

**“L’ART NE CÉDERA PAS À VOS RÈGLES!”:
RUPI KAUR AND ALIAA ELMAHDY**

In March 2015, Toronto-based poet and performance artist Rupi Kaur posted an Instagram photo of herself lying in bed, fully clothed, with a stain on her pajamas and sheet, denoting menstrual blood. When Instagram deleted the photo, Kaur replied: “You deleted a photo of a woman who is fully covered and menstruating stating that it goes against community guidelines . . . I will not apologize for not feeding the ego and pride of misogynist society that will have my body in underwear but not be okay with a small leak.”²⁸ Kaur’s reaction to the deletion of the photo, which was part of a series for a visual rhetoric project, emphasizes that although women can be freely objectified, a “small leak” becomes unsettling. The “small leak” according to Kaur puts in question the imagined community online, undermining its covenant (guidelines), and generating a radical act of erasure. Kaur concluded: “Their patriarchy is leaking. Their misogyny is leaking. We will not be censored.”²⁹ According to Kaur, leaking is not only associated with her body but with the misogyny of the community guidelines upheld online. The photo of the leaking body thus exposes the leak in the phallogocentric model that only accepts the representation of the female body as an object of desire mediated through the male gaze. Leaking de-eroticizes the body, thereby exposing both the leaking of the body and of the system that seeks to suppress it.

Kaur’s leak as double exposure (*fadh*) had immediate consequences that were duly noted by the artist and the media. When Instagram reinstated the photo after it had deleted it twice, Kaur declared victory. In subsequent reporting on the story, the *New York Times* subtitled its article “A photo of a woman on her period unleashed an online revolution,” explaining how Instagram apologized and reinstated the picture.³⁰ The newspaper’s subtitle presents the leak as something that continues to wreak havoc, this time unleashing a revolution that overtakes the online community. The suppression and reinstatement of the photo highlight the affective power of leaking that intervenes in the political and exposes systems of exclusion and prejudice, but also reveals their porousness and insecurities. This dynamic of leaking and suppressing the leak has been key in exposing and shaming authority both online and off-, both on Instagram in the case of Rupi Kaur, and in the cultural and political contexts that align fears and anxieties playing out in a North American cyberspace with those in the Middle East.

In November 2011, less than a year after the fall of the Mubarak regime in Egypt, a blogger and activist named Aliaa Elmahdy put naked pictures of herself on her blog, *A Rebel’s Diary*, in order to protest the authority of SCAF, the military council that was ruling Egypt at the time.³¹ Circulating online, the images immediately drew the ire of fellow activists and opponents, some calling her the devil while others accused her of betraying feminism and the cause of liberalism.³² The reaction to Elmahdy’s photos excluded her from the community representing Egypt’s wide political spectrum; some dismissed her intervention as a dangerous stunt, others as “child play”³³ that needed to be distinguished from “true” revolutionary action. And when Aliaa protested naked in front of the Egyptian embassy in Sweden, where she had gone to live in 2012 after receiving death threats and risking jail time, calls to strip her of her Egyptian citizenship were made.³⁴ Accompanied by two women activists from the group FEMEN, Elmahdy protested the new constitution under Mohamed Morsi by writing on her body, “Sharia is not a Constitution,” while holding a fake Quran to hide her vagina.³⁵ Elmahdy’s nudity in this performance was seen as a tarnishing of Egypt’s reputation but also as grounds to exclude her from the national community altogether. Exposing the body thus exposed a discourse that defines citizenship and the community in such a way as to outcast the exposed female body, experiencing it as a threat to the political that is, in Marwan Kraidy’s terms, “at once biological and digital.”³⁶

In August 2014, Elmahdy pushed her protest further, this time directing it against ISIS by publishing online photos of herself menstruating on the group’s flag.³⁷ In this performance female nudity and menstrual leaks converge to enact a radical act of *fadh* (exposure, scene-making), linking digital leaking with body leaks. Marwan Kraidy reads Elmahdy’s act as “subverting notions of femininity and dirtiness to depict Daesh [ISIS] itself as a monster. By doing this through her own bleeding, unbounded body, al-Mahdy warned that if women were prohibited from being abstract individuals, then at the very least they can turn symbols of women as abject bodies into a political weapon.”³⁸ In the staging of the menstrual performance, leaking becomes premeditated, meant to shock, soil, and in so doing, make a scene of the shocking ISIS’s soiling, enslaving, and killing of *other* bodies in the name of Islam. The act of leaking operates as a political intervention through an activation of body leaks and the transformation of the female body into a scene and scandal of the violent and archaic system through which ISIS acts. The political effectiveness of this performance ties

together the leak as involuntary and premeditated, as bodily and political, and as a condition and an image circulating online all at the same time.

In one of the entries on her blog regarding an art exhibition in Tunisia in June 2012 that sparked demonstrations by religious conservatives, Elmahdy joined FEMEN Tunisia to proclaim her solidarity with artists Nadia Jalasi and Mohammed Ben Slema, headlining her post with the declaration: "L'art ne cédera pas à vos règles! [Art will not submit to your rules]"³⁹ The exhibition, which showcased mannequins of veiled women surrounded by stones inscribed with Arabic text, was interpreted as drawing an association between Islam and the stoning of women, thereby sparking the vandalizing of the gallery, violent riots, and a lawsuit against the artists for disrupting public order.⁴⁰ The title of Elmahdy's entry invokes the leak as the act that triggers violent suppression. The word "règle" in French means "rule" or "ruler;" when in the plural form ("règles"), it means "period" or "menstrual cycle." On one level Elmahdy's announcement implies that art will not submit to your rules, i.e., the rules of the Islamists who were becoming increasingly vociferous following the fall of Ben Ali and Mubarak. On another level the comment should be read in relation to Elmahdy's menstruating over the ISIS flag. In this context menstruation ("règles") subverts the rules ("règles") associated with a patriarchal order seeking to stifle artistic expression and exclude and enslave women.

The choice of the verb "céder" is doubly important in Elmahdy's entry as it implies to "compromise," "submit to," and "abide by," thereby problematizing notions of voluntariness and involuntariness that tie in political action, bodily function, and the digital condition of leaking. In *L'éthique de la psychanalyse (Séminaire VII)*, Jacques Lacan counters Kantian ethics with the ethics of desire, where the categorical imperative becomes to not compromise one's desire or "céder sur son désir."⁴¹ "Céder," "céder sur," and "céder à" involve notions of surrendering, giving up, compromising, ceding, but also occupying and controlling. Lacan engages with the Freudian structure of desire through the Oedipal denouement on the one hand, and on the other hand, with Freud's death drive or Thanatos in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, which pulls eros into the inorganic state of being prior to the advent of the symbolic (meaning, language). With this in mind, Elmahdy's statement needs to be read as upholding the ethics of desire but also as desire's subversion through women's nudity and menstruation. In this context leaking no longer functions as symptom or lack imagined from the position of the symbolic, but rather as affect that intervenes

in the political and subverts it. The rules ("règles") are those of the Freudian super-ego but also of menstrual blood that flows and makes a scene, thereby causing a public scandal, and triggering threats of imprisonment, death, and eradication. The Lacanian injunction and its subversion thus point to the involuntary and to the law of desire, which take shape through a rule or an injunction that is itself put in question in the event of leaking. This complex staging and undoing of the law characterize the framework through which leaking operates to contest and expose the body of the leaker and the body politic at the same time. The fiction of the Lacanian subject, which bears within itself the unyielding injunction of desire, is exposed (*fadh*) as "fiction" in the event of the leak.

