UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Disorienting encounters : re-reading seventeenth and eighteenth century Ottoman miniature paintings = Desoriënterende ontmoetingen : een herlezing van zeventiende- en achttiende-eeuwse Ottomaanse miniaturen

Firat, B.O.

Publication date
2008

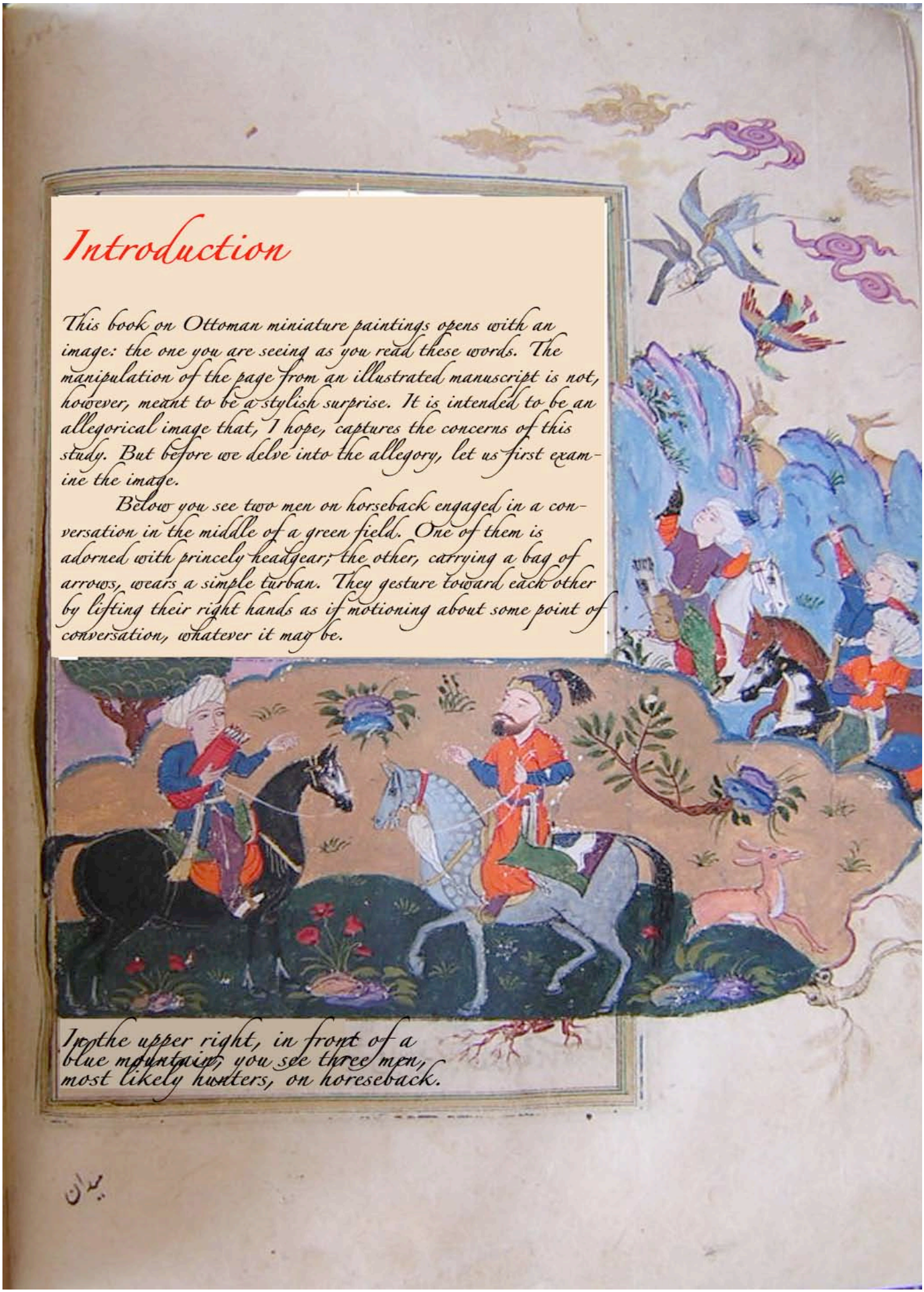
Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Firat, B. O. (2008). *Disorienting encounters : re-reading seventeenth and eighteenth century Ottoman miniature paintings = Desoriënterende ontmoetingen : een herlezing van zeventiende- en achttiende-eeuwse Ottomaanse miniaturen*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, P.O. Box 19185, 1000 GD Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (https://dare.uva.nl)
Download date:13 Nov 2026



Introduction

This book on Ottoman miniature paintings opens with an image: the one you are seeing as you read these words. The manipulation of the page from an illustrated manuscript is not, however, meant to be a stylish surprise. It is intended to be an allegorical image that, I hope, captures the concerns of this study. But before we delve into the allegory, let us first examine the image.

Below you see two men on horseback engaged in a conversation in the middle of a green field. One of them is adorned with princely headgear; the other, carrying a bag of arrows, wears a simple turban. They gesture toward each other by lifting their right hands as if motioning about some point of conversation, whatever it may be.

In the upper right, in front of a blue mountain, you see three men, most likely hunters, on horseback.

The man on the left points at the birds in the sky. He wears a special glove, a black one, of the sort used by keepers of wild birds. The man in the middle is about to shoot an arrow. The other hunter hangs onto the bridle of his horse with one hand while with the other he seems to make a gesture that remains obscure to us.

Above the hill, in the sky, the birds go at each other in a spirited fray. Two appear to be fighting. Another, colorful bird carries something in his beak. Two gazelles watch the scene in the air behind the mountain. A few clouds, two of them painted in purple, hang in the sky—or on the empty page.[1]

This miniature visualizes the "Stableman" story. It recounts the tale of a king who decides to go hunting with his retinue. Having suspicions that his brother might kill him, the king asks the stableman to spy on the prince. The stableman agrees, but soon enough he reveals his mission to the prince. When the king dies and is succeeded by the prince, the stableman is condemned to death. When asked the reasons for his verdict, the new king explains that the stableman cannot be trusted, as he had given away the previous king's secrets.

