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Islam and the Politics of Culture in Europe

Memory, Aesthetics, Art

From Haptic to Optical, Performance to Figuration

A History of Representation at the Bottom of a Bowl

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Introduction

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) celebrated abstract line and haptic space, two aesthetic forms that were liberated from depiction. The two philosophers did not realize that they were indebted to Islamic aesthetics. But the abstract line's refusal to delimit a contour, and haptic space's blurring of the relationships between figure and ground, were developed most strongly in Islamic art.

In three chapters of *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art* (Marks, 2010) I traced how Islamic non-figurative aesthetics entered European art and thought from the Middle Ages on. These aesthetics planted seeds of abstraction and performativity in European figurative art, which would fully flower in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They include aniconism, algorithmicity, and haptic space and abstract line. I argued that implicit subjective positions got smuggled into European art as well.

Enfoldment and Infinity also addressed some of the Islamic sources of Western philosophy. I demonstrated that, in their selective westward travels, Islamic aesthetics and Islamic thought both underwent transformations: they became deeply absorbed and they were refashioned, *remade figurative*, to suit the figurative thought of Christianity. It was not until the late nineteenth century that, in Western art, the non-representational power of Islamic aesthetics began to be rediscovered. The philosophy and aesthetics of becoming never disappeared from Western thought and art. Their resurgence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries owes a great deal to the latent Islamic presence in Western culture.

This chapter focuses on one period in this history, namely the Christian conquest of the Iberian peninsula from the Muslims. During the ethnic cleansing of the peninsula, Islamic influences went underground, or became enfolded. Elsewhere I examine in detail how this enfoldment occurred in philosophy (Marks, forthcoming). Here I would like to study how it occurred in art, in the plastic changes in ceramic design. Islamic ceramics, even when they are figurative, possess qualities of abstract line, haptic space, and performativity that resist being simply representational: I will call this an aesthetics of becoming, which we will see in ceramics in Andalusia and their eastern Islamic and precedents. Yet as the market for and production of these wares came to be dominated by non-Muslims, their designs gradually lost their performative qualities and settle into a more conventional figuration.

Observing these changes does not constitute a judgment of quality, which tends to retrospectively compare a work to precedents; rather I seek to appreciate the changes in the works' formal qualities as indications of ongoing cultural invention, rather like what Alois Riegl called *Kunstwollen*. First, though, I will suggest that an Islamic philosophy of becoming, articulated by Ibn Sina and others, parallels the aesthetics of becoming in ceramics. Taken up by the Scholastics, the philosophy of becoming gradually gave way to one that privileged representation, indeed figuration. Yet the way that Islamic philosophy and art privilege becoming over being deeply informed European thought and art in late medieval times and the early Renaissance.

Philosophy of Becoming

Contemporary philosophy that privileges becoming over being, fluidity over identity, has deep roots in Islamic philosophy, and particularly in the work of Abu 'Ali al-Husayn ibn Sina (980-1037).[1] Like his predecessors, Ibn Sina was dealing with the question of how to reconcile God's unity with the multiplicity of the created world, without attributing to created things an existence independent of God. Briefly, Ibn Sina's solution in *The Logic* of *The Healing* was to argue that being applies to all entities, existence to actualities that have been realized. Everything that is contingent must be caused by something else, except for the one being that is necessary in virtue of itself, God. God is the one predicate. God's essence and God's existence are identical, while for other beings, existence is accidental to essence. Considered in itself, each effect is radically contingent (Goodman, 1992; Wisnovsky, 2000; Janssens, 2006). As the seventeenth-century

Persian philosopher Mulla Sadra Shirazi summarized, for Ibn Sina "an essence is in itself indifferent toward existence or non-existence" (Janssens, 2006, p. 3).

Ibn Sina's doctrine of the *ontological indifference of essence*, or the univocity of being, was, as Robert Wisnovsky writes, a concept "made almost from scratch, using materials that were still quite raw in the year 1000" (Gilson, 1948, chapter 4; Wisnovsky, 2000, p. 115). The strength of Ibn Sina's new approach was that it built an ontology around a God that was utterly unknowable, without attributes: a profoundly non-representationalist ontology, since Islam was (speaking generally) a profoundly non-representationalist religion.

In medieval Europe, Christian theologians recognized the power of a rationalistic defense of monotheism—as well as the other forces of philosophy— and they adapted Arabic rationalist philosophy to their interests and made it their own. Ibn Sina's works, as well as those of the rationalist philosophers writing in Arabic in Andalusia, including Ibn Rushd (Averroës) and Maimonides, and other Islamic philosophers, were initially met by suspicion in medieval Europe, because the Church could not accept rationalism's assault on the faith. But eventually their ideas captured the attention of Christian scholars, who initially learned Arabic to benefit from Islamic works, and then in the great translation movement of twelfth-century Andalusia collaborated to translate them. Ibn Sina's *The Healing* was translated in Toledo by the Jewish philosopher Abraham ibn Da'ud, with the aid of an unnamed Latinist (Burnett, 2005).

In the next century, the Scholastics Roger Bacon, Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, and Duns Scotus, among others, adopted Ibn Sina's categories of existence, clearly attributing them to him. However, in order to make use of Ibn Sina's proof of the existence of God, Christian philosophers and theologians had to tweak it to accommodate the Christian trinity. The theologian Henry of Ghent (1217?-1293) adapted Ibn Sina's Islamic neo-Platonist theory that God emanates the universe in a descending series of beings, beginning with the First Intelligence, to argue that the Son of God is the First Intelligence, and that the Holy Spirit also emanates from God (Counet, 2002). The metaphysician Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) adopted many of Ibn Sina's concepts, including the division of beings into necessary (*wajib*) and contingent (*mumkin*) and his profoundly Islamic argument for the unity of God. But he adapted the latter to a trinitarian Christian God, "threefold in Person and onefold in his nature" as Godhead (Anwar, 2005). Medieval Christian thinkers thus added representation to Ibn Sina's ontology in order to describe a tripartite God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In this way Ibn Sina's magnificent concept of a Being without attributes lost its univocity, being ontologically divided into three secondary entities. It became representational,

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1 This is a summary of part of my essay "A Deleuzian Ijtihad" (Marks, forthcoming).

and, we can also say, figurative. For Christianity, in that it affirms a human Christ and a God in Whose image he was created, is fundamentally a figurative religion.

