

Aesthetics and Semiotics of Communication in Visual Language: A Multimodal Criticism on the Short Film of *Ismail*

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Abstract—This conceptual paper aims to present a multimodal critique of the visual language in the short film *Ismail*. It analyses the social semiotics represented in the film's composition of image and language, which portrays a day story from the Palestinian visual artist Ismail Shammout (1930-2006) in the diaspora. From an aesthetic perspective, the research focuses on the social construction of an artist's identity through visual language. Such film transforms the artist's narrative into a communicational oeuvre in Arabic to represent an individual description of the Palestinian diaspora, which constructed one of the prominent grand narratives in the modern history of Arab Art. The main character in the film is Ismail, a Palestinian painter who performs his daily job as a candy seller in the streets. The argumentation in this critique depends on the aesthetic manifestations of the social semiotics of Arab Art in the film. Throughout the film's visual language, Ismail keeps representing his thoughts about the characteristics of Arab Art. He is a travelling aesthetician who walks through the desert and sells candy to strangers while talking to a younger kid escorting him through the film. The research's problem corresponds to the need for more investigation into language study, which this research advances to render. The methodology dedicated the aesthetic critique to produce aesthetic research on the film's visual language. Introducing an aesthetic review of visual language and connecting it with sociopolitical semiotics is significant. This research raises awareness of the importance of visual language knowledge in education systems.

Index Terms—visual language, social semiotics, multimodal creativity, visual communication, Arab art

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to present an aesthetic investigation of visual language in the short film *Ismail*, which aesthetically represents social semiotics from the grand narrative of contemporary Arab arts. In the creative media of communication, the visual language constructs the values of multiculturalism and multimodality through contemporary Arabic creative productions and industries such as cinema, photography, painting, sculpture, graphic arts and performance arts. This approach negotiates the assemblages of multimodality and multiculturalism. This paper focuses on the crosshatches between the concept of multimodality and the concept of multiculturalism. It presents an aesthetic critique of communication temporalities through visual language in contemporary Arab arts.

In the present millennium's beginning, aestheticians debated the integration or assemblage of multiple human intelligences. They focused on the relationship between humans' textual and visual cognitive abilities to critique and develop communication mechanisms in a new global era. They deconstructed the archaeology of communication and explored the chemistry of every expressive component. They explored the language and art and semiology, performance art kinesthetics and language. Aestheticians stood further to examine the chemistry of all such multimodal properties with multicultural frameworks. They examined the language of displaced people and the arts of refugees and foreigners in different geographic, geopolitical and social conditions. Language is a system of symbolic meanings that perform communicational multifunction, which depends on representing the subjective and objective environment around the

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human (Abu-Hammad & Hamtini, 2023; Alsaggar & AlAtoom, 2021; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001; Mitchell, 2005; Sullivan, 2005; Suvakovic, 2017).

Multimodality describes the assemblage of image, text, performance, kinesthetics and sound in human artistic expression and communication activities. Investigating multimodality in visual language research focuses on transforming social symbolisms into languages, images, and voices in communication activities or kinesthetic artworks. Such discourse expresses an aesthetic, educational, and cognitive composition of text, images, colours and sounds as components of the artistic and communicational message (Peng, 2022).

In the context of Contemporary Arab Art's Grand Narrative, Arab artists and authors practice their visual arts through multiple creative media. Those media are not limited to drawing, writing, painting, sculpting and photography. They reflect human expressions through language and art. Furthermore, Palestinian artists, to whom Ismail belongs, practised the art of autobiography as a creative tool to represent the dynamics behind their art in words (Al-Abbas, 2016, 2023). It is an aesthetic and dynamic research practice to identify human creativities turning into visual or textual expressions through multimodal media. Art practices manifest more comprehensive messages across the audience's multiple intelligences in this context. Historically, visual language is a deliberate process of rendering thoughts as a creative approach in art and literature. The visual language enabled artists to reproduce characteristic social situations as historical and grand narratives in their creative oeuvres with advanced expressive qualities (Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001; Mitchell, 2005; Sullivan, 2005).

