Stamatia Portanova

Postcolonial Epistemodiversity. Reading Laura U. Marks' *Enfoldment and Infinity* against the Geopolitics of New Media

A review of Laura U. Marks, *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2010), 395 pp., ISBN 978-0-262-01421-2

Tito Rajarshi Mukhopadhyay is a 21 years' old Indian poet and writer who was diagnosed with severe non-verbal autism in his early childhood. In *The Mind Tree*, a book he started writing at the age of eight and completed at eleven, he reveals to an astonished neurotypical audience that, as most autistic people, he has experienced *illusions* throughout his whole life. The autistic mind, we learn by reading the book, is constantly presented with things that are *unreal*, things that would be normally classified as *hallucinations*. English Professor Ralph J. Savarese, who has conversed extensively with Mukhopadhyay, has taught him literature and has written about his work, argues that the boundary between *imagining* and *experiencing* something is, for the autistic, a very delicate one, as that between *self* and *other* also is.[1] The biggest challenge, for Mukhopadhyay, is in fact a "boundary challenge" posed to him by his diverse proprioceptive sense, a neurological diversity which prevents him from feeling himself as an enclosed self identity, and gives him the strange but regular sensation of "being scattered" around. "Being scattered around" coincides with the hallucination of perceiving oneself as an arm, a voice, a mind detached from all the other parts, but also of diffusing one's own cognition into the other's mind. This definition of autism not as a relational dysfunctionality but as an insensibility to boundaries and borders (not least one's own boundaries and borders) is not a mere scientific clarification but has, as Savarese shows, important political consequences: "If proprioception ... is an awareness of one's body in space, an awareness of the various parts in relation to one another and their constitution as an organized and dynamic whole, then we might imagine a figurative equivalent: a kind of political or ethical proprioception that not only contests typical arrangements of power and identity but reconfigures them as well. With this sort of proprioception, Tito's body challenges would be an advantage, for they would facilitate a different understanding of, and relation to, the world" (2010, 283). Without romanticizing the autistic condition, following Savarese it can be argued that Mukhopadhyay's proprioceptive failure in recognizing his own boundaries originates a sort of hallucinatory connectivity

[1] Ralph James Savarese, "Toward a Postcolonial Neurology", in *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 4.3 (2010), 273-290.

which becomes a privileged viewpoint. Under this light, entities are not seen as things to be mastered through classifications such as "me/you", "real/unreal", "normal/abnormal": rather, a sort of animistic perception refuses to allow vision, and then language, to "cut up the world", leading for example Mukhopadhyay to become, and to speak as, a banyan tree. Autism becomes in this sense another definition for extreme connection and empathy, revealing the rational isolation in which neurotypicals usually live, a revelation that subverts normative self-identitarian body politics and proprioceptive ethics.

While neurodiversity is generally considered as a sign of cognitive inferiority or shortcoming, contemporary culture presents us with multiple more dimensions of social stigmatization, for example when "The south of the world is framed, not only conceptually enclosed, but also falsely accused of failing to respect a modernity being triumphantly pursued elsewhere".[2] At this point, we start to understand how the history of colonialism, and the semiotic construction of the *south* (or the *east*, or the *orient*, etc.) as cultural categories, are inextricably tied to the geopolitics of the brain which is involved in neurological discrimination. A kind of corporeal colonization is in fact enacted in the field of neurology, which takes the form of a presumed superiority of the left brain hemisphere (the rational logical part of the individual) on the more poetic and con-fused right side (the side which is still at work in poets, young children and pre-literate people). Similar dynamics are therefore at work in the human brain and world, where narratives of both national and personal development leave all immature or primitive perspectives behind. In this sense, it is possible to think of postcoloniality in neurological terms, as "the forces of history have moved inside the brain, and their impact is so much more significant than any simple social constructionism" (Savarese: 2010, 285). At the same time, as Savarese argues, it is possible to link medical patients to colonized peoples, the former's bodies having been rationally conquered, and their indigenous experience of illness having been completely disregarded. "The renunciation of "animist spirituality", whether conscious or unconscious, is a form of conquest, as is becoming an individual". In order to get beyond the perceptual and linguistic semiotics of power, and beyond the imposition of a model of rational, logical, *typically* Western individuality, what is needed are, according to Iain Chambers, "dense grammars of cultural immediacies" that can make "negated conviviality" and an "unrecognised communality" emerge between people and cultures (Chambers: 2015, 19-20). In the same spirit, Savarese's proposal for a postcolonial neurology models itself along the autistic drive to associate the human with non-human natural and material worlds, or a radically critical synesthesia. We could, in other words, think of postcolonialism and autism as two synesthetic expressions of the same critical sense and of the same connective tendency. For this reason, "Troping autism as postcolonialism does not conflate "completely different" experiences; rather, it practices, at least potentially, the kind of "aroundness" that repairs division and the oppressive hierarchies it makes