The miniature depicts the king talking with his stableman while his other retainers hunt in the far distance. The artist's placing of the figures outside the picture plane, on the margins of the page emphasizes the space between the conversing pair and the others. People familiar with the Ottoman literature of the era, or those who had been exposed to the tale through extratextual means, would recognize the story upon seeing certain pictorial elements and gestures—the hunting scene, the animated gestures between the figure wearing regal headgear and a man who looks like his servant, and so on. Other details, such as the gazelles, the black

[1] This miniature is taken from *Hümâyunnâme,* an Ottoman translation of the *Panchatantra* or *Kalila and Dimna*—a collection of animal fables in verse and prose written originally in Sanskrit. The copy from which the miniature is taken from is undated, yet scholars attribute the book to the end of the sixteenth century. It contains 87 miniatures executed by numerous unknown artists. Each of these miniatures are placed around the handwritten script written by an unknown scribe. Like the other miniatures in the *Hümâyunnâme,* the miniature in question, in its original form, contains the script in the textboxes, where I have inserted my own text. The text can be lossely translated as: Upper section: "In the old times lived an almighty king whose reign was valued as just and his country was filled with light by his sword of politics: *He had built a just terrain/ made his time profusely joyful*. One day, he decided to go hunting and headed to the direction where there were a lot of birds. Upon his arrival the place was filled with birds of various kinds and wild animals. His retinue went away to hunt and the king was left alone with his servant." Lower section: "He said to his stableman 'let us stroll around a little…" I am grateful to Hatice Aynur from Yildiz Technical University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of Turkish Language and Literature, for the transcription of the Ottoman (Arabic) text into Turkish.

glove worn by one figure, and the colorful bird in the sky, are not mentioned in the text but are nevertheless present in the image. They add up to the visual narrative and govern the ways we read the image.

Figure 1. "The Stableman" Hümâyunnâme, undated, artist unknown, Topkapi Museum, (R. 843, f. 136b), 7.3 x 20 x 16.2 cm.

This study is concerned with instances when images "surprise" their viewers, thus requiring a demanding process of viewing. They generate moments of bewilderment, which encourage the viewer to think along with the image and initiate an interpretive process that brings about, rather than the "truth" of the image, a performance of the encounter.

If the viewer is willing to go beyond the mere identification of textual elements, the *Stableman* miniature provides this sort of "surprising" experience. What, for example, is the iconographic meaning of the root that is sticking out of the ground right beneath the hooves of the king's horse, below the image, into the text? Resolutely, it has none. The text makes no mention of roots—it has no need to, as the story aims to make an unremarkable statement about the virtues of trustworthiness and fidelity. According to the representational coordinates of the miniature, the roots appear to penetrate into the subterranean realm. However, there

is no pictorial element of the "earth"—such as a tree—that might help us to explain the roots' presence. The roots make up an ambiguous figure reaching into the underground as that which is always there but nevertheless remains invisible to the viewer.

However, if the miniature is considered in its inevitable relation to the handwritten text, the figure of the roots might initiate an interpretive game that opens up a new array of theoretical inquiries concerning one of the oldest, most persistent issues pertaining to representation: the relation between word and image.[2] As Mieke Bal notes, "[t]he very phrase 'word and image' suggests that two different, perhaps incompatible things are to be shackled together," emphasizing "the difference, not the common aspects between the two" (1991: 27). The binding of the pictorial and the textual is perhaps nowhere more tangible than in illustrated manuscripts in which the two realms are inextricably linked and display their inevitable mutual dependence.

The page from the *Hümâyunnâme* brings together the word and the image in a way that invites the viewer to continually translate the realm of the visual into the verbal, and vice versa. This mutual empowerment resonates with W.J.T. Mitchell's "polemical claim" that "all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous; there are no 'purely' visual or verbal arts, though the impulse to purify media is one of the central utopian gestures of modernism" (1994: 5). "The Stableman" image, on the contrary, fashions a premodern gesture promoting a composite, synthetic work that combines image and text as an instance of what Mitchell calls an "imagetext" (1994).

Figure 2. Detail, "The Stableman."

[2] As I do not wish to present a full analysis of the miniature here, I will not give an in-depth discussion of the issues pertaining to the relationship between word and image here.

The root, as the only pictorial element that literally intervenes in the realm strictly reserved for the textual, is a metaphor for how the encounter between the two can be envisioned in visual terms (Figure 2). It points out that the visual is anchored in and fed from the verbal as if it were the ground itself. The textual, on the other hand, is never pure; rather, it is always already tainted by the visual that slips into its realm. In this capacity, the encounter between the root, which reaches out to the textual, and the letter *Alif*, which seems to shy away from the intruding not-fully-developed weak tips of the root, "pictures theory."[3] By means of this detail, the image comes to theorize the ways in which the visible and the readable interact—as if to illustrate this passage from Mitchell's *Picture Theory* (1991):

> If the relation of the visible and the readable is (as Foucault thought) an infinite one, that is, if "word and image" is simply the unsatisfactory name for an unstable dialectic that constantly shifts its location in representational practices, breaking both pictorial and discursive frames and undermining the assumptions that underwrite the separation of the verbal and visual disciplines, then theoretical pictures may be mainly useful as de-disciplinary exercises. (83)

The figure of the root, then, can be a starting point for a critical reading of the miniature as a "self-aware image," to borrow the title of Victor Stoichita's 1997 book, commenting upon itself and on the concerns of painting by inviting its viewer to question what pertains to the visual and the verbal. This brief reading of "the Stableman" miniature exemplifies the ways in which miniature paintings operate as "theoretical objects," rather than historical documents that reflect the aesthetic concerns and artistic tastes of the cultural era within which they were produced.

