ULTRAS
Two of the 74 Al-Ahly Ultras who died in the Port Said incident in February 2012. Tribute Facebook pages were put on the Internet the aftermath of the massacre.
1. Introduction

*More Out of Curiosity* is the second iteration of a documentary film by artist Ronnie Close, which may or may not end up as a feature-length production. Like the first iteration - entitled, simply, *Ultras* - the film considers the fanatical supporters of Cairo football club, Al Ahly. *More Out of Curiosity* focuses on events that followed 1st February 2012, when 74 Al Ahly fans were killed in clashes with rival fans and police at the Port Said Stadium.

2. Background I: Football

The Ultras Al-Ahly formed in 2007. They modelled themselves on Ultra fans in Italy. They aimed to bring spectacle to the Egyptian football terraces. They produced banners, pyrotechnic displays and chanted.

3. Background II: Politics

The Ultras’ activities brought them into direct conflict with the Mubarak regime, which placed a ban on all political gatherings. The Ultras played a vital role during the January 2011 revolution. They helped defend the popular gatherings in Tahrir Square against attacks from government forces. The Ultras view the orchestration of the killings at Port Said as an act of direct reprisal.

4. Structure

The promise of a feature-length version of the film guides both the existing iterations. Ultras took the form of a Hollywood-style trailer: entertaining the temptation to mythologise its subject. *More Out of Curiosity* is divided into seven scenes. Each begins with a title frame, used to identify the theme, event or characters explored. The scenes suggest the basic structural components that could make up the full-length feature.

5. Documentary

Close’s film refuses the conventions of ‘straight’ documentary. Material is drawn from a range of sources, including state television, videos produced by the Ultras and footage made by Close. The aesthetic is inconsistent. Sections jar. Much of the audio is in Arabic without English subtitles. Gaps appear between image and sound, subject and document, the recording of events and our capacity to understand them.
6. Football Chant
They butchered the free Ultras
Coz they sided with the rebels.
They butchered the free Ultras
Coz they sided with the rebels.
In red headed to Port Said
Back in a white coffin and on my land I'm martyred.
O' martyr, you are in paradise
Now, it's revolution all over again.

7. Mediation
In a persuasive account of the Egyptian Revolution, Negar Azimi highlighted the contradictory political role played by media imagery. On the one hand, the mediation of events led to a reductive view that obscured the complexities and internal tensions that shaped the popular uprising from the outset. On the other, the mediation of events was important in securing popular and international support.

8. Rancière
'Critical art is an art that aims to produce a new perception of the world, and therefore to create a commitment to its transformation. This schema, very simple in appearance, is actually the conjunction of three processes: first, the production of a sensory form of 'strangeness'; second, the development of an awareness of the reason for that strangeness and third, a mobilization of individuals as a result of that awareness.'

9. Labour
Some paint flags.
Others stitch banners.
Stencil logos.
Conduct the chanting crowds.
Let off flares.
Pose for photographs.
Fill the streets with moving bodies.
And cameras.

10. Trial
Explain to me what happened with the Port Said trial on 26 Jan last year.
Basically there were around 74 charged, with 50 rival Al Masry fans (probably paid attackers) and 24 local cops in charge of security and stadium officials.

11. Football Chant (Reprised).
عوامر ملائدي
Several slogans repeat in Ronnie Close’s video *More Out Of Curiosity* (2014). We read, again and again, ‘HOOLIGAN’ and ‘MARTYR’. Spelled out, not spoken, these words flash across the screen in bold white type. They describe the work’s protagonists: young Egyptian men, those fanatical football supporters who took to the streets of Cairo in 2012 following the massacre of seventy-four Al-Alhy fans at Port Said. These young men are also known as the Ultras. ‘Hooligan’ and ‘Martyr’, those opposing positions on the social spectrum of political activism, are simply how these men are known in the media—which is the real subject or protagonist of Close’s work. See, read, repeat is the order of the both this video and our mediated public sphere.

Close’s interrogation of the media and news becomes evident when we read another slogan, which appears twice in the video—‘LIVE ON TV’. The phrase refers to the immediacy of the events we are watching; that the massacre at Port Said was broadcast ‘live on TV’. Close’s editing makes this relay between immediacy and record clear. Our viewing of the riots is cut with clips from a local news broadcast of the events as they unfolded on the football field. We see a newscaster bow his head; he can’t bear to look as he listens to what is happening ‘live on TV’. Yet, ‘Live on TV’ also suggests the opposite of immediacy. After all, nothing can be ‘live on TV.’ Everything is mediated, and in *More Out of Curiosity* the mediations are made transparent. The massacre and the events that followed, including the street protests, a trial, and the eventual conviction of football officials, come prepackaged like a TV drama. Close’s video follows a familiar—much repeated-narrative arc. Divided into seven scenes, it moves from documents of violence and murder, from the way in which the massacre was reported in the news, to coverage of the trial and live recording of street celebrations. This crime story culminates with elation and retribution.

*More Out of Curiosity* is not a documentary about the events at Port Said, nor is it a documentary about young men keen to act politically as football fans. There is no moralizing. There is no attempt at objectivity. There is no celebration of self-representation. Moving between the live and the mediated, between the men and the media, *More Out of Curiosity* reminds us to get beyond looking. If Close’s editing makes mediation—and the compromised promise of ‘seeing is believing’—transparent, that transparency is ironically expressed as a cacophony of signs and sound. We read English and we hear Arabic. Close does not translate the chants, the broadcast or the posters. News, opinion, street cries, banners, slogans merge, producing noise as well as necessary questioning and confusion. Nothing is really uncovered or explained, just as nothing is really ‘live’ on TV. In this slippage between live and mediated, between sight and sound, Close also makes us—the TV viewer—the protagonist. We continue to look. We see and read and repeat. We are still before the screen and motivated to watch—‘out of curiosity’.
Ronnie Close

Film: More Out of Curiosity
25:55 minutes, single-screen, 16:9, HD Digital Video.

One of the key players in the new emergent political debate are Egypt's fanatical football supporters, the Ultras. Although affiliated to different teams in the domestic league they often joined forces in street protests to remove Hosni Mubarak in January 2011. The controversy over the 2012 Port Said incident when 74 Al-Ahly fans were killed in an orchestrated attack forced the Ultras back onto the streets. They mounted a successful political protest campaign against the state forces that culminated a year later in legal conviction and a sense of retribution.

More Out of Curiosity is a film work drawing on documentary narratives to frame the capacity of resistance in current social movements. This film is constructed from video footage drawn from a number of sources, including the Al-Ahly Ultras themselves who shared their video archive material. The assemblage of images of street protests, football games, riots and banner making helps stitch together a narrative to expose their unique local subculture in an overlapping meta-documentary format. The film work is bookended by the Port Said incident and the court verdict a year later. This structure is divided into seven scenes which categorize the video imagery. No voiceover resists the direct deciphering of the video material and the film operates on an instinctive, visceral level driven by a charged soundtrack.

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