Veils and sunglasses

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Abstract
Both the veil and sunglasses aim to disrupt gazes. Marshal McLuhan has analysed sunglasses and their relationship with his system of hot and cool media. The attractive eyes of the veiled woman invite the gaze to further scrutiny. A general but relatively profound attraction is effectuated first, which will then create the desire to discover the rest of the face. The perceptual mechanics of dark glasses works the other way. Here the official part of the face is freely exposed, but it loses a part of its attractiveness because the deeper or “real” meaning of the features cannot be fully construed and, in many cases, is not supposed to be construed at all. By hiding in an apparently “cool” way one’s official facial expressions, the resulting play with desire and attraction makes the veil rather hot in the McLuhanian sense. Further, the article examines if the veiling of women prevents or fosters fetishisation and compares the veil to the technique of cropping.

Keywords: veils; aesthetics of sunglasses; Islamic culture; coolness; fashion; women; feminism; McLuhan

Both the veil and sunglasses aim to disrupt gazes. This is especially true in the case of the eye-covering veil where the effect is similar to that of sunglasses. Here the subject cannot be gazed at but adopts the role of a mere spectator. The veil has been compared to the mashrabiyya, the wooden latticework enclosing oriel windows of traditional Arab houses thus permitting women observing purdah to look outside without being seen, or to the Indian jharokha, which serves the same purpose (Picture 1). To see without being seen is an act of empowerment and liberation as indicated in a report of a Swedish woman wearing an all-covering veil in Saudi Arabia: “That was the biggest sense of freedom I have ever had ... You are like a spy not taking part and you can pull faces ...” (Franks 2000: 921). In the 1980 British drama-documentary Death of a Princess, Saudi women on a desert raid sit inside a vehicle taking advantage of their covering for promiscuity. The car stops: outside, men dance as if they want to be chosen. Being covered is a sign of empowerment. Veiling is associated with traditional Arab notions of power relations like “who has the right to be seen by whom” (cf. El Guindi 1999: 94). In a different context, Frantz Fanon (1967) writes about colonized Algeria that “this woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer. There is no reciprocity. She does not yield herself, does not offer herself” (169). The problem is that the person who is completely veiled is too invisible for others as a person and cannot always fully participate in the social game played.

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THE FACE VEIL AND SUNGLASSES

An analysis of the kind of veil that leaves only the eyes visible (niqab, burka) in comparison with sunglasses is more interesting. Both the veil and sunglasses enact a selective covering of the face, but in the former case only the eyes are uncovered whereas in the latter the face is visible while the eyes are covered. The face-covering veil impairs communication (the woman is less audible because her voice is dampened by the veil and the covering of the ears impairs her hearing) but her eyes leave her considerable possibilities to communicate with the outside world. It is perhaps equally difficult to interact with somebody wearing very dark glasses as it is to interact with a veiled woman whose only visible facial part are the eyes. But the difficulties can be traced to different reasons.

Marshal McLuhan has analysed sunglasses and their relationship with his system of hot and cool media. McLuhan’s definition of “cool” bears no explicit link with typical African American elaborations of the term. He rather operates with an interesting opposition of “hot” presence to a more elusive but inspiring “cool” semi-presence. In studies on African American culture, the “cool mask” as “an extension of the instinct to survive” (Majors and Billson 1992: 60) is often linked to the use of sunglasses. Joel Dinerstein (1999) reports that Lester Young’s “second contribution to individual self-expression on the bandstand was the strategic use of sunglasses. (…) Young recognized the use of shades as a mask to deflect the gaze of others without causing conflict” (250). It seems that since then the cool pose of supreme indifference has become “eyes hidden behind shades” (Fraiman 2003: xi) able to symbolize habits of transgression and irreverence as a worldview.

For McLuhan (1964), “hot” is any kind of information that is highly defined or that “leaves not much to be filled in” (37). Hot media favour analytical precision, quantitative analysis, and sequential ordering and are usually linear and logical, while “cool” media leave the transmitted information open to interpretation or even partly unexplained. Speech is thus “cooler” than highly defined images. A cool person wearing dark glasses lacks the “articulation of data” (42) because the glasses “create the inscrutable and inaccessible image that invites a great deal of participation and completion” (44). McLuhan could have made identical points about the veil because the veil also evokes an elusive semi-presence. However, is the veil just as “cool” as sunglasses?

