The urban veil: image politics in media culture and contemporary art
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THE URBAN VEIL: IMAGE POLITICS IN MEDIA CULTURE AND CONTEMPORARY ART

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Summary

This project investigates the particular purchase the image of the Muslim veil has on collective imaginaries outside Muslim-majority countries, by looking at how the image operates in media culture and contemporary art. The main objective of this thesis is to carve out a space of articulation for the “urban veil,” a term I use to refer to a contested site where the politics of representation meet articulations of the heterogeneous subject position of Muslim women living in metropolises in Europe and North America. By image politics I signal sociopolitical forces that subtend readings of the image of the Muslim veil as sign. Image politics moreover implies a site of singularities, struggle, negotiation, and transformation that speak to emergent imaginaries of the veil in specific geopolitical contexts.

The arguments of this study are developed through the course of five chapters, moving from an analysis of existing conceptual and geographic mappings of the image of the Muslim veil toward a rerouting of the sign and micro-political articulations of its semantic legibility as an integral thread of its urban contexts in Western Europe and North America.

The first chapter, *The Image-as-Veil, the Images-as-Folds, and the Islamic Aesthetics of the Veil*, outlines the methodological framework of this project and develops two models of image and articulates an Islamic aesthetics of the veil that I use as theoretical tools of analysis throughout. Kaja Silverman’s theorization of the cultural screen and Deleuze’s notion of the fold articulate the key characteristics of two different operative modes of the image: “the image-as-veil” and the “image-as-folds.” I maintain
that both models are critical for addressing the complex issues and questions surrounding the image of the Muslim veil in the present. They also highlight the alternative individual and collective identification processes enfolded in the urban veil. Drawing on the writings of Dominique Clévenot, Oleg Grabar, and Abdelkébir Khatibi, I claim that the image-as-folds conjoins with an “Islamic aesthetics of the veil” that foregrounds the textures, lines, and ornamentation of surfaces, evoking a mode of perception that is more analogous to reading than to viewing.

The second chapter, *The Archival Image of the Muslim Veil*, I expand on the semantic readings of the veil by exploring the media archive of the image. This chapter takes as a starting point the socio-political landscape of the Netherlands, to demonstrate how the current political use of the image of the Muslim veil in that context depends on a tension between inherited and borrowed historical meanings of the veil as sign. This chapter is divided into two main parts. In the first, I investigate the role the image of the Muslim veil plays in *Fitna* (2008), the controversial short film composed of appropriated media images by Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch Freedom Party. In the second part of this chapter, Linda Wallace’s *Living Tomorrow* is shown to engage with the experience of a time out of joint in contemporary Dutch society. I argue that *Living Tomorrow* operates through an expanded format that partially relinquishes the role of the archivist to the visitor, asking her to reevaluate the past and stipulate how the future of the diverse social, cultural, and economic strands of Dutch society will play out.

In the third chapter, *The Urban Veil: A Politics of (Dis)Identification*, the video installation *(un) covering*, by the Canadian artist Farheen Haq, provides a subjective iteration that raises questions of interpellation and identification vis-à-vis the cultural
screen. I maintain that Haq performs a politics of dis-identification on two levels via interconnected tactics of repetition, notions of drawing, and a specific orchestration of the look. First, *(un)convering* reflects and dismantles the politics of representation of surrounding the War on Terror in Canadian print media. Second, I contend that Haq engages with the tenuous relationship between feminism and religion, which is pronounced in discussions of Islam.

The fourth chapter, *The Intersubjective Inscriptions of the Urban Veil: Toward a New Politics of Difference*, takes the image as a site of intersubjective encounters and asks what new forms of intersubjectivity the image of the urban veil inscribes. At the heart of this inquiry is a desire to explore alternate forms of individual and collective identity formation that do not perpetuate division nor dissolve difference. Two artworks serve as case studies in this chapter, proposing provisional answers to this question. The first is an identity-sharing, online interface by artist Martine Neddam. I argue that *hayet.djelali.org* indexes and subverts the workings of the term *laïcité* in France. In particular it reveals a double bind imposed on the Muslim woman’s body by the principle of *laïcité*. The second case study, Haq’s *Endless Tether*, is a large-scale video installation that continues Neddam’s investigation, working through the bodies in, and in front of, the screen. By plunging the viewing subject into a dynamic field of relations— which offers multiple sites of (dis) identification— *Endless Tether* proposes an alternate to the politics of difference underscoring the term *laïcité* in France, offering a more complex way of thinking the self/other relation.

The final chapter, *Reflections on the Image of the Muslim Veil in Fashion*, investigates how the Muslim veil participates, if at all, in what Gilles Lipovetsky has
called the era of consummate fashion. This chapter brings the investigation of the image of the urban veil to the level of everyday practice, and asks how the mechanisms of the fashion system, in which the female body and femininity are spectacularized and commodified, can co-exist with the beliefs undergirding the Muslim daily practice of veiling. The concept of the mirror serves to articulate the precarious distinction between what I identify as a double movement of the subject in consummate fashion: a process of being made, or fashioned into a certain model by the system, and that of fashioning oneself, or creating a self-image through the system.

The image of the Muslim veil is impregnated with colonial and neo-imperial histories in which it predominantly stands as a sign of otherness. While keeping these histories in check, this dissertation explores how the Muslim veil is coming into being in a historical moment and at geographic locations in which it must also be aligned with a number of alternate genealogies. Motivating this study is a desire to explore the image of the urban veil as a site of connectivity: occasioning surprising effects, for example, as it is read alongside discourses of feminism, articulations of difference, and the system of consummate fashion. This project attends to the performative side of images and the potential of art to transform normative representations. Following Deleuze, if a work of art has the capacity to press on what is known and generate an idea, then this thesis delves into what the works under study have to offer in terms of new understandings of the urban veil in all its singularities and manifolds.
Acknowledgements

This doctoral thesis has spanned the last five years of my life, and consequently, the final content has been shaped by marking encounters with people, art works, images, cities and other projects. Still, the encouragement, inspiration, and participation of some people were truly indispensable to the completion of this manuscript. I want to acknowledge them here.

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Anik Fournier
Amsterdam, January 2012
List of Images


Introduction

In the fall of 2003 while I was completing a master’s degree in my native city, Montreal, a commotion ensued in the media after a young woman appeared for the first day of class at a private high school wearing a Muslim veil. Irene Wassem, then sixteen, was expelled from Charlemagne College because the garment did not meet the school’s dress code. As the story unfolded in the media, a new image of the Muslim veil began to emerge. Following 9/11, the veil, and especially the Afghan burqa, became a visual shorthand for the war on terror. Discourses of feminism and democracy provided the subtext for the plethora of veils in the media, revitalizing the general public’s interest in Islam and the oppression of women. Countering and rerouting this politically fraught representation of the veil was the claim that Wassem had decided to adopt the veil during her summer break “for religious reasons.” Her mother, Hélène Malley, a French Canadian, stated that she and her husband supported their daughter’s personal choice and had taken care to find a blue scarf that would match the school’s uniform. They reported their daughter’s expulsion to the Quebec Human Rights Commission, and although in 1995 the commission had declared that banning the veil in public schools violated the Charter of Human Rights, in this instance they refused to issue a ruling because the incident had occurred in a private school.

Eight years later, as the world commemorates the ten-year anniversary of 9/11, I am living in Amsterdam writing the final version of the introduction to my doctoral

2 “School won’t allow hijab, says Montreal student.”
thesis. Two French women have just become the first to be fined for defying the ban on face coverings in France, a law that took effect in May of this year. It is said that Hind Ahmas (32) and Najat Nait Ali (36) had hoped for this conviction so that they could begin the “long process of challenging the law before the European Court of Human Rights.” Meanwhile, similar laws targeting the burqa and niqab are under discussion in the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland, and Portugal.

These two anecdotes form parentheses around the multiple threads of my dissertation. This project investigates the particular purchase the image of the Muslim veil has on collective imaginaries outside Muslim-majority countries, by looking at how the image operates in media culture and contemporary art. The main objective of this thesis is to carve out a space of articulation for the “urban veil,” a term I use to refer to a contested site where the politics of representation meet articulations of the heterogeneous subject position of Muslim women living in metropolises in Europe and North America. By image politics I signal sociopolitical forces that subtend readings of the image of the Muslim veil as sign. Image politics moreover implies a site of singularities, struggle, negotiation, and transformation that speak to emergent imaginaries of the veil in specific geopolitical contexts.

The Multivalent Folds of the Urban Veil

While my dissertation is concerned primarily with images, the two incidents involving veiled women that I have recounted above speak to the tensions and multifarious forces enfolded in the notion of the urban veil. The two stories bracket off

specific geographic locations (North America and Europe) and a time frame (the first
decade of the twenty-first century), in which the growing visibility of veiled women has
been met by large-scale sociopolitical discourses that have mobilized the image of the
veil into their workings.

Since the early nineties, the presence of veiled women in Europe and North
America has multiplied significantly, most noticeably in universities and colleges.\(^4\) The
reasons for this increase are varied. In *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil’s Resurgence from
the Middle East to America*, Leila Ahmed suggests that in addition to the spread of global
Islamism, the coming of age of a group of women who do not always share the same
opinions and interpretations of Islam as their first-generation immigrant parents is an
important factor.\(^5\) In *The Muslim Veil in North America: Issues and Debates*, Sajida
Sultana Alvi, Homa Hoodfar, and Sheila McDonough demonstrate how the adoption of
the veil by students and young professionals is often a strategy for these women to
negotiate the many facets and senses of belonging that make up their daily experience,
particularly as pious women in societies whose norms and values are often at odds with
their own. In these contexts the veil can be a powerful means to challenge sexism,
counter stereotypes regarding Islam, and affirm the rights of the wearer as an equal
citizen within these societies. Ahmed reminds us that the presence or absence of the veil
is not indicative that the veiled woman is necessarily more religious than her non-veiled
counterpart. Such a reading is far too simple to account for the different ways pious
women choose to embody and live according to their personal beliefs. Notwithstanding

\(^4\) Homa Hoodfar, Sajida S. Alvi and Sheila McDonough, “Introduction” in *The Muslim Veil in

\(^5\) Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil’s Resurgence from the Middle East to America*
the variety of reasons underlying Muslim women’s decision to adopt or refuse the practice of veiling, its visibility is above all an intimation of the wearing subject’s ethical and inner spiritual commitments.

That said, in the last decade the decision to don the veil in North American and European countries has had more weighty consequences. Foreign interventions in Muslim majority countries, notably in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the horrendous attacks of 9/11 in New York, followed by Madrid and London, speak to the neo-liberal context in recent history, in which complex geopolitical forces and power relations have been packaged as a volatile clash between the cultures of Islam and the West. Edward Said’s discussion of the orientalist depiction of Islam and Muslims produced in Western media, an argument he first made in 1981, has only intensified within this context.  

In his recent book *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present*, W.J.T. Mitchell explains how images have always played a key role in politics and in the formation of collective consciousness. Mitchell notes the accelerated pace of production and the networked circulation of images in contemporary media. Using the term cloning figuratively and literally, the author argues that unprecedented in the post-9/11 era is how images are now designed to *replicate themselves* endlessly and infect the collective imaginary of the global population as they travel through the omnipresent media matrix.

With this argument Mitchell insightfully pinpoints a paradox at the core of the image politics of terror. Terrorism in the post-9/11 era has been repeatedly conceived of as a virus, a disease invading and spreading through Western societies. The

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superabundance of images of veils has been key to this imaginary. In European print media alone, the image of the Muslim veil has become a sort of “minor genre” of its own, to borrow the term of art historian Sven Lutticken. The growing visibility of the veil in urban spaces readily sustains the anxiety underlying the image and metaphor, serving as visual proof of the disease invading the social body. And yet, Mitchell correctly signals that it is not a real threat of terrorism, but the images that assault the social imagination with fear, which operate in a viral, and within this same logic, terrorizing manner.

Images have played an equally important part in galvanizing populist movements in many Western European countries, notably England, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Belgium in recent years. Populism as a growing political force dovetails with many narratives of the war on terror in which Islam and immigration are prevailing threats to local cultural identity and social security. Yet the friend/enemy frontier articulated in discourses of the war on terror between Islam and the West, which brings the vulnerability of national borders to the fore, is relocated and presented as an internal frontier between “the people” and the establishment—which, for its part, is no longer seen to represent the peoples’ interests. This internal frontier, according to the political theorist Ernest Laclau, is an essential feature of populism.

In his discussion of the role of the imagination in populist politics, sociologist Merijn Oudenampsen stresses the work that images and storytelling do to produce this internal frontier, and by extension, the symbolic identity of the people via modes of negative identification. Strong cultural imagery is mobilized to identify people by what they are not, in other words, to create a “constitutive outside.” Throughout Western

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Europe, political parties and their leaders articulate this internal frontier first and foremost as an autochthonous/immigrant distinction. For example, Geert Wilders’ PVV in the Netherlands defines “the people” in opposition to the liberal elite and its failed multicultural policy, and the immigrant, who tends to be Muslim and/or a terrorist. Symbolic imagery of lighthouses, windmills, and politicians posing as helmsmen at sea, who will symbolically steer the community out of difficult times, are contrasted with images of veiled women and minarets—symbols of cultural values and a religion that are presented as a threat to the community and are therefore excluded from it.

In the last decade, the discursive and imagistic formations of the war on terror and growing populist politics successfully revived and exploited a long tradition of stereotypes regarding the Muslim veil in the West that can only be seen as imperial and orientalist by nature. I argue that what is most problematic with this occurrence, and what will be a central theme of analysis throughout my dissertation, are the spatial operations (both conceptual and geographic) that the image of the Muslim veil continues to effect in a drastically different historical moment and geographic setting. The media use of the image, so often hyperbolically represented in the image of the burqa, promote tired readings of the Muslim veil as signs of Muslim women’s oppression, the backwardness of Islam, and the fanaticism and violent nature of Muslims. These readings are derivative of embedded spatial mappings of the image that designate, as I have begun to demonstrate here, an outside to the West, or to social-political communities within the West. In this manner, they immediately signal division. Most importantly, the politically charged legibility of the image has real effects on the lives of Muslim (veiled) women living in North America and Europe. Their visibility is immediately translated into a sign
of difference, foreignness, and ultimately a threat to the security of the local society and culture. As the two introductory anecdotes suggest, the increasing attempts to ban the charged symbol’s visibility from various social spaces reflect and fuel these stereotypes and anxieties.

And yet, while the image continues to symbolize a viral element invading from the outside, or an immigrant bearing the expression of values and beliefs deemed incongruent with those of the autochthonous culture, many practicing Muslim women, including those who do not don the veil, cannot be considered immigrants in any sense of the term. Rather, they are second- or third-generation citizens of these countries; they are Canadian, American, French, Dutch, and British women, who nominally share equal rights within these countries, including the right to practice their religion. The new generation of young veiled women, such as the three mentioned above, consider these countries their homelands. For their part, these women are intrinsic to the DNA of their countries makeup, to borrow one of Ahmed’s analogies. Their adherence to the practice of veiling within these countries where it is not imposed, but is rather a nominal right given to them by the state, already implies significant challenges to the semantic legibility of the veil as sign. Hence, even if it is not the objective behind a woman’s decision to wear the veil (as was arguably the case for Wassem), the effects of that choice can trouble and shed new light on a tired image. Others, such as Ahmad and Ali, are actively striving to contest “white men” and their politically fraught attempt to save, in the now infamous words of Gayatri Spivak, “brown women from brown men.”

confronted and challenged by the inscriptions of emergent singularities, that are the women who decide to don the Muslim veil for a wide range of personal reasons in their specific socio-political contexts.

I want to emphasize that my use of the term “urban veil” does not refer to a physical entity that covers a women’s head, to the practice of veiling, or to women who don the veil. The term is meant as a placeholder for an image of a heterogeneous subject position that is simultaneously over-determined by the politics of representation in media culture and emergent within this historical moment. The urban veil is in this way inseparable from the image politics of the Muslim veil in media culture, and yet its manifold facets cannot be reduced to these representations. I argue ramifications of the urban veil can be unpacked through the close analysis of several contemporary art practices. In this way the urban veil is first and foremost a site of struggle between the established images and imaginations of the Muslim veil, and at the same time, images that provoke a reimagining—that involves seeing, feeling, and thinking—the Muslim veil differently.

**Methodologies in Image Analysis**

Ultimately, this thesis investigates the role images play in how we understand ourselves, as well as the role they play in our relations with others. I examine how the image of the Muslim veil remains an operative force for a politics of identity that follows the tradition of orientalism and necessarily aims to secure an image of self that is anchored in an image of a defining other. I want to carve out a space for new relations, whereby the image of the Muslim veil can produce alternate understandings of the veiled
women outside Muslim majority countries—an image that ultimately cannot be neatly aligned within the traditional binaries of West/Orient, self/other, us/them. But it is crucial to go beyond pinpointing and deconstructing misrepresentations. All (mis)representations of the veil, I maintain, have real effects, albeit to differing degrees, on collective imaginaries and on the perception and experience of veiled women in North America and Europe. In this light, the methodological approach of my thesis takes heed of Mitchell’s injunction to renounce critical iconology, which, conventionally, inquires into the meaning of images in their traditional contexts. “We need instead,” he writes, “a method that recognizes and embraces both the unreality of images and their operational reality.” For Mitchell, it is of utmost importance to “trace the process by which the metaphoric becomes literal and the image becomes actual.”11 In this line, this study looks and what facets of images participate in the construction and maintenance of established discourses regarding the Muslim veil, and makes salient features of other (or the same) images that actualize specifications of the urban veil.

In this dissertation, I follow two main theoretical trajectories that contribute to a methodological framework that aims to shed new light on the workings of images (of the veil) and how they affect imaginaries, contribute to (collective) subject formations, and shape subjective experiences. The first is a psychoanalytic politics of representation as developed primarily by the art historian and film theorist Kaja Silverman and the second is drawn from philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s elaborate use of, and contribution to, image analysis. The two theoretical perspectives differ drastically in many ways, but overlap and supplement each other in equally productive manners for my purpose. Each

perspective allows me to focus on different facets of images, ranging from their immanent characteristics to their perception and socio-political consequences.

The Lacanian branch of psychoanalysis offers insights regarding the role that the perception of images plays in psychic processes underlying subject formation. The mirror-phase as developed by Lacan, whereby the enfant perceives the mirror-image as her idealized counterpart, sets in motion processes of identification, idealization, and projection underwriting the subject’s sense of self and her relation to others. Lacan’s productive distinction between the gaze and the look, which also informs this dissertation’s image analysis, sheds light on the role that vision, visuality, and the visual realm continue to play in constructions of subjectivity and intersubjective relations in contemporary screen culture. I contend that these contributions help to explain why the image of the Muslim veil continues to be mobilized and to hold (Western) imaginaries within its grasp.

Many including Deleuze and Felix Guattari have vociferously criticized the normative suppositions regarding difference inscribed into patterns of perception and psychic development in classical psychoanalysis (Freud, Lacan). However, Kaja Silverman convincingly renegotiates this tradition by investing its legacy with a politics of representation that extends beyond the individual subject to account for wider social political norms and stereotypes. Silverman’s notion of the cultural screen, which she defines as the “repertoire of representations by means of which our culture figures all of those many varieties of ‘difference’ through which social identity is inscribed”12 is a central leitmotif throughout this dissertation and a kind of yardstick for measuring the operative effects of images: in other words, whether the legibility of an image sustains

existing understandings of the Muslim veil, or whether it reroutes common sense readings and begins to carve out a space within this screen for new understandings.

The theories of Deleuze contribute to this dissertation a focus on the intrinsic and material characteristics of images, thereby supplementing psychonalaysis’s concern with the participation of images in psychic processes grounded in the realm of visuality. The film theorist Patricia Pisters has convincingly demonstrated how the Deleuzian philosophy of images provides a particularly apt theoretical framework for analyzing images within the matrix of contemporary digital screen culture.13 In his work on cinema, Deleuze classifies images in a way that he compares to a natural history, indicating that for him images, like living things, can be identified by their distinctive features.14 What is more, for Deleuze, images do not represent the world; rather they are realities in themselves. Images are akin to living entities, consisting of immanent percepts and affects. They move through the world and connect with it in rhizomatic ways, producing specific effects in the process.

In this way, Deleuzian thought is not devoid of politics. In fact, Deleuze argues that images are composed of relations of economic and socio-political conditions and have the capacity to express them by giving them material form. The art image, for him, is a particularly potent site in this regard.15 Deleuze often refers to the art image as an idea. Just as the image connects to the world in rhizomatic ways, so too is it inexorably linked to the brain and thought processes. The art image is creative in that it presses on an

impasse in what is known—often through a perceptive logic that speaks to all sensations rather than to the faculty of vision alone, thereby generating something new.

Throughout the chapters of this thesis I employ many of Deleuze’s categories of images as analytical tools. More significantly, however, working with Deleuze in image analysis implies performing close readings of the immanent characteristics of images and their operative effects. Such a method of critical analysis allows, on one hand, to investigate how the image of the Muslim veil intersects with orientalist and imperialist discursive formations. On the other hand, close readings of the materiality go beyond such narratives, shedding light on the transformative effects of the image of the Muslim veil as it travels from one media platform and cultural and geographic situation to the next. Particular attention is paid to how the image of the veil negotiates the cultural conventions of different media, including technologies of image reproduction, advertising, social media, and fashion platforms. Most importantly, I look at how the image takes root, connects, and contributes to the specificities of the cultural and socio-political registers within these contexts, and the social forces and new semantic readings of the urban Muslim veil that emerge in the process.

**Selection of Works**

I want to emphasize that the objective of this dissertation is not to produce a comprehensive understanding of the Muslim veil in Europe and North America. Nor is it a survey of representations of the Muslim veil in media culture and contemporary art. In contrast, I am interested in exploring the tensions and paradoxes that emerge out of close readings of images, as I look for details, fragments, and discontinuities that allow for a
resituating of the image of the Muslim veil along new conceptual and geographic trajectories.

For this reason, each chapter is dedicated to the close analysis of only a few images taken from media culture and contemporary art. As I am concerned with the perceptual processes orchestrated by images and the manner in which their inherent material features interconnect with and produce the social, the economic, and the cultural registers of their immediate contexts, I ultimately demonstrate how images participate in the construction of intersubjective encounters. The makers of the images in question are consequently not limited to Muslim (veiled) women. Rather, the theoretical objects of analysis span a wide range of subject positions and perspectives, which allows me to highlight the multilayered and capacious notion of the urban veil. Although I have chosen to employ the term “urban” to characterize new imaginaries of the Muslim veil, it is in no way intended to evoke a binary between city and rural life. I use the term “urban” to conjure a site of intense connectivity, in which screen culture and images play an ever-increasing role as mediators between cultural subjectivities, temporalities, and spatialities.

Chapter Summaries

The arguments of this study are developed through the course of five chapters, moving from an analysis of existing conceptual and geographic mappings of the image of the Muslim veil toward a rerouting of the sign and micro-political articulations of its semantic legibility as an integral thread of its urban contexts in Western Europe and North America.
The first chapter, *The Image-as-Veil, the Images-as-Folds, and the Islamic Aesthetics of the Veil*, outlines the methodological framework of this project and develops two models of image and articulates an Islamic aesthetics of the veil that I use as theoretical tools of analysis throughout.

Kaja Silverman’s theorization of the cultural screen and Deleuze’s notion of the fold articulate the key characteristics of two different operative modes of the image: “the image-as-veil” and the “image-as-folds.” I maintain that both models are critical for addressing the complex issues and questions surrounding the image of the Muslim veil in the present. They also highlight the alternative individual and collective identification processes enfolded in the urban veil. I argue that inherent to the image-as-veil are perceptual operations based primarily in Western understandings that align vision, knowledge, and power. The image-as-folds radically refutes this tradition. Building on Deleuze’s notion of the fold, I will demonstrate that this modality of the image emphasizes its materiality and its relation to thought and has a strong predisposition to have transformative effects on normative representations. Whereas the image-as-veil inscribes modes of separation, I will propose that the image-as-folds embodies a movement of connectivity.

Drawing on the writings of Dominique Clévenot, Oleg Grabar, and Abdelkébir Khatibi, I claim that the image-as-folds conjoins with an “Islamic aesthetics of the veil” that foregrounds the textures, lines, and ornamentation of surfaces, evoking a mode of perception that is more analogous to reading than to viewing. The articulation of the two models of image and the Islamic aesthetics of the veil emerge from the close analysis of various images across media platforms, from colonial postcards and classical cinema to
contemporary works by artists Shirin Neshat (an Iranian living in New York) and Zineb Sedira (a French-Algerian living in London).

The second chapter, *The Archival Image of the Muslim Veil*, I expand on the semantic readings of the veil by exploring the media archive of the image. This chapter takes as a starting point the socio-political landscape of the Netherlands, which is one among several European countries where the issue of the Muslim veil has become a politically charged topic in recent years. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how the current political use of the image of the Muslim veil depends on a tension between inherited and borrowed historical meanings of the veil as sign. This chapter is divided into two main parts. In the first, I investigate the role the image of the Muslim veil plays in *Fitna* (2008), the controversial short film composed of appropriated media images by Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch Freedom Party. A descriptive reading of the piece demonstrates how the veil becomes a sign that is meant first and foremost to conjure the affect of fear: the fear of an imminent threat to Dutch society and culture. The cultural theorist Sarah Ahmed stipulates that the affect of fear always reactivates preexisting stereotypes.

In the second part of this chapter, Linda Wallace’s *Living Tomorrow* is shown to engage with the experience of a time out of joint in contemporary Dutch society. The form the archive takes in this installation I maintain takes part in what art historian Hal Foster characterizes as “an archival impulse” in contemporary art. I argue that *Living Tomorrow* operates through an expanded format that partially relinquishes the role of the archivist to the visitor, asking her to reevaluate the past and stipulate how the future of the diverse social, cultural, and economic strands of Dutch society will play out.
In the third chapter, *The Urban Veil: A Politics of (Dis)Identification*, the video installation *(un) covering*, by the Canadian artist Farheen Haq, provides a subjective iteration that raises questions of interpellation and identification vis-à-vis the cultural screen. I maintain that Haq performs a politics of dis-identification via interconnected tactics of repetition, notions of drawing, and a specific orchestration of the look. First, I bring *(un)convering* into dialog with a series of images taken from Canadian print media surrounding a terrorist threat in that country: images that operate at the level of the spectacle. Haq opens up and appropriates the performative dimensions of the politics of representation of the Muslim veil in the media, occupying the gap of agency that they paradoxically form. Second, I contend that Haq engages with the tenuous relationship between feminism and religion, which is pronounced in discussions of Islam. To this end, Amelia Jones’ articulation of a para-feminism resonates with how Haq significantly presses on and extends the limits of contemporary liberal feminist theory. In this second part, *(un) covering* is brought into conversation with the theoretical work of cultural anthropologist Saba Mahmood.

The fourth chapter, *The Intersubjective Inscriptions of the Urban Veil: Toward a New Politics of Difference*, takes the image as a site of intersubjective encounters and asks what new forms of intersubjectivity the image of the urban veil inscribes. At the heart of this inquiry is a desire to explore alternate forms of individual and collective identity formation that do not perpetuate division nor dissolve difference. Two artworks serve as case studies in this chapter, proposing provisional answers to this question.

The first is an identity-sharing, online interface by artist Martine Neddam, a French Algerian of Jewish decent living in the Netherlands. The project was
commissioned by an institution dedicated to public art interventions in Marseilles, France, but was dropped when Neddam proposed to create the character of a young Muslim woman living in that city. Based on the project proposal and political terrain into which it sought to intervene, I argue how hayet.djelali.org indexes and subverts the workings of the term laïcité in France. In particular it reveals a double bind imposed on the Mulsim woman’s body by the principle of laïcité.

The second case study, Haq’s *Endless Tether*, is a large-scale video installation that continues Neddam’s investigation, working through the bodies in, and in front of, the screen. A descriptive analysis of the piece is aligned with Deleuzian concepts of the body in art, highlighting how intersubjective relations depend primarily on the ever-shifting meaning attributed not directly to bodies, but to the intersecting and distancing relations established between them. By plunging the viewing subject into a dynamic field of relations—which offers multiple sites of (dis)identification—*Endless Tether* proposes an alternate to the politics of difference underscoring the term laïcité in France, offering a more complex way of thinking the self/other relation.

The final chapter, *Reflections on the Image of the Muslim Veil in Fashion*, investigates how the Muslim veil participates, or not, in what Gilles Lipovetsky has called the era of consummate fashion. This chapter brings the investigation of the image of the urban veil to the level of everyday practice, and asks how the mechanisms of the fashion system, in which the female body and femininity are spectacularized and commodified, can co-exist with the beliefs undergirding the Muslim daily practice of veiling. The concept of the mirror serves to articulate the precarious distinction between what I call the double movement of the subject in consummate fashion: a process of
being made, or fashioned into a certain model by the system, and that of fashioning oneself, or creating a self-image through the system.

The experimental fashion shows of Hussein Chalayan, a Turkish-Cypriot designer based in London, offer multiple perspectives of how two seemingly opposing cultural codes of dress intersect and diverge on questions concerning the woman’s body, desire, and the gaze. An art project produced by a group of young Muslim women living in the Netherlands, one component of which took the form of a fashion magazine, demonstrates how fashion can be used as a means of self-affirmation. This project requires a revisiting of the concept of desire put forth in psychoanalysis. Furthermore, the images in the magazine expose how the aesthetics of the veil, which is characterized by the sense of touch, as well as texture and ornamentation, can be used to deflect consummate fashion’s fetishization of the female body. Finally, I argue that the image of the veil in these instances expresses a subject position that does not completely identify with a liberal conception of the individual or a traditional understanding of communitarianism. I thus introduce the term “generation,” as recently defined by Fredric Jameson, to articulate an active subject position that engages, rather than passively endures, the struggles of its specific historical moment and location.

The image of the Muslim veil is impregnated with colonial and neo-imperial histories in which it predominantly stands as a sign of otherness. While keeping these histories in check, this dissertation explores how the Muslim veil is coming into being in a historical moment and at geographic locations in which it must also be aligned with a number of alternate genealogies. Motivating this study is a desire to explore the image of the urban veil as a site of connectivity: occasioning surprising effects, for example, as it
is read alongside discourses of feminism, articulations of difference, and the system of consummate fashion. This project attends to the performative side of images and the potential of art to transform normative representations. Following Deleuze, if a work of art has the capacity to press on what is known and generate an idea, then this thesis delves into what the works under study have to offer in terms of new understandings of the urban veil in all its singularities and manifolds.
Chapter 1

The Image-As-Veil, the Image-As-Folds, and the Islamic Aesthetics of the Veil


An image found on the website September11News.com presents a figure in a bright blue burqa set off against the rugged camouflage pattern of an army tank. The green, white, and black flag flying at the rear of the military vehicle communicates that it belongs to the Afghan Northern Alliance. The folds and pleats of the burqa create a sculptural blue mass in the center foreground of the image, calling to mind the tradition of drapery found in paintings and sculptures in the history of Western art. The woman’s awareness of being photographed is suggested by her turned head, which is directed towards the camera’s point of view. And yet, the act of returning the look is impeded. Here, the veiled woman finds herself bracketed off between the presence of the camera’s gaze that captures her, transforming her into a legible sign for foreign eyes, and the
patriarchal law of her immediate context, which enforces veiling and bestows the man on
the tank the power to look back.

This play of looks within and without the photograph drives the entanglement of
geopolitical and gender relations home with particular force. In one stroke, the
photographic gaze allows foreign eyes to penetrate a local context and see the visual
proof (the veiled woman) of the need for “benevolent” military intervention. This gaze
from the outside is met by its own physical presence on the inside, embodied by the
Northern Alliance, supported by international powers in the overthrow of the Taliban
regime.

Significant contributions in the fields of art history, feminism, and psychoanalysis
have critically addressed past and present representations of the Muslim veil.16 These
studies have been crucial for unpacking normative readings and the political projects
subtending the veil as sign. However, their arguments are specific to historical, cultural,
and geographic contexts. To transpose these theories to the contemporary specificities of
the Muslim veil outside Muslim majority countries would be to disable new
understandings of the urban veil as an integral component of these societies.

I am interested in examining why the image of the veiled woman continues to be
mobilized as the most politically charged symbol of the Middle East, Islam, and its
oppressive treatment of women. I contend that inherent to the image of the Muslim veil

16 See Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits, 1883-1893: Gender and the Colour of Art History*
(New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), Joan Copjec, *Read my Desire: Lacan Against the
Gillane Tawadros ed., *Veil: Veiling, Representation, and Contemporary Art* (London: Institute of
International Visual Arts, 2003), and Inge E. Boer, *Disorienting Vision: Rereading Stereotypes in
are formal operations that resonate with particular cultural codes in a manner that hold Euro-American imaginaries in thrall. Even more important for this study is how the semantic channeling of these formal characteristics frustrates, and even disables, the possibility of new readings specific to the urban veil.

This chapter therefore begins with the operative side of images and develops two theoretical modalities: the image-as-veil and the image-as-folds. These two proposed models of imaging the Muslim veil diverge with regard to the notion of representation, and as a result, bring a set of different modes of looking, identification processes, and individual and collective identity formations into play. Both articulations of the image are crucial for understanding the image politics of the Muslim veil and for new readings of the urban veil. As a result, they are crucial theoretical tools throughout this dissertation.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first, I define the image-as-veil. An analysis of several images, ranging from colonial postcards to a video installation by contemporary artist Shirin Neshat, enables me to identify what I call the modus operandi of the image-as-veil: the suggestion of a beyond analogous to the workings of an architectural screen. Within Western regimes of visuality, this modality of the image-as-veil harbors a set of binary oppositions that are readily channeled into a politics of difference and discourses of othering: in terms of gender, culture, and geographic location. In this line of thought, I adopt Kaja Silverman’s notion of the cultural screen to highlight how the modus operandi of the image-as-veil moves beyond individual images to create a screen at the level of the cultural imaginary—which mediates our relationship with ourselves, with others, and with the world around us.
In the second section, the work of contemporary artist Zineb Sedira serves as a case in point for a different articulation of the image that builds upon Gilles Deleuze’s notion of the fold. This second model is dependent upon an alternate understanding of representation that emphasizes the image’s materiality, its relation to thought, and its capacity to effect change. The fold, as opposed to the architectural notion of the screen, avoids the pitfall of framing questions of the Muslim veil in terms of visuality, and by extension, negates the spatial operations that maintain the veil as a sign of cultural and geographic otherness. Instead, I will argue that the image-as-folds emphasizes a movement of connectivity with the specifications of the image’s immediate geographical and historical context.

The last section proposes that the image-as-folds corresponds, in part, to an Islamic aesthetics of the veil. The writings of Abdelkébir Khatibi, Oleg Grabar, and Dominique Clévenot help illustrate how the aesthetics underpinning many of the works of art discussed in this dissertation speak to the central role that the veil as metaphor plays in Islamic thought. To be sure, such an aesthetic does not always underpin the intentions behind the analyzed works. However, I maintain that the image-as-folds often frustrates the predominantly visual processes inherent to commonsense understandings of the Muslim veil, interpolating the viewer via the materiality of the image, for example, through ornamentation, textures, and a mode of perception more akin to reading. The aesthetics of the veil recuperates that which is lost in understandings of the veil when it is reduced to questions of visuality.
1.1 The Image-As-Veil

To map out the discussion of this first section, it is helpful to recount the infamous contest between the Roman painters Zeuxis and Parrhasius as told by Pliny the Elder in *Naturalis Historia*. The objective of the competition was to see who could paint in a manner that created the greatest illusion of reality. When Zeuxis completed his work, the image was so successful that birds tried to eat the berries on his painted trees. Certain that he had sealed his victory, Zeuxis walked over to Parrhasius’ painting and attempted to remove the veil to reveal his image, only to realize that he had been deceived. The veil itself was painted: it was one with the surface of representation.

The veil in Parrhasius’s painting exemplifies a set of Western ideals about representation and how their disruption affects the viewing subject. Through mastery of technique, the two artists were asked to transform the surface of their canvases into that which denies itself and points to a beyond, becoming, in Albertian terms, a window onto the world. In an act that may be called self-reflexive, Parrhasius did not implement but rather represented this ideal, using the veil as a representation of “pointing beyond.” Furthermore, his representation of the veil successfully evoked a beyond and simultaneously denied revealing it to the anticipating viewer. This gesture clearly displaced the viewer in his capacity to see and know. In this case, Zeuxis was able to see, but the wish to know what was imagined to lay behind the veil’s materiality was not satisfied; he was ultimately fooled.

I recount this story as a way of engaging the culturally specific terrain in which the image of the Muslim veil circulates: a predominantly European and North American landscape embedded in a tradition of scopic regimes. Within this tradition, the imaged or
real veil is perceived first and foremost as a physical barrier that obstructs vision, and hence suggests a beyond: what I call the modus operandi of the image-as-veil. This operative mode of the veil, as exemplified in Parrhasius’ painting, articulates a front and a back, and correlating visible and invisible spaces within the painting. When the Muslim veil is depicted, such spatialization channels meaning into binaries, which have conceptual and geographic repercussions. In the next section I look at two such encounters that are contingent upon the tensions at the heart of modern life: first, the desire to see and to know underlying a colonial will to power, and its confluence with the scopic regime of modernity; and second, the anxieties surrounding the experience of modernity and the role that the visual plays in psychoanalytical theories of subject formation and articulations of difference.

The Coextension of Colonial and Scopic Regimes of Modernity

The geographer and theoretician David Harvey reminds us that modernity is marked by conjoining and even conflicting formulations. One facet of the experience of modern life, as elaborately theorized by Walter Benjamin, is characterized by continual fragmentation of time and space, and the perpetual play of possibilities, struggles, and contradictions. However, another facet of modernity is concerned with the scientific development of rational forms of social organization and thought, the aim of disciplining all spheres of human life: including economic structures, law, bureaucratic administration, and the arts.¹⁷

In relation to the rational movement of modernity, the historian Martin Jay has further discussed how vision has played a hegemonic role in the modern era and how visual experience is intimately tied to psychological processes of the Western subject of representation (in this study this term refers to both the maker and the viewer of representation).\textsuperscript{18} Jay coined the term Cartesian perspectivalism, which combines the Enlightenment’s linking of subjective reason to notions of truth and progress along with a modern will to master, possess, and control the visual realm. This term emphasizes the epistemological project in which the disinterested gaze is considered a central agent in the acquisition of knowledge.\textsuperscript{19} In this section I discuss how the modus operandi of the image-as-veil, its suggestion of a beyond, is deeply entwined with the ideals and anxieties subtending the visual realm, which are foundational to the project of modernity.

