

## *HANAN AL-CINEMA: AFFECTIONS FOR THE MOVING IMAGE*

Susana Mouzinho (IFILNOVA)

Laura U. Marks. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015. ISBN: 9780262029308.

Ambitious in scope, Laura U. Marks's *Hanan al-Cinema: Affections for the Moving Image* is overall a valuable addition to film scholarship and to the studies on film production in and from the Arab world. The numerous works analyzed, from the last two decades and a half, put forth many different modes of engagement and thinking through and with the moving-image. Experimental in nature, these films reflect and construct modes of image making that summon in myriad ways a sense of belonging and of being affected by the moving image; experience and affect, the primary mode of a personal engagement with cinema according to Marks. To speak of experimental is already to refer to a major criterion in the selection of the films in analysis — Marks is partial to experimental film and its history — although this criterion is somewhat complicated: experimental as in the lived experience that informs many of the works in study as well as being synonymous with experimentation regarding the construction of narrative content, montage procedures, the use of different film mediums and image generations. The book's title hints at one of Marks's central arguments which calls for the moving image as a mode of relation, connection and engagement between artistic community, cinema and spectator, an inescapable relationship that aims to foreground an intricate reading of the moving-image in terms of its affective power and mobilizing potential.

The study opens with an overview of the modes of production and organization in Arab-speaking countries and the institutional and informal relations that are established between the different agents involved in art and film production such as the State, production companies, independent galleries, filmmakers, spectators, friends, in order to bring about an "unfolding of Arab cinema" in its diverse approaches to the moving-image. It follows a thematic organization with a few chapters interspersed throughout dedicated to the work of a single artist/filmmaker, such as Elia Souleiman, Mounir Fatmi, Mohamed Soueid, among others, which offer a case-study analysis of the major topics developed in neighboring chapters — such as body, landscape, algorithm, archive. The 15

chapters that make up this volume, as Marks notes in her introductory remarks, are dedicated to an analysis of a large corpus of films that are thought through the concept of “enfolding-unfolding aesthetics”, derived from Atomist Islamic philosophy and Deleuze’s theory of the fold. It is this concept of “enfolding-unfolding aesthetics” that informs her discussion of the way cinema can “make events perceptible and seek connections among them” (20). Drawing from extensive philosophical references such as Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, Baruch Spinoza, Charles Sanders Peirce, Félix Guattari and, as mentioned, Gilles Deleuze, the following chapters are an enticing read on the moving-image in the Arab world, where manifold historical-political inflections and self-reflexiveness come up as expressive characteristics of this cinema.

Such an approach to film as Marks’s, works out a discussion of these films that is intent on locating that which is hidden in the folds of experience and how it is actualized in the image. In fact, a tri-partite relation is at the basis of what constitutes a semiotics of enfolding-unfolding aesthetics, the enfolding-unfolding of experience being one of experiential appearances and disappearances, derived from Charles Sanders Peirce, via Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of the “plane of immanence,” where, in the categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness of the sign, Marks finds the concepts that allow her to elaborate this aesthetics and thus work out a methodology for thinking the moving-image. Thus, the unfolding, the coming into immanence from infinity — that is, the whole of experience — is thought through the triadic model. The Peircean categories are named experience, information and image, the latter establishing a relation between experience and information. Through this triadic model, Marks aims to bring into discussion not only how and why certain images reach us from an abundance past and present, but also the socio-political organization that lies behind our experience of the world as well as the ways in which we react and interact with images. Marks suggests:

This model shows that in our time, much art is concerned with the nature of en/unfolding rather than with producing images; these artworks (and other things) thus are not so much representational as performative. Attending to the flow of unfolding and enfolding can help us understand artworks (and other things) as performative in their origins and their effects in the world. They become fluid and transformative, like the Peircean sign itself. (73).

The engagement with Deleuzian philosophy and the notion of an affect for the moving-image leads Marks to a discussion of modes of embodiment, further expanding the notion of the performativity of the moving-image, arguing for the affect as the mode for a continual passage from action to thought. This performative act is thus located in Marks's reading of the affection-image in Deleuze:

This moment of suspension (the affection-image) can give rise to what Deleuze calls time-image, images produced in creatively widened circuits of perception, memory and imagination. The affection-image suspends qualities that might become the basis for reactive acts and instead makes them vibrate with the potential for new kinds of acts, feelings, or perceptions. The time-image elevates the incapacity to act to a high creative principle that allows any image to connect with any other. (4)

Herein lies an ethics for a sustained circulation of images as it will involve the viewer in a relation with the image (again relating to Peirce's theory of the sign) that requires the investment of said viewer (or interpretant) in the image/sign, thus creating a connection from which a new sign may appear: "A sign grows stronger through use as it 'spreads among the peoples'." (282). The suggestion is that this may lead to the motion of action and thought, to an affection-image and to an emancipatory sociability of the image.

The concept of the affect is thus imported for a film theory that advocates its potentialities for the time-image. In the mobilization from action to thought, a movement is made for an impassioned relation with the world that moves beyond the photographic, beyond representation, towards performativity, affection and sociability (the time-image as a "belief in the world" that does not rely on the photographic as indexical evidence, instead, presumes the enfoldings and unfoldings of experience in their contingent meanings). This is a scholarship that argues for a cognitive and affective/embodied relation with the image, expanding on the concept of the "haptic" — Marks has developed the notion of the eye as an organ of touch — a mode of sensuous relation with the world and the film image that will potentially produce a culturally sensitive approach and a field of the ethical. The moving-image is the locus of a mediated encounter between the bodies on the screen and viewers' bodies. This "contact" Marks argues, is what lies at the base of the movement from affect to thought. The "affections" that the title of the book references, solicit the notion of experience — in keeping with a reading of Deleuze and Guattari's *plane of*

*immanence* where life and art events become manifest or *actualized* — with which to think, live and act in the world, film as a *bloc of sensations* activated by the viewer.

In fact, Marks champions an embodied reading of the image that relies on the particular subjectivities, which seems at odds with the Deleuzian idea of cinema's capacity for the creation of a non-embodied image of expressive matter, the *becoming* image as independent of a grounded subject. But for Marks the crucial move, in this reviewer's understanding, is the move beyond representation towards the affect — the "becoming molar of the molecular" — an affectivity that derives from an impression of bodies — art's bodies, cinema's bodies, neighboring bodies — upon the viewing subject, a performative knowledge of the world that is arrived at through the experience of the circulation of images. A well thought out book, and invaluable discussion of the recent history of Arab cinema, that argues for the potentials of the encounter with moving-images and the exemplary and multifarious ways in which a compelling corpus of films works these concepts.