

Veil, Architecture, Secularism

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This article explores the veil not as a symbol of oppressing religion, nor as a form of resistance, but as an object that signifies a mode of subjectivation other than that proposed by the spatial configuration of secularism. On Tuesday, February 10, 2004, the French Assembly voted the law forbidding “the wearing of signs or dress ostensibly manifesting religious belonging in schools, high-schools and colleges.” This has been done to “enforce the spirit of laicism.”

The question that emerges and constitutes the key of this argument may be puzzling by its simplicity: Is it “women’s oppression” and “religious belonging” that upsets French politicians? In the present article, I will argue that an intricate relation between space and visibility is at the core of the dispute, revealing to us more the structure of French citizenship assumptions and its link with architecture, than anything about Islam. Thus, the article will approach the aesthetic, social, and political implications of the training of the eye. The argument will concentrate on ways of seeing in the public space, and how the visible is structured there. As there is no visibility in the absence of the invisible, it is often necessary to close our eyes to understand the image through its lack. Therefore, the public space does not emerge without its complementary private realm.

The Veil Affair: A Short History

The practice of veiling among Muslim populations has a long history, however unequal in terms of geographies and aesthetics. The post-Ottoman Empire newly formed countries in the Middle East and North Africa passed through successive periods of relaxation or imposition of the wearing of the veil, depending on the political environment. Military dictators and/or states with secular policies (Egypt, Iraq, Turkey) or “enlightened” monarchies (Jordan, Iran before 1979) went so far as to forbid the wearing of the veil, while Islamic monarchies or the Islamic Republic of Iran imposed it by law or by custom. From the onset it should be clear that the veil, as a practice in the twentieth century, is profoundly politicized. It was, and continues to be used, as a tool to affirm or assert identities and aspirations of socio-political organization and resistance, nation-state building or aspiration of modernity understood either as Westernization or as an alternative to Muslim modernity. The consequences of the veil-related policies in the region ranged from lowering the school attendance for women from traditional backgrounds as in Iran in the 1920s and 1930s (Adelkhah, Balasescu,

Naficy) to creating a space of silent or overt resistance against the military regimes in places such as Turkey (Gole).

France's relationship with the veil starts in the colonial period, and the image of the veil was projected as both a sign of backwardness and an object of exoticism and seduction. The discourse on the veil in France was a product of colonialism, and some argue that the generalization of the practice itself was in some places a result of French garrisons' presence in the vicinity of cities and villages in the colonies. The practice was taken up or imposed by the families of young women in order to protect them from the unwelcome gaze of the colonizing soldiers.

However, it was not until the veil entered in the public political space of France via the imagery of the woman fighters in the decolonization wars, who hid under the garment not only her exotic beauty but also the deadly arms used by the liberation forces, that the object started to be a source of elaborated discourses. And it was not until the early nineties, when the second generation issued from the postcolonial immigration in the metropolitan France started reclaiming a political identity through the veil indicating thus the failure of the politics of assimilation in the French culture, that the veil became a public "affair." The debate started at Creil in 1989, when two Muslim teenagers were expelled from their school under the pretext that their attire was improper for attending school in a secular (*laïc*) environment. From that moment on, the veil was literally framed as the indicator of a series of tensions, between the assimilation and identity politics, women's control and submission and freedom of choice on one side. At a larger scale, it was tension between a progressive modernity and a backward tradition based on religious precepts. Arguments were given in both debates, emphasizing the role of individual choice in wearing the veil. However, the positions tended to shift form and sometimes radicalize under the influence of internal and international dynamics (Roy). The veil was used by the Front National – the extreme right party of France – as the symbol of the "destruction" of French values by immigration, but also as affirmation of political choice by radicalized Muslim women. The debate was equally complicated by the fact that each school had the autonomy to choose if they would allow or not the veil wearing among their students. The arguments against the wearing of the veil echoed the idea that school is the privileged space of citizenship formation, which in France is tightly linked to the concept of separation of religion and state (secularism versus *laïcité*).