For centuries afterward, Western philosophy labored under representationalism. It took a long time to restore Ibn Sina's concept of Being as Being to philosophy.

Art of becoming: haptic space and abstract line

Like the philosophy of Ibn Sina, much religious Islamic art can be characterized as non-representational, a performative art whose forms privilege fluidity and transformation. Islamic non-representational philosophy has its counterpart in non-representational art; an art of becoming accompanied a philosophy of becoming. This non-figurative aesthetics in Islamic art arose from aniconism. The history of this aesthetics is commonly dated to the rise of the 'beveled style' in ninth-century Samarra, a form of ornament in which deeply etched lines swirl around forms that emerge and recede depending on how you look at them. The beveled style swept the Islamic world, in carved and molded stucco, carved wood, and stone. In two-dimensional artworks, swirling lines that resist defining contours proliferated in manuscript illumination, mosaic and painted surfaces, textiles, and many other media, in a form that early art historians termed the arabesque.

As I argued in *Enfoldment and Infinity*, this non-figurative aesthetics is very well characterized by Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of haptic space and abstract line, which they freely adapted from the art history of Alois Riegl. Riegl's term *haptic*, coined in *Late Roman Art History*, characterized early Egyptian works that isolate objects and adhere them to the picture plane, effectively providing a near view: inviting the eye to touch them rather than behold them from a distance (Iverson, 1993). Riegl observed the breakdown of figure-ground distinction in late Roman and early Christian decorative art of the fourth and fifth centuries, writing that its ambiguous figure-ground relations "cause the observer's eyes to pay attention neither to the organic significance of the motifs nor to their inorganic harmonization but to the regular flickering of adjacent areas of light and dark (in the case of reliefs) or of various colors (in the case of paintings)" (Riegl, 2004, p. 154).

This describes the subjective effect of haptic space. The concept of abstract line can be identified in Riegl's meticulous history, in *Questions of Style*, of the vine-scroll motif, which finally liberated itself from naturalistic depiction in the Islamic arabesque. It is notable that Riegl's concepts, arising as they did from studies of craft and decorative art, were considered minor concepts as long as art

history concerned itself mainly with figurative arts; they have returned to prominence with the more recent art-historical interest in abstraction.

Deleuze and Guattari adapted the concepts of haptic space and abstract line and newly valued them as aesthetic forms that resist figuration. They do not associate them with Islamic art, instead giving preference to what they call "nomad art"; and, following Worringer rather than Riegl, they locate the abstract line in Gothic art. But haptic space and abstract line are powerful concepts to appreciate the inventiveness of Islamic art. The abstract line, Deleuze and Guattari wrote, is a line free from depiction; "a line that delimits nothing, that describes no contour, ... that is always changing direction"; a line that is not anthropomorphic but has a life of its own (1987, pp. 497-498). The related term, haptic space, is a space organized from within and experienced intensively. It is characteristic of what Deleuze and Guattari call smooth space, as opposed to striated space, which imposes an external order on space; smooth space is organized intensively.

We could say that haptic space, and smooth space in general, privilege becoming, while striated space privileges representation. Similarly, abstract line seems to move for the pleasure of moving (as Paul Klee said) rather than to reproduce a preconceived form; again, an aesthetics of becoming. In both abstract line and haptic space, form is not imposed from without, as in figurative art, but generated from within. In *Enfoldment and Infinity* I discussed numerous examples of haptic space in Islamic, modern, and contemporary art, and argued that they appeal to an embodied, subjective perception.

Representation and abstraction are not binary opposites. Often the lines that delineate a figurative image seem to have a life of their own, and this animated quality of the line surely informs the pleasure people feel in looking at figurative images. Similarly, haptic space often erupts in figurative paintings, in indistinct passages and shimmering patches of color. Conversely, of course a non-figurative line can obey rules, as in formal calligraphy; writing always disciplines the abstract line to some degree. And haptic space can become formulaic and lose its quality of becoming. Generally, though, the more an artwork invites an embodied perception, the more haptic space and abstract line are at play.

The term 'horror vacui' has been used in an Orientalist and even racist way to characterize methods of filling negative space. For example, see this description by Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina of an Iranian earthenware dish, adapting the Sasanian royal theme of the hunt. The bowl depicts a hunter on horseback, a cheetah perched behind him, surrounded by birds and abstract letter-like motifs.

"This design ... does not ... exhibit any of the single-minded dedication to the royal theme that characterized the original pieces; there is no sign of excitement while the animal is being hunted nor of any dramatic impact of the heroic moment. Out of a *horror vacui* the motifs – including not only human figures and animals but also floral designs, and bits of script – are crowded into dense and often uncoordinated all-over designs with only enough background showing to permit the distinguishing of individual elements." (2001, p. 118).

This description is written from a point of view that values narrative—the "dramatic impact of the heroic moment." Narrative in a visual medium relies on optical visuality, the capacity to clearly distinguish figure from ground in order to imaginatively project oneself into the characters depicted (Marks, 2000). Crowding the space with forms seems, from this point of view, regressive. But what if telling a story that requires psychological identification is not the point? What if the point is to create an abstraction with a feeling of visual intimacy, a tactile appeal? If we understand these techniques not as reactionary modes of *horror vacui* but as considered variations on haptic space we can better appreciate the artists' inventiveness in all their great variety.

