

## Walls of Freedom: Process and Methodologies

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### Abstract

*The Egyptian revolution of 2011 produced a massive transformation in the perception of urban space and the interrelated dynamic of people, their bodies, and the language within that space. Cultural expressions such as caricature galleries, makeshift exhibitions, chants, poetry readings, and memorial spaces defined the square as a place where activism and art intersected weaving a lyrical tapestry of the revolution. The most prominent of these expressions was the street art of the revolution where the act of painting on walls re-territorialized the city making it the revolution's barometer by registering the shifting political discourses as they unfolded. Documenting and preserving these visual expressions was the driving force behind a three-year book project, entitled Walls of Freedom: Street Art of the Egyptian Revolution, which narrates the revolution through striking images of the art that transformed Egypt's walls into a visual testimony of bravery and resistance. This article will serve to offer a detailed analysis of the methodologies and tools used in creating the book as well as managing, financing, and collecting all of its necessary components. Primarily focused on qualitative visual research methodologies, the book is layered into three components or levels: one level is a visual journey of the revolution through a chronological image-timeline. The categorization and indexing of images by artist, photographer, date and translation was an important function allowing quick access to images visually placing them in a larger continuum. The second level is a reference-based timeline of events where a connection between the art and the historical/political events is presented. The third level involves the essays and analysis supplementing the timeline with historical implications, political and social contexts and personal voices collected from artists and activists.*

**Keywords:** Egyptian Revolution, Street art, Research Methodologies, Iconography, Political art.

### 1.1 Introduction: Street Art of the Egyptian Revolution

One of the things that will remain of the Egyptian revolution is its graffiti, which we already began to collect and archive during the first 18 days. It will endure not in its original and ephemeral nature, but in documentation through photos, films, and books like this one. Graffiti has never been more powerful than it is in Egypt today. It encapsulates the essence of what this revolution is—for its people by its artists. The artworks also tell a true history of the events, though it is a history that can easily be tampered with, were it not for professional and honest documentation. We hope our work helps to contextualize this art in a truthful and appropriate manner. It was a meticulous task that took us three years and left us more than once in despair, but even more often humbled (Hamdy and Karl: 260).

The Egyptian revolution of 2011 produced a massive transformation in the perception of urban space and the interrelated dynamic of people, their bodies and language within that space. The uprising metamorphosed Tahrir Square into a liminal space of communal interaction where class, gender and religious boundaries became blurred. Within this arena of celebration and resistance ideas were negotiated, discussed and even tested and performed in poetical enactments. Cultural expressions such as caricature galleries, makeshift exhibitions, chants, poetry readings, and memorial spaces defined the square as a place where activism and art intersected weaving a lyrical tapestry of the revolution. These expressions, whether written, oral, visual or performative produced a new language that redefined the limits of cultural production in public space. The most promi-

ment of these expressions was the street art of the revolution where the act of painting on walls re-territorialized the city making it the revolution's barometer registering the shifting political discourses as they unfold. Street art of the revolution employed rhetoric, humor and cultural references and ranged from scrawls and scribbles to elaborately painted murals covering the walls of Cairo. Repeatedly erased and "cleaned" by the state, the walls were a place of contention where a layered narrative continued to challenge authority and reclaim the right to the city.

### 1.1.1 Why this book?

Documenting and preserving these visual expressions was the driving force behind a three-year research and book project entitled *Walls of Freedom: Street Art of the Egyptian Revolution* which narrates the revolution through striking images of art that transformed Egypt's walls into a visual testimony of bravery and resistance. Created in close collaboration with artists and photographers on the frontlines of the battle, the book documents how they converted the streets into a dynamic newspaper of the people, providing a much-needed alternative to the propaganda-fueled media. *Walls of Freedom* traces the revolutionary journey from the early pinnacle of extraordinary hope and inspiration to its slow decline, and includes a chronicle of the day-to-day volatile political situation as it rapidly unfolded. The photographs of key events and street art were meticulously collected from 100 photographers, while the written essays were commissioned from experts across many fields. The main focus of the project was to preserve and categorize the images of street art and to present them through a narrative of the historical, socio-political, and cultural backgrounds that have shaped this movement.

The journey for making the book began by laying out the book's goals and setting up a loose methodology for gathering interdisciplinary essays, personal stories and recording key events. The collection of photographs and other visual resources continued throughout the process but was regulated by creating labels and tags to reference each image through a timeline of folders and files that we collected digitally. An iconographic analysis of the images began by mapping the photographs and working with the text-sources. When mapped to a timeline of events it was easy to identify the clusters of significance that were then supplemented with additional texts.

This article will serve to offer a detailed analysis of the methodologies and tools used in creating the book as well as managing, collecting and analyzing all of its necessary components. Primarily focused on qualitative visual methodologies, this article will begin by introducing the framework for research by describing the research project in detail. Then it will focus on various methodologies and strategies for approaching a large-scale visual project including visual and virtual ethnography, interviews, participant observations and iconographic approaches to analysis. It will outline the process of creating a photographic archive and collecting verbal and written components. Then it will discuss some important ethical considerations, and finally it will briefly touch on some specific scenarios relating to visual research projects in shifting social or political circumstances.