The face defines the person’s identity in a private as well as in an official fashion (passports, etc.). It is both an intimate and a legally responsible part of the body. The eyes are certainly the most private and most “unofficial” part of the face as they are closely connected to the brain and thoughts become manifest more directly through the eyes than through other facial features or body movements. It is relatively easy to fake a smile using the mouth and other facial muscles, but it is difficult to entirely control the expression of the eyes. Professional poker players wear the “poker face” but in addition, they often wear dark glasses because the eyes can unwillingly betray spontaneous reactions. Dark glasses intrigued Aldous Huxley, whose popularization he could observe in his youth:

This extraordinary notion that the organ of light perception is unfitted to stand light has become popular only in the last twenty years or so. Before the war of 1914 it was, I remember, the rarest thing to see anyone wearing dark glasses. (…) As a small boy, I would look at a be-goggled man or woman with that mixture of awed sympathy and rather macabre curiosity which children reserve for those afflicted with any kind of unusual or disfiguring physical handicap. Today, all that is changed. The wearing of black spectacles has become not merely common, but creditable. Just how creditable is proved by the fact that the girls in bathing suits, represented on the covers of fashion magazines in summer time, invariably wear goggles. Black glasses have ceased to be the
badge of the afflicted, and are now compatible with youth, smartness and sex appeal. (Huxley 1974: 29)

Huxley traces this “fantastic craze for blacking out the eyes” to weakness: “This addiction has its origin in the fear of light.” Paul Virilio, in a comment on Huxley, takes the problem from the opposite end. He does not interpret the wearing of dark glasses in terms of a weakness but rather of “coolness” because, for him, the wearer of dark glasses becomes stronger: “The wearer of dark glasses knows that the protectors—propagators of bodies and images are loaded weapons. He veils therefore prudently his retina and particularly the area of the macula (…). His fear of being surprised by the sudden onset of the image, the intense illumination of projectors (…) is magnified when he finds himself in a place that is naturally dark or crepuscular” (Virilio 2009: 60).

Robert Murphy, in an article from 1964 on Tuareg culture, synthesizes both opinions when interpreting the sunglass phenomenon as a “means of defense and withdrawal” which is particularly popular “among West African emirs and Near Eastern potentates (…). They are commonly used in Latin America, where, indoors and out, heavily tinted glasses are the hallmark of the prestigeful as well as those aspiring to status, for they bestow the aloofness and distance that has always been the prerogative of the high in these lands” (Murphy 1964: 1272).

The wearer of dark glasses is protected against light even at night (who has not been blinded by a car flashing its high beam headlights in the night?) as well as against the look of the other. The other’s look into my eyes can be hypnotizing and thus disabling and the protection through glasses will make me more powerful. As a consequence, the wearer of dark glasses is cool: no grimaces, no frowns, and no signs of strain and tension even when exposed to extreme light or hypnotic stares.

Though both sunglasses and veils present a combination of presence and non-presence, creating the effect of mystification, in both cases the mysteries are “resolved” in different ways. The person wearing dark glasses reveals important parts of her face though she obliges us to retain any final judgment about these expressions because the gaze is missing. We have to content ourselves with the “official” signal sent out by the rest of the face but are unable to look “behind” it in order to interpret the face in the light of the more “real” intentions signalled by the eyes. The face remains “cool” in McLuhan’s sense because the meaning can never be construed.

The veil, too, incontestably does construct a mystery. It is not without reason that it has been a main symbol of the “inscrutability of the East” (Secor 2002: 7) for centuries and not only for women. Murphy (1964) finds that also the face veil of Tuareg men “promote[s] this atmosphere of mystery and apartness and the Tuareg, whether in town or in his native desert, has often been remarked upon for his penchant for appearing the master of all he surveys” (1266). However, the mystery created by the veil is different from that created by sunglasses. The face of the woman who is wearing the face veil is like being put on a psychological operation table exposing only the most important parts of her psyche, which remain analysable, hypnotisable, and vulnerable. The eyes give us access to “hot” information because, as long as we see the eyes, we can decipher her state of mind (is she afraid, shy, defiant, etc.).