Let me return to the allegorical function of the "photoshopped" version of the page from the *Hümâyunnâme* mentioned at the outset. I replaced the original script with my own text not only to make a clever introductory gambit but also to demonstrate what miniatures can *do* beyond their conventional illustrative function. I

[3] In *Picture Theory* (1994) Mitchell develops the notion of metapicture—"a piece of movable cultural apparatus, one which may serve a marginal role as illustrative device or a central role as a kind of summary image," what he calls a hypericon, referring to that which "encapsulates an entire episteme, a theory of knowledge" (49). "In their strongest forms," hypericons "don't merely serve as illustrations to theory; they picture theory" (49).

consider this altered picture to be an allegorical image embodying the logic of this study. Each miniature discussed in this book is anchored in my text; their roots creep into my writing and ways of thinking about visuality and visual representation. In this sense, the miniatures do not simply illustrate my words—this is never the case. Rather, my words are informed, tainted, and sometimes misguided by the miniatures' imagery, which, in the first place, lured me into writing this study.

Miniature History

This book centers on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ottoman miniature paintings found mostly in illustrated manuscripts. Miniature painting—or *taswir* and *nakish*, as the Ottomans called it—was the dominant form of Ottoman pictorial art until the eigthteenth century. It developed together with medieval Islamic book illustration—alongside illumination (*tezhip*), calligraphy (*hat*), paper marbling (*ebru*), and bookbinding (*cilt*). Manuscript production formed an integral part of Ottoman institutional activities. Miniatures were produced mostly in the imperial studio (*Nakkashane*) founded in the mid-fifteenth century under the patronage of Mehmed the Conqueror (1451-1481). It was an art of the court commissioned, largely, by Ottoman sultans and powerful courtiers.

The imperial studio was responsible for creating a unique style, designed by the head masters, such as Nakkash Osman, Matrakçi Nasuh, and Nigari from the sixteenth century; Nakkash Hasan, Ahmed Nakşî, and Musavvir Hüseyin Istanbulî from the seventeenth century; and Levnî and Abdullah Buharî from the eighteenth century. The preparation of an illuminated manuscript engaged various craftsmen—the author, the calligrapher, the gilder, the illuminator, the margin-drawer, the illuminator of intricate floral ornamentation, the marbled-paper maker, the painter, the master binder, and the artist who ornamented the bindings with lacquer work.[4] That the miniatures were not signed until the eighteenth century alludes to the collective nature of their production.

According to Günsel Renda, the representational modes of miniature painting were formed by artists who "imbued with the abstract worldview of Islam, reflecting

[4] These craftsmen were united in guilds, each having a patron saint. Each craftsman had to obey the rules that governed the guilds.

a conception of painting based in primary colors, emphasized contours, and a preference for decorative surfaces and two-dimensional depiction omitting light and shade" (1995: 16). This conceptual approach to figural representation was handed down to the Ottomans from Persian and Timurid schools (particularly those developed in Shiraz, Tabriz, and Herat) as well as from Chinese and Byzantine painting—even if the latter influence is rarely mentioned. The Ottomans conceived miniature painting as an art in the service of the Empire and therefore regularly commissioned works depicting the daily events and activities related to the palace circles.[5] This approach obliged the miniaturists to "develop ways of representing incidents and persons realistically" while "adhering to the formalist representational mode of Islamic miniatures" (Renda, 1995: 20). In this sense, Ottoman miniature painting differs from its artistic counterparts such as those flourishing in the Safavid (Persian) and Mughal schools, which have poetic styles.

Illustrated books fall into classifications including history, cartography, urban topography, science (cosmology, geography, astronomy, pharmacology, botany, alchemy, and physics), (sultanic) portraiture, literature, and religion (with the exception, of course, of representations of the Koran). The formative period (ca. 1451-1520) of Ottoman miniature painting was heavily influenced by the examples of Western schools brought by Venetian artists—such as Gentile Bellini and Costanzo de Ferrara—who were invited to Constantinople by Mehmed the Conqueror. Simultaneously, local artists were grappling with Persian, Timurid, and Chinese masterpieces so as to find a unique Ottoman visual voice. [6] Going forward, the sixteenth century, which has been considered the "golden age" of Ottoman miniature painting, was the period in which the imperial visual language was institutionalized, especially in the works of Nakkash Osman, which tended not to use the effects of Italianate painting introduced in the previous century and created a more "Eastern" style of expression.

[5] Such events included the sultans' enthronement, their audiences with ambassadors, and their departures for military campaigns, as well as battle scenes and images of daily life including royal hunting scenes and festivities held in the sultan's presence.

[6] The issue of periodization remains a problem, as one cannot trace a linear progressive development of the practice. Atasoy and Çağman (1971) suggest a periodization, mostly following the reigning sultans: "The Early Period: Mehmet II (1451-1481)," "The Period of Establishment: Süleyman the Magnificent (1520-66)," "The Classical Period: Selim II (1566-74) and Murat II (1574-95)," "The Late Classical Period: Mehmet III (1595-1603)," "The Seventeenth Century," and "The Eighteenth Century."

This study looks at the so-called "declining period" of miniature painting, namely the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. My decision to focus on that period in particular is due to the fact that miniatures of the seventeenth century have received less scholarly attention because very few examples, especially from the second half of the century, have survived. According to Atasoy and Çağman, the second half of the century is, in fact, "the most obscure period in Ottoman miniature painting" (1974: 71).[7] Another reason why I have decided to study the period has to do with certain shifts in the production of miniatures. The few illustrated books remaining from the epoch demonstrate that the imperial language of the sixteenth century began to give way to less established ways of representation.

The first modification can be observed in the amount of works collected in *murakka*s —albums in which numerous miniatures from different periods and styles were assembled. Even though some single-page miniatures had been produced in the previous periods, only in the seventeenth century did such miniatures generate a genre in its own terms. Second, the lessening of the material and textual constraints of the book allowed miniaturists to experiment with new subjects, most notably the everyday scenes that had not previously been possible under the thematic reign of the book. In this period, the supremacy of the imperial studio was challenged by urban miniaturists—mostly located in Istanbul—who, not restricted by imperial constraints, worked in a distinct style and took up new subject matter. At the same time, new schools of miniature painting, such as those in Aleppo and Baghdad, sprang up in the provinces. These schools, though marginal and short-lived, managed to bring about a new idiom, marked by a flexible use of the page and the frame and a wider color scheme.