A series of postcards reproduced in Malek Alloula’s \textit{Le Harem colonial: images d’un sous-érotisme}\textsuperscript{20} of veiled and unveiled Algerian women during the first three decades of the twentieth century serves as a first case in point. The postcard is arguably one of the first uses of photography that was meant for the masses. The first few decades of the twentieth century are in fact often referred to as the golden age of the postcard, a period that corresponds to the height of French colonial presence in Indochina and North Africa. During this time, hundreds of “harem-postcards” were taken by European photographers and circulated through a landscape that bridged European elite and non-

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 69.
The reproduced postcards in Alloula’s book reveal that the women in the photos have no names, merely classifications such as “Woman from the Maghreb,” “Woman from the South,” and “Woman from Algiers.” Even more debasing are those with captions, such as “Oh! Is it ever hot!” [Ah! qu’il fait donc chaud!].

Alloula’s book, which was written in 1981 in Paris, in which the author “collected, arranged, and annotated” picture postcards of Algerian women was meant to deliver a delayed response to the degradation that the images enact. Alloula’s argument suggests that a personal offense has been committed by these photographs. The disrespect inflicted on these women is described by him as an insult to Algerian society at large. Alloula reproduces ninety of the postcards of Algerian women which, in accordance with the unfolding of his argument, are arranged in order of increasing debasement. The proliferation of postcards of (un)veiled women at the turn of the century together with Alloula’s response highlights how the image of the veil exacerbates the conflicting formulations of modernity underlying the Cartesian perspectivalism.

First, the postcards demonstrate how the failure of the colonial subject of representation in his capacity to see and know the veiled woman directly evokes erotic desires to unveil and visually possess her through the photographic act. Second, once the visual barrier has been breached, the photographs are made to circulate for foreign eyes, concomitantly serving as a visual marker of the consuming public’s cultural and geographic outside. In this way, the image of the veiled woman performs a second

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The postcard images therefore extend the entanglements of sexual and cultural power relations underlying Orientalism. In *Colonial Fantasies: Toward a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, Meyda Yeğenoğlu argues that the veiled Muslim woman becomes an “imaginary anchor” in a process that concerns above all the Western and masculine production of identity through difference. In Yeğenoğlu’s words, “in imagining this hidden Oriental/feminine essence behind the veil as the repository of truth, the subject turns the Orient into an object that confirms his identity and thereby satisfies his need to represent himself to himself as a subject of knowledge and reason.”

I concur that these images must be seen as imaginary anchors for the European subject who attempts to secure a sense of self within the spatial and temporal maelstrom of the modern experience. It is important to stress here that the encounter with the colonial other via modes of technological reproduction only intensifies such spatial and temporal compressions. Furthermore, if the image of the Muslim veiled woman is meant to inscribe an imaginary cartography indexing the boundaries of a rational and orderly European self, then her fleshy mass and abounding folds represents the bodily, irrational, and disorderly nature of its defining other. Alloula’s attempt to classify the postcards through an argumentative logic suggests the uncomfortable position he is allocated via the spatializing operations of these images. Alloula finds himself aligned with that which

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25 This is a term that Yeğenoğlu borrows from Teresa Brennan, in “History after Lacan” *Economy and Society*, 19/3 (August 1990).
26 Ibid., 49.
lies beyond the veil: an ostensibly unruly female body that is representative of a debased Algerian culture. His response to these insults, consequently, says nothing of the subjecthood of these women, but instead indicates an attempt to reclaim them as property: that is, to reclaim them as the object of his knowledge and by extension, to regain a valid subject position within the conceptual and spatial mappings that the images inscribe.

Identification photos of Algerian women taken in 1960 by the conscript soldier Marc Garanger serve as a second case that further reflects how the operative mode of the image-as-veil engages the project of modernity and its dependency upon the supremacy of vision. Garanger’s photographs were part of a disciplinary endeavor by the French military that demanded that each Algerian be photographed, meaning made visible, classifiable, knowable, and controllable. The veiled woman proved to be a bone of contention in this endeavor. In *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*, Frantz Fanon was among the first to offer some insight into the central role the veil came to play as a site of the struggle for domination in French Algeria. The Algerian woman’s refusal to be looked at due to the veil’s capacity to block the gaze reverses the structure of modern institutional power outlined by Foucault and epitomized in the panoptic model. Fanon notes that the Algerian woman “who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer,” and as a result, the colonizer “reacts in an aggressive way before the limitation of his perception.”27

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To this end, veiled Algerian women, most of whom were from the countryside and had never seen a camera before, were forced to remove their headscarves to be photographed. In Kaja Silverman’s words, such an undertaking can only be characterized as one of “violation and subjugation.” That said, the images taken by Garanger have been much discussed for how they disable their initial objectives. These women, in their singular acts of facing the camera and looking back, do not confirm the viewing subject’s position but rather trouble it in a powerful way. With this in mind, I will now turn to the productive insights psychoanalysis offers regarding the anxieties underpinning the visual realm in the modern era—and which are brought to the fore and exploited in the workings of the image-as-veil.

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Anxiety and the Visual Realm, the Image-Screen, and the Cultural Screen

Turning back to Freud, we learn that the subject’s sexual identity is largely constructed in the field of vision, through various scenarios that involve seeing and the discriminatory function of the eye. However, the visual realm in Freudian analysis is complex and as Jacqueline Rose points out, perception often “founders.” She states, “The relationship between viewer and scene is always one of fracture, partial identification, pleasure and distrust.”29 This distrust of the visual realm, and by extension representation, is central to Jacques Lacan’s work. According to Lacan, it is impossible to possess a picture visually, even when an object that is usually concealed is made completely visible and accessible, as is the case with Garanger’s photographs. Seminar XI outlines how not only the image, but also the visual realm always remains a source of anxiety. In his seminars he spends a significant amount of time debunking the ideals of the geometric tradition—what I have been referring to as Cartesian perspectivalism, which posits the possibility of the subject’s mastering position vis-à-vis representation. Lacan’s theories surrounding subjectivity in the realm of vision hinge on the severing of the mastering gaze from the human eye.

In the scopic field, according to Lacan, we always encounter a limit to our sense of commanding experience. This limit presents itself as a threat and is anchored in the fundamentally split nature of the subject: specifically, in the lack constituted through castration anxiety and the subject’s entrance into language.30 The scopic field comes to symbolize this central lack, and in this landscape the subject loses the capacity to possess

the image visually, the “belong-to-me aspect of representation so reminiscent of property.”  

This loss of a dominant position in the realm of vision is, in a sense, transforms the field of vision into an entity that stares back at the subject of representation. The Lacanian gaze is therefore not attributed to the dominating position of the viewing subject over the image; rather, the gaze, for Lacan, is that which is outside the image. This gaze is not seen but “imagined by me in the field of the Other” and the realization of this causes the image to turn into an image-screen and generate its own beyond. 

This is what is at stake in the series of photographs by Garanger. Although the women are made “visible,” the subject of representation fails to secure a dominant stance. As Joan Copjec points out, while in the linguistic turn and specifically in Foucauldian theory, subjectivity is believed to be fully constructed in discourse (and representation), in Lacanian theory, the subject recognizes these walls as “trompe l’oeil” and at this point asks: 

‘What is being concealed from me? What in the graphic space does not show, does not stop not writing itself?’ This point at which something appears to be invisible, this point at which something appears to be missing from representation, some meaning left unrevealed, is the point of the Lacanian gaze. [...] At the moment the gaze is discerned, the image, the entire visual field, takes on a terrifying alterity. It loses its ‘belong-to-me aspect” and suddenly assumes the function of a screen.  

The modern colonizing will to possess, discipline, and know, outlined above, is bound up with the subject’s desire for command of experience. The threat posed to subjectivity by the gaze in the field of vision, which I contend operates in full force in the image of the

31 Ibid., 81.  
32 Ibid., 84.  
33 Joan Copjec, Read My Desire, 35.
(un)veiled woman, embodies the gaze that looks back: the image-screen that suggests that there is always something more than what is seen.

Finally, important for my discussion here is how according to this theory, the subject can only secure a sense of unity of self through fantasy. Lacanian psychoanalysis explains how the sense of lack evoked by the gaze must be displaced through fantasy onto an object of desire. Certainly, the ambivalent desire to see and know evoked by the veiled woman lends itself to this scenario. Crucially, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bernard Pontalis remind us that fantasy is a defensive process that involves negation and projection. It is a creative activity that belongs to the psychic realm of the perceiving subject and therefore it “cannot fail to evoke the distinction between imagination and reality.”

Fantasy has nothing to do with the object of desire and everything to do with the subject of representation.

In the preceding pages, I have sketched out some features of the image-as-veil that serve as analytical tools, which will also be expanded upon throughout this dissertation. The project of modernity and ideals underpinning Cartesian perspectivalism, explain why the image of the Muslim veil immediately evokes a beyond, and triggers a correlating desire to see and know based on fantasies of what lies beyond. Moreover, according to Lacanian psychoanalysis, distrust for the visual—and representation in general—turns the image itself into a screen that generates its own beyond. When the image is that of the Muslim veil, such anxieties operate in full force. In both scenarios, the ideal or the failure of a mastering position can be displaced, turning the (veiled) woman into the anchor that secures a sense of self and unity. The image-as-veil that

labors this politics of difference can moreover operate on a collective level, as is the case with the harem postcards, entertaining a collective body’s conceptual and geographic outside.

My argument is that the operations of the image-as-veil that I have examined in these historical images continue to form the subtext of the creation, circulation, and viewing processes of the image of the Muslim veil in the present, thereby re-inscribing what I maintain are outdated cartographies of the veil. The image of the *burqa* and tank with which this chapter opened is a prime illustration, whereby the veiled woman clearly serves as a marker for the viewing subject’s cultural and geographic outside. She reconfirms the subject of representation’s sense of self and presumed ethical and political commitments.

Even more important for my argument are the implications that arise when readings of the veiled woman in this image are conflated with the visibility of the veil in societies outside Muslim-majority countries. Such confluences are instrumentalized in present political rhetoric surrounding the question of the veil in Europe and North America, in which the terms *burqa* and *niqab* predominate. For instance, the French government has recently endorsed a ban against face-coverings in public spaces. In the bill’s seven articles, the words “woman,” “veil,” and “Muslim” are carefully omitted. However, the bill actually has its point of origin a year prior, when the French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, proclaimed that the “*burqa is not welcome*” in France.35 Sarkozy’s use of the term is strategic, evoking the extreme case of enforced veiling specific to

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Afghanistan, so that his statement encourages the same legibility of the sign onto of the very different forms of veiling practiced in French society.

In this manner, the operations of the image-as-veil extend beyond their immediate reading to construct and maintain what Kaja Silverman calls a cultural screen. In *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, Silverman revisits Lacan’s theoretical concept of the image-screen in order to invest his definition of the screen and the gaze with political implications. For Lacan, as already mentioned, the gaze does not belong to the subject, but is outside in the field of the other. The structure of Cartesian perspectivalism—in which the image is understood to mediate the spectator and a referent in the real world transparently—is replaced with a model in which the image mediates the perceiving subject and the gaze.

This model attributes a central role to the visual field and images in the realm of intersubjectivity, and is therefore useful for understanding certain visual processes tied to the psychology of the viewing subject with regard to identity formation. Silverman is cautious, however, regarding the potential epistemic violence of such transcultural and atemporal assumptions. For Silverman, while the psychological processes underlying this model might very well transcend different scopic regimes, the gaze and the screen must be understood as culturally and historically constructed. Silverman consequently redefines the screen as “the repertoire of representations by means of which our culture figures all of those many varieties of ‘difference’ through which social identify is inscribed.”

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repertoire, affecting the way we perceive others and are perceived in turn, will remain a crucial theoretical concept in the present study.

I want to stress here that I am not arguing that present-day uses of the modus operandi of the image-as-veil are specific to mainstream media. The modalities of the image-as-veil are also found in contemporary art practices. Shirin Neshat (an Iranian artist based in New York) is certainly one of the most widely known contemporary artists dealing with women and Islam.

However, Shirin Neshat’s video pieces from the late nineties are a prime example of images that largely work through the logic of the image-as-veil outlined above. Neshat’s work is often characterized as a powerful expression of the experience of women in Iran. According to Peter Schjeldahl in *The New Yorker*, “Neshat’s elegant two-screen meditations on the culture of the chador in Islamic Iran emit an icy heat of suppressed passions; they are among the first undoubtable masterpieces of video installation.” Neshat claims that this body of work emerged from a simultaneous sympathy for radical Islam’s hostility toward Western hegemony and dismay with Iran’s treatment of women. However, this ambivalence is not immediately clear in the formal structure of the installations and their images.

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The skillful, cinematic use of the medium and the formal characteristics of her installations create a highly charged, affective experience. And yet, this emotional force is immediately channeled into the binary structure of the work, re-instantiating what is largely common knowledge about the status of women in Iran. To begin with, the image of the veiled woman is already the quintessential symbol representing Iran as a fundamentalist and oppressive regime, and the omnipresence of black *chadors* in Neshat’s work of this decade situates her installations directly within this trope. Moreover, the affective experience is made powerful in Neshat’s two-screen installations, such as *Turbulent* (1999) and *Fervor* (1999), by physically positioning the visitor in the middle of a black-and-white logic: literally amidst the play of binary oppositions.

In *Turbulent*, I find myself in a dark room between two screens facing each other on opposing walls. Fierce, wailing chants resonate from black-and-white images of a woman on one screen and a man on the other. The woman and the man appear to respond to each other, and yet there is no immediate connection between them; their temporal occupation of the same space is visibly out of joint. The woman sings and the man listens in a cold, detached manner. He waits until she is done before breaking into song.
and vice versa. I follow their melodic utterances as my attention shifts from one screen to
the next. The woman, eyes closed, belts out a song, and her powerful interiority resonates
deep within me. And yet, her strength and voice are seen in the image as having no
audience; she is not heard in her immediate location, and this denial of a voice and by
extension, presence, becomes the spectacle for foreign eyes. The man, on the other side,
looks outwards and sings. He, like the veiled woman in the image of the burqa and tank,
is bracketed on both sides by me (the viewer) and an audience of men gathered behind
him in the photograph. Unlike the woman in the burqa he can look back, and the image
clearly communicates that his voice has an audience. Therefore, the image communicates
his presence and position of dominance in Iran.

By positioning the visitor in the precise center of the affective forces of sound and
image that are readily channeled into binary semantic structures of man/woman,
heard/silenced, domination/subjugation, exteriority/interiority, and presence/absence, the
visitor can be seen to occupy the position of the cultural screen. This body of Neshat’s
work circulated mainly through prominent museum spaces in North America and Europe.
Consequently, the images of chadors once again serve as an indexical screen pointing to
the cultural and ideological outside of these Western liberal democratic societies; and
more importantly, they reinforce the idea that the veil belongs to the cultural values and
religious ideologies specific to that geographic outside. These works, once again,
become potent sites for reducing the struggles specific to the heterogeneous experiences
and practices of the urban veil to such simplifying representations.

In this section I have outlined the modus operandi and correlating spatializations
of the image-as-veil, and introduced the notion of the cultural screen through which the
Muslim veil is often perceived in Europe and North America. In subsequent chapters I will investigate the historical “tropology” of the Muslim veil, as well as the politics of (dis)identification that the cultural screen enables. I will now turn to a second model of the image: the image-as-folds.

1.2 Image-as-Folds

La Maison de ma Mère (2002) is a series of twelve photographs presented in a grid by artist Zineb Sedira. Sedira was born in France of Algerian parents active in the resistance against the French occupation. Sedira now works and resides in London, where she moved for her studies in the mid nineteen eighties. Her work often takes references
to her autobiography, cultural heritage, and family history as starting points. The images in *La Maison de ma Mère*, as the title suggests, are details of the interior spaces of the artist’s mother’s home, as well as intimate photos of parts of her mother’s body.

Ubiquitous in the photos, in which veils, curtains and a veiled woman figure, are different patterns of lace, textures of cloth, and folds. And yet, *La Maison de ma Mère* completely disables the spatializing operations of the image-as-veil outlined above. In this work, the central modality of suggesting a beyond is rerouted by images that evoke a different kind of looking. Confronted with this mosaic, my look is immediately entangled in textures and folds, actively sliding across, upwards, and downwards over the surface of the various fragments. Generally the images appear too close, too intimate, to entertain a mastering position over what they depict. These images emphasize a thickness, whereby veils and curtains do not operate as partitioning structures, but rather suggest another layer of folds in front or in back, of other surfaces such as skin, doors, and windows. Layers, folds, textures, and repetition replace binary structures and their visual operations.

Consequently, the cultural, gender, and geographic implications of the image-as-veil cannot resonate within the highly subjective and intimate setting of these photos. First, there is nothing threatening or erotic about the veiled woman. Rather, both her aged appearance as well as the objects that surround her—such as the imprints and creases on the sheets of a bed from which someone’s body has just emerged—speak of traces of her personal history (and by extension that of the artist). History here means first and foremost the many personal, familial, and cultural stories that make up a person’s sense of self. The work reminds us that within North African cultures, which have strong
traditions of oral history and storytelling, women are the principle mediators of history.\textsuperscript{39} The artist’s exploration of her mother’s home and body is, in this light, an exploration of her Muslim heritage and her Algerian family history.\textsuperscript{40} And yet, despite the highly personal starting point, when looking at this assemblage of photos, a strange sense of familiarity arises. I find myself conjuring images of my own grandmother’s home: a crocheted lace placed under a large bowl in the center of the dining room table, the white lace curtains above the kitchen sink, the gold chain and cross that she wore around her neck. Instead of providing a springboard for identification processes that operate through difference, the images induce points of entrance into the viewer’s personal histories.

I have presented Sedira’s \textit{La Maison de ma Mère} as a way of introducing the image-as-folds, which I develop as an alternate understanding of the image, and which I distinguish from the image-as-veil primarily through a set of different perceptual operations that it calls into play. The image-as-folds is chiefly indebted to the Deleuzian notion of the fold, most predominantly found in the philosopher’s works on the thought of Leibniz and Foucault. In this section, I discuss how the image-as-folds successfully reroutes the cartography of the Muslim veil primarily by working through the synaesthetic side of experience, thereby disabling the visual operations that support the image-as-veil. I demonstrate how the image-as-folds also contributes to the production of subjectivity; but unlike the image-as-veil, it does not co-opt normativity. Rather, it stresses singularity, variation, and transformation, and hence affirms real difference.

Finally, I argue that the image-as-folds tends to emphasize its operations and means of production, and hence, its status as mediation.

Moving away from the idea of the screen toward the movement of the fold immediately calls upon a set of different operations. Whereas the screen entails a dividing structure that blocks vision and creates binary dynamics derivative of a front and back, as discussed above, the idea of the fold suggests layers that fall back on one another and in which no clear front or back is identifiable. The fold conveys the idea of surfaces that touch each other and create in-betweens. Deleuze reminds us that “the fold, as Foucault constantly says, is what constitutes a ‘thickness’ as well as a ‘hollow.” 41 Central to my concern with the image-as-folds is a desire to avoid all illusions to the modality of the veil as a surface that points to a beyond, which suggest that the veil hides and hence threatens or delineates an outside. I take up Luce Irigaray’s metaphysical contention for the need to resist differentiating between the veil and what lies beneath its folds, arguing that it is imperative for this study to stress that “beneath the veil subsists only veil.” 42

This shift therefore strategically moves away from all the visual processes and correlating spatial mappings supported by the image-as-veil. La Maison de ma Mère exemplifies images that invoke a different form of looking, which privileges a more synaesthetic experience. The intimate close-ups of the skin of the mother’s fleshy arm, the saturated light that hits the back of her veil, making the distinction between figure and background untenable, the range of materials and textures presented in the different fabrics and lace, all speak of relief, texture, and materiality. This work consequently

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evokes the sense of touch, and thus a haptic mode of looking. Furthermore, the grid-like sequence of the photos, together with the reference to the history of storytelling in North African cultures, ascribes a form of orality to the images.

Laura Marks has demonstrated how the synaesthetic image “extends the surface area of experience,”\textsuperscript{43} while undermining the disembodied understanding of vision that has been equated with knowledge in European post-Enlightenment rationality.\textsuperscript{44} What is important here is not a complete negation of the sense of vision. Vision still plays a role in this form of perception, but it does not take the mastering position required by the perceiving subject in the Foucauldian model of power; nor does it occupy the central role played by vision in the psychoanalytical understanding of the construction of subjectivity in the realm of vision. The image-as-folds promotes a form of perception that is multisensory and therefore does not immediately master, but rather progresses in an exploratory and tentative manner. This form of perception does not reaffirm what is already known, but rather attends to the singularity of that which it encounters, and as a result, tends to problematize knowledge.

This implies that the image-as-folds entertains a very different connection to processes of identity formation and subjectivity. In \textit{La Maison de ma Mère}, the image-as-folds tends to transform normative, commonplace assumptions. It is impossible to read into Sedira’s images the tropes of the victimized or threatening veiled woman. Nor is the veil in the series of photos read as visible proof of the woman’s subjugation to her culture and religion. Rather, the veil contributes to the communication of the important role the woman plays in transmitting her cultural, religious, and familial histories. Moreover, the

\textsuperscript{43} Laura Marks, \textit{Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002): xi.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., xiii.
strange familiarity and warmth that the images transmit succeed in opening onto my own familial stories and memories. I am not capable of conceiving these images as representing an imagined cultural outside. The fold, as Deleuze says, implies “changes of direction.”45 Here, the highly singular presentation of the artist’s mother and home succeeds in creating a real difference that does not reconfirm sameness, but instead creates a new fold in my consciousness, a variation.

The fold is in many ways Deleuze’s articulation of subjectivity, or what he, following Foucault, calls subjectivation. In *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, the fold is not presented as a specific characteristic of that period. Rather, it is theorized as a set of operations that can be traced across different historical periods, geographic locations, and forms of knowledge, as well as in the expression of subjectivities, such as an artist’s personal style.46 In this conception of subjectivity, there is no clear distinction between self and outside47: that is, between interiority and exteriority. Subjectivation is a continuous operation that involves self-production through folding in the outside’s forces and relations of power. In fact, the outside is articulated as always already inside: it is the un-thought within thought. The fold consists in its actualization: in the folding, unfolding, and refolding of the un-thought/outside, which results in new forms of self-knowledge and knowledge of the world.48 Each fold occurs through perception and involves a singularity that brings about a modulation or a variation that problematizes

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48 Ibid., 111-112.
what is known. In this manner, the modulation induces the crossing of a threshold in consciousness and thereby creates a new fold.  

I am developing the image-as-folds here largely by contrasting its workings to that of the image-as-veil. However, the two modalities of image should not be understood in opposition to one another. Rather, the relation between them is more a question of emphasis: that is to say, primarily which facets of the images and which alternate modes of perception come into play in particular instances. For example, Kaja Silverman has convincingly argued that the distinction between interiority and exteriority in psychoanalysis is also not so clear-cut. Although the visual realm and the discriminating functions of the eye are key, the subject’s relation to the cultural screen is far less ocular-centric or purely psychic as it may first appear. Silverman demonstrates how processes of identification and idealization with the cultural screen involve a bodily ego first and foremost; and secondly, the process of subject formation entails a continuous dialog between the interiorization and projection of the exterior cultural screen. I want to stress here that throughout my study, both models—the image-as-veil and the image-as-folds—are useful for understanding the various problematics and questions specific to the urban veil.

That said, I maintain that the two models of image do operate in significantly different ways. The image-as-veil, with its fundamental modus operandi, visual operations, and correlating identificatory processes based on difference, maintains normativity and consequently shares an intimate link with the cultural screen. The emphasis on textures, the materiality of images, and the expression of singularities in the image-as-folds invokes a primarily haptic (and a correlated, exploratory) mode of

49 Deleuze, The Fold, 88-89.
perception that works transformatively upon the cultural screen, as is exemplified in Sedira’s *La Maison de ma Mère*. Most importantly, the shunning of spatializing metaphors by the image-as-folds has the capacity to inscribe new geographies and re-signify the veil as sign, both of which are crucial for new understandings and articulations of the urban veil.

This capacity highlights the last feature that I define as specific to the image-as-folds. By emphasizing its thickness, materiality, and textures, the image-as-folds emphasizes its status as mediation. Mediation is not understood here as a dividing device, as it was in the case of the idea of a screen. In this instance, the image becomes connective tissue. Laura Marks remarks that what is interesting in quantum physics’ theorization of the universe as an extended surface that has infinitely been folded together is the idea that “points that were unfathomably distant in space-time come to touch each other.” Consequently, there is a significant rerouting of the image from that of a dividing agent to that of an agent working through connectivity. I will return to this characteristic in the remaining chapters. For now, to close this chapter, I will address how the image-as-folds can, in certain instances, sustain an aesthetics of the Muslim veil.

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50 Marks, *Touch*, x.
1.3 The Islamic Aesthetics of the Veil

With regard to Garanger’s policing photographs of Algerian women discussed above, Silverman speaks of the photograph’s aspect of mortification. When a picture of a subject is taken, his or her being fades and is replaced by an image. The cultural screen intervenes between the gaze and the existential body, conferring an identity upon that body at the expense of its subjecthood. Silverman explains how this occurrence has significant cross-cultural implications, noting that in Garanger’s photos, one cultural screen intervenes and substitutes for another:

With the “clicking” of Garanger’s camera shutter, the Algerian screen “fades” away and is replaced by one connoting “exoticism,” “primitivism,” “subordinate race,” and a European notion of femininity (“woman as spectacle”). The one image, emblematized by the veil, must “die” in order for the other to prevail.\footnote{Silverman, The Threshold of the Visible, 151.}
So far I have discussed the notion of a cultural screen through which the image of the Muslim veil is predominantly perceived and ascribed meaning in Europe and North America. However, I have not accounted for the cultural screens out of which the religious practices of veiling have emerged. It is far beyond the scope of my study to intervene in the debates surrounding the practice of veiling based on various interpretations of the Qur’an and hadiths. What I am interested in, rather, is how alternative cultural traditions, sensibilities, and (collective) memories inevitably enter the fabric of the work for many of the artists I consider here, as they are largely first- and second-generation secular or practicing Muslims who now live and work in metropolises throughout Europe and North America.

A second piece by Sedira will enable me to address briefly some of the understandings of the image in Islam, which continue to invest some of the work discussed in the present study. Significantly, the understanding of representation in Islam is entangled with metaphors of the veil. I propose that the preoccupation in Islamic forms of art with ornamentation, bi-dimensionality, and the solicitation of a deciphering look can be aligned with the operations of the image-as-folds. It is perhaps not surprising that many of the works in this study that help us to step back from the politics of representations surrounding the Muslim veil, thus enabling new understandings of the urban veil, are invested with the weight of a distinct cultural tradition that operates transformatively in a new context.

Sedira’s *Quatre Générations de Femmes* (1997) is an installation piece consisting of silk-screened, digitally generated patterns on ceramic tiles. When it was presented at

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52 Hadiths are reports of the sayings or actions of Muhammad or his companions, together with the tradition of its chain of transmission.
the Venice Biennale in 2001, the white, black, blue, yellow, and red geometric patterned tiles covered the four walls of the small installation room.

![Image of geometric tiles and miniature portraits]

1.6 Zineb Sedira, *Quatre Générations de Femmes*, details of installation.

The effect was an almost dizzying repetition of geometric forms that overwhelms the look. Closer up, the viewer is confronted in the upper half of the walls with miniature portraits of Sedira, her grandmother, mother, and daughter. Between the geometric interstices in the bottom half are autobiographical writings in the three languages she uses to communicate with the different members of her family: Arabic, French, and English. The work therefore rehearses the continuities and discontinuities of the artist’s matrilineal genealogy. Whereas her mother, for instance, speaks Arabic and French, her daughter only speaks English. Also, the miniatures depict the grandmother and mother as veiled, while Sedira and her daughter are unveiled. On an aesthetic level, the work embodies several characteristics specific to Islamic art and hence continues that tradition, while significantly revisiting many of its tenets.

In her book *Une Esthétique du Voile: Essai sur l’art arabo-islamique*, Dominique Clévenot observes the central role the religious and philosophical concept of the veil
plays in Islamic aesthetics.\textsuperscript{53} It should be stressed here that many assumptions regarding the iconoclastic approach and strict refusal of figuration in Islamic art can be problematized through the various interpretations of religious texts and examples of art-making that span the histories, cultures, and geographical locations of the Muslim world. That said, Clévenot maintains that while interpretations regarding the practice of art embody variations and divisions—as is the case with the practice of veiling—Islam as a religion is also a strong, unifying force that imposes certain hegemonic characteristics. Within the wide-ranging manifestations of Islamic art is a preponderance of ornamentation, a strong sense of bi-dimensionality and the presence of vegetal arabesques, geometric patterns, and calligraphy, all of which contributes to the logic of the blocked gaze (\textit{le schéma du regard barré}).\textsuperscript{54}

These characteristics of Islamic art are underpinned by the belief that only God has the capacity to create life, and therefore, artists should not attempt to give the illusion of sharing in this capacity through their art. In this logic, representational devices such as figuration and perspectival space are considered as deceptively seductive of the gaze: they assert a presence of life where in fact there is none. More importantly, in the Christian tradition, God is ascribed an anthropomorphic form, for it is believed that he created Adam in his own image and further reproduced himself in the figure of Jesus. In Islam, God does not have an ascribed form (\textit{sûra}); he is unknowable and therefore unrepresentable, his face always concealed behind a veil (\textit{hijab}).

\textit{Hijab} in Arabic means curtain. Generally \textit{hijab} designates a device that separates two subjects, rendering all visual appropriation of one by the other impossible. For


\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 14.
example, the *hijab* is used in a passage of the Qur’an that speaks of the need to address the wives of the prophet from behind a curtain: a passage that often serves as a reference for the practice of veiling. *Hijab* is also constantly used to refer to the veiled God and the believer’s endless search for God’s face. The *hijab* blocks vision, which is immediate and illusory, while allowing the word (*parole*) to be uttered. Hence, *hijab* embodies a double movement of veiling and unveiling. God is not knowable through vision, but rather reveals himself through the word that must be endlessly decoded and interpreted. Central to Islamic thought, then, is a very different status of the gaze and the realm of vision. Concerning the former, there is always the danger of an objectifying gaze (for instance, of one subject by another) or an idolizing gaze (as with the adoration of images that create the illusion of representing God or his presence). The very realm of vision is often referred to as an opaque veil that conceals rather than reveals knowledge about God.55

In stark contrast to the equation of seeing and transparency with knowledge that is made in the European Enlightenment tradition, the primary modality of Islamic art is to block or distance the gaze precisely because it is easily seduced and deceived, and hence, incapable of bringing the believer closer to the face of God. As a result, Islamic art strives to solicit a very particular kind of gaze, which is more readily associated with reading and interpreting the written word. In the Qur’an, *âyât*, which means signs, refers to “images” or “symbols” to be interpreted.56 Abdelkébir Khatibi continually reminds us in his writings of the precarious distinction between the sign and the image in the Islamic tradition because both form an intertextual tissue that involves the double movement of veiling and unveiling.

55 Ibid., 87.
veiling and unveiling through decoding and interpretation. Consequently, there is an inextricable relation in this tradition between art and thought.

The pervasive use of ornamentation, geometric patterns, and bi-dimensionality in Islamic art are all devices that stress the idea that the visual realm is a veil; it is opaque, never transparent, and constantly needs to be decoded. The predominance of the line in all of these forms of art stresses their intimate link with the written word and the interpellation of a very specific kind of looking, which is not objectifying or idolizing but engaged in the deciphering of meaning. Oleg Grabar has discussed at length the difference between mimetic forms of representation and Islamic art in which ornamentation plays a key role. First, there is a shift from a heightened visual experience to a more sensorial experience; and second, whereas mimetic art is believed to point transparently to a referent, rendering meaning immediately accessible, ornamentation always affirms itself as an intermediary between meaning (the word of God) and its reader and interpreter (the believer).

To return to *Quatre Générations de Femmes*, Sedira clearly mobilizes what I have articulated here as an aesthetics of the veil. The walls of the room are impenetrable to the gaze. They are pure opacity, creating a visual screen that surrounds the viewer. A second glance brings the visitor closer, interpellating an engagement with the various fragments of texts and the small faces that peer back. The visitor is thus induced to read and make sense of these autobiographical references that consist of the artist’s story. While Sedira utilizes the line and geometric patterns specific to the aesthetics of the veil, she further revisits the main tenets of the Islamic tradition of art. This tradition, like that of the West,

was predominantly reserved for the practice of men. Here, she creates a space dedicated to femininity and once again gestures to the key role women play in her culture in the transmission of culture. Grabar remarks that historically, geometry in Islamic art has been used by minority groups such as women:

Geometry appeared as a true mediator, rarely significant on its own as an object of visual expression (except for esoteric purposes like magic), but precisely because of its lack of consistent associations, favored and exploited by the historically marginalized, such as women, frontiers, poverty, and other deprived patrons, makers, and users of art and artifacts.59

Finally, through the inclusion of the small potraits, Sedira incorporates figuration within her work. I am not suggesting that these features are in themselves radical. However, what is significant is how Quatre Générations de Femmes on the one hand renegotiates the operations of the image-as-veil, through the aesthetics of the veil and specifically the invocation of a deciphering look. On the other hand, Sedira revisits the position of women from within her cultural heritage and the tenets of Islamic art, through the incorporation of “foreign” elements, such as the photographic portrait.

I want to call attention to the resonances of the image-as-folds with this articulation of an aesthetics of the Muslim veil. Most prominent is a shared depreciation of the visual in aesthetic experience. Both affirm an explorative, deciphering look with regard to the image, a look that does not confirm meaning or what is already known, but which takes part in a process of (un)folding or unveiling new meanings and knowledge. Therefore, both attend to the inseparable relationship between the materiality of form and thought. Finally, both the image-as-folds and the aesthetics of the veil emphasize the

mediating nature of the image. The veil as surface is what separates the believer from the face of God, but it is also the medium through which God’s word is transmitted and deciphered. Like the image-as-folds, the aesthetics of the veil manifests connectivity.

**Theoretical Specificity and the Subject of the ‘Urban Veil’**

In the remaining chapters, the concepts of the image-as-veil, the image-as-folds, and Islamic aesthetics of the veil remain central theoretical tools that operate in relation to, and at times are renegotiation by, the images through which I develop my main arguments. These concepts are by no means the exclusive categories through which image politics surrounding the representation of the Muslim veil in the media can be discussed. I have developed these terms in relation to the primary objectives of this specific study: the disentangling of the urban veil from the stereotypes undergirding the current, widespread use of the image of the Muslim veil. While these categories are not ends in themselves, they do highlight how images operate in different ways in specific historical and cultural contexts. To be sure, the cultural screen is always being reconstructed and maintained in accordance with the power relations of a specific historical moment and geographic location. The fold, as Foucault reminds us, is the endless process of enfolding and unfolding that constitutes subjectivation in relation to the specificity of historical struggles, which implies that new political struggles create new subjectivities.

The following chapters will continue to build upon, and negotiate the operative side of representations at work in the image politics of the urban veil.
Chapter 2

The Archival Image of the Muslim Veil

Living Tomorrow (2005), by artist Linda Wallace, is a three-channel, database-driven installation. The artwork’s database consists of sequences taken from the American soap opera The Bold and The Beautiful, as well as images of surveillance cameras, Dutch landscapes, and Muslim veils. The images are all subjected to a kaleidoscopic effect that turns them into geometric, textured surfaces. A program designed by the artist randomly streams the images to three projectors and subtitles them with scripts that Wallace has written, which include excerpts from “Annals of National Security: The Coming Wars” from the New Yorker, “A New Breed of Islamic Warrior is Emerging,” from the Wall Street Journal, and a speech by Osama Bin Laden from 2004.60 The result is a rough

storyline in which the soap opera’s protagonists discuss the “world of appearances,” the present “dark ages,” “the spiritual vacuum,” and the “problem of oil,” and claim that they are “fighting networks with networks.” Through the shuffling of images and subtitles, murders take place, marriage proposals are made, and some are refused because the blond protagonist claims that “she wants to wear the headscarf.” Woven into the unfolding narratives—through which a distinctly Dutch cultural and geographic landscape emerge—is the highly publicized 2004 murder of the Dutch film producer Theo van Gogh. Although the juxtapositions and connections in Living Tomorrow strike the viewer as fictive and even humorous, as the piece progresses she is confronted with something more complex: the many social, cultural, and political threads of a society are shown to intersect in new ways.

In the first chapter of this study, I outlined two different models of images and the roles they play with regard to the image politics of the urban veil. I paid particular attention to how their inherent spatial mappings have the potential to inscribe or disrupt readings of the Muslim veil as the cultural and geographic other of Europe and North America. In this chapter, I expand on the semantic readings of the veil by exploring the media archive of the image. This chapter takes as a starting point the socio-political landscape of the Netherlands, which is one among several European countries where the issue of the Muslim veil has become a politically charged topic in recent years. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how the current political use of the image of the Muslim

veil depends on a tension between inherited and borrowed historical meanings of the veil as sign. I argue that with *Living Tomorrow*, Linda Wallace manages to unmoor the image of the veil from these histories and locate it within a horizontal field of associations, where it acquires new meanings as it converges with the social, cultural, and political transformations taking place in its immediate context.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. In the first, I investigate the role the image of the Muslim veil plays in *Fitna* (2008), the controversial short film composed of appropriated media images by Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch Freedom Party (Partij voor de Vrijheid – PVV). A descriptive reading of the piece will demonstrate how the veil becomes a sign that is meant first and foremost to conjure the affect of fear: the fear of an imminent threat to Dutch society and culture. The cultural theorist Sarah Ahmed’s theorization of fear stipulates that this affect works through a structure of displacement, moving in two directions: a backward movement that activates historical associations, and a sideways movement that uses these associations to collapse or create distance between bodies and objects in the present.

The backward movement involved in the affect of fear that fuels current perceptions of the Muslim veil necessitates that I engage with the archive of its image. The artwork *Muqaddimah Li-Nihayat Jidal/Introduction to the End of an Argument: Speaking for oneself/Speaking for others* (1990) by Jayce Salloum and Elia Suleiman unpacks the iconography of the Orient and one of its predominant tropes, the Muslim veil, in the history of Western media—specifically the history of cinema and television. The work uses avant-garde strategies of appropriating existing material in order to reveal
how media platforms are an important site for the production of cultural identity. The notions of “inheritance” and “borrowing” as articulated by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, help elucidate tensions between remembered and forgotten tropes that haunt the perception of the veil as sign today. Furthermore, Derrida’s theory gestures to how the veil is a “revenant,” serving as an imaginary anchor in times that are “out of joint.”

In the second part of this chapter, I investigate the different positions that the image of the Muslim veil occupies in Linda Wallace’s *Living Tomorrow*. I maintain that the installation also engages with the experience of a time out of joint in contemporary Dutch society. However, the archival nature of the piece is significantly different, taking part in what art historian Hal Foster characterizes as “an archival impulse” in contemporary art. I argue that *Living Tomorrow* operates through an expanded format that partially relinquishes the role of the archivist to the visitor, asking her to reevaluate the past and stipulate how the future of the diverse social, cultural, and economic strands of Dutch society will play out.