LEAK CONTRA LACK

Elmahdy's use of "règles" necessitates an engagement with psychoanalysis, and with the work of Jacques Lacan specifically, in order to theorize the leaking subject yet resist reducing the leaking subject to Lacan's injunction—its "règles." Jacqueline Rose argues that "for Lacan, the unconscious undermines the subject from any position of certainty, from any relation of knowledge to his or her psychic processes and history, and *simultaneously* reveals the fictional nature of the sexual category to which every human subject is none the less assigned."⁴² She continues: "Lacan's account of subjectivity was always developed with reference to the idea of a fiction."⁴³ "The symbolic order ... for Lacan ... is not some mythical moment of our past, it is the present order in which every individual subject must take up his or her place."⁴⁴ In this context the leak as discharge is not only a material object in the world but also something that transforms the leaker, affecting and being affected by it. Coinciding with the fiction of the leak rather than with the fiction of the symbolic, the discharge activates femininity both in the male and the female leaking subject. In leaking, the subject's gender and sexuality are altered and redefined by the event of the leak, thereby intervening in the political and ushering in a text with a new aesthetic—a new fiction—that imagines a different relation among subjects, and between subjects and power. Models of interpellation and intersubjectivity are recoded in the event of the leak.

Leaking inscribes the body, and marks and outcasts it yet activates it affectively. Leaking operates through the inscription of skin and surfaces, from the

CD surface inscribed with classified information passing as “Lady Gaga songs” in Chelsea Manning’s Iraq leaks, to the bodies of Manning and Assange oozing and leaking these “songs” (classified information) in cyberspace as we will see below. Leaks proliferate through loose connections and partial (digital) objects as intensities and fluxes, reconstituting the subject as a condition of reconstituting the social and contesting power relations.⁴⁵ This process designates the work of *faḍḥ* as making a scene *of* and *through* the leaking body, which not only undermines the structure of power (symbolic order, patriarchy) but also exposes the fiction through which these structures interpellate and assign roles and codify gender. The *faḍḥ of* and *through* the leaking body exposes the involuntary and voluntary functions of leaking in the *Nights* and in the performances of Elmahdy and Kaur. The voluntary and involuntary event of leaking emerges from the intersection of politics and fiction.

The leaking subject who exposes a fictional model that is unable to hold in its excesses and violations is at work in online leaking as well. Fluids transform into data and secrets online, subjecting leakers to outcasting and persecution. The leakers who have been unsettling models of news and communication from the mid-2000s onward, both in the United States and in the Arab world, reveal a public now engaged through modes of political awareness or consciousness tied to browsing practices and digital habits. This public has an antipathy to the secret and to the opaque in the digital age. It is from these new fictional models and what scholar Geoffroy de Lagasnerie calls “*éthique du voyou*” (thug ethics) that a reengagement of a cynical public *who knows it all but does not care* is taking place.⁴⁶ The leaking subject hacks systems and circulates information that submerges both the leaked and the leaker, the secrets of authoritarian regimes and the body of the leaker. The leaker’s body becomes confined to spaces of extrajudicial detention, embassies and airports, all of which lie outside the state and, in some cases, beyond the gendering fiction of the symbolic (Chelsea Manning). From Elmahdy and Kaur, who are pushed outside the national and online community, to the leaker of classified data pushed beyond the law, the leaking subject makes a scene of systems of exclusion, authoritarian practices, and violations, exposing in the process the unsettled fiction of power. To bring something to light, to make it visible—be it gender exclusion or human-rights abuse—is to resort to making a scene (*faḍḥ*) for a public that relates to a new kind of knowledge and information, revealed under a different light, in order to produce a spectacle that shocks and titillates.

EXPLOITING SECURITY HOLES: MANNING, ASSANGE, SNOWDEN

In *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism*, Slavoj Žižek situates the leaking subject within the ethics of psychoanalysis in which perversion is not simply dismissed and criminalized but rather upheld as “*règle*.” “For Jacques Lacan, the axiom of the ethics of psychoanalysis was: ‘Do not compromise your desire.’ Is this axiom also not an accurate designation of the whistleblowers’ acts?”⁴⁷ By invoking Lacan’s injunction not to compromise one’s desire as a framework for thinking about whistleblowing, Žižek is unable to fully account for the kind of relation between the involuntary and voluntary as the constituents of the political subversion that I argue for in this chapter, wherein desire is not simply tied to the model of misrecognition fictionalized through the relation to the Other and language (Lacan), but also operates as something inscribed on the body, leaking in and out through cracks, fissures, and security holes.

In 2010, stationed in Iraq during the American occupation, twenty-two-year-old Chelsea (then Bradley) Manning sent classified information to Julian Assange about violations by the US military in Iraq. Manning also provided WikiLeaks with “260,000 classified United States diplomatic cables.”⁴⁸ Describing Manning, Adrian Lamo, a hacker with whom Manning corresponded and who would later denounce Manning to the authorities, claims that Manning “was just grabbing information from where he could get it and trying to leak it.”⁴⁹ Depicting a process of assemblage, “random grabbing” is a compulsive act that is not focused, targeted, or centered on a particular piece of information or violation that needs to be exposed. When “he was arrested in Kuwait on May 26, 2010,” Manning was “accused of exploiting gaping security holes on the military computer system by downloading the secret material onto CDs that he marked as Lady Gaga songs.”⁵⁰ The “gaping security holes” that the leaker “exploits” and the material he transfers onto CDs become exposed in a scene that marks the body of the leaker and the body politic at the same time. The holes reveal and are revealed on the body of the leakers and in the system itself. The holes are thus not structural, built into the body (lack), but come into being and become known, perforated, recognized, and made legible in the act of leaking. Security holes on the body of the leaker are activated as sites of contestation, information, and writing. This is not to say that the leakers have no agency or

that they are simply gaps and holes through which excess fluids of power flow. On the contrary, the leakers themselves “exploit” these gaps by leaking and making a scene of their bodies as passageways and streams for these leaks to become affective.

The security holes that Manning exploits make a scene of the system as excessive and overflowing, and therefore leaking in an act that exposes simultaneously the violations of the US occupation of Iraq, and the US occupation itself as a leaking fiction and a violation to be made a scene of. The fluids (cables, data, e-mails, videos) leaked out by Manning to Assange and then from Assange to cyberstreams transform the body of the leaker, through its imprisonment in solitary confinement at first, and then through its cross gendering into Chelsea Manning when in prison. Classified information is recoded as songs by cross-dressing and gender-bending artist Lady Gaga⁵¹ as it is burnt onto the CDs leaked to Assange. The leaking event inscribes the digital body (the CD surface) and the human body (Manning), burning and perforating holes that leak fluids and data, subverting the “règles” of security systems and gender codification, leaking in and out, releasing classified information and hormones. This proliferation of the leak renders the body porous and dangerous in terms of the instability it reveals about both the system (“security holes”), and about the “règles” as both rules and cycle through which the system controls its flows and those of others through codes of gender and sexuality as well as information and honor codes (is Manning a traitor or a hero?).

