (Between them...#tunisians)*" constitutes precisely this space from where dialogue, discussion, and agitation can arise.³⁰⁹

One might ask whether the veil describes an act of political subversion, somewhere on the limits of identity and authority, as put forth by Frantz Fanon in relation to the veiled Algerian woman in "*Algeria unveiled*" (1959).³¹⁰ Therein Fanon outlines the role of the veil as a symbol of colonization that the French colonizer strove to remove. By laying his focus on the defense of the Algerian woman – depicting her as indigent, veiled, suppressed – the European colonizer tried to subvert a traditionally patrilinear society and pejoratively denoted the Algerian man as cruel, oppressive and backward. Fanon reveals the psychological and cultural consequences of the brutal clash of two cultures and puts forth the claim that no single custom of a culture can be modified "without at the same time re-evaluating its deepest values, its most stable models."³¹¹ Further research on "*Entre elle(s)...#tunisiennes (Between them...#tunisians)*" might reveal if the veil today is still considered a sign of resistance or of affiliation, or, if, especially with the younger generations, the societal divide between secular and religious forces is something that still perpetuates in Tunisia after 2011.

The project "*Under The Sand*" likewise testifies to Mani's tendency to absorb places and people. Together with Wilfried Nail, a French artist, she conceived an international and transdisciplinary project tellingly described as "*archéo-artistique*" running since 2016. The artistic encounter was a matter of priority and Mani and Nail aimed at revaluing the territory of Gafsa, located on the gateway to the Tunisian desert, through a laboratory with artists residencies. Issues related to the notions of territory and transdisciplinarity fueled the exchange between Nail and Mani, and served as the basis for the project's development. Exploring its landscape historically, politically, and ecologically, interdisciplinarity guided the laboratories in the territory of Gafsa. Archaeological processes such as excavation, extraction, and filtering revealed that which is *invisible* in this territory and examined the hydrographic condition of Gafsa as a mining basin. The idea was to investigate a singular territory and multiple landscapes along scientific, cultural, historical, and anthropological

³⁰⁹ Bhabha 1994, p. 320.

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 89.

³¹¹ Fanon 1965, pp. 41-42 (French original text: Fanon 1959, p. 24 « [L'impossibilité] organique dans laquelle se trouve une culture, de modifier l'un quelconque de ses types d'exister, sans en même temps repenser ses valeurs les plus profondes, ses modèles les plus stables. »)

interests (i.e. oases, mining and fossil sites, prehistoric deposits, archaeological remains, agrarian heritage, colonial heritage, intangible heritage). In order to rethink the signification of the place by consulting the territory with different questions, practitioners of natural (chemistry, biology, geology, etc.) and human (literature, history, philosophy, anthropology, etc.) sciences worked collaboratively. Initiatives with local educational institutions yielded workshops and other formations of collaborative work, and functioned as a resource network of skills that invited students to work in situ with the artists, engage in exchanges, and interviews with artists, and participate in roundtables.

Mani's own project "*Impressions embarquées (Boarded impressions)*" (on the rear wall of fig. 23), capitalizes on precisely these principles. Two potential scenarios were designed for the operational functioning of the work that arise out of a reflection on "ici" and "ailleurs", i.e. here and elsewhere, the obverse and the reverse of one movement. Mani interrogates ways of becoming one with a territory by extracting data via technological interfaces that measure and locate her land art intervention. The pigment of the ochre-red circle that Mani drew on the soil exemplified the dissemination and pollination, as well as the fixation and the permeation, of data and material. It alludes to nature's dynamic to spread and evolve according to climate conditions. The second proposal – taking place at night as opposed to the first scenario – saw technological devices, developed by engineers,³¹² absorb more than 3,000 meteorological data frames of the location not far from Redeyef. For the exhibition "*Metaxu. Le séjour des formes (Metaxu. The abode of forms)*" at the B'Chira Art Center in Tunis, curated by Fatma Cheffi and Marion Zilio, Mani decided to present post-performance photographs of the first scenario together with live data transmitted from Gafsa to the exhibition space in Tunis. "*Impressions embarquées (Boarded impressions)*" has to be considered as a continuation of Mani's splitting, doubling, and repeating of presence through the use of new media technology. What we have seen in the projects from 2010–2014 has now shifted to into a scientific realm that intersects with the parameters of land art. Aspects worth investigating in this work would be the role of contemporary, technologically enhanced land art occupations in relation to colonial heritage.

So far, the projects of "*Under the Sand*" have been exhibited in Nantes, France – "*Nucléus*" at L'Atelier in 2016 (fig. 21, 22) – and in Tunis – "*Metaxu. Le séjour des formes (Metaxu.*

³¹² The engineers were Ahmed Sghayer, Jawhar Mansour, Hedi Kastouri and Ahmed Kharrat. <http://souadmani.tumblr.com/post/166548068569/impressions-embarquées-plateaux-1-2-impression> [last accessed: 12 October 2018].

The abode of forms)” at the B’Chira Art Center in 2017 (fig. 23). In order to provide a sustainable dynamic and network between Tunisian and French artists, from 2019 onwards the project aims to continue as a regular event with biennial meetings, scientific and territorial research, and the promotion of artistic discourse.³¹³

Further research could also examine the methodological approach of an artistic laboratory and the history of these often trans- and interdisciplinary spaces, especially in today’s intertwinement of human and digital developments in science. In this regard, it is noteworthy to highlight a paradigm shift which has been observed for some time now: the flexibility of roles within the contemporary artist field; artists become curators, curators critics, and so forth. Further investigation could analyze the floating roles within the art scene but also, especially in regions of emerging contemporary artistic production, how this trend could be set in relation to the rise of artistic festivals and other community-based, non-state funded and independent initiatives, i.e. platforms of opposition. It would be interesting to ascertain whether these formations necessitate the agility of roles or if the switching of roles is yet another freedom they provide, as we have seen in the project “*Under The Sand.*”

³¹³ See: <http://under-the-sand.org> [last accessed 17 May 2018].

6. Conclusion

This last chapter suggests how this thesis contributes to and updates discourses in art history. In addition, it recounts what this thesis could mean for future research on the region.

In order to identify the value of this research for art historical debates, we ought to return to the hypothesis stated in the first place. Regarding the postcolonial discourse in art history, this thesis has presented how a neo-colonial approach can be avoided and priority given to the place from where art ‘speaks.’ Instead of considering the place of utterance as a confinement for artistic practices, we should prioritize it and value it as a substantial contingency and scrutinize the confinements at place. Theoretical embeddedness and the cultural environment of the artist, which influence artistic production regardless of the artist’s origin can then be acknowledged. The highest priority, therefore, has to be and was throughout the research carried out, to circumvent stigmatizing descriptions and hasty interpretations.

With regard to new media art, Mani’s interventions in real and virtual public spaces demonstrate a return to human social interaction in the service of the community. Whereas new media art accounts for a wide spectrum of possibilities – for example, through augmented viewer perception or other techniques of embedding technology into the arts – her approach differs in that it takes up modernism’s legacy and revalues her work with issues beyond an artistic agenda but with issues at stake in the environment where they are placed.

Concerning the public space that Mani seizes for her technologically enhanced installations one must consider that different dynamics coincide in Tunisia than in the Western world when the public space is just being reclaimed and re-appropriated by the public. It is differently charged, historically and traditionally, which is why it still holds a promise for the community to jointly discuss and address individual and collective histories that have excluded some while including others. Those in power have decided and controlled who would have access to contribute to a society’s formation. We can see here, with regard to Tunisia’s transitional state, that the issues at stake are also significantly current in other societies. This fact can only be appreciated if we are willing to study regions with a different understanding of community and civic engagement.

In terms of its method, this thesis could provide a new entry point for questioning the role of internationally contested concepts such as public space. For, regardless of its location, a performative artistic space allows for the investigation of, and the experimentation with, limits and limitations of social power in an agonistic realm.³¹⁴ Especially when this process introduces a split between prevalent, traditional, stable conceptions and systems, and the political present.³¹⁵ Articulations of resistance carry the potential of disturbing and interfering in spheres foreign to the artistic realm. A performative and deformative practice demonstrates that culture can be a producer of value, meaning, and new strategies of conviviality. The applied methodological approach can yield a refined consideration of theory in general. To clarify, theory can act as a *lingua franca* between different loci and attitudes by creating relations of equality on an academic level. It should be highlighted that this thesis does not advocate a methodological approach that co-opts theories regardless of their origin, but rather puts forth the need to discern the connective element of theory and recontextualize it. Through examining Mani's work, it became obvious that what must always be taken into consideration and respected is how issues are addressed, i.e. how artists methodologically tackle issues. Only by doing so will we, eventually, arrive at a sense of equality when writing about art.

With attention to Tunisia's transitory phase since the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring, the role of culture in this specific context must be highlighted. As mentioned above, contemporary art in Tunisia was considered elitist and impaired through the incalculable socio-political interests of those in power. As a result, contemporary practices were neither approachable, nor able to address a broad audience in Tunisian society. Therefore, it is worth highlighting that Mani's practice not only contributes to enriching the understanding of critical contemporary art in Tunisia, but also displays a specific kind of approachability, be it online or in public space. Precisely, this thesis revealed how Mani activates enunciative and discursive spaces for culture that are apt to accelerate Tunisia's transition into a democratic society.

³¹⁴ Bhabha 1994, p. 41.

³¹⁵ Ibid., p. 51.

7. Appendix

7.1. Tunisia – A politico-historical overview

To begin with, we must acknowledge that the history of Tunisia is characterized by heteronomy and national revolt. On May 12th, 1881 Tunisia came under French protectorate as the Bey signed the “Contract of Bardo.” The “Contract of La Marsa,” signed five months later, obliged Tunisia to implement all measures recommended by France while it installed a parallel government from which Tunisia’s educational elite were expelled. At end of the 19th century the elite formed groups in order to promote modernizing and reforming the Tunisian society. The bilingual elite belonged to the Muslim Arab culture but at the same time they published in liberal French newspapers. However, their endeavors, such as bilingualism and societal modernization after the European model were rejected by the conservative Ulama families of the country, who only accepted the Islamic scholar as a voice of the people. While the party, “Jeunes Tunisiens”, initially benefitted from the French protectorate, the situation changed when France began to exercise domestic policy more repressively and ultimately forbade the “Jeunes Tunisiens,” fearing the development of a national consciousness.³¹⁶

The First World War marked a change for national movements, which previously aimed for a collaboration with the occupiers, and now reacted to France’s interventions in the economy and administration by withdrawing their efforts. On a socio-economical level, the occupation yielded in negative changes for Tunisian society and a shift of ownership and production structures. In 1920, Europeans had appropriated 14-18% of fertile ground in the north of the country. As a result, farmers were forced to settle in the middle of the country, in turn displacing the local nomads. This expropriation led to socio-economic disparities, both in the countryside and in the cities, where a wage-working tier emerged that began to form trade unions in the 1920s and 1930s.

With a new, educated, bilingual, and diversified generation, the efforts of the national movement finally found adherents besides the urban elite. The newly founded “Parti Néo-Destourien” (PND) – a successor of the former “Parti Destourien” (PD) – condemned the socio-economic problems of the rural population and urged national independence.³¹⁷ The third phase of the national movement attained the support from both rural and urban populations and was supported throughout the social classes. The reason for the unlimited

³¹⁶ Faath 1989, p. 59.

³¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 65-67.

support was Habib Bourguiba, who, himself, came from the Sahel and was educated at the Collège Sadiki.³¹⁸ He envisioned a new Tunisia that stayed true to its Arab Muslim culture yet, at the same time, opened itself up to modern, European political thinking.³¹⁹ From 1952 until 1955 Bourguiba was placed under house arrest, until France accepted Tunisia's internal demand for autonomy in 1954. It was not until March 20th, 1956 that France officially declared Tunisia independent. After the abdication of the Bey, Bourguiba ruled from July 25th, 1957 for 30 years.³²⁰

The constitution of June 1st, 1959 granted Bourguiba absolute power and allowed him to appoint government officials, civil and military, hence giving him control of the structures of official institutions.³²¹ Although Islam was named the official state religion, Bourguiba and his modern adherents relegated religion to a rather subordinate role. The goal was secular control of Islam through the state, which led to the abolition of Sharia-law³²² and polygamy, the encouragement of gender equality, and the introduction of a divorce law, which were pioneering decisions for the Arab world in 1956. With religious personnel having a civil servant status, religion became part of the state apparatus.

The reformed status of Tunisian women and the radical Islamist politics aroused hardly any protests, but Bourguiba's education reform, particularly the alterations concerning religious education.³²³ Among more traditional currents, discontent emerged in Bourguiba's party, mainly concerning the prevailing image of women and the secular imbrication of religious education. As a result, in the 1970s and 1979³²⁴ Tunisia witnessed the first emergence of an Islamist movement when the traditionalists separated themselves from Bourguiba's party. The traditionalists enunciated a politico-ideological conception of Islam that differed significantly from the official state concept.³²⁵ While they remained oppressed by state officials and in the media, the Islamist movement has been a socio-political current ever since. The emancipation of women, for example, illustrates the modern ideal of Tunisia that Bourguiba had in mind and enforced with differing degrees of success. The social changes in Tunisian society that

³¹⁸ For a German explanation of "Collège Sadiki" see Müller 2012, p. 12.

³¹⁹ Faath 1989, p. 68.

³²⁰ Ibid., pp. 77-80.

³²¹ Verfassung der Republik Tunesiens 2011 (1959), online.

³²² Faath 1989, p. 20.

³²³ Ibid., p. 139.

³²⁴ In 1979 Iran saw an Islamic revolution that led to a similar movement in Tunisia and Algeria. Abdol Hossein 1994, p. 92.

³²⁵ Faath 1989, p. 140.

enabled women to study, become doctors and police women, keep their salaries, and be an active part of the society was in the beginning limited to the capital, Tunis.

Socio-economic inequality overshadowed this development with recurring inner political crises. It was particularly evident in the North-South division – and oppositional interests – since the PSD would neither acknowledge conflicts nor allow for oppositional parties. A number of ambivalent decisions, such as the use of weapons against the Tunisian people during two uprisings in 1980 and 1983/84, along with Bourguiba's constantly deteriorating health condition culminated in Prime Minister Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's 'medical coup' in November 1987.

Among his first fundamental decisions were the renaming of the PSD³²⁶ to RCD ("*Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique*") and the initiative towards a multiple party system, although the RCD never allowed for fair electoral campaigns and remained the dominating party until 2011. Moreover, Ben Ali allowed the release of 5,000 political prisoners, the opening of an Amnesty International office in Tunis, and the free circulation of Islamist movements.