### 2.1 The Muslim Veil: Too Close for Comfort

I begin this chapter with a discussion of the controversial short film *Fitna*, directed by the PVV leader Geert Wilders. I am not interested in reviewing the coarse nature, shortcomings, and ultimate failures of the project. Such criticisms, aversions to, and even mockeries of the film have already been well rehearsed in the media. Rather, I use *Fitna* as a case in point to engage with how the image of the Muslim veil is instrumentalized within the discourses that the film promotes. Although it is tempting to

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disregard the proposition underlying the film as being merely populist, these discourses
do have undeniable political weight in the current Dutch and European landscape. More
importantly, they overlap with legislative measures that affect the perception and daily
lives of veiled women in these societies. I therefore find it critical to address them here.

*Fitna* constitutes an audiovisual essay composed of found footage, which argues
the need to safeguard Dutch society from the threat of “Islamic ideology.” The visual
argument is bracketed by an opening caricature of what one assumes to be the Prophet
Mohammed with a time bomb ticking on his head. *Fitna* ends with the statement that just
as Nazism had been defeated in 1945, and communism in 1989, now Islamic ideology
“has to be defeated” in order to defend “our” freedom. To be sure, the entire piece is
structured around a blatant antagonism between “us” versus “them.” The film is
correspondingly divided into two parts. The first is a presentation of “them.” In this
section, quotes from the Qur’an are juxtaposed with footage from the media meant to
demonstrate how specific *suras* induce Muslims to carry out acts of violence toward non-
believers. The non-believers are the implied “us,” represented as the direct victims of
Islamic ideology, and exemplified in audiovisual footage of 9/11, the Madrid and London
bombings, and hostage killings carried out by extremists in Afghanistan.

The second section is introduced by the heading “Netherlands Under the Spell of
Islam.” In this part, the future “we” has taken political correctness and tolerance too far
and has allowed “them” to overthrow the local culture and values. This threat of Islamic
ideology to Dutch society is meant to be demonstrated by numerous references to the
murder by a radical Muslim of the Dutch film director Theo van Gogh on November 2,
2004. Gogh directed *Submission*, a short film scripted by the Somali-Dutch writer and
politician Ayaan Hirsi, which was highly critical toward the treatment of women in Islam. The film has been rightly characterized as Orientalist. The viewer is presented with images of a Muslim woman as an enclosed victim of her religion and husband within an Orientalized décor and eroticized attire, all from a proclaimed position of someone in-the-know: Ayaan Hirsi.

*Fitna* certainly does propagate the structure and narratives of a populist discourse. In this piece we have the components of what Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe identify in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* as the primary features of an attempt to establish a discourse as hegemonic. First *Fitna* articulates social space as an us/them antagonism. The establishment, which is inscribed on “their” side of the divide, is no longer perceived to represent the demands of the people, “our” implied side. In *Fitna*, the establishment is the government that has become too lenient regarding immigration and integration, so that core Dutch values, such as tolerance, are now portrayed as menaced. Second, Wilders takes on the role of the charismatic leader who voices the frustrations and desires of the people. Thirdly, the internal frontier articulating a divide between the establishment and the people is created through “versatile symbols,” which have the capacity to speak to and represent a wide range of frustrations felt by the people. The overabundance of images of veiled women in *Fitna* is used precisely as such a versatile symbol, from a sequence depicting a three-year-old wearing a white headscarf and already displaying intolerance towards Jews, to images portraying women as victims of Islam (including the decapitated head of a veiled woman after being executed for adultery), and gory images of female mutilation, to statistics demonstrating the increasing

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immigration of Muslims to the Netherlands against the backdrop of their visible presence: veiled women in distinctly Dutch cityscapes, wearing full face-coverings and pushing baby strollers.

Thus, the montage of *Fitna* conflates images coming from radically different socio-political contexts: namely there is a fusion of women’s treatment in Middle Eastern geographic and cultural contexts with the depiction of a future Netherlands. The result is a deliberate muddling of spatial and temporal references. This is exemplified, as mentioned in chapter one, by the misuse of the term *burqa* in debates surrounding the Muslim veil in European societies. The term resurfaces in *Fitna* in images of newspaper clippings with headlines such as “Cabinet: No Burqa Ban,” referring to the Dutch coalition government’s decision in 2008 not to move forward with a tabled request to ban face covering in the Netherlands. The widespread use of the term *burqa* in debates regarding face covering in Dutch media is a direct result of Wilders’ deployment of the term in 2005 when he asked that the cabinet take measures “to prohibit the public use of the *burqa* in the Netherlands.”

Anthropologist Annelies Moors has argued that the mobilization of the inappropriate term has had important consequences, invoking the imaginary of the Taliban regime, which “has not only come to be seen as the most repressive regime for women ever, but the *burqa* has also become the visual symbol of women’s oppression par excellence.” It is clear that the conflation of this powerful symbol of women’s oppression with the veiling practices specific to Dutch society aims to stir up strong sentiments of discomfort and fear.

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65 Annelies Moors, Ibid., 402.
The Image of the Muslim Veil and the Affect of Fear

Brian Massumi, Slavoj Zizek, and Sara Ahmed, among others, have shed light on how the affect of fear is widely used in the present as a political tool to create new articulations of a collective self and senses of belonging. Such feelings are produced through the conviction that the collective self is faced with a set of crises: direct threats posed to its cultural identity, security, economic, and environmental conditions. Technologies of fear and media platforms play a central role in this regard, to secure power through the creation of a constant, although never materializing, threat.

In the Cultural Politics of Emotions, Ahmed takes a psychoanalytical approach to the question of fear. She explains how the proximity of an object of fear induces cannibalistic fantasies of being devoured by the other. The self here refers at once to “me,” “us,” “what is,” “life as we know it,” and “life itself.” The fantasy of being consumed by the other through proximity immediately invokes the instinct of preservation: a desire to flee from the fearsome other in order to protect the self. In this scenario, the self turns towards the object of love, which can be the mother figure, but also a safe enclosure such as the community or nation. In Fitna, the veil’s visibility in Dutch cityscapes signals the proximity of the object of fear, in this case Islamicization, and consequently becomes the object from which the fearful distance themselves. As a result, the veil brings all those who fear closer together even as it sets the veiled woman apart. In this manner, the affect of fear creates and collapses distance between bodies.

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67 Massumi, Fear (the Spectrum Said), 35.
Furthermore, according to Ahmed, for an object to feel too close implies that it already signals that it is to be feared: “Proximity involves the repetition of stereotypes.”

She states:

I would suggest that the sideways movement between objects, which works to stick objects together as a sign of threat, is shaped by multiple histories. The movement between signs does not have its origin in the psyche, but is a trace of how such histories remain alive in the present.

Referring to Freud and the backward movement of fear, which he links to the primal fear of castration, she shows how the archive of an object’s past meanings is necessary for creating the “sideways associations” that produce its menacing contemporary connotations. Thus, the meaning of the feared object is immediately legible because it is already present on an intra-psychic level. The images of the veil in *Fitna*, and especially the references to the *burqa* in the Netherlands, induce fear because of their versatile symbolism. The images trigger associations of the oppression of women, foreign culture and values, radicalism, and by extension, a threat to Dutch society and culture. To be sure, these readings are deeply embedded in histories of Western representations that underscore the veil as sign.

To further this argument, it is crucial here to engage with the archive, by which I mean the history of representations of the Muslim veil, and for my purposes, representations in media culture outside Muslim-majority countries. Ahmed’s argument recalls Silverman’s notion of the cultural screen in an important way. If the affect of fear is produced by objects whose past associations determine how they are perceived in the present, then it follows that the archive of images plays an important role in the

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69 Ibid., 63-64.

70 Ibid., 66
construction of the cultural screen—which consists of the “repertoire of representations” through which a culture “figures all of those many varieties of ‘difference’ through which cultural identity is inscribed.”

Introduction to the End of an Argument: The Media Archive of the Muslim Veil

With this in mind, I turn to Muqaddimah Li-Nihayat Jidal/Introduction to the End of an Argument: Speaking for oneself/Speaking for others [which I will henceforth refer to as Introduction to the End of an Argument], by Jayce Salloum. Salloum’s Lebanese grandparents immigrated to British Columbia, Canada, where he still primarily lives and works. For this piece, Salloum collaborated with the Palestinian-Israeli film director Elia Suleiman. The forty-five minute film consists of a choppy montage of audio-visual material that reveals the politics of representation of the Middle East in Western media. The work was created in 1990 amidst the first Intifada and clearly demonstrates how media coverage of this event reactivated pre-existing cinematic associations between the Middle East, Arab culture, the Palestinian people, and the indexical role of Middle Eastern womanhood in this regard.

Taking the archive as their starting point, the artists reused found material from the history of cinema, such as the Lumière brothers’ depictions of Egypt, excerpts from Ken Russell’s Valentino, images from Raiders of the Lost Ark, and Nightline, as well as fragments from the history of television that span a wide range of genres including cartoons, sitcoms, news casts, and documentaries. Intermittently, the reused material is interrupted by live footage shot by Salloum during a visit to the West Bank and Gaza in

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71 Silverman, Male Subjectivity at the Margins, 19.
the late eighties. The artists sifted through media history, selecting images and ordering them with the aim of creating a new representation not of the Middle East, but of how the perception of the Middle East is constructed in Western media. Salloum comments:

Before one could make any more representations of/from the Middle East, we had to confront the representations that existed previously, forming the dominant images and stereotypes that we were up against. We had to carve out a space, arresting/deconstructing the imagery and ideology, decolonizing and recontextualizing it to provide a rupture, a rift for other voices and projects.

In this section, I will address two interrelated questions that the film raises with regard to the archive of the Muslim veil in particular. First is the issue of how the image of the veil is intimately connected to processes of naming that are at the heart of discourses of othering. Second, the film reminds us that the image of the Muslim veil is but one among the tropes of womanhood that have served at various moments as a symbol for the Orient and the Middle East. I will therefore look at the archive of representations inherited in the present and explore how the archive’s multiple histories provide a potent site from which to borrow for current political discourses that seek to create antagonisms between “us” and “them.”

What is striking upon first viewing Introduction to the End of an Argument is a discrepancy in the representation of the Middle East and the use of the image of the Muslim veil in the media as a sign of otherness then (1990) and now (2010). Whereas today the predominant “other” is Islam or the Muslim, at the time this piece was made, “the Arab” occupied the dominant position in this regard. The film reminds us that while today the image of the Muslim veil is prevalent in media culture, at other moments, the

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belly dancer and harem woman were chiefly used as indexical signs for the Orient. The piece gestures to the probability of these shifts, as it traces histories of representing the Middle East in a section that begins with the heading “Naming.” Most noteworthy is how the film reveals that the underlying associations of the Arab then—and the Muslim now—as violent, backward, and oppressive toward women, are largely the same.

In “Western Hostility toward Muslims: A History of the Present,” Tomaž Mastnak delineates various histories of how the self has been constructed through the radically reductive processes of naming an “other.” Mastnak’s historical analysis illustrates that for centuries, Muslims were one among many groups considered by Latin Christians to be pagans, infidels, and barbaric. The Muslim as “the” enemy of the West emerged concurrently with the forging of a Western understanding of the self in crisis: first, with the creation of Christendom during the crusades, and later, with the emergence of Europe as the “new historical form of the broadest community of Western Christians.”

Although the name representing the West’s other changes over time, reduced at various historical moments to figures such as the Saracen, the Turkish Sultan, the Ottoman, and the Arab, what remains constant is how this named other stands as the reference point for the fabrication of a sense of “us-ness.” In reality this us-ness was and still remains, as discussed in chapter one, internally divided. It can only be secured as a unified self through fantasy and the identification of a common threat located in an immutable and nameable other.

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75 Ibid., 35.
The ordering of media representations of the Middle East in *Introduction to the End of an Argument* demonstrates how complex political events and power relations are violently reduced to names and tropes—associations that are repeated across genres and media history—coalescing in the late 1980s to legitimize the foreign mapping of, and intervention in, the Middle East. These foreign interventions are presented as necessary to the protection of a vulnerable ally, Israel, against its violent, barbaric, and backward neighbors, the Arabs. *Introduction to the End of an Argument* emphasizes the central role the image of Oriental womanhood plays in referencing the backward and despotic nature of Arab men and culture. The representations of Muslim and Arab women are revealed, however, as being plural and even conflicting in certain ways.

The montage of one particular sequence in *Introduction to the End of an Argument* presents images from *Harem Scarem*, in which Elvis is dressed by his scantily dressed harem *entourage*. After a cut to Elvis singing *Shake Your Little Tambourine*, the cartoon figure Jeannie emerges as a white cloud of dust from her bottle, followed by cinematic images of shimmering glitter and belly dancers, which is then interrupted by grainy black-and-white pictures of women lounging and smoking up a storm in a harem. The song ends abruptly and Barbara Eden, from *I Dream of Jeannie*, appears. Dressed in her genie attire, she sits on a couch in a typical 1960s American household, doing a newspaper crossword puzzle. She slowly spells out the word “M.A.S.T.E.R.” “Master!” she cries with a gleeful smile. There is a cut to black-and-white images of a large wooden door being pushed open and a gathering of veiled women is revealed. They sing and clap their hands as they attend to the dressing of a bride-to-be.

The next cluster of images is introduced by the title “BIG BUDGET HISTORY,” accompanied by the sound of drums and a vintage television on which we see a close-up of a dancer’s quivering belly. The images cease and a man appears and states, “Her name is Dalia.” He holds a photograph of three veiled women, in which the one in the middle clutches a rifle against her chest. There is a jump to images of a man wearing a balaclava with a gun in his hand, walking up and down the alley of a passenger plane. He shouts: “They call us terrorists!” Melodramatic music interrupts and a teary, veiled woman says to a man who has his arm wrapped around her shoulders: “This is an ancient, devious world, and you come from a young country.”

In these two sequences we are presented with very different images of Arab and Muslim women that can basically be divided into four categories: the veiled woman, the
segregated woman of the harem, the belly dancer, and the terrorist. Although the belly
dancer and veiled woman can appear at first to embody very different, or even
contradictory, representations of Muslim/Arab womanhood, they can also be seen to
work as signifiers in very similar ways.

The cinematic clip featuring the tearful, veiled woman referenced above sums up
the metonymic link between the veil and the Middle East that is still firmly in place in
Europe and North America today, such that the Muslim veil becomes an indexical sign
that points to a backward, deceitful, and violent place. This is an example of the basic
workings of the image-as-veil that I articulated in chapter one, in which the veil is a
spatializing screen that delineates a barrier between the West and the Muslim world, and
at the same time identifies the Muslim woman as the primary victim of the latter. The
spatializing effects of the image-as-veil are found in many other images in these two
sequences, in which women are revealed by the camera as being kept not only behind
veils but also behind doors, such as in the numerous scenes of women sitting in harems.
These images present the Muslim woman as segregated prisoners of a male dominated
culture: images that also immediately signal transgression by the (male) Western gaze.

It is worth recalling here that the association between the victimized and
segregated veiled woman and the Middle East has not always existed, nor has it been the
predominant representation of the Orient. As Leila Ahmed states, “The issue of women
only emerged as the centerpiece of the Western narrative of Islam as Europeans
established themselves as colonial powers in Muslim countries.”Yet in Western
Representations of Muslim Womanhood, from Tergamant to Odalisques, Mohja Kahf
convincingly argues that even this historical pinpointing of the veil’s emergence as a key

symbol of Islam and the Middle East within the context of European colonialism is somewhat too simplified. Kahf outlines how the terrain for colonial discourses and representations of the Muslim woman as victim in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century was prepared by two recent historical developments in the West. The first is that articulations of liberty and human rights emerged in Western thought in the seventeenth century; and the second is that women’s position shifted with regard to labor and domesticity in Europe in the early eighteenth century. Kahf therefore highlights the multifaceted intersection of Western representations of women in Islam with Western discourses of gender and class. I will return to this complex relationship in the next chapter. For now, another of Kahf’s main tenets helps explain the ostensible contradiction between images of the veiled and segregated women and the plethora of images of belly dancers in Introduction to the End of an Argument.

In her book, Kahf excavates a long neglected Western trope of the Muslim woman that was predominant in literature during the Middle Ages. According to Kahf, before it became Christendom’s archenemy, the Islamic world was perceived as superior to European societies in many ways. In this literature, the Muslim woman appeared as a powerful queen or noblewoman who embodied the earthly might of Islam. In this manner, the Muslim woman was typically portrayed as a highly active figure, characterized by her large size and wanton sexuality. Instead of being a figure that needed to be maintained as a radical other, at the end of such stories, she would often

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convert to the side of the Christian hero and “embrace a more passive femininity, and become part of the European world.” This trope of the Muslim woman is all but forgotten today, such that the active, powerful figure of the unveiled, non-segregated Muslim queen, who possessed the power to harm or rescue a Christian hero, has given way to the figure of the victimized, veiled woman who needs to be liberated from her backward culture by the benevolent, male, and militarist West.

The figure of the Muslim queen nonetheless resurfaces in other historical Western representations of women from the Orient, notably those that support Western erotic fantasies. The figure of the odalisque and imaginaries of the seraglio in the nineteenth century are legacies of the Medieval Muslim queen stripped of her power and freedom. As demonstrated above, such highly sexualized images intersect with the operations of the image-as-veil, because they embody fantasies of what is hidden from foreign eyes behind veils and doors. The belly dancer is one of the most predominant iterations of this sexualized trope of Muslim womanhood in Western media. This preponderance is demonstrated by the sampling of belly dancers featured in *Introduction to the End of an Argument*, which spans the history of the moving image: until the eighties, the belly dancer was far more prominent than the veiled woman.

Certainly the shift from the Arab to the Muslim, and from the belly dancer to the veiled woman in discourses of othering during the past decades, is inextricable from global political transformations. Most significant is the expansion of neoliberalism and the increasing presence of Muslim citizens outside Muslim-majority countries, often conflated in the media with the rise and spread of Islamism. But I want to take a closer

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79 Ibid., 4-5.
look at how the archive of the image of the Muslim veil works, to further unpack how it is made to function in the present.

Derrida’s book *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* is most often evoked in discussions of the archive. However, in the present study I take the archive to be a repertoire of images, and the vocabulary in Derrida’s earlier work, *Specters of Marx, the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* and the notion of inheritance that is found there, is particularly apt for understanding how certain images from the repertoire disappear, resurface, or get reactivated over time.

Derrida points out that the notion of inheritance, which evokes the idea of something being passed down from generation to generation, is a state of being. Inheritance is given whether the receiver wishes it or not. To be sure, the concept of inheritance differs from the concept of the archive, yet it compliments the latter because for Derrida, while one does not choose to inherent, the process of inheriting is never passive: it always involves an active response on the part of the receiver. If what we inherit were always transparently legible and knowable, we would never be more than what we inherent, a process that would quickly come to a standstill. Yet the archive we inherit is never a fixed or static entity; it is never at one with itself. The archive possesses an inherent injunction that opens it up to a process of constant interpretation. According to Derrida, “the injunction itself (it always says ‘choose and decide among what you inherit’) can only be one by dividing itself, by speaking at the same time several times—and in several voices.”

Consequently, the process of inheriting is coupled with

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procedures of decision-making and interpretation—and therefore with the inevitability of inventing something other than what is given, that is, creating something new. This feature is certainly what makes the archive such an appealing site for artistic intervention.

Derrida further delineates a temporal paradox that occurs when a trace from the past appears in the present, which he refers to as a revenant or specter. On one hand, the specter that appears in the present moment exists in multiple times, for “no one can be sure if by returning it testifies to a living past or to a living future,” causing a “disadjustment of the present.” On the other hand, in times “out of joint,” feverish borrowing from the past ensues:

The paradox must be sharpened, the more the new erupts in the revolutionary crisis, the more the period is in crisis, the more it is ‘out of joint,’ then the more one has to convoke the old, ‘borrow’ from it. Inheritance from the ‘spirits of the past’ consists, as always, in borrowing. (…) And the borrowing speaks borrowed language, borrowed names, says Marx.  

Importantly, then, in times of profound change, narratives and names (or what I have called versatile symbols) are actively borrowed from the archive of their past meanings and associations. This temporal paradox undergirds the use of both the belly dancer and the veiled woman in past and present discourses of othering, I contend, supplementing the image-as-veil’s spatializing operations with an inscription of temporal divides as well. While these two figures are perceived as revenants of a pre-modern culture, in times of great anxiety-causing transformation, these connotations are also actively sought, borrowed from the inherited archive of representations for the purpose of providing solid temporal and spatial points of reference.

81 Ibid., 6
With regard to the images under discussion here, this argument is perhaps better understood in relation to what Amira Jarmakani refers to as the metanarratives of modernity and their main pillar, the myth of progress. In her interdisciplinary study, *Imagining Arab Womanhood: The Cultural Mythology of Veils, Harems, and Belly Dancers in the U.S.*, Jarmakani considers this temporal paradox, underscoring the use of the figures of the belly dancer and veiled woman. For example, she addresses the hype surrounding belly dancers, known as hootchy-kootchy performers, presented at the 1893 World Fair in Chicago. Contemporary commentaries express ambiguous responses to the dancers’ capacity to contort their bodies, Jarmakani notes. Many accounts characterize the bodily undulations, which deviated drastically from contemporary Victorian codes of female sexuality, as “hot” and “lascivious,” while others perceived the movements as animal-like and primitive. The belly dancer, Jarmakani claims, readily adhered to the fundamental structure of the Fair, which sought to present America as a leader in its modern urban industrial development. This progressive image of America needed to be anchored in a present-yet-receding past. As Jarmakani explains, the belly dancer was used as a marker of such temporal distance: “Through the racialized and orientalized bodies of ‘savages’ and hootchy-kootchy dancers, the receding past was displaced onto a distant, faraway place cast anachronistically in a pre-modern space.”

Jarmakani observes how tropes of Oriental womanhood have continually resurfaced throughout American media culture. The most recent examples include the figure of the belly dancer in advertising schemes by Camel cigarettes to promote a new

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83 Ibid., 66-67.
84 Ibid., 71.
line of Turkish blends, and the 2003 United Colors of Benetton’s repurposing of the trope of the veiled woman, which promoted the notion that liberation is tied to liberal-democratic ideal, ideals they sought to embody in order to expand their market. In keeping with the paradox of inheritance, Jarmakani argues that these images tend to surge up in moments of profound transformation in the history of capitalism. I will address the most recent transformations, which are intimately connected to the expansion of neoliberalism, in more depth in the second section of this chapter. The point I want to stress here is that the image of the veil is one among others which, due to the archive of its meanings, is both perceived and actively sought as a temporal marker for setting up a pre-modern/modern binary.

To recapitulate the important insights *Introduction to the End of an Argument* offers my study, first, the artwork demonstrates how the archive of the Muslim veil is plural. By this, I mean that this image is one among several of Oriental femininity that have served time and again as an indexical screen between the Middle East and the West. The coexisting and at times contradictory tropes of femininity make up the image repertoire we have inherited: the image is a versatile symbol which, like naming processes, harbors a variety of connotations. Yet, following the imperative of the archive (“choose and decide among what you inherit”) some of these connotations are at certain moments disavowed, while others are recuperated and inscribed with new associations in future scenarios.

The Muslim queen is an example of a forgotten trope, the sexual connotations of which can be seen to live on in other figures such as the belly dancer. However, even this figure no longer operates in the same way since *Introduction to the End of an Argument*
was created in 1990. Since the work was made, and especially in the last decade, there has been a general shift from conflating the Muslim with the Arab to a generalized fear of Islam and Muslims in European and North American societies. While the belly dancer is a cliché of Arab womanhood, it goes without saying that she cannot stand in as a representative figure of Islam. Further, the belly dancer conceivably no longer has the capacity to provide a temporal or cultural alternative to Western codes and norms of female sexuality. Today, the belly dancer has in many ways been embraced by mainstream global culture. Pop icons such as Shakira and Beyoncé and their trademark abilities to incorporate belly dancing into their choreography are prime examples. These figures undeniably continue to embody pre-modern connotations, but now these markers of temporal and cultural difference are highly marketable, which is certainly not the case for the figure of the veiled woman.

Secondly, *Introduction to the End of an Argument* points to the temporal paradox of the image of the veil as a revenant. In line with Jarmakani, I have argued that images of Arab and Muslim womanhood have been instrumentalized time and again to inscribe spatial and temporal order in times out of joint. The last point I wish to make with regard to this artwork is that the montage stresses the recurrence of these tropes throughout media history, undermining the linearity needed to secure the pre-modern and modern logic for which they are borrowed in their original contexts. As a result, the images in this work take on an odd twist. In this instance of artistic appropriation, the use of these two images as markers of tradition within metanarratives of modernity gives way to a signaling of the repetition and circularity specific to the subject of representation. This

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also holds for the use of the image of the Muslim veil in *Fitna*, which I argued was mobilized because of its status as a versatile symbol: its history of meanings is immediately legible and is meant to address, and fuel, contemporary frustrations and fears. The image of the veil in *Fitna* is clearly presented as a revenant of times past erupting in the present, but also as a specter from the future: the future Netherlands. The film certainly projects a stagnant image of veiling practices, often from the Middle East, onto a future scenario in the Netherlands. Consequently, it disavows the forward motion and inevitable transformation of all cultural traditions and practices as they travel through time and from one context to another. Underlying this film is the anxiety that the Netherlands is undergoing drastic transformations, along with a desire that Dutch culture maintain its status quo.

In accordance with the temporal paradox of the revenant as articulated by Derrida, the reuse of the image of the Muslim veil in this instance must be seen as a strategy to deal with far more complex transformations that cause a disjunctive experience of the present moment. It is to these transformations that I now turn in the second section of this chapter.
2.2 Living Tomorrow: The Creative Potential of the Open Archive

Living Tomorrow by Linda Wallace, an artist who was born in Australia but now resides and works in Amsterdam, offers a very different portrayal of the Muslim veil in Dutch society. In this section, I argue that Wallace also takes on the role of the archivist; however, the archival form of her piece differs drastically from that of Fitna, which highlights the open-ended nature of the archive. Specifically, I discuss Living Tomorrow in relation to three characteristics that Foster has identified as integral to the archival impulse in recent art: a turn to installation formats; the expression of a desire for connectivity in a late-capitalist framework; and a shift away from deconstructive strategies to institutive stances that allow for significantly increased participation by the viewer. On the level of the image, I maintain that Wallace works with the modalities of the image-as-folds to disrupt and reroute the spatial and temporal effects of contemporary right-wing use of the image of the Muslim veil. I focus on the synesthetic modes of perception that her fractal treatment of the images evokes, the emphasis on their mediating and connective nature, and the way that they unseat static stereotypes through constant variation. In this last section, I suggest that Living Tomorrow succeeds in severing the image of the veil from its historical associations and invests the image with new resonances, highlighting how it converges with the multiple political facets of a Dutch society that is coming into being.

The Archive in an Expanded Format

In Living Tomorrow, the viewer finds herself located in a media environment where images and texts appear across three screens from mismatched sources. For

example, images from the American soap opera *The Bold and the Beautiful* meet Dutch landscapes as well as local and global socio-political issues (2005). Although the images have been selected by Wallace, she has programmed a database to send them randomly to a three-channel projection. The projected images are further subtitled by a narration that consists of excerpts from newspaper articles articulating Samuel P. Huntington’s clash of civilizations discourse, speeches by Osama bin Laden, and texts written by the artist. Despite the haphazard juxtaposition of images and text, a typical soap opera unfolds, with several narrative strands that address love and betrayal.

One strand reveals how a blond protagonist, whose name is Beatrix (after the Dutch queen) has to explain to the man who has just proposed to her why she has received an engagement ring and proposal from someone else. Ultimately, she tells the man that she cannot accept his proposal because she wants to wear a headscarf. A second story line shows the American soap opera protagonists trying to come to terms with the murder of a woman named Wilhelmina (the name of the Dutch queen’s grandmother). This strand weaves references to the murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004 with discussions of the war in Iraq, the shallow experience of the realm of appearances, and the present-day need to fight networks with networks. Finally, interspersed within these fictive yet highly socio-political narratives are images of typical Dutch landscapes, shots of surveillance cameras, and what are discernibly colorful Muslim headscarves and a public market.

The archive in *Living Tomorrow* is a database that can be ordered, accessed, and projected in various ways. While working on the piece during a 2004-2005 residency at Montevideo, The Netherlands Media Art Institute in Amsterdam, Wallace was able to
incorporate current events as they happened, such as the murder of Van Gogh, turning the work into a live archive—or what I will hence forth refer to as an open archive—which captured its immediate context as it was unfolding.

To be sure, new technologies in recent decades have increased access to, and manipulation of, archives to the point that since web 2.0, media reuse has for many become a daily practice.87 In her forthcoming book, The Neuro-Image: A Deleuzian Filmphilosophy of Digital Screen Culture, Patricia Pisters addresses the political potential and dangers of these transformations. Building on Derrida’s work in Archive Fever, Pisters presents the archive as fundamentally open to the present and anticipating the future88 because its narratives are never closed: they are always open to future appropriation and interpretation, or in her words, contestation and extension. This resonates with my use of his earlier concept of inheritance, whereby what is inherited “can only be one by dividing itself, by speaking at the same time several times—and in several voices.”89 New media technologies have exacerbated this feature of the archive, giving way to a plurality of orderings of history and memory. The danger, as Pisters points out, is that these tools can be used to reinforce state power or to “pose blocks of fixed identity (as ‘safe havens’) in the sea of data, images and possible ways of life.”90 Indeed, this pointedly describes what is at stake in the archival practice underscoring Fitna. However, the marriage between new technologies and the open-ended nature of

89 Derrida, Specters of Marx, 16.
90 Pisters, The Neuro-Image, from chapter seven in manuscript version.
the archive, according to Pisters, has also opened up new opportunities that are “creative” and “empowering.”

In “An Archival Impulse,” Foster investigates the widespread return to the archive in contemporary art and how this recent body of work differs from precedents such as appropriation art exemplified in Introduction to the End of an Argument discussed above. Through a close analysis of the work of Thomas Hirschhorn, Tacida Dean, and Sam Durant, Foster demonstrates how current practices respond first and foremost to the saturation of media and information technologies characteristic of our neoliberal moment. Commenting on Hirschhorn’s large, mixed-media installations and jumbled references, Foster claims that such practices are “a grotesquerie of our immersive commodity-media-entertainment environment: such are the elements and the energies that exist to be reworked and rechanneled.”

Three aspects of Foster’s discussion of the archival impulse suggest that Wallace partakes in this movement: the shift to installation formats and its ramifications for the viewing experience, a clear intent to connect in a neoliberal framework of disconnection, and a shift to institutive stances that exploit inherent features of the open archive. Certainly, the first aspect of Living Tomorrow that is drastically different from the previous two archival pieces I have analyzed in this chapter is its physical layout. Here, the archive of images and text take shape in an expanded installation in which Wallace juxtaposes three channels of disjointed images and narration. The three channels have been presented in different ways on different occasions. At Montevideo in Amsterdam, the visitor found herself in front of an elongated television structure in a staged living

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91 Ibid.
room set-up. When presented in Berlin in 2007, Living Tomorrow consisted of a large, immersive, three-channel projection installation piece. In both cases, the visitor is located amongst the various strands of visual material and information that frames a historical period and locale in a horizontal manner. Consequently, the structure of the piece grants certain elements of a location (the Netherlands) tangible form, while recreating how neoliberal media and entertainment conglomerates permeate the daily experience of that locale—and contemporary life in general.

According to Foster, there is a drive in recent artwork to make historical information physically present. Foster cites Sam Durant, who explains his own attempt with multi-media installations to “[frame] a historical period as a discursive episteme, almost in the sense of Michel Foucault, with ‘interrelated elements [placed] together in a field.’” To this end, immersive installations are often the chosen art form. I argue that Living Tomorrow further uses this format to engage critically with the embodied experience of the highly saturated mediascape in which we live.

The entanglement of Dutch socio-political fragments and media culture in the formal structure of the installation extended by the coexistence of the real and the fictional throughout the piece expands this idea. In Living Tomorrow, the facetious conflation of real issues and popular entertainment taps into recent widespread skepticism toward media culture and politics. Art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty has addressed the noticeable turn to fiction as a strategy in contemporary art, claiming that it reflects the current mistrust of mainstream media and the political agendas they support. The first decade of the twenty-first century, she claims, “has special claim to being, if not a more

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93 Ibid., 17.
lie-prone era, the one in which untruths have had especially catastrophic effects.”

Some of the “lies” Lambert Beatty is referring to here are directly referenced in *Living Tomorrow*: for example, the highly publicized claim in 2003 that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction, which sought to legitimize American-lead intervention. Deception is also a leitmotif of the strands of narration throughout the piece, in which blond protagonists deceive their partners and repeatedly bemoan the deceitful realm of appearances in which they live.

But *Living Tomorrow*’s use of fiction cannot be reduced to mere criticism of media culture. Rather, fiction is used on several levels in this piece as a way to reflect and deflect how mass media operate and thereby construct subjectivities in a given location. Consequently, *Living Tomorrow* addresses how the media archive participates in the construction and maintenance of the cultural screen. Indeed, like *Introduction to the End of an Argument*, *Living Tomorrow* evokes the mediating nature of the cultural screen. Nonetheless, Wallace’s installation differs from the earlier video insofar as it works transformatively upon the cultural screen through characteristics specific to the image-as-folds.

*The Archival Impulse and the Image-as-Folds*

I have already addressed how mediation is brought to the fore in the formal structure of work that places the viewer in a tangible, mediated environment. I now turn to the material treatment of the images themselves. The screens in *Living Tomorrow* do not in any way suggest transparent windows onto a real world. Rather, all the images have undergone a kaleidoscopic effect that blurs the contours and legibility of what is

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95 Ibid., 57.
represented. In this work, images are transformed into morphing surfaces that call to mind geometric patterns, textures, swirls, and even folds of fabric.


This material aspect of the images is at the antipode of the Albertian model of visualization, which in European culture has determined the understanding of the subject of representation, both the maker and perceiver of the work, since the Renaissance. This model imagines the viewer at the apex of vision, located outside the image. Such a position of dominance over the field of vision is believed necessary for acquiring knowledge about the object of perception, and by extension, the perceiving subject’s sense of coherence. In chapter one, I problematized the alignment of seeing and knowing specific to Western scopic regimes of modernity. To be sure, subsequent technological innovations and critical theory have unseated the basic assumptions of this model. Yet, as art historian Amelia Jones has remarked, it remains the “ideological force of
perspectival logic” in European and North American culture, and continues to subtend forms of ocular centrism in present technologies of representation.\(^{96}\)

In *Living Tomorrow*, the Albertian model is replaced by an emphasis on the mediating nature of images, foreclosing any sense of transparency. Again, the images in each channel are constantly morphing into each other, and the random juxtaposition of representations and narratives across three screens subjects the viewer to a state of constant variation. In this way, the viewer is denied the possibility of inhabiting a position that is outside, controlling, or dominating with regard to what she sees. Such an experience speaks to what Deleuze proposes as an alternate model of perspective in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Baroque perspectivism begins with the assumption that both the viewing subject and the point of view (the image) are in a state of constant co-variation:

Such is the basis of perspectivism, which does not mean a dependence in respect to a pre-given or defined subject; to the contrary, a subject will be what comes to the point of view, or what remains in the point of view. That is why the transformation of the object refers to a correlative transformation of the subject […]. A needed relation exists between variation and point of view: not simply because of the variety of points of view (though, as we shall observe, such a variety does exist), but in the first place because every point of view is a point of view on variation.\(^{97}\)

This passage describes an interdependency of self and image at work in the experience of viewing that I maintain made conspicuous in *Living Tomorrow*. In this understanding, neither the image nor the subject preexist their mutual encounter in a fixed or coherent


way. Most important here are the significant consequences that the materiality of the images, together with this articulation of perspectivism, has for the very different position the image of the Muslim veil occupies within this work.

The Archive as a Practice of Connectivity in Times Out of Joint

Images of the Muslim veil appear sporadically throughout the piece, both as patterned representations and also in references to headscarves in various strands of the story line. And yet the archive of the Muslim veil that was revealed in *Introduction to the End of an Argument*, and repurposed in *Fitna*, is almost entirely disconnected from the image here. *Living Tomorrow* literally works through horizontal connections in the present, rather than via borrowings of historical associations. To return to the extended form of *Living Tomorrow*, the image of the veil emerges as one among many “interrelated elements [placed] together in a field,” to quote Durant once again. Surveillance cameras and discussions of the war on terror do intersect with images of the veil. Yet in this case, the morphing images of colorful veils at the market, and blond soap opera stars’ proclamations regarding their religious commitments, evoke banality, if not humor. The horizontal mapping of elements positions the veil and surveillance cameras alongside each other as elements that reflect daily life in the Netherlands. Allusions to the image of the veil’s erotic or victimizing connotations are also completely ruled out. In fact, as a result of the shuffling and haphazard connections, the veil becomes a tool of empowerment for the blond soap opera protagonist, who claims that she wants to don the headscarf and live “beyond appearances.”
Furthermore, the spatializing operations inherent in the image-as-veil are completely disabled through the textured treatment of all images in this piece. Their morphing, swirling, and textured materiality recall the Muslim veil’s physicality, even as they deactivate its deep-seated characteristic of suggesting a beyond as well as all the semantic derivatives that unfold from this basic binary structure. The point is that in *Living Tomorrow*, the image of the veil does not suggest either division or a distancing movement. To the contrary, the image of the veil falls in line with the connective logic of the installation piece, positing the veil as one element that intersects with others. The haphazard connections between these elements yield decisively new, sometimes seemingly preposterous, meanings.

Citing Hirschhorn in reference to his own work, Foster claims that a will to “connect what cannot be connected” is another characteristic of archival art in the present that is also intimately connected to the experience of late capitalism. Notably, Foster suggests that the drive for connectivity is a reaction to a current state of “anomic fragmentation” in society, “for why else connect so feverishly if things did not appear so frightfully disconnected in the first place?” Underlying this frenzy is a kind of paranoia caused by the perceived breakdown of social norms and values—a paranoia caused to a great extent by global media culture.

In their article “Neoliberal Xenophobia in the Netherlands,” Jolle Demmers and Sameer S. Mehendale argue along these same lines that we must look beyond media representations and racist repertoires of images to understand more fundamental transformations that effect widespread unease in contemporary Dutch society. They posit

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99 Ibid., 22.
that the merging of the socialists and liberals in the early nineties was the main instigation for an “accepted inevitability” of a set of changes fueled by neoliberal market logic. These ongoing changes have significantly affected education, welfare, housing, health care, and social security in the Netherlands. More significantly, a central effect of the marketization of Dutch society under the neoliberal project is “atomization under the rubrics freedom, progress, and efficiency,” causing the destruction of collectivities and the emergence of new forms of “liquid belonging.” Certainly, these wide-ranging transformations have caused the disintegration of key features of Dutch society in the last decades, which the two authors identify as the waning of Dutch social “welfarism” and “merchantness.” In their place a bureaucratic, surveillance state has emerged.