[2] I. Chambers, "The Southern Question... Again", in A. Mammone, E. Giap Parini and G.A.Veltri, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Italy* (London: Routledge, 2015), 13.

possible" (Savarese: 2010, 288). The aim behind this introductory presentation of autistic neurodiversity, and behind Savarese's unexpected association of autism to the postcolonial, is therefore not to merely conflate two distant phenomena, but to show them as sharing the same political necessity for a perceptual shift.

One of the ways in which the colonial project reveals its discriminatory nature is through the predominance of a hegemonic point of view on the history and critique of science, technology and disciplines such as Media History, Media Studies and Media Art, considering the latter as intellectual prerogatives of advanced Western civilisation. Since the main image on which this discrimination is based is that of a fast-paced future-projected modern West, one possible counter-cultural and counter-perceptive strategy could be to make time more fluid, intensive and resistant, and to be able to dedicate a necessary amount of it to the rethinking of history, and of disciplinary histories such as those of media and new media. Such strategy is adopted by Laura U. Marks in *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art*, a book where, against what is recognised as a cultural given (in other words, the idea of science and technology, or Reason, as Western property), she deploys a different sense of possibility whereby she can invent (in the sense of the Latin "invenire", to find, to rediscover) a different, hidden history. Through this operation, the media scholar shows us the origins of contemporary new media art as lying in ancient Islamic thought and aesthetics, revealing the profound association existing between "us-West-now" and "them-East-then", and eroding some of the main boundaries of cultural proprioception in space and time. A different viewpoint emerges, based on connection rather than detachment, a privileged perspective that allows Marks to unfold the connections traversing the media field. On a parallel level, despite the aura of abstract techno-rationality that permeates the hegemonic view on Media, New Media and Software Studies, Marks notes that today's technologies still cling tightly to the living body. Exploring, as she does, the corporeality of technology is therefore one of the ways to trouble the vision of our mediated experiences as characterised by an abstract algorithmic nature. What is revealed by revelling in such corporeality is the "deep time" in which new media are folded – a deep physical involvement but also a deep history of medium-body connections that Marks excavates, until reaching some of the most ancient creations of Islamic art.[3] The very concept of an embodied aesthetic sense, she tells us, finds some of its first, most profound actualisations in the Islamic architecture of the 11th century, where domes invited a haptic look to move along their surfaces, inducing the beholder to experience mystical states. By synesthetically connecting (at least) two perceptual worlds, that of Islamic art and that of new media art, Marks performs a postcolonial operation, or what could be defined as an epistemologically *diverse* perceptual shift, connecting what is not usually connected from an epistemotypical point of view, presenting us with a cultural *un-reality* that, once we plunge more deeply into its fascinating folds, starts to look interestingly real. The whole operation results in an unmaking of

[3] For the notion of 'deep time', see Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2006).

boundaries and a liberation of the *brain* or the intellect of media and technological studies from the unilateral shortsightedness of its vision. Echoing Rey Chow's words, we can say that her work explores the "dynamics inherent in the encounter between the phenomenology of seeing and the emergence of epistemic ruptures".[4]

[4] Rey Chow, "An Interview with Rey Chow", *Social Semiotics*, 20.4 (2010), 460.