Ben Ali pursued Bourguiba's course of modernization by fostering women's rights, reducing the illiteracy rate from 55% in 1975 to 20% in 2008, and promoting education, with 37.9% of 19-24 year old's matriculating in universities in 2009/10. By allowing a radio broadcast of a call to prayer five times per day Ben Ali also reconciled with religious Islamist voices, though critics regarded this move as a means of control.³²⁷ Nevertheless, in terms of economic development, under his rule Tunisia was voted most competitive economy of Africa by the World Economic Forum in 2009.³²⁸ Although Ben Ali's reformist measures would suggest otherwise, his rule was pervaded by nepotism and clientelism, and a small powerful elite exploited the country. His 'presidential dictatorship,' therefore, did not signify a rupture with the former regime but, on the contrary, the reforms led to the prolongation and even solidification of the former regime structure.

Dissatisfaction returned quickly after his assuming office because Islamists were once again imprisoned,³²⁹ the opposition repressed, and the illusion of freedom destroyed. Additionally,

³²⁶ The PND was renamed PSD "*Parti Socialiste Destourien*" in 1964. Müller 2012, p. 33.

³²⁷ Faath 1989, pp. 219-221.

³²⁸ Sydow 2011, online.

³²⁹ Schmid and Nordhausen 2011, p. 22.

economic development remained far off for a large part of the population, and promises for programs for enhancing the socio-economic situation remained only this. Furthermore, corruption and nepotism hindered well-educated Tunisians from holding public office and as a result general discontent intensified. While Ben Ali propagandized the implementation of human rights, international human rights organizations were aware of the arbitrary imprisonments, torture, and solitary confinement.³³⁰ There was a considerable lack of freedom of speech and freedom of press, and Ben Ali implemented total control of the media and the internet: sites such as CNN, Amnesty International or YouTube were not accessible.³³¹ Technological progress, however, still had consequences for the population since Ben Ali used technology to build a surveillance state and every Tunisian had to carry an electronic identity card bearing information about their profession, previous convictions, and personal details. Moreover, the country was ruled by a vast spy system.³³²

In 2008, Gafsa became the center of attention due to the unfair allocation of positions in the city's phosphate mines. Protests spread over the whole country but were suppressed; some voices consider these as setting the course for the revolution two years later. Socio-economic problems such as unemployment and increased living expenses as well as the corrupt and repressive politics were no longer bearable, and it was only a question of time until the last straw would break the camel's back. And on December 17th, 2010, 26 year old fruit seller Mohamed Bouazizi's cart was confiscated because he lacked a license that he could not afford.³³³ After being slapped in the face in public by a female policeman, he immolated himself in front of the governor's official residence.³³⁴ His act of desperation was considered a protest against unemployment and raging injustice,³³⁵ sparking a wave of protests not only in Tunisia but in the entire Arab world.³³⁶

Despite efforts to keep the demonstrations under wraps, soon the whole country learned of the violent reactions towards civilians as images and videos circulated on Twitter and Facebook. Ben Ali's first official reaction on the December 28th, 2010 was followed by a TV speech in January. Nonetheless, the arrest of internet activists, human rights activists, and dissidents,

³³⁰ Kirchner 2004, p. 274.

³³¹ Ibidem.

³³² Schmid and Nordhausen 2011, p. 22.

³³³ Ben Jelloun 2011, p. 37.

³³⁴ Schmid and Nordhausen 2011, p. 17.

³³⁵ Muhammad 2011, online.

³³⁶ Ibidem.

and the growing number of deaths as a result of the demonstrations led to the incessant slogan “Ben Ali, degage!” which was now audible throughout the whole of Tunisia. On January 14th, Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi announced that Ben Ali had dissolved the government and that new elections would take place in six months. The fact that the interim government included members of the former regime caused protests once again; on March 4th, the constitution was annulled and five days later the RCD was liquidated.³³⁷

The first free elections witnessed a clear majority of the “Muslim” party “*Ennadha*,”³³⁸ – forbidden until 2011 – which formed a government with the leftist “*Ettakatol*” and “*Congrès pour la République*.”³³⁹ Human rights activist Moncef Marzouki became the interim president of the newly constituted state.³⁴⁰ In 2014, the founder of “*Nidaa Tounes*,” Béij Caïd Essebsi became the first democratically elected president of Tunisia, and thus replaced Moncef Marzouki who had come under criticism due to his proximity to the Islamist “*Ennadha*” party.³⁴¹ Although the Tunisian population sent a clear statement against the interconnection of religion and politics, “*Ennadha*” remains the second strongest power in the government.³⁴² Admittedly, low voter turnout in rural and less affluent areas of the country raised new concerns.³⁴³ This abstention is most likely a protest against the reinstatement of former political figures, such as Essebsi, who was politically active under Bourguiba as well as under Ben Ali.³⁴⁴

At stake now, according to Merone, is facilitating all social classes to find a voice to express themselves during this process of nation-building. Moreover, this transitional process is key to counteract class exclusion and consequently hinder the fundamentalist movement from spreading amongst disenfranchised social classes.³⁴⁵

³³⁷ Munzinger 2012, online.

³³⁸ Konrad Adenauer Stiftung 2011, online.

³³⁹ Kolb 2011, online.

³⁴⁰ Munzinger 2012, online.

³⁴¹ Wandler 2014, online.

³⁴² Schäfer 2014, online.

³⁴³ Ibidem.

³⁴⁴ Marks 2014, online.

³⁴⁵ Merone 2015, p. 87.

7.2. The interview with Souad Mani

The interview with Souad Mani was conducted in French on May 3rd, 2017 in Sousse, Tunisia.

Souad Mani (SM): Là, on est en train de produire un projet à Gafsa, qui s'appelle « Under The Sand ». C'est un projet international, franco-tunisien. On fait des projets transdisciplinaires, en fait, archéologiques et nous sommes des artistes multidisciplinaires. Surtout ce sont des artistes chercheurs, ce ne sont pas de artistes seulement, ce sont des universitaires aussi, il y a des docteurs, en même temps des artistes visuelles. On fait de la vidéo, on travaille beaucoup avec le numérique, par exemple. Plein de *plantures*, en fait. Un est aussi un performeur ; Il Rahman ; il fait une performance dans l'institut des beaux arts chemal... On a deux pages, l'association DELTA et aussi le projet « Under The Sand » sur Facebook. Je suis enseignante aussi aux Beaux Arts Sousse.

Christina Anderle (CA): C'est l'association DELTA?

SM: Oui, Delta. Est-ce qu'on est amies sur Facebook?

CA: Non, je ne pense pas.

SM: On n'est pas amies sur Facebook. En fait, dans un certain moment, qu'on a commencé à discuter un peu je n'ai été pas sur Facebook, parce que ça n'allait pas bien donc je me suis déconnectée. Et là je suis revenue pour le travail.

CA : Moi aussi, je n'étais pas sur Facebook pour deux ans mais quand j'ai fait mes études à Paris pour un an et toutes les informations étaient sur Facebook... Donc il fallait que je revienne.

SM : Il faut imaginer en Tunisie. Il y a que...la seule source rapide, crédible, et cetera, c'est Facebook. Tout le monde passe par Facebook pour faire passer l'information. Et surtout après la révolution.

CA : Et avant la révolution on a utilisé Facebook aussi ?

SM : Il y a Facebook, MAIS... en fait c'était pas trop populaire. Après la révolution tout le monde s'y met. Tout le monde, tout le monde...

CA : Parce que j'ai lu beaucoup d'articles...

SM : La rôle des réseaux sociaux sur la... Oui ils en fait un rôle immense...

CA : Et aussi j'ai lu sur Lina Ben Mhenni, la bloggeuse, j'ai lu son livre et c'était super intéressant aussi

SM : Elle est à Tunis si tu veux la rencontrer

...

SM : En fait j'ai lu tes questions que tu m'a envoyées mais j'ai besoin de beaucoup plus de temps pour répondre. Tu es averti... Par contre je sais que après notre entretien tu vas peut être reformuler ou bien ajouter d'autres questions...

CA : Oui, ça j'aimerais bien parce que j'ai jamais mené un entretien avec une artiste donc j'ai voulu intégrer toutes les choses qui m'intéressent et qui sont importantes pour la thèse mais au moment je ne voulais pas donner des idées ou des directions, tu vois, c'est très difficile...

S M : très délicat

CA : J'ai parlé avec mon prof et elle m'a dit qu'il faut aussi faire attention aux « éthiques » ça veut dire, comment on mène un entretien avec un artiste il faut les mettre dans la thèse comme un statut. Je ne veux pas t'imposer quelque chose avec mes questions. Il faut que tout soit libre, volontaire, etc.

SM : Spontané

SM : Comment tu as trouvé mon travail, comment... a quel moment tu a dit oui, c'est le support qui me convient...

CA : En fait, j'ai vu que Christine cherche une assistante pour The Turn et je lui ai envoyé mon application et on s'est vues pour boire un café ensemble pour parler sur le projet et après j'étais sa stagiaire, dans l'exposition et à Vienne j'ai fait la connaissance de Faten Rouissi, Patricia Triki,...

SM : Les artistes d'ici ?

CA : Oui, mais pas tous étaient à Vienne... Noutayel Belkadhi était là et Moufidha Fedhila. Aussi, des Autrichiens comme Helmut et Johanna Kandl, Irina Eden et Stijn Lernout et aussi Halim Karabibene

SM : Ah oui, il est très sympathique

CA : Oui, il est monté dans le métro avec la cocotte et moi, je lui ai donné des œufs pour faire la performance. C'était super..

SM : - (Elle montre sur la page Facebook de l'association L'art rue) – Tu les connais ?

CA : Eux, ils ont créé une association ensemble. Elle s'appelle L'art Rue. Je crois que tu peux passer par là parce qu'ils ont créé un événement qui s'appelle Dream City. C'est une biennale aussi dans une démarche d'animation, tu vois. Pas, que je me compare, mais j'aimais aussi le projet Dream City pour évoluer dans le projet Under The Sand. Under The Sand c'est pas comme Dream City mais aussi, il y a aussi des questions autour du territoire. Dream City c'est aussi un projet dans la médina, ils engagent beaucoup d'artistes, beaucoup de jeunes et [ce

festival] a crée une dynamique intense etc. Mais Under The Sand c'est autre chose. Under The Sand c'est un projet de recherche qui engage le territoire, les habitants, etc. Sans créant de l'animation spectaculaire, tu vois ? Under The Sand c'est un projet, ce n'est pas un festival. C'est surtout un projet et une rencontre. C'est de faire se rencontrer... des artistes français, des artistes tunisiens, artistes et chercheurs, artistes et étudiants, institutions et les habitants. C'est tout a fait normal qu'on ait recours aux habitants pour avoir des informations, pour avoir de l'aide logistique et cetera, mais ce n'est pas notre objectif, l'objectif c'est créer une dynamique de recherche. On est dedans, comme des archéologues en fouille dans le passé, dans l'histoire, dans le présent aussi donc, on est dans un processus de travail, tu vois, dans un chantier... on déterre c'est qu'il y a dans tout ce territoire et dans toutes ces pistes de recherche que ce soit utopique, historique, politique. C'est aussi un projet qui est lié à la problématique de l'eau parce que ce territoire a une histoire de l'eau. Il y a dans les années cinquante le paysage humide de cette région n'est pas celui d'aujourd'hui. Donc, il y a une histoire de l'eau qui est liée à l'histoire politique. Et aussi c'est un territoire, une ville minière. Il y a des mines de phosphate, donc l'industrie de phosphate a influencé la nappe d'eau qui a aussi influencé le paysage urbain, influencé l'éducatif, le travail donc tout est lié et emboité dans ce territoire. C'est un territoire très complexe et pour ça qu'on est dans une profonde recherche, en profondeur dans ce territoire.

CA : Donc, les artistes sont arrivés avec leurs idées, ils savaient ce qu'ils (re)chercher ou comment ça fonctionne ?

SM : Peut être je te parler de l'histoire de ce projet, si tu veux. Moi, je suis allée enseigner à Gafsa. Pendant quatre ans en fait j'ai enseigné. Et j'ai enseigné mais en même temps j'étais dans une dynamique de travail hebdomadaire. Je faisais quatre heures de route aller - retour chaque semaine.

CA : Ah, je connais ce projet de ton blog...

SM : Oui, c'est « Sur la route ». Donc j'ai crée une dynamique en fait, comme j'ai passé quatre ans, chaque année j'ai un projet, qui commence début de l'année et je termine fin de l'année. Mais en même temps sa lecture peut se faire par semaine. Et comment j'ai fait ? La première année, en fait, et en même temps à la fin de mes quarts ans, j'avais l'impression que j'étais en train de créer un calendrier de mes passages à Gafsa. Et c'était spontané réellement c'était spontané mais j'étais dedans, j'étais quelque part disponible de réfléchir, de voir, de sentir, de tout quoi. J'avais le sens, j'ai parlé de sens disponible et pour habiter, pour habiter au lieu, pour habiter la route, pour habiter les choses qui m'entourent. Et donc la première année j'avais... et mon histoire aussi avec Gafsa – les quatre ans de Gafsa ont évolué

avec mes outils – mes outils de travail. J'ai commencé avec un appareil photo classique mais numérique par rapport à ce que je suis en train de faire actuellement. Et comme avant tout ça je travaille sur l'unique, le multiple, sur ces notions. Je me suis dite, le premier jour que je vais aller dans cette ville je vais choisir un endroit. Et je vais le prendre un photo chaque semaine. Et c'était ça en fait, le premier soir, - comme je passe chaque semaine une nuit à Gafsa - la première nuit je suis allée chercher dans le quartier où j'habitais. J'ai cherché un endroit et j'ai commencé à expérimenter, de prendre des photos en rafale mais l'objectif pour moi c'était de déconstruire les codes de la photographie : Je ne pose pas de tri pieds, je m'en fous si elles sont floues, ou bien cadrées et cetera mais je prenais en rafale les photos. Et là c'était le déclic – tu veux que je montre des images en même temps quand je parle ?

- elle se connecte sur Facebook –

SM : Peut-être aller sur Facebook, j'ai deux blogs aussi. Regarde mes albums... Souvenirs du présent, voilà ! C'est cette photo qui était la première photo prise dans mes quatre ans. Et c'est la première photo que j'ai prise, en fait c'est pas la première mais c'est la photo comme je prenais des photo en rafale chaque semaine. J'ai choisi une seule par semaine. Donc, c'était celle-là. C'était un coup de foudre pour moi pour continuer le travail. Et donc c'était la première photo et toute l'année je reviens dans le même endroit en même moment de la journée avec le même appareil photo et je faisais le même processus. Je marche et je prends des photos, je marche et à la fin je sélectionne une seule par nuit. Quand je rentre je partage sur le réseau social Facebook cette photo. Donc, là c'est un travail sur la vidéo aussi, mais aussi c'est un travail qui est à la fois à court terme et à long terme. Et après quatre ans, et après une année en fait, j'ai eu un album, du même endroit.