Unlike Fitna’s warning that Dutch identity and society are threatened by encroaching Islamic ideology, Living Tomorrow maps a different picture that instead emphasizes how the recent expansion of neoliberalism and its technologies of control that have gone un-politicized that are bringing significant changes to Dutch society. And here we return to the experience of times out of joint and the mechanisms that are normally triggered to help assuage fears in moments of profound transformations: namely, the feverish borrowing of past tropes that serve as stable points of temporal and spatial references.

In Living Tomorrow, as images peel away from the database and appear to morph in random connections with other elements, semantic associations are opened up and linked in new ways that leave the visitor trying to reassess the situation and the meanings that unfold before her, rather than reconfirming them. The appearance of the Muslim veil

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101 Ibid., 52.
in this instance does not stand in as a fixed sign for a distinct culture, tradition, or geographic location. Instead, the veil is seen to converge and connect with other points of identification in contemporary Dutch society, such as the expansion of global media conglomerates represented by the American soap opera, the surveillance camera’s evocation of the bureaucratic turn and privatization of public space, and Dutch agricultural landscapes. The image of the Muslim veil therefore enters into a far more dynamic relation with many other elements of Dutch society. The result is that both the veil and Dutch society are presented in a state of transformation, suggesting the inevitability of change as various cultural, social, and economic forces converge in the present.

An Institutive Reading of the Open Archive

My final point concerning *Living Tomorrow* regards how the presence of modalities of the image-as-folds work transformatively upon the cultural screen constructed and maintained by the archive of meanings that are specific to the image of the Muslim veil. Because of the multiple strands of narration that unfold throughout the piece, and because they are haphazardly played out via the random streaming of material, the archive in this case is not presented as a totality: neither the meaning of signs nor the future outcome of the narratives are pre-ordained. *Living Tomorrow* maps a fictive portrait of Dutch society, providing possible endings and consequently opening up its polyvocal past and present. In Derridean terms, we can read the notion of inheritance in the database of *Living Tomorrow* as “[speaking] at the same time several times – and in
several voices,” while leaving the injunction “choose and decide among what you inherit” partially open to the viewer.

Foster contends that one of the most crucial differences between previous archival art practices and current work is the move away from a deconstructive stance toward an orientation he characterizes as institutive:

Although the contents of this art are hardly indiscriminant, they remain indeterminate like the context of any archive, and often they are presented in this fashion—as so many promissory notes for further elaboration or enigmatic prompts for future scenarios. In this regard archival art is as much preproduction as it is postproduction: concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces (perhaps “anarchival impulse” is more appropriate), these artists are often drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects—in art and history alike—that might offer points of departure again.102

According to this articulation of an “anarchival impulse,” the desire to disrupt the archive’s order, which underscores these works, and by extension the cultural screen, instantiates revisions of histories and their future unfoldings. More importantly, such works attribute an important role to the viewer in the process of meaning making. Living Tomorrow’s open-ended structure, together with the embodied disorientation that it induces in the experience of the work, can clearly be seen to prompt cognitive effects.

Despite their contrasting nature and operations, Introduction to the End of an Argument and Fitna, which I have presented as archives in their own right, are nevertheless totalities unto themselves, insofar as they can both be characterized as visual essays that reuse audio-visual material to construct an argument. Salloum and Suleiman selected and ordered images to reveal and deconstruct how Western media has created stereotypes of the Middle East and Arab culture. Fitna uses images to construct the

argument that Islamic ideology is a threat to Dutch society. In these works, the selected images have already been interpreted by the artists, such that the images have been judged suitable to represent the argument they seek to put forward. Consequently, in the encounter with these works, the viewer can either agree or disagree with the interpretation of the images: she can, in turn, judge whether the arguments the pieces present are true or false.

*Living Tomorrow* operates in the register of fiction. Rather than an argument, it presents a story with multiple narratives and possible readings and endings. I have demonstrated that although the piece is fictive, it tenaciously weaves together actual elements of Dutch society and taps into real socio-political issues, thereby locating the viewer at the crossroads of political, social, cultural, and mediating forces of a society coming into being. Most importantly, it fails to provide a concrete resolution for how these forces that are transforming Dutch society will play themselves out. Rather, the visitor is left in a state of suspension in front of what appears to be several fictive or impossible scenarios. In this way, the piece turns to the productive side of fiction and chimes with what Deleuze, following Nietzsche, calls the power of the false.

The desire to “connect what cannot be connected” can be said to create and reflect a world of incompatible presents, which according to Deleuze in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* has the power to revisit what is considered already known, in such a manner that it is perceived as no longer necessarily true. Moreover, the power of the false that I argue subtends *Living Tomorrow* creates a loss of fixed reference points and as a result, the question of whether what unfolds is true of false, becomes irrelevant and untenable. Instead the visitor is subjected to feelings of comfort and discomfort, leading her to

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evaluate the possible scenarios that unfold before her. Clearly, the image of the Muslim
veil operates very differently in *Living Tomorrow* than in the two works analyzed earlier
in this chapter. In Wallace’s piece, the archive of the image is mobilized only to be
rerouted via random connections with other tropes that are read as incongruous, and
therefore, fictive and even humorous.

And yet, the affective register of this piece lies in the unease and, in Foster’s
terms, paranoia that accompanies what appears to be preposterous visions of a future
Dutch society. The constant state of variation causes the visitor to lose her bearings
without being able to pinpoint a precise cause. The haunting aura of deception and the
allusion to disconnectivity and atomization resulting from neoliberal spatial and temporal
compressions in no way yield deeper truths about the Muslim veil, but can be said to
work transformatively upon the fixed subject positions the veil habitually corroborates.
Wallace’s installation exploits the modalities of the image-as-folds and the power of the
false to heighten the experience of the disjunctive present. The failure to find one’s
bearings, place oneself outside what unfolds, and read into it what is already thought to
be known, institutes an evaluation and ultimately, a politicization, of the represented
historical moment and context.
Institutive Trajectories for the Urban Veil

This chapter has engaged the history of meanings of the image of the Muslim veil in Western media culture. I strategically chose three archive-based works that each repurpose audio-visual material from media platforms in specific ways. *Fitna* served as an example of how contemporary populist movements instrumentalize the image of the veil’s versatile symbolism in support of affective constructs of cultural identity and belonging. My analysis of *Introduction to the End of the Argument* by Salloum and Suleiman elucidated how the histories of the image of the veil dovetail with reductive processes of naming and discourses of othering. The video installation further opens up the archive of the image of the veil and demonstrates how it conflates and differs from other images of Middle Eastern femininity, which prompted me to address instances of continuity and discontinuity within these images over time. I argued that this repertoire of images and their associations provide the polyvocal archive that is inherited in the present and that provides us with versatile symbols to borrow in historical moments of disjunction. However, the piece’s montage brings to light how the repeated use of these images as signs of pre-modernity disavows inevitable transformations, not only in relation to veiling as a practice, but also in relation to the subject of representation who borrows them.

Although it is crucial to understand the historical deployment and meanings of the image of the Muslim veil in order to see how they are coopted in the present, I argued that *Living Tomorrow* succeeds in disentangling the image from its historical associations, locating it within a horizontal field in which it intersects with the ongoing transformations taking place in a specific geographic locale, notably the expansion of
neoliberalism in contemporary Dutch society. By reading the veil as an integral element of the local context, and not its defining other, the veil acquires new meanings as it responds and contributes to the larger transformations of that context. Working with the modalities of the image-as-folds, in this instance its emphasis on connectivity and mediation, together with the open-ended nature of the archive, the work provides points of departure for new trajectories and articulations of the urban veil and its heterogeneous meanings. In the following three chapters I will pursue these new trajectories, looking specifically at how a politics of dis-identification with the cultural screen, a form of para-feminism, an alternate articulation of a politics of difference, and an engagement with the world of fashion emerge when the Muslim veil is analyzed as an integral component alongside others in their local contexts.
Chapter 3

The Urban Veil: A Politics of (Dis)Identification

In my art-making, I attempt to reclaim my own cultural practices and exert my agency in the cultural and public spaces I occupy. In performing and making the work, the moments of resistance and transformation are what inspire me. As codified as our cultures and spaces may be, the room to move within their structures does exist. In the realm of my videos, I want the viewer to experience a space of limitless possibility.

-Farheen Haq

Borrowing the formal composition of a photographic portrait, the video installation (un)covering presents the tightly framed, bare shoulders and head of a Southeastern woman. It is in fact a self-portrait, as the woman portrayed is the artist Farheen Haq, a Canadian-born, secular Muslim of Pakistani decent. Haq stares straight at the viewer and begins to draw a black cloth around her shoulders and head in a measured fashion. She repeats this slow and purposeful gesture for more than five minutes, her eyes fixed, never ceasing to address and confront the gaze outside the frame. The title of the work takes on an ironic twist as the black cloth is used as a tracing line that increasingly outlines the body even as it covers it. Eventually it creates a black mass surrounding the face and shoulders that clearly separates the subject from the white background. For the hegemonic, white, North American viewers to whom the piece has been presented in several shows, the initial image of difference, that of a racial (gendered) other, is nuanced in its religious and cultural specificity, gradually delineating a veiled Muslim woman.
Haq herself does not wear the veil in public spaces. I maintain that her mobilization of the highly charged symbol in combination with the genre of self-portrait is indicative of how that symbol—regardless of the fact that she does not wear the veil on a daily basis—mediates her sense of self, in terms of how she is socially and culturally perceived. Consequently, in this chapter, I will argue that in *(un)covering*, Haq uses the veil in part as a strategy to engage with, reiterate, and negotiate a distance from the cultural screen. As Silverman reminds us, the cultural screen “gives shape and significance to how we are seen by ‘others as such,’ how we define and interact with the agency to whom we attribute our visibility, and how we perceive the world.”\(^{104}\)

In the first two chapters of this study, I proposed that there are specific spatial operations inherent to the hegemonic and emancipatory image of the Muslim veil, and sketched out the media archive that currently invests the veil as sign with meaning. Haq’s piece provides a subjective expression of the image of the urban veil and serves as the basis for this chapter’s analysis. In what follows, I will argue that Haq maneuvers in and

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through the image of the veil via interconnected tactics of repetition, notions of drawing, and a specific orchestration of the look.

In the first part of this chapter, I will address how Haq’s look in *(un)covering* speaks of an engagement with that which lies beyond the frame. But that which lies outside the frame, the viewer and the viewer’s present moment, is in fact present in the frame, in all its historicity: the cultural screen. I will discuss how the artist uses the genre of self-portraiture, and specifically, modalities of photography, to evoke the cultural screen and the workings of the spectacle. To these ends, I will put the work in dialog with a series of contemporaneous images of the Muslim veil taken from Canadian print media that operate in precisely the same register.

Despite the clear reference to photography, the weight of time inherent to the medium of video—in combination with the specificities of the genre of self-portraiture—will be seen to highlight how the subject of *(un)covering*, in Derrida’s words, “has no relation to him[her]self that is not forced to defer itself by passing through the other in the form of the eternal return.”\(^{105}\) Deleuze’s theories regarding the close-up of the face, together with Silverman’s idea of a productive look, demonstrate how an economy of means in the image has strikingly powerful, political effects. In *(un)covering*, Haq opens up and appropriates the performative dimensions of the politics of representation that underscore the image of the Muslim veil in the media. In their place, she offers what I call a politics of (dis)identification.

In the second part of this chapter, I will elaborate this notion of a politics of (dis)identification, which I maintain undergirds *(un)covering* on more than one level. I

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propose that in addition to reading the installation as an intervention into the politics of
the representation evoked by the image of the Muslim veil, (un)covering also enters into
dialog with, and takes a distance from, discourses of liberal feminism. The embodied
aspects of the installation converse with the theoretical writings of Rosi Braidotti, Jasbir
K. Puar, and Saba Mahmood, and significantly renegotiate contemporary liberal feminist
type. Haq’s claim that she uses the veil in (un)covering as a form of drawing finds a
direct parallel with what Mahmood calls “habitus”: performed bodily acts that have
inscriptive consequences on subject formation. I maintain that the specificities of the
look, as well as the repetitive gestures that constitute the bodily acts of the religious
ritual, carve out a space for a distinct feminist position that is specific to the urban veil. I
will argue that the feminist stance found in (un)covering operates parallel to liberal
feminist discourses in the form of what Amelia Jones refers to as a para-feminist impulse;
her critique of the tradition of liberal feminism thereby extends the intervention of
feminists such as Leila Ahmed, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Mahmood. In this
chapter, (un) covering, which at first appears to be a rather minimalist, short video
installation, thus serves as a rich theoretical object with several entry points, each offering
fresh methodological trajectories.

3.1: The Spectacle of Terror and the Specular Image of the Muslim Veil

Significantly, (un)covering was created by Haq in 2002, amidst the rise of
anti-Muslim sentiment widespread in North America and Western Europe after 9/11.
The sensational media coverage of that event and representations of the ensuing War
on Terror have encompassed racist, secularist, nationalist, and anti-immigrant
stances. There have been equally coercive and stereotypical responses on behalf of
non-Muslims attempting to counter the negative images of Muslims with positive ones. These endeavors have often led to what Andrew Shryock refers to in “Islam as an Object of Fear and Affection” as a politics of inversion, which identifies the good and true Muslim (friend) in opposition to the bad Muslim (enemy).\textsuperscript{106} The good Muslim is presented as tolerant of other religions and politically moderate, an advocate of democracy, human rights, and religious freedom, and an opponent of armed conflict against the United States and Israel. The good Muslim woman is “highly educated, works outside the home, is her husband’s only wife, chose her husband freely, and wears a hijab (if at all) only because she wants to.”\textsuperscript{107} The politics of inversion therefore has a homogenizing effect as it reaffirms the hegemonic liberal democratic self by measuring Muslims against its own categories and terms.

In the first part of this chapter I explore how \textit{(un)covering} intervenes in this scenario by pointing to an un-reflected position within the homogenizing landscape. I demonstrate how the piece directly interpellates the imaginaries of terror surrounding the image of the veil at that time, which I argue functioned within the symbolic economy of the spectacle. By bringing Haq’s piece into dialog with photographic images from Canadian print media, Debord’s notion of the spectacle, and Silverman’s notion of the gaze, I expose the performative dimensions inherent to images of the Muslim veil that support discourses on terrorism in Canada. These are dimensions that


\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 10.
not only affect Haq’s own subject position, but also serve as a site of agency into which (un) covering intervenes.

The Spectacle of Terror

The media coverage of the First Gulf War, the decisive turn to anti-Islamic discourses after 9/11, and the ensuing talk of a global War on Terror had considerable impact on the perception of Muslims in North America and Canada. These threats were presented as real and imminent in Canada on June 3, 2006, when seventeen men were arrested in Brampton, Ontario, on charges of a terrorist plot to “storm Parliament Hill, seize the politicians and behead the Prime Minister.”

The court hearing for the charges was held at the Brampton Courthouse on June 6, 2006. The following day, newspapers across the country featured front-page images of the suspects’ “family members and friends” attending the hearing. The photographs overwhelmingly present the women dressed in black veils, trying to make their way in and out of the courthouse. This targeting of the women and their chadors is best

exemplified in a Reuters image republished on the front page of the Montreal daily, Le Devoir. The shot is taken over the shoulder of a person, perhaps a man, wearing a white shirt, leading two veiled women—surrounded by a mob of photographers—into the courthouse. This person hinders the view of what the photographer was unquestionably trying to capture: the two heavily veiled women behind, one of whom holds her head downward behind the person’s shoulder and raises her hand in an attempt to prevent being photographed. The second woman is scarcely visible due to the shoulder and raised hand. She stares directly at the camera while holding her veil high up around her face in a protective manner.


Without question, the veil was seen as the perfect symbol for the Canadian media to represent the threat of terrorism at home. This decision is linked to what I have so far outlined as the inherent characteristics of the image-as-veil and its built-in anxieties, which are readily co-opted to numerous semantic ends. Here, the veil is mobilized to demonstrate the threat of terrorism hidden within, now brought to light and made visual through the arrest of the men and the visibility of their heavily veiled relatives. In this case, however, I will specifically address the performative dimensions of this set of mediatic images.
These dimensions are paradoxically visible, illustrated within these images of veiled women attending the court hearing, which appeared on the cover of the Montreal newspaper The Gazette. A photograph with the heading Terror Case: Crown Charges Suspects Plotted to Storm Parliament, Behead PM, Lawyer Says, shows two veiled women enclosed by a horde of photojournalists and camera lenses. The women are represented from the waist up and create an outstanding black mass at the centre of the image. They are wearing heavy, black veils that reveal only a slit of skin surrounding their eyes. The woman in front tilts her head and looks slightly back toward the other, perhaps speaking to her. The second woman’s eyes are partially hidden due to a reflection, possibly of a flash, in one of the lenses of her glasses. This probability is reinforced by the fact that her other eye is shut. The woman’s right hand is raised from under her chador in an almost protruding fashion in the lower space just inside the frame. She wears a gold ring on her wedding finger and the exposed hand clutches a small, ornate book: the Qur’an? This is no doubt what the image wants us to conclude, for it suggests and visualizes the association of terrorism, the veil, and their link to Islamic fundamentalism entertained in mass media. Also visualized here, however, are the performative facets of the image we are looking at.
There is a formidable wall of cameras that encloses the two women within a confining space located between us, the masses, and the many lenses that capture and disseminate this view to us. This impressive grouping of cameras all directed toward the two veiled women visually and literally does two things: first, it turns the women into a spectacle for the masses; second, coupled with the headings that proclaim “terror,” the images that these cameras take dictate how the women are perceived by the public at large—they are evidence of the threat of terrorism in Canada.

Just like the mob of photographers that captures celebrities arriving at world premiers, it is the visualization of the multitude of cameras around the women that generates the spectactularity of what is shown. Here, the veil as spectacle does not sell a movie or contribute to celebrity culture, but rather represents an event that the media sells to its consumers, producing the cover image that will win attention. This staged hype,
grounded in the visibility of the veil and its link to terrorism, chimes with Baudrillard’s notorious theorization of the simulacra. To a certain extent, the image displays the inherent implosion of meaning characteristic of consumer society and mass media, whereby the women’s subjecthood is seen to be devoured by the row of cameras turning them into captivating images. In *Simulacras and Simulations*, Baudrillard argues that information technology devours the real through a constant proliferation of images. In his argument, the media is less concerned with communication than with the *mise-en-scène* of communication.\(^{109}\) Through the *mise-en scène* of the veil as an index of terror, this image communicates not the real threat of terrorism, but instead, the gripping image of terror. Baudrillard’s following remarks pertaining to the representation of terrorism in the media in 1981 are still appropriate for what is at stake in this image:

> The media render themselves the vehicle of moral condemnation of terrorism and of the exploitation of fear for political means, while simultaneously, in total ambiguity, they diffuse a brute fascination with the terrorist act, they are themselves terrorists to the extent that they work through fascination.\(^{110}\)

Here too, there is an implied condemnation of the attempt to carry out an act of terrorism in Canada, together with a purposeful fueling of the fascination with such acts. However, contrary to a complete devouring of meaning, I contend that the spectacularization of the veil, as evidence of terror, constitutes a form of speech act. This image delineates how the veil is perceived. In other words, the spectacularity of


\(^{110}\) Ibid., 129. « Les médias se font le véhicule de la condamnation morale du terrorisme et de l’exploitation de la peur à des fins politiques, mais simultanément, dans la plus totale ambiguïté, ils diffusent la fascination brute de l’acte terroriste, ils sont eux-mêmes terroristes, dans la mesure où ils marchent eux à la fascination » [my translation]. Ibid., 129.
terrorism conveyed through the image of the veil can be seen to replace a true threat of terrorism, while transferring, and not annihilating, the meaning of terror onto the veil. In this light, the spectacularity of the image is in line with Guy Debord’s definition of the spectacle, which he stipulates “is not a collection of images, it is a relationship between people that is mediated by images.”111

The collective Retort has convincingly argued that in the aftermath of 9/11, Debord’s twin notions, “the colonization of everyday life” and “the society of the spectacle” still possess explanatory power. Notably, they still help in the political analysis of how the “military-industrial-entertainment complex” has responded to 9/11 with what they call a spectacular politics conducted in the shadow of defeat.112 More specifically, these two key concepts have purchase on how the acts of 9/11 succeeded in delivering a tremendous defeat to the West and its colonizing operations of the world of appearances, the effects of which are crucial for the reproduction of its self-image. The 9/11 attacks followed this imperial capitalist logic: they were designed to be visible above all, and demonstrated how vulnerable the state is at the level of the image.

In the aftermath of the attacks, Canada was likewise represented, both at home and abroad, as being too lenient on border control and immigration. Canada was accused time and again as having let terrorists slip in, opening up the possibility for terrorist acts in Canada and its neighbor, the United States. The working of images such as the ones under discussion here must be seen, in part, as the state’s

attempt to regain control over its image, and by extension, reaffirm political power and legitimacy over its subjects.

This brings me to the question of how such images govern the specularity of the veiled Muslim woman in the immediate context in which such images circulate: primarily, urban Canadian spaces. According to Retort, the spectacle cannot be understood as a disembodied image world distinct from capitalism and materiality. Rather, the “spectacle is an exertion of social power. It does violence to human actors just as much as does the discipline of the production line.”\(^{113}\) Hence, the spectacle contributes to various registers of material production, including the production of subjectivities. In keeping with this argument, I believe the wall of cameras surrounding the two women in the *Montreal Gazette* can also be conceptualized in terms of the Lacanian gaze. The gaze plays a central role, as I argued in chapter one, in the construction and maintenance of the historical specificity of the cultural screen, and by extension, the legibility of subject positions.

*The Specular Image of the Muslim Veil*

Significantly, the metaphor used by Lacan to represent the gaze, which he characterizes as unrepresentable, is the camera. In “What Is a Picture,” Lacan argues that the gaze is most determinant for the subject in the scopic field. He writes:

> What determines me at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which – if you will allow me to use a word, which I often do, in a fragmented form – I am photo-graphed.\(^{114}\)

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\(^{113}\) Ibid., 15.

The gaze is everywhere and nowhere at the same time, and it is often referred to in Lacan’s seminar as light. Analogous to the mechanism of the photographic apparatus, the gaze, in the form of light, has the capacity to both capture and show. Therefore the gaze, like the cameras in the Montreal Gazette’s front-page image, visually arrests that which is in its purview. Referring to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Lacan describes how the gaze is felt as if one were being illuminated or looked at from all sides. In his words, it is a seeing to which I am subjected in the spectacle of the world.115

Moreover, in the act of showing, the gaze simultaneously circumscribes the subject in the form of an envelope or stain, creating the specular image of what it captures, so that it creates the mirror that society holds up to the “photo-graphed” subject. In the newspaper photo, the image that envelops the visible surface of the veiled woman’s body is the stain of terror, a visible connotation of the veil as sign that is mass-produced and disseminated. The gaze thus intersects with Silverman’s cultural screen, insofar as that gaze mediates the collective gaze that renders the subject legible in the visual realm.

115 Ibid., 72.
The specular image therefore necessarily entails processes of projection, identification, and idealization in the ongoing dynamic of subject formation and subjectivation. In other words, the mirror or screen that society holds up to the subject necessitates forms of misrecognition through which we identify others and ourselves. In chapter five, I will discuss mechanisms of idealization involved in the production of normative images of female beauty upheld by the consummate era of fashion. For the moment, I will focus on instances in which the specular image is inimical: that is to say, when the subject is forced to identify, and is identified, with a harmful self-image, as exemplified in the images under discussion.

Frantz Fanon’s account of his experience of blackness in France as a subject of that country’s former colony is relevant to how the veiled woman in these images is stained by the image of Canadian’s society other (the Muslim/terrorist/enemy). In Black Skin, White Masks: The Experiences of a Black Man in a White World, Fanon explains how he was never conscious of his blackness until he found himself in France. Alluding to the gaze through photographic metaphors, Fanon recounts how he became aware of his body’s difference upon arrival in France through the collective gaze that fell upon him. He states, “I stumbled, and the movements and attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye.”¹¹⁶ Most important in Fanon’s description of being subjected to the gaze and the self-consciousness it effects is the frustration that arises out of being reduced to an image, in his case negritude, with which one does not identify. Such an imposed self-image connects with what I called in the previous chapter processes of naming, whereby the subject in all its complexity is reduced to a name. Fanon explains, “The Other gave me a name and thus shattered my

last illusion. [...] In all truth, in all truth I tell you, my shoulders slipped out of the framework of the world, my feet could no longer feel the touch of the ground. Without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood.”

Hence the imposed self-image is experienced in the form of negation: it becomes a form of non-existence, an absence, or in Fanon’s words, an “un-reflected position.”

My point is that the above images, coupled with their captions, operate through the symbolic economy of the spectacle, the performative effect of which enacts violence. They produce a specular image through which veiled women are perceived within the immediate context in which these images circulate. Consequently, these images interpellate the veiled woman in a fixed subject position, leaving her little room to maneuver and negotiate her self-image on her own terms. A passage from Judith Butler’s *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, in which she analyzes the performative dimensions of naming through Althusser’s model of ideological interpellation, adeptly captures the effects of the images of veiled woman during the Brampton court hearings:

Imagine the quite plausible scene in which one is called a name and one turns around only to protest the name; ‘That is not me, you must be mistaken!’ And then imagine that the name continues to force itself upon you, to delineate the space you occupy, to construct a social positionality. Indifferent to your protests, the force of interpellation continues to work. One is still constituted by discourse, but at a distance from oneself. Interpellation is an address that regularly misses its mark.

With this in mind, I return to the staging of an image of a veiled woman in *(un)covering*. The fact that Haq does not wear the veil in her everyday life, yet creates a self-portrait embodying a veiled self, strongly suggests that the performative aspects of

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117 Ibid., 137-138.
118 Ibid., 135.
the ubiquitous use of the Muslim veil in the mass media after 9/11 also affects her specular image in the scopic field. I will thus now address the inherent paradox of the performative dimensions of the images under discussion, and specifically their simultaneous dependency on and vulnerability to acts of repetition. It is in this register that Haq’s piece can be seen to intervene strategically.

To recapitulate, so far I have outlined how the economy of the spectacle participates in the construction of the cultural screen, and by extension, in the creation of the specular image of veiled Muslim women in the symbolic landscape post 9/11. I highlighted the relation between the mass-produced image and the gaze that interpellates the subject—as a specific subject—in the realm of appearances. In the following section I address how these operations are at once dependent upon their media platforms, and hence on acts of repetition, and at the same time made vulnerable by the possibility of failure or something new inserting itself in the act of reiteration. I focus explicitly on Haq’s strategic, intermedial use of video, which clearly evokes the medium of photography, and specifically, the genre of self-portraiture. Such intermedial allusions allow Haq to tap into what Amelia Jones calls the “photographic paradox.” Jones’ theorization of the self-image in contemporary art and technology, as we will see, provides insightful points of entry into how the self-portrait is being mobilized here. With particular attention to how repetition comes into play in multiple ways in *(un)covering*, and a close reading of the deliberate orchestration of the gaze inside and outside the image, I argue that in *(un)covering*, Haq inscribes herself into the visible in a new way: through an act that gestures towards an un-reflected subject position in the cultural screen.
The Self-Portrait and the Photographic Paradox

Although (un)covering is a five-minute video piece, its fixed-frame composition is undeniably photographic. In their respective histories of photography, which are among the earliest theoretical reflections on this medium of technological reproduction, both Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin address the concomitant emergence of photography and a distinct preoccupation with, and democratization of, the genre of portraiture. Jones’ reflection on the self-portrait in Self/Image: Technology, Representation and the Contemporary Subject provides an insightful explanation for this historical flourishing of the genre. Her analysis repeatedly returns to what she identifies as an inherent paradox of the photographic medium: its simultaneous death- and life-giving characteristics.

Kracauer’s essay, “Photography,” theorizes what is lost in the photographic image. Kracauer contrasted the photograph, in which time is transformed into a spatialization of life, with what he called a “memory image.” The memory image is defined as a mental image, consciousness’ manner for recollecting life. It is a person’s actual history and it is precisely this aspect that “passes without return” in the photograph. For Kracauer, “the old photograph has been emptied of the life whose physical presence overlay its merely spatial configuration. In inverse proportion to photographs, memory images enlarge themselves into monograms of remembered life.”

Resonating with this earlier essay, Roland Barthes’ treatise on photography, La chambre claire, explains that the photograph bears an indexical reference to its subject of

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representation in the form of a this-has-been.¹²¹ Implicit in this reference is a this-is-no-more, and hence, an evocation of loss. The photo-graphing of the subject therefore occurs at the expense of a micro-death of that subject, the body of which is frozen in time and representational form. The shots of the veiled woman in the Brampton court hearings function in this way. The veil is meant to index an event visibly, with a certain truth claim, a this-as-been: a terrorist plot in Canada. The death-dealing blow of the act of photographing coheres with my analysis of how the veiled women are captured, reproduced, and widely disseminated as symbols: in the process, their subjecthood is negated.

In Benjamin’s “Little History of Photography,” there is already a seed of the theory he will later develop in his unfinished Arcades Project as the dialectical image: an image that has the capacity to reactivate the past in the present. In reference to a double portrait of the photographer Karl Dauthendey and his young fiancée, who would later commit suicide, Benjamin asserts that the beholder

feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, the here and now, with which reality has (so to speak) seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment, the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it.¹²²

The possibility of reactivation in the encounter with the photograph provides the theoretical ground upon which Jones elaborates the life-giving characteristics of photography. In his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin theorizes the democratization of the image insofar as the work of art is now

brought closer to the masses, allowing the viewer to encounter the image in his or her own context. Jones uses this argument as the starting point for an understanding of how this encounter reactivates the reproduced object/subject, extending its life through successive instances of interpretation. The encounter with the photograph opens onto an ethical relation based on the contingency of the represented and viewing subjects. The life-giving facets of the photograph therefore consist in its very reproducibility, circulation, and open-ended interpretations. Jones locates the potential for artistic intervention and agency with regard to self-representation in the site of reactivation, quoting Derrida’s understanding of the continual process of subject formation in relation to the eternal return. He writes, “[The subject] has no relation to him [her]self that is not forced to defer itself by passing through the other in the form…of the eternal return.”123

Significantly, this resonates with the agency that Butler attributes to the performative nature of speech acts such as naming. According to her, speech acts are at once dependent upon and opened up to their own vulnerability through repetition. Coming back to the violence that occurs in the act of being named, she states:

The terms by which we are hailed are rarely the ones we choose (and even when we try to impose protocols on how we are to be named, they usually fail); but these terms we never really choose are the occasion for something we might still call agency, the repetition of an originary subordination for another purpose, one whose future is partially open.124

(un)covering takes as its starting point the photographic paradox. By reiterating the image of the Muslim veil, Haq deliberately interpellates the specular image: the collective mental image that society holds up to her and through which she is perceived socially. To be sure, the specular image is a stereotype, a photographic cliché. There is precariousness in this invocation of the stereotype because of the very fact that it calls forth what we believe we already possess in terms of knowledge. Deleuze has discussed how the cliché is always a subtractive image through which we seize a select amount of information. Faced with the cliché, he argues, the beholder takes in only that which she has an interest in seeing:

A cliché is a sensory-motor image of the thing. As Bergson says, we do not perceive the thing or the image in its entirety, we always perceive less of it, we perceive only what we are interested in perceiving, or rather what it is in our interest to perceive, by virtue of our economic interests, ideological beliefs and psychological demands. We therefore normally perceive only clichés.  

Aware of this reductive process of viewing stereotypical images, Haq repeats the cliché in a very calculated manner. Her tactic of repetition takes the form of an intervention into the specular image, whereby the image of the Muslim veil interpellates the cliché only to hold the viewer there, in front of it, asking her to keep looking. This is when a second register of repetition appears in full force: the slow, measured performance of Haq wrapping the black cloth around her body, gradually retracing the (self-)image of a Muslim woman. Haq consequently evokes the death-dealing aspect of

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the portrait only to allow the life-giving facet to take over through a repetitive gesture that introduces the intrinsic temporal qualities of video into the frame.

As I discussed above, in its incipient moments, photography brought about a democratization of the image, and notably, the portrait. In Benjamin’s essay the proliferation of the portrait went hand in hand with and bears witness to the emergence of a collective self: the emergence of a class coming into being. The first artistic experiments with video, by contrast, stood at a remove from the mainstream use of the medium as an information technology, focusing rather on the psychological processes the medium exposes in relation to the self-image.

Beginning with Rosalind Krauss’s seminal essay “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” many theorists have articulated the narcissistic disposition of the medium’s technological structure. The simultaneous projection (camera) and reception (monitor) of the image opens up psychic conduits, according to Krauss, which enable the artist to encounter her self-image in the form of a “mirror reflection.” Raymond Bellour has also articulated the predisposition of the videographic medium to the self-portrait, whereby the live-time feedback allows the artist to stage a *mise-en-scène* in which a “*qui suis-je?* ” (“who am I?”) is posited and played out.

Finally, Stuart Marshall has theorized the medium’s solipsistic lure, stating that with video, the subject can position herself at a distance as an object for immediate contemplation, and consequently, “The artist confronts both equipment and image of the self, and it is at this point that the curiosity of the artist about the medium

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becomes subverted into a curiosity about the relationship of the subject to its representations.”

These early theoretical propositions—which address the opportunities offered by the videographic medium for explorations of the self through representation—clearly pertain to what is at stake in (un)covering. Most pertinent is the recurring claim that the staged confrontation with the self-image is always one of struggle, which elicits the awareness that the subject can never coincide with her own self-image. And yet, within these theories, the relationship between the subject and medium (or self-image) is envisioned as a tautology: thus foreclosing the possibility of an engagement with the specular image, which I have argued is located outside the represented image, in the realm of the gaze.

This tautological relation between the artist and her image is most forcefully articulated in Krauss’s use of the term “narcissism” to characterize the feedback mechanism of video. Krauss proposes the total self-absorption of the subject of representation in his/her self-reflected image. In her analysis of work by Vito Acconci, Nancy Holt, Lynda Benglis, Joan Jonas, and Peter Campus, she argues that these works reveal, in different ways, the process of the subject being bracketed from the outside world. The camera, the monitor, and the instant feedback between the two create a parenthesis in which the artist finds herself in a state of self-encapsulation. This structure is a purely psychic condition that is experienced, in Krauss’ words, as a collapsed present. She writes:

In all these examples, the nature of video performance is specified as an activity of bracketing out of the text and substituting it for a mirror-reflection. The result of this substitution is the presentation of a self understood to have no past, and as well, no connection with any objects that are external to it. For the double that appears on the monitor cannot be called a true external object.\textsuperscript{129}

Whereas the struggle and frustration that emerges out of the subject’s encounter with her self-image is clearly attached to internalized mechanisms of projection, identification, and idealization, Krauss’s schematization of the self-portrait in video does not postulate how the subject can actively intervene at the level of the specular image, which is outside the material image and invested by the gaze. Rather, the mirror reflection between the monitor and the psyche is conceived as a prison, which the artist is consigned to without possibility of escape. On this question, Haq’s artistic practice and the theoretical work of Jones can be seen to depart significantly from earlier theorizations and artistic experiments with videographic self-imaging; instead, a distinct politics of dis-identification comes into being.

This political intervention occurs in the moment that (un)covering brings about a slippage from one register of the photographic paradox to another, and from one form of repetition to another. Just as Jonas, Campus, et al. mentioned above, Haq engages with her own image, and yet, the insertion of the veil—which she does not don on a daily basis—allows the outside to penetrate what is given to be seen. By introducing a distinct reference to the Muslim veil, Haq demonstrates how the cultural screen and the cliché of the veiled Muslim woman mediates her self-image. And yet, crucially, unlike the earlier videos, Haq is not seen struggling with her self-image. For the duration of the

\textsuperscript{129} Krauss, “Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism,” 55.
piece, the artist calmly and decisively wraps one layer of black cloth around her head and shoulders after another, willfully inscribing herself into the visible, using the weight of the repetitive gesture to open the cliché onto something new. This new element comes into being through the form of a struggle, but it is a struggle that occurs elsewhere, not within the image. The struggle is located outside the image, or more precisely, between the image and its reception. In \textit{(un)covering} it is the viewer who becomes the locus of struggle and frustration. It is this evocation of the other through processes of self-imaging that was left unarticulated in the early theorizations of the self-portrait in video. I now turn to this aspect in \textit{(un)covering}, which allows me to address the politics of dis-identification at play in the work, concurring with Derrida’s claim that “[the subject] has no relation to himself [or herself] that is not forced to defer itself by passing through the other.”\textsuperscript{130}

\textit{The Politics of the Faciality Machine, the Close-Up of the Face and the Productive Look}

I will now address the ways in which the tightly framed image of Haq’s face in \textit{(un)covering} inevitably calls forth the Deleuzian concepts of the “faciality machine” and the close-up of the face, or the affection-image. In \textit{A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia}, Deleuze and Guattari speak of the face as the site where two semantic regimes are made to intersect in accordance with an abstract faciality machine. In this schema, one axis consists of the white wall of the face, which provides the surface onto which the regime of significance inscribes its signifiers. The second axis is found in the face’s orifices, which provide the black

\textsuperscript{130} Jacques Derrida qtd. in Amelia Jones, \textit{Self/Image}, 35.
holes where “conscious passions and redundancies” are lodged.\textsuperscript{131} The faciality machine, it must be noted, operates in other phenomena besides faces, so long as these two axes coincide. What is crucial is how the faciality machine produces a grid that governs the legibility of the white wall/black hole system.

Although the two authors explicitly state that the faciality machine must be understood as prior to the Lacanian gaze, it is striking that they refer to it in one instance as a “camera,” and in another, as a “third-eye.” Although there are crucial differences in the overall theoretical projects, especially with regards to the institution of psychoanalysis, the faciality machine and its grid operate in very similar ways to Silverman’s cultural screen, whereby given data is subjected to the workings of a distinct economy and organization of power:

Faces are not basically individual; they define zones of frequency and probability, delimit a field that neutralizes in advance any expressions or connections unamenable to the appropriate significations. Similarly, the form of subjectivity, whether consciousness of passion, would remain absolutely empty if faces did not form a loci of resonance select the sensed or mental reality and make it conform in advance to a dominant reality.\textsuperscript{132}

The faciality machine, like the cultural screen, collapses singularities into normativities, turning the face into a form of redundancy. Furthermore, the authors assert that the faciality machine is not universal, but rather takes Christ’s white, male face as its degree zero, or the standard according to which all other faces are compared and judged in terms of “biunivocalities” and “bina-rities.”


\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 168.
In this logic, the economy of the faciality machine is clearly a politics of identification. To return to (un)covering, the faciality machine provides three lines of differentiation according to which Haq’s face is produced, read, and categorized in relation to the white face of Christ: she is female as opposed to male, dark as opposed to white, and Muslim as opposed to Judeo-Christian. What I want to stress here, and what I will return to in the next section of this chapter, is how these axes of difference cannot be seen as intensifications of a singular digression; nor is one reducible to the other. Each axis is singular and comes into being through distinct organizations of difference and signifying chains that have their respective conditions of possibility. What is less clear in the articulation of the faciality machine as grid is how the different signifying chains and axes intersect and inflect each other in complex ways. Ania Loomba reminds us that in the instance of the colonial woman (undiably an important subtext in the reading of the Muslim veil), race and colonial difference are both produced and split by gender differences.133 Further on I will address, through a feminist approach, the manifold registers of difference that come into play in (un)covering, and how we need to address them separately, and ideally on their own terms, to understand better how the various registers of othering are in a continual state of mutual constitution and transformation.

