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# "What Does It Look Like?": On the Use of Intermediary Images in Egyptian Film Production

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*This article examines the use of intermediary images in the process of commercial film production in Egypt. Without being integrally part of the film product, intermediary images play a vital role in mediating interactions in the production process by anchoring the filmmakers' multiple and sometimes conflicting representations of "the film" in visual proxies. Focusing on scouting work in two recent Egyptian films,* Décor *(2014) and* Poisonous Roses *(in postproduction), I draw attention to the way in which intermediary images allow filmmakers to imagine some aspects of the film-in-the-making while mitigating their mutual misunderstandings.* [cinema, Egypt, film, intermediary images, scouting]

## Introduction[1]

In the autumn of 2013, I was working on my field notes at the office of New Century Film Production when Mohammed Setohy, the production manager in *Décor*, a film project that I followed closely, came in exhausted. I asked him where he had been all day: he said that he went on a scouting mission at the district attorney's office (*neyaba*) in Qasr el-Nil, but the police officers guarding the establishment would not allow him to photograph the building unless he received special permission from the district attorney (*el-na'eb el-'am*). Later that day around sunset, Ahmed Farghalli, the line producer, serenely entered New Century's office. As soon as he sat down, he started gathering scouting pictures from all production crew members present. Setohy gave Farghalli his camera's memory card, but he had no photos of the *neyaba* to show. Farghalli looked toward him and asked, "Why didn't you scout the office?" Setohy told him the whole story—to which Farghalli immediately replied, a little heatedly, "You couldn't even steal a tiny little picture? I just wanted the external appearance (*khargi*) of the office!" Setohy justified himself by saying that he did not feel like he could take any photos, given the guards' presence, so Farghalli sighed and asked, "What does it look like?" The answer was an oral-cum-gestural evocation of the building's yellow color; its bulky, rectangular shape; and its architectural style, similar to other *neyabas* in Cairo (Figure 1). Farghalli seemed somewhat satisfied with the answer, but he still asked Setohy to photograph the office on the next day—which he dutifully did, as he was able to surreptitiously take a photo of the building's external look.

This vignette illustrates the importance of what I will refer to as "intermediary images" in Egyptian commercial film production. Filmmakers produce intermediary images to visualize a particular aspect of the film product, yet these images are never part of the final film per se. Scouting pictures, costume-fitting pictures, printed set designs, color tests, casting videos, video-assist recordings, and unwanted takes in editing are all "intermediary images" in this sense. I argue that these images are vital in understanding the creative process of film production: they are not mere by-products to this process, but the very substance through which the film is made. In Grimaud's words, filmmaking is an endeavor "largely shared between individuals, material

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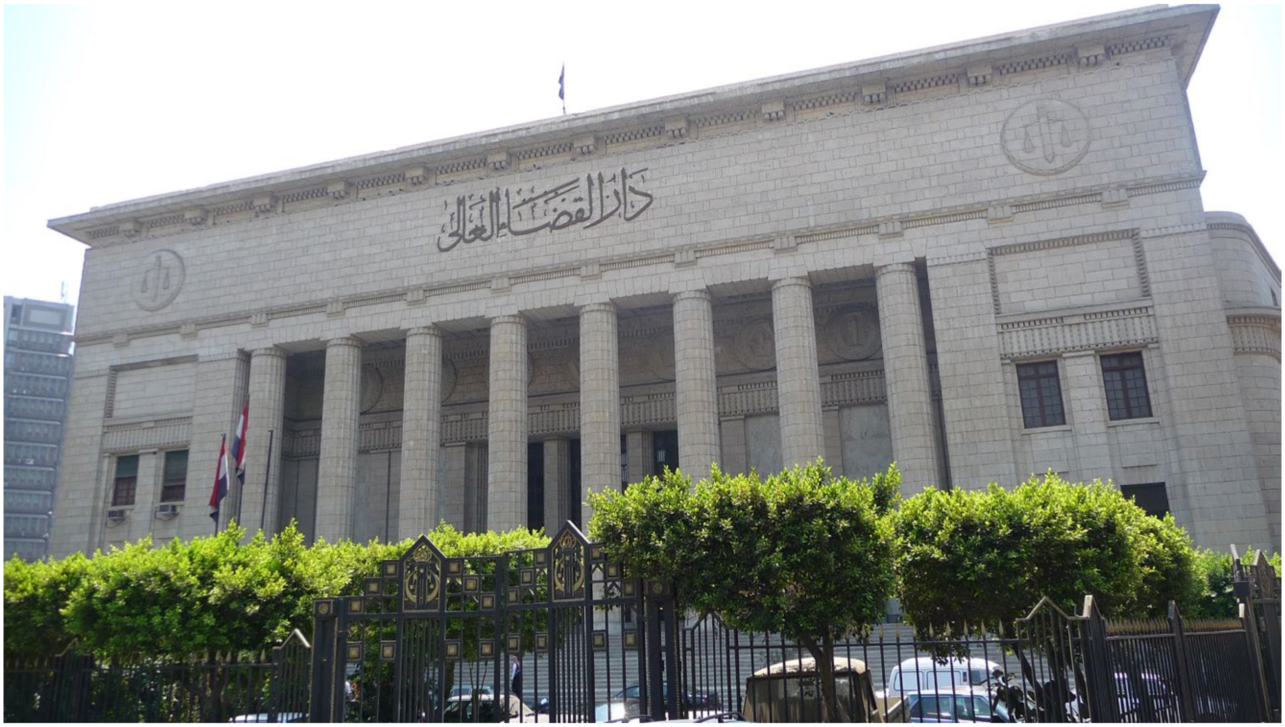