CA : Quand tu as mis les photos sur Facebook, est-ce que tu as expliqué ce que tu es en train de faire ?

SM : Non, j'ai créé une forme d'animation. En fait, j'ai commencé uniquement sur Facebook. J'ai partagé ça sur Facebook, donc les gens qui me suivent sur Facebook ils ont compris que je suis de quelque part... ils ont compris que je travaille sur un projet tel je partage. Il n'y a que ceux qui apprécient... et il y a l'interrogation qui m'intéresse.

CA : Et les réactions, elles ont été comment ?

SM : Bon, ces sont celles par rapport aux réseaux sociales, de part ils étaient des likes, mais je pense que depuis c'était en 2010 et après jusqu'à maintenant ce même projet ces mêmes photos, ils ont pris d'autres formes. En 2014, là tu peux aller sur Vimeo, le site... Toute la série.. je fais une vidéo.

CA : En fait, je connais la vidéo...

SM : Ah, tu l'a déjà vue ? Donc, cette vidéo c'est aussi le travail d'une année. Chaque semaine je prends un photo sur le même endroit et cetera et cetera. Je t'expliqué le processus. Et cette vidéo a été exposée à MuCEM, à Marseille. Je l'ai montée en fait, pour une exposition en 2014 et après je l'ai montrée au MuCEM. Et puis Gafsa, donc l'année d'après je continue à réfléchir en fait autour des outils, avec lesquels je travaille donc avant j'ai commencé avec un appareil photo B ensuite la deuxième année, ma deuxième année à Gafsa j'ai acheté un smart phone. Mais il n'avait pas eu de connexion 3G rien du tout, juste un Smartphone et au début des smart phones déjà en Tunisie et là j'ai commencé expérimenter sur la route. Je prenais des photos et j'ai commencé à travailler avec des applications. Je prenais des photos, l'album (sur Facebook) s'appelle **Sur la route de Gafsa**. Je prenais mes photos, je les traite mais elles sont à 80% des photos prises sur la route en roulant. Et je traitais la photo dès que je rentre à la maison avec une connexion et chaque semaine je partage un nombre de photos que j'ai travaillées, que j'ai prises sur la route. Et c'était spontanément, j'étais pas très consciente que je savais, que je faisais ça pour chaque semaine mais j'ai pas pensé qu'au delà de ça, après le quatre ans je vais je suis en même temps en train de construire une réflexion. Et en fait mes partages, il y a des personnes qui savent, Souad elle va partager à telle heure, à tel jour des photos. Il y a plein de gens qui sont en train de me suivre et spontanément il y avait un

CA : Et jusqu'à maintenant seulement sur Facebook ?

SM : Oui, seulement sur Facebook, jusqu'à ce projet. Donc là c'est pour ça que je suis en train de te dire que c'est une réflexion autour des outils et autour du medium. Et là il y a eu des connections avec d'autres personnes. Il y a un artiste, un poète français, il s'appelle Georges Thiéry. Il a fait une performance sur mes images, sur cet album. Il a pris une heure je crois de temps et il a commencé à revoir les images et écrire même il est entré dans un forme de performance, tu vois. Et tous ca, tous ces commentaires, ils sont des improvisations. Il a improvisé, et après cette on a pris la trace en fait, mes images avec ses textes et on les a exposés ensemble à B'Chira Art Center à Tunis, ensuite on a fait un livre que j'ai exposé à Paris, donc ce qui m'intéresse c'est que l'œuvre elle devient. Elle change d'aspect? Mais elle reste presque la même, tu vois.

CA : Et Oussema Troudi, il a fait la même chose ?

SM : Oui, il a fait la même chose. Mais je l'ai pas intégré dans le réflexion du projet, franchement.

CA : Donc, le sens c'était d'inspirer d'autres personnes et de travailler avec....

SM : Mais tu vas comprendre pourquoi c'est important pour moi de travailler, de continuer avec Georges parce que là je vais finir de parler de Gafsa et [je] commence à évoluer avec Under The Sand et puis revenir à 2008 pour te parler d'un projet qui englobe tous. Et donc, l'année 2011/2012 j'ai fait ce travail autour de Gafsa. L'année d'après 2012 et 2013 j'ai acheté un iPhone donc j'avait une connexion et la géolocalisation surtout donc. Là tu peux voir sur mon blog, c'est #weeklylandscape. Donc, #weeklylandscape je l'ai fait avec un smart phone intelligent, très intelligent – elle rit – et qui surtout me propose ma géolocalisation and mon nom, et cetera. Donc, j'ai commencé à expérimenter j'ai créé un protocole, en fait. Ça rend toute l'année et je dois faire prendre un quatre d'heure ou dix minutes pour une forme de performance sur les réseaux. Et là aussi j'ai commencé à travailler sur Instagram. Donc, Instagram c'est aussi le point d'ancrage qui – hop – ils partagent partout. Donc, je prenais le paysage, et là c'est mon histoire de mon œuvre, quoi. Comment ça être lié au paysage. Et au paysage je viens plus fort dans la pratique. Avant je travaillais sur l'idée du multiple et l'unique mais j'étais pas très consciente que je suis dans le paysage. C'était pour moi un prétexte mais là, réellement je suis dans le paysage et le paysage devient une réflexion très importante. Et là donc, dans ce travail je prenais le paysage et je prenais un certain moment directement de ma géolocalisation dans le même instant et je fait un montage avec des applications et j'ai créé aussi une phrase, une forme de poésie, une impression du moment de l'instant même. Mais je n'ai pas oublié de partager, de mettre le même hashtag. Donc le même hashtag qui a commencé du premier partage jusqu'au dernier partage. Et donc, je prends la photo, je la partage sur Instagram, et d'Instagram directement vers Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, et aussi sur – je n'utilise plus de cette application mais c'est une application de photo... je ne sais pas pourquoi je ne l'utilise plus – c'est l'une des premières applications... – la téléphone sonne - excuse-moi, je dois répondre...

Je continue... Donc, j'ai partagé chaque semaine une photo avec ma géolocalisation, la capture avec le paysage lui même et j'ai créé des mots et surtout j'oublies pas de mettre #weeklylandscape. À la fin de l'année donc, chaque fois je partage une partie sur Instagram et je partage un peu partout sur d'autres réseaux. Donc, les gens qui sont en train de me suivre, par exemple sur Facebook, ils ne savent pas que je suis en train de aussi partager sur d'autre réseaux en même temps. Et moi, ce qui m'intéresse, c'est que j'ai réfléchi aussi autour de [la question] « Qu'est-ce qu'un atelier ? » Qu'est-ce qu'un espace d'exposition ? Qu'est-ce que l'œuvre ici ? Et avec cette performance j'ai intenté, j'ai à la fois pris la photo, je l'ai exposée sur les réseaux sociaux enfin des expositions... Non, donc j'ai pris la photo, je l'ai les

produite, je l'ai travaillée, je l'ai pensée aussi et puis je l'ai partagée et exposée, je l'ai archivée.

CA : Donc, c'est un forme d'archivage aussi ?

SM : C'est un archive, oui. Finalement, il y a la fin de l'année et quand je consulte le hashtag #weeklylandscape j'ai l'historique. J'ai l'archive de toute une année de passage même si au départ c'est dispersé dans le temps et dans les réseaux mais grâce à cet hashtag ça devient une unité. Donc, là c'est une réflexion autour du cadre aussi pour moi. En fait, moi, j'ai commencé par la peinture. J'ai fait une spécialité peinture au départ mais là je réfléchis la peinture autrement. J'ai un rapport à la peinture mais je ne fais pas la peinture classique, peut-être un jour, si je trouve la nécessité, mais là pour l'instant je n'ai pas besoin. Et donc là c'est la question du cadre aussi. Qu'est-ce que le cadre, qu'est-ce que l'œuvre, qu'est-ce que le temps d'exposition, qu'est-ce que aussi l'atelier. Mon téléphone devient mon atelier, la route devient mon atelier. La voiture, elle même, devient mon atelier. L'atelier est le culte, un espace colloque et là aussi je relie ça à l'Impressionnisme. Donc, tu verras, l'atelier devient en plein air. La quatrième année de Gafsa – donc c'était le troisième projet de Gafsa - j'étais franchement très fatiguée mais je me suis dite, bon... [Sur son blog le travail Entre elle(s)...#tunisiennes apparait] en fait ça aussi c'est un de travail que j'ai réalisé mais c'était dans un contexte précis. C'était une réaction à une époque où il y avait un conflit entre les islamistes et des universités. Et moi, je n'ai pas dit tout ça en fait, j'ai mis ça indirectement ça dans ce petit texte. Dans cette période il y avait les événements de Manouba ; il y avait une confrontation violente entre des étudiants islamistes et l'université. Il y avait aussi une confrontation et le directeur, le doyen, il refusait que des filles portaient le hijab, pas le hijab, le niqab. Et moi, la même période, comment j'étais en revenant des vacances, après 15 jours, mon étudiante vient avec ce niqab.

CA : J'ai lu dans un journal sur l'incident quand un étudiant à l'université a levé un drapeau salafiste... Et dans l'article on lit « A young woman removed a salafi flag from a top building from the university of Manouba... »

SM : C'était à Manouba. C'est la même université. À l'époque les islamistes, ils étaient fous ils essaient de prendre le pouvoir. Et là, ce jour là, un islamiste, il a voulu changer le drapeau tunisien, le rouge avec l'étoile, et cetera. Et c'était une réaction spontanée de la fille, qui montait et arrachait pour qu'il n'enlève pas le drapeau, je pense que ça c'était le seul événement qui a fait le tour. Donc, moi, dans cette époque, j'avais une étudiante, la seule étudiante à Gafsa qui ait porté ça, c'était dans mon atelier. Moi, je savais pas comment réagir en fait, je suis contre mais en même temps je suis pas protégée, il n'y a aucune loi qui dit non,

si je voulais la faire sortir, j'ai pas le droit, aussi qui sait peut-être elle ne veut pas sortir, elle va me violenter. Eh, oui, bon, j'étais l'enseignante, je suis artiste, je suis la femme aussi parce que c'est entre deux femmes, j'étais aussi dans un statut d'artiste, aussi dans un statut d'enseignante, qu'est-ce que je vais faire ? Je n'ai pas arrêté de sortir, d'entre et sortir et entre mais après j'ai commencé à discuter avec elle et puis je me suis dite, non Souad tu peux pas lui interdire vu que tu n'es pas protégée, d'abord. Donc, j'ai.. on a engagé des discussions ensemble et à chaque fois elle m'a dit, mais Madame, Vous avez mon regard, Vous avez mon regard pour voir mes yeux, ça suffit. Et j'ai dit, non, ça ne me suffit pas, moi, j'ai besoin de voir tes expressions, tu bloques l'expression, toi, tu as le droit de voir mon visage, moi, je n'ai pas le droit de voir ton visage, c'est pas juste. Mais en même temps j'ai délaissé ce statut mais je veux dire, Ecoute, tant que moi je suis pas protégée, moi, je veux quand même continuer à discuter avec toi. Et moi, j'étais toujours accompagnée avec un miroir - je vais t'expliquer pourquoi – et dans mon casier j'avais des mémoires, toujours mon appareil sur moi, les appareils. Je lui dit, je veux que tu m'accordes 15 minutes après chaque séance qu'on discute ensemble mais pas en tant qu'enseignante, je ne suis pas ton enseignante, je suis l'artiste. Et entre deux femmes, si tu veux. On a commencé à discuter dans 3 séances, juste moi, j'avais mes outils de moi et elle parle ou bien elle me demande des choses : pourquoi j'ai un appareil photo, pourquoi j'ai un miroir, je lui demande : « est-ce-que tu veux qu'on joue avec ce miroir, est-ce qu'on fait une mise-en-scène, et cetera. » Pour engager des discussions. Je lui dit que j'ai rien à lui demander, « enlevé ce voile, » juste qu'on communique, et je l'intègre aussi dans mon monde peut-être, en m'intégrant dans son monde, peut-être, elle va s'ouvrir, je ne sais pas. Moi aussi, en même temps, je me pose plein de questions. Et donc on a commencé à jouer. Je lui ai demandé, « Est-ce que tu peux prendre mon rôle ? » Moi, d'habitude je prends des photos. Moi, je vais me poser, et toi, tu me prends en photo. Et moi je vais faire l'inverse. On va jouer. Et là, c'était juste une mise-en-scène, j'avais un tableau...

CA : Donc, c'est elle là, sous le voile ?

SM : Celle avec le voile, oui c'est elle, mon étudiante. Donc, elle portait le miroir et moi, je la prends en photo et on a fait l'inverse. Et puis j'ai collé les deux images ensembles. Quelques-uns ont pensé que c'est moi, en fait.

CA : Moi aussi, j'ai pensé que c'était toi.

SM : Ce n'est pas moi, c'était une autre personne. J'ai partagé ça la première fois sur Insta[gram] c'est pour ça que j'ai mis un hashtag, parce que je réfléchis en même temps – en fait je ne suis pas une artiste de galerie. Je suis artiste de territoire quelque part. Donc, j'ai commencé avec le réseau, j'ai commencé sur le territoire et aussi dans mon association je

parle de deux territoires ; géographique et numérique. Et donc ça, c'était la quatrième année, bon, c'était un travail de réaction pour moi actuellement, si on me propose d'exposer mon travail, je dirais non, parce que c'était un travail que j'ai réalisé dans un contexte précis. Ça peut avoir un sens, ça peut être discuté, et cetera, mais pour le réexposer je pense que je serais pas très...

CA : Tu vois, quand on sait que c'est ton étudiante là, ça change complètement le contexte...

SM : Autre chose, quand j'ai partagé la photo, j'ai promis à l'étudiante – là maintenant je le parle, je le dis – parce que je dois dire que comment ça c'est passé mais j'ai promis à la fille que je, sur les medias, rien ne doit être mentionné, ni son nom, ni dans quelle école, c'était un engagement avec elle. Parce qu'elle, elle avait peur, mais je ne sais pas pourquoi, mais bon. Je lui ai promis que je ne vais pas dire son nom, ça c'est clair. Mais après deux ans, après un an et ou quelque mois plus tard, on est restées en contacte et elle m'a même invitée chez elle, et c'était très gentil mais elle à la fin elle a fini par enlever. Elle porte juste un foulard classique, mais là elle l'a enlevé.

CA : Et elle, elle voulait porter le voile intégral ?

