Image Creation as a Problematic
28 to 29 April 2005

Villa Jaffé, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Wallotstr. 10, 14193 Berlin

Convener:
Shereen Abou El Naga
(Cairo University, Fellow of the Working Group Modernity and Islam 2004/5)

Program / Abstracts

Thursday, 28 April

10.00-12.30   Session 1

Introduction and Moderation: Shereen Abou El Naga (Cairo University, Fellow of the Working Group Modernity and Islam 2004/5)

W.J. Thomas Mitchell (University of Chicago, Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin 2004/5),

Cloning Terror

In the months before September 11, 2001, the cloning debate was the leading issue in American newspapers.   After September 11, terrorism dominated the news. This paper explores the logic that connects cloning and terrorism as the twin phobias of our historical epoch. The clone and the terrorist are cultural icons linked by the fear of the "uncanny double," the mirror image of the self as its own worst enemy. The terrorist is the enemy who doubles as a friend or countryman, pretending to be "one of us"—or just the opposite. He appears as the Evil Twin, the dark other, masked, invisible, but racially stereotyped or "profiled." The clone is the figure of biological doubling as such, the inverted, perverted mirror image of a parent organism, an artificial simulation or twin of a natural person. The terrorist is the "evil twin" of the normal, respectable citizen-soldier, and the clone is the "evil twin" as such. The "war on terror" therefore is also a "war of images" that draws its vocabulary from the language of epidemiology, of plagues, sleeper cells, and viruses, on the one hand, and from iconoclasm, iconophobia, and holy wars over images on the other. Tracing the "war of images" in mass media and popular culture from the cloned Schwarzenegger of The Sixth Day to the clone armies of George Lucas, from the destruction of the World Trade Center to the Abu Ghraib torture photographs, this paper explains why the war on terror is actually "cloning terror" by breeding more terrorists, and suggests some ways that this war might be managed and brought to an end.

Khalid Hroub (Cambridge),

'American democratisation of the Arab world': images versus paradoxical realities

The image-loving US Administration is in a state of recent euphoria watching 'democratic' images flooding in from Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon and Egypt, attributing them to its own influence. In each of these countries there is an unfolding process of controversial events which are seen and valued differently by different people. Central to these events is the emphasised image by the US officials that democratisation in the region is finally on the move. Cleverly and constantly this image is exploited and used to prove that the so-called 'American project to democratise the Arab world' has started bearing fruit. The images that have shown millions of Iraqis exercising their right to vote freely and democratically, as portrayed in the media, were undoubtedly powerful. The Palestinian elections of the past January, conducted peacefully and in a civilised way, were also impressive. Equally stunning was the flood of images of Lebanese and Egyptian people demonstrating in the street, calling for the freeing of Lebanon from Syrian control and ending the authoritarian mode of politics in Egypt, respectively. Driven by these images, global media and many politicians have been prompted to predict that the dawn of Arab democracy is looming close. Away from these image-based constructs, the realities of the 'project' and its complexities provide a different story.

In the grey area between those images and realities the end result of this passing period of American interest in democratising the region is the reproduction of the status quo. Behind the mask of cosmetic democratic clothing that will be brought about in several countries; the US simply cannot afford having fully fledged democratic systems in the region. There are many American strategic interests at stake in many of those countries where the democratic demand is allegedly called for.

