The urban veil: Image politics in media culture and contemporary art

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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. 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.61 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 effect 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.”69 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.70

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

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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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

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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.\footnote{For a detailed and insightful discussion of the shifting role of domesticity in the eighteenth century also see Inge Boer, “Despotism Goes West” in Inge Boer, \emph{Disorienting Vision: Rereading Stereotypes in Orientalist Texts and Images} (Amsterdam: Rodopi: 2004): 27-48.} Kahf therefore highlights the multifaceted intersection of Western representations of women in Islam with Western discourses of gender and class.\footnote{Mohja Kahf, \emph{Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Tergamant to Odalisques} (Texas: University of Texas Press, 1999): 7-9.} 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 \emph{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...
convert to the side of the Christian hero and “embrace a more passive femininity, and become part of the European world.” 79 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

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 inherit, 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.”

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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

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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. 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 future 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.” 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.”

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

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89 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 16.
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.’”93 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.94 The first decade of the twenty-first century, she claims, “has special claim to being, if not a more

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.\textsuperscript{96}

In \textit{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 \textit{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.\textsuperscript{97}

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


\textsuperscript{97} Deleuze, \textit{The Fold}, 19-20.
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.\(^{98}\) 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?”\(^{99}\) 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

\(^ {98}\) Foster, “*An Archival Impulse.*” 21.
\(^ {99}\) 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 reaffirming 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.\(^{103}\) 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

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
erouted 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.