The authors of the above description (probably Ettinghausen, given his writing elsewhere on *horror vacui*) do evaluate the work on formal as well as narrative levels, evaluating the coordination of the motifs, but even here the dominant criterion seems to be that ornament should be subordinated to narrative, or, to use Riegl's term, to "argument". Riegl privileged artworks that established a balance between ornament and argument, or ornament and naturalistic motif: ornament has a framing function, but it cannot constitute a work of art in itself (Olin, 1992). He held that Greco-Christian art, given its figurative content, had a "conceptual" or spiritual purpose, while he dismissed aniconic Islamic art as conservative and lacking conceptual purpose.

Yet Islamic figurative art switches the valuation of ornament and argument. These works do not lead the viewer away into mental narrative; they involve her on the surface of the image in a delightful visual conundrum where motif and ground, figuration and ornament mingle inseparably. In all these ways figuration was inseparable from haptic space.

Performativity in Islamic Art

Now let me briefly suggest that the aesthetics of becoming are performative, in the sense that they initiate an act in time. To indicate how non-representational art is performative, we could invoke the speech-act theory of J. L. Austin (1962) as readily as the fundamental principle of Islam that God is the only creator. Speech-

act theory accounts for certain sentences that rather than represent a state ("You are married") bring it about ("I now pronounce you husband and wife"). And the Qur'anic principle that God is the only creator emphasizes the performative nature of the universe, as in the two well-known verses in which God says "Be!" to a thing, at which point the thing then is (Qur'an 16:40 and 36:82; Wisnovsky, 2000).

Haptic space, abstract line, and performativity (as well as other aspects of Islamic aesthetics I do not discuss here, such as algorithmicity) create new states in time. They appeal to an embodied beholder to contemplate them in time and witness the ways they transform within perception. As Oleg Grabar wrote (1992), ornament does not represent but mediates; it brings about a new state. In Grabar's distinction between ludic and liturgical functions of ornament, we may consider haptic space and abstract line to be ludic in the way they set up a perceptual game, without fixed end, for the pleasure of the beholder.

Byzantine and Islamic performativity: talismans and ceramics

Many communities outside Latin Christendom from the tenth to fourteenth centuries shared a culture of *sympathetic magic*, in which objects do not represent the world so much as perform an intervention in the events of the world. The performative qualities of Islamic art have much in common with early Byzantine art, which was also at many points an art that did not represent but brought about a new state.

The Byzantine context helps us to understanding how some performative objects invoke their referent through mimesis, a performance of presence. The Byzantine icon is considered not to represent the deity or the saint but to enact its absence as presence (Mondzain, 2004). The term *mimesis* as I use it here refers not to the Aristotelian concept of imitation, but to the concept of manifestation of presence that was cultivated in Byzantine thought (Pentcheva, 2006a). In eleventh-century Byzantium, writes Bissera Pentcheva, a Neoplatonic concept of *empsychos graphe*, living painting or inspirited painting, arose, according to which objects manifest the divine presence through material change. The eleventh-century Byzantine theologian Michael Psellos asserted that "the people involved with the divine affairs, [apprehend] the affinity of all the visible things to each other and to the invisible powers" (Pentcheva, 2006b, p. 152). Pentcheva notes that Psellos, a Neoplatonist, was evidently aware of Proklos' text "On Providence", which argues for correspondence between invisible and visible worlds.

Neoplatonism of course informed many circles of Islamic thought, from al-Kindi to the Ikhwan al-Safa' to Ibn Sina. The Ikhwan al-Safa' of tenth-century Basra for example, assert in their encyclopedia that the human body corresponds in its parts to the universe (Ikhwan al-Safa', n.d.). The Ikhwan influenced the Islamic popular culture of sympathetic magic in their teachings on magic squares, which spread to Iran, North Africa, and in the twelfth century Islamic Spain, in some cases through Jewish intellectuals such as Abraham ibn Ezra of Toldeo (Cammann, 1969).

Humbler and secular objects were held to have performative qualities in both Byzantine and Islamic societies. Perhaps the most popular performative object was the talisman. Talismans (are supposed to) enact a command: protect me from sickness, protect this house, harm my enemy, etc. Often they took a micrographic form. Popular among Byzantines were textual amulets, tiny rolled or folded scrolls as protection against harm: sometimes Gospels, sometimes powerful words borrowed from other religions, particularly texts from the Torah (Skemer, 2006). In the Islamic world, magic squares and other works of miniature writing made popular talismans in Safavid Iran, North Africa, and the Ottoman empire (Blair, 2006; Marks, 2010).

Though both Islam and Byzantine Christianity officially disapproved of talismans, ceramics, as relatively secular objects, were able to employ their power in fairly harmless ways. Talismanic animals, knots, and other motifs populate both Islamic and Byzantine ceramics. Eunice and Henry Maguire (2007) argue persuasively that Byzantine non-religious art came to acquire functions similar to that of the religious icon. After Byzantine art ceased to use animal motifs to symbolize Christ, images of lions, cheetahs, and birds of prey came to operate in a talismanic way. They became not symbols, as in Western Christian art, but 'profane icons' with protective powers.[2] Images of animal combats occur far and wide, appearing in Mesopotamian artifacts and ancient Chinese art and later in Iranian, Greek, Roman, Coptic, Catholic, and Islamic art (Hartner and Ettinghausen, 1964). But Maguire and Maguire propose that the performative role of animal combats in Byzantine art is unique, at least in Christian art, because they do not simply represent the animal, nor employ it metaphorically, but actually make its power present. Ceramics often depict a saint slaying a dragon, a dragon tied in knots, or a bird of prey, sometimes attacking snakes. Maguire and Maguire argue that these were apotropaic means of preventing sickness from spoiled food or drink. Moreover, circles, knots, crosses, not just ornament (or symbol) but

controlling devices—performative images. Byzantines, like ancients, endowed circles with apotropaic qualities, associated with protective objects like mirrors and round shields. A bowl decorated with a knotted snake calls on the apotropaic power of knots to confuse demons, again in the hope of making its contents safe for the partaker. A knot may confuse devils in itself, or it may be an abstract knotted snake.