This paper attempts to deconstruct the image-reality confusion that overloads this 'American project'. It maintains that the 'project' is imbedded with several paradoxes and unanswered questions that reveal the emptiness of the image-made currently celebrated 'democracy'. In the first place, there is the paradox of the continuity of the pervasive and standard 'trade-off American foreign policy' where the US demand for democracy is dropped in return for guaranteeing certain strategic interests, such as cooperation in the so-called 'war on terror'. Also, there is the unanswered question regarding the prospective victory of Islamist movements in any democratic elections if they were conducted freely and fairly. Then, there is the paradoxical position concerning the rise of the relatively free and democratic Arab media (such as Al-Jazeera) where American pressure is mounting on governments to silence what is seen by many to be almost the only active democratic forum in the region. Another paradox is the indirect discrediting and harming of indigenous Arab democratic forces, where these forces are increasingly perceived as American proxies at a time when American foreign policy is deeply hated across the region. However, the most damaging paradox for the US 'democratisation project' remains its unparallel support of Israel, and the decidedly undemocratic US insistence on imposing the more or less status quo Israeli formula of occupation on the Palestinians. Military foreign occupation of any people, as is the case of the Israeli military rule over the Palestinians, is against the very basic notions of democracy. It is the most flagrant mode of authoritarianism. Leaving this most disastrous case unresolved while focusing on other countries' 'more pressing need for democracy' is hypocritical.

12.30-14.00 Lunch

14.00-17.00   <u>Session 2</u>

Moderation: Friederike Pannewick (Free University Berlin)

Monika Flacke (Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin),

Nations and their Iconic Memories

World War II has never faded away from the memories of the European nations. It has been moulding these collective memories to the present day. The split between fellow travellers, collaborators and those who resisted was so deep-seated that rebuilding the unity of the nations was of predominant importance when the war had come to an end. Civil wars had either to be prevented or brought to a close, nations split up in themselves since World War I had make peace with themselves. This meant that in the memories of nations allied with or occupied by Germany collaboration and fellow travelling had to be pushed into the background by a myth of resistance. Germans considered themselves either betrayed and innocent victims or, as in the GDR, members of the Resistance.

The myth of resistance nations had such a power of persuasion that most of the people accepted it only too willingly. The media of transformation were images. Actuating imagery ("Bildakte") made the reconstruction possible that was so essential to Europe after the Second World War. The fabricated memories became manifest in various forms – in photos – schoolbooks – books – medals and coins – posters – postcards – souvenirs – paintings – sculptures and, above all, films. Roberto Rossellini's Roma città aperta – Rome, open city, produced in 1944-45 to show that the whole nation offered resistance, may serve as a perfect example.

Shereen Abou El Naga,

Politics of Interpretation: From the Image of the Harem to the Image of the Veil

Scholarship on the harem is so wide that it has become an essential component in the humanities (literature, anthropology, history, cultural studies, women's studies…). Basically, this scholarship has come to specific conclusions: that the harem was an expansion of the colonial imagination, that it was used to create the exotic other and that it was used as the stereotype of Oriental women. However, the harem really did exist. Yet, it was all the time seen by the outsider, the traveler, and the orientalist. This paper is not about the harem. It is about how the image of the harem (paintings, travel accounts, fake translations…etc) was used culturally to produce the image of the nation (Europe in this case). That is to say, the paper will look into the politics of making an image and then the politics of interpreting it. On the other hand, the way this image was justified by the Orient that held the harem will also be analyzed.

It is not a coincidence that the battle of the veil in modern times has replaced the battle of the harem. Women's sexuality has always been the focus of representation and identity formation. This paper is not about the veil. It is about the strategies Muslim women living in Europe employ to mark their own identity through consolidating the image of the veil; how the veil becomes an image of the nation; how the image of the veil is interpreted, sometimes, from within the Islamic world as a sign of backwardness; and, how the popular culture in Europe has co-opted the image of the veil and the harem for its own benefit (sex ads, internet, belly dancing, films, music, …etc).

Identity formation and representation of the self and the other have used and abused women's sexuality in an everlasting battle over either 'fixing' images or 'subverting' them. Somehow, these images have become like a commodity that targets the market and thus, it needs buyers/ spectators. Moreover, images circulate in a socio-economic system, a fact that defines and determines the meanings they generate. Through this assumption one could track the similarities between the politics of interpretation in relation to the image of the veil and that of the harem, without ignoring the fact that each is to be historicized.