FIGURE 1. The Egyptian High Court of Justice, where *el-na'eb el-'am* has his office. The *neyaba* in Qasr el-Nil is a different building with a similar architecture. Photo by Bastique, used under Creative Commons 3.0. Source: https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D9%85%D9%84%D9%81:Egyptian_High_Court_of_Justice.jpg.

components, and the phases of the cinematographic process" (2003, 10). This insight is all the more important given that the filmmaking process unfolds over extensive periods of time: standing in the present, a filmmaker can only approximate the eventual film's on-screen appearance in some of its aspects (e.g., the actor's look, the image's color, the set's design, the edit's pace). Farghalli could not simply rely on common knowledge about the architecture of a typical *neyaba*, then, but he asked Setohy to take a picture of it, to approximate what the background of a planned shot of the *neyaba* would actually look like on-screen.

My detailed attention to intermediary images contributes to two broader issues in visual anthropology. First, in line with recent ethnographies of commercial film production (Grimaud 2003; Hoek 2014; Rot 2014; Pandian 2015), I wish to highlight the instability of the film-in-the-making. Much like Pandian, "Wherever I followed filmmakers … I found a milieu of tremendous uncertainty …. Directors, cameramen, designers, and editors struggled with this caprice, but I also found them constantly anticipating and improvising with chance events" (2015, 6). A film, then, is never a straightforward materialization of the crew members' ideas: it is a constant back and forth between crew members, intermediary images, and unstable representations of what the film will eventually look like. Introducing a sense of the temporal extension of film production to this equation raises the issue of how filmmakers manage to "see" the eventual film, here and now, and I will argue that this process partly takes place thanks to intermediary images.[2]

Second, this article speaks to a wider literature on the materiality of images (see Pinney 2001, 2004; Edwards and Hart 2004; Meyer 2010; Gürsel 2012). A central problem in this literature lies in determining the distinct value of the visual when, as Pinney writes, "the historian [or the anthropologist] reads into [images] *what has been learned by other means*" (2005, 260). The typical attention to narrative, imagined audience, labor, and ideology in media anthropology often cannot answer Pinney's challenge to examine the visual

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"in itself."[3] From my experience in the Egyptian film industry, however, I argue that the ethnography of media production would be enriched by a more detailed account of the role of visual artifacts in production. The specific situation of *intermediary* images is important in this regard, as the same image can accrue different meanings at different times throughout the filmmaking process, and it can be read differently by different people at the same time.[4] In this sense, these different interpretations are not just attached to the image's immediate material presence, but to its orientation toward an incoming future where it will be, with some modification, "the film."