Beginning in the eighteenth century, Ottoman miniature painting underwent distinct transformations as the Empire opened up to the West for the first time. During this period, known as the beginning of Westernization, the Ottomans showed themselves to be intensely interested in European art and architecture, epitomized in

[7] According to the authors, the sultans reigning in the period from 1648 to around 1703 were located in the palace in Edirne. Therefore, "the palace in Istanbul had lost its previous importance and consequently the Istanbul palace studio was no longer encouraged" (71). Subsequently, the miniaturists moved to the Edirne palace, which already had a long-established studio. The illustrated works made and kept at the Edirne Palace were probably lost during the many disasters and enemy occupations that later befell the city, perhaps in 1878, when the palace was blown up by the Russians (71).

the so-called Ottoman Rococo, even as they themselves became objects of desire for Europeans, as seen, for instance, in the writings of Mary Wortley Montagu and paintings by Jan Baptiste Vanmour. The cultural encounter with the West had inevitable effects on Ottoman arts. Accordingly, contemporary art historians have focused on the ways in which European techniques of representation (such as modeling, illusionism, perspective, and shading) have been incorporated into traditional Ottoman arts, most notably in miniature painting.

In these inquiries, considerable attention has been given to the oeuvre of Levnî, who by and large revised traditional miniature painting by experimenting with new expressive forms (see, Atil, 1999, 1993; Tansuğ, 1993; Irepoğlu, 1999). Working in the so-called Europeanized style, Levnî's contemporary Abdullah Buharî created single-page miniature paintings that depicted scenes from everyday life and made paintings of costumes and flowers as well as landscapes frescos that become popular in the second half of the century. Among the last examples of book illustration are *Hubanname* and *Zananname* by Fazil Enderunî and *Hamse-i Atayî* by Nevizâde Atayî, completed in the last quarter of the century. Several illustrated copies of these works demonstrate that traditional methods in miniature painting—such as mixing pigment with gum arabic and employing non-overlapping layers of paint—have been replaced by new techniques adopted from the West—such as the use of watercolor, which allowed for subtle gradations of light and shade. By the end of the century, miniature painting was gradually supplanted by new media such as murals (landscapes) and oil-on-canvas painting (sultanic portraits).

To study the visual production of the period under consideration, I have selected three miniatures from each century. These works are representative of the material and conceptual shifts brought about by Westernization. The corpus I have drawn together—from early-seventeenth-century work to that of the mid-eighteenth century—covers a wide span of existing trends, styles, and genres. In this way, this study considers various levels of style, genre, geography, material, and illustrative function. It largely concentrates on works executed in the imperial atelier (Chapter 2, 3, 4, and 6). Yet I also include a miniature in the provincial style of the seventeenth-century Baghdad school (Chapter 5), as well as a work by an independent local painter, most probably from Istanbul (Chapter 1). The miniatures encompass diverse genres, encompassing the historical (Chapter 3 and 5), the literary (Chapter 6), the religious (Chapter 1), portraiture (Chapter 4), and the nude (Chapter 2). Three of the

miniatures were part of illustrated manuscripts (Chapter 3, 5, and 6), two were conceived as single-page miniatures that were bound in a codex later on (Chapter 1 and 4), and one was executed as an independent miniature (Chapter 2).[8]

Most of the extant illustrated manuscripts from the Ottoman period are now preserved in the Library of the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul. Other museums and libraries in Istanbul (such as the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum and the Süleymaniye Library) also house rare manuscripts. In addition, Ottoman miniatures can be found in museums, private collections, and libraries around the world, most notably the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin and British Library in London. All these manuscripts are kept in special sections in these museums and, with few exceptions, they have no public visibility except when they are displayed in special glass vitrines for specific exhibitions. In this sense, the contemporary viewer's encounter with miniatures is not only historically but also physically mediated.[9]

Michael Camille, one of the most stimulating art historians writing about Medieval European art, suggests that when manuscripts are exhibited, the viewer "can only peer through the glass at one opening." This means that one has to "relinquish the crucial dynamic of the turning page, and usually ha[s] access to only one frame from a complex cumulative experience of seeing and reading" (1984: 509). For this reason, the viewer can never encounter the miniatures in the ways they had once been experienced. For Camille, this discrepancy presents a challenge that must be overcome. He suggests that "[u]nlike the largely defunct visual orders of icon, altarpiece and, some would even say, easel painting, we still all utilize and learn to deal with this form of communication in the ways that our ancestors did" (509).

This study, however, starts from the impossibility (and ineffectuality) of reenacting such an authentic encounter with miniatures. Instead, it proposes to revisit the tradition in order to investigate and complicate ways in which we look at images

[8] I have not included cartographic and scientific miniatures because both have resolutely illustrative and descriptive functions. I have also left out the vast collection of illustrated manuscripts known as costume books produced by local painters for European travelers. Even though they are noteworthy in terms of quantity I consider them to be mass-produced souvenirs. However, in the second chapter, I discuss a nude miniature painting produced in the imperial atelier that appropriates the style and the content of miniatures found in costume albums.

[9] Miniatures are also reproduced in museum catalogues and scholarly publications, on souvenirs of different kinds as well as on websites.

today.

Miniatures as Theoretical Objects

I am aware that it may not be obvious why I am undertaking this research on Ottoman miniature paintings in the interdisciplinary field of cultural analysis rather than the more established discipline of art history. After all, the corpus with which I am engaging is historical, and has so far been researched under the rubric of art history even though it has remained a marginal realm of inquiry there. Until now, the scholarly works on Ottoman miniature paintings have concentrated on conventional issues pertaining to patronage, attribution, and periodization, as well as the formal, stylistic, and iconographic analysis of miniatures.