It is true that the protection and hiding of the mouth does have equally strong symbolic connotations. Murphy (1964) points to Freudian literature, which “gives extensive documentation to the female symbolism of the mouth, its vulnerability to penetration, and to the unconscious association between the eyes and the male generative powers” (1272). However, in no way is this kind of covering related to the grammar of coolness. The plugging of bodily orifices for fear of penetration is not an expression of coolness, while the hiding of information as well as the disruption of one’s own stare definitely is. Therefore the “hot” exposure of the woman’s eyes does not permit the expression of real coolness. Above that, while the woman can communicate emotions relatively directly through the eyes, she is given no chance to formulate her message “officially” through other facial expressions. All this contradicts the concept of the veil as a vehicle of coolness.

Apart from the prevention of potential penetration, the covering of the mouth has other important symbolical (and practical) consequences. In conversations, the mouth is the main communicator and to see a person’s mouth while speaking can be crucial especially when there is background noise or when the person speaks the language poorly. The “mystery” of the face veil
is in the hiding of the official information that is supposed to complement the intimate one. This explains why the veil has so often been evoked in the context of erotic intentions because here the intimate message is sent out without being complemented by any official confirmation. Attractive eyes invite the gaze to further scrutiny. A general but relatively profound attraction is effectuated first, which will then create the desire to discover the rest of the face.

The perceptual mechanics of dark glasses works the other way. Here the official part of the face is freely exposed but it loses a part of its attractiveness because the deeper or “real” meaning of the features cannot be fully construed and, in many cases, is not supposed to be construed at all. The result is mystery but not primary eroticism. I am not saying that the (male or female) wearer of sunglasses cannot be erotic, but s/he will not be erotic because she is wearing sunglasses. The sunglasses themselves are not erotic because they divert the gaze instead of encouraging it to further scrutiny. This is the reason why they are cool and particularly much cooler than the veil. Sunglasses create a diffuse sort of interest and occasionally they arouse the feeling of being intrigued; but they do not attract.

The veiled glance, on the other hand, is active in a very straightforward fashion. The cool glance is neither active nor passive but, according to Pountain and Robins (2000), it is “rather detached – it expresses an indifference that challenges the other to attempt to attract its interest” (116). This pattern explains also why sunglasses worn together with a face-covering veil do not have the same effect of coolness that is usually attached to sunglasses. What is needed in order to be cool is the interplay of official messages with more or less construable unofficial messages.

Sunglasses worn by women cannot have strong erotic connotations because in this case, the male gaze will not be supported by desire. It can never become subjective, but will keep hovering between objective and subjective expressions. Saudi Arabian clerics showed remarkable insight when claiming in 2011 their right to cover women’s “tempting eyes” (Keyes 2011) though, most likely, this covering will not happen through the use of sunglasses. Given the particular economics of desire linked to the veil, the generalized wearing of sunglasses would definitely make Saudi women look cooler. Interestingly, there is no Islamic veil covering only the eyes.

It can be concluded that the veil covering *everything but the eyes* is not cool. By hiding in an apparently “cool” way official facial expressions, the resulting play with desire and attraction makes the veil rather hot in the McLuhanian sense because the eyes are the “hottest” component of the face and any vestimentary aesthetics limiting facial expressions to this hot part cannot be considered cool.

The eroticism of veiling works along the lines of the Lacanian scheme of the paradox of desire as it has been explained by Slavoj Žižek. The perception of the veiled object is “supported, permeated, and distorted by desire” or it is even “posited by desire itself” (Žižek 1992: 12). Desire is sparked when *something* (its object-cause) embodies or gives positive existence to its *nothing*—that is, to its void. What does the desire want? It wants an official confirmation that the desired object (the rest of the face) “really” exists and possibly desires us.