SM : Oui, même aujourd'hui ils ont le droit de le porter, personne ne dit non. Il n'y a pas de loi. Par contre elle, ce qui est intéressant c'est que ça vient d'elle. Elle a commencé à dire, « je vais porter » et après elle a commencé à murir avec les échanges, je pense que moi aussi, j'ai donné indirectement quelque chose et puis elle a réussi à l'enlever. Et là pour moi, pourquoi j'ai te dit que c'est dans un contexte précis ? Là c'est un travail qui a invité la communication. Parce que à cette époque il y avait beaucoup, beaucoup de violence sans échange, sans communication, sans échange rationnel. Il y avait beaucoup de violence et là j'invite, c'est un invitation...

CA : Et c'est évidemment une provocation aussi

SM : Oui, aussi, c'est une œuvre ouverte en fait, il y avait beaucoup d'interprétations autour de ça, et ceux qui peuvent peut-être faire une analyse sur ce que je fais ou sur moi, parce que moi je travaille sur l'histoire du miroir, la présence du soi, et cetera. Pourquoi je me suis placée ici aussi face à elle. Est-ce qu'on est égale ?

CA : Pour moi, c'est la femme tunisienne, les deux images d'elle. Après la révolution elle a la liberté de porter le voile intégrale ou pas. J'ai lu quelque chose sur le statut de la femme tunisienne après la révolution, que c'est comme une redéfinition de la femme. Il y a eu l'instrumentalisation de la femme et maintenant c'est une nouvelle question.

SM : Oui, en fait le statut de la femme actuellement il y a eu beaucoup de polémique, beaucoup de discussions, donc à l'époque où ils ont été en train de reformuler le statut, la constitution, le code...

CA : Ah, tu penses au CSP ?

SM : C'est quoi le CSP ? Le code de...

CA : C'est le code de statut personnel, Majella.

SM : Oui, le code de statut personnel. Et donc, il y avait beaucoup de discussions, et d'échanges par rapport à ça et aussi à l'écriture de la constitution tunisienne. Et aussi le mouvement féministe qui a commencé à avoir après la révolution plus de - je sais pas si tu es intéressé de rencontrer des filles ou les personnes engagées dans des mouvements féministes

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CA : Oui, ça m'intéresse...

SM : En fait, une des personnes qui travaille beaucoup avec moi qui est aussi enseignante et aussi la chargée de la production Under The Sand elle a une association féministe, chouftouhonna. Elles font aussi beaucoup d'expositions, des expositions avec des femmes, elle est aussi membre de mouvement EGBT je peux te la mettre en contact.

CA : Merci, je reviendrai sur l'offre quand j'ai besoin.

SM : Donc, là je te parle de la dernière année de Gafsa je fait ça et puis je n'ai pas pris un travail hebdomadaire comme je faisais d'habitude. Je voulais en fait creuser dans le territoire, dans la ville. C'était toujours, route, route, route et parce que j'ai passé huit heures de route quand même et après en fait, il y a un travail sur la piscine.

CA : Oui, je le connais bien, j'ai vu des photos.

SM : Leurre liquide, oui, voilà. Leurre liquide, ces sont deux grands piscines qui datent de l'époque romaine. Et ces piscines justement elles ont subies l'effet de l'industrie du phosphate qui a puisé la nappe d'eau. Il n'y plus d'eau depuis plus ou moins 20 ans dans les piscines alors que c'était la vie de Gafsa. Les piscines quand même c'était le noyau de Gafsa contrairement aux autre villes de Tunisie, dans d'autre villes le noyau c'était la mosquée. Alors qu'à Gafsa, le noyau c'était l'eau. Moi, j'avais des souvenirs, j'étais un enfant, j'ai visité la ville et je me rappelle qu'il y avait de l'eau, il y avait toute une ambiance, il y avait des touristes qui viennent, des jeunes qui faisaient le spectacle de se plonger et gagnent de l'argent aussi. Il y avait des agriculteurs, ils nagent, c'était magnifique, c'était la vie là-bas et c'était une source d'eau naturelle, ce n'était pas artificiel comme aujourd'hui. Et là la première année j'étais choquée qu'il n'y a pas d'eau, et cetera et moi comme je fais beaucoup de flânerie dans la ville, dès que je termine mon cours, je commence à flâner, faire des

promenades dans la ville et puis je rentre. Toutes les personnes que je rencontre je leur demande, « qu'est-ce qui c'est passé à la piscine? C'est quoi l'histoire de l'eau ? Pourquoi il n'y a pas d'eau ? » Et à chaque fois j'ai des réponses différentes mais la seule chose commune qu'on me dit, « on nous a dit qu'on va faire revenir l'eau. » Et c'est toujours du CPG³⁴⁶, dont ils parlent, c'est la compagnie de phosphate de Gafsa. Et c'est la seule chose qui est commune entre tous et moi j'ai travaillé sur ça, en fait. On m'a invitée en même temps à B'Chira Art Center pour réfléchir.. moi, j'étais en train de préparer ce projet et quand BAC m'a proposé d'exposer dans une exposition qui s'appelle « *L'art devant ma porte* », j'ai proposé ce projet. Donc j'ai installé, j'ai créé une forme de tromperie, j'ai installé le sens de l'eau et j'ai créé cette leurre, parce que c'était un leurre. Les gens attendaient le retour de l'eau ça fait longtemps qu'ils l'attendent c'était toujours flou, l'histoire de l'eau, des piscines c'était toujours flou. Donc, j'ai installé du son ça créait une ambiance, les gens qui viennent, avant qu'ils regardent en bas, « ah vous avez fait revenir l'eau, ça déclenchait un flot aussi des réactions, il y a des personnes qui ont commencé à pleurer, on a commencé à me raconter des histoires... on faisait ça, on faisait ça..., Et il y a des discussions politiques et d'autres, affectives et cetera. Et donc là c'est un travail où il y a l'idée d'installer le son et puis moi, je réfléchissais, comment je vais faire pour garder des traces pour l'expo pour montrer ce travail sur l'expo. Je ne suis pas la journaliste qui enregistre seulement les gens, ce qu'ils racontent et je suis aussi la plasticienne, comment je vais faire. Et c'était spontané, il y avait les enfants du quartier, ils ont intégré l'installation, ils ont commencé à jouer dans les piscines autour du son. Et là j'ai commencé à travailler pendant deux heures alors que la nuit va tomber et je n'avais presque plus de batterie dans mes appareils donc je devais faire avec, donc j'ai demandé aux enfants qui ont déjà commencé à jouer. J'ai commencé à les encadrer, j'ai demandé qu'ils jouent uniquement sur le périmètre de mon cadre, de mon appareil et de continuer comme ça, en fait. Et puis j'ai fait deux vidéos de deux piscines des enfants qui sont en train de jouer, mais ce qu'il est intéressant pour moi c'est le prendre d'eau, de plonger, c'est aussi une histoire de pouvoir, comme si, comme si... le CPG a le pouvoir d'écraser quelque part ces gens. Aussi dans l'histoire des piscines les jeunes, les enfants jouaient dans l'eau, dans l'eau, avec l'eau. Et là il y a une mutation : les enfants jouaient dans les piscines vides, c'est ça. Et après dans la galerie j'ai exposé trois vidéos, deux vidéos des deux piscines avec des enfants qui jouaient, et là, j'ai pris la vidéo ancienne que j'ai trouvée sur internet mais j'ai fait un montage avec de l'eau et des images très anciennes que j'ai trouvées sur internet de la même piscine, tu peux même toi aussi les regarder sur Youtube – écrit « Piscine

³⁴⁶ http://www.cpg.com.tn/Fr/historique_11_8 [last accessed: 19 May 2018].

romaine de Gafsa. » Mais, moi j'ai fait un montage de la même personne qui se plonge, j'ai fait l'inverse. C'est comme si un flashback dans l'histoire donc là c'était une installation multimédia.

CA : Et c'était où l'exposition ?

SM : L'exposition, à B'chira art centre.

CA : Ah je lis Hamdy Reda [l'un des participants de l'exposition], j'ai aussi fais connaissance avec lui à Vienne. Il était là pour la conférence [de l'exposition The Turn].

SM : Et Christine [Bruckbauer, la commissaire de The Turn] elle était là aussi, elle a vu l'exposition. Voilà pour cette année, mais en fait, entre temps, pendant trois, quatre mois presque j'ai rien produit à Gafsa, j'étais trop fatiguée mais après les deux dernières séances, j'ai repris, j'ai repris le travail, j'ai repris la route en fait, j'avais le deux dernières voyages que je faisais le même jour – un aller retour. Donc j'ai repris le travail avec mon téléphone, j'ai fait deux performances « paysage en devenir » et là dès que j'ai pris la route de Sousse j'ai commencé à travailler. Et je vais t'expliquer comment. L'idée, le protocole en fait, le protocole de la performance c'est de travailler aussi avec des références littéraires. J'essaie de travailler aussi avec des théoriciens en résonance. Comme j'ai pris la route, donc je le protocole technique, je prends la route pendant les quatre ans, quatre heures d'aller et quatre heures de retour, je prends une photo, je la travaille à la manière... j'essaie de créer des images qui s'approchent à la peinture, d'accord.

CA : Ils me paraît très abstract...

SM : Et aussi dans ce travail j'ai travaillé sur Daniel Arasse, « Le détail », c'est son livre, « Le détail. » Le détail dans la peinture. Et donc j'ai repris quelques idées, je prenais la photo, je la traitais, mais j'ai choisi un fragment de la photo et je partageais sur la route *que* des fragments. Donc, ces sont des détails. Des détails des photos. Donc, je m'en fous de la photo ou de l'image travaillée, je prenais que des détails. Et ça donnait des images abstraites.

CA : Oui, c'est comme de la peinture abstraite.

SM : Voilà, c'est toujours un rapprochement entre peinture et photographie. Et aussi ça rejoint la réflexion autour de l'impressionnisme et il y a toujours un lien avec l'histoire de l'art.

CA : Ca me souvient beaucoup de pointillisme...

SM : Oui, pointillisme aussi. Et le titre c'est « paysage en devenir » avec le hashtag #onyvoitrien c'est aussi un titre du livre de Daniel Arasse. « On y voit rien » parce que aussi, on n'y voit pas... C'est abstrait, mais on voit plein de choses d'autre, mais j'ai fait surtout référence à Daniel Arasse. Comme j'ai commencé de Sousse, et je revenais de Gafsa-Sousse,

je faisait la même chose, j'ai eu la trace sur la carte comme si moi, je faisais une séance.

Sousse-Gafsa, il y a des partages.

CA : Ca me semble comme une archive localisée, non ?

SM : Localisée, voilà, oui, localisée. Ensuite quand je reviens pour donner du sens a mon hashtag, quand je click sur le même hashtag je trouve l'archive mais, ce qui est intéressant qu'il y a des personnes qui ont utilisé ca. Donc, là c'est aussi une réflexion autour du web sémantique.

CA : Donc, ça c'est aussi une forme de connexion avec d'autres personnes

SM : Oui, une connexion avec d'autres personnes. Voilà, ça c'est pour cette performance. Et là mon cadre c'est aussi une réflexion autour du cadre, elle est où là, « est-ce qu'elle un seul partage ? », « est-ce que le hashtag est lui même ? », « est-ce que c'est la carte ? », « est-ce que c'est cette capture en elle même ? », tu vois, elle est multiple à la fois. Elle est unique et multiple à la fois.

CA : Et ce n'est plus ton propre cadre, c'est partagé avec d'autres personnes, la route est partagée avec d'autres personnes...

SM : Oui, c'est instantanée et en fait j'ai oublié de te dire que moi, je prenais des photos et tout ça est partagé instantanément sur les réseaux. Donc, les gens regardaient sur place une exposition, j'ai exposé, à la fois je fais mon travail, mon œuvre, je la réfléchis, je l'expose, j'ai l'archive en instant... Et donc, avec la route, avec la vitesse tout a été réduit. Atelier réduit, temps d'exposition, temps de production, tout a été réduit en même temps, en instant. Voilà et après j'ai fait la dernière séance de mon travail à Gafsa et c'est aussi un travail d'aller retour. C'était #captureshaptiques, j'ai exposé ça au MuCem aussi.

CA : Oui, j'ai lu l'entretien dans la publication.

SM : Tu le veux en version numérique ?

CA : Non, merci, j'ai le catalogue chez moi.

SM : D'accord j'ai le même en numérique si tu as besoin. Donc, ici, « sur la route pareil » je prenais des photos et je les travaille. Et là c'est un travail aussi avec la même dynamique, le même protocole mais avec une autre réflexion avec d'autres penseurs. Et toujours une forme de rapprochement de la peinture avec la photographie. Donc, ce travail était fait avec plusieurs applications, ces sont mes outils de travail. Pareil, je prends une photo, je la travaille, je prends mon temps à travailler sur la route, dès que je descends ça y est, le travail est fini.

CA : Donc, tu restes dans la voiture ?

SM : En marche, en route, en vitesse, tu vois ? Ca n'a pas de sens sinon – elle prend un appel – Donc, là c'est la réflexion aussi... autour de rapprochement entre peinture et photographie et je parlais de #captureshaptiques et je fais référence à Gilles Deleuze. Et Gilles Deleuze parlait des captures de l'orchidée, de « La guêpe et l'orchidée », par exemple et c'est pour créer... elles font en sorte qu'elles soient une unité. Donc, là j'ai créé une forme d'unité entre la peinture et la photographie, la photographie connectée. « Haptique », parce que c'est aussi tactile, je faisais ça avec mon doigt, tout ça est fait avec mon doigt et « haptique » c'est en référence avec tactile-visuelle. Donc, voilà c'était ça c'est le même protocole, je prenais la photo, je la travaillais sur la route, je la partage en même temps sur tous les réseaux sociaux, j'ai des interactions, des « j'aime », des commentaires en même temps – un appel – Donc, pareil, le même protocole de prendre une photo, de la travailler sur la route avant de descendre et ce qui reste à la fin de la journée, j'ai une carte, une semence entre Sousse et Gafsa. Le même hashtag #captureshaptiques à chaque fois. Donc, c'est à la fois dispersé, et le rôle du hashtag, de cadrer et de mettre en unité le travail. Et la même chose pour... ça ce qui m'a intéressé, ce qui m'importait c'est cette semence sur la route. Et ce hashtag c'est partout, sur toutes les photos il y a #captureshaptiques. Tu es sur Instagram ?

CA : Oui..