Friday, 29 April

10.00-12.30   Session 3

Moderation: Samah Selim (Marsseille, Fellow of the Working Group Modernity and Islam 2004/5)

Marie-Therese Abdel-Messih (Cairo University),

The Image of the 'Egyptian' in Art: Local and Global Encounters

Egyptian art was revived in the early twentieth century as a result of global and local encounters. Contact with the west coincided with massive archaeological discoveries. The process of re-presenting the 'Egyptian' in art has brought into alignment the quest for origins and anxiety about modernization. Although the 'Egyptian' in art appeared as a resistance to academism and the different versions of orientalism, it has explored possibilities of reconciling imported techniques with the local. The coordination between particular and universal has aroused different re-definitions of space and volume, as in Mukhtar's (1891-1934) monumental sculptures. Mahmoud Said (1897-1964) crossed the difference between the western canon and the local to re-present the identity of the painted subjects. Margaret Nakhla (1905-79?) combined between Parisian sites and Egyptian landscapes, foreign and popular locations.

Global encounters raised the problematics of image making which artists had to contest, by resisting western academism. On the other hand, local encounters, in the thirties, among emergent vanguard movements experimenting to represent the popular subject brought up the multiple faces of identity, and competing critical discourses of the aesthetic. By associating with the cosmopolitan surrealist movement, the 'Art and Freedom' group represented the conflict between rootedness and displacement. Meanwhile, the 'Contemporary Art Group' brought popular interiors to the forefront, the interior being the site of the spiritual and the erotic. The popular interior did not simply adopt 'folkloric' motifs, but represented the mystical in the everyday. Popular spirituality has been taken up by later generations, and practiced in both, figurative and abstract art.

The dilemma confronting the 'Egyptian' in art has always invited the beholder's participation in issues of authenticity and the aesthetic. The 'Egyptian' and the popular have sometimes become interchangeable, and the problematic entailed has remained the site of exchange until this day. The archaism of the popular still attracts the global market, while in the local context there remains a gap between the artist and the multitude, his subject of representation.

Nevertheless, new formal and informal spaces for dialogue are emerging. The Aswan Symposium, a state-sponsored project, claims such a space. It hosts native and non-native sculptors in the mountainous zone of Upper Egypt, a location away from the metropolis,

where the stone may provide a medium that initiates a dialogue between indigenous and outsider. We need to consider its potential for interpellating viewers in a new space, where the 'Egyptian' is not a 'naturalisation' of a culture or a geographical environment, rather, it is in a constant process of flux and exchange.

Now that the contemporary scene is overwhelmed by images of the 'Egyptian', partly imposed by the state, and partly controlled by the technologies of the global market, the 'Egyptian' in art is at a juncture where strategies for survival need re-thinking. Perhaps by providing a location beyond the imagined 'Orient' and away from constructed 'images', this workshop may become an encounter re-visioning the 'Egyptian' htrough local and global perspectives.

Faisal Darraj (Damascus),

The Self and the Other in the Arabic Novel

The 'other' has taken several forms in the Arabic novel. The first form was the general reference and framework. The novel as a genre was completely absent from the Arabic literary tradition, however, this tradition, which seemed as the only possible reference for the 'novel', forced Arab writers to take the route of going back in time trying to locate roots. Needless to say that roots are essential for those who feel threatened. Contrary to writers who were trying to support their novel by the old Arabic tradition, there were other writers who were imitating the European novel, believing that the Eurocentric culture was valid for all without limits or discriminations. In addition to those two forms, the 'other' appeared in the Arabic novel as 'the woman' who was being invaded by 'masculinity'. Hence, the transformation of the East/ West relation into a male/ female one, a fact that expresses an ahistorical consciousness par excellence. Meanwhile, the 'other' as the colonizer was a common image in the post WWII novel. The relation of the Arab intellectual to the 'other' has, thus, taken the forms of threat, imitation and escape in time.