Intermediary images, in short, contribute to the filmmaker's ability to imagine in the present some aspect of the eventual film product, by materially anchoring individual and collective imagination on some aspect of "the film." As Strandvad notes in the case of screenwriting meetings in a Danish film project, creative ideas remain uncertain until they are given a material form: "as long as an idea is presented verbally, it may be easily changed. To carry an idea further, it is essential to write" (2011, 289). This point can easily be extended to visual ideas, whose inscription delegates to the image the otherwise verbal or physical task of, say, describing the *neyaba*, or scouting it in person, instead of taking a picture of it. By holding intermediary images, Egyptian crew members have a seemingly objective arbiter to their discussion.

The intermediary image materializes a creative tendency that I explore with a particular filmmaking operation in mind: scouting. This phase of filmmaking can reveal, at once, various aspects of the film product and a variety of interpretations in the production process. At any point during production, whatever will be "the film" remains an imponderable potentiality, which is negotiated by filmmakers through their imagination, their conversations, and a wide variety of visual proxies such as intermediary images. These proxies are important material evidence of the film, not only to the film historian, who retrospectively tries to reconstruct the film's making based on this evidence, but also to the filmmaker, whose daily anticipation of what the film will eventually look like is heavily reliant on the mediation of these images. I argue, therefore, that no anthropology of cinematic creation is possible without attention to these intermediaries because they are integral to the daily reflection and communication of filmmakers over the future of their common endeavor. This situation is not unique to the Egyptian film industry, yet I believe that it is underrepresented in the existing literature on commercial film production in anthropology (with exceptions such as Grimaud 2003; Hoek 2014; Rot 2014).

To situate my argument on intermediary images, I start by sketching local notions of artistry and authority in the Egyptian film industry, with an eye on explaining how intermediary images intervene in the film-in-the-making. It is important to note that the interaction between Egyptian filmmakers and intermediary images is mediated by a specific labor hierarchy, where only certain "artistic" crew members are deemed to have the legitimacy to engage with the image and its eventual concretization in the film. Having described this hierarchy, I present two case studies of the scouting process in recent Egyptian film projects: *Décor* (dir. Ahmad Abdalla, prod. New Century Film Production, released in 2014) and *Poisonous Roses* (dir. Ahmad Fawzi Saleh, prod. Al-Batrik Art Production, to be released).

## Art and Authority in Egyptian Film Production

Both *Décor* and *Poisonous Roses* are, according to industry insiders, "artistic" (*fanni*) movies in the contemporary Egyptian film industry, which has tended to produce many more light comedies and action movies in recent years, although it has had a long history of realist cinema (see Armbrust 1995). *Décor* is a black-and-white psychological drama about a young female art director, Maha, who is torn between two lives, one with an art director husband and another with a taxi driver husband (Figure 2). The story alternates back-and-forth between Maha's two worlds, without knowing which one is real or fictional, and Maha is at a loss to choose the better world. *Poisonous Roses* is a social drama about a young female toilet cleaner, Taheya, who lives with her mother and her brother Saqr in Cairo's tanneries district. When Saqr, a well-educated yet lowly worker in tanning workshops, decides to migrate to Italy to seek a better future for his sister and mother, Taheya uses all means necessary to keep him by her side.

The label "artistic" has two usages in the Egyptian film industry. Firstly, it serves as a tool of professional "boundary-work" (Ganti 2012, 7), whereby movie projects with an artistic mission are deemed to have more refined objectives and crew members than the light comedies and action movies with a "commercial" (*togari*) mission. Secondly, while the artistic movie is evaluated according to its aesthetic appeal, the commercial movie is evaluated according to its ability to sell in local theaters and in Gulf-based satellite television channels like Rotana and MBC Egypt. All my interlocutors hold this distinction, even though what

ديكور
DECOR

FIGURE 2. Promotional poster for *Décor*. Courtesy of New Century Film Production.

is designated as "artistic" is not always the object of a common agreement. Thus, *Décor* was vaunted by its production team as an artistic project, destined to put New Century Film Production on the map of international film festivals, even though many Egyptian filmmakers contended that it was a "commercial" project by virtue of being produced with big-name stars in a big production house.