SM : Regarde sur Instagram [le hashtag] captureshaptiques. Regarde ce qu'il va donner pour visualiser l'œuvre. Donc, le lieu principal de ce genre d'œuvre ces sont les réseaux et quand on m'a invité pour exposer à MuCEM, bon, le commissaire de l'expo a beaucoup aimé cette performance et ces images il m'a dit, « je veux bien que tu exposes ce travail. » Je continuais à réfléchir – à l'époque en fait je travaillais avec un mini iPad – et donc j'ai commencé avec un smart phone Samsung, puis un iPhone, et le format, le format c'est toujours un format paysage parce que c'était aussi adapté au format de l'iPad. Mais là c'est carré parce que aussi Instagram à l'époque coupe le format et aujourd'hui on a la possibilité de partager avec instagram sans changements de format. Donc la c'est aussi des évolutions des outils de travail. Donc, au MuCEM j'ai exposé ça sur un iPad...

CA : Ah, je comprends. C'était ma question, comment tu as exposé ce travail... ?

SM : Oui, comment j'ai montré ça : l'idée est de... comme c'est un travail [dont le] lieu d'exposition était le réseau et comme il est travaillé sur le même outil et partagé avec le même outil, l'idée est d'exposer le medium lui même, même l'outil lui même. L'outil qui fait médium à la fois. Et aussi le message est aussi le médium. Et là – un appel – Tumblr c'est mon activité quotidienne, presque. C'est ce que je fais quotidiennement et l'autre c'est plutôt

des projets mais pas vraiment mis à jour. Je n'ai pas encore mis à jour parce que en fait je suis en train de préparer un autre site.

CA : Et filège [sur son blog], c'est quelque chose...

SM : Oui, je vais t'en parler. Et là c'est mon histoire de quatre ans à Gafsa et fini avec #captureshaptiques. Je suis retournée à Sousse pour enseigner et même pas une année, en fait, j'étais enceinte et cetera, et même pas une année on me contacte, quelqu'un me contacte – je préfère te parler du premier projet avant de parler de ca, d'accord ?

CA : Ok, d'accord !

SM : Tu as saisi mes quatre ans à Gafsa, là...

CA : Tu as habité à Sousse, ou à Gafsa... ?

SM : Non, j'habite à Sousse et je faisais des aller-retour chaque semaine, parce que j'enseigne deux jours donc j'y vais le matin, j'enseigne l'après-midi, je passe une nuit j'enseigne le matin et je reprends la route. En 2008 j'étais à Paris pour un mois, pour faire mes recherches. En fait, j'ai commencé une thèse et en allant à Paris je ne savais pas... en fait j'avais un sujet mais un sujet lié à une pratique personnelle. Et mes pratiques personnelles n'étaient pas encore développées, j'ai fait des choses mais c'était pas trop clair ce que j'allais faire.

CA : Et toi, tu as fait tes études à Sousse, à l'académie de Sousse ?

SM : Oui, j'ai fait université de Sousse, l'école des Beaux Arts. Je ne sais pas comment ça fonctionne en Autriche mais c'est pas comme le système français. C'est une université. Donc, j'ai fait quatre ans d'art plastique et puis j'ai fait un master en esthétique d'art visuel.

CA : C'est comme en Autriche...

SM : Kif, pareil.. Ensuite j'ai fait un doctorat à Tunis, j'ai commencé à faire un doctorat en art plastique à Tunis. Tout en restant.. J'ai enseigné aussi à Sousse contractuel et puis quand j'ai passé un concours, je l'ai réussi et on m'a mutée à Gafsa. Ca c'est côté cursus professionnel. Quand je suis partie à Gafsa, j'ai arrêté mes inscriptions de thèse mais je sais que je suis en train de continuer... tout ce que je suis en train de faire c'est lié à la thèse. Tout ce que je fais sur les réseaux, tout, tout, tout, un jour je vais reprendre ma thèse et je vais mettre tout ça dans ma thèse. Et je vais écrire sur ca. Donc, c'est un projet de longue haleine qui prend beaucoup de temps pour se développer, et cetera. En 2008, donc, j'ai fait un mois à Paris, pour faire des recherches, dans le but de faire les recherches théoriques aussi mais aussi à réfléchir à une pratique liée à ça que je faisais avant. Quand je suis revenue à Sousse, je me suis rendue en compte que j'ai passé un mois seule, toute à moi, mais seule et j'avais pas réellement des photos de moi, par exemple dans Paris, mais pas de photos de moi. Mais en regardant les photos, j'étais impressionnée je voyais mon reflet partout dans presque tout, parce que je

faisais beaucoup d'expo, et donc il y avait beaucoup de mon reflet. Et certainement dans le musée Centre Pompidou il y avait un restaurant au haut.

CA : Oui, Georges, je le connais.

S M : Oui, le restaurant Georges. Et dans ce restaurant il y avait la vestiaire, tu te rappelles, et il y avait beaucoup de miroirs dedans, c'était une vestiaire aux miroirs. Je commencé à jouer et c'était le moment où j'étais consciente que je me prenais en photo... (on cherche le travail sur le blog) Tu connais ce travail, il s'appelle « Elle m'aime » ?

C'est là, donc, c'était la photo où j'étais consciente que je me prenais en photo. En revenant à Sousse, bien sûr, pour voir mes notes, j'ai commencé à réfléchir à cette présence dans le miroir. Et puis, je choisissais cette photo parmi plusieurs, celle là, et j'ai commencé à faire des analyses. Je commençais à faire des analyses, lire aussi beaucoup, entre temps je lisais Walter Benjamin autour « L'œuvre [d'art] à l'époque de sa reproductibilité [technique] ». C'est toujours lié aussi à la technique mon travail, tu vois...

CA : Mais, ça c'est le commencement du miroir ?

SM : C'est le commencement, oui. C'est le premier part du miroir. Et après deux ans j'ai arrêté quoi, j'ai arrêté de réfléchir autour uniquement de cette photo, c'est nécessaire de passer à autrui. Il y a moi, oui, il y a le miroir, moi qui le représente moi, mais c'est aussi multiple et, « pourquoi pas », je me suis dite, pourquoi pas multiplier, multiplier, multiplier à l'infini presque cette photo. J'ai fait une installation à l'école des Beaux Arts où j'ai imprimé la même photo 400 fois peut-être et j'ai choisi une salle, c'était dans une évènement culturel à l'école, j'ai demandé aux gens qui parlent ou qui passent de prendre une photo et je traçais une ligne [pour les] coller sur ces murs. Et c'était pendant deux jours, c'était le premier jour, une fois le mur est rempli, franchement je savais pas ce que je suis en train de faire mais je sais que je maîtrisais quelque part le début mais la fin, je savais pas. Et comme j'ai mis du scotch derrière les photos [pour] que les gens les collent aux murs, ça c'était mon cadre. Et après, un certain moment quand le mur était bien rempli, je redemandais aux gens qui passaient de prendre une photo et de faire ce qu'ils veulent avec. Sur Facebook, il y a des images... – en montrant sur Facebook – Ca c'était le départ, et puis, moi je fais le premier pars et les gens commençait à coller la photo, tu vois ? Et à un certain moment la salle est devenue pleine et je prenais une vidéo aussi, je fais une vidéo avec ça. Il y avait un mouvement, en fait, où j'ai posé la série. C'est toujours une réflexion autour du multiple ici... c'était à l'université de Sousse dans un cadre d'un festival qui s'appelle Chebdhef... Et une fois rempli, donc je redemandais aux gens qui passaient de prendre une photo et de faire ce qu'ils veulent avec. A ce moment là, il avait une dispersion de la photo, je trouvais des gens

qui la collaient partout, et aussi une dispersion dans le temps, parce que les gens après deux semaines, trois semaines continuent à me croiser « Ah, tiens Souad, j'ai encore ta photo dans mon classeur ».

CA : Donc, ils ont pris des nouvelles photos... ?

SM : Non, ils ont arrachés la photo, ils ont pris la photo du mur. Donc ça commençait dans une salle vide, elle est plus remplie, remplie, un certain moment la salle a été vidée et puis dispersée dehors. Et là j'ai eu le déclic de continuer le processus. Donc, là c'est le déclenchement d'un processus je me suis dite, Souad, il faut continuer le voyage, ça commençait dans un voyage à Paris, ça commençait avec moi et puis ça s'est ouvert dans la théorie et il a encore..., je maîtrisais son avenir, je maîtrisais son cadre. Et quand je l'ai donné à autrui, je maîtrise plus rien. Elle est devenue dispersée, elle est partout, elle m'appartient, elle m'appartient pas, il y a moi dedans, il y a une partie de moi chez les autres. Donc, ce sont des réflexions qui m'ont... « Tiens, Souad tu dois continuer tout de suite. » Et j'écris un document, PDF j'insère la photo et j'ai fait une demande aux gens de prendre la photo, j'ai inséré la photo dans le document, donc je demandais aux gens de prendre la photo dans un endroit où ils sont ; de m'envoyer la photo de l'endroit, leur photo de visage, et la géolocalisation et la date, donc ces sont ses données essentielles, qui m'apportaient. Et j'ai envoyé ça via les réseaux sociaux, via mes adresses mails,...

CA : Est-ce que tu as ajouté un hashtag également ?

SM : Non, l'hashtag ça commençait avec Gafsa, et là Gafsa n'existait pas encore. C'est pour ça que je voulais te dire, de parler de ça avant de reprendre le projet de Gafsa.

Donc, j'ai l'envoyée à plein d'anonymes, ou bien des gens que je connais ou des gens qui l'ont donnée à d'autres personnes. Ça commençait à me dépasser mais j'étais dans une forme de conscience, j'étais consciente de ce que je fais quelque part. Je ne sais pas ce que je veux faire après avec ça, mais pendant les deux premières années j'ai commencé à récolter des données. J'ai eu plein de réponses de France, du Maroc, des Etats-Unis, L'Île de la Réunion, plein, plein de pays quoi, mais ça commence. C'est moi, qui provoquait, si je provoque les choses, il y a des retours, s'il n'y n'a pas de... je stimule. Et là après quelques années je me suis sentie dans un processus de pollinisation, comme si je suis l'abeille, en fait, comme si je suis dans un processus de semence comme l'abeille qui passe et elle fait une forme de pollinisation avec la personne. Donc, s'il y a une pollinisation, donc il y a une fécondation. Les personnes avec qui j'ai eu un retour, il y a eu un... ça s'arrête pas là, en fait. Puisque je parlais de pollinisation, s'il y a une rencontre, il y a un retour, le processus peut continuer vers un trajet artistique, ces sont des collaborations ensemble...

CA : Donc, ça incite à des nouveaux projets...

SM : Oui, ça croise d'autres. Sinon, le processus peut échouer aussi, il peut ne pas aboutir, il peut s'arrêter là. Et là j'ai créé une carte où j'ai mis les voyages avec l'intention de continuer et de tracer les devenirs, des voyages de cette photo initiale. C'est la même, j'ai rien changé, c'est la même qui d'un main à l'autre. Finalement, au départ j'ai pensé à créer des liens avec des personnes mais ça créait pas uniquement des liens avec des personnes mais j'étais en train de créer des liens avec des personnes et avec des territoires et aussi des domaines, parce que les personnes aussi, ils sont pas uniquement des artistes, ils sont des n'importe qui, avec des docteurs, des informaticiens, et aussi avec... quand les choses nécessitent ou bien créent une fécondation on essaie de travailler ensemble si on veut continuer à travailler ensemble et créer un projet et ce projet est interdisciplinaire. Donc, ça peut ne pas être uniquement... je peux aussi collaborer avec des informaticiens, peut-être avec un médecin, biologiste, je ne sais pas. C'est pour ça que je suis dans une forme transdisciplinaire. C'est toujours ouvert, c'est toujours connecté. Là, je peux revenir à mon projet après mes quatre ans à Gafsa, si tu veux. Après les quatre ans à Gafsa, j'ai pensé que ça y est, c'est l'envolé naturel mais comme je travaille beaucoup sur les réseaux, je travaille sur d'autres pollinisations, après quelques mois, quelqu'un me contacte. « Souad, j'ai vu ton travail à Gafsa sur le web et je suis invité pour... pas invité mais je travaille sur un projet à Gafsa, que je connais pas, mais c'est dans le cadre d'une convention entre Nantes et Gafsa. » Mais il ne connaît pas le territoire de Gafsa et donc il m'a contactée pour peut-être, éventuellement faire quelque chose ou avoir des informations, parce qu'il a trouvé que Souad qui a fait des choses sur ce territoire. En ce moment là, je dis que mon processus de pollinisation de réseaux est en train de réussir, tu vois ? C'est mon œuvre qui fait son chemin, c'est pas moi qui est allée chercher ce monsieur, rien de tout. C'est la sélection naturelle, et c'est aussi la fonction naturelle de l'œuvre.

CA : Ce monsieur, il a connu laquelle de tes œuvres ?

SM : Il a connu le nom de Souad Mani qui fait des choses à Gafsa, pas des projets uniquement, pas forcément, mais mes projets liés à Gafsa, qui sont déjà dispersés. Et là, moi, j'étais enceinte, quand il m'a contactée et j'ai lui dit, « Je viens de rentrer, » fatiguée déjà de Gafsa, je suis enceinte, je sais pas ce que je vais faire, mais j'étais excitée parce que moi j'ai laissé à Gafsa plein de choses à faire. Je savais pas que je vais revenir mais je savais que un jour je vais peut-être – si je reviens à Gafsa je vais faire... je vais expérimenter des choses, faire des choses de telle ou telle piste. Et quand j'ai écrit un mail très long sur ce que je laissais, je lui donnais des contacts que je connaissais. Dans le deuxième mail il m'a dit, « Souad est-ce que tu veux faire un projet ensemble. » J'ai lui dit, « je vais t'aider mais je sais

pas » mais là je me retrouve dans un projet que je m'attendais pas du tout. Je me trouve en train... ben... de l'artiste, en fait, moi je préfère pas dire artiste du départ, je me dis, plasticienne, parce que je faisais des choses... plasticienne chercheur. Mon objectif ce n'est pas forcément d'exposer ou avoir une carrière dans les galeries, c'est pas ça mon [objectif]. Si c'est nécessaire de le faire, je le fais mais je t'assure on m'a proposé plein de choses mais je refuse plein de choses en même temps. Et c'est ça qui me donne de la crédibilité de ce que je suis en train de faire. Et puis lui, il est un de ces caractères toujours pressés, donc je me suis retrouvée en train de faire un projet, de le porter en Tunisie, de créer des dossiers. J'ai jamais fait ça dans ma vie, de faire une association.

CA : L'association DELTA ?