For now, what is crucial is how, according to this conceptualization, the face is itself a politics, which implies, in Deleuze and Guattari’s words, that “dismantling the face is also a politics involving real becomings.”134 The two authors suggest that in order to unsettle the face, recourse to the program of schizo-analysis is required,

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whereby the wall of significance is broken and one leaves the black hole of subjectivity in order to trace new lines of flight. This program might seem abstract when it comes to putting it into practice; therefore, I believe a more productive site for my analysis of what is taking place in (un) covering with regard to the faciality machine is to shift the discussion to Deleuze’s theorization of the close-up of the face in cinema, which deals specifically with the inherent qualities of images.

In *Cinema I: The Movement Image*, Deleuze delineates the equivalence between the cinematic images of the close-up, the face, and the affection-image. Although he clearly states that the affection-image is both a type of image and a component of all images, what the affection-image, close-up, and face possess to a higher degree than other images is the co-presence of two poles: a motor tendency and a sensitive nerve. Deleuze evokes the image of a clock to illustrate the latter operations. The hands of the clock represent the motor tendency that initiates an intensive series of micro-movements, and in this sense, the motor tendency is associated with power. The face of the clock, like the sensitive nerves of a body, constitutes a receptive plate that may be inscribed, reflecting the quality of the micro-movement of the hands. In this way, the micro-movements do not extend into action, but rather enter into a series of intensifications that are expressed as a quality on the immobilized plate. Affect occurs, according to Deleuze, each time these two poles are present in an image. They reroute its potential to extend into action by foregrounding the image’s expressive qualities, the gradual intensification of which culminates in the crossing of a qualitative threshold. Consequently, when such components are present in the image—whether it depicts a face or not—it is as if the image has been “faceified,”
as Deleuze calls it, and the viewer feels as though the image looks back or stares at her.135

I make this excursus into Deleuze’s theory of the image of the face not only because (un)covering is composed of a tightly framed image of the artist’s face, but also because this theory highlights an important aspect of Haq’s piece: the entire image functions as an affection-image, and hence, as a face that looks back. In (un)covering, the hands of the clock—the motor tendency that consists of micro-movements and the power behind the image—is the repetitive gesture of veiling. The perpetual wrapping of cloth around the body gradually traces an outline that becomes thicker as the piece progresses. The line is inscribed onto the white surfaced image, which serves as its sensitive nerve, and which expresses an overall quality: serenity and self-composure. With the gradual tracing of the figure, that which comes to be circumscribed and intensified is not a clear subject position, but rather the subject’s very looking back, or at least her looking out beyond the frame. It is this intense look that engages and transgresses a threshold: a transgression that is felt by the visitor.

Certainly, the image of the veiled Muslim woman triggers the faciality machine, or what I have been referring to as the cultural screen, and specifically, the cliché of the veiled Muslim woman. However, the image that continues to unfold in time through the unremitting gesture of veiling gains intensity, forcing itself upon the viewer. This persistence of the image disables reductive associations imposed by the faciality machine, including historical associations and acts of naming, such as the identification of the figure of the veiled woman as terrorist or victim. Common-sense readings of the

image are completely defamiliarized. Even though the overall quality of what takes place is calm and composed, the visitor is jarred by the gradual undoing of what she thought she knew. The faceified image is experienced as frustration: a struggle for meaning.

What looks back at the viewer, then, is an image that is out of joint with Haq’s specular image. It is in this regard that Haq engenders a strategic intervention that puts distance between her and the cultural screen—a distance that could only be negotiated by passing outside the image, both by interpellating the cultural screen and by rerouting the visitor’s act of perception. I maintain, recalling Jones’s central thesis, that Haq successfully supplements her specular image with an image of an “un-reflected position,” by evoking a politics of identification that is negated by the performance of a self that does not fit the grid. This induces, in Laura Mark’s vivid term, “a stranded eyeball,” or a look that proves unable to draw on viewers’ resources of common sense.136

*(un)covering* can therefore be said to interpellate what Silverman calls a productive look from the viewer. Thus far in this study I have addressed the gaze, which I have reiterated does not belong to the perceiving subject or the image, but rather is both prior and outside them. In its metaphorical form of light, the gaze is that which shows. The look, by contrast, is equated with the human eye and vision. The look is therefore located within the spectacle of the gaze, as well as embodied in the subject and her temporality of desire.137 In this manner, the look is the subject’s discriminatory faculty at work in the realm of vision and is intimately connected to the construction of subjectivity and notions of difference. It involves trajectories of

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projection, identification, and idealization, and hence, of misrecognition. Consequently, whereas the gaze shows, the look apprehends what is “given-to-be-seen.” Subjected to the gaze and embodied in the subject of desire, the look is not conceived as the transcendental mastering faculty of the perceiving subject articulated in the Western tradition of Cartesian enlightenment—in fact, far from it.

Silverman emphasizes the look’s tremendous difficulty in circumventing ways of seeing that are prescribed in advance, to see something new in the realm of vision that is not already pre-given by the spectacle of the world. To avoid this, she maintains, the look has to be interpellated by a set of alternative imperatives, and here she claims that art plays a crucial role. In her opinion, art has the capacity to evoke a productive look, which can be made to see in new ways that trouble the viewer’s relation to the cultural screen, and by extension, the relation of the self to the other that it mediates. For this to happen, the work has to enter into the complex networks of the unconscious and the memory trajectories of the perceiving subject. The artwork, as we have begun to see is the case with (un)covering, has to block the backward path of preexisting associations that constitute the remembering web, and introduce the “not me” into the perceiving “I’s” memory reserve. In such cases, something new is conjured, provoking a significant displacement of the perceiving subject, and as a result, a realignment of the self-other relation.

To summarize, in the first section of this chapter my objective was to demonstrate the intimate connection between the Debordian notion of the spectacle and the construction of the specular image of subjects in the visual realm. This connection,

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138 Ibid.
139 Ibid., 185.
I argue, is crucial for a political analysis of how the image of the Muslim veil is used in the politics of representation involved in the War on Terror. I highlighted how technologies of image reproduction tied to print media platforms are the tools by which the spectacle/specular image act upon the subject, as well as the site for agency, whereby the act of reproduction in the form of repetition can enable the emergence of something other than shown. I demonstrated that in (un)covering, Haq effects a politics of dis-identification with her specular image largely circumscribed by the spectacular coverage of the War on Terror, by working through the photographic paradox inherent to the piece’s intermedial nature. Haq at once mobilizes the death-dealing and life-giving features of the photographic medium, in order to tap into the crucial register of perception and interpretation that occurs outside the image and provides the site for the cliché’s reactivation and disruption. With this gesture, Haq moves away from the “this has been” aspect of the photograph, which repeats an existing subject position, and uses the temporality of the video to supplement the specular image with an embodied performance of an incipient subject. The performance of an unknown subject position—and its relation to what I have articulated as a productive “look,” predicated upon the intrusion of the other into my (lack of) memory—provides the basis for a feminist gesture in (un)covering, which I will address in the following section.
3.2: The Urban Veil as Para-Feminist Impulse

In this section, my objective is to move away from the performativity of the spectacle in relation to the specular image of the veiled Muslim woman in (un)covering, and consider the performative work accomplished by the embodied practice of veiling. My aim is to eschew the central position accorded to visibility in historical and contemporary controversies surrounding the veil. Visual operations and their attending spatializing effects that subtend the working of the image-as-veil, as I have argued, foreclose a reading of the invisible and multifaceted work that the veil carries out for the women who choose or are forced to don it as a daily practice. I argue that the mise-en-scène of the act of veiling in Haq’s piece gestures towards the embodied facet of the practice of veiling and its relation to the non-visible processes of subject formation that it entails. More importantly, I propose that looking at the image of the veil from the site of embodied performativity shifts the discussion to a terrain that pointedly addresses the practice of veiling on its own terms. In this way, I suggest
that \textit{(un)covering} can be read as a type of para-feminism, a concept that I borrow in part from Amelia Jones. While it is surely not the intention of the artist, I believe that Haq’s piece intervenes into hegemonic discourses of liberal feminism, significantly troubling some of their main presuppositions with regard to feminism, religion, and the practice of veiling. In this way, in keeping with Jones’s notion of para-feminism and its link to what she calls a politics of positionality, \textit{(un)covering} works to expose “the circuits of power through which subjects are identified and so positioned in culture, and/or the glorious articulation of sexualized bodies across a range of femininities.”\textsuperscript{140}

Drawing on Jones’s definition of para-feminism, I argue that Haq initiates a politics of dis-identification, this time with tropes of liberal feminism, and thereby intervenes into its discourses from the outside, renegotiating feminist tenets according to an alternate set of terms.

The cover image of a \textit{québécois} feminist magazine, \textit{La vie en rose}, will serve as the starting point to examine how the War on Terror reactivated colonial and militaristic discourses that have mobilized putatively feminist stance to legitimize imperial actions and agendas in the Middle East. Returning to the spatializing operations of the image-as-veil, I will demonstrate how the status of the (veiled) Muslim woman has been used to map modern democratic liberal societies based on their commitment to progressive forms of sexuality. An analysis of the magazine cover that uses the \textit{burqa} as a trope for women’s oppression exposes the highly problematic appropriation of such an image within the local context, and the assumptions it encourages regarding veiled women in that location. By putting the image in conversation with a photograph by the artist Poulomi Desai, I will signal the

heteronormative and self-serving underpinnings of such purported feminist stances. Further, I suggest that even as Desai reveals the terms of the debate by transgressing them, she fails to disrupt its architecture in a significant way.

Employing the theoretical work of cultural anthropologist Saba Mahmood to address the embodied practice of veiling in *uncovering* enables the articulation of a (religious) feminist stance at odds with traditions of liberal feminism. This movement entails coming back to Silverman’s notion of a “productive look” in combination with Laura Marks’s notion of intercultural cinema, where two regimes of knowledge are seen to intersect and displace the visitor. The visitor’s lack of cultural memory is transformed into a site of knowledge production.

The Feminist Stance of (Neo) Imperialism

The resurgence of the benevolent white person’s attempt to save “brown women from brown men” supported claims that sought to legitimize foreign intervention and presence in Iraq and Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11. One such example of renewed interest in the plight of women in Afghanistan is found in the full-length portrait of a woman in a burqa on the cover of the fall 2005 special edition of the québécois feminist magazine La vie en rose: Le magazine féministe d’actualité. The pose of the veiled figure reenacts Sam Shaw’s infamous 1954 portrait of Marilyn Monroe standing among the floating pleats of her white dress above a subway grate. Here, it is the swaying blue folds of the burqa that are lifted by a gust of wind, exposing a pair of slender legs in open-toed, black high heels and a fine pedicure of red nails. The accompanying headline states: “The feminist magazine of the eighties has not said its last word.” Juxtaposed in this cover image are two opposing, culturally specific tropes of women’s oppression: the commodified, hyper-visible exposed female body in liberal capitalist consumer society, and the concealment of the female body by the burqa under the fundamentalist Islamic regime in Afghanistan.

The image suggests that the lessons regarding power relations undergirding notions of “global sisterhood” still have not been learned. Or at least it confirms that when it comes to the veiled Muslim woman, her status as ultimate victim of male oppression is so widespread and unquestioned that she can easily serve as its universal symbol. To be sure, the equation between the oppression of women in a Western liberal

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141 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 93.
142 “Le Magazine féministe des années 1980 n’avait pas dit son dernier mot” [my translation].
143 The widely used slogan from the seventies most notably problematized by bell hooks, Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism (Boston: South End Press, 1981).
democratic society with the oppression of women under a specific regime in the Middle East is highly problematic. First, it levels the many factors that structure one’s experience and subjectivity as a woman and person—namely the numerous positions one occupies within specific contexts, in terms of class, race, cultural forms of belonging, and even the wide-ranging sexual identifications that women can inhabit—to a single position: that of being a victim of patriarchy. Hence, such an equation is myopic concerning the numerous textures of differentiality at play in the formation of subjecthood, smoothing them out into one assumed subject position. Moreover, such an equation adheres to, in the words of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, a “cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy.”

Secondly, presenting female oppression as universally shared obliterates the inherent historical structures of dominance between the represented tropes of femininity. Present global power relations between the two cultures is what enables the hegemonic Western feminists, here French Canadian women, to appropriate fundamentally different experiences as being in keeping with their own set of struggles and agendas. This appropriation of the Muslim woman’s experience is all the more paradoxical in light of how these feminists have internalized the feminist position historically promoted by Western imperialism, which is a masculine and militaristic stance at its core.

Furthermore, feminists who subscribe to Western, liberal assumptions concerning progress, modernization, and universalism that subtend this civilizing attitude render invisible the role that colonial and imperial expansion has played in their historical emergence as individual, emancipated subjects. This dissimulating feminist position is at work in the cover image of *La vie en rose*, which inevitably extends its support for the Euro-American, militarist utilization of the plight of Afghan women at that time. To be sure, these images do little, if anything, to better the conditions of women in Afghanistan. The reiteration of their fate nevertheless reconfirms the liberated, Western feminist’s achievement as a norm and goal that has yet to be reached elsewhere. All the more troubling is how the conditions and ongoing struggles of First Nations women in Canada and the harsh economic, political, and domestic violence to which they are subjected—which is directly connected to Canada’s history of colonization—are completely neglected in the content of the magazine. My point is that in this cover image of *La vie en rose*, Western feminist ideals are reaffirmed and masqueraded as the universal norm. Such a cover image reaffirms the integrity of the Western feminist subject, while simultaneously disavowing her complicity in oppressive structures of dominance towards other women.

Finally, and most important to the overall arguments of this study regarding the image-as-veil and its attending spatializing operations, this image co-opts imaginary geographies. The image implicitly points to women’s oppression “here” (the reference

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to Monroe as an American icon and emblem of the commodification of the female body) and “there” (once again, the distinct use of not just any veil but the *burqa*).

Hence, the geographic indexing that the photo enacts not only reduces wide-ranging diversity and singularities to two geographically specific tropes, but also re-inscribes cartographic trajectories representing progressive/suppressed sexuality, in which the veiled Muslim woman has repeatedly played the negative signifier. The incorporation of feminism into the West’s colonial effort to delegitimize Islamic countries as uncivilized and backward has had the result of transforming the status of women into a kind of map-making device that differentiates progressive, modern secular societies from traditional, religious ones. For example, and as Leila Ahmed has pointed out, some of the first feminists in the Middle East, notably in Turkey and Egypt, were actually male political leaders who saw the emancipation of women via reforms (such as in education and governance of clothing) as a crucial means for the modernization of their countries and for joining the international community of modern, liberal nation-states.\(^{147}\)

Such mappings of sexual politics continue in the present, as evidenced in current debates surrounding certain countries’ entrance into the European Union, notably Turkey. These spatial inscriptions go hand in hand with temporal modes of mapping, a coupling that I discussed more extensively in the previous chapter. I will simply add here that this utilization of feminism, with its built-in notions of sexual progress and freedom, are underscored by a political contestation over time. In her recent article,

“Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time,” Judith Butler writes of a secular organization of time in which “hegemonic conceptions of progress define themselves over and against a pre-modern temporality that they produce for the purpose of their own self-legitimation.”

Reinscribing imaginary geographies on the cover of a feminist magazine distributed almost solely within the province of Quebec reaffirms these spatial and temporal cartographies of sexuality, depreciating the possibility of more intricate and textured mappings, which would reflect intersecting positions that occur within the immediate context. Within the semantic framework that this cover image upholds, how can one situate the veiled Muslim woman in Quebec, where women are not forced to veil, and often adopt the religious practice by choice?

In *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Jasbir K. Puar, provides pertinent insights to this question through her theorization of the sexual politics constructed through the War on Terror. Puar addresses how cartographies that have traditionally been mapped according to commitments to feminism are now being reinscribed by narratives of homonormativity. Just as the West has customarily presented itself as feminist in relation to Muslim countries, now countries such as France, Canada, Britain and the United States are portrayed as gay-safe compared to Muslim majority countries.

More importantly for my study, Puar demonstrates how the current politics of liberal sexuality is not only utilized to reinscribe imaginary geographies in which

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Europe and North America are positioned as the progressive center; progressive sexualities are also coerced to articulate and map new forms of national belonging and exclusion within these countries. As was the case with the rise of white women into the status of emancipated subjects, the current domestication of homosexuality supports what Rey Chow has referred to as a “white male ascendancy.” Within the current political landscape, those who approximate and support the white affluent male as norm possess what is necessary to enter the polity, while racialized and forms of sexuality perceived as errant mark the outside of the national community. The veiled woman assumed to be sexually oppressed, and the male terrorist, who is frequently portrayed as practicing deviant forms of homosexuality, are the prime examples of the latter. To put it simply, liberal, secular states currently mobilize women’s and gay rights to launch cultural assaults against Islam.

These narratives and correlative mappings of progressive sexuality posit religion as the primary motivating force behind the Muslim’s sexually conservative or errant body. Citing various research studies undertaken in the United States that seek to explain the individual and group psychology of terrorists, Puar stresses how religion is represented in these documents—through the lens of liberal secularism—as the antithesis of modernity and rationality. She writes:

Religious belief is thus cast, in relation to the other factors fueling terrorism, as the overflow, the final excess that impels monstrosity – the ‘different attitude toward violence’ signaling these uncivilizable forces. Difference itself is pathological. In the liberal secular imaginary, religion is always already pathological.\footnote{Ibid., 55.}
What I want to emphasize here, via the astute analyses proposed by Puar, is the complex interrelationship between diverse axes of differentiation (sexuality, race, class, and religion) and how these axes inflect each other according to hegemonic systems of articulation at a specific moment in time and place. Discourses subtending the War on Terror are seen to promote forms of sexuality that corroborate specific modes of consumption, and hence class, as well as whiteness, against racialized, lower-class, and sexually deviant bodies that do not support white male ascendancy as the norm. Furthermore, this multifaceted process that creates and marks the terrorist body is conflated with liberal, secular assumptions that depict religion as a fundamentally premodern, irrational, and static force.

What Puar also highlights—crucially, for my discussion of embodied practice in the work of (un)covering—is how the particular constellation of these axes of differentiation encode what can be called liberatory or agential stances within a given cultural context and historical moment. Pertinent here is Puar’s discussion of a photograph by the London-based artist Poulomi Desai. The photograph depicts a young, Middle Eastern man dressed in a Muslim cleric’s garb with a long, fake beard, looking directly at the viewer through a pair of slightly tinted glasses, and holding up a protest sign: “I am a homosexual also.”
The image evokes the Orientalist imaginary of male homosexuality in Arab culture, and more recently, terrorist forms of sexual deviancy from homonormativity. That said, the ambiguous referent of “also” upsets the very framework of such a reading. On one hand the “also” seems to say, “just like you,” interpellating the non-Muslim homosexual outside the frame and frustrating the antinomy set up between Islam and liberal sexual politics. On the other hand, the “also” can be aligned with the racial and clearly religious other in the image, implying that he is Muslim and gay, signaling a transgression, or resistance to, what are assumed to be Muslim codes of sexuality.

Puar maintains that the disruptive force of Desai’s image lies in its unabashed assertion that religion, spirituality, and faith are the ultimate downfall of any rational politics. I would argue, to the contrary, that like the image on the cover of *La vie en rose*, the juxtaposition of two allegedly irreconcilable positions does not so much trouble the antinomy set up between them as it demonstrates that for the Muslim to have any sort of legitimate sexuality, he/she must support the dominant norms of the
liberal, secular context through an approximation of those norms. By extension, the Muslim subject must be seen to transgress or resist the ostensibly conservative logic and sexual codes of Islam. In this case there is not a disruption of sexual politics, I argue, but rather a politics of inversion at work, as is articulated at the beginning of this chapter with reference to Shryock’s notion of the good and bad Muslim.

I will now return to my earlier question regarding imaginary geographies and their work within the local context inscribed in the cover of the québecois feminist magazine. According to the current sexual politics corroborating the War on Terror, which I maintain functions as a subtext of this image, the veiled Muslim woman in Quebec can only be understood as a embodying a regressive, non-liberated, religiously prescribed form of sexuality, which is associated with a foreign culture, temporality, and location, and devoid of any agency.

The paradox is, of course, that within this liberal, democratic context, one has the freedom of choice regarding one’s sexual orientation and one’s religion. However, if the expression of one’s religion does not align with the current sexual politics, then regardless of one’s right to choose, one will be deemed as having made the wrong decision. When it comes to the practice of veiling, Western feminists are often the most critical of the religious practice, even expressing repulsion. In a recent article in the Montreal daily Le Devoir, the journalist Claireandrée Cauchy recounts how the veiled women that she interviewed in this city spoke of receiving looks, predominantly from women, that betray pity and are often accompanied by the question “Is it your
husband who forces you to wear that?” And yet, according to research carried out by the cultural anthropologist Homa Hoodfar, among second-generation Canadian Muslim university students, out of sixty-nine women between the ages of eighteen and thirty-two who wore the veil, only six of their mothers also don the veil. Many of these women are not yet married and veil against the wishes of their parents.

These women deliberately choose the veil and cover their bodies as a daily religious practice. This praxis does not sit well with the liberal feminist movements to liberate the body from patriarchal constraints, which Haq’s unremitting look and slow, deliberate action in (un)covering reflects. How can a subject position that willingly embraces what is deemed to represent non-progressive forms of sexuality and the subjection to a patriarchal tradition be conceived in terms other than the dominant politics of sexuality articulated here—a politics that strips the practicing women of individual agency and disregards the meanings that the daily ritual has for them? In the next section, I bring (un)covering into dialog with the theoretical work of Rosi Braidotti and Saba Mahmood to uncover, as it were, the embodied and invisible work that the practice of veiling operates at the level of subject formation. In this way, my argument coincides with a dominant site of post-structural feminist concerns, while aiming to renegotiate liberal feminism’s main assumptions significantly through the close analysis of a religious practice on its own terms.

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(Un)covering, Al-hayā, and the Embodied Facets of Pious Subject Formation

In her own description of the piece, Haq alludes to the act of repeatedly wrapping the black cloth around her shoulders and head, which I have argued is the intensive series of movements that structures the entire piece: the “performance becomes a drawing as the fabric becomes a line that fills the space.” This analogy between the performance and the idea of drawing is crucial to the main arguments of this chapter. In the first instance, and in line with my argument in the first part of the chapter, it alludes to the idea of drawing an un-reflected position into the realm of the visible. Secondly, it can be seen to corroborate what I outlined as an aesthetics of the veil in chapter one (and which I will return to below), calling forth the notion of calligraphy and writing that plays a central role in Islamic aesthetics and interpellates a mode of viewing that is analogous to reading. Finally, the notion of drawing speaks to the inscriptive work that the practice of veiling operates in a process of self-realization, and hence, subject formation: it renders tangible the invisible labor that the practice of veiling carries out for the Muslim woman. It is to this form of drawing that I first turn, by examining the distinctly embodied, as opposed to symbolic, role the veiled body plays in (un)covering; the notion of repetition as a form of inscription upon the embodied subject; and finally, the different modality of agency that is at work in the piece.

Although Haq suggests that in (un)covering, the black cloth is used as a tracing line that gradually fills the space of the image, the body is clearly its explicit site of inscription. I want to stress the significant shift from the predominant use in media culture of the veiled Muslim woman as a visual sign to the performance of embodied subjectivity that occurs here: the body is clearly not a sign but a means; it is the site

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through which the subject carries out a cultural and religious practice. In “Embodiment, Sexual Difference, and the Nomadic Subject,” philosopher and feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti advocates for a new style of feminist writing in the wake of post-structuralist thought: a style that takes embodiment as its starting point for rethinking subjectivity and sexual difference.154

Grounding feminist thought in embodied subjectivity, as “a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological”155 attends, in the first place, to the subject’s situatedness: the conditions of possibility specific to the politics of her socio-political context. In this way, the category of woman is not a universal, but becomes “the site of multiple, complex, and potentially contradictory sets of experience, defined by overlapping variables.”156 In the second place, embodied subjectivity necessarily involves a shift away from the rational subject, which plays a key role in liberal thought, to the central role that desire plays in subject formation. As will be discussed further below, desire in this understanding is not predicated on lack, as in psychoanalysis. Rather, it is conceived as a creative force motivating self-realization: a desire to become. According to Braidotti:

The notion of desire in this configuration is not a prescriptive one: the desire to become and to speak as feminist subjects does not entail the specific content of women’s speech. What is being empowered is women’s entitlement to speak, not the propositional content of their utterances. What I want to focus on is women’s desire to become, not a specific model for their becoming.157

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155 Ibid., 7.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid., 6.
The performance taking place in *un*covering, the act of veiling, can be understood as adhering to such a feminist style of writing. With this claim, I do not intend to suggest that Haq has specific feminist intentions or agendas underlying the piece. Rather, it is my argument that the piece itself speaks of the embodied position of a woman at the crossroads of overlapping and contradictory conditions of possibility. Furthermore, there is an acute expression that permeates the work of a desire to become. It is the combination of the situatedness, and hence the politics of location, together with the expression of a desire for self-realization—through the conditions of possibility of that situated position—that I maintain invokes and renegotiates a feminist stance.

First of all, the ritualistic act taking place by Haq in *un*covering can in no way be seen as passive or submissive, as many liberal feminists would have it. Every movement is carried out with the outmost concentration and precision, as if Haq were rehearsing or disciplining her body. Her look is focused, it stares almost past the viewer, as if carefully observing that each repetitive act of veiling measures up to what she is striving to achieve.

In *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Saba Mahmood provides a provocative new way to think of the feminist subject in relation to Islam, and explains what it as stake in the religious practices of the women who actively choose to participate in the Egyptian Mosque Movement.¹⁵⁸ I turn to this body of work precisely because this group of women, like Haq and many women in Canada—as discussed in the writing of Homa Hoodfar—manifest new, creative ways

to deal with the difficult internal struggles (Mahmood calls these struggles *fitna*) that arise out of trying to combine the secular ideals of the society in which they live with their commitment to Islam and its values.

The analogy that Haq evokes, and which is manifested in *(un)covering* between the use of cloth and the notion of drawing, has a direct link to Mahmood’s discussion of how the mosque participants labor to meet the Islamic virtues of *al-hayā* in their daily lives. All virtues are gendered in Islam, and *al-hayā* are the set of virtues associated with women and considered necessary in their achievement of piety. *Al-hayā* can be translated as shyness, modesty, and diffidence, and are outlined in “The Story” [*Surat al-Qasas*] in the Qur’an.159

I want to stress here that Mahmood, in relation to the women of the Mosque Movement, and Homa Hoodfar, whose research pertains in part to the revival of Islam amongst young university students and workers in Canada, both underline how religious practices pertaining to the cultivation of the virtues of *al-hayā* (which can include the practice of veiling) are most often based on direct engagement, interpretation, and knowledge of Islam and its theological texts. Self-acquired knowledge, which is in many instances obtained in women-only discussions and pedagogical groups within these contexts, serves as the basis for daily conduct and behavior.

While the virtues of shyness, modesty, and diffidence are specific to the achievement of piety in Muslim women, such virtues are not conceived as being given at birth. Rather, they must be cultivated, which is to say, learned through practice.

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159 Ibid., 155-156.
This is where the development of *al-hayā* as articulated by Mahmood corresponds with what develops in *(un)covering*. The participants of the mosque movement explain how in veiling, among other means, the outward performance of such virtues becomes the basis for their inner inscription. If these virtues are not felt, they can be acquired or made to be felt through disciplinary practice. Mahmood uses Aristotle’s notion of *habitus* to explain how outward performance in these instances is seen as the vehicle for inner change.

In Aristotelian ethics, which greatly influenced early Christian and Muslim theologians alike,160 *habitus* is the basis of a subject’s ethical formation; it is a pedagogical process through which one’s moral character is secured. For Aristotle, such acquired excellence is achieved through repeated bodily acts, whereby an inner quality is developed via means of its outward performance.161 Therefore, in such an understanding of subject formation, repetition is crucial. What is repetitively manifested on the outside gradually disciplines and inscribes itself onto the internal self.

It is in these terms that the participants of the mosque movement articulate what they deem as ineluctable for achieving the virtues of *al-hayā* in their daily lives. With specific reference to her interpretation of a passage in the Qur’an and her struggle to achieve what she deemed was required of her, one woman said:

I used to think that even though shyness was required of us by God, if I acted shyly it would be hypocritical because I didn’t actually feel it inside me. Then one day, reading verse 25 in Surat al-Qasas [“The Story”] I realized that *al-hayā* was among the good deeds, and given my natural lack of shyness, I had to make or create it first. I realized that

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160 These include, most notably, the Islamic thinkers Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111) al-Miskawayh (d. 1030), Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) and Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406). See Ibid., 137.
161 Ibid., 137
making it in yourself is not hypocrisy, and that eventually your inside learns to have *al-hayā* too.

[…] And finally I understood that once you do this, the sense of shyness eventually imprints itself on your inside.¹⁶²

I maintain that such a statement finds its visual embodiment in the use of black cloth and the repetitive gestures performed in *(un)covering*, in which the cloth expresses at once the religious norms the subject seeks to acquire, and their inscription through disciplinary measures imposed upon the self. It is clear that such a description of self-formation, whereby the subject strives through bodily acts to discipline herself in accordance with the codes of conduct of a historically patriarchal religious tradition is at odds with what can readily be categorized as a feminist stance or strategy. As Mahmood correctly points out, agency in the liberal feminist tradition is defined in terms of resistance to, or resignification of, patriarchal norms—not, as is the case here, in terms of the subject’s determined acts to achieve them.

And yet, Mahmood makes two theoretical moves that allow us to see such practices in a different light. In the first, she calls for the uncoupling of self-realization from the liberal and rational concept of autonomous will. Secondly, she conceptualizes agency not as resistance or resignification of norms, but rather as a modality of action—that is, action that raises questions about the relationship between the subject and the norm that she seeks to inhabit. Such a concept of agency entails looking at the immanent form a bodily act take, how it is inhabited, and its effect on the subject’s self-transformation— rather than understanding it as

¹⁶² Ibid., 156.
positioned in resistance to norms. This is a powerful shift that refuses to make the practices of these Muslim women more palatable to liberal imaginaries, and examines ritual behaviors on their own terms.

Consequently, for Mahmood, the modality of agency lies in the specific effect the bodily act has on the architecture of the self in relation to the norm. I argue that it is also indispensable for this study to look at the effects such performances have on the broader scope of norms in which the bodily acts take place. For the purpose of addressing what I have called the “urban veil,” which I use to index the heterogeneous practices and subject positions of Muslim women in democratic liberal societies, it is crucial to examine the effects that such embodied practices have on the complex conditions of possibility in which they take place. This necessitates coming back to the body as a primary site of political struggle.

Certainly, Mahmood’s insights are crucial for bringing to light what is at stake in the invisible labor that underpins ritualistic practices such as veiling, which is undertaken by women committed to the values of Islam; and further, her analysis allows the perception of such bodily acts outside liberal presuppositions that would immediately strip them of agency. She demonstrates that Islam is not a predetermined, monolithic set of beliefs and values, but rather an institution that is constantly reinterpreted and reproduced in different ways through practices that take place across wide-ranging cultural and geographic contexts. However, we must also consider the fact that such disciplinary measures are taken in part because of the inner struggles that arise for women living in so-called secular societies, and their corresponding

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163 Ibid., 38-39.
norms regarding sexuality (which I argue are heteronormative and male-dominated at their core). That is to say, I agree that there is a need to think such practices on their own terms and to be cautious not to ascribe modes of resistance where there are none intended (such as a specific renegotiation of the Islamic norms in themselves), and to look instead at modalities of agency in terms of what these practices achieve for the practitioners themselves. However, to leave it at that only addresses half of what is at stake in these instances in which the woman’s body is, to recall Braidotti’s words, “the site of multiple, complex, and potentially contradictory sets of experience, defined by overlapping variables.”

Hence, I am interested in coming back to the liberal understandings and presuppositions surrounding such acts to analyze how these assumptions can be significantly complicated and challenged in light of alternate articulations of these rituals, as suggested by Mahmood and inscribed in (un)covering. I will thus propose a rereading of (un)covering that takes Mahmood’s notion of habitus as a starting point, to explore how a politics of dis-identification is at work in this piece, which significantly renegotiates some of the main assumptions that inform feminist and liberal claims about the practice of veiling.

The title, (un)covering, already points to the key manner in which Haq’s piece drastically renegotiates the primary liberal assumption with regard to the veil: that it covers, and hence, oppresses and restricts the (sexual) freedom of the body of the wearer. Her piece points to the primary operation of the image-as-veil, in which the veil is posited as a barrier or screen that clearly divides inside from outside; the private and the public; the knowable visible exterior; and the hidden, and by extension, unknowable

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interiority of the veiled woman. However, (un)covering, together with the notion of *habitus*, suggests the very opposite. In the video installation, the black cloth does not hide the body so much as it becomes the medium through which the body communicates. The cloth is therefore an intermediary site between the inscription and the expression of the self.

As discussed earlier with regard to the Aristotelian notion of ethical formation—and as each meticulous gesture of veiling undertaken in (un)covering seems to confirm—the body’s outward performance of veiling must be seen not as an instance of hiding the body, but rather, as an outward manifestation of a constant striving for inner change. The veil in (un)covering does just that. It is used to discipline the body by covering it, and at the same time creates and communicates the embodied, pious subject coming into being. Here we can speak of the distinct workings of the image-as-folds, whereby the process of subjectivation (self-production) involves processes in which the outside is enfolded and unfolded inside, and vice-versa.

Such a fluid understanding of the co-constitution of exteriority and interiority further disrupts the critique that the veil indicates that the wearer’s desire is oppressed. This assumption, as Mahmood has also argued, presupposes that desire is determined in advance. A prime example of this assumption is found in the psychoanalytical model, according to which desire is predicated on an internal lack that dictates outward behavior. (un)covering speaks of a different form of desire, which Braidotti associates with becoming. In this case, embodied practices create and determine desires and emotions. The desire to become (a pious subject) is gradually created and felt through *habitus*. I will elaborate on this alternate model of desire in the final chapter of this
study, in which I examine subject formation and fashion. For now, what is important is that contrary to the idea of a lack and repressed desire, *(un)covering* speaks of a subject’s desire for becoming (and becoming pious), initiating a self-inflecting process in which bodily acts do not arise from, but rather create, the singularity of that desire.

As I suggested earlier, I believe that the black cloth that Haq refers to as a tracing line must not necessarily be read as the Muslim veil. Rather, in keeping with her statement and the notion of *habitus*, the cloth can be seen as the visible manifestation of the religious values she seeks to inscribe upon herself, as she strives to embody them through outward cultural practices. That said, it is clear that the religious codes embodied in the black cloth and repeatedly inscribed onto her body do not adhere to the secular, liberal, and capitalist logic, in which the liberated body often dovetails with the commodification of female sexuality. Her embodied subjectivity is therefore a politics of location in and of itself, and her bodily acts demonstrate how she initiates a politics of misidentification with the dominant values of her immediate context. Consequently, in the process, she can be seen to challenge and complicate the assumptions that subtend them. It is in this light that I argue that *(un)covering* exhibits a para-feminist impulse.

According to Jones, “*para-*” here signals both “side-by-side” and “beyond” earlier feminisms.\(^\text{165}\) On one hand, *(un)covering* expresses the desire to become a female subject in keeping with culturally specific religious values, and hence embodies a female subject position that is located on a separate but parallel track to that of dominant liberal feminist agendas and projects. On the other hand, the very expression of this un-reflected female desire for subject formation according to religious ideals

\(^{165}\text{Jones, “The Return of Feminist Art.”}\)
necessarily challenges dominant feminist discourses in some of their central and long-standing assumptions: most notably, that a feminist stance entails resistance to or resignification of patriarchal norms; that one cannot speak of patriarchy in the singular; and that feminism goes hand in hand with liberated and progressive forms of sexuality. While religion, and Islam in particular, is often seen as incongruent with feminist agendas, *(un)covering* reminds us that feminist struggles are articulated and experienced differently across axes of differentiation: namely, race, gender, class, and religion. Hence, feminism is never a goal to be achieved, but necessarily an ongoing project that must continually reorganize itself around specific configurations and intersections of these axes, as well as the terms specific to each instance of political struggle.
By Way of Conclusion: The Islamic Aesthetics of the Veil at Work in (un)covering

In the first part of the chapter, I proposed that Haq successfully operates a politics of dis-identification with her specular image, circumscribed by the cultural screen—and that in the process, she points toward an un-reflected, and hence incipient, subject position. In the second part of this chapter I pushed this argument further by exploring the embodied aspect of the practice of veiling and the invisible effects it achieves at the level of subject formation for the veiled woman.

I would now like to propose that both instances of dis-identification, in the specular image and in liberal feminism, involve the mobilization of what I outlined in chapter one as an Islamic aesthetics of the veil. This mobilization of a foreign aesthetics is what stumps the viewer in her processes of perception. It introduces the memory of the “not me” into the act of perception, which introduces a frustrating effect and displaces the viewer in her assumptions. The title (un)covering, which indicates a double movement of covering and uncovering, veiling and unveiling, together with the dominant use of the black cloth as a tracing line, already points directly to an Islamic aesthetics of the veil. Hence, as this chapter’s final point, I would like to address Haq’s notion of writing at work in (un)covering.

As discussed in chapter one, in Islamic aesthetics there is a profound distrust of the visual realm. Unlike the long tradition in the West of equating knowledge with seeing and transparency, Islamic aesthetics shuns visual objectification and idolization, and calls instead for what Clévenot has called the system of the barred gaze [le schéma du regard barré]. The predominance of bi-dimensionality, ornamentation, and above all, the tracing line that is found most notably in
calligraphy, are all mechanisms that solicit a specific kind of look in the act of perception: one that is forced to decode, contemplate, and interpret. This mode of perception is akin to modalities of reading. The word āyāt [signs], which refers at once to images and symbols to be interpreted, intimates how the written word and the image form an intertextual tissue in Islamic aesthetics. The workings of the hijab [veil or curtain] are also often articulated in a similar fashion to the written word. Both the hijab and calligraphy enact the double movement of veiling/unveiling, covering/uncovering, whereby visual representation and appropriation of God are completed negated, allowing only the word [parole] to transpire in such a way as to be endlessly decoded and interpreted. It is through this form of perception, which is analogous to reading, that knowledge (of God) is acquired.