Furthermore, the label "artistic" designates a set of filmmaking practices associated with the physical appearance of the film product. Of all the workers on an Egyptian crew, only a limited set of "artistic" workers—above all, the screenwriter, the director, the cinematographer, the art director, the stylist, the editor, and the composer—have direct authority over some "artistic" aspect of the final film (namely, the actors, the lighting, the set design, the costumes, and the soundtrack). Executive workers like assistant directors, lighting technicians, and hair stylists are not professionally expected to be concerned with the film's appearance: they are only required to execute the logistical and technical work necessary to enact the artistic workers' decisions. Many commercial film industries establish a similar distinction between "artistic" and "executive" labor, most notably the French film industry with its tradition of *auteur* cinema (see Darré 2006). As I will detail in the section on *Poisonous Roses*, execution is no less a creative exercise than the decisions made by artistic workers, yet it always occurs in the context of a particular relation of authority, between someone who decides over the film's "artistic" aspect and someone who does the work needed to enact this decision.

All crew members contribute to the labor necessary to make the film, including the production of intermediary images, but this labor is subject to the word of each artistic team's head and, ultimately, to the director's "vision" (*ro'ya*). The term "*ro'ya*" is as ambiguous as the English term "vision": it can imply both a concrete envisionment of physical images as well as an abstract ideational project. In the Egyptian film industry's everyday vocabulary, *ro'ya* tends to suggest the latter: it is a capacity to "see" the film as an ideational whole. In this sense, Egyptian filmmakers generally agree that the director is the only crew member with a complete, overarching vision of the film-in-the-making, and his prime skill consists precisely in his ability to materialize his vision in the film. This can be explained by the director's position of authority in the industry's hierarchy. After all, the director might not actually see the whole film as concrete images in his head, but given that all crew members believe that he can "see" it as a whole, then all his concrete, real-time decisions are taken to be manifestations of his overall vision, which gets to be materialized in the film as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Ahmad Fawzi Saleh, the director of *Poisonous Roses*, would regularly express disbelief at the common view that the director "knows what he is doing" at all times. The film is an ever-evolving process, he insisted, involving a constant effort to concretely see (*yshouf*), for instance, what a particular location would look like on camera or to anticipate what it will look like on the big screen. This effort, in Fawzi Saleh's case, was supplemented by his claim to have looked at twenty thousand images, including innumerable scouting pictures of the tanneries district where he was about to shoot, as well as a great number of movies, paintings, and photographs, where he sought inspiration on image composition, camerawork technique, and/or editing style.

In Fawzi Saleh's narrative, images serve as a kind of visual capital: a stock of material out of which he seeks to craft his own cinematic style. Yet intermediary images bear a more direct, practical influence over the film-in-the-making in its successive stages. When the art directors in *Décor* watched scouting pictures (discussed below), their comments were not simply about what would look nice in the film, but how they could design a set in this location, or how they would furnish it with appropriate props. When locations were secured, both art directors in *Décor* used design software to image a 3-D version of the set; whenever they needed to determine what the furniture would look like on set, they scrolled through long lists of prop pictures on their smartphones. One can distinguish two important moments here: one in which the art directors try to see how the location can be transformed while selecting it and another in which they actively plan the transformation of a given location, all the while eyeing the set's look on-screen. To do so, they used a variety of intermediary images to discuss artistic choices—of materials, of colors, of props. These choices were in turn nested in a sociotechnical sequence, where choices about set design or props could only be delimited once a decision was reached about the shooting location by the whole artistic crew. The same can be said in the case of lighting or camera movement, where artistic choices made by the cinematographer and the director in each operation are limited by earlier choices in scouting.

Hence, it is important to accurately try to anticipate not only what the film will look like on-screen but also how the film will be made—a necessity that is presumably not exclusive to the Egyptian film industry, yet whose consequences have not been adequately described in existing ethnographies of media production. One key consequence is that filmmakers engage with intermediary images as tools to probe into the film's future, which is never evident to them a priori. This probing relies on tacit knowledge of the specific sequence of operations leading to the film's making, which is not equally shared by all workers in the industry, and therefore gives additional weight to the opinion of workers who are supposed to hold "the film" or some portion of "it" in their minds. Hoek's (2014) work in the Bangladeshi film industry illustrates these points in another context. With a particular interest in demonstrating how "obscene" material is made visible/invisible in the making of a popular action movie, Hoek shows how, at every juncture in the production process, differently positioned filmmakers anticipate the inclusion of "cut-pieces," or obscene footage, in later stages of film production. Obscenity, therefore, is not just evident in the final film, but it is made visible/invisible in screenwriting when a producer asks to add narrative "hooks" where cut-piece footage will be inserted; or in shooting when this footage is shot away from the main studios; or in postproduction when different "cuts" of the same movie are made to be shown to the censor board or in cinema halls across rural Bangladesh. In short, the necessity to consider both the contents of the movie and its anticipated production process is as pressing to the Egyptian art director trying to see how a location might be arranged in the course of scouting as it is to the Bangladeshi director trying to create sufficient footage to edit a movie with juicy "cut-pieces." In both instances, crew members endowed with a particular authority over artistic matters seek to plan *both* an upcoming, unfinished, imponderable operation *and* the eventual film, with the help of various proxies.