This study aims to discuss multimodality and multiculturalism as a concept for developing underdeveloped educational and communicational systems, specifically in the practices of artistic and creative expressions. Studying the elements of art and expression can benefit the future of making efficient educational and communicational systems globally. Such communication and education systems can construct better multicultural and multimodal bridges among human societies. This paper investigates the importance of studying visual art language through contemporary expression. It also explores through the aesthetic critique the need to develop multimodal and multicultural elements such as visual artistic expressions and performance to produce a higher quality of visual communication.

II. AESTHETICS OF COMMUNICATION IN VISUAL LANGUAGE

From an aesthetic perspective, the language of visual art emerges through multimodal and multicultural creativities. Authors and artists compose the manifestations of this art synchronously with textual, musical and kinesthetic elements. Across the conditions of social change, the visual language transforms from familiar artistic semiotics in painting, sculpture or traditional poster art to the new media modernist iconographies. These concurrent transformations evoke the obsessions of integrating traditional aesthetics into modern culture.

This study's methodology corresponds to its problem statement, which provokes the dialectics of the connections between the visual and textual. The problem is how to construct/deconstruct/reconstruct a multicultural and multimodal visual language that meets the recent advances in creative media. Therefore, the methodology in this paper is qualitative and focuses on the aesthetic critique. It concentrates on the multimodal visual language framework presented in Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2001). Images, texts and languages compose signs, flags, fashions, and films in the human visual ecology, which provide a visual oeuvre for aesthetic analysis in art research. The multimodal phenomenon constructs visual and textual grammar framework in the semiotic world of meanings (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Consequently, the aesthetic and qualitative investigation examines the connections of images and texts representing semiotic association and multimodal manifestation.

In this methodological context, the aesthetic analysis focused on a qualitative approach to recognise and explore social performers, reflecting visual and semiotic messages. This method chosen in the present study is related to its aesthetic approach because it demonstrates the emergence of multimodal expression practices through the assemblage of textual and visual elements in communication and creative human practices (Bahrudin & Bakar, 2022).

In the context of this paper, the methodological frameworks of the aesthetic values integrate into the academic patterns to explore social authenticity transversely within the spaces of the Arab visual culture through the social and political constructions of geographic, historical and national narrative circles. On another level, the social aesthetics in a community's structure impacts the artistic practices on the levels of individual experience within the aesthetics of the artistic community itself.

The phenomenon of multimodal aesthetics manifested noticeably and diversely in the contemporary practices of visual artists' societies. In this creative context, the waves and recessions of globalization influence communities to flow over the latest advances in multicultural aspects. At the same time, the question of keeping the classical language of iconographies and social semiotics appears in the course of such progress to indicate the social originalities within artistic practices. The question of social identity through personal displacement, diaspora, communal memory, and nostalgia evokes different perspectives, from collective conceptions to individual perceptions. It is how individual creativity deals with the popular iconographies of society's visual culture and how the intellectual, creative person challenges the collective or mainstream thoughts within community intrinsic and extrinsic constructions (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001; Suvakovic, 2017).

This subject is visually and culturally loaded, diverse and simultaneously complicated. Art critics and aestheticians address the multimodality of visual aesthetics in different humanities and social science fields. Visual Arts is one field

that discusses this issue more often as part of the post-colonial practices in Art Criticism and Art History. The social values that connect those multimodalities in the reader's/viewer's mind evoke diasporas, nostalgias and cultural identities made by authors and artists' oeuvres. Those construct diverse and multicultural implications.

Such representations build multicultural and multimodal narratives as aesthetic experimentation in this study. This aesthetic study investigates and identifies the conceptual phenomenon of multimodality and multiculturalism in creative contemporary arts.

In the context of Arab Art's Grand Narratives, Studying the creativities of Arab artists through geographies and narrative temporalities passes through the conditions of the global and contemporary art practices that lead to investigating those aspects and narratives in artistic representations. They exist in the same framework when reviewers address the relation between the artist and their social context, primarily when the artist represents social issues such as diaspora, nostalgia and cultural identity. The iconographies of those issues manifest as the artist transfers or displaces from the familiar social contexts to the unfamiliar social context, representing cultural identity through nostalgic representations. In the global context, art critics consider this as diaspora when they locate artists' representations outside their cultural geographies and temporalities.