A more trenchant position was adopted after the events of September 9th, 2001: the beginning of the war in Iraq (2002), and the increased tensions within the French society. In 2003 the president of the Republic at the time, Jacques Chirac, appointed a commission of twenty prominent members lead by Bernard Stasi with the mission to reflect upon the state of secularism in France. The result was the "veil law" passed in Spring of 2004. The law stipulated the interdiction of the "ostensible signs of religion" in schools. Although it referred to all religions, the history and the recent

dynamic pointed out that the law addressed the veil more than any other possible religious adornment. Despite the fact that the reasoning seemed in harmony with the principles of the separation of religion and state, I argue that the veil is not necessarily what it seems to be. What bothers the French public opinion and the politicians about the veil is not necessarily its multilayered symbolism, but more the fact that it attacks the doxa of the construction of the public space in France right in its core. In order to understand this, we need to understand the fine historical and political structuration of the public space, through its architectural expression.

Architecture, Space, and Modern Voyeurism

“The eye is a product of history, reproduced by education”
(Pierre Bourdieu 1979)

Bourdieu, Sennett, Elias, Ross, and Rosaldo have argued for the complementarity of public and private; this dichotomy lies at the core of different understandings of the veil (El Guindi, Abu-Lughod). Many scholars of colonialism have explored the political significance of this dichotomy, as well as its Eurocentric character (Comaroff and Comaroff; Lazarus-Black; Stoler). I am interested in the emergence of public space in France, along with the rules of its construction and the pattern of human relations in public, in the context of the changing of production relations and the emergence of the national consciousness. The discourses on the legitimacy of the veil articulated around the presence of the veil in a particular space, the school, and oscillate between the issues of national identity and adequate public behavior. In this second part of my essay, I will explore the connection between the rules set forth for and by French architecture in the late 18th century to the type of space they created¹ and the ideal of an individual self they promote. I will emphasize the importance of visibility as a generative principle for the construction and use of public space, and relate the political role of the gaze in France to the Islamic women’s veil.

Space is organized and perceived in many different ways in various cultures. Many have treated not only the spatial organization of modernity, but argued for the idea of modernity as spatial condition. Most of the authors directly relate space to the capitalist socio-economic relations (Harvey, Clark, Elias), showing how transformations in relations of production were paralleled by the structural transformation of space. Others have related space structuration to the understanding of political categories such as citizenship, human rights, etc. (Caldeira, Holston and Caldeira, Vidler, Ross; Young). And those who study both the imperial center and the colonial advent explore the manner in which ideas about modern are intimately linked to space formation, and with design procedures (Comaroff and Comaroff, Wright, Holston and Caldeira, Mitchell). In my argument I am interested in the political potential of design, and in the

implications of the social practice of design on the level of individual human self-conception.

Vidler argues that the Renaissance architectural projects of the street originate in representations of ideal or utopian spaces, particularly the theater scenes. Sebastiano Serlio's projects from the 16th century were re-worked and used for the project of the streets in the centuries to come. The invention of perspective implied major changes in the design of the streets: "[f]or the laws of perspective were not only those of illusion, of depicting three dimensions in two, but fundamentally the constructive laws of space itself. Thus, the street, subject to perspective representation in the ideal theater, was transformed by this technique and shaped by it" (30). In order to understand this transformation one has to do away with the Kantian idea of space as an *a priori*. The lived space is a direct result of architectural design, and our spatial perceptions are influenced by the rules of this design.

The operations of design and construction of the street following the rules of perspective created the possibility of a vista point, and moreover, it made any point along the street become a vista point. The rule of perspective centralized the role of visual perception, and, at the same time, de-centered the place of the perceiver in the case of transposition of the bi-dimensional plan in tri-dimensional construction. For instance, while for the representation of a street on paper the vista point is the place of the designer or of the plan viewer, once transposed on a street built on such a plan, every place offers the same overarching perspective, combining the quality of panorama observer with the position of equal participant in the landscape-spectacle of the street. "The tragic street was thus the instrument of urban control and regulation, inserted at the will of the planner into a hitherto private realm. The streets of Fontana and the boulevards of Haussmann two and a half centuries later shared this common rule." (Vidler 30). However, before the streets were projected and construed in this manner, architecture, following the advice of philosophers, came to regulate particular aspects or moments of life (e.g. the industrial production, or the sickness).