### 1.2 Project Overview

This article is based on three years of extensive field research in Cairo-Egypt between October 2011 and December 2013 and was a collaboration between myself (based in Cairo-Egypt and Doha-Qatar) and my collaborator (based in Berlin-Germany). Together we collected close to 4,000 photographs from 100 photographers over the course of three years. About 100 street artists are featured in this project, and about 30 were closely involved with the development and formulation of the project. The written component consists of a timeline with 250 detailed date entries, 20 extensive essays, 20 short texts and 10 artist texts. There were many challenges involved in working on this project and some of the methodological strategies, approaches, and challenges may prove useful to researchers within the art, design, and other visual disciplines.

The motivation for the project began following the events of the January 2011 Revolution in Egypt and the idea to create a project to document revolutionary street art was born a few months after the revolution had erupted. Almost every event that happened was mirrored on the streets with art that was powerful and left a strong impression on people. There were many obstacles that needed resolution during the initial stages of the project; one of them was that street art or graffiti is not always recognized as a valid form of cultural production and, therefore, is rarely the subject of extensive analysis or research of this magnitude, more specifically, research that strives to uncover multiple perspectives behind the creation and synthesis of the works.

Initially, we discovered some similar attempts at documenting street art in Egypt, however few projects were interested in telling the story of the revolution through street art, which became our primary goal. Our motivation to produce *Walls of Freedom* was to reflect on a period in Egypt's history where the "visual material is treated as evidence...and as historic sources on culture, politics, society and life at a given time in the past." Visual material is most valuable when it "illuminates both past and present communication processes" (Müller, 2011: 286). Initially, it seemed impossible to bridge a connection between street art, history and the social and political factors behind the movement. As the revolution was still developing as we began creating this project, many of the analyses and research that we worked on in the first year changed by the third year and were thus revised or re-evaluated completely.

Street art in Egypt is a cultural practice that is not associated with one unified group of artists. On the contrary, the street art scene in Egypt – even though it may have been motivated by similar goals – has many internal conflicts within the community and a large division between its members. Some were very protective of their identities, avoiding public interaction, and wished to stay anonymous, whilst others worked openly, and rejected the label of 'graffiti artist.' Some artists, particularly those from the more politically motivated spectrum, simply consider public art as a form of spreading political messages and dissociate themselves from the street art movement completely. The artists' affiliations and skills also varied greatly: whereas some were originally painters or teaching faculty at art institutions, or working in the advertising business, others had no formal training or art-background prior to the Egyptian revolution. Therefore approaching the artists, interviewing them, and involving them in the work required a variety of strategies and approaches.

### 1.3 Research Methodologies

#### 1.3.1 Visual & Virtual Ethnography:

Art and design research has come a long way over the past several decades. However, reviewing some of the literature available on the topic it is clear that there seems to be a lack of integration in the approaches or strategies for conducting visual-based research. Luc Pauwels (2011: 194) argues that, "visual methods seem to be reinvented over and over again without gaining much methodological depth and often without consideration of long-existing classics in the field."

When designing this book we struggled to find a clear and concise plan on gathering, analyzing, and presenting visual information within a larger cultural framework. Therefore, we approached the problem by borrowing methods and techniques from various sources and paradigms. Using part intuition and part logic our research methodologies evolved as we moved deeper into our topic. Overall the research can be viewed as visual ethnographic research in the sense that it is informed by some classic methods such as participant observation and qualitative interviews, and visual in the sense that it is concerned with the analysis of visual artifacts and relies on photographic archives.

However, these methods provided only a rough guideline and framework to what we can only describe as a part-formulated, part-intuitive experience. Many researchers approach visual ethnography as a method of interviewing and observing participants, however the process we used for our research is less synthetic and more reflexive. It is best described as an "approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing experience, culture, society and material and sensory environments that informs and is informed by sets of different disciplinary agendas and theoretical principles" (Pink, 2013: 34). Therefore, our own experiences, identities, and subjectivities are intertwined within our research and our unique backgrounds and relationships to Egypt and the MENA region were central to our interpretations, connections, and research production. This was something that we were conscious of as researchers and we continued to evaluate our level of empathy or subjectivity, and "how different elements of our biographies, existing experiences, and elements of our identities become significant during research" (Pink, 2013: 37). Therefore, our final project "does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of [our] experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, the embodied, sensory and affective experiences, and the negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced" (Pink, 2013: 35). In order to do this we became committed to research that closely focuses and even includes the artists behind the work rather than study them at a distance. Involving participants at various stages of the research project allows for research that is recordable through scientific research methods, and that is open to discovery through individual subjective experiences.