Reem Fadda (2009) describes such a narrative phenomenon through a convergent critique of the connections between the poetic, aesthetic and political issues artists evoke:

The selected artists strive to link aesthetic and poetic developments with broadly conceived politics. Issues such as historical memory, nation-building mechanisms, dispossession, the physical and psychological impact of wars and selected internal conflicts are only a few topics that have been addressed...., in the Palestinian context, we increasingly see an analysis of belonging, identity, nationalism, diasporas, borders, land/geographies and narratives of conflicts by artists However, artists' thematics are not exclusive to their location, but serve as the starting point of an investigation that has a broader significance. (Fadda, 2009, p. 16)

We need to translate this identity to be more understandable and give meaning to this image and the iconology of this artistic phenomenon. In this context, Fadda (2009) quotes Walter Benjamin's statement about language expression when he says every word and expression in each language conveys a narrative mutation to represent particular significance in certain conditions. He says translation is the search for the common dominator, like intention and pure understanding of the world. He calls it a Heideggerian understanding of the world when we represent the pure intrinsic beauty of things without indicating their extrinsic significance. Fadda discussed those issues that can be detected in the visual artworks while presenting the artistic practices through her critical point of view.

III. THE SOCIO-VISUAL LANGUAGE CRITIQUE

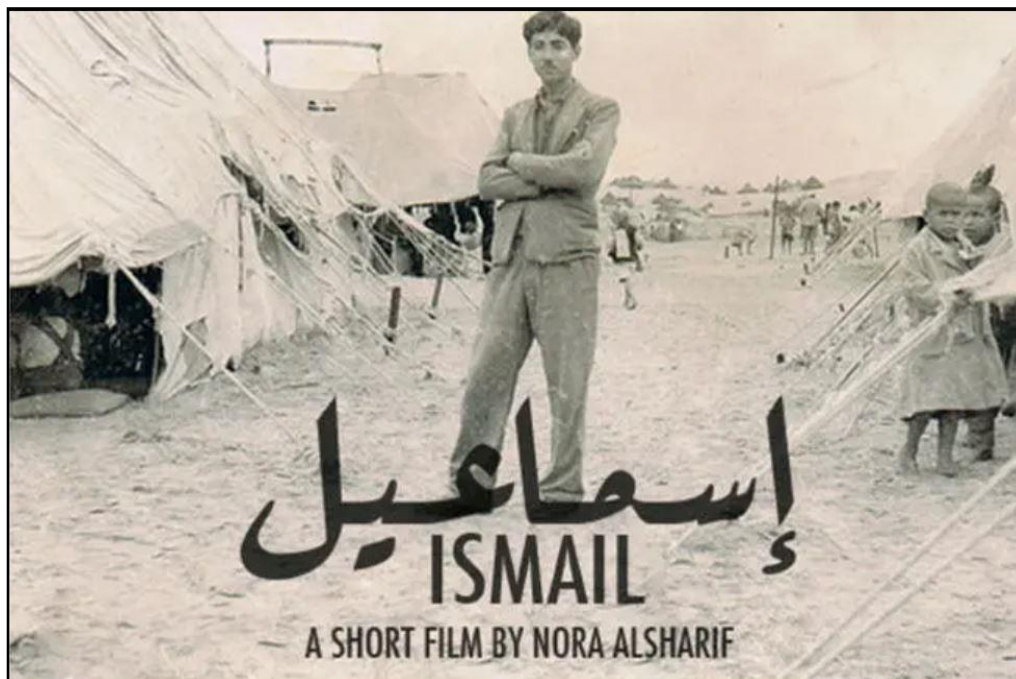


Figure 1. The Film Poster (Public Domain)

In the pictorial composition of this film, the images, colours, texts, and other visual and textual symbols construct the message of its narrative. As a graphic visual art, film frequently takes images and pictures as the primary pictorial system of communication. The picture assembles countless communicational codes, such as language, colour and composition, corresponding to the film's theme. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) characterise the process of constructing

the meaning from the image into a social symbol or semiotic narrative. The narrative images in the short film *Ismail* are a performance of a multimodal phenomenon, seeing the aesthetics of texts, movements and images reflect the spirit of the visual artist through the oeuvre. In the multimodal composition of this film, the narrative presents the connection between the image identity and the audience.