Reporting on Manning’s initial detention in solitary confinement for ten months, Glenn Greenwald wrote: “In sum, Manning has been subjected for many months without pause to inhumane, personality-erasing, soul-destroying, insanity-inducing conditions of isolation.”⁵² The leaking permanently marks the body of the leaker who is now forced into complete isolation and erasure. And when Manning’s trial began, Greenwald said that the military decided to subject her to the worst punishment: life without the possibility of parole.⁵³ Greenwald captures the desire to see Manning disappear, erased, banned from the community, and denied a plea deal as a vindictive act.⁵⁴ In this context leaking does not simply put the leaker outside the law, but also the law outside of itself, exposing and making a scene (*faḍh*) of punishment, torture, invasion, occupation, and killings as extrajudicial and vindictive. The leak as scene and rupture thus operates against the “règles”—from acquiring and sharing information illegally, to unlawful persecution and imprisonment that revert to a pre-Foucauldian incarceratory model. The leaker is not the subject of correctional

and disciplinary practices, but rather a leaking subject trapped in his/her own body, which is marked, punished, isolated, and deprived. The materiality of the body is emphasized in this process, thereby exposing an archaic reversal in the imagined liberal model that codes power and knowledge, punishment and information, gender and sexuality.

The unusual punishment to which the leaker is subjected and the juridical limbo into which he/she is thrown seek to not only contain but also eradicate the contamination of the social and the political brought about by the leaks of Manning, Assange, and later Snowden but also Elmahdy and Kaur. The vindictive punishment is a desperate yet scandalous (*fāḍih*) attempt to erase the new text, contain the proliferation of the leak, locate its origin, and suppress its “règles.” Just as the leaking in the tales from *The Arabian Nights* exposes the leaker’s body and the gaping holes in the harem security system (religious narrative, gender and sexuality codes, sacred/profane), the event of leaking in this contemporary example makes a scene of the fiction of power. The link between these two events is conceptual rather than cultural or historical, tied to questions of the law, its makeup and violations. This link is centered around bodily functions, the making of gender and sexuality, and the voluntary and involuntary as characteristics of those functions and acts that determine punishability and exclusion. The event of leaking thus involves a fiction that exposes the makeup and the porousness of the fiction or narrative of the law, be it political, tribal, or religious. The leakers are seen as contaminating, rogue, unpredictable, nomadic, dirty, unable to control or contain their bodies, mouths, and revelations, thereby constituting the real danger to systems of control and containment, namely to the symbolic as it has been theorized through an engagement with mythological structures and literary narratives from Oedipus onward.

Julian Assange, the Australian activist and hacker who founded WikiLeaks in 2006, is portrayed in articles and reports as having led a nomadic life since childhood, a Huckleberry Finn at the margin of the law, moving from town to town with his mother and her partner, who worked for a theatre company.⁵⁵ Assange, who hacked NASA and the Pentagon at the age of sixteen,⁵⁶ grew up on stage, which he came to enjoy as an adult as well, reveling in the attention and limelight as he mines and leaks data only to redistribute it to the “unknowing” and “uninformed” public. Starting out as a Robin Hood of the digital age, Assange as fictional character and actor subverts models of security, ownership, news, and authenticity. Assange’s leaking is hailed and celebrated yet pathologized and criminalized.

Visiting Assange at the Ecuadorian embassy in London in 2013, Žižek describes Assange's restricted living conditions, constantly guarded and bugged. Referring to the sexual misconduct allegations against him, Žižek asks: "where does such a ridiculously excessive desire for revenge stem from? What did Assange, his colleagues and whistleblowing sources do to deserve this?"⁵⁷ Assange found himself in juridical limbo at the embassy starting in 2012, resisting extradition to Sweden to answer to an allegation that he had ejaculated during intercourse as part of a consenting sexual act. The allegation is that Assange, by refusing to use protection, could have infected his partner with a sexually transmitted disease. The body leak read as contaminating along with the leaks spewing from his website push Assange into a space outside the law in ways that Žižek reads as vindictive, excessive, and inexplicable. As in the case of Manning, the treatment of Assange reveals forms of excess and revenge as the law's deployment and violent reaction to the leak that risks contaminating through its proliferation the social and the body politic. The double act of leaking (the sexual misconduct allegation and WikiLeaks) exposes the leaker's outcasting and exclusion, and the law as vindictive. In this context the revenge against Assange and Manning—the whistleblowing and leaking duo of the Iraq cables—exposes the Iraq invasion itself as a campaign and fiction of revenge beyond the law, and the war on terror and the system of mass surveillance set in place after 9/11 more generally as rooted in revenge rather than legality. Leaking reveals a scene of vendetta and fantasy—a fiction of the law engaged in tribal warfare, or in sadistic practices of torture and punishment, as we will see in the next chapter with policemen filming and leaking their abuse of detainees in Egypt under Muabarak, and in chapter 5, in the Twitter campaign against Badriah Albeshr through cyber-raiding on Saudi Twitter. Leaking thus constitutes a transnational event and a comparative text, connecting the Arab world to the United States, and fiction to politics.

In *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, Jacques Derrida exposes the porous boundary between rogue and democratic states, elaborating on the notion of democracy to come (*à venir*). Derrida calls attention to the fundamental contradictions at the heart of democracy, which requires sovereignty to govern in the name of the *demos* or people, and upholds freedom and singularity yet imposes equality. Emerging from his response to the political environment and discourse following 9/11, Derrida argues that the democracy associated with the liberal state is never a closed system but always leaking out and being leaked into as an outcome of its necessary contradictions and deferrals.⁵⁸ This is what Derrida

calls the "autoimmunity of democracy," which renders porous the relation between rogue state and the liberal democratic state, the Arab world and the United States. The act of leaking in this context exposes in the moment of establishing the boundary with the rogues (*voyous*)—as both states but also leakers—the vulnerability of this boundary and the fiction of the boundary that is itself invested in fantasmatic modes of self-recognition (free world versus rogue states, liberal versus Islamic, etc.). Emerging from this framework is the agent of the leaking process, a rogue figure (*voyou*) or *roué*, who acts like the fold—lying outside of democracy yet conditioning its advent. The *roué*, whose name is semantically tied to being on the *roue* ("the wheel," a premodern torture machine), is also the agent of delinquency, perversion, and subversion, who acts roguishly yet freely, and in that movement performs and prefigures the democratic yet prevents its closure.⁵⁹ It is in this sense that the leakers discussed in this chapter could be viewed, operating at the limit of the law, negating it yet making it possible.