Social media was integral to the Egyptian Revolution and naturally it was an important source for gathering informa-

tion, tracking down images and contacting participants. Therefore, it is important to also consider various visual methods within “virtual social contexts since Internet technologies offer the opportunity to incorporate new methodologies and tools for visual data gathering and analysis, such as image searching tools, graph programs or geo-mapping” (Ardévol 2011: 86). In discussing a research project conducted in Spain that involved protests and a heavy social media activism, Pink and Postill accurately describe the state of social media fieldwork in a changing political landscape and state that it “often shifts between periods of relative calm and periods of intense activity--even turbulence” (2012: 129). In addition, the nature of social media is complex and a researcher will have to navigate various virtual and non-virtual contexts such as engaging in a Facebook conversation

with an artist, marching in a protest, or uploading a video of an artist spraying a stencil, and these situations “are neither communities nor networks--they are hybrid forms of sociality” where the researcher and the participants form mutual partnerships (Pink and Postill, 2012: 130). This hybrid and fast-shifting form of fieldwork is very descriptive of the state of ethnographic fieldwork in Egypt at the time of the revolution both online and offline. It is also important to understand that these shifts continue to occur and affect the research project even after its completion and publication. The project’s social media outlets, such as the Facebook page, website and twitter accounts, serve to underscore and enhance this sociality and become communities that provide a space for further discussion and knowledge transmission.

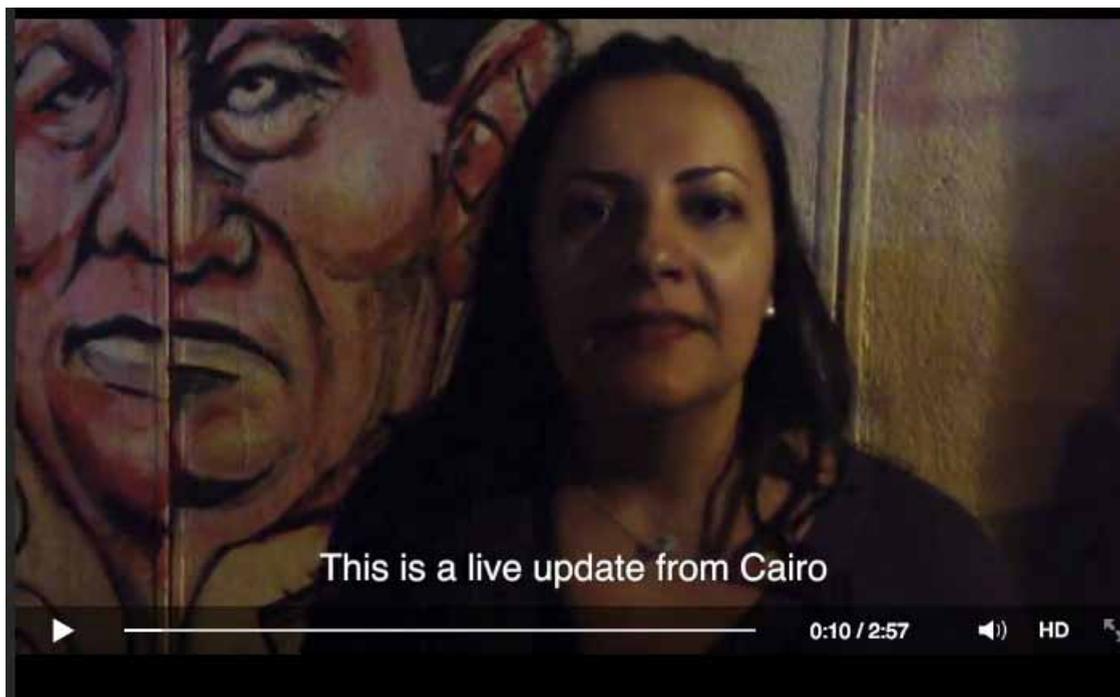


Figure 1. A still from a live update from Cairo posted on our Facebook page on July 2nd 2013 at the Ittihadia Presidential Palace in Cairo soon following the military coup of June 30th and the toppling of President Morsi. The video shows the street artist Picasso surrounded by protestors who are celebrating the coup as he paints a mural predicting who would be the next president of Egypt. This video was shot using a smartphone and updated to our facebook page that same night. It demonstrates the complexity of ethnographic social media research and hybrid fieldwork discussed in section 1.3.1 [Online] Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/WallsOfFreedom/videos/vb.514430378603158/10201619608599008/?type=1&theater>

### 1.3.2 Interviews and Participant Observation:

Before beginning the project, it was important to conduct thorough research on the topic as well as to identify existing literature and documentation. As mentioned in section 1.3.1., virtual or social media ethnography provided an appropriate strategy for approaching this problem. Furthermore, communicating online with participants before beginning research for projects that are physically located far from the researchers was a crucial step in the process (Pink, 2013). Virtual research methodologies in ethnographic fieldwork are still fairly new, however, they are quickly becoming an important component of visual research:

The internet is not the focus of the research but part of the field for conducting research. Internet forums and communities allow researchers to approach participants gradually and to progressively construct rapport (Ardévol 2011: 77).