In some particular situations the observer might decide not to reconstruct the rest of the face and to make those items that are visible the final focus of his fascination. Sometimes he might fear that the discovery of the entire face will involve a deception. The woman on Picture 2 attracts because her “hot” eyes actively engage in seduction. Her expression of seduction is so much emphasized that we do not necessarily feel the desire to have our impression “officially” sanctioned by unveiling the rest of the face. We might simply take her seductive look for granted.

The male wearing of the veil can follow the same perceptual pattern. The Tuareg man might
look cool on the Picture 3 but not because interesting facial elements have been hidden in a “cool” fashion, but rather because the “hot” information sent out by his eyes suggests defiance and aggressiveness. Again, we do not necessarily desire to discover the rest of his face.

**THE VEIL AS A FETISH**

The pattern becomes very clear when the feminine attraction is suppressed in a way that the subject will definitely refuse to discover what is underneath the veil. Then the veil itself becomes “hot.” French nineteenth-century writer Gerard de Nerval was convinced “that it is the veil itself and not the woman concealed beneath it, that attracts” (Dobie 2001: 127), and Orientalist appreciations of the veil have suggested that the woman is not “the interior that needs to be protected or penetrated. Her body is not simply inside of the veil: it is of it; she is constituted in and by the fabrication of the veil” (Sedira 2003: 70). When the veil’s hotness is extreme it becomes a fetish. This happens for example when the veil turns into a clichéd symbol of negative perceptions of Islamic culture as seen in the propaganda posters of the Swiss right-wing anti-Muslim movement, which combines a veiled woman with missiles and war motives (Picture 4). It is certainly no coincidence that hoods and balaclavas are also worn by extremely uncool (hot) terrorists.

The fetish character of the veil is particularly plausible in the light of classical literature on fetishisation. Here we are expanding our considerations that have, so far, been limited to the face veil and the consequences of difference ways of face covering. In this section on fetishism, the

![](Picture 3)

Veil, which covers only the head but leaves the face visible, will be taken into consideration, too. Fetishism plays a crucial role in Freudian psychoanalysis where the fetish represents a substitute of phallus, of which the woman lacks. It is discovered by the boy who begins desiring it and finally depends on it for sexual satisfaction. Jean Baudrillard, influenced by Freud as well as by Marx’ theories of commodity fetishism, concentrates on fetishism in order to analyse the subjective sentiments of the consumer towards consumer products. Baudrillard shows that the cultural mystique surrounding a product creates not only illusions about the product’s virtues, but can even develop a life of its own.

For Freud, as for Baudrillard (1993), fetishism is mainly a male penchant and for Baudrillard it is related to the transformation of the female body into a phallus whose main characteristics is to be smooth and blank: “The naked thigh and, metonymically, the entire body has become a phallic effigy by means of this caesura, a fetishistic object to be contemplated and manipulated, deprived of all its menace” (102). Baudrillard believes that “eroticization always consists in the erectility of a fragment of the barred body” (ibid.).

Apart from the phallus, the other most classical fetish is the doll. Anthropologist Max von Boehn writes in his *Dolls and Puppets* (1937) that “the doll, among ancient and among modern peoples, plays an important part in magical practice.” For von Boehn (1937), “almost anything can become a fetish, but generally human forms are preferred” (1–2). Combining both, for Baudrillard, the process of fetishisation turns the woman into a *phallic doll* in the sense of a smooth and blank effigy on which male desire can be projected. Having been deprived of all her menace, she has
become an object that can be contemplated and manipulated. Having become a doll-like empty screen, the woman is ready to function as the recipient of male desire.

Can the veiling of women pursue this function or does it instead prevent this kind of fetishisation? First, there is a strong parallel between veiling and fetishisation as pointed out by Sarah Kofman: “The reasons women would have for veiling themselves and for wanting to be enigmatic would all link up with man’s need for a certain fetishism, in which woman, her interests being at stake, would become an accomplice” (1980: 59/1985: 4). The surface of the fetish-woman is smooth and nothing is supposed to disrupt the creation of male desire that is sparked when looking at a blank body screen. Through veiling, a woman’s body can indeed be cast as “virtually uninhabited, a shell of skin desiring only to be desirable, to be raped, to have permanent beauty mysteriously drawn upon it” (Braunberger 2000: 5). Christine Braunberger’s quotation is drawn from a discussion not of the veil but of female tattoos that are supposed to disrupt the male perception of the female body and thus to prevent the process of fetishisation. According to Braunberger’s logic, the skin of the fetish-woman is blank and the tattoos applied by the woman on her blank skin disrupt her smoothness. Also tattoo specialist Margot DeMello (2000) writes that tattooed female skin “control[s] and subvert[s] the ever-present “male gaze” by forcing men (…) to look at their bodies in a manner that exerts control” (173).