The tracing line embodied by the black cloth in (un)covering functions in such a manner. It creates a slippage between what could easily turn into the visual appropriation of a cliché and its habitual semantic readings, and an image that inscribes itself into the visual in a manner that displaces such readings, and by extension, the viewing subject. Interestingly, in his essay “Video Writing,” Raymond Bellour makes the argument that the medium of video has an inherent predisposition toward the scriptural. For Bellour, when faced with a video installation, we are never confronted with one image, but instead with layers of images immersed in the matter of language. Therefore, we always have in front of us an a priori image. In the case of (un)covering, we find the specular image built up through layers of reiteration and common-sense

166 Triki, L’Image, 40.

Throughout this chapter, I have proposed in various ways that this is precisely what is at stake in (un)covering. I have suggested that what modulates the cliché or specular image—as well as feminist assumptions regarding the veiled woman in Haq’s piece—is precisely the intrusion of time, and by extension, a memory that is not mine. This memory is manifested in the drawing forth of an embodied subject position inscribed with memory traces belonging to a specific, subjective religious and cultural experience that is unknown to me. And yet, Haq’s use of the black cloth, repetitive gesture, and intense look, provoke me to remain in front of the image, and to contemplate and interpret what is taking place. In this way, through an aesthetics of the veil, she invokes what Silverman has called a “productive look,” which ultimately displaces me in my capacity to know the other (here, the veiled Muslim woman).

(\textit{un})covering can therefore be characterized as an instance of intercultural cinema as Laura Marks defines it: a work that operates at the intersection of two or more cultural regimes of knowledge. Marks explains that certain interculturally invested images have the power to defamiliarize the cliché precisely because they cannot connect to the viewer’s memory reserve. When this happens, the viewer is forced to confront the limits of her own knowledge. And yet, according Marks, when the complex paths of memory and knowledge are blocked, they activate a site of creativity. What cannot be known immediately flashes up in its singularity, and in the
process, it requires that we puzzle over it and see it anew. Moreover, this disrupts the complex system of perception and knowledge that invests the object with meaning in the first place. Citing Henri Bergson, Marks describes how the frustration that arises when faced with an unknowable object induces us to “create anew not only the object perceived but also the ever-widening systems with which it may be bound up.”

In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate how Haq powerfully effects a politics of misidentification on several levels in (un)covering. This slippage not only shifts debates surrounding the Muslim veil in liberal, democratic societies to a set of alternate terms, but it also provokes a revisiting of the terms of systems—namely the use of the spectacle to promote terror and the assumptions of liberal feminisms, which work to obfuscate the object in the first place. In conclusion, (un)covering, which at first appears to be a very simple video installation, reveals itself as a powerful theoretical object that provides new spatial and conceptual trajectories, bringing non-visible and embodied facets of the urban veil to light.

168 Marks, The Skin of Film, 48.
Chapter 4

Intersubjective Inscriptions of the Urban Veil: Toward a New Politics of Difference

Hayet.djelali.org was the provisional title of a work by web-based artist Martine Neddam. The project was commissioned by Association Commune, an institution in Marseille dedicated to public art interventions. It was conceived as an identity-sharing, online interface and was to take the form of the personal website of a fictive persona, Hayet Djelali: a young, French-Algerian Muslim woman living in Marseille who studied journalism, was committed to the freedom of expression, used social media to disseminate her political views, and wore the veil. The project, scheduled to launch in January of 2005, was halted in November 2004 when certain high-profile media events in France caused many of the project’s co-participants to withdraw.

I am not interested in discussing whether or not the reasoning behind the abandonment of the project is valid. Rather, I want to explore the tensions and contradictions that the project brought to light, and which contributed to its ultimate discontinuation. I will argue that the visibility of the Muslim veil in France places strain upon contradictions at the heart of French republican ideals. Specifically, the project illuminates how the French principle of laïcité (secularism) subjects the (veiled) Muslim woman’s body to a double bind. Her body must be seen to adhere to a politics of difference in which she either identifies with the body politic or is perceived as falling away from into its constitutive outside. The body thus becomes a crucial site through which the Muslim woman is required to perform her citizenship, and by extension, through which the national body is reaffirmed.
Throughout this study, I have repeatedly referred to Silverman’s notion of the cultural screen to address how image repertoires are a crucial site for processes of intersubjective formations that govern how we understand ourselves, particularly in relation to others. While the cultural screen has been a leitmotif in this dissertation, in this chapter, the image of the Muslim veil as site of intersubjective encounters will be the primary site of inquiry. Specifically, I ask: what new forms of intersubjective encounters does the image of the urban veil inscribe? Neddam’s unrealized, web-based project hayet.djelali.org, together with Endless Tether, a large-scale, three-channel video installation by Farheen Haq, serve as case studies that provide provisional answers to this question.

In the first half of this chapter, based on a description of the proposed project and the political terrain into which it sought to intervene, I will investigate how hayet.djelali.org exposes the central role that the term laïcité plays in debates surrounding the Muslim veil in France. I explore the spatial mapping that this principle of secularism effects between the political and the religious, and the public and the private. I suggest that the form Neddam’s work was meant to take would have significantly challenged these inscriptions.

The concept behind Neddam’s project further reveals how these spatial mappings prescribe modes of identification that must be performed, subjecting the visibility of the Muslim (veiled) woman to a double bind. Whereas the Western subject is understood in post-structuralist terms as having multiple points of identification and belonging, the veiled woman is first and foremost perceived through her religious identity. In France, the visibility of the veiled woman signals her identification with Islam, an identification
that is referred to as a *repli identitaire*; a regressive folding-back from the space of the body politic of equal, abstract citizens to a communal space of incommensurable difference.

Neddam’s *hayet.djelali.org* would have proposed a far more complex web of possible sites of identification, provoking a rethinking of the politics of difference subtending the principle of *laïcité*. As epitomized in the psychoanalytic model of difference in the visual realm, difference according to the logic of the *repli identitaire* signals a lack of unity in the collective self. I attempt to shift the psychoanalytical and post-structuralist articulation of difference throughout this chapter from one predicated on lack to one that is predominantly relational and affirmative.

To this end, in the second part of this chapter, a close reading of Haq’s *Endless Tether* shifts the ground of discussion to the “imaged body”: the body on and in front of the screen. *Endless Tether* draws attention to the role the body plays in the production of social space as well as the processes of identification (projection, idealization, and alienation) that this space calls forth. The predominance of horizontality in *Endless Tether* suggests that intersubjectivity is above all relational: a form of what Jean-Luc Nancy calls a “being-with.”

The unidentifiable rituals taking place on the screens exacerbate tensions in the formal aspects of the work: between fragmentation and continuity, proximity and distance, and identification and alienation. Such tensions, which are felt and embodied by the viewing subject through haptic modes of perception, are brought into dialog with Deleuzian concepts of the body in art. This highlights how intersubjective relations depend primarily on the ever-shifting meaning attributed to the intersecting and
distancing relations established between bodies. By plunging the viewing subject into a
dynamic field of relations—one that offers multiple sites of identification as well as
(dis)identification—Endless Tether explodes the double bind of the (veiled) Muslim
woman. It gestures to an alternate politics of difference that I believe offers a far more
appropriate way of thinking self/other relations in contemporary pluralist societies.

In this chapter, I propose the image of the urban veil as a site of encounters that
promote modes of identification in which difference is affirmed. And yet, this site of
encounters also accommodates the possibility that some elements remain withheld and
unknowable, even as they maintain a presence within the intersubjective relation.

4.1 Hayet.djelali.org, the Principle of Laïcité, and the Body’s Double Bind in France

Martine Neddam, a French Algerian of Jewish descent living in Amsterdam, is
well known for her series of fictive characters given a virtual existence through
interactive websites in which both the artist and internet users are the creators of the
personas’ identities. Neddam’s characters often tap into sensitive and highly charged, if
not taboo, topics such as Neddam’s first experiment in the genre dating back to 1996,
Mouchette. The figure of Mouchette is based on the suicidal adolescent in Robert
Bresson’s film by the same name. Certainly, while the personas are fictive, the issues
they embody are real. The interactive web platform in which they live and evolve not
only creates a space for the characters to exist, but also for the exchange of information
and ideas generated by users who identify with the figure, or have something to say about
the topics they embody.
Unlike the editors behind many user-generated platforms that have emerged in the last decade, Neddam is committed to a form of censorship resulting from her own judgment calls with regard to the information she circulates on her sites. While everything she receives is archived in her private databases, not everything is made public. Hence, the characters and opinions expressed publicly are completed, mediated, and in a sense, authored and authorized by her.

To be sure, from the outset, hayet.djelali.org is positioned in highly precarious terrain by the identity-sharing format, the figure’s fictive identity, and the highly charged topic of the Muslim veil in France. Neddam and the organizers at Association Commune were well aware of this fact, and groundwork for the project progressed cautiously and collaboratively. The artist performed fieldwork by interviewing representatives from the associations *Femmes d’ici et d’ailleurs*\(^{169}\) and *Collectif Feministes pour L’Égalité* in Marseilles. She also organized workshops with students and residents from the predominantly Arab municipality of Belsunce. Association Commune and Neddam approached Radia Louhichi, a teacher of economics in the suburbs of Paris and the activist behind *Une école pour tous et toutes*, a network created after the ban of ostentatious signs of religion in public schools in March 2004. That ban had resulted in schools denying access to several young veiled women the same year. Following discussions with Louhichi, it was decided that she would serve as the model upon which the fictive person of Hayet was to be based. Louhichi committed herself to Neddam’s project, agreeing to submit texts, political commentaries, and messages that stemmed from her work and experiences to the site on a regular basis.

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\(^{169}\) An association that helps housewives, students, and women of various faiths, including atheists, to learn French and acquire professional skills, with the goal of fostering mutual understanding and aiding those women to participate fully in the social fabric of Marseille.
The project was scheduled to launch in January of 2005 for a minimum of two years. However, in the following months, several high-profile political events occurred: the saga surrounding the Danish caricatures (September 2005), the French urban riots (November 2005), and the horrifying murder of Ilan Halimi (January 2006). These events caused many of the participants of the project, including Louhichi, to withdraw. As a result, Association Commune, whose existence was already on precarious ground, decided to pull the plug on the project. The curators claimed that the political context and timing was not right. They wanted to avoid feeding into stereotypes and existing radicalism among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. They also hoped to avoid contributing to the hyper-exposure of veiled Muslim women in France at the time, and speaking on their behalf.

To be certain, the concerns surrounding the project were legitimate. But what is of more pertinent interest is how the artwork’s perceived threat exposed tensions that I believe are directly related to the form and structure of the project and the intersubjective encounters it aimed to stage. Consequently, in what follows, I look at three aspects of the web-based project and how they highlight and deflect spatial mappings of citizenship in France—and the double bind to which the visible female body is subjected within this configuration. These three aspects converge in the work that the term *laïcité* does in creating spaces and modes of interpellation in the French republic.

I will first demonstrate how the French mapping of public and private, and secular and religious spaces projects a normative image of the veiled woman as folding back from the political body. This presupposition attributes only one axis of differentiation to her: her religious identification. I will next look at three interrelated aspects of Neddam’s
project: first, its social media platform characterized by a mode of self-presentation; second, its supplementation of a visible subject with the discursive utterances of a (collective) self; and thirdly, the use of various modes of address that stage multiple sites of (dis)identification. I maintain that by shunning the question of visible difference, Neddam’s project intended to create a subject position that could not be seen as folding back from the political body, but instead, would have been seen as actively intersecting with, and contributing to, the multiple sites of identification and collectivities within the French socio-political landscape.

*The Spatial Mappings of Laïcité*

The principle of laïcité has been central to debates surrounding the veil in France. Secularism takes on specific characteristics in each of the socio-political contexts in which it is adopted. In some instances it can mean the equal treatment of religions by the state. In France, the term *laïcité* designates a radical separation of church and state. The Greek root of the word, *laikos*, designates “of the people,” indexing the central imperative of national unity demanded by the French republic, in which citizens are asked to display their loyalty to the nation above all. Their individual differences, especially their religious affiliations, must be contained within the private realm. The history of this principle is inexorably linked to the stronghold the Catholic Church had on French society. Many have already critically addressed how the term’s roots are embedded in Judeo-Christian values and an understanding of public and private spheres specific to Western traditions of socio-political thought. Citizens whose cultural

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understandings of space are not articulated in these terms are, as a result, already discriminated against. Such is the case with Muslims. As discussed in the previous chapter, Saba Mahmood has elaborately illustrated how, contrary to common sense understandings, the practice of veiling does not lend itself to private/public distinctions. Rather, it is a highly personal, quotidian ritual undertaken whose goal is the attainment of pious behavior. Veiling chiefly concerns the architecture of the self, and by extension, a body that continually breaches what are, according to the logic of laïcité, public and private spheres.

The Stasi commissions of 2003, in which the question of the Muslim veil [l’affaire du foulard Islamique] was a key issue, portrayed the visibility of the veil as an intrusion of a sign of religious affiliation into the nominally neutral space of the political sphere, and at the same time, a signal of the veiled woman’s folding back [repli identitaire] from the unity of the body politic into a communitarian space. The banning of ostentatious religious signs in public schools was among the final series of proposals made by the Stasi commission—a proposal that was implemented by the French government in March of 2004. The law perpetuates the role that educational institutions have played throughout the history of the French republic. It serves as a secular tool par excellence in nation building; the privileged site where, in Joan Wallace Scott’s words, “differences were contained and transformed into Frenchness.”171 This motion was extended last year by a further ban on face coverings in public space (April 2011), another politically fraught attempt by white men to save “brown women from brown men,” to recall the words of Gayatri Spivak.

Anthropologist Mayanthi L. Fernando convincingly suggests that the intolerance manifested towards veiled women in the French public sphere points to a structural contradiction at the heart of republican citizenship: its dual universalizing and particularizing imperatives. In the first instance, the principles of equality, freedom, and laïcité must necessarily be seen to transcend and hence annul individual differences in order to lay claim to a universal status. Within the second particularizing register, there is a simultaneous recognition and erasure of a commensurable difference—a difference that can and must be transformed and integrated into the cultural particularity of the nation. A failure to do so signals an incommensurable difference, which in turn challenges the universalizing claims of the republic. The Muslim veil’s stubborn visibility, which stands in as a signpost for identification with an alternate set of cultural principles and values, turns its legibility into one of incommensurable difference. Attempts to ban the Muslim veil from French public spaces, then, do not only express a desire to accommodate right-wing voters and anti-Islamic sensibilities, but such legal action must also be seen as an attempt to erase the visible failure of French republicanism and its universalizing claims.

The instrumentalization of the figure of the secular Muslim woman by the French government, as Fernando indicates, became a strategy to outweigh the visibility of the veil with the image of successful incorporations of Muslim women. Such an effort is epitomized in Les Mariannes d’Aujourd’hui, a series of fourteen images displayed on the facade of the National Assembly in Paris in 2003. The fourteen large-scale portraits depict Muslim women from across France who had taken part in a march against

women’s oppression in the suburbs. They are clothed in the colors of the Republic, and wear, in opposition to the Muslim veil, the red cap of Marianne [bonnet phrygien]. In Fernando’s words, these women were clearly meant to symbolize the “transition from difference to non-difference that performs the universality of republican citizenship.”

The point that I want to emphasize here is that the term laïcité sets up a spatial articulation of difference that locates the Muslim woman’s body on one axis of interpellation, and hence one axis of differentiation. Whereas post-structuralism has taught us that a subject inhabits multiple sites of identification and belonging, including political, economical, racial, and sexual affiliations, the Muslim woman (and here more so than the Muslim man, whose visible difference is less charged) is reduced to her religious identity alone. This identification is signaled by the presence or absence of the veil. Significantly, not only does this structure presume that the veiled woman is necessarily more pious than her unveiled counterpart, but it also denies how her subjecthood intersects with or diverges from other principles and values of the French socio-political landscape. As journalist and writer Amin Maalouf laments in Identités.

173 Ibid., 390.
Meurtrières, whereas everyone has multiple points of belonging and identification, only some people at certain moments are required to affirm one at the expense of others. This is the predicament that the body of the Muslim woman finds itself in. In a double bind set up by the term laïcité, the unveiled Muslim woman is perceived as identifying with the national body, and the veiled woman signals a folding back (when in fact she is being pushed back) from the body politic; as a result, she becomes its constitutive outside.

The Spatial Inscription of hayet.djelali.org

To return to Neddam’s proposed project, I maintain that hayet.djelali.org exacerbates the contradictions at the heart of the principle of laïcité and deflects its workings via three characteristics: its platform as personal website; its presentation of a discursive instead of a visible social subject; and its use of various modes of address that communicate and stage multiple sites of (dis)identification.

In the first place, by masquerading as a personal website of a pious Muslim woman, hayet.djelali.org raises questions about how social media currently challenge the spatial mappings of laïcité. Social media are public platforms that purportedly reflect the ideal of the individual freedom of expression that is specific to liberal democracies. Freedom of expression in the public sphere, however, has always been subjected to dominant socio-political configurations, as is made clear in France by the overriding of the supposed freedom of expression regarding religion. Benedict Anderson has shown that mass media forges collective imaginaries in the constitution of national communities.

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And yet, while new media and communication technologies continue to construct and represent the political body, they also increasingly offer new opportunities for self-expression in the public realm, as media theoreticians Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have pointed out.\textsuperscript{175} The artist and theoretician Jordan Crandall has characterized the cultural transformations initiated by social media platforms, including personal websites, blogs, twitter, MySpace, Second Life, and Facebook, as a shift from a culture of \textit{representation of the world}, to a culture of \textit{presentation of self to the world}. Social media has inaugurated an unprecedented paradigm of and for self-display.\textsuperscript{176}

It is important to note here how mass media and religion are currently intersecting in new and complex ways. In \textit{Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere}, Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors point out that religion, and especially the so-called “book religions” such as Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, has historically laid claim to a mediating status: between the divine and the faithful.\textsuperscript{177} Moreover, religion, like mass media, has always played a “public role.” Religion is a mediating practice that creates publics. In the last few decades, the increase of information technologies has dovetailed with the decline of the nation-state as the primary site of representation and identification, opening the door for religion to play an increasingly important role in this regard.

Hence, while the term \textit{laïcité} delineates a clear separation between the private (religious) and the public (political) realms, the conception of \texttt{hayet.djelali.org} engaged and highlighted a far more porous spatial configuration. Riding the wave of the culture of

self-display, the identity-sharing nature of the piece would have turned it into a site of connectivity and identification in its own right. Far from suggesting a repli identitaire—a movement away from the public domain—the users of the hayet.djelali.org site would have created a collective self that identified with the (fictive) pious figure, jointly manipulating her image as a form of (collective) self-expression within the public at large.

Secondly, Neddam’s characterization of her virtual characters as “a narrative process” is indicative of how the figure of Hayet Djelali would have been staged primarily through textual encounters. Although it is impossible to address the exact contents of a site that never materialized, we can examine the site’s intended strategies of narration; its positioning of a reader through modes of address; and its interactive and layered structure.

As is typical of a personal website, and as exemplified through the sites of her previous virtual characters such as Mouchette (1997), David Still (2001) and Xiao Qian (2006), Neddam conceived a multi-layered platform for the project of hayetdjelali.org. This platform would have featured a series of pages dedicated to Hayet Djelali’s biography, including texts about her life, family, friends, and a sample of personal photos. Another set of pages would present her “work” as a student of journalism, including a CV and writing samples of her studies and articles to be published. Finally, there would have been a series of functional pages used primarily for sending and receiving emails. These various pages aimed to present the character in all her

complexity, such as her political views, taste in fashion, daily struggles and
discrimination she faced and her unfolding relationships with friends and family. 179

More importantly, however, the Internet user who encountered the site would have had to engage with the various forms of self-writing across these various genres, each of which address, and hence position, the user in different ways. Some modes of narration and address would have been informational. The articles that she would have produced regarding a political issue or event provide an example of these informational modes of address and narration. The voice of Hayet, within the context of the articles, would take on a certain authority on a given topic, and the reader would be positioned in relation to the text as someone being informed. However, the reader would also have been able judge whether she agreed or disagreed with the arguments of these articles.

When paging through Hayet’s private emails, the reader would have become an exterior witness to informal and occasionally intimate dialogs with friends and family, which would reflect her everyday experiences and personal relationships. The result could have lured the reader into a position of discomfort and even voyeurism.

Neddam claims that the salience of her virtual personas is rooted in their capacity to entice users into a reflexive process about various issues of concern specific to the fictive characters. 180 Neddam, who has a background in linguistics, has explored various modes of interrogation that most often take the form of the virtual character asking the visitor, who is directly referred to as “you,” staged questions. In such instances, the visitor is positioned in a dialogic relation to the persona. As semiotician Daniel Chandler has pointed out, this form of interrogation causes the reader to feel directly looked at and

179 This information is outlined in the artist’s project proposal for Association Commune.
180 Paule Mackrous, “Le partage sur le Web.”
spoken to. It is a mode of address that “stimulates interaction with each individual viewer.” In the case of Neddam’s sites, the interrogative act is followed by the possibility of the user responding directly, in writing, on the interface. These answers are then read by Neddam, some of which are selected and incorporated by her into various pages of the site.

Some strategic aspects of Neddam’s identity-sharing interfaces, which are deployed to cajole the visitor into an explorative mode, are the various playful and even tactile interactive features that encourage the user to navigate the sites’ numerous pages. Such devices include pop-ups; highlighted or pulsating words that one is prompted to activate with a click of the mouse; and modes of narration and textured images that produce a sensuous relation to the interface. This last tactic is employed on the Mouchette site, where an image of the virtual persona licking the screen is accompanied by the written interpolative comment: “Finally, I can come that close to you. Do you also want to come that close to me?” The user can click on yes or no. The question is immediately followed by, “Put your cheek on the monitor. How does it feel?”

The historian Martin Jay, among others, has argued that vision is the most abstracting of all the senses. Building on this argument, one of the main objectives of the present study is to stress the highly problematic tendency in current debates to reduce readings of the Muslim veil to issues of vision—a sense that is closely allied with power and knowledge. The politics of difference orchestrated around the term laïcité and the reading of the veil as a visible sign of (dis)identification operate in this manner: they

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abstract the singularity of the veiled woman to the legibility of the veil, which serves as a sign of an incommensurable difference.

*Hayet.djelali.org* clearly aimed to eschew such a politics of visuality, presenting a far more complex image of subjecthood. The interactive nature of Neddam’s project would have necessarily generated a figure that was multilayered and always in the process of becoming. The encounter with this virtual figure is therefore never complete. Rather, resonating with Luce Irigaray’s metaphysical claim that “behind the veil there is only veil,” the internet visitors were to encounter the virtual persona through the site’s many layers as well as by virtue of their own personal choices—and navigation through and interactions with its pages—so that they would never attain a coherent image of the figure.

The project affords the visitor a web of axes of identification and (dis)identification in which he or she can identify with certain struggles and forms of discrimination; disagree with opinions and values expressed; and experience moments of intimacy or discomfort toward the figure. The work consequently operates through registers of affect to dismantle the possibility of attributing to the veiled figure a simple reading of incommensurable difference. With Fernando’s argument regarding the universal and cultural imperatives of republican citizenship in mind, I maintain that Neddam’s project offers a more plastic model of citizenship: it implodes the double bind ascribed to the Muslim woman’s body by *laïcité*.

Hence, although I do not disagree that the project in many ways ran the risk of undermining the very goals it sought to achieve, I want to suggest that on paper (where such risks remain contained), Neddam’s project initiated a conceptual departure from a
politics of difference and citizenship contingent upon visible modes of identification of and with the female body. Hayet.djelali.org would have occasioned an encounter with a written body that is seen to engage actively with, and contribute to, the socio-political landscape in protean ways. Moreover, such a figure could not have been contained within the spatial configuration inscribed by the principle of laïcité. This web piece presupposed a far more intricate spatial mapping, in which the veiled woman could not be interiorized into or repelled from the body politic in one stroke.

It is now necessary to examine more closely the politics of difference being displaced, so that in the second section I can further elaborate this alternate model, through the analysis of a second case.

The Politics of Difference, Identification, and Lack

Throughout this study I have demonstrated how difference, especially when it comes to the politics of representation underscoring the Muslim veil in European and North American imaginaries, is predominantly articulated as a failure of sameness with regard to the subject of representation. This politics of difference, as I have sought to argue in my case studies, is contingent upon the idea that difference is needed to structure sameness. By sameness I refer to both the individual and the collective subject of representation, and by extension, to individual and collective identities. I have argued that the image of the Muslim veil often secures various historical articulations of identity by serving as its defining outside, such as in its relationship to constructs of Christendom, European culture and values, Western feminisms, and now laïcité; the nation as a unified political whole.
Within these articulations of self that the image of the Muslim veil helps to structure, the veiled woman is reduced to a symbol—the semantic reading of which, as I argued in chapter two, is plural and has shifted over time. As a result, the image of the Muslim veil has in various historical moments and contexts symbolized the backwardness of Islam; woman as victim; the eroticized Orient; tradition; and in the present chapter, a repli identitaire—an instance of (dis)identification from the ostensibly shared universal ideals and values of the French Republic. What I want to emphasize across these readings of the veil is the reduction of the complex and heterogeneous subject positions of veiled women to a single, fixed reading of her visible difference. Meyda Yeğenoğlu reflects on the reductive representations of the veiled woman that are used to structure the self in Orientalist discourses:

If the veiled woman/culture remains always different or infinitely dissimulating in Orientalist logic, this is not because of the complexity of her/their being-in-the-world, in which one might find continuities as well as discontinuities with one’s own culture/subjectivity, but because they are always absolutely different. They should remain different, because I should remain the same: they are not/should not be a possibility within my own world, which will thus be different.183

Thus, the identity of the veiled woman has repeatedly been constructed by representing the element from which the self is differentiated. In my investigation I am concerned with how, subtending the work that the image of the veil performs in this regard, processes of (mis)identification with exterior images play out. The psychoanalytical model, and specifically, Lacan’s theory of the mirror phase, help explain the dynamics of identification that take place between subject and image.

183 Meyda Yeğenoğlu, Colonial Fantasies, 57.
In Lacan’s *The Mirror Phase* (1949), the child who experiences its own body as lacking coordinated motor skills and bodily unity mistakes the seemingly more coordinated image in the mirror as his, and proceeds jubilantly to interiorize the *Gestalt* of this image into his sense of self. This proprioceptive process of self-formation—via external (and idealized) imaged bodies—continues throughout the subject’s mental development.184

This model of subject formation is important for my argument in three ways. First, it highlights the central role that the identification with imaged bodies plays in subject formation. Second, it suggests that the process of interiorization of an external image is predicated on a preexisting sense of lack within the subject. And third, it necessarily implies that the other is always already a constitutive part of that self.

It is important to reiterate here that the process of identification with exterior images/bodies generally takes two alternate trajectories, which represent the double bind of the Muslim woman’s body under discussion in this chapter. According to the image politics of the cultural screen, if the exterior image is perceived as an idealized image, the self will assimilate it. If, on the other hand, it is perceived through the cultural screen as a un-idealized image because of its race, gender, or other axes of differentiation, it will remain as a defining outside. This brings us back to the question of the politics of difference and identification that is central to this chapter.

Freud revealingly describes the incorporative logic that undergirds the relation to the idealized other as cannibalistic. Similarly, Silverman’s citation of Max Scheler, the German philosopher, explains how the other’s specificities and singularity are annihilated

in instances of what he calls idiopathic identification. This process results in the “total
eclipse and absorption of another self by one’s own, it being thus, as it were, completely
dispossessed and deprived of all in its conscious existence or character.” Such a
process illustrates what is at stake in the simultaneous recognition and erasure of
difference that underscores the parading of the secular Muslim woman’s image in French
public spaces. The assimilation of her supposedly commensurable difference as a secular
Muslim into the unified whole of the nation occurs at the expense of unrecognized and
erased specificities: namely, her race and class.

I would add that these features of incorporative identification processes call forth
the ideals and inevitable failures of discourses of multiculturalism. It has become a
tenancy for liberal democracies to claim that they accommodate cultural diversity—a
term that is at the core of multiculturalism’s ideals. Homi Bhabha argues that cultural
diversity is not the same as cultural difference, however, and that the discrepancy
between the two exposes contradictions between the particular and the universal in
mechanisms of identification. For Bhabha, cultural diversity in liberal democracies
functions in an analogous manner to the idea of a musée imaginaire, in which other
cultures are present, but categorized and presented within our own grid of representation
and meaning. This occurrence operates on the assumption that all cultures are translatable
and knowable. Following Bhabha, in the case of the universal ideals that underscore
French republican values, the universalism that provides the subtext for the recognition of

80-84.
cultural diversity ends up containing cultural difference, by masking the universalist claim’s inherent ethnocentric norms, values, and interests.\textsuperscript{187}

Hence, the purported claim of accommodating cultural diversity at the heart of multiculturalist discourses must be seen, on the contrary, as an attempt to “respond to and control the dynamic process of the articulation of cultural difference.”\textsuperscript{188} In such logic, the universal and general prevail and contain the singular and particular, and by extension inhibit “emergent moments of social identification and cultural enunciations.”\textsuperscript{189}

I want to stress that the identification operation underpinning the de-idealized image/body is equally dismissive of cultural difference. This is exemplified in the perception of the veiled woman’s incommensurable difference in the French Republic. Instead of a legitimate recognition of cultural difference, as well as points of continuity with the veiled subject, cultural singularity is pushed to the outside—to the invisible private sphere—as the constitutive defining other.

Chantal Mouffe, in reading Carl Schmitt against the grain—combined with a psychoanalytical understanding of identification mechanisms involved in subject formation—has vociferously stressed how we/them constructs always form a core subtext in constructions of political identities. Political institutions, she claims, fail in the present to offer political identities that reflect the plural societies in which they operate. According to Mouffe, “Citizenship is vital for democratic politics, but a modern

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{188} Bhabha, “Translator/Translated” page number?
\item \textsuperscript{189} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
democratic theory must make room for competing conceptions of our identities as citizens.”

Political institutions’ failure to recognize the diverse nature of its citizens political struggles and forms of identification is evidenced when subjects find themselves in contradictory modes of interpellation through the available modes of identification. Such is the case of the veiled woman, who is at once interpellated as an equal citizen and negated by her religious difference, all within the same political sphere. Moreover, when political struggles and passions are not given legitimate forms of inscription within the political realm, subjects turn to other outlets and forms of collective belonging. This helps explain both the current rise of various forms of populism throughout Western Europe, and the emergence of differing degrees of Islamism in the Middle East, Europe, and North America over the last few decades. What is needed today, and what the current understanding of terms such as laïcité fail to provide, are more flexible modes of collective identifications on both the “we” and the “them” side. It is in this sense that Mouffe has called for a form of radical pluralism. She contends that in order to radicalize the idea of pluralism, so as to make it a vehicle for a deepening of the democratic revolution, we have to break with rationalism, individualism, and universalism. Only on that condition will it be possible to apprehend the multiplicity of forms of subordination that exist in social relations and to provide a framework for the articulation of the different democratic struggles – around gender, race, class, sexuality, environment and others.

I assert that Neddam’s hayet.djelali.org and Haq’s Endless Tether, which I will turn to in the next part of this chapter, offer templates for rethinking processes of identity

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formation along these lines of radical pluralism. By creating platforms for protean forms of identification between images and subjects/bodies, these works eschew the desire for a unified self and correlated we/them constructs. Moreover, these art works do not prescribe, as an alternative, a postmodern model of identity politics or what Judith Butler has theorized as “the embarrassed etc.”: an endless, horizontal accumulation of adjectives that strive to situate and encompass a comprehensive subject, but ultimately fail to do so. As Jeffredy T. Nealon has pointed out, such a failure prefigures an impossibility of wholeness and hence signals a form of lack.193

In *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity*, Nealon asks, “Can this failure of sameness be rethematized as an affirmation of difference? What possibilities are there for concrete responses that do not merely or finally reduce otherness to a subset of the same, to a subset of an inquiring subject’s identity?”194 In the second part of this chapter, I aim to develop preliminary answers to these questions by building on my analysis of *hayet.djelali.org* through a close reading of *Endless Tether*. I suggest that these works think about identity and difference not in terms of fixed identities ascribed to bodies, but rather, following Jean-Luc Nancy, as processes involving mutable forms of identification. This implies revisiting the central role the image of the other plays in the formation of the self, and the assumption underscoring the mirror-phase scenario, in which the idealized body in the mirror is fixed.

In the next section I turn to a Deleuzian articulation of the body, and more specifically, the body given to us in art. I maintain that the fixed position of the other is an impossibility that has considerable implications for the correlative positioning of the

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194 Ibid.
self. By extension, I adopt a theoretical framework that proposes a web of identifications subtending mechanisms of individual and collective self-formation. I contend that difference, articulated as a web, obstructs the possibility of the idea of absolute difference. And yet, it also has the capacity to accommodate components of the other’s difference that remain withheld, unknowable, and ultimately, inassimilable.

4.2 Endless Tether: Toward a New Politics of Difference

Endless Tether is a large, three-channel video installation that spans the surface of a gallery wall. On the right-hand screen, a pair of hands tosses a lavish red cloth across the middle screen. The cloth is caught on the far left by a three-quarter length cropped nude female, Haq, who begins to pull the cloth and wrap it around her body. The red cloth, set off against the white background, forms a formidable horizontal line spanning the width of the work, creating a continuous flow moving from right to left. The two figures serve as brackets for the cloth, which occupies the entire middle screen, with only the occasional intrusion of Haq’s hands as they reach in to grab hold and pull the cloth toward her. The middle screen renders visible the dynamics that occur between the two figures: dynamics that are given form through the materiality of the folds. To this end, the images are projected slightly in slow motion, allowing us to take in the liveliness of the cloth, which, at moments, flows smoothly from one figure to the next. Multiple pleats convey slackness, as one pair of hands gently feeds and the other calmly receives and wraps. At other moments, the red cloth tightens, becoming a creaseless, red wall between the figures as the hands grip and enact a sort of tug-of-war with Haq’s body, which inclines to add force as she struggles with the cloth that seems to entangle her. Throughout the piece’s seven minutes, the images intermittently disappear and the screens turn white, becoming luminous squares that saturate the installation space with light. Halfway through, when the images return, there is a shift in direction; the movement flows from left to right. Now the hands pull, causing Haq to turn in the opposite direction as the red cloth unravels from her body.195

195 Endless Tether can be viewed at www.farheenhaq.com/work/tether/.
In the following section, I will begin where I left off in my analysis of hayet.djelali.org, with the disappearance of a visible body that signals an incommensurable difference. I will focus on the emergence of a body/subject that refuses a fixed position of difference and continually addresses the viewer in various and at times contradictory ways. Neddam’s web piece sought to enact this discursively. I will now explore how this can be achieved via images of the body: a primary site, according to psychoanalysis, for structuring sameness and difference in the field of vision.¹⁹⁶

Haq’s Endless Tether will provide the theoretical terrain upon which to explore the new forms of intersubjective encounters that the image of the urban veil can inscribe. To this end, I will bring the structural and formal aspects of the piece into dialog with Deleuze’s interpretation of the body without organs. By doing so, I will provide a model of identification processes in relation to the imaged body that is an alternative to the one that the mirror phase postulates. This model creates a crucial slippage between a body that is identified through the sense of vision and one that is submerged in a dynamic field of relations into which my own body is drawn, in a manner that is predominantly felt.

The following aspects of the work are pivotal for enabling this slippage: the play between continuity and fragmentation, between proximity and distance, and ultimately, between the interpellation of visual and haptic modes of perception.

The first aspect of Endless Tether that impedes the visual mastery needed to secure one’s relationship to the imaged body (which would either be assimilated as my own or identified as its defining other) is the sheer size of the work: a horizontal landscape that spans the width and height of one large gallery wall. Consequently, it is impossible to take in the entire image in one glance. The continuous movement of images

flows across the three screens, whose borders are emphasized as unlit black frames. The result is a paradoxical continuity of movement between the screens, and a fragmentation of the image in three distinct parts. Accordingly, in this installation I find myself following the continuous flow of the images. My eye slides across their surfaces from one figure through the middle screen to the other, forgetting the borders between the projections. At other moments, I focus on one of the three screens. The pleats in the cloth catch my attention, the hands reach in and I follow them into the next screen, where they begin to wrap the red folds into place, tightly, around the body. The arms on the other side pull, and the body on this side reacts, inclining to add force, so that the cloth in the middle stretches out and tightens.

The paradoxical relationship between continuity and fragmentation literally affects the way I am positioned in relation to the image, both in terms of proximity and distance. The continuity of the movement as well as the materiality, and the slightly slowed-down pace of the images, encourage my look to be carried across, or to jump in a syncopated manner from one screen to the next—but always horizontally, and predominantly on the surface of the screens. In heightened moments of tension, or conversely, of slackness, the grip or feeding gesture of the hands, resistant or complicit postures of the body, strained or smooth flow of the cloth, are all aspects of the work that my look falls upon.

The screens turn abruptly into three large, white, illuminated surfaces. I am suddenly aware of my own body as it is pushed back at a distance into its place. As I sit against the back wall of the gallery space, a feeling of malaise sets in. I have the impression that I am witness to the unfolding dynamics of an intimate relationship
between two people. The images reappear and the middle screen speaks to me of a
landscape, its horizon line in the far distance. The life and texture of the cloth bring me
back to the surface and convey sensuality. The left-hand screen takes on the appearance
of a billboard, depicting a woman in a sexy red evening dress. The hands grip, the body
protests, I feel entangled.

*Endless Tether* plays with my modes of looking and, ultimately, with my
positionality in relation to the image. It accomplishes this through the interplay of
continuity and fragmentation, proximity and distance, and through positions that oscillate
in tandem with the interpellation of optic or more embodied forms of looking. In *Touch:
Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Laura Marks argues that the video image has a
predilection for invoking a haptic mode of perception. Marks contrasts what she calls
“video haptics” with optical visuality. How the image appeals to one modality of
vision or the other is largely dependent upon its capacity to distance or absorb the viewer.
Most importantly for my analysis is that optical visuality is aligned with perspectival
space, according to Marks, such that it assures the distance allowing for identification,
symbolizing processes, and a mastery of the image. Images that construct a visual field
on the surface of the screen in a way that emphasizes the electronic texture of the
projected image tend to lose optical clarity, encourage an embodied view, and engulf the
viewer in a flow of tactile impressions.

Marks notes that the video image is almost never entirely haptic. The haptic
image usually occurs in a dialectical relationship with the optical. Yet, when I engage
with the image in a haptic way, “I come to the surface of my self, losing myself in the

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intensified relation with an other that cannot be known.” I will return to the concept of an unknowable body further on. What I want to emphasize here are the shifting interpellations of the image that position me in multiple and even contradictory ways in relation to the body on the screen. In this manner, I can never secure one form of identification with the imaged body; as it is in a constant state of renegotiation, so am I.

The treatment of the imaged body in Haq’s piece, together with the use of video, opens bodies up to each other both on and in front of the screen, situating them within a dynamic field of relations. This field of relations is staged, represented within the projected images. The landscape format that reaches an apex in the middle screen, where the cloth literally serves as a trait-d’union between the two figures, most prominently embodies this idea of relation. This binding link renders tangible the ever-shifting nature of the relationship between the two figures. Consequently, we can invoke what Deleuze calls the “Figure,” a term he used to characterize how the painter Francis Bacon was able to render the intensive register of the body palpable in his paintings. According to Deleuze, Bacon did not represent the body. Instead, the painter succeeded in de-forming the visible body by conveying its vital forces through the materiality of the painted medium. The concept of the Figure must therefore be differentiated from the notion of figuration, as it entails an alternate relationship between form and matter. Whereas figuration is largely understood as a process of giving form to matter, with the Figure, it is the medium, or matter, that gives form to intensities: forces and power relations that are normally imperceptible. Moving beyond the form of the visible body interpellates a haptic mode of perception, creating a body that is more aptly characterized as being felt.