What should be clear, by now, is that visualization is not simply bound by a single filmmaker's mind, but equally by his authority over artistic decisions and his skill in trying to tie intermediary images with the eventual film's concrete image.[5] To take another example, Fawzi Saleh would say that he could see his main protagonist better, as a concrete image, once he had chosen the actor (Ibrahim el-Nagari). This is not just a product of the iconic link between the actor's intermediary casting/fitting images and the final film, but equally of the cumulativeness of artistic decisions, where an initially formless script (e.g., Saqr as written in a scenario) gradually turns into a concrete image (e.g., Ibrahim el-Nagari on-screen). A similar skill is enacted through scouting, and indeed the ability to "concretize" the film's image is equally important to all artistic operations in film production, whether in screenwriting, casting, set design, fitting, shooting, editing, coloring, or mixing. In each case, filmmakers try to anticipate what a given character, shooting location, actor, set, take, color palette, or even a given sound or music track will "look like" in the film.[6]

## Scouting in *Décor* and *Poisonous Roses*

Going back to the opening vignette, one can very clearly sense Farghalli's irritation when Setohy tells him that he has no photograph of the *neyaba* to show. This missing scouting picture was vital to Farghalli in two ways. On the one hand, it would have given him a visual idea about the *neyaba*'s surroundings, which could have helped in organizing his daily logistics (e.g., parking shooting cars, storing equipment). On the other, and perhaps more importantly, it would have helped him show artistic crew members what the shooting location looked like, so that they could decide whether or not it fits their demands, whether it looked good on-screen or not, and eventually, whether Farghalli should secure the location. By virtue of his position as line producer in the ongoing preparations of *Décor*, Farghalli was expected to coordinate all logistical elements necessary to the shooting. This duty involves showing potential shooting locations to the artistic crew to ease their choice, which meant that Farghalli wanted a physical photograph of the *neyaba* as a practical alternative to scouting a location in person. Farghalli's interest in having a scouting picture, then, is not in trying to anticipate what the location will look like on-screen, but to give the artistic crew a good idea about the look of the visual. To describe the building to the artistic crew as Setohy had done, with a mention of the building's shape and color, would not be sufficient in the absence of a photograph to show them physically what the building can look like on camera. And as the scene in which the *neyaba* was to be shot needed to convince the viewer that the main characters were making a deposition to the attorney, taking a building that did not look like a *neyaba*, or did not instill a certain sense of officialdom, would have gone against the artistic crew's demands.

In contrast with Farghalli and Setohy, who had no interest in commenting on scouting pictures beyond their attempts at suiting the artistic crew's demands, Asem Ali and Nihal Farouk (both art directors in *Décor*) commented on scouting pictures by pointing to those elements in the location's design that did or did not match their own aesthetic criteria. Tarek Hefny (cinematographer) would comment on the location's visible light sources, its partitioning, and its colors. Ahmad Abdalla (director) would comment on the location's overall appearance, or on its depictive adequacy for the characters and the plot, or on its suitability to the envisaged camera movements. When everyone was gathered around Farghalli's computer to look at scouting pictures, each crew member presumably saw something different in the same images. To the art directors, they are documents of the way in which the eventual location can be transformed to give it the aspect that they desired. To the cinematographer, they give an idea about the location's natural light and atmosphere, and how it can be adjusted to give a particular texture to the film's image. To the director, they give a general idea of the space in which he can stage his story and re-create his overall vision of the film. While this overarching *ro'ya* is only attributed to the director, it remains evident that crew members in all artistic teams—in cinematography, in art direction, in styling—are involved in visualizing some concrete aspect of the final film with the help of various intermediary images.