My co-researcher and I sent hundreds of emails to potential collaborators ranging from photographers to activists and researchers on related topics. The emails contained information on our planned book project, goals, and questions and invitations for collaboration. At the time, artists were being bombarded by the media, and multiple projects such as documentaries and books were being planned on the topic, therefore, we found it challenging to establish trust with our contributors and participants. The internet was an important first step in establishing connections which later developed into meetings and interviews. Most interview requests were established through social media, emails, and phone calls and consisted initially of structured interviews and participant observation, however, as the project progressed the relationships between us (the researchers/authors) and the artists and activists developed and matured. The three-year project inevitably established trust and allowed us to connect with many participants providing us with invaluable insight and opportunities. The impressions we developed during our initial interviews changed dramatically as events unfolded and time passed. Naturally our own personal backgrounds and connections were important factors in this process. For example, as an Egyptian, my belief systems and political positions were aligned with many of the activists and artists. And as outlined above, our approach to this project was one that celebrated these subjectivities as an important component

of the research. My co-researcher/author is a German street artist and publisher; however, he has family in the Middle East and close personal ties to the region including a strong connection with some street artists based in the MENA region. These personal connections and positions contributed to the relationships we were able to develop with many street artists, some of whom worked closely with us on the project and endorsed it to others.



Fig. 2

Participant observations were varied and were primarily based on either observing street artists creating work, observing or participating in demonstrations or events related to the revolution, as well as experiencing the revolution and the events that unfolded over the course of the three years. These were transmitted in the media, written about on social media, and discussed at gatherings. I do not believe that separating our involvement in the revolution or in the events that surrounded it is logical or even necessary, in fact, as mentioned previously they were “our experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context” and with-

out them this research would not be possible (Pink, 2013: 35). Nevertheless, our writing could not be simply subjective opinion but needed to be based on facts and supplemented with multiple perspectives in order to portray a multi-faceted reality, one that provides insight and contributes knowledge.

### 1.3.3 Iconography: A Forensic Approach

Müller (2013: 285) defines iconography as “a qualitative method of visual content analysis and interpretation, influenced by cultural traditions,” which is based on the “analysis of visual and textual sources, and their original contexts,” and is similar to a forensic analysis where every detail plays an important part in the overall picture. Panofsky (1982) introduced a three-step approach to iconography, which includes pre-iconographical description, iconographical analysis, and iconological interpretation. The main aspect of iconography is the detailed attention given to every as-

pect which has been likened to “a detective story, in which various threads are woven together to gain a full picture of a given period and its visual reproduction” (Müller, 2013: 286). This method became central to our approach to analyzing and interpreting our visual and verbal data, allowing us to interpret components as parts of a larger whole, with every piece uncovering more clues to further components. This did cause the book to expand in size on multiple occasions and our initial 200 pages had expanded to 268 pages and included 750 photos and illustrations at the time of publication. Iconological interpretation is the ‘crowning’ step in Panofsky’s scheme and requires “several years of scholarly immersion and research and only very few studies fulfill these high expectations... more often the outcome of a hurried iconographical analysis is just an assembly of pictures with similar motifs” (Müller, 2013: 287).

