

A one day workshop report by Valérie Amiraux

Drama Queen/Malika: fashion, beauty, humour, in a context of constrained visibility

Dramaqueen, a one day workshop co-organized by Valérie Amiraux (UofMontreal) and Nacira Guénif (Villetaneuse) took place on 30 September-1st October 2011 in Paris at Le 104 (<http://www.104.fr>) and was organized in two sections:

Contemporary Western societies are stages where regimes of compulsory visibility are being implemented and heavily affect [shape if you don't want to repeat affect] the public perceptions and social management of Muslim bodies. The intensification of the anti-headscarf campaign in Europe and elsewhere has brought Muslim female bodies to the forefront of public stages. In this process, specific forms of injustice affecting Muslim women are embodied through specific politics of aesthetics designing borders to decide who is to be desired or on the contrary rejected. Religious Islamic garments operate as transnational "synecdoches" (Razack), and gender, ethnicity, race and religion intersect in mapping the boundaries along which desired and rejected icons are produced and circulated in the Euro-Atlantic imaginary, making power relations visible.

In a field that is saturated by either ideological statements or purely descriptive assessment, visual culture and artistic experiments appeared to us as a relevant field for developing new perspectives. Indeed, they permit moving beyond the usual binary conceptions (tradition vs modernity, brown vs white women, oppressed vs emancipated subjects) and the limitations of "national models" (multiculturalism, republicanism, interculturalism, etc.).

This workshop was conceived as a place where artists and scholars would engage in discussion and conversation regarding the variety of tones that compose visual cultures (including fashion, internet, contemporary art and Islamic culture, music scenes, theater experiments, comedy, advertising, etc.). The aim was to explore the impact of the intersection of norms carried by images coming from fashion, comedy, art and the beauty industry and the way they interact with the publicized drama figure of the Muslim(s): *Drama Queen/Malika*. We set up the stage for a constructive dialogue between scholars and artists that analyzes the contiguity of their respective work: on the one hand, the academic analysis of religious practitioners, and on the other, irony and humor, and artistic performances based on the same practicing religious individuals.

1. In the afternoon of 30 September 2011 :

The co-organizers held an academic workshop engaging conversations between Valérie Amiraux (U. Montréal), Nacira Guénif-Souilamas (U. Paris Nord/13), Annelies Moors (U.

Amsterdam), Rubina Ramji (U. Cape Breton, Ca), Niqabitch (artists, Paris), Alia Sayed (Southampton Univ.), Elsa Dorlin (Paris 8), Diletta Guidi (EHESS-GSRL).

Rather than listening to disconnected presentations, we asked the participants to connect to this broad theme by trying to think of their own work (whether academic or artistic) around the following questions (in English and French):

a. How do discursive and visual regimes operate in designing the public stages and define the legitimate/illegitimate visible otherness (*altérités visibles*)?

b. How do they operate in organizing the increasing porosity between private and public spheres in particular on matters related to intimacy, personal choice and individual autonomy?

Fashion is perceived as conveying standards of beauty to be replicated by consumers: what does fashion say about those who do not comply with these standards? Moreover, what does it offer to those women trying to meet the canons of fashion from a different perspective: Could veiling be considered beautiful even if in secular contexts it is mostly perceived as conveying anything but beauty/seduction?

Veiling as hiding oneself-becoming invisible seems to be tolerated and sustainable as long as it appears as an artistic performance or an ironic expression. It quickly shifts to being unbearable, intolerable and unsustainable when performed in the every day lives of ordinary persons. What makes the veiling of female bodies become a problem? How can we analyze and discuss this alleged “experience of disappearance” and veiling’s automatic entrapment in the discursive framework of the everyday and the public sphere ?

The audience was made of 20 persons, mostly students (graduate, doctoral and post-doctoral students) from Paris universities. Few professors and researchers joined.

2. In the evening of 30 September 2011:

We had a more artistic focused discussion mostly looking at public performances around the Muslim subjects with the following participants:

Martha Kirszenbaum (independent curator, Paris), David Harper (curator, Brooklyn Academy of Music, NYC), Frédéric Nauzcyciel (artist, Paris), Samia Oroseman (humorist/comedian, Paris), Francesca (performer, NYC)

On 1st October, an artistic performance took place as a cultural event of the Paris City Hall Nuit Blanche (Fireflies-Francesca-Baltimore) at the Institut des Cultures de l’Islam.

The audience was composed of around 40 persons, partly students, academics, journalists, artists and local audience of the neighborhood.