With all eyes on Farghalli's scouting pictures, then, one can easily imagine how expectations about the eventual shooting location (and indeed the eventual film) sometimes came into conflict. When choosing one of the main apartments in *Décor*, for example, Asem Ali adamantly refused to shoot in an apartment that both Ahmad Abdalla and Tarek Hefny liked very much. As he explained, the apartment's living room did not have enough "angles" (*zawaya*), by which he meant that wherever the camera would be positioned, the image's background would be a flat wall, which he deemed aesthetically unpleasing by contrast with an apartment that would have several layers in depth. Ali's opposition remained strong whenever he was shown pictures of the apartment in question, and even after he viewed it, which prompted the production team to go on several scouting trips throughout Cairo, in vain. Eventually, Ali gave in to Ahmad Abdalla's initial choice because he recognized the director's ultimate authority over artistic decisions (Figure 3).

Thus, if creative possibilities can seem indefinite to the director on his own, one can only imagine how many more are envisaged by the whole artistic crew, and how their expectations can not only conflict at times but also become mutually unintelligible. This is not a strictly linguistic matter of miscommunication, but a very material difficulty in communicating images that approximate divergent expectations about the

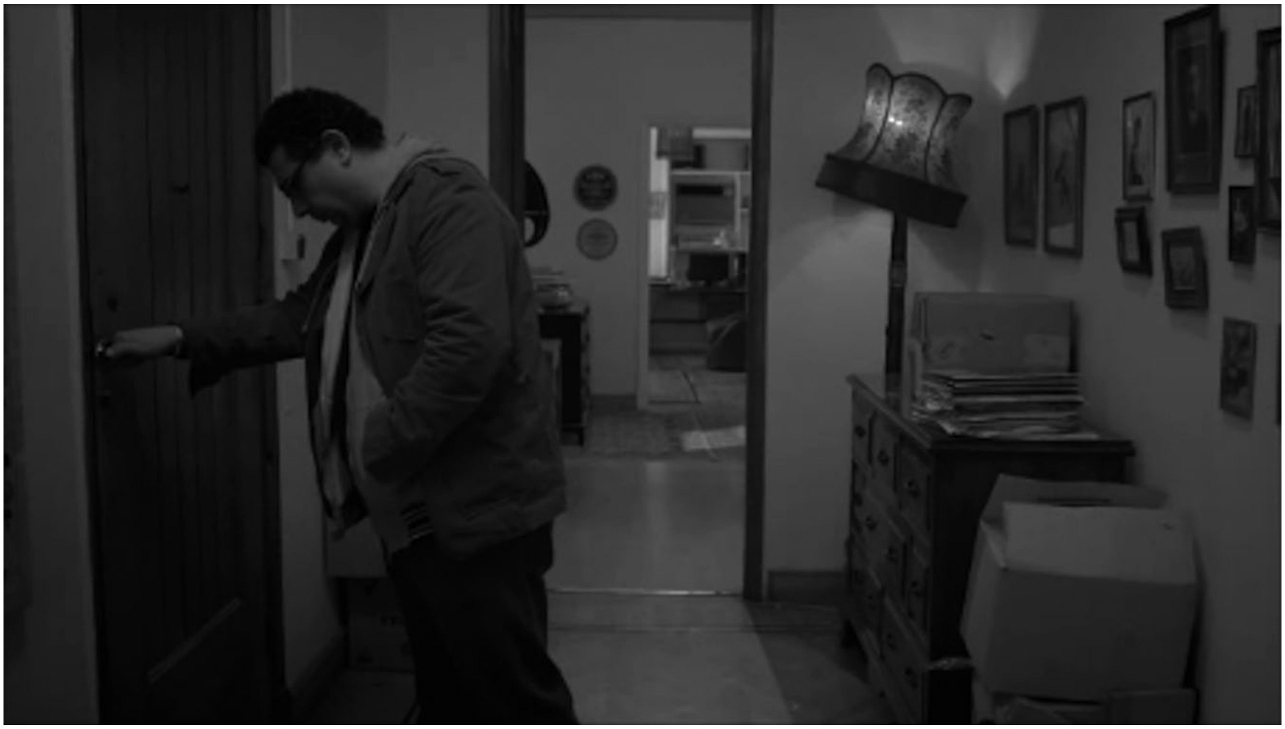
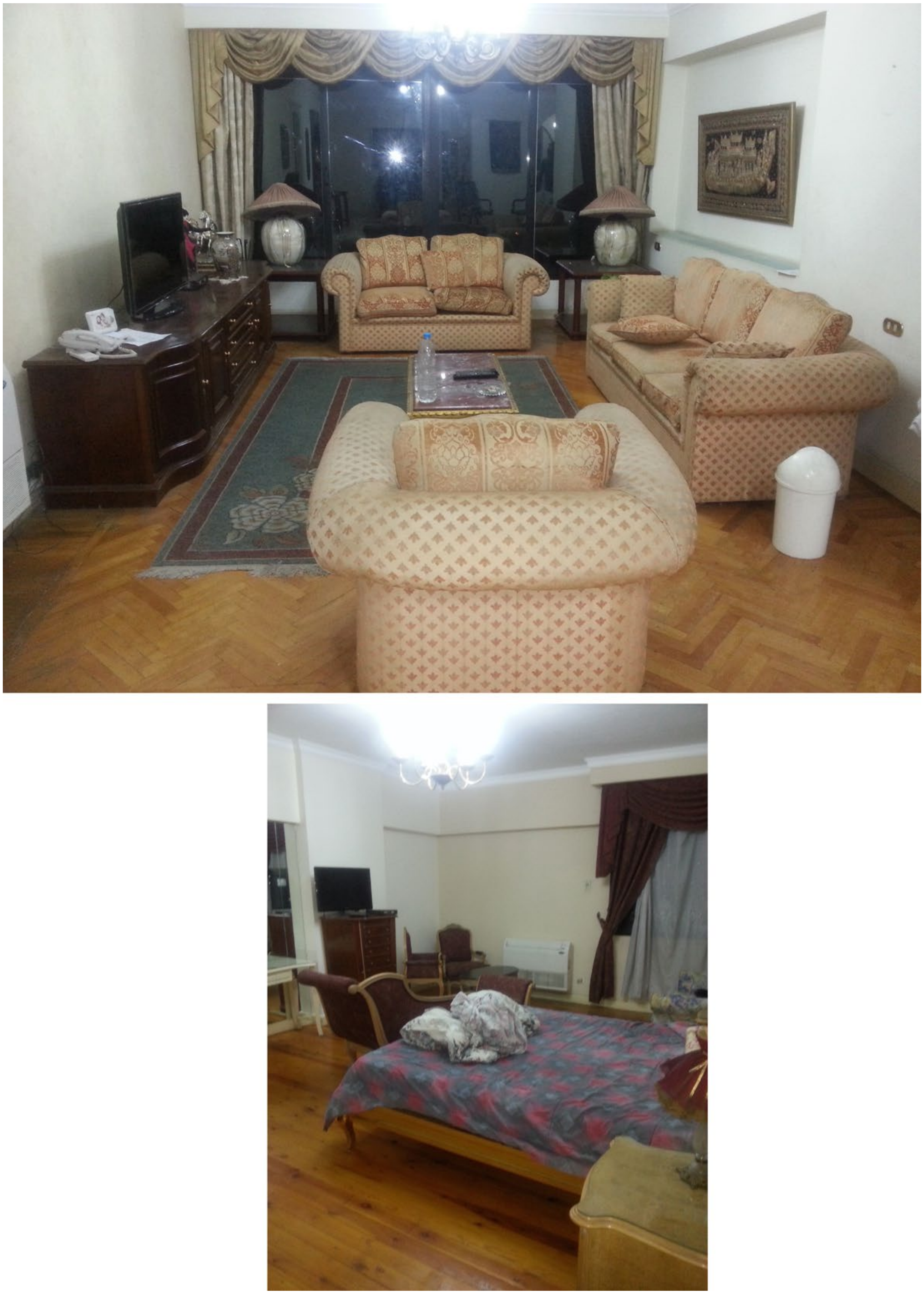


FIGURE 3. Screen still from the contentious apartment in *Décor*, with Mostafa (one of the protagonists, played by actor Maged el-Kedwany) pictured by the door. Courtesy of New Century Film Production.

