

Preface

It was in the frame of a conference titled “Globalising Dissent” that the intentions of our project became easier to articulate. Sitting in Cairo with a number of people from a number of places, discussing “translation and the many languages of resistance” in the context of 2015 was important.

How do we translate events of psychological violence and lexical transgression? Can we reposition unstable desires into language without arresting them? What is it to interpret these conditions as they register on a corporeal level, at the scale of the individual, and also in relation to the fragmentation, re-configuration or dissolution of a group? Wavering ideologies and shifting allegiances meant that what was known to those who had been there then was something they were no longer bearing witness to. Our task was not just to translate words and images, but emotional and physiological transformation, changes in our interior composition. How do we transcribe the experience of “intolerable complexity” onto a textual plane? Ultimately, this is what we had found ourselves faced with.

We commissioned the essays that comprise this publication late in the summer of 2013. Earlier on that year, we had initiated a series of open-ended discussions with friends. We entered each other’s areas of knowledge and extended our own bodies of thought onto them. We measured each of us against the next and ourselves against the pulse of the moment we were living in. We started marking out an overlapping space

of affinities and this is when we sensed that we were not just more than who we are, but also less.

What we know now is that those conversations could only have transpired then. Cairo was a place in time with coordinates in flux, and we were all subject to the weather of events. Even though Emotional Architecture was not envisioned as a project for writing about what happened, and was rather committed to writing itself, the distinction between these intentions was impossible to maintain. Language was a frontier and it was closing in. Even if we did not know how to say what we wanted to say nor to what end, the compulsion to sustain a community of thought through the process of writing together was what drew us along.

Two years on these texts have been a long time coming. Were we waiting something out? For the impasse to end, and a certain meaning to emerge? We had wanted to find a location in language, to stand on ground from which the shape of yet unknown desires could manifest. But how does one record “the memory of an image of a future that will not be,” when transcription and translation turn against themselves? We knew we had to try to keep the past from slipping, to reclaim the moment even as it was being rewritten. If on the outset we were oriented towards a poetics of protest, what we came to learn was that what was at stake was much more basic: the site to occupy was that of clarity, an unbearable clarity from which fantasy can begin to exist again.

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Cairo, September 2015