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**Editorial**

e-flux journal #23 — march 2011 Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle  
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The Gulf War did not take place, as Baudrillard notoriously put it. But now something else has taken place, and it did not happen in the doldrums of virtuality, but in the streets and squares of Tunis, Cairo, Benghazi, and elsewhere. It seems that the prospect of an all-encompassing condition of techno-saturated anorexia, perhaps appropriate for a time when communications networks and the tools for producing reality were situated in the hands of governments and telecommunications tycoons, has been inverted. No one could have foreseen the perseverance of reality over mass-deception, the weaponization of communications networks in the hands of ordinary people, and the discovery of commonality where it had surely been obliterated by systems far more oppressive than anything a camera or computer could ever devise.

How to even begin to describe the extraordinary release of energy, subjectivity, and potential witnessed in the Middle East over the past several weeks? After all, it is still going on. But at this point we can provisionally say, following Franco Berardi, that if cognitarians and knowledge workers have been searching for a body – for genuine social, physical, and socioeconomic connections in the midst of a loose field of cursory contact – this body has now manifested itself as more than a mere possibility, and it is a beautiful thing.

In this issue, Suely Rolnik recalls a singing lesson she took in Paris in 1978, when the act of singing a simple song allowed her to rediscover a desire for life. Until that moment, as she realized years later, this desire had been buried beneath a thick shell that had grown around her while living in exile in France after fleeing the military dictatorship in Brazil. Not only did the liberation of this voice mark the moment she decided to return to her home country, the moment was also a discovery of the power of one's own voice against a brutality that had wound itself inextricably into the workings of a private body and life, a brutality that Rolnik had carried with her regardless of having left the military regime behind.

In "Camels vs. Google: Revolutions Recreate the Center of the World," Jon Rich considers the recent revolutions in Cairo and the Middle East as still circulating within a network of fragile assumptions regarding the nature of modernity and democracy. Now supplemented by new regimes of image production and a shift in American cultural dominance from the sphere of consumers to a reign of the "user," can we really be so certain of the primacy of the pro-democracy protests in the Middle East?

In the second installment of her extensive three-part series on the “culture class,” Martha Rosler zooms in on Richard Florida as the most prominent protagonist of urban renovation in recent years, with his bestselling book outlining the economic advantages of catering to the new demographic of the “creative class.” But taking into account Florida’s neoliberal deployment of this loosely-knit network of traditionally left-leaning artists, academics, designers, programmers, and so forth, it seems that gay-friendly and “creative” urban landscapes may simply mark a new chapter in a much older narrative of class warfare – this time with artists’ own political ambivalence leading the charge against the disenfranchised.

Inspired by Tomas Saraceno’s installation *Galaxies Forming along Filaments, Like Droplets along the Strands of a Spider’s Web* (2008), Bruno Latour looks at the topology of the sphere as an alternative to that of the network. Whereas networks are able to articulate cursory and diffuse forms of connectivity in the midst of an infinite expanse, the sphere can be seen as pointing the advantages of networks to another technology by which local, fragile, and complex “atmospheric conditions” can gain a form of resilience by way of a container within a broader network. How can we then apply the same logic to a means of “recomposing” disciplinary divides in a way that sustains a common vocabulary, yet overcomes established hierarchies?

Mona Mahall and Asli Serbest reflect on the life and work of Siegfried Giedion, a historian whose work pinpoints a sharp, but mobile border between nature and culture, between thinking and feeling – a border defined more by constant motion than by its actual dissolution. Key to the dynamism of this border for Giedion was a view of history as authorship (rather than progress), an understanding of the language of movement, of the cyclical nature of time, and of science and engineering as cultural production.

Peter Friedl observes Charles Willson Peale’s famous self-portrait, *The Artist in His Museum*, to find the artist, naturalist, and American revolutionary having set aside his palette and brushes to invite the viewer into his collection of objects. The artist plays at being a historian, but in a concession to the highly ideological apparatus of the museum, such a figure attempting to present natural and cultural information as objective historical facts also renders himself a historical artifact.

In the second of his three-part series on “neo-materialism,” Joshua Simon considers how the aura of symbolic value has eclipsed the materiality of objects, transcending concrete application to produce a phantasmic dimension

in which commodities assume lifelike characteristics of their own, where shoes, for example, no longer need feet. This has been reflected in a number of works by artists who address this shift in the nature of the commodity with a revised view of objecthood as waste material, as negative capacity, as commodities waiting to be animated by a brand.

In her response to Paul Chan and Sven Lütticken’s last issue of e-flux journal, *Idiot Wind*, Lívía Páldi reports on the situation in Hungary, where the incumbent Fidesz Party government has, together with the right-wing press, organized a smear campaign against a group of prominent philosophers. Seen as part of a broader push to withdraw support for public education and the arts, such moves presumably clear the way for the advancement of, in the words of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, a “fine, noble, and refined elite.”

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