These works are of course valuable—especially for making the corpus available for further study. My research diverts from previous art-historical inquiries through claiming the contemporary cultural agency of miniature paintings. Rather than conceiving miniatures as historical products of an era to which only the diligent researcher has access, this approach is grounded in one of the main tenets of cultural analysis, namely that it must be, in the words of Mieke Bal, "based on a keen awareness of the critic's situatedness in the present, the social and cultural present from which we look, and look back, at the objects that are always, already of the past, objects that we take to define our present culture" (1999: 1). Therefore, for Bal, the practice of cultural analysis is not indifferent to history; on the contrary, it foregrounds "the active presence of the object, or text, in the same historical space as is inhibited by the subject, 'me'" (12). Following Bal, I have built my analyses on the principle that one should not reify a historical state but rather must look at the present situation as a starting point to understand historical objects. This standpoint, based on a clear commitment to contemporariness, considers miniatures in their relevance for the present.

Certainly, such an approach entails and privileges anachronism, regarding it not as a shortcoming in dealing with historical images but as an enabling condition for research. This allows us, following Georges Didi-Huberman, to account for the richness of images that combine different temporalities—the moment of their production as well as the moment when we look at them. Didi-Huberman suggests,

in line with Walter Benjamin, that in every historical object "all times meet" (2000: 91). Therefore, the history of images is one of "objects that are temporally impure, complex, overdetermined. It is therefore a history of polychronistic, heterochronistic, or anachronistic objects" (2003: 42).

To consider images as a montage of different temporalities is to acknowledge that historical images exert their agency in the present. This impure understanding of history encourages the analyst to reflect on the potentially productive dialogue between historical images and those theories and concepts pertaining to what images *do*, today—in other words, to visuality, as we have come to call it in the past decade. In my point of view, miniature paintings are not merely historical artifacts but rather theoretical objects, which in their historical specificity engender "general, transhistorical, and philosophical questions" (van Alphen, 2005: xiv-xv).

As outlined by the French art historian and philosopher Hubert Damisch, the notion of the "theoretical object" advances the potential of works of art to transform the way we think about art—formulated in the axiom "art thinks."[10] According to Damisch, a theoretical object

> [o]bliges you to do theory but also furnishes you with the means of doing it. Thus, if you agree to accept it on theoretical terms, it will produce effects around itself. [… I]t forces us to ask ourselves what theory is. It is posed in theoretical terms; it produces theory; and it necessitates a reflection on theory. (Bois et. al, 1988: 8)

Therefore, Damisch's approach does not consider artworks as mere manifestations of a culture or historical period or as the reflection of the creator's intentions.[11] For him,

[10] Damisch mentions the formula toward the end of his *The Origin of Perspective* (1987), in which he discusses perspective as a paradigm. He suggests that the early-modern paintings he examined make visible and comprehensible how painting not only shows but thinks. He argues that "the formal apparatus put in place by the perspective paradigm is equivalent to that of the sentence, in that it assigns the subject a place within a previously established network that gives its meaning, while at the same time opening up the possibility of something like a statement in painting" (200: 446). I follow Bal's (1999) and van Alphen's (2005) take on Damisch's axiom that extends the limits of his understanding to those artworks that articulate thought about art.

[11] This does not mean that historical context is irrelevant. He comments on the relation between theory and history: "But I never pronounce the word theory without also saying the word history. Which is to say that for me such an object is always a theoretico-historical object. Yet if theory is produced within history, history can never completely cover theory. That is fundamental for me. The two terms go together but in the sense in which each escapes the other" (Bois et. al, 1988: 8).

as van Alphen summarizes it, art is a form of thinking that compels the viewer to start a "dialogue with it by articulating questions of a more general—for instance, philosophical, political, or social—nature" in which the artwork becomes a *historical* articulation of a general, more fundamental problem (2005: 4).

Theoretical objects, however, are not simply phenomena to be observed; rather, they are actively constructed by the analyst in her close encounter with the cultural object. Miniature paintings as theoretical objects pose questions that go beyond the concerns of the eras of their production and in so doing offer us modes of thinking about art and visuality. Thereby, my analyses were informed—but not directed—by material and intellectual conditions affecting the production of miniatures. I have deliberately left out contemporaneous philosophical and religious documents that might "explain" the aesthetic concerns of Ottoman miniatures.

In the introduction to her insightful book *Beauty and Islam* (2001), Valérie Gonzalez explains that historical sources, such as Islamic ones, "alone cannot supply the necessary methodology for dealing with complicated aesthetic problems," which "therefore means that one has to use tools which do not belong *a fortiori* to the cultural area under observation" (3). Whereas Gonzalez mounts a phenomenological inquiry to understand the peculiarities of Islamic art and architecture, my study maintains an interdisciplinary "concept-based methodology" (Bal, 2002: 5). Here I employ concepts as tools for a critical and situated analysis of the miniatures. They are the third partner in the otherwise "totally unverifiable and symbiotic interaction between the critic and object," as Bal writes (23).

However, the partnership does not entail the imposition of the theoretical concept on the cultural object so as to "apply" the concept. In his introduction to the *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Brian Massumi reflects on the shortcomings of "application":

> The first rule of thumb if you want to invent or reinvent concepts is: don't apply them. If you apply a concept or system of connection between concepts, it is the material you apply it to that undergoes change, much more markedly than do the concepts. The change is imposed upon the material by the concepts' systematicity, and constitutes a becoming homologous of the

> material to the system [….] It has less to do with "more to the world" than "more of the same." It has less to do with invention than mastery and control. (Massumi, 2002, 17)

In line with this caution against application, the practice of cultural analysis does not so much seek to master, predict, or explain the object by way of concepts—rather, it aims to specify, analyze, and get an eye for differences of the object and the concepts we work with. Such theoretical practice, to follow Bal's maxim, "helps us to understand the object better *on its*—the object's—*own terms*" (2002: 8).