Animal and knot motifs occur in Islamic ceramics as well. Knot motifs likely share the apotropaic quality of Byzantine knot-motif ceramics, though it is debatable whether they derive from snakes (Baltrušaitis, 1955; Gombrich, 1979). Animals usually refer to the courtly practice of the hunt; I have not come across arguments that animals depicted on Islamic ceramics had talismanic powers, and it seems unlikely, given that the Qur'an expressly condemned ascribing powers to figurative images. Rather, it is pious words which often have a talismanic function on Islamic everyday objects. Examples abound throughout the Muslim world of ceramics decorated with pious phrases. A dish decorated with words like *baraka* or *yumn* would have a mildly performative effect, bringing a blessing upon the user and averting trouble.[3]

Thus as well as privileging the performative qualities of abstraction, Islamic ceramics, like their Byzantine counterparts, sometimes extended their performativity into a mild sympathetic magic.

Becoming-Figurative in Andalusian Ceramics

In what follows I will trace the transformations that the abstract line, haptic space, and performativity, all in ceramics, undergo as they move from Islamic to Christian contexts. We will see that European and Christian motifs are added, and moreover, that the designs progressively favor the depictive line over the abstract line and illusionistic space over haptic space. At first these changes occur not slowly but in saccades, in negotiations between the ceramists and their market. Then Islamic aesthetics recede deep into latency in the European ceramics they inspired, paralleling the expulsion of human Muslims from the Iberian peninsula.

Although I am fond of abstract line and haptic space, I do not mean to deplore their diminishment in the changing styles of Andalusian, Spanish, and (later) Italian ceramics. Christians on the Iberian peninsula received Islamic ideas and images in many ways, from assimilation to rejection, and sometimes both at once. Maria Rosa Menocal and her colleagues have written extensively and poetically about this ambivalent reception of Islamic culture (Menocal, 2002; Menocal,

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2   The Quinsext Council of 692 forbade representation of Christ as a lamb; later, iconophiles condemned animal imagery in religious contexts, because the iconoclasts (in an interesting reversal of Islamic iconoclasm) had destroyed human images but left animals whole (Maguire and Maguire, 2007).

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3   I discuss such performative ceramics in Chapter Eight of *Enfoldment and Infinity* (Marks, 2010).

Dodds and Balbale, 2008). Another idea that I find appealing is Francisco Prado-Vilar's concept of the Gothic anamorphic gaze in the intercultural relations of thirteenth-century Castile. Alfonso Xsought to integrate the Muslim minority; his law code, the Siete Partidas, says Christians should endeavor to convert Moors "by kind words and suitable discourses, and not by violence or compulsion". It was a policy, Prado-Vilar writes, of seduction and repression. What he calls the Gothic anamorphic gaze is "informed by experience and direct knowledge of culture and religious diversity, rather than by dogma and ingrained stereotypes of alterity" (Prado-Vilar, 2004, pp. 72-73). Such an anamorphic gaze would be open to ideas and images from another religious culture, yet interpret them in terms of its own: to be seduced by its images and to repress that seduction, to fit those images into a more familiar context.

Under the influence of the traffic among Muslim and Christian ceramic artists and consumers, figures become abstract; abstractions become figurative. To think in terms of an anamorphic gaze would allow us to appreciate all variants in the transformation of Islamic motifs for Christian consumers, rather than elevate the Islamic originals over the Mudejar 'copies'; for to do that would be to fall into the same trap that had art historians criticizing Islamic ceramics as awkward copies of Sasanian motifs. For example, this description of a group of blue and manganese-painted fifteenth-century ceramics—"The decoration of these dishes is characteristic of *Mudéjar* pottery, not only in the use of debased Islamic motifs such as the pine-cone, stylised leaf-and-bud, *alafia* inscriptions, chevrons and scalework, but also in the *horror vacui*, the cramming of every available space with small motifs, and in the radial layout of the design" (Ray, 1987, p. 306)—somehow manages to criticize both Islamic ("horror vacui") and post-Islamic ("debased") aesthetics. So I do not wish to denigrate the later ceramics for their awkwardness, but to appreciate that awkwardness as the sign of emergence of something new.

The gradual Christianizing of ceramic designs parallel a much more violent ethnic cleansing of the Iberian peninsula. The expulsion and genocide of Muslims and Jews from Spain remain a world-historical crime; but the dishes are innocent. They live on as witnesses of the repression of Islam in Europe, and allow us to see the creative ways Islamic aesthetics went into hiding. And as with other repressions, the repressed return to claim justice for historical violence.

Let us see how becoming-figurative occurs in Andalusian ceramics.

Figures in the Round

The theme of a figure or figures in a round frame might have originated in Sasanian ceramics (Ettinghausen, Grabar and Jenkins-Madina, 2001), though it is also a common East Asian motif; it also occurs in Byzantine ceramics. In medieval figurative ceramics, well-balanced composition took precedence over naturalism. We see similar compositions in Islamic, Byzantine, and European ceramics. For example, a bowl with bird from the principality of Antioch (modern Turkey/Syria), 1200-1268, incised decoration with green and yellow glaze, at the Victoria and Albert [illustration 1]. The shapely bird is all curves—belly, back, beak and legs—and swooping tail. From above, a birdlike ornament balances the composition.[4]

Illustration 1: Bowl with bird from Antioch. Source: Victoria and Albert Museum

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4 This dish comes from a period too complicated to determine aesthetic influences, Islamic or Byzantine. The principality of Antioch was populated mainly by Armenians and Greek Orthodox. However, many Muslims had lived there before the crusade that established the principality and murdered Muslims. Likely the dish is based on an Islamic design.