Vidler follows the political transformation of the space in France, starting with the philosophical ideas of the mid-18th century and ending with the late-19th century (in the aftermath of the Paris Commune). Preoccupation with the geometry of space and spatial organization characterized the philosophy of Enlightenment. Diderot showed concern for the adequacy of the form of space to its function, a principle to be applied in the construction of the places of production. This mode of thinking about space came out of the Encyclopedists' concern with rationality and the rationalization of production. It is interesting to remark that in order to explain their concepts about spatial organization of production, the Encyclopedists gave up the written word and used the rhetoric of images. This procedure of creating and using images that speak through themselves is twofold; once pertinent in order to better illustrate the theory of the space, and second because this new space is based on the idea of complete visibility,

required to secure a harmonious surveillance of the production. It is worth mentioning that the colonial encounter largely impacted the Encyclopedist's project, oriented towards the cataloging of the other.

Architecture gave a symbolic code to industrial enterprise, oriented both in the directions of surveillance and communitarian life. The harmony of a society constituted of citizens-workers was produced in Ledoux's plans for manufactures. The salt exploitation at Arc et Salins is maybe the most famous of his industrial projects that came to life. Hospitals and prisons ("therapeutic architecture") were two other types of edifices to take advantage of the newly set-forth precepts of space.ⁱⁱ In a famous analysis of social order that has as its departure point the architecture of Bentham, Foucault seizes on the relation between one common occurrence and one powerful state institution: plague and the juridical apparatus. This relation is one mediated by and constructive of power. The dream of a disciplined society, in which the prisons would be ultimately rendered useless, is based on the image of the plagued city, "traversed throughout with hierarchy, surveillance, observation, writing; the town immobilized by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinctive way over all individual bodies – this is the utopia of a perfectly governed city" (198). At a small scale this principle is applied in the construction of the panoptical prison. Nevertheless, there are major differences between the plagued-town and the panopticon. While the first is an exceptional case, the second is the disembodied, timeless principle of the functioning of power. It is a particular model of power that constituted the ulterior model of state organization, with the arrangements of the subjects in a visible constellation, a model that has as its ideal the eradication of dark or invisible spaces. The Panopticon's functioning "abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented as pure *architectural and optical system*: it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use." (205, the emphasis is mine).

In his writings, Foucault always emphasized the relation between the mechanisms of power and the forging of the subject able to feel and resent the action of this specific form of powerⁱⁱⁱ. Numerous critiques of modernity^{iv} approach the subject of visibility, in both senses, that is the visibility as subject of analysis and the subject emerging from the social organization around the optical ideas. This subject is endowed with certain qualities, and has a specific relation with the power, that is, it establishes a reciprocity that places it in both a position of power and in the realm of powerless subjectivation. Ledoux's salt exploitation, an industrial Panopticon, transforms the industrial space into a theater scene, and establishes a relation between workers and director that reminds Vidler of Rousseau's relation of reciprocity in the social contract, expressed in the mechanism of elections. If in the Panoptical prison the relation is unilateral, in Rousseau's ideal case the sovereign is under continuous scrutiny^v of his/her electors.

Vidler traces the genealogy of the optical power and its corollary subject to the project of Enlightenment. Analyzing Locke's theory of environmental influences on human behavior; Condillac and Helvetius conversion of this theory into principles of psychology; and Burke's idea of "the sublime effect"; the author concludes that: "The Enlightenment as a whole had placed the onus on the science and art of observation to reveal and instruct, to mediate between object and subject; the instrument of observation was the eye and its commanding quality – the faculty of vision." (54). Since the visibility would secure the knowledge, and knowledge is at the basis of rational organization of communitarian life, the eradication of invisible spaces would insure the construction of the harmonious society. Logically, this principle extended in architecture beyond the construction of special institutions to the reformation of the spaces in the city and its transformation into a public realm. This movement invested it with political qualities and disabled its capacities of political action by making it more accessible to forces of power (Vidler, Ross, Elias). At the same time, it places the subjects into the apathy of self and reciprocal contemplation (Sennett).