The object's own terms can be grasped by adopting the technique of close reading as an active negotiation and confrontation with the cultural object. The literary method of close reading certainly undergoes a significant change when one deals with images. In visual analysis, close reading's attention to detail is taken to a level of productive obsession—particularly with those details that somehow fall out of the representational "logic" of the image and by so doing do not conform to a swift process of interpretation (of, for example, the figure of the root in the *Stableman* image). Such details not only enable a novel interpretation of the object but also encourage the analyst to revisit her theoretical framework.

In *Reading in Detail* (1987), Naomi Schor warns us that a detailed reading does not bring about the truth of an image or a text. Rather, it shows that the "truth value of the detail is anything but assured" (7). Accordingly, she proposes that the detail, as a guarantor of meaning, is "constantly threatened by falsification and misprision" (7). Keeping Schor's observations in mind, I realize that my analyses of the miniatures that saturate even the tiniest details with meaning are under constant threat of overinterpretation. These small elements do alter the overt, overall meaning so as to inscribe something that did not seem to be there. Rather than seeing overinterpretation as a negative attribute of analysis I contend, with Jonathan Culler, that "interpretation needs no defence; it is with us always" and that, "like most intellectual activities," it is "interesting only when it is extreme" (1992:110). Indeed my study demonstrates how overinterpretation as a method can "let the object speak back," to use a methodological figure Bal advances. Hence the aim of my book is to develop a novel mode of reading that allows the miniatures to look back at us and disorient our encounters.

Disorienting Encounters

The metaphor of the object speaking back has evident anthropomorphic undertones to it. Another notion, namely the encounter, which I use throughout this study—as well as in my title—also inevitably advances a not-so-hidden anthropomorphic agenda. As I conceptualize it, the notion of the encounter describes simply what happens when the viewer starts reading an image. According to the Oxford English Dictionary the term refers to "[a] meeting face to face; a meeting (of adversaries or opposing forces) in conflict; hence, a battle, skirmish, duel."[12] This definition underlines a few of the reasons why I chose to employ the term, "encounter." First, it emphasizes that looking does not happen at once—as in an *Augenblick*—but rather is a process ("a meeting"), an event that takes place in a historically and culturally specific situation. In this capacity, the encounter with an image cannot be anticipated in advance but is instead performed as an event in which both sides are active participants. Second, it underscores the reciprocity between the seeing subject and object seen that is involved in the process ("face to face"). In Bal's terms, this understanding amounts to the "empowerment of the object" (2002: 10), in which the object "from subject matter becomes subject, participating in the construction of theoretical views" (1999b: 13). Finally, the notion of the encounter refers to the potential of conflict that is always already inherent to "intersubjective" relations ("skirmish," "duel"). Yet the conflict between the viewer and image does not entail closure; rather, as I have persistently argued so far, it provides an opening whose outcome is thought.

The term "encounter"has been advanced in this sense by philosopher Gilles Deleuze. In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze suggests that " [s]omething in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental *encounter*" (1994: 139, my emphasis). [13] Departing from Deleuze's statement, Simon O'Sullivan defines encounter's relation to recognition as follows:

[12] Throughout this book I consulted the online version of the Oxford English Dictionary (1989) at *www.oed.com.*

[13] In *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze,* an eight-hour series of interviews between Deleuze and Claire Parnet aired on Arte Channel in 1994 and 1995, Deleuze states that "he believes in encounters (*rencontres*), but these encounters don't occur with people. People think that it's with other people that encounters take place, like among intellectuals at colloquia. Encounters occur, rather, with things, with a painting, a piece of music. With people, however, these meetings are not at all encounters; these kind of encounters are usually so disappointing, catastrophic. On Saturday or Sunday, when he

> An object of an encounter is fundamentally different from an object of recognition. With the latter our knowledges, beliefs, and values are reconfirmed […] an object of recognition is then precisely a *representation* of something always already in place. With such a non-encounter our habitual way of being and acting [….] is reaffirmed and reinforced, and as a consequence no thought takes place. With a genuine encounter […] our typical ways of being in the world are challenged, our systems of knowledge disturbed. We are forced to thought. (2006: 1)

The encounter, according to O'Sullivan, operates as a rupture, producing a crack in our habitual ways of thinking. The rupture, however, contains "a moment of affirmation" of "a new way of seeing and thinking" (1). It is a creative rupture that encourages us to think otherwise. Following O'Sullivan, this study deems miniature paintings partners of different encounters that force us to think about the ways in which images affect us.

The encounter, understood in this way, involves an underlying characteristic of disorientation, another notion I would like to touch upon briefly. Disorientation might, intially, have negative connotations. The *OED* entry defines it as "[t]he condition of having lost one's bearings; uncertainty as to direction." It also refers to a "confused mental state, often due to disease, in which appreciation of one's spatial position, personal identity, and relations, or of the passage of time, is disturbed." Certainly an academic study on miniature paintings should not aim to drag its readers into such a state.

To clarify, then, I employ the term disorientation in a sense that has been particularly inspired by Inge Boer's *Disorienting Vision* (2004). Boer's book shows how a detailed rereading of French Orientalist texts and images can dislocate stereotypes about the Orient. Even though my objects are decisively different than Boer's, my approach has a similar agenda of destabilizing stereotypical approaches to the manifold cultural encounters between East and West. Without refuting the claim that the "East" and the "West" are historical discursive constructions, this

---

goes out, he isn't certain to have an encounter; he just goes out, on the lookout for encounters, to see if there might be encounter material, in a film, in a painting." The summary of these series of interviews can be found at *http://www.langlab.wayne.edu/CStivale/D-G/ABC1.html*

study shows that miniature painting, as the most authentic artistic form of the Ottomans, has always been a hybrid site where different notions of representation have been negotiated. As I argue in the fourth chapter, the genre of Ottoman sultanic portraiture has developed through a dialogue between the traditions of Timurid and Venetian portraiture. In this sense, the visual idiom of Ottoman miniature painting should be understood as a site of cross-cultural encounters that entails a "deviation from the eastward position" (*OED*).

