

ABSTRACTS

THE ROLE OF IMAGES IN AL-FĀRĀBĪ'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

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This essay examines the concept of image in Abū Nasr al-Fārābī's philosophical thought and the relevance of this idea within his envisioning of the perfect state. Through careful analysis of his writings concerning the arts and methods of representation and his political works, I shall demonstrate that images provide an essential key for the supreme legislator and religious leader to guide people towards happiness or the achievement of ultimate perfection. However, this relies on a redefinition of the author's idea of happiness in the terms of what one could call a "political happiness," that is the perfection of the community as a whole. Hence, I explore the way in which, in al-Fārābī's thought, images contribute to this ultimate goal through their ability to inspire the audience's will to follow moral values and obey political rule. This is built upon his understanding of images from a psychological perspective, rather than from a scientific approach to them, which was common in Ancient philosophical texts. Furthermore, it also relies on a defined methodology of production of virtuous images, which I elaborate in this article.

Keywords: Community; Image; Islam; Perfection; al-Fārābī.

AN UNEXPECTED IMAGERY: THE HEART'S VISION AND OTHER SYNESTHETIC FUNCTIONS OF THE *DHIKR* INTO THE ISLAMIC TRADITION

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Islamic Tradition is known for its aniconic heritage that is the result of a religious perspective which excludes the use of images in places of worship. Anyway, the discussion about the prohibition of images in Islam must be presented in such a way as to point out the multi-faceted complexity of the issue. This prohibition has its source in some *ahadith* of Prophet Muhammad, but it is complicated, not contradicted, by a constant recourse to the

unexpected value of the images. In this regard, a special attention has been devoted to the implication of imagery as a privileged instrument of the heart's vision and the seat of the intellect, which mirrors the Divine Presence. The way the heart's vision is displayed deals with the ritual practice of God's remembrance. That is why, traditional Sufi Masters like Shaykh Abu-l-Hasan 'Ali Ash-Shadhili (d. 1258) and Shaykh Darqawi (d. 1823) attach considerable importance to the repetition of the Name of God, as a tool of salvation and a great life-altering experience. The aim of this paper is to survey how synesthetic craftsmanship of the *dhikr* (ritual invocation) has been passed on until the present day and how this technique has favored a crucial role of the images in the Islamic Tradition.

Keywords: Aniconism; Image; Islam; Ritual.

CALLIGRAPHIC ANIMATION AS VISUAL MUSIC: A GENEALOGY OF ISLAMIC SYNCHRONIZATION OF SIGHT AND SOUND

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In this article, the author traces the genealogy of calligraphic animations (here defined as animations in which Islamic calligraphic elements are the only or one of the main visual components of the film) that establish a correlation between Islamic calligraphy and music. Within the past few decades a number of time-based artworks that establish such a correlation have been created. These artworks — in the form of films, animations, interactive art pieces and performances — can be considered visual music, following a broad definition of the term. While Visual music calligraphic animations may be considered a direct continuation of earlier European visual music films (such as the works of Oskar Fischinger, Viking Eggeling, Hans Richter, and others), a detailed study of their historic-cultural context reveals a different genealogy line that goes back to the earlier centuries of Islamic civilization. It is argued in this paper that these visual music calligraphic animations and time-based artworks seem to be inspired by the putative comparisons between various aspects of Islamic calligraphy and those of music (or aural arts). The author begins the article by exploring different modes of musical analogies that were used to describe Islamic calligraphy throughout the history of Islamic civilization. He continues to review the influences of such analogies on calligraphic art,

especially in the contemporary context. Then, he studies the influence of musical analogies on calligraphic time-based artworks, and contextualizes visual music calligraphic animations within such a historic-cultural background.

Keywords: Animation; Calligraphic time-based art; Islamic art; Visual music.

SEEING THE UNSEEN: THE INVISIBLE WORLDS OF JAFAR PANAHİ'S CINEMA

Mani Saravanan (Nanyang Technological University)

This paper examines the intersection of visibility and ethics through Jafar Panahi's exploration of the unseen and unseeable in two of his docufiction films. In 2010, Panahi was arrested and banned from making films for the next 20 years. In response, Panahi made films which directly engage with the significance of the prohibition. *In film nist (This is Not a Film, 2011)* is a video-essay style documentary, where the director describes scenes from a film he would no longer be able to make. *Taxi (Taxi Tehran, 2015)* features the director driving a taxi in Tehran and interacting with his passengers. Panahi's inventive use of technology is necessitated by his physical confinement. In these films, Panahi demonstrates an iconoclastic function of film which destroys narratives of fixed visual certainty in favor of narratives of possibility. French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas protests the closed nature of art as it precludes the ethical question by fixing the image permanently and preventing further interaction. Panahi's subversion of the visual medium to seek the invisible resonates with Levinas' call for an art that is incomplete in its completion and thus be able to address the world within which it is set.