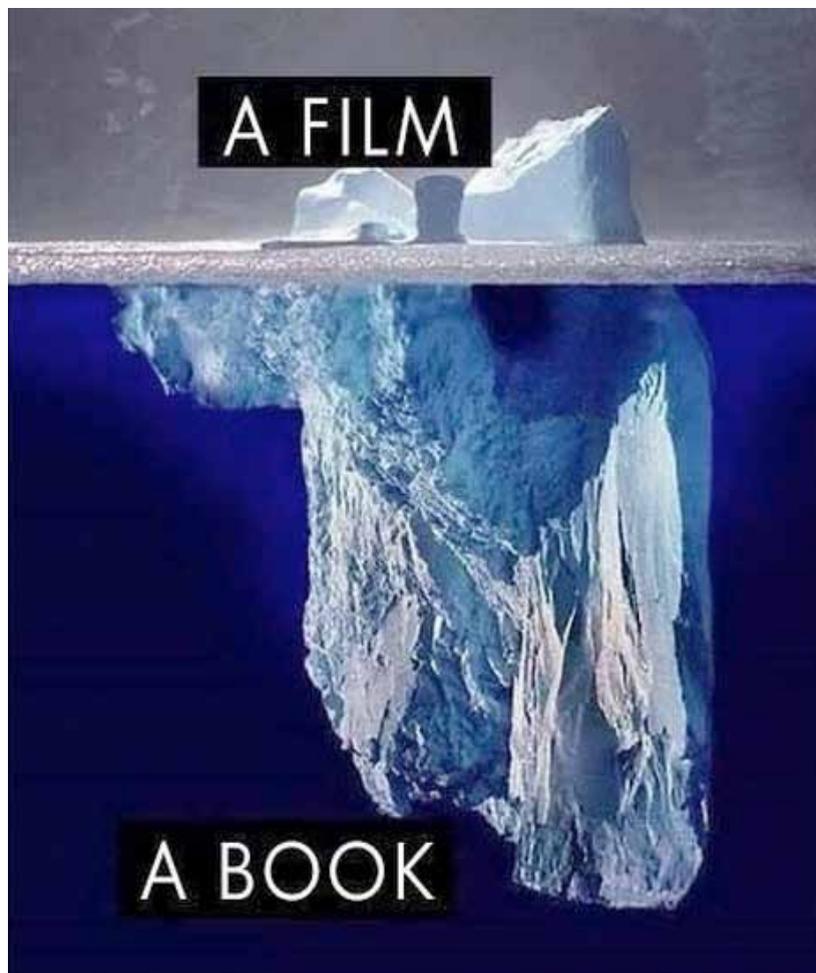


Fig. 3

## 1.4 Visual Research and Archiving:

### 1.4.1 The photographers:

Walls of freedom is a predominantly visual research project with images and photographs as a primary source of information and the subject of the project as a whole. Therefore the role of visual research within this context was clear: it would be central to the production of the project. Visual media has long been a crucial element of ethnographic research. However, how the image is actually shot, in what context, and by whom are all important factors to consider. Photographing street art ourselves was an important step in gathering images for the archive, yet it was not always possible for us to be present as events unfolded. Collecting photographs and actually shooting photographs of the work were two separate aspects of the project and served two different purposes. Additionally, when we composed our initial

drafts we knew that graffiti or street art separate from context would not portray a clear image of the motivations behind the work. Therefore, to complete the overall picture of what happened and why artists were creating these works, it was necessary to include images of actual key events. As a result of the volatile nature of Tahrir Square, and particularly during revolutionary battles and violent events, there were few available photographs documenting important events as they unraveled and many of the photographers shooting during these events risked their lives or were injured. Tracking them down and securing permission to publish their images was a big challenge especially in light of the media frenzy surrounding the revolution. Additionally, many were highly compensated for their work and our project's limited funding was a problem. Still, many agreed to publish their images in the book after they learned it would become a form of documentation of their work and of the events of the revolution.



Figure 4. (Art by Sad Panda, Photo by Carmel Delshad.) This photo was shot by Carmel as she was interviewing Sad Panda as he worked on this stencil. It is the only photograph that exists of this work since the next morning it was whitewashed by the municipality, as it was a negative portrayal of the army. Many pieces were whitewashed or destroyed and contacting photographers that sometimes had the only photo of a piece was difficult. This photograph ended up in the book and caused much controversy in the press following the confiscation of the shipment of books in 2015. It was smartphone photo shot around midnight and illustrates why this project needed to include many contributors and photographers.

There is an ephemeral nature to street art but an even more ephemeral nature to the process of its production. One of the lenses we hoped would create a richer look at the street art scene in Egypt during the revolution was engaging with the artists as they worked. Photographs of artists painting in Mohamed Mahmoud Street (a major street in Tahrir Square) were crucial to reflecting an accurate image of the events that unfolded. As discussed by Ahmed Aboul Hassan in *Walls of Freedom*:

Graffiti is a weapon of the revolution. It rallies the people, challenging us to ask questions and point towards ideas that the mainstream media cannot dare to address. Only the wall has the power to reach the minds of everyday people passing by. The wall brings Egyptians closer to the revolution and further from its many enemies (2014).

It became clear to us that in order to create a multi-faceted project that reflected the many aspects of street art during the revolution we would need to work with many different photographers. The photographs were, in many cases, discovered through social media and the photographer contacted by email or phone. Citizen journalism and the transmission of photography and video on social media – to make up for the frequent media blackouts and to counter media propaganda – was common during the revolution. This was an important component that contributed a great deal to our research project since “the breakdown of the cultural circuit dominated by mass media production...the intermingling between amateur, commercial and institutional production has become more and more complex and has blurred the clearly defined roles of producers and audiences” (Ardévol 2011: 81). Culture producers were now the revolution’s protestors and participants and were able to snap decent photographs with their smartphones. This naturally fed into the availability of images on the web of both amateur and professional quality, and in some cases the images produced by amateur photographers were quite unique, or often the only documentation of a particular piece/event.

#### 1.4.2 Tagging/ The Archive:

The organization of the images into categories was an important step in understanding the material that we collected. Since we were living in different locations it became clear

that the archive needed to exist on the Internet. DropBox became a viable solution and we began by creating detailed folders and indexing formulas to create a tagging system for the photographs and files. The process of archiving and tagging is an essential component to the project’s organization and an “essential part of the iconological research process. Scholars collect visuals and categorize them, thereby constantly sharpening their analytical understanding of the studied visual topic” (Müller, 2013: 287).