SM : DELTA, oui, et pourquoi DELTA. C'est lié à l'eau ; d'abord au territoire, transdisciplinarité, au réseaux, parce que c'est aussi une rivière qui s'ouvre et crée milieu plus grand et aussi ça, ma réflexion au transdisciplinaire... je commence par « Elle m'aime » moi, Souad, et puis je les choses s'ouvrent, elles deviennent dispersées, et créent une forme d'unité. Et mon travail il est à l'eau, pourquoi ; parce que moi je suis très liée aux données, je récolte des données, et les données aussi, elles sont fluides, comme l'eau. Donc là, une réflexion entre eau et données. Voilà, donc depuis 2015 je suis en train d'écrire le projet « Under The Sand » avec lui ensemble. J'ai adapté le projet parce qu'il n'avait pas de liens avec l'archéologie aussi...

CA : Donc, vous avez également des archéologues dans le projet ?

SM : Oui, on travaille avec un archéologue aussi. Depuis 2015 je suis en train d'écrire, de monter, de construire le projet, de faire plein de contacts, discuter, échanger avec différents gens. Avant j'ai parlé pas aussi librement, aussi facilement, tu vois, mais avec ce projet... En fait, « Elle m'aime » donc finalement, cette photo elle est en train de s'agrandir, de devenir autre chose, elle devient un paysage aussi. Une photo de soi, un miroir, et elle devient aussi un paysage sur la route, un arbre... je ne sais pas, mais elle devient. Moi aussi, parallèlement comme je suis dans cette photo avec mon œuvre, la grande œuvre, je suis en train de devenir. On dit devenir, je deviens aussi ; j'ai jamais pensé que je vais choisir des artistes pour travailler, là j'ai un rôle de commissaire, j'ai le rôle du président d'association, plein de rôles à la fois. Là c'est le statut en fait, le statut qui devient. Dans ce projet, comme je l'ai accepté - parce que, moi, j'ai aussi mes recherches sur ce territoire ce que je veux bien continuer - je suis pas uniquement la portée du projet, je suis surtout l'artiste. Le projet, il est réfléchi en tant qu'œuvre et aussi moi, j'ai mes œuvres dans ce projet. Qu'est-ce que je suis en train de

faire, donc, comme artiste : je travaille sur trois niveaux, ou territoires. Au départ, j'ai commencé à travailler – je vais te montrer une photo [sur Facebook].

Et cette photo, c'était prise instantanément à Gafsa, c'était dans filège, pourquoi filège, en fait, les villages sont des villages construits par les Français, par les colons français autour des zones minières et à Gafsa avec « village-village » avec leur accent locale, ça devient « filège. » Aujourd'hui on parle de « filège. » Et filège, il y a des constructions jusqu'à maintenant construites à l'européenne.

CA : Et les gens, ils habitent encore là ?

SM : Il y a des locaux qui sont encore habités, il y a d'autres qui sont abandonnés, ou détruits comme des églises parfois. Il y a trois filèges sur lesquels je travaille maintenant, donc là pour moi c'est du patrimoine colonial. Et j'ai lié ça à cet aspect pictural, qui m'intéresse, j'ai lié ça à l'Impressionnisme, comme je travaille aussi sur ce moment de la journée entre chien et loup, cet aspect flou. J'ai pris cette photo instantanément, et tiens, j'ai dit « pourquoi pas continuer sur ça. » C'est aussi une de raisons... et [pendant] la dernière résidence, j'ai pris plein de photos à ce moment de la journée dans les filèges. Et quand j'ai commencé à faire ce processus, ce travail, j'ai découvert autre chose, j'ai découvert les sous-sols de ces lieux.

CA : Est-ce- que tu en as des photos ?

SM : Plutôt j'ai des photos de ce lieu du moment de la journée. Mais elles sont pas travaillées, parce que c'est aussi de la matière que je n'ai pas encore travaillé. – Elle me montre des photos liées à l'industrie de phosphate sur son portable, comme des usines –

CA : Et ces bâtiments étaient des maisons ?

SM : Non, ces sont pas de maisons, c'est là où on a stocké... ça c'est pas une maison, c'est l'endroit où on faisait autre chose. Mais il y a des maisons, je vais te montrer... Plus c'est flou, plus c'est intéressant pour moi. Il y a aussi une église, un cinéma...

CA : Est-ce qu'il y a des chrétiens qui habitent là... ?

SM : ...qui habitent là-bas, non, il n'y en a plus. Mais il y a trois églises, une qui a été vraiment dans un état qui m'a beaucoup choquée, une autre qui est fermée, et la troisième ils ont gardé l'église mais ils l'ont transformée en un club d'enfants. Pour moi si l'on transforme, c'est pas mal.

CA : Selon moi, les conditions ne sont pas trop mal...

SM : Celle-là, oui, mais il y a d'autres qui sont pas bien. – Elle montre des photos des passages de phosphate dans l'usine.

CA : Est c'est une partie de Gafsa ?

SM : Oui, une partie de Gafsa. C'est pas le centre ville de Gafsa, c'est les alentours où il y a le phosphate.

CA : Et les usines de phosphate, est-ce qu'on y travaille encore?

SM : Il y a moins de travail après la révolution parce que c'est un produit qui pose plein de problématiques pour l'instant. Il y a, soit de grèves... en fait la région elle n'est pas satisfaite parce que toute la production... Imagine avant la révolution ils produisent l'équivalent de 5 milliards par jour et tout cet argent va à Tunis, à la capitale, est la région ne bénéficie pas de son argent. L'infrastructure, elle est dans un état lamentable à Gafsa. Donc, ils ont des formes de réaction aussi. Donc, ils font beaucoup de grèves, ils arrêtent la production pour trouver des solutions. J'ai qualifié aussi le phosphate à Gafsa, comme un *pharmakon*³⁴⁷, je ne sais pas si tu connais le philosophe Bernard Stiegler. Il parle de pharmacologie, il dit que la technique est un *pharmakon*. C'est à dire elle est à la fois le remède et aussi le poison. Moi, je dirais que le phosphate à Gafsa est aussi un remède et aussi un poison, parce qu'il est en train d'empoisonner l'écologie, il métamorphose le paysage, et cetera. Et aussi un remède parce qu'il... – un remède pas pour tout les pays –il fournit de source d'emploi pour la région, surtout l'emploi pour les ces gens. Et ici ils sont bien payés c'est pour ça qu'ils font aussi la grève parce que les jeunes, ils veulent intégrer la CPG, ils veulent travailler dans la CPG. Même si ils risquent de tomber malade, de cancer, de plein de choses...

CA : Tu sais, la lumière dans ces photos me rappelle un peu la peinture de Magritte, avec cette seule lampe...

SM : Je vais te montrer peut-être les sous-sols ? Donc, j'ai trouvé un peu mon bonheur, j'ai même exposé ça à Nantes.

CA : Oui, j'ai vu les photos.

SM : Ces sont des documents, des archives justement. Donc, à partir du sol c'était l'architecture coloniale puis je me suis retrouvée travailler sur le sol, je vais te dire qu'au départ je voulais travailler sur des données météorologiques, récolter des données de l'atmosphère. Quand j'ai vu ça, les choses ont commencé à se connecter, c'est à dire que, j'ai commencé à réfléchir seule, sous-sol et air, donc trois niveaux du territoire et toujours lié à l'industrie de phosphate au point où il y a de l'eau et phosphate et aussi l'histoire de la

³⁴⁷ “The *pharmakon* is at once what enables care to be taken and that of which care must be taken – in the sense that it is necessary to pay attention: its power is curative to the immeasurable extent [dans la mesure et la démesure] that it is also destructive. This ‘at once’ characterizes what I call a pharmacology....”, (French original text: “Le *pharmakon*, c'est à la fois ce qui permet de prendre soin, et ce dont il faut prendre soin – au sens où il faut y faire attention : c'est une puissance curative dans la mesure et la démesure où c'est une puissance destructrice. Cet à la fois caractérise ce que j'appellerai une pharmacologie....”) Stiegler 2013, p. 4, (original version: 2010, p. 16).

colonisation, la trace des colons. Dans ce sous-sol il se trouvaient des archives en papier qui datent de l'époque coloniale jusqu'à aujourd'hui. C'est pour ça que je parle d'une archéologie de présent parce que je trouve trois, plusieurs époques à partir de l'époque coloniale. Au niveau du sous-sol j'ai récolté beaucoup d'archives, au niveau du sol il y aura des images picturales et au niveau de l'air je suis en train de travailler sur un kit connecté avec des capteurs, des senseurs, que je vais faire voler avec un drone, à la fois pour prendre des photos aériennes et aussi capter des données météorologiques. Et là, l'histoire aussi, qui reviens à part cette histoire du territoire, de la photo, l'histoire de l'impressionnisme. Si moi (six mois), je vais capter ces données, j'ai pensé aussi aux impressionnistes, les impressionnistes ils sont partis dehors, ils ont installé le chevalet pour prendre des données, pour des impressions. Moi, je vais prendre des données, des impressions, mais elles sont numériques, elles sont des impressions numériques et volantes et je fais le lien avec Nadar, je ne sais pas si tu l'a connais, Nadar, dans l'histoire de la photographie il a fait voler avec un Montgolfier l'appareil photo. Il a pris des photos aériennes, donc là c'est l'idée de satellite. J'ai oublié de te dire que en prenant des photos sur le territoire, ces photos en marchant - c'était un bref instant, un bref moment de la journée - puisque ce n'est pour ne pas tomber dans la nuit... il n'est pas la journée. J'utilisais des applications qui traçaient mon chemin et là c'est l'action des dérives, le territoire, la cartographie c'est toujours lié. Et la aussi un lien avec le satellite qui annonce aussi mon travail avec le drone, avec les données aériennes. Voilà.

CA : Donc, aussi un moyen de localisation.

SM : Oui, c'est toujours, pourquoi c'est ça ? Je n'oublie pas que je suis en train... à l'origine, je travaille sur le miroir. C'est aussi une présence de soi, mais autre. Je ne suis pas obligé de montrer mon miroir. Le miroir existe mais autre. Et la présence de soi, elle est là, mais autre. C'est pour ça que je te dis que je travaille sur un seul projet mais qui est en train de devenir, qui change d'aspect à chaque fois.

CA : En fait, moi je comprends le miroir dans un sens complètement différent.

SM : Le miroir, ce n'est pas le reflet qui symbolise, signifie un narcissisme, c'est pas ça, en fait, c'est un miroir qui est outil d'ouverture aussi un outil d'altérité, d'interrogation sur soi, mais une interrogation sur soi qui est ouverte. Et aussi la réflexion, c'est comment cet autoportrait initial est en train de devenir un monde. Il devient un monde, un monde où il y a tout le monde. Il y a beaucoup de domaines, beaucoup d'endroits, elle est complexe à la fois mais propose surtout une certaine poésie, un fonctionnement d'un monde capitaliste parce que moi j'utilise des outils capitalistes quelque part et ils proposent une poésie.

Voilà c'est un peu, peut-être, compliqué mais surtout je veux que tu comprennes que le projet de Gafsa est lié. À un certain moment, moi, je faisais le projet de Gafsa à part mes trajets et je faisais aussi mon projet « Elle m'aime » à part, et à certains moments il y a eu une connexion. Et la connexion a commencé avec Georges Thiery, qui déjà m'a fait un retour. Il a pris la photo chez lui, il a fait une improvisation sur mes images de Gafsa et hep, ça a commencé. C'est pour ça qu'avec Georges Thiery, le poète, j'ai un trajet. Il y a une fécondation, on est dans des collaborations, il y a un fil qui continue avec lui.

CA : Wow, merci. Peut-être on commence avec « Vous êtes ici... Et ailleurs! » parce que là il y a aussi le miroir...

SM : Oui, ce travail, voilà. Donc, « Vous êtes ici...Et ailleurs ! » comme je lisais « Les Espaces Autres » de Michel Foucault, je tombais sur les espaces... sur l'hétérotopie, le miroir est un espace autre, c'est une hétérotopie. Et donc, j'ai réfléchi ce projet et celui de Cheninisur cette idée de l'hétérotopie et l'hétérochronie. Donc, j'ai choisi de travailler sur Sidi Bou Saïd... Pour ce travail j'ai réfléchi deux territoires à la fois, celui de Sidi Bou Saïd et celui de Chénini. Chénini, tu es déjà en courant de ce projet ? Tu connais un peu le paysage, la différence entre les deux paysages, entre Sidi Bou Saïd et Chénini?

CA : Pas vraiment, j'ai vu des photos mais c'est tout...

SM : En fait, Sidi Bou Saïd c'est un village de bourgeois, c'est aussi très le Nord, c'est la banlieue [de Tunis] et Cheninic'est un village berbère. Donc, les gens habitent aussi encore dans les grottes, tout est encore... même ils parlent encore berbère, leurs habitudes... Moi même, en tant que Tunisienne c'est la première fois que j'y vais. J'étais dans un état ou dans une réaction. Le premier jour, j'étais impressionnée par un certain décalage. Moi, je venais connectée avec mes appareils, et cetera et eux, ils étaient dans un autre temps, ils habitaient dans un autre temps. C'est cette impression d'être dans un autre temps... Je viens dans un autre temps... Je n'ai pas pensé qu'en Tunisie il y a encore une partie de gens qui habitent dans un temps autre. Et là ça fait la connexion avec ce que je lisais autour de l'hétérotopie, des espaces autres, et entre le miroir et aussi Chénini, qui habite dans un temps autre. Donc, j'ai eu l'idée d'installer un miroir mais on peut voir à travers, et derrière j'ai installé tout un dispositif. Et ce dispositif qui est connecté, donc qui capte ce qui se passe devant, donc tout ce qui se passe instantanément devant le miroir est diffusé sur le net.

CA : Donc, le miroir était à Sidi Bou Saïd ?

SM : Oui, à Sidi Bou Saïd. Là je vais parler de ce que j'ai installé à Sidi Bou Saïd. Donc, j'ai installé le miroir et derrière le miroir il y a un ordinateur connecté et il peut capter des images. Tout ce qui se passe devant était enregistré en streaming sur le web. Les gens peuvent me

suivre à distance, et derrière j'ai installé le miroir. – Nous regardons les photos sur Facebook. Elle m'indique quelque chose. – *Ca c'était [la] fin de la journée, le dispositif normalement, tu peux voir, oui celle là.* Je faisais avec les moyens que j'avais. Donc, j'ai installé un ordinateur avec une connexion et j'ai créé un compte streaming pour la visualisation et j'ai partagé ça. Avant ça j'ai fait une carte, j'ai créé une carte, j'ai indiqué les lieux où ils se trouvent [le miroir et les écrans]. Je crois que je l'ai mise sur mon blog plutôt... Mais là oui, là ce sont des endroits où j'ai installé un écran aussi connecté. Ce qui se passe devant le miroir, se passe aussi dans des lieux autres comme des galeries, restaurants, cafés... des cafés uniquement dédiés aux hommes et aussi des cafés mixed. Donc le départ était ça – elle montre la photo du miroir – j'ai partagé ça avec... (Je lui montre ma présentation power point et elle demande) Il n'y a pas le texte ?