This film's aesthetic values cluster into metaphoric integration based on a multimodal aesthetical framework. The language and image analogies build a social construction of semiotic meanings, where the cognitive operations embody social connotations. The film reflected social realities, while the characters focused on representing the narrative of diaspora across continuous scenes and locations. Such symbolic construction assembles multiple mods of semiotics. Such conceptual assemblage drives a dynamic structure of the meaning of multimodal metaphors from a cognitive perspective. This aesthetic critique provides a new perspective on interpreting multimodality in multicultural and educational settings (Wang Chongqing, 2022).

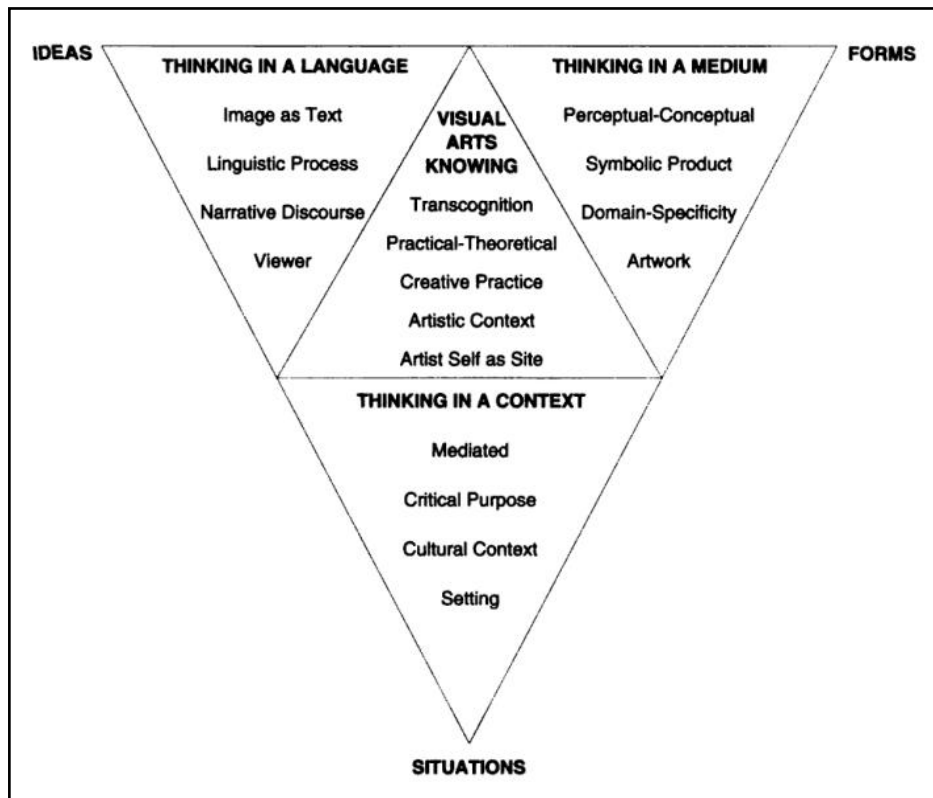


Figure 2. Framework of Visual Knowing (Sullivan, 2005, p. 129)

According to Sullivan (2005), language and media engage in visual knowledge, where cultural ecology crystalizes through the aesthetic connection between the artist and the others. This connection grows among language, media and socio/cultural/political/psychological contexts. Nevertheless, those 'others' may manifest as a mainstream homogeneous community or appear as heterogeneous individuals who act highly individually. In this context, the social narratives, cultures and memories connect to the artist's cognition. The artist/author reflects social/cultural cognitive experience, where social concurrency is a social construction while cognitive perception is a psychological and physical action inside a social/cultural context. Therefore, the knowledge of visual art is a conjunction of thinking in language, media, and context (Sullivan, 2005).