There is a necessary movement of dissociation of the subject and the object that parallels this spatial conception. Elias makes the argument that this was made possible only by a shift in the mode of conceiving the relations of the world. The author convincingly argues for the invention of *homo clausus*, the human endowed with interiority and separated from the exterior, with which s/he communicates only on the surface. Elias remarks the omnipresence of this conception of the individual in the intellectual European tradition, from Descartes and Leibniz to Kant and Weber. Elias rightfully questions this assumption and shows in his wonderful analysis how *homo clausus* emerged in a specific period (late Medieval Ages, early modernity) through a series of specific social practices – the manners, doubled by a shift in the scientific conceptualization of the world (starting with the adoption of the heliocentric model of the universe on the expense of the geocentric perspective).

Before this shift occurred, a relational understanding of the natural phenomena pervaded scientific thought: the events of exterior world were always perceived in terms of their relevance, or as meaningful sign, for oneself. Elias reveals a double movement in the scientific and the common thought – because no paradigm shift take place in the absence of a general mood able to accommodate the shift. First, there is the dissociation of the self from the exterior events, and the development of object-oriented rather than self-oriented instruments of knowledge. Second, there is an increasing of the self-control by humans. According to Elias, the particularity of this process, which gives the specific "form of classical European epistemology today" (210) is that the process was not perceived as such, but as a pre-existent condition of separation between an internal instance that does the thinking, and an external world that is thought about: "The thought, and the affective restraint that is demanded, did not appear to those thinking about it at this stage as an act of distancing but as distance

actually present, as an eternal condition of spatial separation between a mental apparatus apparently locked ‘inside’ man, an ‘understanding’ or ‘reason’, and the objects ‘outside’ and divided from it by an invisible wall” (210).

Elias seems to prioritize the separation subject/ object over the spatial construction of the perspective, and the adoption of systems of signifiers that entail this separation. He considers that the construction of *homo clausus* is predicated on restrictions of the “natural” impulses that facilitated the perception of the self as separated from the external world. His rationale is not altogether different from thinkers like Foucault, Vidler, or Rotman, who emphasize a changing in social (or spatial) practices that created a new form of self – or the subject as we know it. Nevertheless the latter (especially Foucault) do not conceive a pre-existent state of naturalness altered by the social practices, but the emergence of an altogether new ‘nature’ of the human being.

Here one needs briefly to introduce the question of subject of the new forms of *governmentality*: developing and departing from Foucault’s work. For example, Rabinow or Agamben show how the new form of politics – the biopolitics, is based on the administrative organization of bare life, implicitly on the creation of its subject as bearer of bare life. This mode of subject-formation is based on the exclusion of the attached characteristics of political existence, those characteristics that do not refer directly to bare life: religious belonging, ethnic identifications, and gender. Allow me to explain: Agamben identifies the relation between *zoe/bios*, bare life/political existence, exclusion/inclusion as the “fundamental categorical pair of Western politics.” However, Agamben concludes that the subject of biopolitics is the *homo sacer*, that is the exception to the politics based on language.

The new identity politics are oriented towards including the “minorities” not into the sphere of politics of language, but into that of biopolitics, by stripping them of any other characteristics than that of “minority.” The constant preoccupation with identifying the “minority” may be in fact only the extension of the domain of governmentality (state of exception) through exclusive inclusion. The law against the headscarf may be indeed the mode of locating Muslim women with disregard to the language and the syntax of the veil. Muslim women are given “voice” and reduced to the common denominator of bare life, branded subjects of governmentality.

The Rise of Public Space and ‘The Fall of Public Man’

The 19th century in France witnessed the generalization of the Enlightenment principles of architecture, along with the rise of bourgeois political power, and the generalization of industrialization and the capitalist relations of production.