CA : Non, ces sont des images de ma présentation de l'université.

SM : Ah, d'accord. Je te donnerai peut-être des informations plus précises, plus claires. Donc c'était ça avec un petit texte ou indication aussi. Je crois que j'ai mis un hashtag... J'ai espéré que les gens allaient partager des choses mais il y avait beaucoup de réactions, (auxquelles je m'attendais pas) que m'attendais pas, les gens appelaient leurs amis, « Ah, regarde ce lien, je passe directement ! »

CA : Viens me cherche en ligne !

SM : Oui, regarde-moi en ligne. Il y a des gens qui passaient des messages aussi « Je t'aime » Je sais pas s'il y a ça mais, il y a des réactions en fait, plein, plein des réactions [Nous regardons les photos de l'évènement sur Facebook]. On n'a pas mis tout [sur Facebook] mais il y a la diffusion. Et aussi, il y a Christine [Bruckbauer] quelque part... Plus bas ce sont des lieux où j'ai installé l'écran, là c'est une galerie, c'est un restaurant, un salon de thé, aussi un café, ça c'est un espace à la fois musée et un espace de spectacle, c'est Dar Sébastien. En même temps il y eu une diffusion... il avait la radio qui parlait du projet. Donc, moi j'ai fait une diffusion directe. Après, j'avais un flot d'images du captures. Mais ce projet d'installer un miroir avec une connexion c'était l'interrogation « où est l'œuvre ? », « est-ce que c'est l'interaction, des gens ? », « est-ce que c'est le miroir lui même, seul ? », « est-ce que c'est aussi le dispositif derrière ? », « est-ce que c'est la carte ? », donc, là, c'est multiple. Comme je fais toujours des connections et des liens, j'ai pris les photos de cet hétérotopie, de cet espace autre et j'ai fait une collaboration avec deux ingénieurs informatiques. Ces sont des amis, mais on a fait une expérimentation et on a travaillé avec un kinect pour le projet « De Colline en Colline » à Chénini, dans l'autre village, le Sud tunisien, où ils sont tous des berbères. « Temps augmenté » cette œuvre, elle est connectée à la première [à Sidi Bou Saïd].

On a commencé à expérimenter avec le kinect et l'informaticienne, elle a créé une application pour que le spectateur puisse regarder à distance les images qui ont été capturées à Sidi Bou Saïd. J'ai fait une sélection. Donc, les spectateurs de Cheninideviennent spectateurs de Sidi Bou Saïd.

CA : Donc, il y a deux choses dans « Temps augmenté » ?

SM : En fait, peut-être je vais parler de « De Colline En Colline ». Dans le projet de « Colline en Colline » il y a deux œuvres connectées. La première à Sidi Bou Saïd, et la deuxième à Cheninidonc « Vous êtes ici et... ailleurs ! » et l'ailleurs devient à Chénini. Et « Temps augmenté » pourquoi, « Temps augmenté » aussi parce que je t'ai parlé que j'ai l'impression que je suis venue du présent et ces gens qui habitent à ces lieux, ils viennent du passé. Mais j'ai ramené le future parce qu'un kinect qui... – le portable sonne – Et là c'est un travail à la fois expérimental et ludique, mais moi, au-delà de ça, ou au-delà d'une collaboration avec des informations, au-delà que c'est aussi un travail in-situ et ludique, c'est aussi un évènement, c'est une réflexion liée au premier projet et aussi liée à ce que je fais. Est-ce que tu as lu le catalogue « De Colline En Colline » ?

CA : Oui, je l'ai reçu de Christine Bruckbauer...

SM : J'y ai aussi parlé de l'œuvre [qui] ne m'appartient pas, mais aussi ce qui m'appartient c'est l'évènement, son évènement. Son évènement c'est à dire, ce qui l'a précédé, comment j'ai pensé la chose. Comment elle va devenir aussi.

CA : Donc, quand on entre dans la pièce...

SM : Oui, ça c'est l'application où les gens avec les mains... comme aux jeux - d'ailleurs le Kinect est utilisé dans des jeux - ... Et elle [sur la photo] est l'informaticienne qui l'a développé. Elle est développeur et elle a développé une application pour que les corps deviennent un medium.

CA : Donc, avec ça, les enfants peuvent faire des mouvements et la photo change ?

SM : Oui, la photo change, comme s'ils feuillètent un album. Et en même temps, ils se voient ici, le fond, c'est un miroir de ce qui se passe et ça c'est la photo de Sidi Bou Saïd.

CA : Mais, c'est génial !

SM : C'est vrai ? Mais pour moi c'est une expérimentation. Il y a une réflexion interactive qui engage l'autre. Il y a toujours un miroir et dans cet espace en entrant on a trouvé un miroir aussi donc je l'ai laissé comme ça, derrière. Il fait parti de l'espace et je l'ai gardé. C'est pour ça que je parle d'un in-situ.

CA : Et ça c'était l'installation dans la première chambre, et dans la deuxième... ?

SM : La deuxième, en fait... le spectateur, quand il avance, les couleurs changent selon la température. Plus on avance, plus les couleurs deviennent chaudes. Plus on recule, les couleurs deviennent froides.

CA : C'était capté par un deuxième camera ?

SM : Un deuxième Kinect... deux Kinects. Ça c'est la Kinect est relié à un vidéoprojecteur et lié à l'ordinateur.

CA : Et les gens, ont-ils eu besoin d'explications ?

SM : Ils ont vu quelqu'un qui fait une démonstration et ça c'est aussi devenu... c'était jouer quoi, c'était du jeu et là c'est moi.

CA : Dans le miroir.

SM : Evidemment. Et je suis pas seule... Il a toujours quelqu'un.

CA : Et ça a duré 24h comme expliqué par Faten Rouissi ?

SM : Mais non, les gens dormaient donc on été obligé d'arrêter et on a repris le lendemain.

CA : En fait je voulais aussi parler avec Faten Rouissi mais malheureusement elle n'est pas à Tunis en ce moment. Mais ça, c'est génial avec trois miroirs dans un espace.

SM : Il y a des miroirs partout, même le vidéoprojecteur aussi on peut le réfléchir comme un miroir.

CA : Et les réactions, elles étaient comment ?

SM : L'émerveillement, c'était l'émerveillement - un travail technique quoi - devant de la technologie.

CA : Et pas seulement les jeunes, aussi tout le monde a essayé d'expérimenter ?

SM : Oui, tout le monde l'a essayé.

– pause –

CA : Je pense concernant les œuvres il faut que je reformule les questions mais j'ai encore d'autres questions sur... Tu vois, des questions sur New Media Art en général mais aussi sur NMA en Tunisie.

SM : Moi, je fais partie des artistes pionniers de ça en Tunisie mais là il y a plusieurs... Mais moi j'ai commencé avec mes recherches, pas en tant qu'artiste qui expose où qui montre ce travail. Mais dans ma tête j'ai des noms qui peuvent répondre à cette question...

CA : Oui ça m'aiderais beaucoup. Maintenant je comprends ton chemin et aussi le « pourquoi, » pourquoi tu as recours à New Media, je comprends pourquoi la photographie, le smart phone...

SM : À part ça, est la peinture, et la peinture n'est pas oubliée. La peinture comme si c'est le retour sur l'origine. Et dans mon travail le projet de « Elle m'aime » c'est aussi une traçabilité de devenir et aussi un archivage de soi, et aussi une forme d'archéologie des médias, archéologie du projet « elle m'aime » de germe. Comment il a commencé avec ce germe.

CA : Donc, ça veut dire que tu exposes les outils, comme le iPad, comme les outils du projet « Temps augmenté », donc tout le monde peut voir comment ça se passe.

SM : C'est dévoilé. Le dernier travail que j'ai exposé il y a deux mois - je vais te montrer - ici à Sousse, un travail qui... J'ai exposé à Paris dernièrement, en fait, moi, j'expose que lorsque je trouve qu'il y a un lien avec ce que je fais. J'ai pas envie de me montrer, déjà je suis en train de me montrer où montrer ce que je fais sur le web, mais je préfère montrer mon travail quand il s'agit d'une réflexion. J'ai montré ça, et là, c'est des images travaillées. Ces sont des paysages du village de Hergla. Hergla, c'est pas loin d'ici [Sousse] et c'était dans le cadre d'une rencontre des deux rives, c'est la rive de Erki à coté de la Bretagne et Sousse, et quand j'ai vu à travers le web les images de Erki, je trouvais un ressemblance énorme entre Erki et Hergla. Et moi, j'ai déjà un lien avec Hergla, j'ai déjà fait un projet à Hergla. Donc je reviens toujours au passé pour créer des liens. Donc j'ai fait une flânerie dans des paysages de Hergla, mais avec mon iPad, mon outil, mon mobile, j'étais dans un travail de cartographie. Comme ces sont des images numériques et connectées - elles sont connectées, donc géolocalisées - j'ai pris les images, de paysage, je les travaillais de la manière de la peinture comme je fais toujours. Et j'ai créé un trajet sur cette série avec des points, des points rouges. À la fois elles représentent, elles renvoient la photo « elle même » où il y a la couleur rouge [qui] est aussi une présence de soi et symbolise la vie. Cette couleur..., parce que moi, j'ai des réflexions autour une sphère qui est connecté, ça symbolise la vie. Donc, j'ai fait un diaporama avec mon chemin de là, par exemple jusqu'à là. Et chaque fois je prends la photo, je la traite et cetera. Mais je mets le point selon les coordonnées ; longitude, altitude, que j'ai trouvées dans la photo connectée. Donc, moi, quand je prends n'importe quelle photo, je sais où elle est prise, donc j'ai ses coordonnées, bref.

CA : Donc, pour l'instant, j'ai une dernière question. Ce qui m'intéresse ce sont tes projets interactifs dans l'espace public...

SM : Ah, j'ai oublié de te montrer un autre projet que j'ai réalisé entre Paris et Tunis. C'est un projet interactif, réalisé en 2012 avec un artiste...- tu peux le voir sur Facebook. Il s'appelle « Instants Flux ». Et là, c'est un des artistes qui, au départ avec le projet « Elle M'Aime », a participé à prendre la photo dans l'endroit où il est. Et les choses ont évolué, on a fait plein de choses ensemble. Ce projet « Instant Flux » consistait à installer un écran avec une

connexion ; il y avait du Skype, avant c'était pas vraiment une bonne connexion mais il y avait de la connexion. Et moi, j'ai créé ce dispositif, j'ai diffusé et je lui ai envoyé les images à Paris instantanément et lui dans son atelier - il travaille beaucoup avec la ligne, il est un artiste rhizomatique - il me fait un renvoi instantané aussi et pour diffuser, pour en faire une diffusion dans la galerie. Mais qu'est-ce qu'il y a dedans, en fait ? Ce qui se passe devant, ce qui se passe devant cet écran... il est là mais, picturalisé.

CA : Alors, ces sont des œuvres de son atelier ?

SM : Dans son atelier, oui. Non, les images de cet espace mais travaillées dans son atelier et revenues. Donc, eux ils sont en train de se voir comme un miroir, mais pas comme un miroir bien net. Mais ils sont picturalisés. Donc, les outils sont toujours apparents, les câbles, ça ne me dérange pas de les garder. Je ne sais pas si tu connais Mc Luhan, il parle de « message of the medium »

CA : Oui, je le connais.

SM : Parfois ça vient et ça part comme...en fait, c'est l'effet de... ça réagit avec la connexion, parfois elle coupe, parfois ça vire du glitch, et ça dérange pas, ça donne du sens. Ça donne du sens à l'œuvre qui est entre deux lieux, entre deux personnes, la connexion n'est pas vraiment fluide mais ça donne du sens pour moi.

CA : Oui, j'ai vu ce projet et j'ai pris note. Et c'était à B'Chira Art Center.

J'ai aussi des questions concernant l'artiste féminine, le rôle de l'artiste féminine en Tunisie. Par exemple, j'aimerais savoir s'il y a un nouveau statut post-révolutionnaire de la femme ou si les effets de la révolution sont perceptibles dans ton œuvre ?

SM : C'est pas changé pour moi en tant que ou parce que je suis une femme, en fait. Dans mon travail j'interroge pas la féminité mais, par exemple, j'ai du mal à exposer dans des expositions ou des événements où il s'agit uniquement des femmes. Je pense que c'est contre le féminisme. Ça veut dire que, dans mon travail, oui, il y a une dimension féminine, parce qu'il parle de moi, parce que c'est un récit d'autobiographie quelque part, parce que moi je suis une femme. Donc, c'est clair. Et la post-révolution, qu'est-ce qu'elle a changé en moi, personnellement : peut-être plus de liberté de l'information, avant on avait plus de censure, censure de l'information, même à Youtube on n'avait pas accès. On n'avait pas accès justement à plein des sites. Ce qui est le plus important, c'est la ouverture sur le web. Le web est très important dans ma démarche. Et moi, je suis artiste qui – si tu veux j'appelle ça artiste – moi, je suis plasticienne qui est évoluée avec le web. Le web fait partie de ma construction en tant que personne et en tant que plasticienne. Peut-être aussi, s'il n'y n'a pas le web, je ne

sais pas, peut-être il y a autre chose, mais le web c'est vrai... l'ouverture du web a fait de moi quelque chose.

CA : Donc, le projet, non l'expérimentation avec ton étudiante [Entre elle(s)...#tunisiennes], c'était la seule fois où tu as vraiment posé la question de la femme...

SM : Directe, directement, oui. C'est le seul travail où je l'interroge...

CA : Mais, c'était une occasion spéciale...