Geoffroy de Lagasnerie argues that the actions of Manning and Assange but also Snowden, the NSA whistleblower on mass surveillance, herald a paradigm shift in the Foucauldian sense (a reference to *Les mots et les choses*), forcing us to rethink the political, the law, and modes of subjectivation. He suggests that these leakers' punishment is so great and incomprehensible—like being put on the *roue* in Derrida's sense—that it implies that their actions fundamentally destabilize the system rather than operate as crimes that could be contained or incorporated dialectically and punished accordingly. De Lagasnerie draws on Agamben's "state of exception" in which he describes the nonjudicial state of the enemy combatant that places the detained person outside the law and the judiciary altogether, producing a "sujet déchu" ("fallen subject"), stripped of all rights.⁶⁰ De Lagasnerie describes *jouissance* as the experience of those in power in withholding the information from the public, and that leaking therefore constitutes a narcissistic wound, which explains the (inexplicable) excessive and violent reaction to leakers.⁶¹ The leaking event thus reveals multiple scenes, bodily and political, involving massive and fragmented texts that flood and overwhelm, and a monstrous regime and practices that hinge on the wrathful and the archaic from Foucault's Place de Grève to drone warfare.⁶²

Edward Snowden is the computer consultant and whistleblower who provided Glenn Greenwald in June 2013 with a cache of NSA data that exposed the amplitude of the government surveillance system targeting not only suspects but ordinary citizens as well. Snowden, who now lives in juridical limbo in Russia,

discovered when working with the CIA a “Strangelovian cyber warfare program in the works, codenamed MonsterMind.”⁶³ It is said that General Keith Alexander, head of the NSA during the Snowden leaks and whose motto is “collect it all,” acted like Jean-Luc Picard, having transformed his work space into the command deck of the *Enterprise*, endowed with an immense screen to enact the notion of 24/7 control and surveillance of the world.⁶⁴ This sci-fi fan and trekky, who invited visitors to sit in the “Picard chair,” has also been represented as a “loose cannon” and a “cowboy.”⁶⁵ For Alexander, a notion of space and cyberspace as a fictional and architectural utopia enabling the operation of total knowledge intersects with the narrative of the outlaw (cowboy, loose cannon) who cannot control his gun, his actions, and his amassing of data. In this context madness is no longer the characteristic of the “rogue agent” who snaps and leaks but rather the attribute of a government that is supposed to control its fantasies (violations, fluids, secrets) but is unable to do so.⁶⁶ To invoke the Lacanian axiom, it is thus the government agency that is unable to compromise its desire (“céder sur son désir”), and is thereby reduced to the compulsive grabbing and collecting of data. Thus two fictions of the outlaw emerge: the NSA (Alexander) that cannot cede its desire, and the whistleblower (Snowden) who cannot cede his desire to hack and leak. This is also tied to the digital compulsion to amass and store information, which is a condition of leaking, as Wendy Chun argues. Read at the intersection of US and Arab politics, leaking as overflow and scandalous excess collapses “monstrous” Arab despots—as we will see in the next chapter—with a “monstrous” system of total knowledge unable not to amass data and not to vindictively punish those who leak it. In both cases models of involuntarity, uncontainability, and compulsion transform the leaker into leaking in and leaking out, embodying yet simultaneously exposing the leaking fluids of power. The relation between Arab dictatorship and liberal democracy is porous. The leak in this case puts in question both material boundaries (bodies, geographies, regions) but also time and histories, undermining the narratives through which these models are produced or imagined as distinct and delineated (democracy versus dictatorship or rogue state). The leaking events expose the portals through which the bodies and fluids that connect these regions and temporality flow.

In *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*, Alan Nadel reads the Cold War through the US rhetoric of containment, which turned the United States into “the universal container,” both in its foreign and domestic policy but also in its “rhetorical strategy that functioned to fore-

close dissent, preempt dialogue, and preclude contradiction.”⁶⁷ Building on Lyotard’s notion that “the power to produce knowledge exceeds the power to comprehend it,” Nadel argues that “political power thus resides in containing the resulting surplus, and the name that Lyotard gives to the strategies of containment is *metanarratives*.”⁶⁸ Nadel engages George Kennan’s theory of containment, developed in a 1947 essay in *Foreign Affairs*, in which the latter coins the word “containment” by representing the Soviet personality as suffering from psychological disorder, but also, as Nadel argues, as being schizoid-like.⁶⁹ The schizoid bypasses individuation at the Lacanian mirror stage or through the Freudian Oedipal structure. The schizoid is reduced to nonindividuated limbs and fragments that never coalesce into a whole and coherent subject. Nadel situates “containment” in relation to the fluids of the “contradictory” flowing body that can only be contained. The strategy of containment treats the other as “Aristophanes’ Lysistrata,”⁷⁰ and its only aim is to contain the contaminating flow of its leaks. Nadel continues that the Soviets, given this containment model, are akin to the orientalized Other suffering from gender and sexual fluidity that needs to be suppressed and closeted with its boundaries (and binaries) clearly marked. Drawing on Eve Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*, he writes: “In distributing the potentials for domination and submission, allegiance and disaffection, proliferation and self-containment, loyalty and subversion—all of which require clear, legible boundaries between Other and Same—the narrative of American cold war takes the same form as the narratives that contain gender roles.”⁷¹

Despite the emergence of evidence regarding Assange’s collusion with Russia starting in 2016, the leakers including Manning were already imagined and interpellated as leaking subjects given the Cold War model of containment that Nadel so brilliantly identifies. The inability to control one’s body, contradiction, seduction, and gender disphoria are all staged in the practices and treatment of leakers that need to be isolated and contained through imprisonment, exile, or worse. Though Nadel focuses on the strategies of containment, I engage here the uncontainable leaking subject and the ways in which the fluids in need of containment end up exposing the impossible and fantasmatic attempt to contain them. The leak and the attempt to locate and stop the leak and its subjects expose the leakiness of the fiction of power or old fiction, which includes *adab* and *ta’dib* in the context of Arab regimes, or the containment strategy and “know it all” fantasy in the NSA context. Invested in controlling and wiping spills and breaches, the attempts to contain Soviet body fluids and the revelations of

contemporary leakers make a scene of the fiction and practices of power, exposing the porous boundaries of the liberal state as well as its ideology, vindictive practices, and archaic logic. This reveals a strategic continuity in deploying containment, both in the context of the Soviet Union and the contemporary Middle East, thereby connecting the Cold War on the one hand to the War on Terror and the two Gulf Wars on the other, thereby moving from the ideological conflict with the Soviets and communism to Islamic fundamentalism and terror, both represented as uncontainable and schizoid-like. The focus on the leakers' actions and justifications in this context helps to elucidate the political stakes of the leaking subject, who exposes the ways in which these fictions are produced, imagined as separate, and sustained through acts of war, containment, surveillance, torture, and imprisonment.