The reconstruction of Paris closely followed the rules of visibility; the streets became the place of display of the newly established social order. Ledoux’s spectacle of production is extended on the social life as a whole. The streets were enlarged, and rebuilt in a manner that allowed the access of the eye in any of their corners. They also allowed the better display and circulation of commodities (Harvey), and of the forces of order. It is generally agreed that Haussmann’s project of Paris both followed the precepts of Enlightenment regarding the form, and celebrated or expressed the political victory of bourgeoisie in the fight over power. At the same time, the space of the street was invested with political symbolism. The poor and the working class start to be excluded from the streets precisely because the streets became the site of power display (they were present before on the street, but never in the aristocratic courts). The epitome of the street was in the mid nineteenth Century the Arcade (Vidler, Ross, Buck-Morss). Projected and executed as interior streets, the Arcades are the space of simulation of the social, as the *flâneurs* that populate them are simulations of the poor into a space of fantasy. The Arcades were somehow a generalization of the private space in which the bourgeois fantasies could find their fulfillment^{vi} (Vidler; Buck-Morss, Benjamin, Lacoste, and Tiedemann).

This exclusion of the poor from the streets is twofold because it is only in this way that the street could become the site of political struggle. If in 1789 the revolutionary forces had to occupy sites of power like the Royal Palace or Bastille, now it is enough to take over the streets and claim a place into the spectacle of power. This is exactly what has happened in 1848, and later during the Paris Commune (1871).

Nevertheless, as Ross observed, a political transformation brings not only a spatial transformation, but also, a transformation of the space/time structure. The separation of the public from private realm, Ross argues, made possible the conception of the secular state as “excrescence” separated from the civil society, which was the realm of private interest. State’s infrastructure suffered a transformation from protector of private interests to parasite of the infrastructures created by those very interests^{vii}.

All these transformations worked towards the establishing of a new political realm, the public space, and a new object of political dispute, the private. The importance of public display and seeing in the new social order became primordial. From a scientific way of knowledge, seeing transformed in a social tool of knowledge. T. J. Clark calls the seeing indiscriminately “the actual form of our knowledge of things” (13), and there is no wonder that it became^{viii} so in the XIX century.

But what are the things one would look for in the newly constructed space? What are the signs that would hint at the functioning of a new social organization? As previously argued, the individual endowed with self, identity, and interiority became the organizing principle of the society. The game of interior/exterior, of public and private, of political and civil, plays at the border that separates the two, there were the significances are negotiated in terms of the visibility. Many anthropologists explored the implication of the new political categories emerged along with the ideology of space separation and their complicated intertwining (Rosaldo, McClintock, Fitzpatrick). I am mainly interested in the negotiation of the borders between public and private through the numerous visible membranes that are socially perceived as borders. While Elias emphasizes the role of manners as indicator of individual interior qualities, other authors concentrate upon dress and its increased importance. This new tendency is reflected in the literature of the epoch, Balzac being the exponent of the detailed observer of habits that focus on dress; he is a master in showing the anxiety that clothes provoke to their wearers, because of the belief in the magic capacity of revealing character. He also observes with a keen eye the new habits inherent to the public space, emphasizing personal display and reciprocal examination (Vidler 77-78).

Sennett follows the life of the nineteenth century from three perspectives, and he presents in detail the status of the self and its interface with the (newly invented) exterior world. The author identifies three major transformations that affected the nineteenth century: the double relation between capitalism and the public realm, the new forms of secularism, and the gradual decay of the public life from within.

Capitalism's relation to the public space is characterized first by an increased pressure for privatization, and second by a "mystification" of material life in public, especially in the matter of clothes, caused by mass production and distribution." (19) In the author's opinion this did not lead to the homogenization of the population, but to an increased belief in the impenetrability of public appearance and in the total intractability of the 'stranger'. Appearance can deceive, but at the same time, appearance is all that is left for the public interaction.

And here comes Sennett's interesting innovation in thinking about secularism: The author proposes not a binary opposition secularism/ religion, but a definition of secularism based on the experience of the immanent that would give the code of the world interpretation. This increases the mobility of the various schemas of world interpretation, at the expense of encompassing systemic explanations. The consequences of such a belief on public behavior are enormous, Sennett explaining in fact from other perspective the transfer onto the social of the scientific mode of knowledge through gaze. The public became a space of immediacy in which "[...] appearances [...] no matter how mystifying, still had to be taken seriously, because they might be clues to the person hidden behind the mask. Any appearance a person made was in some way real, because it was tangible." (21) The gaze is silent, inactive, and this is unsettling for Sennett. Here the author

identifies the decomposition of the public, in the gradual loss of politically meaningful action. The expansion of the public realm, the intensification of the worldly spectacle means for Sennett the cease of significant interior activity.