From a methodological perspective, this paper critiques the visual phenomenon through sociopolitical influences. Corresponding to the short film *Ismail*, the current semiotic critique provides a contextual background of the film's composition. It introduces the social analysis of the stylistic expressions in the visual language. The current investigation focuses on the crossing points between art, language and culture by conceptualizing the interaction between the displaced cultures through creative media. Then, the paper renders the composition and visual values by considering the cultural and historical contexts, revealing the concepts behind using iconographic motives or formal values in artwork to get through the synthesis of visual cultures and artistic practices.

In the film *Ismail*, the semiotic connection between characters' creative visions anticipated the movement of their individualities towards the self and surroundings. The original endeavour in the film is to observe and understand the diasporic symbolisms through simple artistic practice. The grand narrative of Palestinian displacement involved the visual environment in direct contact, and the film developed the audience's visual understanding through different phases of cognition and awareness. In this visual development context, language plays a significant function. The

multimodal vision is one of the primary sources of knowledge, memories, and meanings. On the other hand, the self-image of Ismail presents the intellectual individual who keeps on creating visual knowledge.

The film presents Ismail as an intellectual who thinks as an artist/author. However, the viewer can now observe various backgrounds of mass and symbolic production of images and iconographies. Artists/authors compose multicultural/multimodal/semiotic values to deliver various narratives to support visual and lingual expressive methods. In the same context, contemporary artists always use avant-garde media to represent their ideas and concepts, along with traditional art forms like painting and sculpture. Remember that the interactions between different visual cultures are an imaginative subject for art practitioners and critics to practice artistic creations in visual arts and studies.

In social realities, Arab artists present a significant example of political symbolism within the domain of individual artistic experience, as they created a record of the Arab narratives when they represented their memory and folklore. The temporalities of the Palestinian people are a significant example of the Arab creative narrative through different stages of the modern Palestinian displacement into the contexts of the political and social environments. The novel aesthetics of visual arts construct the artistic process within social contexts that convey the resemblance of the authentic Arab interactive visual culture. In the context of socio-politics, the impact of the political atmosphere in the Arab visual culture manifests through diverse proportions within popular spaces.

The phenomenon of political and social manifestations in the visual language of art constructs social symbolisms, which emerge pictorially in art. Arab artists, in this context, represented social narratives and memories. Through portraying the daily iconographies of social temporalities, the influence of Palestinian contemporary politics on folkloric practices generated a phenomenon that led to different expressions in the local and global Middle Eastern contemporary arts (Gharran, 2009). The ecological and sociopolitical influences on the individual creative experience significantly manifest the social symbolisms through visual arts. As we can see in Ismail's short film, the narrative practices of contemporary Arab artists presented a deeper communication among social characteristics and politics.

In the same political reality and social context of the film, the visual narratives of Ismail represent Palestinian folklore through several geographies as the Palestinian diaspora extended worldwide, where we indicate it in many global cultural events interacting with different shades of people telling the narratives of the Palestinian story. This interaction through the folklore led to different examples of convergence between the displaced and the recipient visual cultures. Since this kind of folklore represents political contents, visual phenomenon constructs a dynamic social iconography which consists of the representations and imaginations of three visual iconographic elements; the first one is a group of people that move with their own cultural identity, the second element is the host culture that hosts the displaced people, and the third element is the cultural messages, narratives and memories of the displaced people to the new urban spaces within the recipient community.

The dynamics of social iconographies manifest in Ismail's artistic narratives and reflect the turbulent political situations in Palestine. However, those three elements of the displaced visual culture, recipient visual culture, and the social-political content illustrate how politics influence contemporary visual arts across different creative practices, particularly in the contemporary arts. The iconographies and social manifestations evoke the relationship between the visual identity of folklore as a part of the collective cultural identity and the visual arts as an individual artistic and creative practice (Gharran, 2009). In general, the Palestinian artists created an individual diasporic narrative, contributing to worldwide art exhibitions by continuously travelling from one country to another. They exchanged different artistic concepts of cultural identity through the temporalities of displacement. Palestinian artists are telling the Palestinian story and individual narratives to the people.