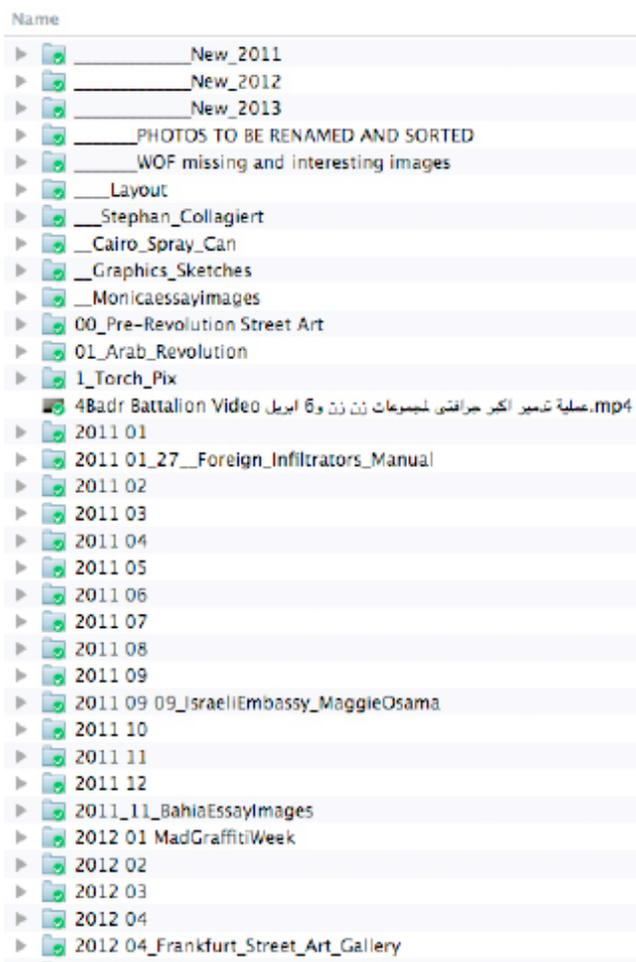


Figure 5. Screenshot of the Walls of Freedom DropBox Archive

Pink and Postill (2012) discuss the navigation of the social media ethnographer through data and how archiving has evolved from disk storage to cloud platforms such as Drop-Box and Google docs. Additionally they discuss the acces-

sibility of tagged web content, which allows easier access to archived images on the web and how this can benefit ethnographers by offering an “‘open’ in place” that offers not only “practices of gathering and accumulating, but also of sharing, linking, following, tagging” (Pink and Postill, 2012: 129). The essence of tagging is to categorize images, whether photographs of the graffiti or of the events, using labels and keywords. For our collection of work that spanned three years, tagging and creating categories by date was the first step. Each photograph itself was tagged by labeling it with a sequence of descriptions in a particular order. Each tag included the date, name of artist, name of photographer, name of the work and any relevant keywords that could relate it to the text or timeline. Tagging the photos into date folders allowed us to identify the missing gaps in our collections and to identify the clusters of significance that were used as key moments throughout the book, supplemented with information. As the project developed we began to visually interpret the images by mapping them to the text sources and timeline of events that was being developed.

### **1.5 Verbal and Written Research:**

It is true that a picture is worth a thousand words, however, context is an important aspect to consider when creating a project about a political and social event like the Egyptian revolution. The intended meanings and interpretations behind a particular piece will change completely given enough background information. During the initial stages we realized that we did not want to create a coffee table book that enthusiasts could flip through to look at beautiful imagery or, as mentioned previously, “just an assembly of pictures with similar motifs” (Müller, 2013: 287). In order to do justice to the artists, photographers, and activists of the revolution we had a responsibility to preserve an important period in Egypt’s history. Our goal was to try to represent the situation as accurately as we could and accuracy could only happen through meticulousness. As daunting as the task seemed, we knew we could not leave a stone unturned. We approached the visual image database with a multi-pronged approach, collecting images by many different photographers and in varying contexts. The written texts would also need to be multi-faceted, and functioned like pieces of a puzzle that fitted together.

#### **1.5.1 The Timeline:**

The timeline provided a backbone for all the text sources and consisted of factual entries of key events that happened over the dates covered within the project. The timeline was a thoroughly researched and verified document that was collected from multiple resources including various TV and printed media resources, interviews, blogs and social media. Only dates that were of significance to the revolution were recorded and explained. The total number of entries written was close to 450. The timeline dictated the overall structure of the final design of the book and it made sense that the images and photographs should be placed chronologically against the timeline.

#### **1.5.2 The Essays:**

The essays were 2000-2500 word documents that served two main roles: the first was to fill any missing gaps and to introduce important in depth analyses of specific topics. The second was to bring together visual and verbal sources, attributing meaning or clusters of meaning and threading together patterns within street art production, linking it to trends within history or current theory. For example, one essay provided an introduction to street art prior to the revolution, another explained in more detail the use of Quranic manuscripts by graffiti artists, and a third was to give an in depth analysis of the Rabaa’ Symbol. The challenge with the essays was how to fit them within the structure of the book. Eventually they became breaks within the overall structure, in some cases placed chronologically or simply to complete the visual flow of the book.