THE WIKI IN WIKILEAKS

In a 2012 *Rolling Stone* interview, Julian Assange stated that in addition to 9/11, which unleashed mass surveillance laws, “[t]he creation of WikiLeaks was, in part, a response to Iraq . . . the clearest case, in my living memory, of media manipulation and the creation of a war through ignorance.” Then he added: “The question is, where has the United States betrayed Madison and Jefferson, betrayed these basic values on how you keep a democracy? I think that the U.S. military-industrial complex and the majority of politicians in Congress have betrayed those values.”⁷² Assange displaces betrayal from the leaker to the leaked, from Manning to the US government, representing the latter as having betrayed its founders and spirit of the law. This betrayal extends to the functioning of the political structure (see, elections) that falls short of restoring the shattered ideal. In an interview with Google executives Eric Schmidt and Jared Cohen published in *When WikiLeaks Met Google*, Assange says: “You can have a lot ‘change’ in the United States but will it really change that much? Will it change the amount of money in someone’s bank account? Will it change contracts? Will it change void contracts that already exist? And contracts on contracts? And contracts on contracts on contracts? Not really.”⁷³ According to Assange, there needs to be a distinction between an ideal of justice tied to the founding of the liberal state and the US Constitution on the one hand, and an excess and perversion of that ideal through practices involving political corruption, extrajudicial incar-

ceration, mass surveillance, and the violation of human rights on the other.⁷⁴ In this sense, leakers and whistleblowers in Assange’s narrative are not consciously set on eliminating the law altogether but rather on exposing and making a scene of a compromised ideal or an unsettled symbolic that needs to be restored and reactivated. The perversion of the *roué* thus masks a true belief in a distorted ideal invested in forms of rights and freedoms.

Leaking as performance and event of revelation centered on the body exposes the rupture and the reaction to the rupture, ushers in extralegal practices, and reveals new (or old) fictions and definitions of the law and justice. Commenting on Manning’s trial, Greenwald writes: “The government has insulated its conduct from what is supposed to be the legitimate means of accountability and transparency, judicial proceedings, media coverage . . . and has really erected this impenetrable wall of secrecy using what is supposed to be the institutions to prevent that. That’s what makes whistleblowing all the more imperative; it really is the only remaining avenue that we have to learn what the government is doing . . . the only thing that shines light on what they’re doing.”⁷⁵ Describing Manning’s actions, Greenwald says: “That’s a whistleblower in the purest and most noble form: discovering government secrets of criminal and corrupt acts and then publicizing them to the world not for profit, not to give other nations an edge, but to trigger ‘worldwide discussion, debates, and reforms.’”⁷⁶ According to Greenwald, the insistence on a properly functioning government has to revert to measures of last resort. The system’s overflow with secrets and violations pushes subjects to commit acts of last resort, and then prosecutes them and tries to erase them when they do. Far from advancing a causal logic wherein the leaker or whistleblower, as Greenwald would suggest, is an idealist or hero as opposed to traitor, I argue that the event of leaking as exposure (*fadh*) is both digital and political, voluntary and involuntary, and sets in motion a proliferation that could not be reduced retrospectively to an identifiable political narrative following the intentions of its “authors” and their stated political ideals.

Like *fadh*, leaking is an act of last resort that is meant to restore a dysfunctional system or compromised ideal. WikiLeaks as well has been characterized as “publisher of last resort.”⁷⁷ That said, this act of last resort needs to be aligned with a new condition of grabbing and leaking in the digital age tied to compulsion and involuntary actions as well. What needs to be emphasized is the event itself as it unfolds rather than a focus exclusively on the cause (“what caused the Arab Spring?”) and the structure. It is important to investigate the scene of *fadh*

that involves compulsion and a digital condition as well as instances wherein people are pushed or coerced into acts of last resort where leaking takes place, as the examples from *The Arabian Nights* and Elmahdy demonstrate. In this context, the whistleblower/activist is the scene- or scandal-maker (*faḍḍāh*) who risks death and undergoes erasure as he/she confronts and exposes the withdrawal or erasure of the law. This double exposure of oneself and of the violation is staged in the act of leaking, and more specifically, in the act of whistleblowing in the case of Manning and Snowden. The excess of the reaction (expulsion, isolation, incarceration, juridical limbo, suppression) mimics the excess of the law that has gone beyond itself through “unlawful” acts. Leaking as a scene of *faḍḥ* occupies a space outside the law in order to confront yet reestablish the law as other, misrecognized, irredeemable. The act of leaking opens up a possibility for rethinking the law altogether and not simply restoring it to an ideal origin in the constitution of the liberal state. In this sense leaking moves beyond its justificatory narrative to produce its own meaning that could not be fully contained.

UNTAMING THE LEAK

The leak’s power consists in the very act of revelation as violation against violation, rupture against rupture, which engulf character, author, reader, and story. Thus, we need to deconstruct the notion of the “new” in Zizek’s “new Encyclopédie,”⁷⁸ and open it up to the power of *faḍḥ* (scandal, scene) as an affective and biopolitical fiction countering the fiction of the law, or the law as fiction such as *adab* in the Arab context. Leaking is not a process of showing and informing conducted by those who know how to enlighten those who lack knowledge or are in the dark. Rather, leaking consists in making a scene and exposing the inscriptions and perforations on leakers’ bodies, as with the Lady Gaga CD, through their own gaping holes, which are pushed into spaces outside the system of knowledge altogether. As such, leaking cannot be controlled once set in motion. Leaking and whistleblowing subvert the legality of the law by exposing it and confronting it with its own violent and vindictive fiction—its fiction of origin of the state and of the self, or the fiction of modernity. Moreover, leaking introduces a condition of materiality that needs to be distinguished from the ideality of the law and the political more generally. Wael Abbas’s quest for “real

freedom” and “real democracy” explored in the next chapter, which is embodied in the mouth, in the tongue, and on the body, prevents us from considering leaks as the redemptive coalescing or the return of a healed subject finally in control of the needed information to awaken from his/her deep slumber. In trying to determine and fix the meaning of the leak—to direct it like an arrow in a political fight—Assange ignores the advent of models of consciousness and subjectivity that could not be sutured through a “redemptive” liberal moment in the digital age. The leak always operates through what Derrida calls “dévoïement,” a straying movement and a leading astray of the narrative of power. In this respect leaking is both an act by individuals who often remain anonymous and also a text and fiction countering and exposing the fiction of power. The leak engulfs the leaker and exposes power’s excessive, overflowing, tribal, religious, and fantasmatic fiction. Leaking as an event and as a text offers a new model for the way fiction interrogates the political in the digital age, exposing its unraveling rather than correcting its functioning. The leak is a perverse text, superfluous yet incriminating, decipherable yet untranslatable.