Disorienting Encounters indeed aims to disturb the reader's appreciation of her spatial position and of the passage of time by maintaining that historical images are objects of encounter that can teach us how to think, speak, and write about art here and now.

From the Detail to the Threshold: The Contents of This Study

Rather than imposing one overarching theoretical argument that would allegedly explain the truth of the miniatures, my study engages with each of them them in their specificity by addressing different theoretical issues concerning visuality and visual representation that the encounter with them generates. In so doing, I aim to not only to make the practice of miniature painting resonate with contemporary theory but also to critically assess the concepts through which we understand what a work of art does. This study's objects, then, are both miniature paintings and those theories and concepts we work with to understand what visuality is and does.

The book consists of chapters that each focus on one miniature in its singularity. Every chapter is organized around a central theoretical problem raised by each miniature that I bring to light by engaging with a set of concepts to bear on the miniature. The selection of concepts is deliberately eclectic, as I do not strictly follow either a body of disciplinary literature or a theoretical body of work but engage with the ways in which my objects make statements about issues pertaining to visuality. As such, each chapter should be seen as an essay founded on an argumentative structure triggered by the encounter with the miniature. Moreover, the chapters take along the unresolved issues of preceding ones. In this way, they collectively bring about not only a novel methodological approach to the study of miniature painting but also a coherent theoretical work.

The first chapter explores the narrative function of the pictorial detail in our reading of images. Does it not only inquire into the ways in which words and images interact but also sketches out my methodological stance throughout this study. I wish to demonstrate how a viewer's detailed, performative reading can alter the conventional and official interpretations of images. To address the issues pertaining to reading, I examine a seventeenth-century miniature painting that visualizes a story that is universally known (at least in the West, and further afield as well): the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise. Conventionally, an informed iconographic analysis suffices to make a "correct" assessment of pictorial elements in the miniature by relating them to different literary sources (in this case the Koran and other religious sources). As I will demonstrate, certain iconographically dysfunctional details that do not easily fit in the pre-textual framing of the miniature open up a process of narrative reading, which privileges the detail as a site of meaning on its own.

Reading the *Fall of Adam and Eve* miniature through details that have no apparent iconographic meaning not only empowers the image as a new text that reiterates the founding myth but also asserts the dynamic status of such myths. Moreover, and more importantly, it allows us a way to read for the victim (Eve) and offers an alternative story that is as acceptable as the standard interpretation, even if one insists on remaining within the context of theology. In so doing, in the first chapter I demonstrate that images are not merely prefigured by official texts but also, and above all, *post*-performed by the viewer, a premise developed in the following chapters.

In the following chapter, I advance my take on the process of reading in greater detail by engaging with the notions of rereading (Roland Barthes) and palimpsestic looking (Boer's reworking of Barthes' notion of rereading). This time, I deal with conventional modes of viewing and visual discourses invoked by images and imposed on them by their viewers. I look at an eighteenth-century single-page nude miniature entitled *Woman bathing in the Hamam* by the court artist Abdullah Buharî. This miniature, a unique occurence in the scarcely existing genre of the nude, appropriates the style and content of so-called bazaar miniatures, produced by local miniaturists working outside of the imperial atelier, which drew on Orientalist images from costume albums produced by European artists. Negotiating with the Orientalist gaze handed down to it from these albums as well as local bazaar

miniatures, the miniature encourages us to ponder the conventional ways of addressing a nude that have been formulated in binary oppositions such as gazing and glancing, or returning/subverting the gaze.

The mode of viewing proposed by *Woman bathing in the Hamam* involves a performance of what I call an "intimate encounter," a process of rereading that produces a new text that can serve as an alternative to the distanced, voyeuristic, and almost rapist reading enabled and indeed encouraged by the Orientalist imagery. The miniature fosters a spatial, embodied, haptic, and erotic intimacy that plays on the boundaries between knowing and not-knowing the other's body. As such, the miniature, while proposing an intimate look as a mode of engagement, simultaneously prompts us to reconsider the concept of intimacy. Ultimately, by constructing two diverse understanding of the intimate advanced by Gérard Wajcman and Hamid Dabashi, I argue that the miniature promotes an instance of intersubjective intimacy in which the image looks back at and touches the viewer.

Chapter 3 takes the reader on a rather adventurous journey. I look at the *Sûrname-i Vehbi* by Master Levnî, the only Ottoman illustrated manuscript with a historical subject from the eighteenth century. It gives, in 137 single-page miniatures, a day-to-day visual and verbal account of the fifteen-day circumcision festival of Sultan Ahmed III's sons held in 1720. By presenting the festive occasions as events taking place in the here and now of the viewer the miniatures perform a sort of visual storytelling.

To address the ways in which the miniatures of the *Sûrname* visually perform an event, I provide a close reading of a set of miniatures that depict the procession of Sultan Ahmed III consisting of three sets of double-page miniatures spread over three folios. I propose that the use of individual miniature panels arranged in a sequential order has an anachronistic cinematic touch to it because the technique underlines a problem of representing an *event*—a problem that extends into the treatment of time and space within motion. My comparison between the two visibly incompatible media does not rely on a forced analogy but on an understanding of the "critical loop" between media—a concept inspired by the writings of the Soviet cinematographer Sergei Eisenstein—through which the *problematic tradition of representation* that has been handed down to the figurative arts over time can be "put in image." This interpretative method allows me to address issues concerning representation in the miniature series through engaging a chain of cinematic concepts

such as the notions of the still developed by Roland Barthes (1977) and the out-of-field articulated by Gilles Deleuze (1993a, b) and Jacques Aumont (1997) among others, as well as the notions of montage and the interval. This montage of concepts allows me to mediate on the ways in which the procession miniatures produce an idea of event-ness in effect and affect in the service of constructing an imperial visuality.