Keywords: Docufiction; Film ethics; Iranian cinema; Islam; Levinasian ethics; Jafar Panahi.

THE FOIL AND THE QUICKSAND: THE IMAGE OF THE "VEIL" AND THE FAILURE OF ABJECTION IN IRANIAN DIASPORIC HORROR

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The present study attempts to explore the dynamics between the image of the “Veil” and the “fear” in contemporary Iranian diasporic “horror”: for example, Babak Anvari’s *Under the Shadow* (2016) and Ana Lily Amirpour’s *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014). With references to Julia Kristeva’s idea of the abject through which objects of horror can be evicted, Freud’s concept of *der unheimlich* (uncanny) and the exploration of the modern weird, the paper would look into the proliferation of the recurrent image of *Chador*, a stiff moving triangular stretch of dark fabric or yards of floating floral, as a threat to the figures within the screen, but something that cannot essentially be cast away as the “other,” as it appears right on sync with the backdrop offered within the celluloid canvas. The characters cannot purge themselves of the image, as it willy-nilly becomes a part of their essence.

These cinematic depictions of the veil defy the ongoing controversy of whether it is an empowering choice for women or a symbol of domestic and societal oppression (Kensinger and Abu-Lughod amongst many), as it acts as either a foil to the terror of the disconcerting nonchalance amongst the urban populace or a complement to it. It is just “there” — an unisolatable part of the panorama. The image becomes nigh impossible to be singled out as the essential object of uncanny, which, can be efficiently isolated and then evicted from the “self” to sustain its health.

The two films in question challenge the time honored understanding of the “uncanny” or the “un-home-like” sensation of horror, as the object of fear ceases to be an abjection that can be cast out from the self. As an incongruent female figure skateboards her way through the dark alleys in a *chador*, the object of fear shifts from the “vampire in veil” to the ennui and isolation of “Bad City.” The vampiric spreading of the burqa loses its element of terror as The Girl looks almost benign as she bares her fangs to prey upon the bad as laconic citizens amble past a ravine full of decomposing bodies. Conversely, Anvari’s *Under the Shadow* essentially functions around the suffocation of a stay at home mother Shideh with her recurrent nightmare of a demonic presence draped in yards of chadari in a derelict bombed out building during the Gulf War. The jump scares are intensely built up through flashes of a floral print *chador* which in turn throttles Shideh, scares off her neighbors, confuses her daughter, disembowels her CDs and absconds with her treasured book of medicine. The all pervasive yards of the “unreal” presence complement the reality of what Barbara Creed calls the eternal conflict between the maternal authority in the per-

sonal space of a female figure and the paternal laws which conditions the taboos and fears of the space.

Keywords: Abjection; Islam; Psychoanalysis; Julia Kristeva.

POST-CINEMATIC (MIS-)REPRESENTATION OF ISLAM

Taida Kusturica (Academy of Fine Arts Vienna)

This paper examines the post-cinema production of the political and cultural antagonism towards Islam in an era of the emergence of digitally generated “new media.” Digital technologies have pushed the boundaries of what counts as cinematic, which is not simply a passive material or substance in its ontological materiality, it is rather a new kind of reality, a programmed and self-generated sensory shock-affect, already incorporated in the future narrative of representations, what Wendy Chun has termed *programmed visions*. The dissolution and extension of the cinematic in terms of its mediality, coincide with contemporary neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism. Thus, the question of cinema could be investigated from a shifted view, not from the question of medium, but from its “digital” viewer/s. The post-cinematic mode of production will be related to the cinematically directed and image-manipulated visual drama of the Twin Tower attacks (also referred to as the “war on terror” launched by the U.S. government after the September 11 attacks in New York in 2001). This article argues that from Twin Tower Attack, such a mutual agency between digital media and religion, has become ever more intertwined in a re-employment of the old orientalist trope against Islam and Muslims.

Keywords: Digital image; Islam; (Mis-)representation; Post-cinema representation.