SM : C'était dans un cadre spécial, c'était dans un contexte spécial, oui. J'ai oublié de te dire que par rapport à la femme, j'étais invité à Paris pour monter une exposition l'année dernière pour exposer le 8 mars, la journée de la femme. J'étais invité pour choisir trois femmes artistes mais au départ quand on m'a invitée j'ai dit ça : « Est-ce que vous m'avez invitée parce que je suis femme et vous attendez que je vous expose la femme qui souffre, Tunisienne, qui a ses problèmes, le voile, et cetera, parce que vous avez peut-être vu mon travail avec la femme voilée ou bien vous m'avez invitée parce que je suis plasticienne. » Moi, je suis d'abord plasticienne qui évolue dans son travail. Je ne suis pas localisée dans cette étiquette. Et heureusement, on m'a répondu que, « Souad, tu peux faire ce que tu veux, on t'offre l'espace, on veut inviter des artistes Tunisiennes mais femmes, vu que c'est l'évènement à la journée de la femme, mais tu fais ce que tu veux, tu montres ce que tu veux, tu n'est pas obligée de me montrer... C'est pas un commande derrière » Et j'étais soulagée mais j'ai joué sur ça, j'ai fait une exposition qui s'appelle « Zafra » ça veut dire « un voyage, singulier ». Et Zafra c'est aussi un clin d'oeil sur un évènement politique, parce que à un moment le [Moncef] Marzouki il a parlé – je crois que c'était avec le mouvement à Manouba – dans un discours des femmes... il a partagé la femme Tunisienne en tant que femme « Zephirhat » et [celle] avec le voile intégral. Et Zephirhat ça veut dire dans la langue Arabe, celle qui a le visage dévoilé. Et moi, j'ai écrit un texte – je vais te l'envoyer – j'ai invité des artistes et je les ai invitées [pour] qu'on travaille, qu'on fait une exposition autour du paysage qui montre que la femme Tunisienne est une femme – je faisais le contraire de ce que le public attendait – que nous sommes des femmes voyageuses, on voyage, on est ouvertes. C'était cette idée ! À la fin, j'ai fait un jeu de mot « mon zefirat » pas « zefirat » voyageuse contre l'immobilité. Et c'est toujours ouvert vers d'autres contrées, d'autres pays, d'autres domaines. Donc là c'est aussi indirect ; il y a de féminisme indirect. Je ne suis pas obligée de mettre ce ticket et dire que c'est mon travail [qui] défend la femme. Tu vois ?

CA : Oui, je comprends ce que tu voulais dire... C'est pourquoi je ne savais pas, comment formuler la question, comment traiter le sujet.

SM : « Elle m'aime » ça veut dire, je fais voir un narcissisme avec l'amour. Mais elle, et c'est féminin, elle voyage, elle est mobile, elle est libre, elle est libérée, même si peut-être on n'est pas assez libérée. Mais c'est une image, c'est une présentation sans limites, sans cadre, sans étiquette. Je suis la plasticienne et mon travail peut être universel, dispersé dans un fonctionnement actuel du monde. Voilà.

CA : D'accord. Merci pour ton temps et tes réponses.

SM : J'espère que tu as de la matière.

CA : Oui ! Et on reste en contact pour s'envoyer des choses et pour le reste des questions.

Part two (over lunch)

CA : Est-ce qu'on pourrait vite encore parler de la notion « participation » ?

SM: Quand tu dis participation, c'est que l'un est lié à l'autre [ou l'un] qui intervient. Et la naissance de « Elle M'aime » ma photo de moi, que j'ai partagée fait un sens avec le retour des autres qui ont participé à ça. Et là je participe - la participation en collaboration - quand je suis en train de collaborer avec des informaticiens ou même avec Wilfried Nail avec qui je suis en train de produire le projet « Under The Sand. » Là il y a de la participation, tu vois ? On est en train de participer à construire quelque chose, une œuvre, pas forcément direct, tu vois. Et même dans les performances que j'ai réalisées sur la route de Gafsa [il y a] la participation des gens... il y a des interactions plutôt, il y a des interactions pas de participation...

CA : Mais avec Thierry, c'était plutôt une participation ?

SM : Oui, c'était une participation.

CA : Donc, le web, d'une certaine façon demande la participation pour la dispersion, n'est pas ?

SM : Donc, le web fait parti de la colonne vertébrale de ce que je fais. En fait j'ai écrit deux ou trois projets autour de ça, qui sont encore écrits. J'ai un projet d'une exposition personnelle presque 100% interactive mais la je dois trouver le temps et trouver l'espace pour faire ça. J'espère que je le ferai avant que tu termines ta thèse.

CA : Ah oui, mais maintenant c'est définitivement terminé et je te remercie encore une fois pour tout.

7.3. Abstract (english)

The following thesis addresses the nature of contemporary Tunisian multimedia artist Souad Mani's interventions in real and virtual public space. By means of a work analysis of a selection of Mani's oeuvre from 2010 until 2017 this study examines how aesthetically constructed spaces are capable of encouraging modalities of civic interpersonal engagement, contributing to the expansion of the Tunisian democratic public sphere. In addition, it strives to find out whether Mani's engagement with new media could serve a reassessment of the history of modernity in Tunisia. Following Bhabha's theory of postcolonial translation Mani's projects testify to a new media practice that exceeds mere spectatorship but activates the spectator and their senses and opens up sites of enunciation that embrace the in-between spaces of cultural difference. These sites could possibly lead to the articulation of new cultural meanings and strategies and the creation of platforms of opposition.

7.4. Abstract (german)

Die folgende Arbeit befasst sich mit den Interventionen im realen und virtuellen öffentlichen Raum der zeitgenössischen Tunesischen Multimedia-Künstlerin, Souad Mani. Anhand einer Werkanalyse einer Auswahl von Manis Oeuvre von 2010 bis 2017 untersucht diese Studie, wie ästhetisch konstruierte Räume dazu geeignet sind, Modalitäten zivilgesellschaftlichen und zwischenmenschlichen Engagements zu fördern, die zur Erweiterung der tunesischen demokratischen Öffentlichkeit beitragen. Außerdem wird der Versuch gewagt zu hinterfragen, ob Manis Auseinandersetzung mit Neuen Medien einer Neubewertung der Geschichte der Moderne in Tunesien dienen könnte. Mithilfe Homi Bhabhas Theorie der postkolonialen Übersetzung bezeugen Manis Projekte eine neue Medienpraxis, die das bloße Spektakel übersteigt und den Zuschauer und seine Sinne aktiviert und Orte der Äußerung eröffnet, die aus den Zwischenräumen kultureller Differenz entspringen. Orte, die möglicherweise zur Artikulation neuer kultureller Bedeutungen und Strategien und zur Schaffung von Oppositionsplattformen führen könnten.

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1. Figures



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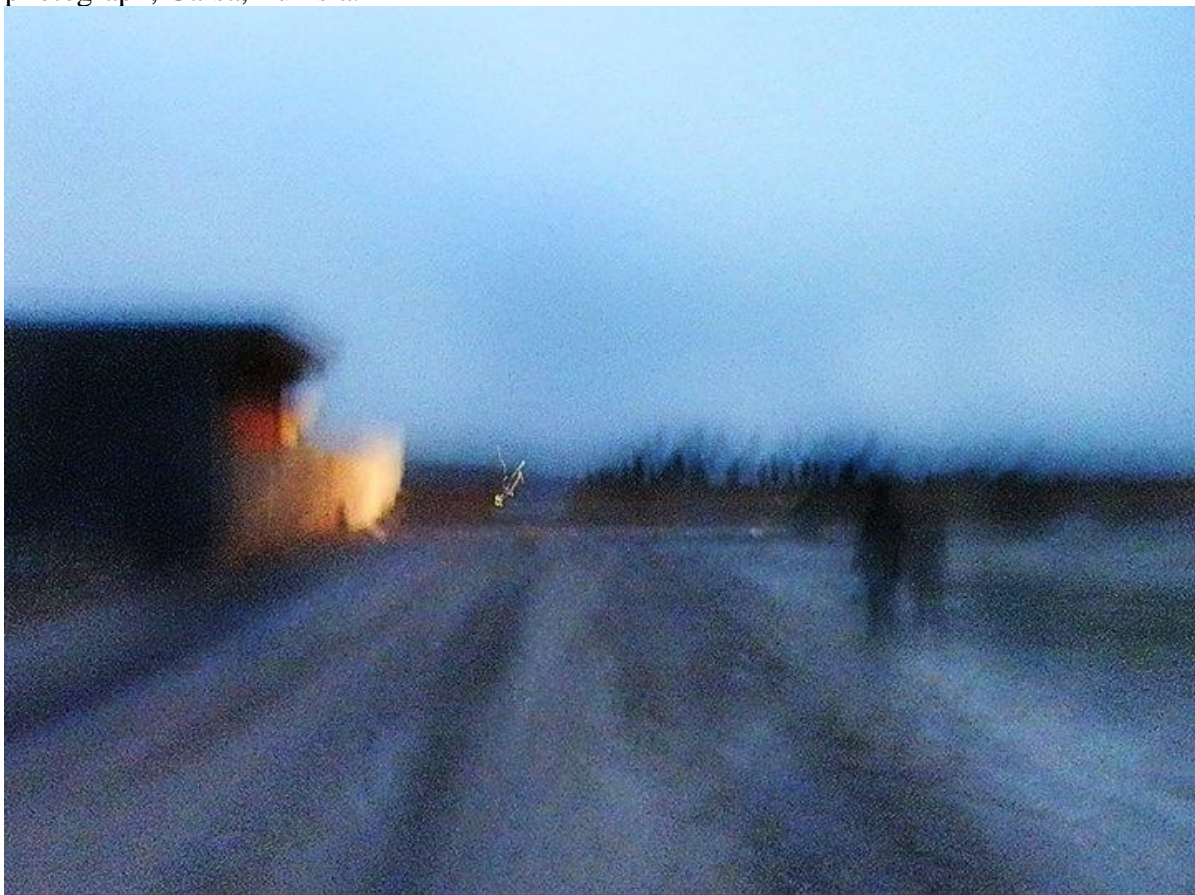


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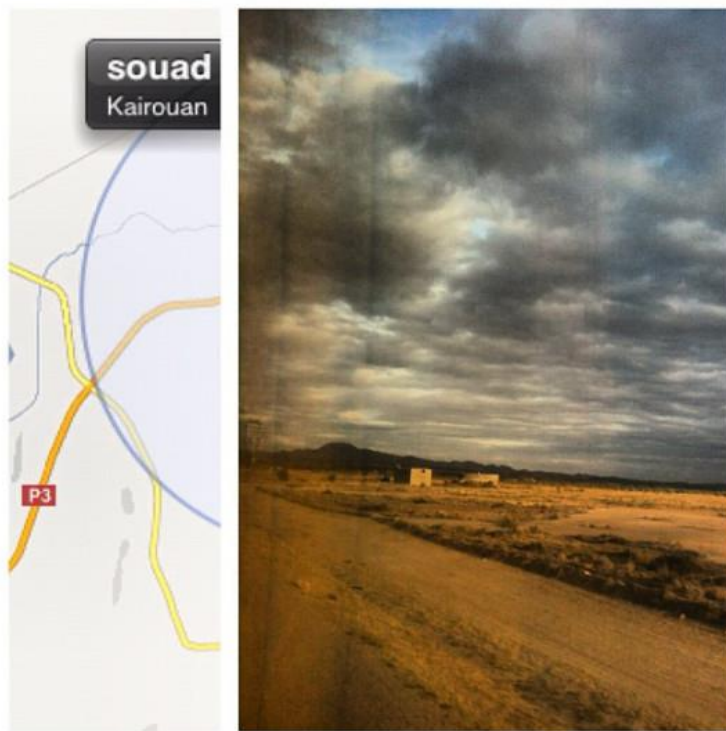


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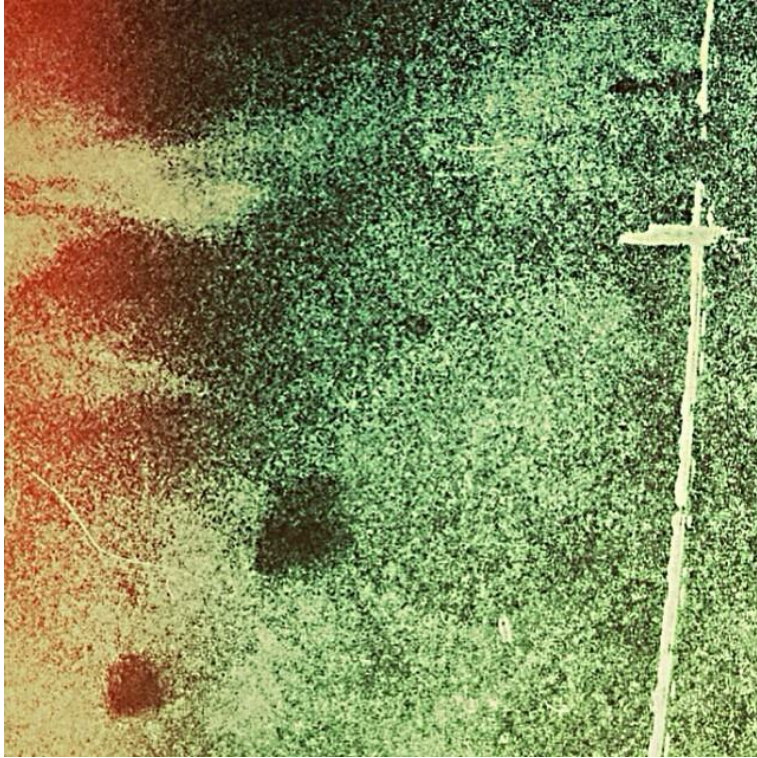


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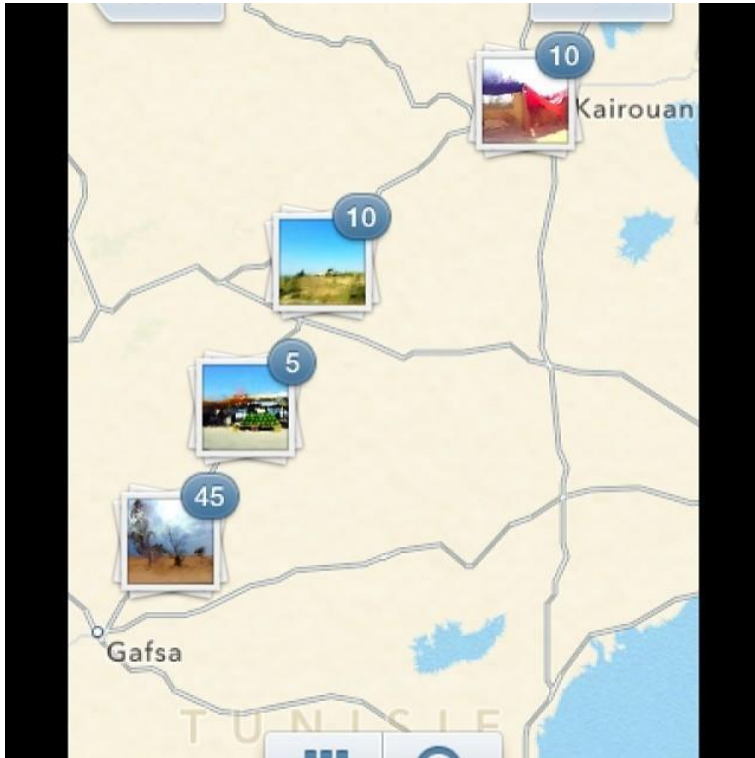


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