Yet, with the development and maturity of the Arabic novel, this relation was transformed into one of reconciliation. This reconciliatory relation which emerged from the idea of the universality of modernism and the unity of human culture, has led the Arab novelist and modernist to believe in the concept of Man, without any ideological foundations, to perceive the future as the only desirable time, and to subvert the absolute belief through the acceptance of the relativity of knowledge. In the final analysis, the Arab intellectual has stayed away from the ideology of reactions and started to deal with the novel as modernism: static, general, human sayings.

If the 'other' had contributed to the birth and development of the Arabic novel, the failure of modernism by the end of the 20th Century and the hegemony of the closed religious ideology have led the Arab society to equate modernism with the other, atheism and colonization. Therefore, the Arabic novel has become a marginal literary genre that reproduces the marginality of the Arabic thought, which was defeated in June 1967 – a defeat that is being reproduced until today.

To sum up, the other, in the Arabic novel, could be: the one who is to be imitated, the Western who is a threat, the colonizer who confiscated the rights of the Arab, the beautiful woman who is to be dominated by an illusory masculinity, and finally, the other is the sum up of a culture to which the alienated Arabic intellectual aspires to belong to.

12.30-14.30 Lunch

14.30 – 16.30 Session 4

Moderation: Richard Tapper (SOAS, London)

Viola Shafik (American University in Cairo),

Film Images: America and the Arab World

Since decades American film industry has produced a variety of largely xenophobic and racist stereotypes of the so-called Orient in general and the Arab World in particular. However, what about the Arab representation of the USA? What has the Arab art house film on the one hand and popular Arab (largely Egyptian) cinema to tell about America, also in the light of the recent political events, such as 9/11 and the US led intervention in Iraq? One of the first results is that despite of the political importance and presence of the US in the region as well as the pre-dominance of Hollywood's cinematic products in the Arab world on the level of distribution and consumption and as much as the latter has formed a source of inspiration for glamour, technical achievements and popular film genres, the representation of the US and its people has been absent on the narrative level. This absence-presence will be the major focus of my study along with a thorough textual analysis of those few recent cinematic exceptions - that is a very limited number of commercial Egyptian feature films including Youssef Chahine's latest Alexandria-New York - that deal in fact with the US and with what it seems to embody to their film characters. The study will also attempt to contextualize the highly apologetic orientation of some of these films in the light of a larger body of very recent popular film-industrial works set in Europe, Asia and Africa whose ideological implications can be only assessed through looking at the problematic issue of so-called globalization.

Ziba Mir-Hosseini (London, Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin 2004/5),

Challenging Images of Muslim Women

Between March 1996 and April 1998, I was involved as co-director of the documentary film Divorce Iranian Style with an independent British film-maker, Kim Longinotto. The film was inspired by my book Marriage on Trial (1993), based on ethnographic research undertaken in family law courts in Morocco and Iran. This, my first exposure to film-making, involved me in a long series of negotiations, not only with the Iranian authorities for permission and access, but also with myself: I had to deal with personal ethical and professional dilemmas as well as with theoretical and methodological issues of representation and the production of anthropological narratives. The film's subject-matter inevitably entailed both exposing individuals' private lives in a public domain, and tackling a major issue which divides Islamists and feminists: women's position in Islamic law.

My paper gives an account of these negotiations, exploring the problem of ethnographic representation generally, as well as the complex politics involved in representing 'Iran' and 'women in Islam'. I start with an account of my own involvement in the politics of gender in Islam, which as we shall see came to leave its traces on the narrative of the film. Then I will summarize the reactions of various audiences to the film - that is, a final series of negotiations of meaning. Through these narratives, I want to show the ways in which 'the reality' of Iranian women as portrayed in our film came to be constructed, and how this 'reality' came to be interpreted by the viewers.

16.30-17.00   Closing Session

Moderation: Shereen Abou El Nagga