Illustration 2: Bowl with Portuguese ship. Source: Victoria and Albert Museum

In the thirteenth century, the city of Málaga in the Kingdom of Granada was the center of ceramic production. Its specialty was lusterware with a gleaming coppery glaze, a technology received from the east: Iran, Iraq, Syria, Fatimid Egypt. From this tradition Andalusian Muslim artisans produced a great variety of vessels, some ornamented with Arabic or pseudo-Arabic script, some with arabesques and geometric ornament. Granada became increasingly Islamic from the twelfth century, with Jews but very few Christians (who would have been Mozarabs, Arabized Christians) in its population.[5] So we can imagine that its visual culture drew largely on Islamic precedents, except for the innovations exerted by European demand.

Málaga ceramics often feature the formal vegetal arabesques descended from Umayyad designs, as well as knot patterns, geometric patterns and interlace, and epigraphy. When they feature figures, these play against *sgraffito* patterns of arabesques and abstracted plant forms, seeming to grow from them. Sometimes decorative Kufic or pseudo-Kufic writing share the space. They also include many lovely variants of a broad dish at the center of which a hare, deer, or other animal cavorts or an archer or musician performs. Painters inventively arranged the motifs

to occupy the circular shape of the dish, continuing a practice evident in ceramics from Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt since the tenth century.

Illustration 3: Deep dish with deer, Manises. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art

These works' formal arrangement played down the figure-ground distinction in many ways. A stunning bowl from Málaga at the Victoria and Albert [illustration 2] featuring a Portuguese sailing ship may have been commissioned by a Portuguese maritime merchant (Victoria and Albert, n.d.). The curving prow and sails, flags and mast of the ship fit elegantly into the roundness of the bowl; a school of fish populates the space below the ship; and lozenges with abstract motifs protect the bowls' remaining edges from emptiness. Then, between these forms, the painter has filled the ground with curls and flowers. The overall effect is of a beautifully balanced, abstract composition within a circle.

Some Andalusian and Valencianceramics, like comparable eastern Islamic works, pursue the figure-ground relation *en abîme*, by filling up the negative space created by a figure, and then filling the negative spaces within the negative space. (Indeed we might question the term 'negative space', which privileges figure over ground.) The ingenious device of the 'contour panel', "a reserved area that frames

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5   1125 is the year Alfonso I of Aragon attempted to invade Andalusia, after which time Andalusian rulers viewed Mozarabs as potential subversives (Harvey, 1990).

and follows the contour of figures and focal points, separating them from the background decoration," originated in Persian ceramics (Mack, 2002, p. 102; Hess, 2004a). It occurs in Syrian and Fatimid Egyptian ceramics as well, elegantly creating a means for figure and ground to merge in a unified composition while maintaining the figure's integrity. (We often observe the same method for filling negative space in the 'cloud cartouche' of calligraphy, in which an illuminator paints a protective 'cordon sanitaire' around the words and fills in the remaining space with ornament.)

Emigration and commerce

Málaga ware became a hot international commodity. The great traveler Ibn Battuta recorded in about 1350 that "At Malaqa there is manufactured excellent gilded pottery, which is exported thence to the most distant lands" (Halsall, 2001). The Italian term *maiolica* initially referred to imports, deriving initially from the Spanish *obra de malequa / obra de Malachia*, 'Málaga ware' (Pérez, 1992; Mack, 2002; Hess, 2004b).

Andalusians suffered through complex and interminable tumult in the wars between the Emirate of Granada and Christian kingdoms. Ceramists were among the refugees who fled Granada. Many of them moved to Christian-ruled areas, especially Manises in Valencia. In the 1350s and 1360s the de Buyl family of landowners in Manises encouraged Muslim craftsmen to emigrate from Granada and arranged to promote their wares for export, keeping 10% of the profits (Randall, 1957; Mack, 2002). There they lived under temporary protection. Working, as before, for Christian clients, they now also taught their trade to Christian artisans. Organized trade passed from Manises, port of Valencia, to Pisa, port of Florence, through the transshipment point of Majorca; the term *maiolica* came also to indicate works shipped through Majorca (Pérez, 1992; Mack, 2002; Hess, 2004b).

Valencia, unlike most of Christian-ruled Spain, had a majority Muslim population from the time after the conquest. In 1250 James I presented a surrender charter to the Muslims of the Uxó valley in Valencia that supported a separate, self-governing Muslim society (Harvey, 1990). They continued to speak Arabic: "it was Valencia that kept Arabic alive after it had died in Granada," L.P. Harvey notes (1990, p. 119), also noting that, since Manises is a port, Muslims there remained in communication by sea with other Muslim communities. So we can imagine that for some time the Muslims of Valencia lived autonomously and were under little pressure to adapt to Christian customs.

Yet, as Harvey also notes, subject Muslims "sought to have no history, to live discreetly and unperceived" (1990, p. 68). Twelfth-century laws and surrender documents were contradictory, on one hand granting Muslims the freedom to travel, on the other seeking to confine Muslims in fear that they would emigrate, leaving the land uncultivated and crafts abandoned. Whether Muslims stayed or tried to leave, their Christian overlords harassed them. Blending in was crucial for survival.

Did Islamic motifs go into latency just as subject Muslims attempted not to draw attention to themselves? Or did Christian influence, at least on ceramic production, come in the seemingly more innocuous form of market demand? Manises potters developed new styles from the Islamic repertoire that suggest answers to these questions. The figure in the round continues to cavort on these dishes, with new decorative motifs filling the background. These included an overall pattern of vine tendrils tipped with ivy, chains of little flowers, and dots. In fifteenth-century Valencian ceramics, a dotted floral motif began to replace the arabesque, eventually supplanting it completely (Valencian Lusterware, 1970). Those little flowers with their five petals and, sometimes, five-lobed leaves are bryony.[6] Sometimes bryony flowers are depicted with six petals (so they might be daisies, another popular motif) and three-lobed leaves. It strikes me that bryony would have appeared a neutral motif, less obviously Islamic than the arabesque while filling the same function as a background motif.