#### **1.5.3 Short Texts:**

The essays were long and in depth analyses of the key aspects of the revolution and its artwork. The timeline provided a quick key summary of daily events. However, in order to shed more light on complex events that could not fit within the timeline and were not represented by the essays, we created ‘short texts.’ These were short paragraphs between 200-400 words that elaborated on an important event, key figure, or movement within the revolution that was featured in street art, but was too complex to translate or explain through a caption or in the timeline.

#### **1.5.4 Artists’ writings:**

It became clear when interviewing many of the artists that they each had a separate philosophy and they were ap-

proaching the topic using various methods that were distinctive. We invited all of the artists to contribute their personal voices, philosophies, and narratives to the book believing that it would create a more holistic and complete outlook on their motivations and goals in making their work.

### 1.6 Ethical Considerations:

When working on a research project with many participants there are some standard issues to take into consideration such as informed consent, confidentiality, and harm to participants, 'giving back' and ownership (Pink, 2013). A collaborative approach to research production may help with some of these issues, and address the relationship between participants and researchers:

Normally the relationship between researcher and participants is often characterized as one of inequalities, whereby it is the researcher who stands to gain. Rather than try to redress the inequalities after the event, it would seem better advice to attempt to undertake ethnography that is less exploitative from the outset. If ethnography is seen as a process of negotiation and collaboration with participants, through which they too stand to achieve their own objectives, rather than as an act of taking information away from them, the ethical agenda also shifts (Pink, 2013: 65).

Most of the artists we worked with did not see the project as separating us – the researchers – from them – as participants – and this was due to the fact that we invited them to form a collaborative relationship with us from the start. We were creating this project together, and even though we had our own gains as researchers and publishers, the artists also gained through the book's production and distribution. Furthermore, our connection with the artists through our close collaboration as the project progressed allowed them to fully understand the project in a deeper sense. Pink discusses this important approach as a crucial aspect of visual ethnographic research and states that:

by focusing on collaboration and the idea of creating something together, agency becomes shared between the researcher and participant. Rather than the researcher being the active party who both extracts data and gives something else back, in this model both researcher and participant invest in, and are rewarded by, the project (Pink, 2013: 65).

This was not always the case with the photographers who were contacted for their photographs and not as mutual collaborators. Since the project had limited funds there was very little gain from the photographers' perspective, and many refused us the rights to their photos or were difficult to negotiate with. Ethically, it was important for us to explain that the ownership of the photos would remain solely with them and that the license to print their photos in the book would not grant us the rights to distribute or use the photos for any other purpose. It is very important to clarify rights of use and ownership of photographs before a project is finalized in order to avoid any unwanted surprises. However, the limitations of copyright laws in Egypt and the duration of the project made the process much more complicated.

Furthermore, there were ethical considerations related to the artists and activists participating in the book that we had to examine closely as we were nearing publication. Towards the end of 2013, the situation in Egypt was difficult and the state had tightened its grip on dissent and reinforced exceptional policies such as the protest law and a law criminalizing graffiti (see Hamdy, 2014). The publication of our book would also publicize the names and contact information of graffiti artists, and in order to ensure an ethical outcome we had to re-negotiate consent at different stages of the project to ensure that participants were informed. Since ethnographic research involves making private aspects of people's lives public it was not enough that the artists had agreed to participate in the project; we needed to ensure that under newfound circumstances they were aware of the implications of their consent. As Pink states, "When a participant has already agreed for the materials to be used in publications, sometimes the ethnographer may be left with the task of deciding whether or not to publish" (Pink, 2013: 64).

Before publication we made sure that all artists and photographers in the book were still comfortable with their names, opinions, or contact information to be published in the book. This does not necessarily guarantee that no harm will come to anyone involved in the book since circumstances may change and laws do get passed that may criminalize activities that were previously legal (see section 1.7.2 ) and this will always remain a risk in fieldwork or research dealing with political topics, thus it is important for researchers to be aware of the possibilities.

## 1.7 Design and Dissemination

### 1.7.1 Book Structure and Design

Walls of Freedom was a complicated project to design and would require various components to be integrated onto each spread. The design began with a rough grid and a process of layout and elimination. Photographs, illustrations and visuals were chosen according to their impact and significance. Naturally, key events from the timeline would sometimes dictate the choice. However, some pieces were more popular than others and so became more prominent in the overall page. The rough laying-out of images occurred until each folder was processed and then the discarded or unused images were kept in separate folders for final review. This would allow a collaborator to go back and check if an important image was not used, and it would also help keep track of what was already placed in the layout.

The layout of the book was divided into various sections, or levels, each characterized by a distinctive style for clarity. The first level was the visual journey, which consists of a chronological image-timeline. The categorization and indexing of images by artist, photographer, date, and translation was an important function allowing quick access to images by visually placing them in a larger continuum. The next level was a reference-based timeline of events where a connection between the art and the historical/political events was presented with key date-titles highlighted in yellow for quick

reference. The third level was a series of short texts supplementing the timeline with historical implications, and political and social contexts. Further levels included quotations and personal voices collected from artists and activists, and an image captioning system including translations and interpretations of each image. The book included a table of contents, an artist and photographer index, and supplementary maps showing key locations within Egypt and downtown Cairo.