Leaking interpellates publics by forcing them to take account of that which they could be shielded from through traditional media. It interpellates people as spectators in a scene of *faḍḥ* in which they too become engulfed, sending videos of abuse to the YouTube channels set up by leakers and hackers. The public participates in the affective economy of the leak as contributors and avid consumers and readers who are shocked and titillated yet always following the leak. Quoting Zizek again: “We didn’t really learn from Snowden (or from Manning) anything we didn’t already presume to be true—but it is one thing to know it in general, and another to get concrete data.”⁷⁹ “Concrete data” as *donnée*, as a material and affective “given” following Yuk Hui’s opening quotation, is tied to the question of materiality that leaking makes possible, that the leak reveals as in the tale of “The Lady and Her Five Suitors,” wherein the king becomes exposed and humiliated in the act of leaking. This concrete data is the data of *faḍḥ*, an affective scene anchored in the uncontainable body of the leaker who cannot but click, hack, write, respond, and violate in order to face the violation. This body becomes a bruised body but also a body that is pushed outside the law and its codifying power, coerced into liminal spaces such as embassies, airports, diaspora. As we saw in “The Steward’s Tale,” the leak is always coextensive with a story that needs to account for it, ushering in a new fictional order and “règles” that make this concrete data legible, allowing it to proliferate and go viral.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has established that leaking is a process tied to the body, which becomes a *site* and *sight* from which the fiction of the leak flows, exposing the fiction of power as vindictive, fantasmatic, monstrous. Whistleblowers are both anonymous and the new celebrities trapped in their fame, burnt, marked, harassed, imprisoned. Their hostage bodies need to be smuggled in and out of countries and across borders like the information they smuggle on CDs, zip drives, and videos. The body that exposes is dangerous and in danger. The leaker and whistleblower let knowledge out through pores and holes that stink and flow. The body cannot escape what it leaks. Therefore the leak is not excrement but rather that which marks the body and gives it meaning, determines its belonging and unbelonging, its location in jail or exile, and its gender. The question of gender is fundamental to the anxiety surrounding the leaking body both in terms of what it discharges and what it reveals, requiring an elaboration on the porous boundary between the sacred and the profane as a way of framing the subversive potential of the leak. This dovetails with the topics of women writing and harassment, with which I engage in the last two chapters of the book, in which anxiety about leaking and women's fiction is a key site for investigating the subversive economy of leaks with regard to gender roles and public participation, especially in the Gulf.

The leak brings the body into fiction and into a new economy of knowledge. To be informed in the digital age is to acquire the desire of the leak, which involves pleasure, pain, and horror. Information as leaks could not be fully comprehended, understood, and read. The leak thus draws on the literary yet contests its power of representation. There is a materiality in the leak that could never be subsumed in the figurative, demanding an investigation of bodies, ports, portals, and affect. Leaks are tied to fiction as stories and founding narratives yet could not be reduced to it, requiring an investigation that simultaneously engages the metaphorical and the material, thereby forcing us to rethink what fiction means in the digital age. Is the virtual the fictional, or does fiction designate a new order of reality and materiality in the digital age—a hyperreality perhaps? These are questions I take up throughout the book.

Leaking exposes an affective text that arrests and unsettles, countering its readers' fatigue and cynicism. Snowden wanted to "out" himself after leaking the documents to claim the act.⁸⁰ "I only have one fear in doing all of this," he said, "that people will see these documents and shrug, that they'll say, 'we assumed

this was happening and don't care.' The only thing I'm worried about is that I do all this to my life for nothing."⁸¹ The scandalous effect is not produced by the simple act of revealing the secret, which readers might already know, as Zizek claims, but rather by the scene that is made of this secret. "Shining light" on the revelation brings it into discourse in such a way that it outs the system itself. Thus, Snowden fears not being able to make a scene or enact the scandal (*faḍīḥa*), which requires a story and an affective scene that shake things up, as in outing the king who is locked up in the lady's cabinet in the tale from the *Nights*. When Greenwald got the first batch of leaked documents, he exclaimed: "My heart was racing. I had to stop reading and walk around my house a few times to take in what I had just seen and calm myself enough to focus on reading the files."⁸² Provoking fear and excitement, the experience of reading the leak as "a major explosive story"⁸³ or "explosive revelation"⁸⁴ unsettles and fascinates. The fiction of the leak explodes and splinters, moves the body and triggers affects for both readers of the leak and the people translating and making those leaks legible and available, such as Greenwald or the journalists who worked for a year to decipher and translate the Panama Papers. This transfer of affects from leaker to reader, and from leaker to reporter to reader, is key in identifying an affective fiction that requires a reader-manual like the one Greenwald and other journalists provide by editing and covering the leaks in traditional media (newspapers, TV).

Making the heart race or causing a drop in blood pressure as Ahmed Naji's detractor claimed upon reading his text, *Using Life*, characterizes the effects of the narrative of the leak or leak as narrative that is both literary and material, producing affective reactions that shake and knock down. As biopolitics and fiction of scandal in the digital age, leaking unveils and exposes fictions of power across political and cultural contexts, from the United States to the Arab world. However, no longer restricted to ideological narratives of opposition, leaking emerges from the intolerance of abuse, the secretive, and the opaque. Unable to control and contain the leak, leakers are no longer authors in a text whose meaning they can define and control because leaking moves beyond the construction of the leaker as author, public intellectual, criminal, traitor, or hero, as we will see in the case of Wael Abbas. Wael's leaks and scene-making practices are inscribed on the body, in the mouth, bursting out as words and invectives, torture videos and images of abuse circulating online. These leaks arrest readers and interpellate them as consumers of scandal from which they are unable to turn away, making them read more, anticipate, follow.

CHAPTER 2

What Is in My Heart Is on My Twitter

To scandalize is a right. To be scandalized is a pleasure. And the refusal to be scandalized derives from a moralizing attitude.

—Pier Paolo Pasolini, interviewed by Philippe Bouvard, October 31, 1975

I usually don't like to talk about myself, but if you ask anyone who follows mainstream Egyptian media, you will only learn that I don't shower; that my ear is cut off; that I'm ill-mannered [*qalil al-adab*]; that my parents didn't raise me well; that I'm queer; that I'm impotent; that I'm a loner; that I'm debauched and decadent; that I'm a drunk; that I'm a stoner; that I'm an atheist; that I'm an agent for pay; that I'm a sleeper cell; that I'm a member of the Muslim Brotherhood; that I'm a spy; that I work for Qatar; that I work for the US; that I'm on the run in London ... and countless other filthy rumors.

—Wael Abbas, *Min Awraq Nāshit Hukūki* ("From the Papers of a 'Scratchy Activist'")

In April 2006, Wael Abbas—whose star as an activist was on the rise—participated in a solidarity protest organized by the Centre for Socialist Studies and by a number of political activists in solidarity with the basement dwellers of Imbaba [in Cairo]. Wael Abbas was a familiar figure to a number of these activists, including Khalid Abdul Hamid, who leaned over to Wael during the demonstration and said: "There are people who have something to show you." Abdul Hamid took him aside and introduced him to two Imbaba residents who showed him [on their phone] a short video of a police officer assaulting a fellow Imbaba resident. Wael copied the video via Bluetooth and uploaded it online. This was the first torture video to be posted on the Internet [in Egypt]; it shows an officer beating a citizen on his scruff, and thus the video became known as 'the scruff' [*al-qafā*].