The Method: Deep Time

Enfoldment and Infinity draws a deep spatiotemporal diagram that provides its reader with the information and concepts needed to understand the diversity and plurality of media. What the book tries to argue is that Islamic aesthetics has from the beginning had a strong influence on Western art, and is therefore to be considered as one of the antecedents of new media art. From this point of view, *Enfoldment* can be considered as one of the most literal actualisations of Siegfried Zielinski's notion of "deep time": in Jussi Parikka's words, a methodology of research through which "the superficiality of media cultural temporality is exposed with antecedents, hidden ideas, ... inspiring paths of earlier experimenters".[5] Deep time is in other words a strategy of resistance against the linear progress myth of the West, a strategy through which Marks takes apart the narrative of modernity as a dispositif of Western knowledge, for example showing us how perspective was already present in 11th century's Cairo, and how Arabic theology and philosophy had their own rationalist currents. "Deep time" is therefore harnessed as a method for ripping open the black box of new media history, bringing to light many conceptual points of contact between Western and Islamic thought – notions such as "unity" (as the unity of God and also of the algorithm), "vector" (intended as "qibla", the direction towards the city of Mecca, and also as digital vector), or the "haqq" (truth) and "haqiqa" (reality) conceptual couple, "a historical precedent of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the virtual and the actual".[6] In this way, the book illustrates the argument that Islamic art and philosophy contain the deep sources of contemporary information culture.

[5] Jussi Parikka, "A Call for an Alternative Deep Time of the Media", http://jussiparikka.net/2012/09/28/a-call-for-an-alternative-deep-time-of-the-media/, accessed 2 December 2015.

[6] Laura U. Marks, *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 2010), 14.

Being particularly concerned with images as enfolding (rather than containing) information, Marks defines new media art as a series of works with a "basis in code, an algorithmic process, and a database-interface relationship" (Marks: 2010, 32). In order to discuss these works, she draws on Gilles Deleuze's work, in particular borrowing his theory of signs, where he describes two planes (the image and the infinite) as constantly unfolding and enfolding and re-forming the boundary between the virtual and the actual. Marks' own intervention in this theoretical dispositif is to insert the plane of information between images and the infinite. This addition enables her to introduce Charles Sanders Peirce's concept of a triadic relationship between the infinity of world/God, words, and perceptible images. This tripartite system can obviously directly correspond to the functioning of new media, with the dimension of information (the computer interface, the programming language) working as a bridge between the infinity of code on one

hand, and the finiteness of images on the other. But the real epistemological intervention of the book is to argue that this tripartite structure already appears in Islamic art, where images and artifacts are often composed of written words and correspond to the code of the Qur'an, which in its turn relates to a deeper, infinite truth. In order to better delineate this image/information/code relationship, Marks refers to a theoretical pool which is not limited to thinkers such as Deleuze and Felix Guattari or Gilbert Simondon, but includes Islamic thinkers such as Muhammed Arkoun, Abu al-Walid Muhammad Ibn Rushd (known in the West as Averroes) and Ibn Khaldun. Drawing on their thoughts, she can construct a way of approaching art based on the fact that everything we perceive is generated by an underlying code, and is the sensible presentation of an idea. Her work demands that we take seriously the claim that, in an image, what we do not see is more significant than what we do see. If art has always aimed at making visible the invisible, what characterizes today's new media is the dimension of *information* as a new, intermediary level of in/visibility. The same relation between the visible, the legible and the invisible has characterized Islamic art, to the point that the latter is, for Marks, the strongest parallel and the actual source of our information age. Indeed, as Marks herself does note, the very categorization of "Islamic art" is, like that of "New Media Art", quite problematic; but, she tells us, for the purposes of her book, the latter has been considered as "art made for Islamic religious and ritual purposes; motifs and themes developed in that art that spread to courtly, state, and popular art; and art that, while its purpose was not strictly religious, was produced in accordance with the Muslim religious mores of its particular culture" (2010, 31-32). This sort of bespoke categorization allows her to incorporate many works from the whole Islamic world (ranging from Morocco to Iran), and to examine them without becoming entangled in discussions about their religious or secular nature.