Is the veil a fetish reinstating the woman as a blank female screen or does it rather function like a tattoo, actively subverting the male projection of desires and thus protecting the woman from fetishisation? Comparing veil and tattoos might appear as inappropriate because of their respective phenomenological and ontological conditions. The veil can be taken off while the tattoo stays. The veil might be a fetish, but it always has an “underneath” (the woman) who cannot be fully identified with the veil. Still veiling and tattooing develop similar fetish languages as they work with the elements of desire, smoothness, and the control of the male gaze. Of course, everything depends on if the woman has chosen to apply the tattoo herself or if she has been tattooed by a man. When a man tattoos a woman (a subject dealt with in several films), he will turn her into a desiring subject whose focus he can control. Even when the tattoo stimulates the desire of other men who read the tattoo as the erotic projection of another male, the tattooing male will still exercise control over their desires related to “his” tattoo. Everything changes when the woman decides to be tattooed on her own. Then the male loss of control over the inscriptions of his woman’s skin can equal impotence. First, the man can no longer project his desires on the female skin and second, he will have to accept that other men will be attracted by the tattoo and use it for the projection of their own desires. The loss of control prevents the fetishisation of the woman.

Does veiling disrupt the process of female fetishisation in a similar fashion? Or does the veil rather work in the service of fetishisation? Like in the case of tattoos, there is a big difference between a man forcing a woman to wear a veil and a woman who decides to do so on her own, though in the latter case she might still have given in to self-fetishisation. As Baudrillard writes, women can either be turned into fetishes or they can decide to “perform this labor of continual fetishisation on themselves” (1993: 102). When the woman choses to fetishize herself, she will do so by choosing a form that remains appealing to the male. A man putting a veil over a woman is able to control her desires. However, it is impossible to imagine a man becoming impotent because he is confronted with a veil. The woman who decides to get a tattoo, on the other hand, clearly disrupts the process of her own phallicisation because she destroys her skin’s blank surface. Contrary to tattoos (which are practically never applied to penises) the veil emphasizes smoothness and combines a phallic shape with doll-like attributes. The difference between veils and sunglasses becomes clearest right here. The mystery created by sunglasses disrupts fetishisation in a much more unequivocal way than the veil because it does not re-enact the person in the form of a blank screen. The libidinal economy of sunglasses comes thus closer to that of tattoos. In the case of sunglasses, there is no direct path leading from the glasses to the control of the wearer’s desire, while with regard to veiling, such a path exists. Of course, also sunglasses and tattoos can become objects of fetishisation, but compared to the veil they are much more unlikely to become fetishes.
CONCLUSION: CONCEALING, CROPPING, CUTTING

It has been shown that sunglasses are “cooler” than veils for mainly two reasons: first, the covering of the eyes mystifies the person in a “cooler” way than does the covering of the mouth. Second, the covering of the eyes is not prone to fetishisation while veils (and this concerns also those which leave the face uncovered) can easily become fetishes. Some might still argue that the veil can appear as cool because it suppresses information about the face in a way similar to the technique of cropping (frequently used on Facebook profile pages). It is cool because it makes the person’s face appear mysterious. However, first, the cool cropping effect has been designed for the alteration of immutable pictures and not of faces in real life. In pictures, the look appears to be more stable and much more inscrutable than in real life to the point that the frozen photo face can function as a cool mask in itself. The reductive cropping of portraits draws attention to the eyes and makes the appearance of the face more mysterious; but it becomes so only as a picture. We remember Roland Barthes’ desperate attempts at searching the look of Japanese General Nogi, victor over the Russians at Port Arthur, and his wife for signs testifying to the anticipation of their imminent death. The photos had been taken right before their suicide which they chose because their emperor had died. However, there is no sign of anger, “no adjective is possible, the predicate is dismissed, not by the exemption of Death’s meaning” (Barthes: 94). As they are posing for the photo their pose becomes a cool pose. The conclusion is: a cropped (or veiled) face in real life is not necessarily as cool and mysterious as a cropped face on a photo.