On a deep dish, probably made in Manises, 1435–1465, in the Cloisters collection of the Metropolitan Museum, a deer stands alertly, legs stick-straight but flanks and long neck curving, antlers streaming back from its head like long flowing locks [illustration 3]. A few remarkably lively vines make large, loose spirals around the creature, terminating in graceful brushy flowers almost the size of its head. Closely comparable is a dish from Paterna or Manises, 1400-1450, painted in blue on buff ground, at the Victoria and Albert Museum. An eagle painted in a few confident strokes fills the height of the dish, its curving tail feathers merging with the lower edge of the dish. Delicate spiraling vines terminating in two large feathery flowers (which resemble the deep dish with a deer at the Cloisters so much that I wonder if it's the same artist) flank the bird, and large and small blue dots and circles augment the composition.

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6   Bryony is a vine in the squash family found throughout Europe and in Northern Iran (Wikipedia). It is poisonous, but also has been used as a diuretic and to soothe coughs; the Roman agriculturist Columella mentions it among the herbs that the housewife preserves in the spring (Qantara, n.d.).

Illustration 4: Detail, plate with "archer of love", Manises. Source: Louvre. Photo by Laura Marks

Rise of optical space, figuration, and 'argument'

As I noted in *Enfoldment and Infinity*, we can see abundant traces of Islamic plastic thinking in the arts of Renaissance Europe (Marks, 2010). Yet as I suggested above, as Islamic forms are naturalized in their Christian environment, or made for Christian clients, they re-become figurative. The haptic space and abstract line of Islamic art give way to figuration and faciality, to use a term of Deleuze and Guattari. In both Valencian lusterware and Italian *maiolica* ceramics, we witness an increasing emphasis on figures and, more importantly, contours, a gradual becoming-figurative of the design and diminishment of overall patterns of abstract line. Sometimes bunches of grapes, ivy leaves, bryony, and other larger motifs enlarged, becoming more like figures on a ground and replacing the Islamic-style figure-ground oscillation with regular series that tend to organize visuality.
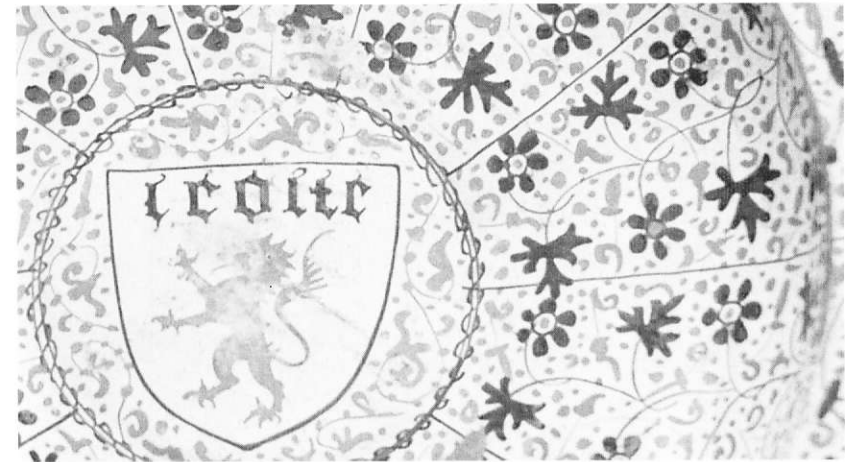
Illustration 5: Detail, armorial plate, Manises. Source: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

We see the process of becoming-figurative in a plate from Manises (c. 1450) in the Louvre [illustration 4]. In a motif that suggests love's archer, a smiling lady in stylish European dress has just drawn her bow, wounding a smaller male figure, also smiling, who clutches at the arrow through his neck. This unusual motif must have been taken from European courtly arts: perhaps it was a commission. The figures, new to the repertory of figurative composition in the round, sit rather awkwardly in the field of bryony flowers. The lady's skirts billow a bit to fill one edge of the circle, but the rest of her figure and the male figure float awkwardly in the space.

To the Islamic repertoire of birds, ducks, hares, fish, and leopards, export ceramics add the lion rampant, emblem of Florence (visible in illustration 5). By 1420, wealthy Italians were commissioning objects personalized with coats of arms [illustration 4]. The center of the dish is often dominated by the coats of arms of Spanish, French, and Italian royalty and nobility (Mack, 2002; Valencian Lusterware, 1970). These heraldic devices were often stenciled for mass production, while the floral patterns and lettering continued to be drawn freehand (Victoria and Albert Museum, n.d. 2). Egyptian Mamluks used shieldlike blazons (Komaroff, 2004), and the Nasrids adopted the Spanish use of a heraldic device. Floor tiles from the Alhambra in 1350-1400 (Victoria and Albert) feature a shield crossed by a banner saying "Wa-la ghalib illa-Allah" (There is no conqueror but God). Still, the coat of arms is much more prominent in Spanish and Italian commissions. Another common central motif is the Christian monogram *IHS*.

Illustration 6: Lusterware dish from Paterna or Manises, 1400-1450. Source: Victoria and Albert Museum. Photo by Laura Marks

In a Deleuzian vein I would say that as these ceramic styles become absorbed into the Christian world, they become not only figurative but also *facial*, in the sense that their patterns seize up around signs of Christian and earthly powers—coats of arms and the Christian monogram—that command submission (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Is the Christian monogram for Jesus more 'facial' than the Arabic words such as *Allah*, *mulk* (wealth), and *baraka* (blessing), that decorate Andalusian ceramics? I suggest that it is. Often Arabic texts in religious contexts seem imposing, hortatory, and commanding submission. But these luxury ceramics were not for Muslim religious use. The lovely ceramics with their playful animals, drinkers, dancers, and words of general blessing do not compel attention and belief but appeal to the visual pleasure of rhythm. This is not the case in the increasingly figurative and facial ceramics for the Spanish and Italian markets.