Marks' story begins as an account of the travels of two concepts she extrapolates from Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, the concepts of "haptic space" and "abstract line", across time and space. These two notions, which the philosophers employ in several of their works to tell us about the aniconic nature of Gothic art and also about the modern art of Paul Klee, are interwoven by Marks with ninth century's Islamic thought, and then tracked down in the carpets which, in 15th and 16th centuries, travelled from the "far east" to Venetian and Dutch households. "Literally smuggled in rolled-up carpets, the abstract line bursts into flower on the Turkish and Persian textiles that decorated European homes;" (2010, 72) and then the line continues its travels, until it reaches modern visual art, and then cybernetics and generative algorithmic art. Throughout the account, Marks gives us some spatiotemporal points of contact: the birth of the algorithm in 830 in Baghdad and its influence on the Baroque tendencies of new media art and of some recent movies; the origin of the pixel in 1000's Baghdad and its entrance in the iconoclastic software art of the 2000's; the zoomorphic calligraphy flourishing

in 972 in Cairo as the first ancestor of concrete poetry; the earliest forms of virtual reality emerging in 1487 in Herat, where examples of infinitesimals and monads started to populate all kinds of images; and the seeds of artificial life in 1700's Karabagh, whose carpets already overflew with genetic life forms blurring the confines between nonorganic and alive, artificial and natural, mineral, vegetal and animal. As Zielinski himself writes in one of the book endorsements, "Chapter by chapter, it becomes evident that some of the most important modern paradigms like pixels, algorithms, morphs, or even virtual reality and artificial life have not been originally generated by the Occident, but through L'Age d'Or of the Orient".

An Example: Atoms, Letters and Pixels

The world of new media has an important genealogy in classical Islam and, as Marks shows, these works often express a sort of Islamic *Kunstwollen* (artistic will) that is immanent to computers themselves. The *pixel*, for example, appears in *Enfoldment* as a conceptual suggestion for thinking through both Islamic and Western atomism, which in their turn constitute the foundations of many art forms. Islamic atomism was a product of the rationalist theological theories of the Mu'tazila of Basra; while the Mu'tazila subdivided all existent things into atoms and accidents as the two emanations of God, atomism in modern Western philosophy (for Marks, mainly the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari) lacks any theological basis. "An aggregate of atoms", [Deleuze and Guattari] write, is a war machine, "a physics of packs, turbulences, 'catastrophes', and epidemics".[7] A physical emergence rather than a divine creation. And yet, even if subsumed to the will of God, the universe as the Islamic atomists conceived it was a smooth universe, for "one cannot rely on any form to persist in it, and everything is susceptible to change at any moment" (Marks: 2010, 196). An Islamic actualization of the atomist world vision is represented by the calligraphy of tenth century's Baghdad, where scribes paid attention to the singularities of each minimal written part. But the bureaucracy and religious leaders of the capital wanted to make sure that everybody got the same meaning from the sacred writings, and therefore imposed the use of a clear and legible script to everyone. For this reason, despite their stylistic efforts to write in their own ways, calligraphers had "established limits in which an individual's style could appear" (ibid., 199). This writing standardisation was based on multiples of the smallest calligraphic mark or atom: "the cross-section of a reed pen, as a point, rhomboid in shape". Being the basis of all calligraphic measurement, this point is the origin of the Arabic written line, which is in fact composed of a series of points, and the two (line and point) constitute the mother and father (or the *alif* and *beh, a* and *b*) of all writing, the field and source of all possible letters. But whereas, in letter *beh*, the point is actually visible as a belly button under a curving line, in all the other Arabic letters it simply functions as a diacritical mark: the point (*beh* also corresponding to zero, while *alif* corresponds to

[7] L.U. Marks, "Thinking like a Carpet: Embodied Perception and Individuation in Algorithmic Media", in A. Petho, ed., *The Cinema of Sensations* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 18.

one), is nothing in itself.