198 Ibid., 12, my emphasis.
Such a body, then, clearly cannot entertain the same identification processes as prescribed in the mirror stage scenario. It should be noted that in the Lacanian model, the subject perceives the mirror image proprioceptively, meaning via his bodily ego. The mirror image provides a visual model, in which, as Laplanche and Pontalis state, “Certain results of maturation and biological organization are attained solely by the visual perception of the counterpart.” Through the visual identification process with the image’s Gestalt, the subject attains mastery over his or her bodily unity. I argue that exactly the opposite is at stake in *Endless Tether*. Here, the body on the screen is constantly in a state of re-formation. At some moments, the body on the left-hand screen appears beautiful, with an attractiveness that gestures toward fashion and advertising platforms. Yet, no sooner is this association made than the image is transformed into a body on a “tether,” struggling with such idealized images as if they were suffocating. The body is continually reconstituted and reconstituting itself, and reconstitutes me and my relation to it in the process. Thus, whereas the mirror image serves to construct a desired or idealized self-image, the imaged body I encounter in Haq’s piece undoes such work. Consequently, I will turn to the Deleuzian concept of the body without organs as a model to help articulate what occurs in, and in front of, the screens in this installation piece.

The concept of the body without organs, which Deleuze largely developed in relation to the artistic production of the poet Antonin Artaud, follows a complex and multifaceted trajectory in the philosopher’s oeuvre. Nonetheless, its practical implications remain clear. To think of the body without organs is to think of the body

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201 See Anne Sauvagnargues, *Deleuze et l’art*, 83-106.
outside its organic determinations. For Deleuze, the organic body is the paradigmatic
unified and hierarchical body, governed by the brain as its central organ. This concept of
the body, I argue, is directly linked to the mirror stage scenario and processes of self-
formation that strive toward, and operate through, imaginaries of a coordinated, unified
subject.

However, for Deleuze, the subject/body consists of another register in which
multiple, virtual forces enter into relation with one another in a constant state of
becoming. He theorizes the organism as that which imprisons these forces, subjecting
them to an organized corporeality—as exemplified by the interiorization of the idealized
image in the mirror and its motor coordination.

The body without organs is not literally a body without organs, but rather an
inorganic body: its virtual side. This facet of the body occurs on a plane of pre-
individuated intensities, where possible outcomes have yet to be actualized. The
inorganic life that animates the body can be connected to Deleuze’s concept of
“haecceities.” Far from a unified entity, the body is conceived as an assemblage of
intensive forces that “consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between
molecules and particles, capacities to affect and be affected.”

It may seem puzzling how such a concept comes into play in daily, intersubjective
encounters and processes of self-formation. For Deleuze, art plays a crucial role in this
regard. The body without organs operates in the extremes of what can be thought, and
can be brought to the realm of experience through art. Deleuze considered Artaud a
great poet precisely because he was able to bring thought and the organized body to a

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203 Anne Sauvagnargues, *Deleuze et l’Art*, 83.
point of rupture through a use of language brought to its asignifying limit. I argue that Haq’s use of video and the imaged body also creates a similar experience that captures the inorganic life of the body. By working through the strategic use of continuity, fragmentation, distancing, absorption, and the materiality of the medium and its images, I find myself caught in a dynamic space of shifting relations, between the bodies on and in front of the screen: relations that are above all embodied and felt.

To be sure, the result does have significant implications for processes of identification. In such a relational field, my shifting identifications cannot be neatly aligned along me/you, us/them constructs. And yet, as Mouffe has shown us, such constructs inevitably play a key role in the formation of collective identities. We may therefore ask what *Endless Tether*—beyond shifting the politics of difference away from visuality and lack to a terrain in which intersubjective encounters occur within a dynamic field of relations—offers as an alternative for thinking about sameness and difference in the constructs of individual and collective self? Once the visible ideal or incommensurable body has disappeared, allowing for the emergence of multiple vectors of (dis)identification, what becomes of difference? Can Bhabha’s notion of cultural difference exist and be affirmed on its own terms within this model? It is to this question that I now turn in the last section of this chapter.

*An Affirmative Model of Difference*

I take the predominance of the horizontal in *Endless Tether* as my starting point in addressing this question. The horizontal, I have argued, prefigures the relational in this piece in several registers. The relational is the social: the link between the bodies on the

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204 Ibid., 91.
screen and the bodies experiencing the work in the gallery space. The dynamic field of relations and vectors of identification between these various subject/bodily positions instantiates what Jean-Luc Nancy calls a “being-with.” In *The Inoperative Community*, he argues that being is relational, first and foremost. And for Nancy, the relational is the communal.\(^{205}\) He reasons that while a unified subject implies absolute autonomy, one nevertheless has to imagine that one is autonomous in relation to something else: an outside. It follows that one cannot speak of a being-self without speaking of a being-in-relation-to, and hence a being-with.

Nancy’s articulation of the relational operates similarly at the collective level, and responds to the logic subtending Mouffe’s notion of we/them constructs inherent in the political. And yet, for Nancy, the relational is not that which constructs; rather, it is that which undoes the workings of community and fixed collective identities. Certainly, for my purposes, what is most important in Nancy’s theory of being-with is not only that the (collective) subject is never one with itself outside its relations with others, but also that the relations between subjects are never absolute. To the contrary, relations are always shifting, and as a result, constantly repositioning: or in Nancy’s terms, *(ex)*posing subjects in various ways in relation to each other. Nancy states:

> Excluded by the logic of the absolute-subject of metaphysics (Self, Will, Life, Spirit, etc.) community comes to cut into this subject by virtue of the same logic. The logic of the absolute sets it in relation: but this obviously cannot make for a relation between two or several absolutes, no more than it can make an absolute of the relation. It undoes the absoluteness of the absolute. The relation (the community) is, if it is, nothing other than that which undoes, it its very principle – and at its closure or on its limit – the autarchy of absolute immanence.\(^{206}\)

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\(^{206}\) Ibid., 4.
Just as the body without organs undoes the possibility of a coherent and unified subject position on an individual level, so too does Nancy’s notion of a being-with undo any notion of a fixed identity, and hence of an exclusive political body. Nancy’s theory implies that the specific nature of being-with is dependent upon the meaning attributed to the relation: one that is never absolute and has the potential to shift, constantly (ex)posing bodies/subjects to each other in mutable ways.

I contend that it is precisely through this logic that Haq’s piece succeeds in dislodging and rerouting fixed constructs of sameness and difference. I have discussed how the installation situates the bodies/subjects in *Endless Tether* in a matrix of relations that the visitor mostly feels, rather than sees. As I have demonstrated throughout this study, seeing continues to be aligned with knowledge ideologically. Such a movement toward the other—which is predominantly felt—therefore has significant implications for the meaning, and ultimately, the knowledge produced in this relation with the other. With this in mind, I will examine how the embodied experience of the dynamic web of relations in *Endless Tether* becomes channeled into processes of meaning-making and knowledge production, and ultimately, into social-political articulations of sameness and difference. This entails revisiting the central role that the image of the body plays in mediating political constructs of belonging. Deleuze’s articulation of the two poles of the cinematic body, namely the everyday and the ceremonial body, have purchase on the passage between the embodied experience of *Endless Tether* and its political implications regarding the double bind scenario that subtends the (veiled) Muslim body.

To begin with, the conflicting positionalities in which I find myself interpellated through the imaged body in this work depend primarily on moments of being touched by,
and hence sharing in—and other moments of being untouched by, and hence detached from—what unfolds in front of me. Such moments occur despite the fact that there is no distinct narrative structuring the piece. It is largely through the materialization of the struggles, or conversely, the harmony of the imaged bodies and the relations between them, that such identification processes are enabled.

In *The Time-Image, Cinema 2*, Deleuze develops the two poles of the body in cinema. For him, the body is not a material site to be known, but rather, a site of knowledge production in itself. Whereas thought has a predilection for reducing the ways in which we live and experience our bodies within specific categories, when it comes to the everyday pole of the body, thought is brought to life through the body’s attitudes and postures. The camera has the capacity to turn the body into a sort of time-image, in which the everyday body is never in the present moment, but rather manifests a transition between a before and an after.207

Certainly, bodily attitudes and postures are given tangible form in *Endless Tether*. For instance, my body relates to moments when Haq’s body resists, reluctantly striving to deal with the cloth being fed to her. These images speak to me of exhaustion, indexing the “before” of the lived body. When Haq pulls the cloth towards her, expressing eagerness, she signals anticipation and an attitude to which my body can also relate. And yet, there is a further movement beyond the temporality of this indecisive body with which I identify, to a body that begins to be encoded: a body that participates in generating the social space and the relations in which it circulates.

This second pole of the body in cinema is what Deleuze refers to as the ceremonial body. The ceremonial body exceeds postures and attitudes, extending to their

207 Ibid., 189.
social significations. Here we are at the level of gestures, or what Brecht called, in reference to the theatricality of the body, the “Geste,” meaning the social relations conveyed through bodily actions. Certainly, Brecht’s materialist aesthetics and his conviction that art must intervene and reflect the means by which social relations are produced is relevant to this discussion. Highly critical of bourgeois theater, Brecht believed that art should not seek to serve as an escape from, or mere representation of, the world. On the contrary, art should strive to expose and intervene in the social production of reality. Terry Eagleton’s description of Brecht’s “epic” theater applies equally to the staging of social relations at work in *Endless Tether:*

> The task of theatre is not to ‘reflect’ a fixed reality, but to demonstrate how character and action are historically produced, and so how they could have been, and still can be, different. The play therefore, becomes a model of that process of production; it is less a reflection of, than a reflection on, social reality.\(^{208}\)

Brecht stressed that such a reflection could be obtained at the level of identification, and specifically in the modes of identification that alienate characters from their roles and the audience from the actors. I want to emphasize that such mechanisms of identification open up a space of social and political reflection and critique, and ultimately, aim to generate something new. The ceremonial body operates at this level. It does not represent, but rather reflects, and even has the capacity to intervene into as well as produce social relations. In Donald Bogues’ words, ceremonial bodies do not so much “inhabit a coherent, continuous space as they generate a space around them.”\(^{209}\)

I will now return to the production of space through bodies and modes of identification that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter in relation to the politics of the Muslim veil in France. This production of space is reflected but also deflected in *Endless Tether.* The space of ritual or gathering produced by the ceremonial bodies in Haq’s work is productive precisely because of its indecisiveness. Indeed, Haq has stated that she uses her own body in her work in order to “choreograph [her] own rituals and imagine new spaces of congregation.”

The new inscriptions of intersubjectivity that *Endless Tether* engenders have to do precisely with the dislodging of social relations from fixed meaning. Conjoining with the perpetually shifting attitudes and postures of the bodies on the screens are unidentifiable social and cultural codes that subtend what unfolds. The legibility of the direction of the images’ movement is a powerful example of this. I argued in the previous chapter that the black cloth Haq uses in *(un)covering* to cover her body represented the tracing line of writing. The red cloth in *Endless Tether* can be read in similar terms: as the social codes that inscribe her body. In this work, however, the specificity of the social and cultural codes that the cloth embodies remains ambiguous. If the cloth is to be read as a form of writing—a tracing line—the direction of its movement throughout the first half of the piece (from left to right) represents Arabic, if not Islamic, conventions of writing and acts of reading. In this case, the red cloth could very well embody the idea of Muslim codes regarding sexuality, feminine values, and dress. Yet, even in this scenario, the staged intersubjective relation remains unclear. Haq’s body is evidently female and dark-skinned. However, the second figure’s characteristics are difficult to ascertain, and hence, so too are the power relations between them. Furthermore, in the second half of

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210 Farheen Haq quoted from the artist’s website. http://farheenhaq.com/about/.
the piece, the direction of movement shifts: the cloth begins to flow from right to left, calling to mind Western codes of written inscription and reading, and an alternate set of values regarding femininity, sexuality, and dress.

Even the choice of red cloth reflects the general ambivalence of meaning underscoring the work, insofar as this color conjures a range of conflicting emotions and references, from love and passion to violence and warfare. The installation piece therefore successfully blurs the specific cultural references with which the subject sometimes appears to struggle, and other times, to espouse eagerly. One is left with the indecisive body of a secular Muslim woman caught at the crossroads of her cultural and religious values and those of the hegemonic, secular, neoliberal society in which she lives. And yet, neither of these cultural references is attributed a definitely positive or negative connotation.

*Endless Tether* brings the relation between the bodies on the screen into focus, while hampering the viewing subject’s capacity to attribute a clear meaning to the relation. This is what allows the work to break away from identity politics that supports us/them, me/you constructs. Moreover, this is what creates a space that more accurately addresses the complicated web of identifications subtending the production of social spaces in pluralist societies.

Maalouf writes that he is often encouraged to affirm a double affiliation or hyphenated identity: “So, half-French and half-Lebanese? Not at all! Identity cannot be compartmentalized, divided in half, or in thirds, or into partitioned spaces.” Echoing this sentiment, the female body in *Endless Tether* refuses to make the choice that would

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clearly align the imaged body with the spatial mappings and politics of difference contained in the term *laïcité*. In his discussion of the creation of alternate community formations in contemporary art, art historian Jean-Ernest Joos argues for the crucial need to de-centre the workings of us/them constructs by generating spaces in which the inclusion of a possible third party in any dual relation, even if it takes the form of a momentary coming together within a space of circulation, always remains open.²¹² *Endless Tether* creates such a space, and I am that third party.

Decisively, *Endless Tether* provides a model of intersubjective encounters and of being-with, in which difference cannot be conceived as absolute or completely assimilable. The moments in *Endless Tether* in which I find myself untouched, and unable to relate or attribute meaning to what I see, are offset by other moments of identification with the attitudes of the body on the screen—to which I am indeed able to attribute my own meaning. These conflicting moments disable any attempt to position the body/subject on the screen as radically other. Instances when I relate to the body on the screen via haptic modes of perception—modes that do not align perception with a mastering, knowing position—the imaged body is embodied by me and yet remains unknowable. In these moments, otherness and ultimately, difference, is felt; it is given a presence but cannot be assimilated into my own experience, my self-image, or what I claim to know. Here we have a distinctly alternative politics of difference. It accommodates moments of continuity and identification with the other, while recognizing instances in which that body affirms the presence of a (cultural) difference impossible to translate into the terms and experiences of sameness.

The Urban Veil’s Politics of Difference and the Democratic Struggles of Pluralist Societies

In this chapter I examined two artistic projects that I contend engage directly with the spatial operations and correlative modes of identification that are mapped by the principle of laïcité in France.

Hayet.djelali.org and Endless Tether productively intervene into the spatial mappings of laïcité, reflecting the central role that the imaged female body plays in the formation of collective identities, and deflecting the key role that visuality plays in securing those constructs. Through close readings of the two works, I developed an alternate model of a politics of difference that promotes protean forms of (dis)identification. I argue that these works reflect the inscriptions of intersubjective encounters that I have been aiming to articulate in relation to the characteristics of the image of the urban veil.

Both hayet.djelali.org and Endless Tether can be seen as directly responding to Mouffé’s contention that there is an urgent need to rethink notions of citizenship and formations of collective political identity in order to attend to the democratic struggles and projects of pluralist societies. These artworks do just that. Both works open up the model of difference that underscores the politics of representation of the Muslim veil, creating spaces where the struggles of the urban veil can be inscribed. Concurrently, they demonstrate how the urban veil, in all its multiplicity, alters the various spaces and modes of identification in which it circulates. Most productively, the intersubjective encounters staged in these two art works crucially circumvent multiculturalism’s dual limitations in its treatment of difference: its devouring and disavowing effects. The model of difference
proposed here moves instead toward the construction of a collective self, whereby the singularity of difference arises from multiple, intersecting, and diverging points of identification across a range of conceptual, physical, and virtual terrains.
Chapter 5

Reflections on the Image of the Muslim Veil in Fashion


*Between* was the 1998 spring-summer collection of Hussein Chalayan, a Turkish-Cypriot designer based in London. Through strategic use of the fashion show as medium, Chalayan provoked a reflection on cultural codes underlying female sexuality and ideals of beauty, and how they are constructed and experienced in different cultural contexts. In one section, the models came out wearing wooden capsules on their heads, with only a slit for them to peer through. Each capsule had a different form, lending individuality to the wearers despite the fact that their facial characteristics were concealed. A second part of the show presented models wearing square-shaped mirrors around their heads, creating a surface around the models’ faces that mirrored back the gazes of the gathered fashionistas. The finale to the event showcased seven models and was choreographed to
unfold progressively like a flipbook. The first came out wearing nothing but a black mask partially covering her face, followed by models increasingly covered from the head down; the last was covered entirely. Other than her exposed feet and hands, only a pair of eyes peered out from behind a black silhouette of cloth. The reference to the *chador* was blatant.

In photographs of this portion of the show, the models’ bodies, whether completely naked or completely covered, take on similar postures. The women face the audience with the confidence of a model accustomed to being exposed. In static poses, arms at their sides, their gazes are blasé. They have submitted to the fact that their bodies are given over to the field of vision. In one image, a partially veiled model deviates, peeking to the side in an almost conniving way, as if she were engaging visually and looking back at someone in the audience.

The 2007 cover image of *mslm Fashion Magazine* presents a very different image of the Muslim veil. The magazine was produced by a group of young Dutch Muslim women living in the Netherlands. This image presents a figure in various textures of white, dusty-rose, and silver cloth. The figure’s head and shoulders are clearly covered by a veil; in fact, no skin is visible in this image. The white sneakers, tight silver leggings, and shimmering veil speak to a youthful, urban aesthetic. In opposition to the compliant and inactive poses of the models in Chalayan’s show, the veiled Muslim woman is bent over in a dynamic posture that expresses vitality.
In comparing these two fashion statements, I am confronted with very different images of the Muslim veil in its encounter with fashion. The first suggests a reflection on two different codes of dress, with the female body as primary receptacle of each; whether naked or entirely clothed, the body is given over to be seen. This is distinctly not the case with the second, in which the body is not entirely given to be seen—not because it is completely covered, but because of its dynamic posture. These two images provide the general trajectories that will be pursued in this chapter: one thread will address fashion as a system of governance and interpellation; the second will demonstrate the many creative possibilities offered by this same system to subjects, veiled women in this instance, when it is integrated with the many registers of their everyday lives.
To be sure, fashion is a ubiquitous system that increasingly affects and shapes all facets of our lives, facilitating economic expansion through the reification of quotidian practices of dress and lifestyle. According to the philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky, we currently live in an era of “consummate fashion.” In *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy*, Lipovetsky describes consummate fashion as having a specific history closely linked with the development of modern democratic values of individualism and freedom in the West.\(^{213}\) The era of consummate fashion is underscored by a temporality of the present, an aesthetic of seduction and consumption (primarily of the female body), and finally, a frenzy for the new.

This description of the fashion realm appears incongruent with the requirements of modesty adopted by many practicing Muslim women. And yet, as Lipovetsky reiterates throughout his study, although the era of consummate fashion has come to infiltrate all aspects of our lives, it has also taken on a radical pluralism that opens up new sites of creative possibility for self-expression. He states, “Fashion’s new configuration is open, un-compartmentalized, and nondirective.”\(^{214}\)

In this chapter I will argue that the subject of consummate fashion embodies a double movement that adheres to the system’s logic. The term “fashion” has its roots in the Latin word, *facere*, which means “to make.” The subject’s double movement in fashion consists on one hand of being made—that is, of being *fashioned* into a certain mold by the system, in which psychic processes of idealization regarding images play a key role—and on the other hand, *fashioning oneself* through a process of self-creation *through* the system, or using the fashion system to create one’s own self-image. This


\(^{214}\) Ibid., 119.
double movement is what makes fashion such an intriguing and rich site of cross-cultural encounters and self-negotiation in explorations of the urban veil.

This chapter is divided into three sections. First, Chalayan’s work will provide the grounds for a discussion of the role the female body occupies in consummate fashion. The formal structure of *Between* manifests self-reflexivity with regard to the fashion show as a medium. Chalayan’s innovative use of this medium and its conventions reveals how its emergence is historically connected to the rise of the female body as spectacle and object of desire in modern consumer culture. Although the tenets underlying the position of the female body in this system are at odds with Islamic ideals regarding modesty, *Between* provides an example in which it is the practice of veiling that unsettles the workings of consummate fashion.

In the second section, the cover of the *mslm Fashion Magazine*, which depicts the veiled woman in a dynamic pose, offers a point of departure from the *being fashioned* dynamic of the fashion system. This image enables an examination of fashion as a tool for self-affirmation and the presentation of the female body not as object, but as subject of desire. This requires substituting the psychoanalytical model of desire, predicated on lack, with Deleuze’s concept of desire as connective. In this context, fashion is explored as a vehicle for creativity and self-expression.

The concept of the “mirror” will be used in the analysis of a second series of photographs taken from *mslm Fashion Magazine*, in which young, veiled, Muslim women are portrayed in typical fashion poses. Reading these images through the concept of the mirror points to the slippery line between the double movement of being fashioned...
and fashioning oneself—which demonstrates that points of conformance and emancipation are not easily disentangled.

In the third and final section, I will adopt the notion of “generation” as a perspective through which to approach the images in *mslm Fashion Magazine*. The images corroborate subjects that do not completely identify with the neoliberal fetishization of individualism, or with a traditional understanding of communitarianism. “Generation,” as recently defined by Fredric Jameson, articulates an active subject position that engages, rather than passively endures, the struggles of a specific historical moment and location. I contend that this subject position, based in individual experience, extends beyond the self—through identification processes—to a collective experience of the historical moment.

5.1 *Between: The Fashioning Operations of Desire*

Chalayan is reputed for creating collections that are conceptual in their form and experimental in their mode of presentation. The designer was born and raised in the Turkish part of Cyprus, straddling the margin between Muslim and Christian worlds. He now lives in London, where he moved in his early twenties to study fashion at Central Saint-Martins.

*Between*, Chalayan’s spring-summer collection of 1998, received much attention for the self-reflexivity his show. Instead of utilizing the platform to parade the new styles of his latest collection, Chalayan transformed his show into a critical reflection on dress codes across different cultures and the main tenets that structure the fashion world. As a finale to *Between*, a model appeared wearing nothing but a partial black face-covering.
The six models that subsequently emerged were increasingly covered in black until the final figure appeared in a full *chador*.

Press reviews for *Between* differ. Constance White, a fashion journalist for the *New York Times*, found the show to be a “provocative exploration of Islamic women’s place in society using the chador as the fulcrum.”\(^{215}\) Caroline Evans comments that it is hard not to read into the mixture of veils and naked bodies familiar tropes of the eroticization of Muslim women as “exotic and mysterious other presences onto which Western image makers can project, as onto a screen, the idea of lascivious Eastern sexuality.”\(^{216}\) White’s comment, on the one hand, is a positivist reading of the designer’s investigation of the status of Islamic women in society, but her use of the term “society” remains non-localized. This ambivalence is revealing and will be discussed further below. Evans, on the other hand, cautions us about the dangers that the use of the *chador* poses, as it readily lends itself to the re-inscription of established cultural and sexual power relations. Yet, both author’s comments focus on Muslim women, or in Evans’ case, the projected image of Muslim women.

In these two instances, as in most reviews of the event, the authors fail to give a satisfactory account of what was so unsettling about *Between*. The strong reaction to the show was not due to the naked bodies, which are relatively frequent in high-end and experimental fashion shows, nor to the *chador* itself. Rather, I contend that the appearance of the chador in a fashion show in combination with nude female bodies conjured a set of blatant contradictions. The shock came with the realization that certain

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culturally specific codes that at first appeared incongruous could begin to intersect and inflect each other.

I agree with Evans that the appearance of the chador—choreographed in an almost titillating reversal of a strip tease—evokes familiar tropes of the erotic Muslim woman, and extends an invitation to the orientalist gaze. As discussed in chapter one, the veiled woman resists Enlightenment ideals of visibility and transparency, frustrating both the subject’s power to know and the consequent confirmation of his or her sense of self. This resistance to the knowing gaze provokes scopic desire, which is a desire to unveil, possess, and know what is imagined to lie behind the veil’s folds. However, Between does not permit this process of scopic desire to come into play fully.

First, scopic possession requires the gaze’s dominance over a passive object. The model in a fashion show is such an archetype: an object on display for the visual pleasure of a gathered audience. Whether completely clothed or almost naked, the model gives herself over to the realm of the visible. This compliant gesture is usually achieved by adopting a blank, disengaged facial expression that neither returns nor confronts the onlookers’ gaze. The models in Between, however, do not maintain this customary disengagement. First, as mentioned briefly above, in one of the sections of the show, the wooden capsules that covered the models’ heads afforded them a kind of mask through which they could see without being seen. When the models reappeared, wearing mirrors around their faces, the gazes from without were refracted—sent back to the audience members, who were confronted with their participation in the creation of the spectacle they had gathered to see.
What is most important for my study with regard to *Between’s* finale is that even though the models’ bodies were increasingly covered in black cloth, which initiated the process of resistance to the gaze that then provokes desire, the models’ eyes peered out from the gap in the partial face-covering and thereby confronted the gaze. In various images documenting the event, one model is shown glancing to the side and another, forward; while others even appear threatening as they engage visually with the audience. Looking back disables the possessive gaze as well as the scopic regime of desire.

Secondly, as discussed throughout this study, the eroticization of the Muslim woman about which Evans warns is contingent upon you/me inscriptions that allow the Western subject to construct her identity by positing the veiled woman as absolutely other. White’s comments on *Between* exemplify this reading. Because the author does not explicitly locate the term “society,” the reader is left to wonder whether she meant to refer to Muslim majority countries—most probably Iran? Or perhaps to London? Or is she alluding to Western societies more generally? Because White does not specifically use the possessive pronoun “our,” the phrase “Islamic women’s place in society” suggests a constitutive outside or a geographical entity set apart. Hence, White’s statement strongly implies a binary us/them logic.

White’s comments also convey that she did not attend the fashion show in person, because Chalayan in fact took strategic measures to unsettle such a binary logic. The fashionistas and journalists who were present at the occasion had to make their way to London’s East End, where Chalayan had selected a venue in the middle of a neighborhood with a large Bengali population. The event was scheduled so that attendees would necessarily pass through the celebration of an Islamic festival on their
way to the show. Chalayan’s decision to present his collection with a clear reference to the chador, and hence to Islam, was meant to echo the presence of religion within the immediate lived context. As has been noted earlier, although the chador signals an unambiguous reference to the imposition of a set of dress codes in Iran, its strong symbolism is often conflated with very different forms of veiling outside Muslim-majority countries. Thus, the deliberate link between the show’s content and the location where it was held ultimately highlighted the continuities and discontinuities between the powerful sign of the chador and the presence of the Muslim veil in the immediate locale. By indicating the transformations that occurs when dress codes travel across borders, Chalayan invited the audience to recast the reading of the Muslim veil as a sign of religious difference into a scenario that is more inclusive.

Certainly, Between risks allowing onlookers to read Western tropes of the veil into the appearance of the chador on the stage. And yet I suggest that even more forcefully, the show evokes questions about the current fashion system and its economies of desire surrounding the female body. I have mentioned how the veiled fashion models stare back at the audience, consequently disabling the scopic regime of desire that underpins the orientalist image of the veiled woman. I now want to address the fashion system’s imbrication in this scopic regime, which is rooted in an economy of (male) desire that is specific to modernity, consumer society, and the West—and in which the image of the female body plays a central role.

Previous chapters have demonstrated how the image of the veiled woman has often served as a screen onto which male anxieties regarding the colonial other could be projected and contained. In her persuasive article “The Other Side of Venus: The Visual

Ibid., 285.
Economy of Feminine Display,” Abigail Solomon-Godeau explains how the image of an eroticized femininity emerged in nineteenth-century France, serving as a receptacle for anxieties and desires with regard to modernity, the rise of commodity culture, and the breakdown of traditional social and gender relations. It is noteworthy that prior to the nineteenth century, the male nude, and not the female nude, was predominant in Western art. However, in the nineteenth century, a new bourgeois aesthetics emerged that substituted the female body for the male not only in high art, but also in popular culture. During the nineteenth century, women’s fashion completely eclipsed men’s fashion in western countries as well. Solomon-Godeau offers insight into how this shift to the female body in representation and fashion occurred concomitantly with the appearance of new technologies of image reproduction such as lithography, and later, photography and film.

Lipovetsky also addresses the simultaneous bureaucratization of fashion and industrialization of image production. For the first time, these new image technologies had the capacity to keep up with fashion’s “frenetic rhythm.” The intimate connection between the temporality of modernity, photography, and fashion was observed in treatises on the history of photography by Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin, as discussed in chapter three.

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221 Lipovetsky, The Empire of Fashion, 73-74.
222 Lipovetsky, 53-58.
223 Ibid., 58.
The result of the historical convergence of new technologies of reproduction and
the bourgeois aesthetics of the female body was a much-increased circulation of woman-
as-image in both elite and non-elite spaces in the form of nudes, pinups, female
celebrities, fashion plates, titillating erotica, and pornography.\textsuperscript{225} The widespread
reproduction, circulation, and consumption of woman-as-image forged a distinctly
modern economy of desire, in which the commodity fetish became intimately connected
to the consumable woman. In \textit{The Arcades Project}, Benjamin draws such an analogy
when he writes that “to desire the fashionable, purchasable woman-as-thing is to desire
exchange-value itself, that is the very essence of capitalism.”\textsuperscript{226}

The commodity fetish and woman as image of consumer society directly
Corresponds to the colonial fetishization of the image of the veiled woman. In both
instances, there is a desire to “have” the image or visually possess the woman. Moreover,
both occurrences are anchored in fantasy. Just as the veiled woman stands in as an image
that is actively produced through a desiring subject of representation, so too is the
eroticized image of femininity produced materially and psychically in nineteenth-century
France. In this second scenario, the images reveal nothing of the subjectivities and
material conditions of the subjects generally represented. According to Solomon-Godeau,
“It is as though the real absence of women as actors in the bourgeois civil sphere was
filled by compensatory fantasies—or constellation of fantasies—about femininity.”\textsuperscript{227}

It is noteworthy that the economy of desire present in the early-nineteenth-century
circulation of colonial postcards of veiled women, for example—which was discussed in
chapter one—dovetails with the shift that transformed the image of the European woman

\textsuperscript{225} Solomon-Godeau, “The Other Side of Venus,” 116.
\textsuperscript{226} Benjamin, qtd. in Solomon-Godeau, 129.
\textsuperscript{227} Ibid., 117.
into a fetish commodity in France during the same period. In both cases, the absence of
visibility and hence knowledge of the female subject is actively displaced, projected onto
fantasized representations.

What is most important for my argument in Solomon-Godeau’s article is how
display culture, femininity, and image technologies all converged at this historical
moment to naturalize the central role that women came to play in consumer society. This
role is best characterized by Laura Mulvey’s term “to-be-looked-at-ness,”228 and it
continues to prevail in the era of consummate fashion. Guy Debord has demonstrated the
extent to which the primary mode of address for consumer society is the register of the
visual, and more precisely, the spectacle.229 I argue that the image of woman that the
fashion world continues to produce participates in the same gendered, libidinal economy
described by Solomon-Godeau when she discusses their nineteenth-century prototypes.
She writes that these image technologies tended “to articulate the sexuality of femininity
in terms of specularity rather than activity.”230

In Between, Chalayan’s use of the chador while experimenting with the fashion
show medium taps directly into this subtext of the consummate fashion system:
specifically, the naturalized conflation between the female body, the spectacle, and the
libidinal economy of desire. The sequential appearance of models that produces an
image of the veiled woman—which moves from a completely exposed body to a
completely covered body that looks back—evokes the structure of early experiments with
the moving image. I believe this is not serendipitous, but rather demonstrates Chalayan’s
commitment to a conceptual and self-reflexive use of his medium.

229 Debord, The Society of the Spectacle.
The form of the fashion show that we know today began between 1908 and 1910 in the French haute couture fashion houses and quickly became “authentic spectacles.”\(^{231}\)

The fashion show shared in the consumerist logic of display in which female models were not subjects but consumer goods designed to lure consumers. In the words of Lipovetsky, “The idealized models of haute couture were the luxurious live counterparts of attractive shop windows.”\(^{232}\)

If I have evoked Mulvey’s “to-be-looked-at-ness,” a term with which she characterizes the image of the woman in classic cinema, it is because I believe there is a correspondence between the emergence of the fashion show and early experiments with the moving image. Both manifest a fetishization of the woman’s body in motion. In *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible,”* Linda Williams explains how early moving-picture apparatuses, such as the zoopraxiscope used by Muybridge at the turn of the century, were developed in the name of science and a desire to understand the body in movement. This stemmed directly from the new capacity to capture movement with a mechanical eye. Williams argues that what was born as a set of scientific questions rapidly turned into a frenzy for the visible, resulting in pornographic answers.\(^{233}\) According to her, by the late 1890s, Muybridge’s “fetishization of the female body, then channels and displaces an original male will-to-knowledge—the ‘academic question’—into so many games of peekaboo around this body.”\(^{234}\)

The pleasure of the visible that emerged around the woman’s body in movement in these forms of proto-cinema, and the appearance of the female model on the catwalk,

\(^{231}\) Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion,* 58.

\(^{232}\) Ibid., 78.


\(^{234}\) Ibid., 49.
each reflect the burgeoning naturalization process of a certain image of femininity as spectacle proper to consumer society and the consummate fashion system. I therefore believe that Mulvey’s “to-be-looked-at-ness” of the female image in classic cinema can also pertain to the archetypal model in a fashion show. Here too, the woman is placed outside the narrative flow of action and is deprived of the capacity to return the gaze; she is therefore only present as an image to be looked at, which is to say, as spectacle.235

Yves Saint-Laurent said that he did not see his models as women but rather as mannequins, stating that if there was one aspect of a model that retained his attention, it was solely how their shape lent itself to the presentation of a certain line.236

Without overemphasizing the connection between the moving-image and the fashion show as it pertains to the female body, I wish to suggest that this connection yields useful insights into Chalayan’s Between. In his use of a sequence of models to enact the gradual donning of the chador, the structure of the spectacle mimics the fundamental structure of classical cinema, in which several separate images are presented, consecutively aspiring to the illusion of one continuously evolving image. In this sense, we can say that Chalayan is referencing the “to-be-looked-at-ness” of the models as image.

The presence of the chador intervenes as a blatant contradiction of this “image” of femininity. As discussed previously, the practice of veiling is tied to wide-ranging interpretations of Islamic ideals of modesty as a female virtue, and is underscored by a general distrust of the visual realm. In Europe and North America, the chador is an iconic

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235 Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures, 12.
symbol of these tenets and is therefore understood as being at the antipode of the
celebration of the female body in the consummate era of fashion. Admittedly, there is a
precariousness in utilizing these tropes, in which the gradual covering of the body in
*Between* runs the risk of enticing rather than resisting the gaze. And yet as I argued
above, the veil in this instance enables the models (especially the more veiled ones) to
look back without being seen, unquestionably refuting not only the orientalist gaze, but
also the traditional role of the fashion model: her “to-be-looked-at-ness.” Chalayan’s
experimental use of the models and the fashion platform in *Between* consequently
gestures to the fashion show’s fundamental ideology. *Between* exposes consummate
fashion’s participation in a distinctly capitalist and male economy of desire, as well as its
capacity to “conceal its constituent relations of production”\(^{237}\) that have normalized the
role women play within this economy.

In the preceding section, I argued that *Between* reveals how the female subject,
both veiled and unveiled, is fashioned by Western libidinal economies into an image of
desire. I have also proposed that the scopic regimes underscoring colonial imagery of the
Muslim woman, veiled and unveiled, are directly linked to the rise of the worship of the
displayed female body as spectacle in the age of modernity. Furthermore, I explored how
Chalayan, by staging his fashion show among the festivities of a local religious event,
introduced a connection between the symbol of the *chador*, which is customarily used to
signal an absolute other, and the very different form that the practice of veiling takes in
the local context—where it is already an integral component of London’s social fabric.
The image of the Muslim veil in this fashion show, in contrast to what Evans and White

\(^{237}\) Solomon-Godeau, “The Other Side of Venus,” 133.
argue, does not merely represent dress codes related to Muslim women, but is also used to intervene and expose the central values and norms prevalent in the consummate era of fashion. However, while the image of the Muslim veil in *Between* provokes questions regarding the fashion system, it does not explain how the Muslim veil actually participates in that system. This question will be addressed in the following section.

### 5.2 The Self-Fashioning Possibilities of the Urban Veil

In the first section, I discussed the fashion show as a medium specific to modernity. I now turn to fashion’s second established media platform dating from the same period: the fashion magazine. The cover of *mslm Fashion Magazine* is intriguing when juxtaposed with the image of the Muslim veil put forth in *Between*. I have examined the way the *chador* in *Between* is used to illuminate the fashioning operations of the gaze on the female body, which results in the production of a certain image of both the veiled woman and femininity in the West. I will now argue that the image on the cover of *mslm Fashion Magazine* demonstrates the creative potential of the fashion system: how the subject can work through the system to affirm and negotiate her self-image. This implies that she is no longer an object of desire, but a desiring subject. The psychoanalytical model of desire that I have been working with up to this point is inadequate for theorizing this shift. In the next section, I will therefore present an alternate paradigm of desire, which accounts for the affirmative movement of the subject in fashion.
The *mslm Fashion Magazine* was the exhibition catalog of a show at MAMA, an art gallery run by the Public Art Squad Foundation in Rotterdam.\(^{238}\) MAMA focuses on the artistic production of young local artists. In this instance they asked a group of “fashion-minded,” second-generation Dutch Muslim women to organize and produce work for an exhibition on the Muslim veil and fashion.\(^ {239}\) The group of women curators behind the project consisted of young designers, architects, writers, and artists. The project provided a space for these women and their audience to imagine what form a fashion magazine would take if it were dedicated to Islamic dress codes produced by Muslim women in the Netherlands.

The blatant paradox of having a “covered girl” as the “cover girl” of a fashion magazine is an obvious entry point into this discussion. The “cover girl,” referring to the photograph on the front page of a magazine, is a genre onto itself. The genre’s connection to the libidinal economy of consumer and spectacle culture outlined above is clear: the terms “cover” and “girl” reference both display and gender (note the absurd sound of “cover boy”). The primary communicative objective behind the cover girl image is recognition. The recognizable face of a movie star, entertainer, or fashion model is used associatively to represent the style of the magazine and to lure people into buying.\(^ {240}\) In addition to being a recognizable face, the chosen cover girl is typically recognizable for her embodiment of an idealized image of femininity and beauty.