In non-figurative designs as well the abstract line tends to thicken up, gradually losing its non-depictive quality and becoming a contour. In the course of the fifteenth century, motifs in which abstract lines create haptic space, which we may call arabesque, occur less frequently, and they are rendered more simply (Valencian Lusterware, 1970).

A further distinction is that Islamic patterns tend to avoid arrangements of two or four motifs. This served historically to distinguish Islamic from Christian

objects, but also prevented the form from resolving into binaries. Designs based on units of five, six, seven, and their multiples lead the eye outward into complexity: they first address the body, the eye moving as it pleases, and only later does the mind enjoy understanding of the pattern.[7] But a composition based on units of four need not resolve into binaries. One example is a lusterware dish from Paterna or Manises, 1400-1450, at the Victoria and Albert [illustration 6]. It is covered with a pattern of scrolls, circles, and dots in gold. On top of this, painted in blue, eight sprigs of a parsley leaf, flower, and bud spring from two concentric tendril rings. The pattern is based on sets of four, but the outer ring is rotated 45 degrees with respect to the inner ring, i.e. the blue sprigs counterpoise each other, so instead of a cruciform one sees an overall pattern of blue and gold.

Nevertheless, the change that occurs when Christians take up Islamic objects is remarkable. Often on ceramics made for Christian clients the cruciform, a facializing binary, gradually replaced Islamic patterns. Binary and cruciform patterns make fewer demands of the eye, instead leading to a mental resolution that is also a judgment: this or that, up or down, heaven or hell. They thus recommend themselves to a disembodied, mental looking that already knows the meaning of what it sees. When it iterates with greater complexity, the basic binary organization of Christian pattern produces what Deleuze and Guattari call "all kinds of arborescences and dichotomies" (1987, p. 179) that only confirm existing binaries. In Riegl's terms we can observe that ornament gives way to argument in the shift from Islamic to Renaissance aesthetics—and the balance remained in favor of argument until the late nineteenth century.

Italian Ceramics Adapt Islamic Designs

As early as the eleventh century Italy was importing *bacini* (painted bowls) from North Africa, Andalusia, Sicily, and Egypt to set into church façades. At this time Italian potters were producing 'archaic maiolica' (an anachronistic term) based on Islamic imports; local production increased in the thirteenth century and came to dominate in the fourteenth century (Mack, 2002). During the fifteenth century Italian ceramics continued to adapt Islamic designs. Sometimes these copies developed into indigenous products, as in the Tuscan figurative *zaffera* or oak-leaf ceramics, produced in quantity for hospitals and pharmacies, that clearly adapt the Valencian motif of animals romping on a field of bryony flowers (Rasmussen, 1989). Rosamond Mack notes that these works show "a new sensitivity to

7   Even the most austere of Islamic geometries appeals to an embodied look. Of course, there is still an organization: Islamic patterns are not utterly deterriorializing.

contrasts and interpenetrations between the dark blue leaf forms and bright white background that relates to Islamic ceramics" (2002, p. 99). They do maintain the delicate interplay between figure and ground of the Valencian ceramics, though the serrated leaves are much larger than the delicate bryony flowers, becoming figures themselves, especially because the dark cobalt pigment expands during firing, rising into relief [illustration 7].
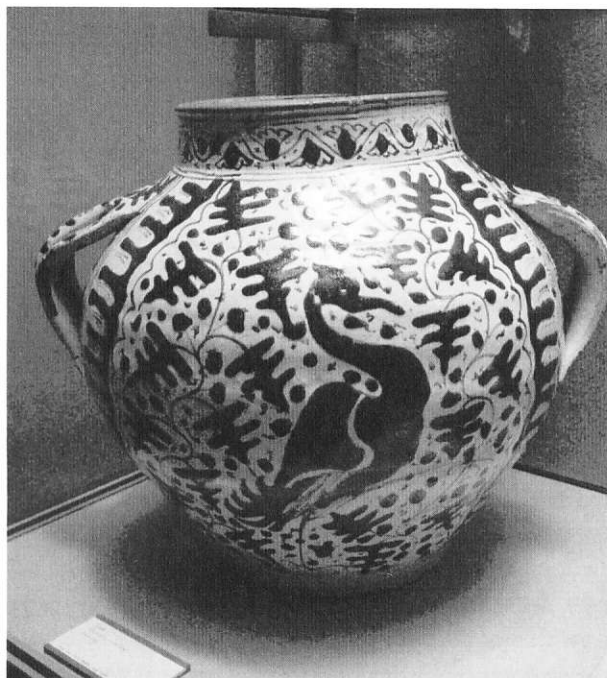

Illustration 7: Tuscan figurative zaffera (oak-leaf) pitcher, 1430. Source: Louvre. Photo by Laura Marks

In the course of the fifteenth century, decoration on Italian ceramics grew more typically Italian, Catherine Hess notes (2004b). They depicted coats of arms, busts, emblems, and narrative scenes and adopted the new pictorial techniques of chiaroscuro, volumetric modeling, and linear perspective. The Renaissance motifs required clear figuration and, in the case of the complex Biblical and mythical narratives, deep space. Painters did not create original scenes but copied them from drawings, sometimes using stencils.