—Ahmed Naji, *Al-Mudawwanāt min al-Būst ilā al-Twīt* ("Blogs: From Post to Tweet")¹

The exchange between Wael Abbas and the two demonstrators narrated in the quotation above characterizes the *exchange* of an illicit substance, threatening to the law and to those "trafficking" in it. The video transfer links two scenes: the exchange of an illegal substance at a demonstration in 2006 and a scene of abuse leaked on video. This exchange or transfer marks the moment that separates yet connects digital and analog, Bluetooth and Wi-Fi, and Internet and the street. It is this limit, transition, and connection that I examine in this chapter by exploring the ways in which the illicit and nondiscursive object leaked out of a police station is always already transferred and circulated, moving and producing its own audience. This process serves to create a new political consciousness or awareness, the exploration of which helps to frame the rise of the Arab activist blogger that I read as the leaking subject. This subject produces an affective textuality and imagery online that keeps the audience titillated, outraged, and informed. A new public and imagined community arises from these practices that break with the Andersonian model and the theorization of modernity centered around the novel, the author, and eventually, the intellectual speaking truth to power. New configurations of writing and critique, circulation and representation tied to the digital, are fully explored in what follows.

The most famous "Wael" to emerge from the Egyptian uprising of January 25, 2011, which led to the fall of President Hosni Mubarak, is Wael Ghonim, a Google executive who founded the "Kullena Khaled Said" (We Are All Khaled Said) Facebook page and helped support online organizing and communication before and during the uprising.² International media has focused on this upright, *mu'addab* (civil, respectful, well-mannered, polite) media executive who was detained by the police and is best remembered for his appearance on TV, crying and recanting his actions. The focus on Ghonim contributed to the perception of the Arab uprisings as Facebook and Twitter revolutions, granting social media the lion's share of responsibility in triggering and enabling a political movement that led to, initially, the toppling of autocrats across the region. This perception has also generated a counternarrative, namely that the uprisings were not at all *caused* by the Internet and new media at the service of "neoliberal" subjects such as Ghonim, but are in fact rooted in traditional activism led by unions and civil-society organizations, mobilizing against economic disenfranchisement and state corruption.³ The social-media hypothesis and its refutation generated a false binary, deflecting from a critical investigation of the intertwining of digital culture, new writing, and the critique of power emerging from sites and practices that are local and global, tied to online leaks

and video uploads, and to the traditional practices of *fadḥ* and scene-making both online and on the street.⁴

The lesser-known “Wael” (outside of Egypt, that is) is Wael Abbas (b. 1974), a human-rights activist and citizen journalist who founded in 2004 the blog *Al-Wa’ī al-Miṣrī* (“Egyptian Awareness” or “Egyptian Consciousness”) along with a YouTube channel, and in 2007 a Twitter account with over 300 thousand followers.⁵ Wael, who is referred to as *qalīl al-adab* (ill-mannered, disrespectful, impolite, uncivil, rude, *roué*)⁶ in the quotation above, was one of the first to capture and report on government violations, organizing protests and flash mobs from the mid-2000s onward, and taking and receiving videos of abuse and police brutality, which he would then post online, starting with “The Scruff” (*Al-Qafā*) in 2006, the same year that WikiLeaks was founded. Picking fights with authority figures and fellow activists alike, Wael swears and expresses himself in colloquial Egyptian, using an abrasive language characteristic of many bloggers.⁷ During his coverage of a Kefaya protest in 2005 to which I will return in chapter 4, Abbas’s blog received half a million hits in two days.⁸ In 2009, he tweeted Barack Obama’s speech at Cairo University as well as the election protests in Iran known as the Green Revolution. A fierce critic of Mubarak, the Muslim Brotherhood, but also of military rule and the 2013 coup that toppled the Brotherhood and brought Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to power, Wael has maintained a credibility that earned him the respect of his peers both locally and abroad. He has won many awards, including Human Rights Watch’s Hellman/Hammett Award in 2008, and he was named Middle East Person of the Year by CNN in 2007, and “Blogger of the Year” by the BBC in 2006.

Wael confronts political figures and actively engages in slinging matches with rivals online, perfecting the art of invective and boast, and mixing a vehement human-rights activism with performative speech that spares no one. With the motto *illī fī albī ‘alā twītrī* (“what is in my heart is on my Twitter”), he tells it like it is, exposing in the process scenes of abuse through reports and videos. “Digitizing” the Arabic expression, “what is in my heart is on my tongue,” which implies that one cannot but say what one feels, Wael presents Twitter as tongue- and heart-like. This direct link between the tongue, the heart, and Twitter denotes a relation of immediacy that unsettles the boundary between technology and its users, man and machine, turning social media into a body organ, and handheld devices into prostheses.⁹ While transparency is traditionally framed as the demand and the right of the citizen of the liberal state to information, the transparency linking the heart and the tongue to Twitter arises from an inability

ity to hold anything back, and from a digital condition and compulsion tied to constant checking, typing, and posting, starting with Wael’s video *Al-Qafā* (“The Scruff”) in 2006.¹⁰ The relation between technological development on the one hand, and unscripted and almost involuntary speech and graphic content that violate the codes of *adab* (civility, propriety, manners, literature, culture) on the other, coincides with the movement of the uncontainable leak, or the leak as a default condition in the digital age. Political engagement thus needs to be read at levels involving body functions and the compulsion to say and show everything, to expose (*fadḥ*) and be exposed (*mafḍūḥ*), and to scandalize and to be scandalized at the risk of one’s own life.

Investigating the interplay of leaks and scene-making in Wael’s posts and language, which are often decried or dismissed as vulgar and offensive, I problematize the charge of *qillat adab* (uncivil, disrespectful, impolite, rude), exploring it both as practice and performance that is amplified by new media technology yet coincides with, is grounded in, and arises from local, affective models of protest and contestation. Tracing a trail of invectives and bruises, torture videos and online attacks, I argue that the activist-blogger is no longer tied to the disciplining project (*ta’dīb*) of the liberal state discussed previously, or to the “lonely intellectual” speaking truth to power.¹¹ The *wa’ī* (consciousness, awareness) generated by Wael’s practices and confrontations is not that of the *mu’addab* (disciplined, docile, civil, respectful) and the intellectual/*adīb* (intellectual/author) in the public sphere who seeks to heal a fragmented subject and nation,¹² but rather the *wa’ī* that captures and exposes a state of fragmentation that is both bodily and political, digital and narrative, emerging from the intersection of the Internet and the street, the body of the activist-blogger and that of tortured and abused people in leaked videos and images that circulate through his accounts online. It is the *wa’ī* of the leaking subject—Wael’s *wa’ī miṣrī*—that moves and interpellates a new public who cannot turn away from the fiction of scandal.