Undoubtedly, Sennett identifies an important transformation of political life, and he subtly points to the increased emphasis put on the refining of the surfaces of contact between the public and the private, between the interior and the exterior. Appearance through clothing is one of the sites most affected by this transformation. But there is a distance from this to the proclamation of the death of the public man, and more so to the death of the political (hu)man. The question is more: where did the politic move? What is the realm that it started to occupy with these transformations?

As previously argued, the play on the surface became more and more important in a spectacle-based society. The omnivoyant gaze and the principles of unobstructed visibility in this situation are not only the expression of an ideal social organization, but also one main aspect of the instrumentality of a newly instated power, based on the active gaze. Sennett's secularism is the central role of the gaze, and the centralized secular state has as its organizing principle the permanent surveillance of the visible.

The deep belief that surfaces are expressions of and gates to interiority is what gives limitless power to state mechanisms. The intrusion of the modern state into private life is made through the scanning of the visible surfaces of the subject, combined with the belief that surfaces are expressions of a deeper interior. It may be that the political action has moved towards an act of deceit of the gaze.

Old State, New Barricades

T. J. Clark concludes his book with a chapter dedicated mainly to Seurat's painting "Un dimanche après-midi à l'île de La Grande Jatte." Seurat completed his painting between 1884 and 1886. The tableau depicts a public park populated by numerous people belonging to various social classes, sharing the same space. Clark emphasizes "the intermingling of classes, not their neat separation" doubled by the "texture of controls and avoidances" visible in the orientation of the personages' gazes. As in Delacroix's painting, "Harem," the characters depicted do not look at each other, nor at the painter, but in an indefinite point, the vanishing point of avoidances. Here, the public space is one of legitimate difference and of anonymity, in which the observational gaze is entirely transferred to the artist (the state?).

Thirteen years before, the barricades of Paris Commune re-inscribed difference in a homogenized space (Ross, Vidler). They interfered with the "free circulation"^{ix}, and physically stopped the forces of order in their attempt to re-institute the state power; only for a short while, it is true. A century later, a veil in a public school provokes an individual reaction of rejection in the name of secularism. What is the link

between the two events? I will argue that there is a link between the objects that form the epicenter of the disputes.

The Islamic women's veil, like the barricades, stops the legitimate access of the state to a site of power exercise: the barricades stopped the government from reaching the National Assembly, while the veil stops the State's gaze from reaching the female's body. Simultaneously, they represent illegitimate forms of control over space: The barricades control the streets' free circulation, while the veil is perceived as re-instituting a private realm in the public, and a religious one in the secular. Both the veil and the barricades re-inscribe difference in a space that emphasizes homogeneity through the ideals of democracy and universalism.

While Clark observes the celebration of diversity in Sauret's painting, and the right to anonymity gained by the disengagement of personal gaze (action?), other phenomena (like the veiling) point to ruptures in the 'perfect vision'. This self-proclaimed neutral and anonymous space is not entirely insensitive to difference. The homogenizing power of the vista point (the focus of attention of Sauret's Republican citizens) stops or is disturbed by the appearance of an impenetrable and hard to integrate object: the veil.

Conclusion

The relation between the eye and the veil is a privileged one. While the originator of the gaze is usually the subject in a power position, the veil always interposes between the eye and the searched "object," and thus generates both frustration and desire. It is interesting how the veil is defined negatively, always in relation but never in itself. What do I mean: the veil is never the object of the gaze, but the object that stops the gaze before it reaches its objective. And what is this privileged object of the gaze? The woman's body? The body in itself, as the carrier of the (divine) truth – hence the narratives organized around the idea of liberation? Undoubtedly, there exists a constant undeniable tendency for the beautification of dress, regardless of the time or space in which the dress is used. But not too many words are said about the aesthetic effort put into the creation and arrangement of the (Islamic) headscarf, and the association veil-fashion is far from being current, if there is at all. Fashion practices appear as the herald of the perfect modernity in which the individual is the product of her/his own (un-)informed choices displayed upon the body, while the body is the vehicle of this presentation in the public sphere. The veil is troubling in this logic since it indicates a presumed space of lack of choice (that is, another mode of subject formation).