Simultaneously, it must be admitted that cropping techniques, when integrated into the practice of veiling, have the highest potential of producing an effect of “cool veiling” simply because here the veil is allowed to overcome the logic of mere concealing. By its very nature, cropping follows the logic of cutting much more than that of concealing. Cutting as an act of stylization, that is, as a gesture able to transform any subject into an aesthetic subject, has been very much analysed in the context of Japanese aesthetics and is known as the aesthetics device of kire (切れ), which means “cut” in Japanese. In a haiku for example, a line will be cut at a certain point and the stylistic cut invites us to anticipate what “exists” beyond the cut. The purpose of the cut is thus not to hide a part of the verse, but rather to produce a new “virtual” verse. In this sense the kire technique comes close to cropping. In certain ways it comes close to Derrida’s (1987) concept of the frame as a site of meaning, which sees all art as “inside” a frame simply because it is distinguished from all outside matter and events. The frame highlights, stylizes and gives symbolical power to the object simply by applying the device of spatial limitation. It also comes close to what has been rendered in the West most generally as “stylization.” In this context it has been said that the result of kire is that of the sublime style called “iki,” which has fascinated several Western thinkers including Heidegger. What is “cut off” through kire is the “everyday context” of an item or a situation, which produces a new and more interesting aesthetic situation. The “cut off” part continues to “exist” but it appears in the form of more stylized and sublime instances.

Sunglasses follow the logic of cutting much more than that of hiding, especially if we think of the unconscious association between the eyes and the male generative powers that have been pointed out by Murphy. This is a further reason why sunglasses are cooler than the veil, which is merely concealing. Like in the case of kire, tattoos and sunglasses attempt to disrupt the gaze by disturbing existent structures; they do not merely hide the body’s surface, but involve parts of the body in a playful act of stylization.

However, it is not entirely impossible to push also the veil towards such mechanisms of cutting and cropping, though, in general, this remains a difficult undertaking given the religious dogma clinging to the veil as an item whose primary purpose is to protect the woman by hiding parts of her body. But some examples do exist. The way many Iranian women wear the veil at present involves an act of stylization that does not seem to be limited to mere concealing. Also the Indian sari attracts because, in the words of Roxanne Gupta (2008), “it is a veil that covers but does not hide” (62). Finally, one can look at the headscarf worn by Western women such as Katherine Hepburn, Jackie Onassis, Brigitte Bardot, Sophia Loren and Grace Kelly in the 1960s (Pictures 5 and 6).
This headscarf relies more on stylization than on hiding; it does not establish a rigid separation between the wearer and the spectator, but functions rather like an accessory similar to jewellery, purses, or sunglasses.