WAEI ABBAS: ADAB VIOLATIONS

When the Tahrir uprising erupted in Egypt in January 2011, prorégime commentators on TV referred to protestors as “ill-mannered kids” (*awlād qalīlīn al-adab*), inquired about their parents, and ordered them to return home. This characterization betrayed an anxiety about the gradual erosion of the legitimacy

of a regime sustained through forms of coercion, censorship, and faux *adab*. In this light Paul Amar argues that “a human-security governance regime . . . aim[s] to protect, rescue, and secure certain idealized forms of humanity identified with a particular family of sexuality, morality, and class subject.”¹³ Particularly, the discourse of *adab* as fiction of power, civility, cultural production, and law abidance that has operated as the backbone of Arab authoritarianism, systematically deployed to stifle dissent, is sustained through a security governance regime that still draws on morals and *adab* to legitimize its power. This discourse, though it could be traced to classical *adab* or belletrism,¹⁴ emerges most directly from a *Nahda* civilizing project best captured by Butrus al-Bustani’s 1859 speech on *adab* and its plural, *ādāb*, defined as the series of developments in education and cultural production meant to forge the civilized—and civil—subject of the modern nation-state, namely the *mu’addab*.¹⁵ Marwa Elshakry argues that *adab* “literature” in the nineteenth century “came to imply new norms of civility and a new kind of moral science,”¹⁶ while “*tarbiya*” became a “national domestic order” that leads to “the production of healthy, hygienic, well-behaved, moral, and productive subjects.”¹⁷ Eventually, *adab* crystalized with Taha Hussein in the twentieth century as a literary canon but also as a framework for the production of the *mu’addab* and *adīb*, the enlightened and docile subject of the *Nahda*, and its intellectual and author respectively.¹⁸

The violation of *adab* as “literature,” culture, and morality but also as civility in Norbert Elias’s sense¹⁹ gradually became the ground for excluding authors and activists from public discourse, banning their books, and incarcerating them. In 1966, Yehya Haqqi’s critique of Sonallah Ibrahim’s *Tilk al-Rā’iḥa* (*That Smell*) for its violation of the codes of *adab* contributed to the withdrawal of the book from circulation.²⁰ In *Egypt’s Culture Wars: Politics and Practice*, Samia Mehrez discusses a series of cases involving Egyptian state intervention to suppress “indecent literature,” engaging Sonallah Ibrahim’s confrontation with the regime of moralistic censorship under then-minister of culture Faruq Husni.²¹ In 2015, the case brought against author and blogger Ahmed Naji, which alleged that his novel *Using Life* violated public morality (*khadsh al-ḥayā’*,²² a violation of *adab* codes) for its graphic content, causing a reader palpitations from a drop in blood pressure, reactivated this deployment of *adab* as *ḥayā’* or *tahdhīb* (disciplining), namely that which ought to govern writing, speech, and behavior. While *adab* became an ideological model for the fiction of power, providing it with symbolic legitimacy to control literary and cultural production, *ādāb al-’amma* (public morality)²³ became the gauge that allowed states to intervene in *adab*’s name, such as in Naji’s case.

Whereas *adab* has been identified as the handmaiden of power, *qillat adab*, or what Emily Apter refers to in a different context as “fiction mal élevée,”²⁴ has been marginalized, shunned, and excluded. The violations of the codes of *adab* or *qillat adab* (incivility, rudeness, disrespectfulness) are affective texts and performances that could be traced to scenes of *faḍḥ* as scandal and public shaming, and *radḥ* (verbal mudslinging) to name a few.²⁵ From the vulgar mudslinging in Egyptian movies to camp as entertainment in a larger context, these unruly affects of *qillat adab* have been traditionally sidelined as working-class and/or gendered phenomena that could be suppressed whenever it suited the regime, or decried when erupting in texts such as Naji’s, leading to censorship if not incarceration. “Such scenes,” argues Edward Said, “are often dismissed as catering to some vague mass cult (of voyeurism? lower-class sensationalism?).”²⁶ In the context of the Egyptian uprising in 2011, Elliot Colla analyzed the use of insults in protestors’ slogans, reading this *qillat adab* as “a political weapon [striking] at the legitimacy and rectitude of the powerful.”²⁷ Colla argues that these insults could not be reduced to a linguistic analysis, and thus require a theoretical framework engaging with performance studies, and, I would add, affect theory.

Going back and forth between the street and social media, the poetics and affective economy of insult, *qillat adab*, and *faḍḥ* have found in cyberstreams and circuits the ideal habitus through which they burst out in fights and mudslinging matches, but also through graphic and inappropriate content leaked and posted online. The proliferation of *qillat adab* as inappropriate, graphic, or offensive content marks a loss of control that exposes leaky boundaries, both political and bodily. *Qillat adab* as I define it denotes the practice and the condition of the leaking subject that is itself breached, uncontainable, and leaking from the “heart to Twitter,” thereby exposing the leaking of power’s legitimizing fiction. This subject is constituted by affective scene-making (*faḍḥ*), and often compulsive actions and reactions, thereby requiring new conceptual tools for explaining political confrontation in the digital age.

EQUALITY IN INSULT

In addition to posting videos of abuse and exposing human-rights violations, Wael Abbas is the go-to person for confronting regime figures and supporters, insulting them and revealing their hypocrisy. Courageous and aggressive, Wael perfected the *kussumak* (literally, motherfucking) insult in his online exchanges,

ushering in a poetics of invective that could be traced to Naguib Surur's *Kussum-iyyāt*, the unpublished expletive-filled poem that exposed social and political corruption under Nasser following the Arab defeat against Israel in 1967.²⁸ Examining *qillat adab* in this context helps to explain the kind of political subjectivity associated with the subject leaking from the heart to the tongue to Twitter.

In the tweets in figure 2, Wael deploys his signature *kussumak* to advance what we may consider a theory and praxis of insult, expounding on its political and legal significance. He claims the right to insult the Muslim Brotherhood, who were about to come to power, just as he had insulted other political figures and groups before them. Foreshadowing the 2013 coup and the ensuing Rab'a massacre, Wael's tweets imply that *shatm* (insulting, swearing) is the condition of the Muslim Brotherhood's entry into the political arena, hence denying them any appeal to the sacred. This exchange debunks the secular/religious binary as the framework often used to explain Arab politics. Wael engages the Brothers as equal subjects in a new political process predicated on *shatm*. In this framework the production of the political subject requires an act of desecralization wherein nothing is taboo, from insulting the mother to insulting the imam. "To insult and be insulted" ushers in equality that turns the vulgar and uncivil confrontation online into a political system of exchange that the Brothers "better get used to." The aesthetics and politics of *shatm* in this case remove political subjectivity from a false binary maintained by the regime (Mubarak's and al-Sisi's) through the slogan: "It's either me or the Brotherhood," namely a choice between "stability" and "chaos." This binary relies on an artificial opposition between the ideological narrative of the state upholding *adab*, discipline, and Arab nationalism as tamed speech and fiction of power on the one hand, and Islamism as this narrative's imagined (and orientalized) Other.²⁹ Breaking with this binary, *qillat adab* emerges in Wael's case as the framework for a political engagement involving the leaking mouth and heart of the abrasive blogger, circulating videos and images of abuse online and engaging in slinging matches with fellow bloggers and rivals.

The right to insult and be insulted in Wael's case involves not only the right to free speech finally achieved after the fall of Mubarak, i.e., it's not a political right acquired after the redemptive revolutionary event of January 25. The right to insult is constitutive of political subjectivity through affective speech. Jokingly, blogger and activist Nawara Negm, who spars with Wael online, captures this affective quality of insult, which counters the cooptation of the activist as *adib* or *muthaqqaf* (intellectual).



Figure 2. Wael Abbas tweets in Arabic and translation. Wael Abbas, March 6, 2012, <https://twitter.com/waelabbas>.