At the height of population administration techniques deployed by Western powers, we are witnessing the process of formation of the new branded subject of governmentality, and the surveillance/ total visibility required for this subject, that may be invoiced, but it is never endowed with language. It is a subject of the permanent state

of exception, the purified individual with no characteristics other than the bear life to be “rationally” administered. The veil law, while reducing the meanings of the veil to a single signification (that is oppressive religion) attempts to recuperate the bodies into the biopolitical space through an inclusive exclusion of this object into the space of law, and through an exclusive inclusion of the bodies into the spaces of total visibility.

Secularism is engrained in and by architectural organization of the space, and its logical conclusion is the purified subject that is at the same time the object of the sovereign gaze. If veil would be considered from its fashionable perspective in French political discourses, a brand new spatial organization should be envisaged, outside the realm of visible. The veil dispute is not about women’s liberation, nor about alleged Islamic danger, but about the rationality of power/ knowledge/optical complex in the age of biopolitics.

Post Scriptum

The French law against the veil is the expression of the desire to keep the veil where it is, in the center of the gaze. In 1989 an erotic misunderstanding erupted between Western Europe and Eastern Block. Eroticism is present only when surrounded by fabric and textile, only in the presence of a minimal body covering. The architectural veil, the most *concrete* veil, the Berlin wall, fell leaving both Eastern and Western Europe in a mutual stunned contemplation of their reciprocal nakedness. The fear of the same occurrence animates the politicians in the French assembly. Including the veil (through exclusion) into the space of law, they are reassured by its now eternal – although mono-semantic and absurd – presence. There is no erotic misunderstanding.

Note: A fragment of this article was published under a different form in Romania, and it contains parts of the volume *Paris Chic, Tehran Thrills. Aesthetic Bodies, Political Subjects*. Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2007.

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Notes

ⁱ The use at a large scale of the Enlightenment precepts in architecture took place half a century later, during the period mostly known as haussmanization. Nevertheless, special institutions, like hospitals, manufactures, and prisons that are commissioned by Louis XV and Louis XVI already used the projects of architects like Ledoux or Bentham, that is, plans that emphasized the easy access of the gaze in all the spaces created by these constructions. (Vidler 1978, 1987).

ⁱⁱ Socialist and utopian thinkers of France (Fourier and his Phallanstery, Morelly and the “Code of Nature”) were all interested in the relation between the inhabited space and the habitus developed by people, in their attempt to find the formula for a perfectly organized society. Le Corbousier entirely embraced this idea in his modernist architectural projects.

ⁱⁱⁱ I will return to this form of the subject later on in the argument. Nevertheless, this sends us back to the constitution of the self in the early modernity as it was discussed in the section dedicated to fashion.

^{iv} I have already mentioned most of the authors relevant to my study. I would like to add John Jervis’ name for his exploration of the modern (1999), in which he places the theatrical principle of spectatorship at the core of modernity.

^v It is not far from the truth to sustain that the media created a situation closer to this ideal (Debray, 1993).

^{vi} A genealogical descendent of the space of Arcades is the shopping mall. For further references see Sorkin 1992.

^{vii} Metaphorically, the State is a mirror that reflects back the image of the civil society, but that simultaneously constitutes the barrier for the complete achievement of those interests.

^{viii} Foucault (1994) approaches the importance of gaze in the clinical enterprise, and he makes the case for the increased importance of the gaze during the shift from classicism to modern period. In his work one can also follow the generative role of the gaze in relation with signs, that is, the way in which a certain way of looking *creates* signs of certain diseases, hence the malady itself. Extended at a social level, this would lead us to question the creation of the entire array of new social types only with the change of the gaze orientation.

^{ix} It is interesting to follow how the entire transformation of the public space from XVIII to XIX Century included the apparition of the idea of public space as one of free circulation (Harvey 1985). Nevertheless, it turned out that the circulation should be also legitimate. For instance it is enough to think about the laws against vagabondage, not to mention the more subtle control instituted by the gaze.

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