The same is true—though to a lesser extent—in contemporary Muslim “veiling fashion,” which attempts to re-enact the veil in a modern context through fashionable devices. It is true that in most Muslim countries veiled women no longer look like nuns before Vatican II. The new appropriation of the veil manages to deconstruct the rigid form of the veil to some extent, especially in Turkey, whose so-called tesettür (veiling fashion) is the pet-subject of academic researchers. However, the creative input should not be overestimated. In principle, the veil as a religious symbol is incompatible with fashion because fashion is playful by definition. Playing or being playful means to be submitted to the constraints of the game but to be also able to step out of the game (to take off the veil) at any moment. Otherwise it’s not a game but work. Anthropological and philosophical definition of games from Huizinga to Mary Midgley highlights this voluntary and liberal stance as one of the fundamentals of the definition of games. “Play” in a fashion context cannot pursue, as Sandikci and Ger say about tesettür women, a matter of entirely “asexual femininity” freed “from the predatory gaze” (2010: 40). This is the reason why the Muslim veil will always remain “more” than merely a fashion article: it will never be merely playful; and this is a problem when it comes to questions about its potential coolness. For “Perihan Mataraci and Serap Cebeci, two covered designers, tesettür fashion has been under the dominance of male businessmen who dress women according to their own understanding of religiously appropriate dress” (Olgun 2005, quoted from Sandikci and Ger 2007: 206). According to the same author, “most of the brand-name tesettür companies market clothes that are devoid of elegance, beauty, and aesthetics and force women to dress in a tasteless and uninspiring way” (ibid.). Rajaa Alsanea (2007), Saudi author of the popular novel Girls of Riyadh, should be taken seriously when making her protagonist Michelle express “how hideous hijab-wearing women usually looked and how the hijab restricted a girl from being fashionable because it also required covering her arms with long sleeves and her legs with long pants or skirts” (244). Religion is simply too serious and “uncool” to be involved in the game of fashion. A way out of this dilemma is to transform religion into culture or to see religion as culture, but this is a subject that would transcend the scope of this essay.

The headscarf worn by Western women such as Katherine Hepburn has added value to the overall appearance of the woman. The reason is that like tattoos and sunglasses, this veil disrupts the gaze by weaving it into an aesthetic game that the wearer engages in to explore diverse stylistic possibilities. Being coordinated with the rest of the clothes, it helps create a stylistic unity that can be read in multiple ways, including that of lightness, sport or cuteness. Most probably it will not lead to one-dimensional readings of the veiled woman in terms of a mere fetish.

The hijab bo tafkha (“puffy hijab”) (Pictures 7 and 8) is another example of how the veil can be used as a restructuring device by “cutting” or re-stylizing fixed and traditional structures. It is created with the help of a hairclip to which are
attached one or two decorative flowers worn underneath the hijab which yields the impression of having a huge amount of hair. Gökariksel and Secor call it the “bonnet,” which enables women “to play with the shape of the veiled head, thus giving rise to the controversial faux bun. To give the veiled head an elongated shape, some women stuff their bonnets with another scarf or other padding. The effect is that of a large bun of hair piled on the back of the head under the scarf” (Gökariksel and Secor 2012: 854).

The hijab worn in the traditional way by many women today in Middle Eastern countries, on the other hand, does not imply an act of stylization but is often limited to mere hiding (Picture 9). Here, the veil often deforms instead of adding value to the overall stylistic appearance. The strict adherence to tradition does not permit the playful attitude necessary for the creation of a personal style found through the veil. Because important parts are simply hidden, the woman’s face often adopts a rigid, artificial, waxy or empty expression (Picture 10). The sculpture-like appearance can easily become sinister. Other ways of applying the veil in a more stylistic way as a means of cool disruption should be explored.

Notes

1. Though I attempt in this article to cancel the ideological weight clinging to the term “veil” and to examine the phenomenon in purely aesthetic and phenomenological terms, I decided not to reject the term veil altogether and to replace it with the word “headscarf” or “covering” (though these terms would certainly be more appropriate in the Turkish context that will be evoked). The reason is that the metaphorical power of the word “veil” is essential to the present argument.

2. The aesthetics of cool developed mainly in the form of a behavioural attitude practiced by black men in the United States at the time of slavery and residential segregation. A cool attitude helped slaves and former slaves to cope with exploitation or simply made it possible to walk streets at night. The residential segregation of white and black Americans brought forward behavioral mechanisms similar to veiling.

3. For example: Tattoo (1981) dir. Bob Brooks; The Tattooed Woman [irezumi] (1981) dir. Yoichi Takabayashi; Eastern Promises (2007) dir. David Cronenberg.
4. I have adopted the thoughts presented in the preceding three paragraphs from my article entitled ‘From the Stigmatized Tattoo to the Graffitied Body: Femininity in the Tattoo Renaissance’ in Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography 2012, 1–17.

5. Shuzo Kuki’s book The Structure of Iki has become famous beyond the community of Japanologists. See also Ohashi (1992) and Botz-Bornstein (1997).

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