Social reality is an authentic ecology of any contemporary artistic practice where the dynamics of the artwork create an assembly between the manifestations of the artwork and the societal structures. The formal comprehension of the artistic practice needs practical aesthetics through investigating the social differences and similarities in the artistic practice. In this context, modern artists are grounded with practical aesthetics led by modernist ideologies established within the post-independence era paradigms.

Visual aesthetics in artistic practices connect various cultural intercourses through sociopolitical impacts. As a result, visual language dualism originates amidst the constructions of contemporary visual culture and artistic practices. The primary account of this paper is to critique visual language as a phenomenon through social realities represented by the artists. The study of communal environments of artistic practices explains the dualism of the artwork's manifestations within the social environment and connects with its cultural ecology. In modern society, the pictorial transformations in the visual ecology from the traditional to modernist artistic identity impacted aesthetics through artistic and creative practices. Connecting aesthetics, poetics and conceived politics evoked the issues of historical memory, national systems, and the social and psychological impacts of wars. In the Palestinian context, the issues of identity, nationalism, diasporas, and land/geography narratives appear (Fadda, 2009).

In the context of visual language practices in the short film Ismail, we can observe that artists reflect the narratives of personal experience, which yields manifestations from the artists' social aesthetics. Furthermore, culture connects the artist to aesthetic experience and socio-politics in Arab contemporary cultures. It is the self-portrait, into which the visual artist practices art through social interactions with the surrounding visual/multimodal/multicultural ecological environment. The conceptualizations of social aesthetics change according to sociopolitical dynamics in the mainstream ideas and advocate new demands for artistic practices through multimedia arts, photography, and novel trends in

applied arts and crafts. Society and social system are the mainstream into which the artist accumulates memories and cognitive means.

The transformation of aesthetics and visual art creates critical practices in political terms determined by inclusion or exclusion. New art blurs boundaries between mainstream art and revokes the mainstream dualism between geographically oriented or regional arts and ethnographic practices. Global art represents a geopolitical or geo-aesthetic brand (Suvakovic, 2017). The visual artist reveals himself/herself through manifesting social culture, signifying an individual visualizer of all imaginative narratives derived from environmental spaces. Also, the practising artist creates individuality by communicating with the social context through augmenting artistic practice from the environment of the corresponding aesthetic uniqueness. The practising artist generates perception within the social and cultural routine systems, revealing technical and practical experience based on social-cultural consciousness.

IV. CONCLUSION

The ecological environment surrounds authors/artists with several substantial elements; they feel/perceive/recognize/understand through multiple audio-visual and kinesthetic knowledge. Consequently, those artists/authors express this multimodal/multicultural knowledge through multimedia creativities such as video art, photography, art posters, expressionist painting and sculpture. Such an interaction between the artist/author and his or her ecology creates a semiotic phenomenon.

This research examined the multimodal aesthetics of visual language in the composition of Ismail's film. The image, locations and backgrounds, and further symbols in the picture concurrently construct the film. Examining pictures from the aesthetic perspectives of graphic language starts from the operational purposes of composition, delivering engagement to the inner portrayal of the film's characters. Social critics and aestheticians explore creative artworks and present argumentations according to cognitive theories. Visual cognition is knowing visuals and rendering them into meaningful ideas. The construction of this knowledge in visual language stands on the architectonics of narrative content, medium, and social context (Sullivan, 2005, p. 129). This organic composition leads to a subjective and aesthetic explanation of an artwork. Social narrative impacts the symbolic meaning of the artwork representation and leads to an aesthetic investigation throughout the social layers of the community. These layers connect critical and cogent reading of the artistic and creative experience. This conceptual research equalized different regional arts culturally by accentuating the interactive ecological influences. It conceptualized the stimulation of displaced visual cultures and languages. Exploring the complementary conditions that touch another culture further integrates components of conceptual paths between cultures, which this research rendered.

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