Tracking the atomist view in modern and contemporary art, Marks argues that the atomist aspect of experimental films and videos consists of the idea that they are composed of minimal parts, or atoms, that are their formal units. An atomist aesthetics of cinema is seen for example at work in *Last year at Marienbad* (Alen Resnais, 1961), a film based on the superposition of frames more than on a linear form of storytelling. Quoting film theorist Jalal Toufic, Marks continues by suggesting that what really interpellates the viewer of a film is not the image but the jump cut which "alerts him or her to his or her substitution by another, similar entity, and his or her annihilation into the one and only Subject". Since the 1960s, structural filmmakers have in fact been editing single video frames or sequences of frames, emphasising the handcraft of this creative process, shattering the audiovisual object into many crystals or fragments, and dazzling the viewer in the same way as the *muqarnas* (honeycomb-like repetitive units) covering the surface of Islamic domes also did. Atomism characterizes, as Marks tells us, the idea behind many contemporary films, where no causal laws seem to be given and no generalization seems possible. "Atomist films", in other words, are those with a very specific focus on some singularity, those that are fragmentary and organized according to a different, almost inexplicable logic – Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together*, Julio Medem's *Lovers of the Arctic Circle*, Abderrahmane Sissako's *Waiting for Happiness*, Tom Barman's *Any Way the Wind Blows*, Miranda July's *Me and You and Everyone We Know*. Films that show us a world where no direct cause-effect relation, for example, manages to connect poverty and famine to global capital and political alliances. Until digital video appears, posing "a profound challenge to this manner of working", and simultaneously representing, with its pixellated nature, the best embodiment of atomist ideas (Marks: 2010, 197).

The void rhomboid points of calligraphy, for Marks, perfectly coincide with the void square pixels of the digital screen as the atomic basis of computers" visual standardisation. In order to function as operable units, computers all need to have the same uniform content, the same number of electrons that can make an electric signal signify *on*, and a pixel appear. Moreover, the large amounts of data required to generate pixellated images are the basis of proprietary imaging software, on which the centralized economic (and political) power of corporate empires is founded. In this sense, "It is not an overstatement that the pixel-based screen, like point-based writing, centralizes meaning and access in corporate powers" (ibid., 204). Not having an internal extension (or intensity), in other words not being an infinitesimal, the pixel is the atom or point where computers" standardisation finds its limit. For this reason, Marks reminds us that pixels, as minimal parts and not infinitesimals, "are capable of infinite extensions", and that "Like the point and line of standardized calligraphy, [they] can produce infinite iterations". The atom of both calligraphy and graphics works, in other words, as a function of power, capable of generating a quantitative infinity of controlled repetitions. In this

context, *Enfoldment and Infinity* acts like a call for a further materialization of digital atoms, because the only thing that can give meaning to the latter's tedious algorithmic journeys is *immanence*: "the materiality of software, hardware, programmers; the imaginative effort of humans" (ibid., 205), in the same way in which the strict standard styles of Ottoman calligraphy could become, through manual execution and imaginative power, the basis of fanciful and complex textual decorations.

The Protagonist: The Subject of Perception

In *Enfoldment and Infinity,* Marks continues the work already undertaken in her previous book *The Skin of the Film,* that is to discuss the subjective and embodied experience of art in intercultural contexts. The individual subject is in fact the real protagonist in Marks' book, a distracted, contemplative, imaginative, mystical subject alternatively identifiable with herself or with a Muslim worshipper kneeling in a mosque one thousand years ago. In particular, *Enfoldment* examines the ways in which the abstract algorithmic patterns of Islamic mosque domes and carpets, but also of modern Western paintings, audiovisual and computer screens, pass through the beholder's body, literally taking her consciousness out of herself, and inducing a particular subjective state. The final argument is that all forms of expression involve a subjective embodied perception, meaning that the artwork plays out in time, animating viewers as it enacts its algorithmic code. In the book, Marks also shows how early medieval Islamic thinkers had already developed theories of a simultaneously rational and subjective aesthetic response that were taken up by Western scholars, and that still find an echo in Henri Bergson's definition of the subject of perception. And yet, it is precisely this subjectively embodied perspective (more than Deleuze's own consideration of Islamic art as a space of statal and religious control) that makes Marks' adaptation of Deleuze's concepts at times quite problematic. As Michel Foucault already argued, we can never really reconstruct what people felt and experienced in the presence of objects. So how can we manage to make (as hoped by Marks) the logical depth of an ancient carpet or dome indicate us the experiences they gave to the people who lived with them in their early days? To stick with Deleuze and Guattari, we should recall that the abstract line and haptic space of art do not defer meaning to a subjective discovery of the viewer, but only to de-subjectified non-human sensations (what they define as *affects* and *percepts*).[8] Nevertheless, despite this conceptual offset, the engagement with phenomenological corporeality is key, for Marks, for understanding the relation between Islamic and Western art both in terms of their similarities and of their differentiations. This phenomenological approach allows her to explore how "Islamic aesthetics encourage certain subjective and receptive states", while also to suggest that new media art often seems to lack that very materiality and sensuousness.