### 1.7.2 Financial and political implications:

The book's time/content expansion caused financial constraints resulting in the launch of a successful crowd-funding campaign in June 2013, which raised 186% of the initial requested budget. Crowd-funding is now a viable solution to research projects that cannot obtain sufficient funding from grant awarding organizations. However, it is a fairly new and developing practice, particularly in the visual arts and humanities disciplines. While there were many serious issues with our crowd-funding experience that would be useful to publish in the future, it is worth mentioning that part of this project's success was due to the huge network that developed as a result of the campaign. This allowed the project to be disseminated faster, gaining media attention in a relatively short period of time.

Shortly following the publication of the book, a shipment containing 400 copies was confiscated in Alexandria by Egyptian authorities for allegedly 'inciting violence.' This was later announced as a misunderstanding by authorities



Figure 5 and 6 Two Spreads from the book showing the structure of the timeline, quotations, captions and short texts and how they vary stylistically to ensure clarity for the reader. For a more detailed live preview, see: [http://issuu.com/fhft/docs/wof\\_teaser](http://issuu.com/fhft/docs/wof_teaser)

## 1.7 Design and Dissemination

### 1.7.1 Book Structure and Design

Walls of Freedom was a complicated project to design and would require various components to be integrated onto each spread. The design began with a rough grid and a process of layout and elimination. Photographs, illustrations and visuals were chosen according to their impact and significance. Naturally, key events from the timeline would sometimes dictate the choice. However, some pieces were more popular than others and so became more prominent in the overall page. The rough laying-out of images occurred until each folder was processed and then the discarded or unused images were kept in separate folders for final review. This would allow a collaborator to go back and check if an important image was not used, and it would also help keep track of what was already placed in the layout.

The layout of the book was divided into various sections, or levels, each characterized by a distinctive style for clarity. The first level was the visual journey, which consists of a chronological image-timeline. The categorization and indexing of images by artist, photographer, date, and translation was an important function allowing quick access to images by visually placing them in a larger continuum. The next level was a reference-based timeline of events where a connection between the art and the historical/political events was presented with key date-titles highlighted in yellow for quick reference. The third level was a series of short texts supplementing the timeline with historical implications, and political and social contexts. Further levels included quotations and personal voices collected from artists and activists, and an image captioning system including translations and interpretations of each image. The book included a table of contents, an artist and photographer index, and supplementary maps showing key locations within Egypt and downtown Cairo.

### 1.7.2 Financial and political implications:

The book's time/content expansion caused financial constraints resulting in the launch of a successful crowd-funding campaign in June 2013, which raised 186% of the initial requested budget. Crowd-funding is now a viable solution to research projects that cannot obtain sufficient funding from grant awarding organizations. However, it is a fairly new and developing practice, particularly in the visual arts and humanities disciplines. While there were many serious issues

with our crowd-funding experience that would be useful to publish in the future, it is worth mentioning that part of this project's success was due to the huge network that developed as a result of the campaign. This allowed the project to be disseminated faster, gaining media attention in a relatively short period of time.

Shortly following the publication of the book, a shipment containing 400 copies was confiscated in Alexandria by Egyptian authorities for allegedly 'inciting violence.' This was later announced as a misunderstanding by authorities in Egypt, since the censors had already approved the book. However, despite authorities promising the book's release, the case remains pending and the books are still in custody. In an atmosphere of diminishing civil rights and mass arrests it is important to consider the implications of a project produced during a severely unstable period in a country's history. The circumstances under which the book was developed has changed dramatically, at that time the revolution was accepted and celebrated by most Egyptians, today the revolution is considered a setback and its revolutionaries have been sentenced to years in prison. In an extreme twist of events, in early May 2015, four graffiti artists were arrested by security forces and detained for 12 hours after painting a decorative mural. After being interrogated by the police they were finally released. Thus, it remains an important indication of the status of freedom of expression in Egypt, reflects on the future of our project, and serves as a reminder of the unpredictability of researching in an unstable political and social environment.

### 1.8 Conclusion:

Visual media has long been a key element to ethnographic research. In a visual project where unraveling historical, political and social implications are crucial to the research, iconological interpretation should be a priority and can be achieved through archiving, tagging, and meticulously mapping the visual and verbal sources in order to produce a multi-faceted and holistic outcome. Less synthetic and more reflexive research can be achieved through understanding the subjectivities of researchers and including participants as collaborators in the research project. Furthermore, virtual or social media ethnography is also an important method that could provide valuable outcomes to research topics that have a strong online presence. Ethical considerations such

as shifting political circumstances, consent, and ownership should be considered in order to ensure that participants or collaborators are not harmed and fully understand their involvement in a given project. In volatile social and political circumstances a project may shift dramatically in content or validity – creating new meanings and implications for the researchers and the participants.

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