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The veiled woman on the cover of *mslm Fashion Magazine* is manifestly not recognizable. Crouched over so that her face is hidden from view, her body is decentered to the far right of the frame and only half-present within the image. In fact, her gender is assumed from the stereotypical feminine palette in which she is dressed, and from the headscarf, which is a distinctly female practice. Neither the woman nor the formal composition of the image expresses specularity. To the contrary, the various textures of materials in which she is clothed, the emphasis on their respective folds, creases, and deflection of light—and the manner in which the veiled figure stands out in relief against the white background—all speak to the sense of touch, and hence, to the aesthetics of the veil outlined in chapter one. This aesthetics is confirmed by the glossy, decorative flowers that span the surface of the cover. These ornamental motifs are palpable to the fingertips, but only visible when the light hits them in a certain way.

This “cover girl” image of a veiled woman clearly disables the workings of the spectacle that would transform the image into a visual object of desire. That said, I argue that desire is expressed in the image, albeit not following the Lacanian definition of desire on which I have been drawing. In that paradigm, desire is located in the psyche of the observing subject: it is embedded in a perceived lack and is directed towards a representation. In the words of Laplanche and Pontalis, desire “is not a relation to a real object independent of the subject but a relation to phantasy.”

Deleuze articulates an alternate schema of desire that reflects the underlying textures of this image, in which an assemblage of various elements are woven together to express a movement of self-affirmation. Here I would like to reiterate the combination of elements in the cover image and what they express: the stereotypical feminine colors and

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the headscarf identify a Muslim woman; the dynamic posture and slender figure communicate agility of movement; the combination of the ankle-high sneakers and silver leggings covered by a loose, knee-length skirt reflect the fashion aesthetics of urban youth, promoted by the likes of H&M and American Apparel at the time the magazine was produced; the emphasis on textures, folds, and the translucent decorative pattern embody Islamic aesthetics of touch and ornamentation; the fact that the figure is not visually objectified or made to represent an ideal of female beauty focused on the body manifests the Muslim principles of modesty and consequently, a commitment to Islam.

Therefore, the cover of this fashion magazine becomes a site where an assemblage consisting of fashion, the stereotypical genre of the “cover girl,” textures, the Muslim veil, urbanity, youth, femininity, Muslim values, religion, and colors all intersect. I am not proposing that these elements communicate the represented veiled woman’s desire to be agile, hip, and fashionable. I maintain rather that taken together, these different elements produce readings of the urban veil that must be seen as the subjective expression of the group of young Dutch women behind the project. In this light, the assemblage of elements manifests a desire, which is affirmative and creative—and, I argue, distinctly Deleuzian.

Deleuze developed his concept of desire in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and in *Dialogues*, largely in collaboration with Félix Guattari. For Deleuze, desire is not a psychic state; it is an energetic impulse, a creative process that exists on a plane that is constituted individually and collectively. According to Deleuze, “each group or individual should construct the plane of immanence on which they lead their life and
carry on their business.” In this constructivist approach, desire does not presuppose a subject, nor is it directed toward an object or fantasy. Consequently, the female body is not an object of desire in this model, but as Patricia Pisters explains, “The body desires to connect with other things (human or other) and become something else: there is no longing for lost origins, but a desire to connect from where one is (i.e. always in the middle).” Desire in this model is an ongoing process that is intimately connected to individual and collective forms of becoming.

The cover image of *mslm Fashion Magazine* is a manifestation of the various elements that together communicate the daily life of a group of young Dutch Muslim women—a life in which both religion and fashion play a role. In this instance, the veil is not used as a feminist strategy to resist and criticize consummate fashion, but rather is seen to coexist with fashion and other elements that express a sense of the collective self at a specific moment and location.

The affirmative, self-fashioning side of fashion was the subject of a recent exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York: *American Woman: Fashioning a National Identity between 1890 and 1940*. Focusing on “archetypes of American femininity through dress,” the exhibition reveals how “the American woman initiated style revolutions that mirrored her social, political, and sexual emancipation.”

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243 Patricia Pisters, “From Eye to Brain. Gilles Deleuze,” 32. By “origins” the author is not referring to a diasporic situation, but rather to the psychoanalytical process by which the child enters into the symbolic order and first experiences its separateness from its mother.
Although I find the idea of fashioning national identity based on styles of femininity highly problematic and essentializing, it is significant that fashion is presented as taking part in larger movements of social formation and emancipation. From this perspective, fashion trends affirm a desire to be perceived in a specific, or alternate, way. On a collective level, fashion can manifest a desire for a world other than the one that currently exists, and can affirm new subject positions in that world, both of which are concomitantly coming into being. The art historian Isabelle Graw has articulated this idea, stating that fashion “has the power not only of giving expression to a specific attitude toward life, but also of creating or anticipating it.”

I maintain that this is the form of desire expressed on the cover of *mslm Fashion Magazine*. Here, the veiled figure embodies a subject position that is committed to Islam and its ideals of modesty. The veil, the sneakers, the leggings, together with the body’s dynamic pose, express an affirmative sense of self that is young, urban, and Muslim. By strategically evading scopic operations specific to consummate fashion, the image affirms a life-world in which the commitments to Islamic values and fashion coexist. In this way, what Lipovetsky refers to as the deeply pluralistic nature of the consummate era of fashion makes possible the combination and expression of numerous positions and sites of identification specific to Muslim women.

Furthermore, and in keeping with Graw’s words, fashion becomes a type of *habitus*, a term I borrowed from Mahmood in chapter three to discuss the invisible processes of subject formation underscoring ritualistic practices such as veiling. In keeping with this logic, the manner in which a subject chooses to express herself through dress codes both reflects and creates an inner attitude. In her article, “‘Islamic Fashion’ in

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Europe: Religious Conviction, Aesthetic Style, and Creative Consumption,” Annelies Moors describes the different styles of dress, including sporty, urban, and elegant, that are emerging amongst Muslim women in the Netherlands. Moors writes of how numerous women she interviewed explained that “their main concern is to produce a ‘fit’ between a particular style of dress and their personality or inner self.”

I will revisit this (collective) self-fashioning movement of fashion below. For now, I want to discuss briefly the precarious distinction between the two movements of the subject in fashion that I have outlined thus far: that of being fashioned by the fashion system and its gaze, and that of fashioning oneself through the system. It is certainly not my claim here that the presence of a Muslim veil in a fashion photo is transformative. Nor am I saying that if a Muslim woman has overseen the production of the fashion image, the Deleuzian model of desire will necessarily come into play. On the contrary, a series of photos in the mslm Fashion Magazine of the organizers behind the project makes it clear that fashion is the ground where a certain form of recognition is sought, and on which measuring-up to an ideal image is an imperative. Therefore, the terrain between the two movements I have outlined is very slippery. The analysis of one of these images will serve to demonstrate this point.

The magazine’s first series of images, “Meet the MSLM’S,” serve as “fashion portraits” of the veiled and non-veiled Muslim women that produced the exhibition and the catalogue for MAMA. The images are accompanied by captions that reference the designers of each item of the featured clothing, as well as the bibliographic details of the “models.” In one image, a figure is dressed in black from head to toe. At first glance the

image speaks of luxury: the model’s black attire consists of high-heeled boots, loose-fitting pants, a suit jacket fitted at the waist by a belt, black leather gloves, an exposed neck, a tight scarf pulled into a bun at the back of her head, and large, tinted sunglasses. The model sits on a chair placed below a marble stairwell with an Art Deco, metal-worked banister. The formal composition is constructed around the diagonal line of the stairwell that divides the image between a lower front section, where the model bathes in daylight that serves to enhance her glamorousness, and the dark background.

The model is posed in such a way that she, like the rest of the image, appears lifeless. She sits nestled into the right corner of the hefty chair, legs crossed, with her right hand on her knee. Her left arm is draped over the chair’s side and a gloved hand falls over the front of the armrest. Her face is directed to the left of the camera, looking beyond the frame of the image, and bears an expression of self-composure.
However, the self-composure expressed in this image has little to do with a desire to affirm oneself in a creative manner that would have emancipatory effects. Here, the figure has transformed herself into an image. Like the stylish glasses perched on her nose, as well as the designer seat upon which she is posed, the model in this image is transformed into an object on display. The veil within this economy is one decorative element among others in a world of glamour and style.

I therefore want to distinguish clearly between the workings of the “mirror” in fashion and the self-affirming fashion image that I argue has productive and transformative repercussions. The concept of the mirror is aligned with the fashioning movement of the subject: it represents fashion’s technique of governance. The Lacanian mirror stage, as discussed above, occurs when the child identifies proprioceptively with an exterior image that she perceives as being more ideal than her own sense of self, and she consequently identifies with, and absorbs, this ideal image. This process is narcissistic by nature and belongs to the order of the imaginary; crucially, it continues throughout our lives as a central psychic function in the construction of subjectivity.

Silverman writes:

Seminar VII thereby intimates that idealization is an activity which the subject performs first and foremost in relation to the corporeal image within which he or she most aspires to see him or herself. All other images which are subsequently idealized are somehow related to it. Indeed, to idealize an image is to posit it as a desired mirror.248

Following this line of thought, the mirrors framing the model’s heads in Chalayan’s Between are not only a strategy to deflect the gaze that fashions the female

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248 Silverman, Threshold of the Visible World, 44.
body through a scopic regime of desire: rather, the model-mirror nexus also stands in for
the mirror in which the gathered onlookers desire to see themselves reflected.

Silverman also addresses the predisposition of the subject to perform, in an act of
mimesis, the ideal image at the moment of being photographed. The anticipation of being
turned into an image provokes the awareness of the gaze, and a desire to be
acknowledged and recognized as measuring up to its ideals. Roland Barthes describes
how the body responds, through a pose, to the awareness that it is the object of the
camera’s gaze; as a result, the body actively transforms itself into an image even before
the shutter opens.249

In performing a pre-fabricated ideal image at the moment of being photographed,
the subject, in a sense, rescinds herself in order to become image. Indeed, Silverman has
stressed how the ideal-image tends to be grounded in established representations.
Consequently, even though Barthes characterizes the enactment of the pose as “active,”
the result of this action can very well result in a passive, self-subjection to existing
norms. Silverman explains:

To assume, in advance, the shape of a particular photograph represents at
most an attempt to exercise some control over an unavoidable transaction;
it is behavior in which the subject engages at the behest of the
camera/gaze, and in response to the impossibility of avoiding specularity.
Mimicry also proceeds in relation to a preexisting representation, which,
in the case of the pose, derives from the cultural screen. It is thus limited
to what is at a given moment representationally “possible.”250

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249 Roland Barthes, *La Chambre Claire : Note sur la Photographie* (Paris : Gallimard Seuil,
1980): 25. [« Or, dès que je me sens regardé par l’objectif, tout change : je me constitue en train
de « poser », je me métamorphose à l’avance en image. Cette transformation est active : je sens
que la Photographie crée mon corps ou le mortifie, selon son bon plaisir »].

And yet, as I argue is the case in the cover image of the *mslm Fashion Magazine*, this occurrence of being photographed, and the subject’s active response in the form of a pose, can also become an instant in which the response productively transforms and disrupts the cultural screen.

I will now address a second set of images in this magazine that also eschew the specular side of fashion. In this final section, I will explore this point of view directly in relation to the image of the urban veil.

### 5.3 The Urban Veil in Fashion

Several photos in the *mslm Fashion Magazine* are grouped together under the title “Osdorp Girls.” Orsdorp is a suburb of Amsterdam and has come to be known over the last few decades as a milieu for immigrants and cheap housing. The series of photos was taken by two Dutch photographers, Martine Stig and Viviane Sassen, and the women in the photos were dressed by Emmeline de Mooij, a Dutch fashion stylist. Each photograph depicts one or more veiled women in Orsdorp’s urban landscape. The images first appeared in 2005 in the avant-garde British fashion magazine, *Dazed & Confused*. None of the garments worn by the women in the images is credited to brand names or individual fashion designers. Therefore, the series of photos is not promotional; rather, it is presented as a staged social portrait of veiled Muslim women and their “street fashion” in Osdorp.

Conscious of the fact that the artists behind the series of photos are Dutch, and well aware that the images are indeed staged, I nevertheless believe that they corroborate a self-affirming movement underscored by the Deleuzian notion of desire; the photos
shed light on what is at stake in the encounter between fashion and Muslim women who are also committed to the practice of veiling. I will provide close readings of three of these images in order to address a manifested desire both to connect with and shape a social landscape. Furthermore, the orchestration of looks in the images provides the starting point for a discussion of an alternate cultural screen under construction in these photos. I will demonstrate how the women look to each other as “idealized images,” while simultaneously reflecting both individual and broader stylistic trends.


The first image figures two veiled women. One of them is positioned immediately on the opposite side of the frame, with her back to the viewer; she appears to be looking
in the direction of the second woman. This second veiled figure is further back and is
directly facing and looking out at the viewer. Both women are wearing clothes made of
various types of white fabrics and seem, simultaneously, to merge with and emerge from
the white concrete building wall in front of which they are photographed. The image is
bathed in daylight, which conveys a pervasive, white, textured appearance. The relief
effect is emphasized by the fact that the woman in the foreground with her back to us is
slightly out of focus, whereas the second in the background is sharply in focus. This
operation has a “push-pull” effect, meaning that it visually pushes the foreground back
and pulls the background toward the surface of the image. These same features, namely
the palette and textures of the clothes that match those of the constructed urban
landscape, and the collapsing of the foreground into the background, are repeated in
several other images in the series.

These formal aspects of the work are consistent with the Islamic aesthetics of the
veil. But what is more important here is the meaning these features generate through the
series of images: they are strongly suggestive of a co-imbrication of the women and their
immediate urban context.

To further this claim, it is necessary to examine a second image. In this photo
there is a group of three women, each of whom wears different colors, fabrics, types of
clothing, and veils. They stand in a triangulated constellation in front of a concrete
housing complex. Two of the women are visibly engaged in conversation and hold
grocery bags, one of which is red and has “Dirk” written on it in bold white letters—the
name of a chain of grocery stores in the Netherlands. The third woman stands between
them and the viewer. She is turned in such a way that suggests she was engaged in the conversation until something behind her caught her attention.

![Image](image_url)


The aesthetics of this image suggests that the women were photographed off-guard while they candidly went about their daily activities. This is characteristic of the genre of street fashion photography that emerged in Britain in the 1980s. Street-style photography was inspired by punk and New Wave subcultures, and attempted to promote everyday street fashion and trends as a statement against the elitism of the fashion
Street-style aesthetics are characterized by their opposition to the elaborate *mise-en-scène* that operates behind images in the fashion industry: they feature full-length shots, natural light, simple backdrops, and a tactic of showing “real people” in “everyday situations.” Today, street style fashion photography has become the genre of fashion blogs, fashion’s so-called new “democratization” platform. At the same time, it has been fully incorporated into the fashion system and widely used by established fashion photographers for mainstream fashion magazines. The fact that the series under discussion was first published in *Dazed & Confused* is a case in point. That said, the relevance of its use for the Osdorp Girls lies in the tactical importance that the cityscape plays within this genre. In street style fashion photography, the city is not seen as a backdrop but “as an important factor contributing to the formation of a specific style.”

The images of the Osdorp series intimately connect the women to the urban setting by integrating their style, textures, and colors into the city’s architectural and everyday fabric. Here, a distinct style is presented as being specific to an urban locale, giving form to the age, gender, religion, and even the class of its wearers. Specifically, the aesthetics of the everyday in these images enables the dialog between the women and the city to take place in two directions. In keeping with the push-pull effect in some of the images, the style is seen as emerging from, and inflecting, its milieu. In an affirmative and creative mode that is aligned with the Deleuzian model of desire, the fashion style in the images can therefore represent a connective impulse emanating from the bodies of these young women as nexus.

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252 Ibid., 134.
253 Ibid., 136.
I want to pursue this argument further through the analysis of a final photograph in this series. In this photo, five full-length, veiled women in various colors are seen making their way across an empty parking lot. The shot is taken at an oblique angle from above, and the women occupy almost the entirety of the two-page spread. The veiled figures converse with each other in a brightly lit scene; one woman lags nonchalantly behind. The women are covered in a stylized manner, attesting more to the creativity of the stylist than actual forms of dress one would encounter on the street. Still, what is striking is both their prominent visibility as a group, and the details that visually distinguish them from each other. In the former case, they share the commonality of the veil, their gender, their age, and a common style; small details in the different colors of their accessories and clothing distinguish them from each other.

It is often said that the Muslim veil hides the individual features of its wearer, rendering her invisible within public spaces. In my opinion, this is an argument that can only hold in contexts where the practice is imposed. However, in liberal democracies where the veil certainly covers part of the woman’s body, it does not render the body invisible, but rather, marks it as the visible sign of a commitment to Islam. Therefore it affirms the wearer’s individuality in the public realm. In a group, such as in many of the images of *Osdorp Girls*, the veil is a shared feature that signals them as different from the majority in Dutch society; but the wide-ranging styles, colors, and personal interpretations of the practice also carve out a space of individual expression, and therefore difference, within the group. Many of the images under discussion here reflect this space.

The orchestration of the looks of the figures in the *Osdorp Girls* gives form to this complex configuration of identification found in the encounter between fashion and women committed to Islam in secular neoliberal societies. In these images, the women are seen to engage each other visually, while at least one figure always looks beyond the frame, and often looks engagingly at the viewer. Such orchestrations of looks replicate the complex web of identification processes inscribed by the image of the urban veil discussed in the previous chapter.

It is relevant here to discuss the proliferation of fashion blogs and its effects for individuals and the fashion system alike. Numerous fashion blogs belonging to young Muslim women and dedicated to Muslim dress codes and fashion have appeared in the past several years. These include, among others, “Muslim Style,” “Hijab Style: The UK’s First Style Guide for Muslim Women,” “We Love Hijab,” “Modest Flair,” and
These blogs create a space for young Muslim women to exchange ideas and creative ways to negotiate their religion and fashion. Moors reminds us of the wide-ranging attitudes adopted by Muslim women in the Netherlands regarding whether fashion can be combined with Islamic requirements and female virtues. She explains how the range of styles reflects these various attitudes and provokes the need for a shift in analysis away from “communities of conviction” to “taste communities.”

The blog “Hijab Style,” edited by Jana Kossiabati, a British woman of Lebanese origin living in London, receives as many as 2300 visits a day. Kossiabati claims that one of the main objectives behind her blog is to provide a site for young Muslim women to share experiences and ideas regarding their constant struggle to fit in. In her words, “Young women are increasingly looking for fashion that doesn’t set them apart from the rest of society.” Hence, beyond serving as a platform for Muslim women to discuss fashion, blogs also provide a space in which to express the challenges of living in secular societies.

I contend that the organization of looks in the Osdorp Girls photographs demonstrates the identification of young Muslim women with one another—a process which not only creates an alternate cultural screen, but also an identification with the broader fashion and stylistic trends of the society in which they live—and a

257 Ibid.
corresponding desire to fit in. Again, the body is the nexus from which the complicated web of identifications originates.

The Osdorp Girls series is intriguing for the manner in which it refutes a full-fledged endorsement of individualism that is key to consummate fashion, and at the same times eschews the sense of self-enclosed group. Frederic Jameson recently used the term “generation” to identify a collective subject position that experiences its historical moment through common struggles. He states, “The experience of generationality is … a specific collective and historical one,” and adds, “a generation is not forged by passive endurance of events, but by hazarding a collective project.” Kossiabati identifies fashion as an active response for a generation of veiled Muslim women in the West to a specific historical moment: “Our generation became more aware of their identity when we were thrust into the limelight after 9/11 and 7/7 and other events of the past decade or so. We were forced to deal with people questioning our faith, our identity and the way we look.” I therefore characterize the manner in which this group of Muslim women engages with fashion as generational. Fashion for this group of Muslim women becomes a platform of connectivity, through which religious beliefs and a desire to fit in and take part in wider stylistic trends coexist.

259 Khalil, “Muslim Designers.”
Looking Back

To recapitulate the main points of this chapter, I will return to the first photo of the Osdorp Girls series in order to demonstrate how the veil becomes a strategy to look back in the consummate era of fashion: a looking back that can be articulated on three levels. First, I argued that the encounter between the Muslim veil and fashion has the potential to unsettle the male economy of desire that undergirds the fashion industry. Looking back from behind the veil allows one to reject being the object of desire, and assume the position of a desiring subject. Second, in this image, the operations of the mirror in fashion are rerouted. The orchestration of the figures and looks in the image suggest that the woman with her back to the viewer looks at and identifies with the veiled girl directly in front of her. This latter woman embodies an alternate ideal-image, different from the ones upheld by the cultural screen and produced through the image repertoires proper to mainstream fashion. This second veiled woman offers to the woman who looks at her, and to the viewer, an example of an ideal-image of modesty that is in compliance with Islam. Finally, that same girl who looks back from behind the veil she wears—as well as the veiled woman who serves as a kind of protective shield in front of her—affirms both her position of religious difference and her desire to engage and connect with the space and the viewers outside the image.

By extension, the images represent an alternate “cultural screen,” or mirror, in which veiled Muslim women can see themselves reflected on their own terms: which is to say, terms that are specific to a group of practicing young Muslim women living in urban milieus in the Netherlands.
Conclusion

A Productive Look at the Urban Veil

This dissertation has aimed to “look productively” at the image of the Muslim veil in order to create a theoretical space for incipient inscriptions of the urban veil, which is a place holder for the heterogeneous subject position of Muslim women living in Europe and North America. According to Silverman, and as discussed in chapter three of this study, a productive look is at work in the act of perception when three interlocking displacements take place: in the first, the subject evade a prescribed position of viewing, allowing for the perception of alternate facets of the image, which normally remain latent, to emerge; the second displacement ensues with the dismantling of established signifying chains associated with the object of perception, opening up new paths of legibility; and finally and most crucially, a productive look necessitates the displacement of the subject of representation, and consequently a realignment of the self/other relationship. These crucial shifts reflect the principle preoccupations and arguments regarding the image politics surrounding the urban veil that this dissertation has addressed. As a result, they will be used to structure my concluding remarks.

Eschewing Prescribed Modes of Viewing Images

Firstly, Silverman’s concept of the cultural screen was a key concept throughout this thesis. The cultural screen is the image repertoire and web of associations that assigns the subject of representation a specific viewing position in relation to what is seen (here, the image of the Muslim veil in Europe and North America), and at the same time,
dictates how one ought to apprehend what is seen. Silverman refers to this configuration as the “given-to-be-seen” nature of normative representations. The first displacement of a productive look occurs when the viewing subject is able to perceive the object of perception in ways that were not prescribed in advance, allowing details of the image to initiate a dismantling of established associations.

Throughout this study I attempted to account for the content of the cultural screen pertaining to the Muslim veil, and how this screen is produced and reproduced, with the aim of revealing why the image of the Muslim veil remains key shorthand for a range of global socio-political issues today. A preliminary step in this inquiry consisted in the examination of the inherent features of images. I maintained that the presence of the veil in an image instigates a series of visual operations that intersect with conjoining formulations of the project of modernity. Cartesian perspectivalism, which is modernity’s scopic regime, aligns rationality and knowledge with the subject of representation’s domination of the visual realm. But Lacanian psychoanalysis also reminds us that this tradition obfuscates deep-seated apprehensions regarding the field of vision. The veil intervenes within these interlocking scenarios in a manner akin to an architectural screen, frustrating the viewing subject’s capacity to see and know, and concomitantly, attenuating anxieties in relation to the visual realm by becoming the surface onto which desire and fantasies are projected.

In this vein, I introduced two modes of image, beginning with the image-as-veil, which articulates the politics of representation, or the given-to-be-seen characteristics undergirding the urban veil. The image-as-veil harnesses the effects of the veil as screen, turning the image into a dividing surface that suggests that there is a beyond to what is
given-to-be-seen. These representational features have rendered the image of the Muslim veil a versatile symbol, readily instrumentalized for the inscription of imaginary conceptual and geographic cartographies in the service of colonial and imperial projects. These features continue to be used in contemporary discourses of othering, such as in the rhetoric of the War on Terror; and in right-wing political movements in Europe and North America that position the image as pivotal in politics of belonging and exclusion.

This versatile symbolism was further examined in chapter two through an analysis of the archive of the image in Western media, revealing the image’s polyvocal past and present. Following Silverman’s postulation that the cultural screen ascribes to the subject of representation a fixed position in relation to the object of perception, I argued that the mobilization of the image of the veil repeatedly functioned as a device for structuring self-sameness. As a result, the veil is ascribed an equally fixed position and legibility becomes an overarching, anonymous signifier for, among other things, women’s oppression, the backwardness of Islam, terrorism, the Orient, and fundamentalism.

Hence, the spatial operations, together with the archive of semantic associations that subtend the workings of the image-as-veil, construct and maintain the predominant cultural screen through which the Muslim veil is envisioned in the present. Most importantly for this study, I claim that these normative representations prevalent in global media culture operate through a form of decontextualization on two levels. Firstly, imaginaries surrounding the violence toward women in Muslim-majority countries—epitomized in evocations of the burqa—are conflated, often deliberately, with the experience of (veiled) Muslim women in Europe and North America, denigrating and disavowing the specifications of the experience and struggles of Muslim women within
these contexts. This decontextualization of imagery functions in a spatial and temporal manner, because such normative representations of the veil fail to account for how cultural traditions and practices change over time and from one geopolitical context to another.

Secondly, as the term suggests, the cultural screen is culturally and historically constructed, and hence, culturally specific. The image repertoire intervenes in the subject’s encounter with the image of the Muslim veil, subjecting what is apprehended to its own cultural terms and codes of representation. Chief within this second decontextualization, and in keeping with the workings of the image-as-veil, is the casting of the practice of veiling in terms of visuality, with the result that the alternate set of principles and cultural conventions—in which the pious practice the image refers to is ultimately grounded—is discredited.

Pertaining to the first displacement of the productive look and its capacity to eschew the given-to-be-seen nature of normative representations, I developed the image-as-folds, a second model of image. The image-as-folds builds upon a Deleuzian and materialist conception of images, bringing into focus alternate facets, modes of perception, and operations in relation to representation. By contrasting with the capitalization of visual processes and the distancing movement characteristic of the image-as-veil, the image-as-folds primarily interpellates modes of perception analogous to reading, which require moving forward tentatively, and also stresses the mediating and connective properties of images. By focusing on these features through close readings, my analysis of the artworks moved toward encountering the image in relation to the Islamic aesthetics of the veil: specifically, its depreciation of the transparent connection
between vision and knowledge, in favor of a mode of knowledge production dependent upon endless processes of decoding and interpretation.

Moving Forward from Here

A second displacement occurs when the productive look, which is imbricated in memory, is blocked in its capacity to enter into existing signifying chains and as a result, is displaced it its capacity to know. According to Silverman, when the backward path of memory is blocked, “we have no choice but to move forward.”

Through the accentuation of the features of image-as-folds, expressions of the urban veil significantly hampered preexisting semantic associations with the Muslim veil, allowing new meanings and theoretical trajectories to materialize. In this way, two reterritorializations of the image were able to take place. With respect to the first, I stressed the potential of certain images to communicate the experiences and struggles of Muslim women living outside Muslim-majority countries, including their continual struggle with how they are represented and perceived in the image-world. At the same time, I highlighted the discrepancies between these articulations and normative representations of the Muslim veil. Therefore, the image of the urban veil was reterritorialized to a specified socio-political situations and a set of distinct conditions of possibility. Living Tomorrow exemplified the new meanings that surface when the image-as-veil is replaced with the modalities of the image-as-fold, repositioning the urban veil as integral to, for example, Dutch society’s make-up.

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In addressing the second reterritorialization, by focusing on the modalities of the image-as-folds, I was able to move toward a theoretical encounter with the image of the Muslim veil that was more consistent with a set of cultural terms in which Islamic practice is invested. The result was a reterritorialization of the discussion to an alternate set of questions, and at times, vocabulary. The third chapter, for example, asked not how the practice of veiling can be aligned with the terms and goals of Western liberal feminism, but instead, how practices related to Islamic ideals of modesty could be envisioned as a feminist project unto itself.

Therefore, by reading images through a specific mode of perception and in line with an alternate set of cultural conventions, meaning is severed from pre-existing associations and gains an independent momentum that keeps step with how religious commitments, in the words of Leila Ahmed, “can evolve as they cross frontiers and take root in environments where new social and political conditions open up new possibilities of belief, practice, and interpretation for the rising generation.”261

New Configurations of Self/Other Relations

Finally, according to Silverman a look is productive if, and only if, in displacing the subject in relation to what is given to be apprehended—and by displacing the remembering look’s predisposition to return to what is already known—the subject is displaced in relation to the object of perception. In terms more appropriate to this study, the final displacement must provoke a realignment of the self/other relation.262

262 Silverman, Threshold of the Visible, 183.
Certainly, a central preoccupation throughout this study has been the identification processes in relation to images that underscore individual and collective subject formation. This dissertation demonstrated that the image of the Muslim veil functions primarily in this register in mainstream media culture. The analysis consequently traced how aspects of images, together with the conventions of media platforms, produce or reroute fixed identificatory constructs; especially us/them, friend/enemy configurations easily accommodated by the modalities of the image-as-veil.

On several occasions in this study, the dismantling of normative readings of the Muslim veil was accompanied by a disruption of self/other alignments. When the fixed position required by the image of the Muslim veil to secure a sense of self is shown to be no longer tenable, the subject of representation is at the same instant displaced in her capacity to know: an occurrence that ultimately affects her sense of self. The result is not only a transformed image of the Muslim veil, but also an exacerbation of the untenable position of the perceiving subject. Most importantly, this displacement of the subject happens in tandem with a problematization of the main terms and tenets belonging to the subject of representation, through which the initial self/other construct depended.

To illustrate this point, articulations of the urban veil in the above artworks problematized the main precepts of liberal feminism, imploded the ideals underlying the principle of laïcité in France, and suggested that the consummate era of fashion and the beliefs underscoring the practice of veiling open onto each other, bringing about transformations in key characteristics of the fashion system (namely, a devaluation of fashion’s commodification of the female body), and at the same time, styles of Muslim dress.
Conspicuously, these disruptions occasioned by the characteristics of the urban
veil upon normative representations and modes of identification demonstrated the pitfalls
of current models of articulating sameness and difference. Following Mouffe, the urban
veil posits a need for an alternate politics of difference that has the capacity to
accommodate increasingly intricate webs of (dis)identifications of citizens in pluralist,
liberal democracies. Neddam’s hayetjelali.org and Haq’s Endless Tether proposed
models in this regard, pointing to the crucial recognition of cultural difference that such a
politics must develop.

More broadly speaking, this study attests to the pervasive role images continue to
play in forging imaginary and lived relations between others and ourselves. For this
reason, images stand as powerful sites for addressing and displacing deep-seated
presuppositions such as those through which the Muslim veil continues to be reproduced.
In keeping with the Islamic aesthetics of the veil, art images have the potential to provide
a platform for an endless process of decoding and interpretation, with disruptive and
inevitably creative effects on knowledge production. Most importantly, such a method as
instrumentalized throughout this study via the close readings of the above works, never
promises a clear, resolute image. Instead, a productive look into the enfolding layers of
an image, as demonstrated by the multiple perspectives proposed in this study of the
urban veil, provokes an encounter that resonates with the words of philosopher of science
Isabelle Stengers: “We know knowledge there is, [but the piece] demands that we slow
down, that we don’t consider ourselves authorized to believe we possess the meaning of what we know.”

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Selected Bibliography

Books and Articles


**Videos**


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Samenvatting

Dit project onderzoekt de bijzondere betekenis die de islamitische sluier heeft voor collectieve verbeeldingen in met name de landen waar geen islamitische meerderheid bestaat, door te kijken naar hoe het beeld gehanteerd wordt in mediacultuur en hedendaagse kunst. Het voornaamste doel van deze scriptie is ruimte te maken voor de articulatie van de 'stedelijke sluier', een term waarmee ik doel op een betwiste plaats waar de politiek van representatie raakt aan articulaties van de heterogene subjectposities van moslimvrouwen in Europa en Noord Amerika. 'Beeldpolitiek' impliceert bovendien een locus van singulariteiten, strijd, onderhandeling en transformatie, elk gerelateerd aan emergente verbeeldingen van de sluier in specifieke geopolitieke contexten.

De argumenten van deze studie worden ontwikkeld in de loop van vijf hoofdstukken, gaand van een analyse van de bestaande conceptuele en geografische cartografie van het beeld van de islamitische sluier, naar een 're-routing' van het teken en de micropolitieke articulaties van de semantische leesbaarheid ervan, als iets dat een integrale component vormt van haar stedelijke contexten in West-Europa en Noord-Amerika.

Het eerste hoofdstuk, *The Image-as-Veil, the Images-as-Folds, and the Islamic Aesthetics of the Veil*, omschrijft het methodologische kader van dit project en ontwikkelt twee modellen van het beeld, en articuleert daarnaast een Islamitische esthetiek van de sluier, die ik in het vervolg van mijn studie gebruik als theoretische gereedschappen van mijn analyse. Kaja Silverman's theorerisering van 'het culturele scherm' en Deleuze's notie van de plooi ('the fold') articuleren de hoofdkenmerken van twee verschillende operatiemodussen van het beeld: “het beeld-als-sluijer” en het “beeld-als-plooien”. Ik stel
dat beide modellen noodzakelijk zijn om de complexe vraagstukken waardoor de moslimsluier vandaag omgeven wordt, aan te spreken. Ze accentueren ook de alternatieve individuele en collectieve identificatieprocessen die in de stedelijke sluier besloten liggen. Puttend uit het werk van Dominique Clévenot, Oleg Grabar en Abdelkébir Khatabi, stel ik dat het beeld-als-plooiën aansluit bij een “Islamitische esthetiek van de sluier” die weefsels, lijnen en ornamentuur van oppervlakken op de voorgrond plaatst, een modus van perceptie oproepend die meer analogieën heeft met lezen dan met kijken.

Het tweede hoofdstuk, *The Archival Image of the Muslim Veil*, wijd ik uit over de semantische lezingen van de sluier, door het media-archief van het beeld van de sluier te verkennen. Dit hoofdstuk neemt als beginpunt het sociaalpolitiieke klimaat in Nederland, om te demonstreren hoe het huidige politieke gebruik van de moslimsluier gebaseerd is op een spanning tussen overerfde en geleende historische betekenissen van de sluier als teken. Dit hoofdstuk is verdeeld in twee delen. In het eerste onderzoek ik de rol van het beeld van de islamitische sluier in *Fitna* (2008), de controversiële korte film samengesteld uit toegeëigende mediabeelden door Geert Wilders, leider van de Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV). In het tweede deel van het hoofdstuk, laat ik zien hoe Linda Wallace's *Living Tomorrow* omgaat met de ervaring van ontwrichte tijd in de hedendaagse Nederlandse maatschappij. Ik stel dat *Living Tomorrow* werkt door middel van een format dat deels de rol van archivaris gunt aan de bezoeker, door haar te vragen het verleden te herevalueren en zelf aan te geven hoe de toekomst van Nederland in haar diverse sociale, culturele en economische aspecten eruit zal zien.

In het derde hoofdstuk, *The Urban Veil: A Politics of (Dis)Identification*, biedt de videoinstallatie *(un) covering* van de Canadese kunstenaar Farheen Haq een subjectieve
iteratie die vragen oproept over interpellatie en identificatie vis-à-vis het culturele scherm. Ik stel hier dat Haq een politiek van disindentificatie op twee niveaus voltrekt, via een samenhangend stel tactieken van herhaling, noties van tekenen (‘drawing’), en een specifieke orkestratie van de blik. Ten eerste reflecteert en ontmantelt (un)covering de politiek van representatie waardoor de War on Terror in de Canadese pers omgeven wordt. Ten tweede laat ik zien dat Haq de ijle relatie aanspreekt tussen feminisme en religie, die in discussies over Islam uitgesproken op de voorgrond treedt.

Het vierde hoofdstuk, The Intersubjective Inscriptions of the Urban Veil: Toward a New Politics of Difference, behandelt het beeld van de sluier als plek van intersubjectieve ontmoetingen en vraagt welke nieuwe vormen van intersubjectiviteit door het beeld van de stedelijke sluier ingeschreven worden. In deze onderzoeking staat een verlangen centraal om alternatieve vormen van individuele en collectieve identiteitsformatie te verkennen die noch verdeeldheid consolideren, noch verschil teniet doen. Twee kunstwerken dienen in dit hoofdstuk als case studies, en suggereren voorlopige antwoorden op deze kwestie.

De eerste is een online identity-sharing interface van kunstenares Martine Neddam. Ik beargumenteer hoe hayet.djelali.org de betekenis en werking van de term laïcité in Frankrijk indexeert en tegelijk onderuit haalt. In het bijzonder toont het een double bind aan, die door de laïcité aan het lichaam van de moslimvrouw wordt opgelegd. De tweede case-study, Haq's Endless Tether, stelt een alternatief voor de politiek van verschil voor, één die een complexere manier biedt om de relatie tussen zelf en ander te denken.

Het laatste hoofdstuk, Reflections on the Image of the Muslim Veil in Fashion, onderzoekt hoe de moslimsluier deelneemt, of niet deelneemt, in wat Gilles Lipovetsky
het tijdperk van 'consummate fashion' heeft genoemd. Dit hoofdstuk brengt de analyse van het beeld van de stedelijke sluier op het niveau van de alledaagse praktijk, en vraagt hoe de mechanismen van de modewereld, waarin het vrouwelijke lichaam en vrouwelijkheid worden gespectaculariseerd en gecommodificeerd, kunnen samenleven met opvattingen die ten grondslag liggen aan de islamitische dagelijkse praktijk van het sluieren. Het concept van de spiegel dient als articulatie van het precaire onderscheid tussen wat ik noem de dubbele beweging van het subject in 'consummate fashion': een proces van door het systeem gemaakt-worden ('being fashioned') tot een bepaald model, en dat van zichzelf-maken of het maken van een zelfbeeld, door middel van het systeem.

Het beeld van de moslimsluier is verzadigd van koloniale en neo-imperiale geschiedenissen, waarin deze eerst en vooral figureerde als teken van anders-zijn. Door die geschiedenissen pas op de plaats te laten maken, verkent deze dissertatie hoe de moslimsluier zich ontvouwt op een historisch moment en in geografische locaties waar deze ook in verband gebracht moet worden met een reeks andere genealogieën. De studie is gemotiveerd door een verlangen om het beeld van de sluier te verkennen als plek van verbindingen: van verrassende effecten, bijvoorbeeld wanneer het gelezen wordt langs bij feministische discoursen, articulaties van verschil, en het systeem van consummate fashion. Dit project geeft daarom de nodige aandacht aan de performatieve kant van beelden en het potentieel van kunst om normatieve representaties te transformeren. Als, in navolging van Deleuze, een kunstwerk in staat is te duwen tegen het bekende en een idee te genereren, dan is deze studie een poging aan de hand van de besproken kunstwerken boven te halen wat ze zeggen over het begrip van de stedelijke sluier in al haar singulariteiten en veelvouden.