[8] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (London and New York: Verso, 2003).

Drawing upon William Gibson's literary definition of the body as *meat* – an ironic claim more seriously echoed in much new media writing of the 1990s – Marks emphasizes that, differently for example from Sufist embodied meditation, the digital network or "virtual community" conceptualized by Howard Rheingold is "a disembodied community", as "cybernetic mysticism tended to disregard the body" (ibid., 145). At the same time, privatization, commodification and surveillance are, for Marks, the main ideas that the Internet, contradicting the world-changing aspirations that motivated the first entrepreneurs of the PC industry, has actually ended up reinforcing. Instead, in order to be fully comparable to the infinite sought after and reached by Islamic art's aspirations towards the divine, Marks argues that the "worldly infinite" of media networks "must be meaningful" (ibid., 148). What this acquisition of meaning entails, is that these networks "must open onto an infinite that is not a lame field of sameness, but struggling, alive, simmering with difference". If such networks indeed already exist, they are never entirely online and digital, and are made of relations that disrupt the homogenization of information through the production of lived particularities or singularities. Networked relations, in other words, must become in any case antagonistic, by diffusing individual corporeal subjectivity into social actions.

Refurbishing the Manor of New Media Art

Enfoldment and Infinity is a substantial book (both in size and conceptual richness), and in some ways, as already mentioned, it functions as a sort of further exploration of Marks' previous book *The Skin of the Film* (although still perhaps moving at a too brisk pace). The duo of books work well together, in the endeavor to realize the notion that intercultural movements imply a transformative force. They both tell us often unheard stories, stories of images that are blocked or lost in movements of cultural dislocation, stories of contact rather than separation. In *The Skin*, multisensory mnemonic images, or memories of the senses, are reenacted by diasporic filmmakers on the screen, against the oblivion of a distant past. Whereas in *Enfoldment*, the personal memories animating intercultural films are replaced by the recuperated traces of a collective history. The haptic visuality of the film skin gives way to what Marks sees as the enfoldment of Islamic aesthetics into the digital, a sort of indelible deep collective memory. In this sense, dwelling on the abstract artistic patterns that pass from the digital screen to the beholder's body is not a way to limit the aesthetic experience of new media to the present moment, but rather to highlight the profound parallels woven across this corporeal thread, between historically and geographically distant practices. Here, Marks' mobilisation of a deep, epistemodiverse vision acts as an important contribution to thinking through the lifecycles of art, and starts to function as a sort of postcolonial brake on Western accelerationist thinking, by emphasizing that no matter how fast humans go, art has its own temporality. Those expecting to find the usual

hegemonic, epistemotypical point of view on new media will therefore not find it here. What they will find are new theoretical tools with which to think through cultural contacts across time and space.

How does Marks herself conclude her reflections? Both the Internet user and the religious worshipper are/were helpless, she says, respectively in relation to the algorithms" and to God's commands. Starting from this presupposition, Marks' preference for "the creative lines of flight" that take Islamic art beyond its religious scope, sets a critical tone for new media. The superiority of the analog makes itself really felt throughout the whole book. Nevertheless, the book also does much to demonstrate that computer-based parallels to the infinitesimal worlds of floriated arabesques do exist. By emphasizing the teeming life of electrons pulsing inside each pixel, Marks avoids the usual critique of digital media on the basis of its extensive algorithmic finiteness, to instead pose a more challenging ethical question: even if a pixel can be seen as the smallest unit, to what extent is it irrevocably empty? Is any kind of subversive political critique tickling "the pixel screen of the digital universe?" And it is, in the end, a positive assessment that emerges, as she ends her book by describing the fascinating similarity existing between the creativity of Caucasian dragon carpets and the creatures of experimental biotechnology or AI: "Like the monsters produced by genetic algorithms, these carpets celebrate a will to form that is not constrained by its products; rather it continues to invent, as though for the joy of inventing" (2010, 313).