Technological advances allowed Italian ceramic painters to draw with precision and model figures. The glaze pigments copper green, manganese brown

and purple, and cobalt blue dissolve and diffuse in the glaze, softening lines. Beginning in 1430-1450, Italian ceramists developed orange, yellow, red, black, and white paints made of insoluble pigment particles with just enough binder to hold them together. These allowed painters to draw with precision, shade figures, and even use impasto (Kingery, 1993). Diffuse blue and green pigments created soft backdrops for crisp narrative scenes, as W. David Kingery analyzes in a plate (c. 1525) made by Nicola da Urbino for Isabella d'Este, now at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Depicting the story of Perseus and Andromeda, it combines flowing (soluble) blue and green pigments for the background with precise brushwork in insoluble white, yellow, and orange for the figures.
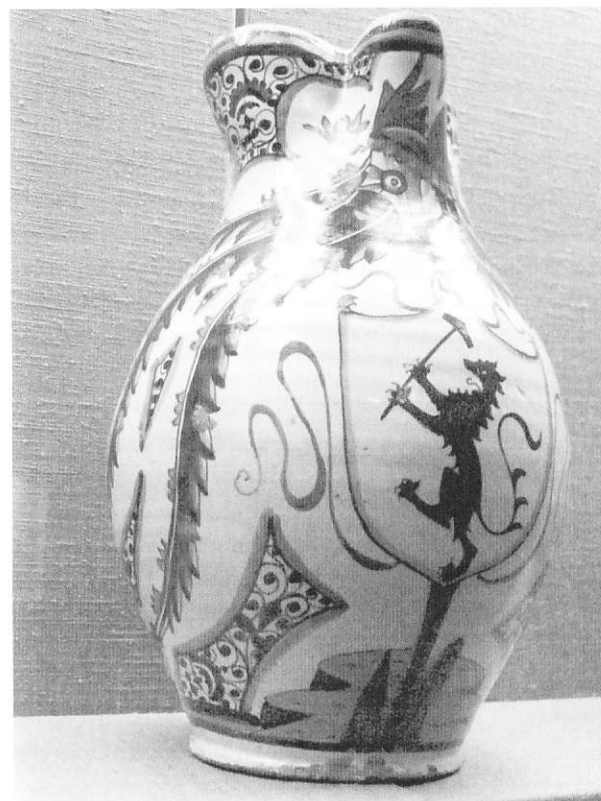

Illustration 8: Pitcher, Montelupo, 1490/1510. Source: Museum of Decorative Arts, Berlin. Photo by Laura Marks

This technological breakthrough tamed the abstract line with finality into an obedient contour—or more positively, it freed artists to choose whether to tame

the line, and in most cases they did. It made possible the portraits and detailed narrative scenes that were so important to the emergent Renaissance humanist taste.

The term *maiolica*, initially meaning Islamic imports, came to designate all Italian tin-glazed ceramics. The 1557 pottery manual *Art del Vasaio* by Cavaliere Cipriano Piccolpasso listed Islamic designs common on Italian maiolica: arabesques, strapwork, knots, as well as Chinese *porcellana*. Italian ceramic painters also incorporated Spanish Islamic designs with Renaissance, Ottoman Iznik, and Chinese motifs to produce some wonderfully original syntheses (Mack, 2002). Some of these look quite strange, as the Renaissance interest in humanist figuration and narrative competes with Islamic abstraction. Haptic space and abstract line are tamed, becoming no more than frames for figures. Yet at the same time the thrill of the grotesque, a Renaissance style adopted from newly discovered Roman ornament, challenged the corporeal stability of figuration (Marks, 2010).

It is fascinating how Italian artists found ways to make a border between the figure and the patterned background. Mack notes that Italian potters adopted the contour panel "without modification" (2002, p. 102). It seems increasingly important to keep the background from growing into the figurative and narrative scenes. This struggle plays out most dramatically on armorial jugs (*boccales*), which show how artists struggled to balance ornament and argument on a difficult shape.[8]

A wonderfully strange armorial jug from the Florentine family Lamberti, Montelupo, also signed by Cafaggiolo, (1490/1510, Inv. Nr. 1891, 212) at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Berlin, bears a shield with the Florentine rampant lion (illustration 8). Red ribbons gracefully inhabit the white space upon which the shield is set. Three thick leafy bands, in blue with orange and green flowers, attached under the spout, cascade down the sides of the pitcher. They in turn become not borders but figures, for they are banded by blue contours. Thus cordoned off in the small areas outside the blue contours, 'negative space' is no longer the right term for the little islands of arabesque: they seem more like ghettoes. And yet these pockets of arabesque open up somewhat randomly, up the side of the pitcher, between the blue leafy bands. Overall it is a fabulous exercise in redefining contours as figures in order to further marginalize negative space— quite comparable to the strategies of Nishapur potters. It looks like the shield with its lion is supposed to be the center, but that is rather crude; the painter's creative interest went to the framing devices.

Illustration 9: Detail, pitcher, Montelupo, 1490/1510. Source: Museum of Decorative Arts, Berlin. Photo by Laura Marks

Thus the abstract line of Andalusian ceramics thickened up and became figurative as it entered European markets and was taken into the hands of European artists. We might say that the 'Gothic anamorphic gaze' that had earlier typified Christian openness to Muslim culture was supplanted by a gaze of disavowal, capable of ignoring the latent traces of Islamic aesthetics in European art. These objects provide a concrete parallel to the way Islamic philosophy also traveled into Europe, becoming representational, its origins gradually effaced. This whitewashing of Islamic presence from art occurred in the context of ethnic cleansing—particularly of Andalusia, as it was re-formed as Christian Spain. Islamic aesthetics went decisively out of fashion.

Looking at the way these objects changed over a few centuries allows us to reconstruct the paths by which Islamic culture and thought survived ethnic cleansing by taking on disguise and going underground. Like Islamic philosophy, Islamic aesthetics went underground, or I would say became enfolded again, in European art and thought. Yet Islamic art's forms of becoming, including haptic space, abstract line, and performativity, had entered so deeply into European art they would never be extricated. The centuries since have witnessed a dialectic between figuration and abstraction, being and becoming, in which Islamic

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8 As well as the pitcher discussed here, see the armorial jugs in Rasmussen, 1989.

concepts and Islamic aesthetics unfold in Western contexts again and again—though under other names.

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