In the following chapter, I trace the production of the imperial visuality further by focusing on one of the most established genres in Ottoman painting, namely, portraiture. The portrait of Sultan Ahmed III by Levnî is an exceptional miniature in sultanic portraiture since its ornamentation, taken to the level of *horror vacui*, nearly overwhelms the main subject—the figure of the sultan. In this sense, the miniature problematizes not so much the core issues of referentiality and likeness but the very function of imperial portraiture. To delineate what this portrait does to its viewer, I first assert that the ornamental, in its various associations with the arts of Islam, is a site of meaning, a constructive supplement, or a *parergon* that constructs a resolutely flat and opaque pictorial space. Additionally, the ornamentation provides the miniature with an "auratic" shield, a notion Walter Benjamin advanced (1969a, 6; 1930), distancing the viewer from the image seen and simultaneously screening her gaze from access to the sultan's inner qualities, a characteristic that has been considered to be among the finest traits of a "successful" portrait.

My question here is how the miniature is successful as a portrait of *the sultan*. It does not represent an individual—Ahmed III—but presents the sultan, conceptually, as an image. The viewer is not provided with *a* sultan, but is shown the meaning of sultan-ness. The miniature does not "intend" to be a portrait in the conventional sense but rather seeks to be an idea or an event that affects its viewer precisely by keeping her outside, at a distance. This view concords with Gülru Necipoğlu's argument that the Ottoman sultan differs from his contemporaries by an irreconcilable invisibility that is epitomized by the architectural structure of the Topkapi Palace (2000). In this sense, the miniature portrait reinforces the sultan's power to not be seen, or to be seen only as a silhouette that cannot be imbued with individuality.

In the fifth chapter, I dwell on material aspects of miniatures. Here I engage with physical and conceptual features of their primary medium, the book. A miniature depicting the campaign of King Timur (a.k.a. Tamerlane) against Sultan

Husayn taken from the seventeenth-century book *Rawdat al-Safa*, directs me to focus on the scale, dimension, and physical orientation of miniatures as conditioned by their placement in books so as to disentangle their implications for the process of reading. The directionality of reading proposed by the Timur miniature, which is analogous to that of reading a book, brings about a problem concerning the orientation of the viewing process. The mode of reading encouraged by the miniature is significantly different from the viewing trajectory promoted by the tableau and wall painting, which follows the vertical orientation of the human body. Following critiques of verticality offered by Walter Benjamin (1928), Leo Steinberg (1972), and Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois (1997), as well as their arguments concerning the horizontal image in modernism, I argue that the miniature suggests a total horizontalization of the viewing process that affects the viewer's body as much as her intellect.

Additionally, the image combines the experience of horizontalization with a process of miniaturization, which, according to Gaston Bachelard (1958), Susan Stewart (2001), and Ralph Rugoff (1997), has a subversive potential that affects our physical and intellectual encounter with objects. In the Timur miniature, at the juncture of miniaturization and horizontalization, an invisible "object," a detail in the center, takes over the image. This invisible detail offers a narrative reading by operating as a device for what has been conceptualized as a "pregnant moment"—a moment that opens up to a future-to-come that cannot be incorporated within the miniature. Moreover, it functions as a symptom, as Georges Didi-Huberman (2005) called it, indicating a passage to "another state of painting."

In the final chapter, I scrutinize this other state of painting. I introduce the concept of the threshold, which I propose as an alternative to one of the "founding" metaphors of visual theory, namely the window. The miniature entitled "The Theological School of Gazanfer Ağa," executed by Ahmed Nakşi in the *Divan-i Nadiri*, is one of the seventeenth-century miniatures in which the artists seems to be dealing with representational techniques—such as the illusion of depth—foreign to the idiom of traditional miniature painting. Scholars have proposed that this miniature should be seen as a negotiation with—and not an imitation of—the notion of painting as a window.

Accordingly, I trace the logic of the tableau-window, as Wajcman called it, and suggest that it is an "epistemological metaphor" that produces the knowledge of

its object and the conditions under which it becomes knowable. The trope achieves these ends by juxtaposing the discourses of the frame and of transparency, both of which are burdened with the baggage of the window-object. The "Gazanfer Ağa Medresesi" miniature enters into a complex negotiation with both discourses. I propose to understand this encounter through another architectural metaphor, namely, the threshold. The miniature frame, instead of offering up the painting as immediate readable object, as suggested by the discourses of the frame and of transparency, encourages a liminal experience of looking that is caught between different modes of representation: looking, reading, and sensing. Moreover, the viewer's acts of looking are "thresholded" by means of horizontal layering of the pictorial plane tainting the encounter with opacity rather than imbuing it with transparency. In this sense, the miniature as a threshold prompts a process of looking that constantly questions the status of the frame as well as the instantaneous visibility and readability of the image being seen. As I will show, in so doing it provides an alternative visual epistemology by encouraging the analyst to dwell in a way of knowing that is transitional, relational, opaque, and precarious, rather than being in the state of certainty, transparency, and unconditioned visibility that is epitomized by the window metaphor.

I conclude this book by tracing the "afterlife" of miniature painting in the realm of practice so as to underscore reverberations of my study in a wider realm. Contrary to the common conviction that Ottoman miniature painting ceased to exist by the end of the eighteenth century, as it had lost its original function and context, I propose that its aesthetic concerns survived and can be found in the "cracks" of modernity. Inspired by Bal's notion of "preposterous history," I discuss the ways in which two contemporary works, namely Orhan Pamuk's novel *Benim Adim Kirmizi* (My Name is Red, 1998/2001) and Derviş Zaim's film *Cenneti Beklerken* (Waiting for Heaven, 2006), engage with the tradition of Ottoman miniature painting and develop a novel literary and cinematographic language conditioned by their encounter with miniatures. These works, I feel, not only reverberate with the concerns of my study in the field of artistic practice but also open up a further realm of theoretical inquiry.