The possibility of a subversive political critique therefore can only spring from an inventive, morphogenetic force. At the close of *Enfoldment and Infinity*, Marks therefore dedicates some space to discuss these carpets: on their surface, animals losing their limbs and morphing into rosettes or palmettes, flowers becoming dragons and viceversa, produce the "truthful hallucination of a universe where all things are connected" (2010, 318). In this way, she also emphasizes the ways in which the creativity of this Islamic form of genetic art suspends action and judgement (as molecular biology also does), reminding us of the perceptual illusions emerging in what Deleuze defines as the "time-image" of cinema.[9] In the dragon carpets, "one does not know whether it is a question of flowers with wings or of birds with petals". Lingering on the description of these connective objects, she continues: "[they] elicit responses of nausea and disgust – responses, among which I include my own, whose violence verges at times on the hysterical. What is that fear but the fear of our own annihilation? If we do respond to the forms of carpets in an empathic way, rather as we might respond to the bodies-in-pieces of the sixteenth century grotesque [or, we could add, to the bodies-in-pieces of the autistics], then we fear for our own bodily integrity when the forms we are looking upon are monstrous or uncategorizable". These monstrous becomings of an ancient, marginalized aesthetics remind us not only of a biotechnology lab, as suggested by Marks, where a human can acquire equine genes, but also of Tito

[9] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

Mukhopadhyay's own vision, where teachers have tulips for faces, and where he loses his arms and becomes a tree. It is this self-dissolution, Marks claims, that "permits the atomized subject to become part of a larger force field", until arriving "to penetrate each atom, to descend to the bottom of matter, to *be* matter". A suspension and becoming that constitute the political significance of art, by defining a diverse proprioception that "reconfigures typical arrangements of power and identity".

We are now able to conclude our reading of *Enfoldment and Infinity* by returning to our intial parallel between postcolonial epistemology and the neurology of autism, on the basis of their common presentation of a diverse, *hallucinatory* or non-hegemonic field of perception, and of its discrimination or marginalisation. We ourselves could at this point think the postcolonial transformation of well-established fields of perception and knowledge in a metaphorical way: for example, as Chow does, as an operation of house-cleaning or a remodeling of disciplinary manors/manners. The epistemotypical geopolitics through which all disciplines proprioceptively manage their space or, in other words, think of their own field and history, in fact often tends to stigmatise or erase all *minor* knowledges through an appropriation of epistemological power. In the context of media studies, approaches go from the inclusion of media within the wider space of Western reason (an enlargement of disciplinary space), to theoretical restrictions limiting the analytical scope to the small perspective of specific problematics and methodologies (psychoanalytical, mathematical, sociological, technical, communicative etc.). Between these perspectival enlargements and restrictions, a complete disregard for *other* points of view persists, excluding episodes, works and concepts, such as the Islamic art examples which Marks attentively brings to light as precursors of modern media culture. Something similar happens when architects try to design and manage the spaces of neurodiverse people, and the proprioceptive peculiarity of autistic individuals induces them to provide their own solutions to the autistic's anxious inhabitation of space; solutions oscillating between the advocation of smaller or much larger volumes, while completely ignoring the point of view of autistics themselves.[10] So what if the marginalized were let to remodel their own space? Coming back to the new media manor, a simple refurbishment might reveal itself as more useful than any enlargement or restriction of disciplinary space. Echoing Chow's words again, we could ask: "What can be thrown out? What has been lying in the basement or in the attic that we have no use for, that is simply taking up space? What alternative arrangements of space and the intimations of time that come with such spatial rearrangements may be introduced? How do some odd pieces of furniture compel us to change the views of entire rooms, and why had we not done it before? What would such a change do to the demographics of the house, the folks who have been living there as though they were the rightful permanent owners and their offspring? Who should be the future occupants of the house, if it is being made over?" (Chow:

[10] Christopher N. Henry, "Designing for Autism: Spatial Considerations", in *ArchDaily*, 26 October 2011, acessed 2 December 2015.

2010, 462). In Marks' book, the new media house, freed from the hegemonic constructions of an Oriental backwards primitivism or religiosity still lying in the attic, is refurbished with a different set of ideas and images. From this changed place, the view on Islamic science, philosophy and art can finally provide a landscape or background for many technological and aesthetic developments, up to the digital age.