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

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

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 theory. 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). 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.” 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 (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

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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.”108

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.\footnote{Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et Simulations* (Paris: Galilée, 1981): 123.} 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.\footnote{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.}

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
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.”

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. 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.”\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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.

\textit{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:

\begin{quote}
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 \textit{photo-graphed}.\textsuperscript{114}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{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.”117
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.”118

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.119

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*. 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.  

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

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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

123 Jacques Derrida qtd. in Amelia Jones, Self/Image, 35.
124 Butler, Excitable Speech, 38.
The Specular Image, the Medium of Video and the Weight of Repetition

(*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.125

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.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

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 (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 (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.”

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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 (un)covering inevitably calls forth the Deleuzian concepts of the “faciality machine” and the close-up of the face, or the affection-image. In 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

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130 Jacques Derrida qtd. in Amelia Jones, 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 unnamable 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 (undeniably 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,

\(^{133}\) Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 2005): 137.
\(^{134}\) Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 189.
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 1: 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,
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 *uncovering*, 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 *uncovering*, 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 *uncovering*, 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 (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, (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.”

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 québécois feminist magazine, 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 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 *(un)covering* 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.

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The Feminist Stance of (Neo) Imperialism

The resurgence of the benevolent white person’s attempt to save “brown women from brown men”\textsuperscript{141} 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 \textit{burqa} on the cover of the fall 2005 special edition of the \textit{québécois} feminist magazine \textit{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 \textit{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.”\textsuperscript{142} 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 \textit{burqa} under the fundamentalist Islamic regime in Afghanistan.

The image suggests that the lessons regarding power relations undergirding notions of “global sisterhood”\textsuperscript{143} 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

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 93.
\item “Le Magazine féministe des années 1980 n’avait pas dit son dernier mot” [my translation].
\item The widely used slogan from the seventies most notably problematized by bell hooks, \textit{Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism} (Boston: South End Press, 1981).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
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.

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Furthermore, feminists who subscribe to Western, liberal assumptions concerning progress, modernization, and universalism that subend 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.\(^{150}\)

\(^{150}\) 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?”\textsuperscript{151} 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.\textsuperscript{152}

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 \textit{(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 \textit{(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.


(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.”¹⁵³ 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

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 *uncovering*, 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 *uncovering* can in no way be seen as passive or submissive, as many liberal feminists would have it. Every movement is carried out with the utmost 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.\textsuperscript{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...

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 156.
positioned in resistance to norms.\textsuperscript{163} 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 scape 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

\textsuperscript{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.”

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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

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. 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

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165 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 re-signification 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.\textsuperscript{166} 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 \textit{a priori} image. In the case of (un)covering, we find the specular image built up through layers of reiteration and common-sense

\textsuperscript{166} Triki, \textit{L’Image}, 40.
readings. Because the videographic medium makes time material, video offers the possibility of treating that image and transforming it. According to Bellour, “we say an image is written when its preexisting matter is modulated.”

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).

(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

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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.