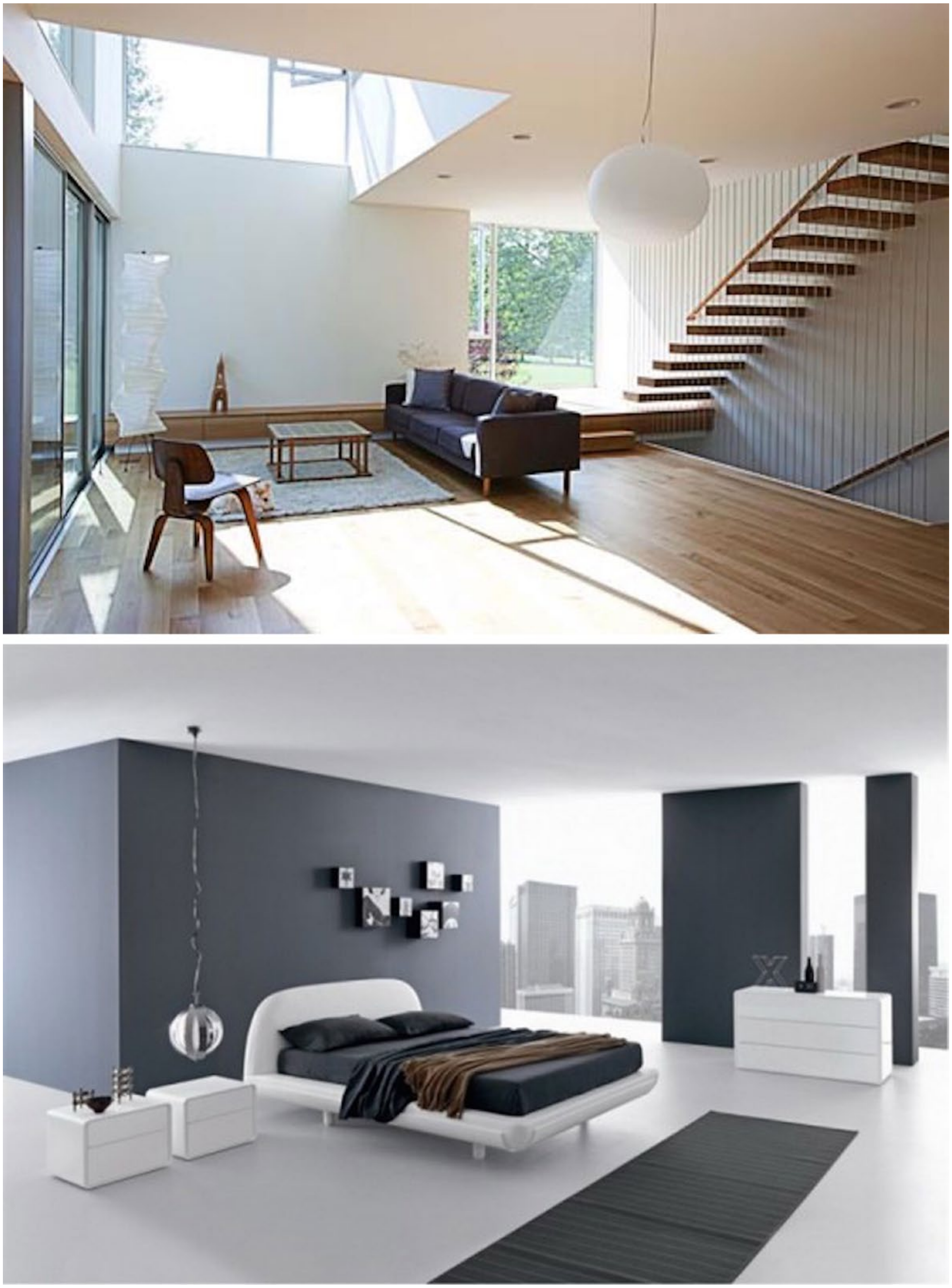
film's visual appearance. The scouting process in *Poisonous Roses*, a film in which I worked as an assistant to the director, illustrates the importance of intermediary images in mediating mutually unintelligible ideas by providing a material arbiter to the discussion (see Strandvad 2011). While we were still scouting, in accordance with the director Fawzi Saleh's wishes, I asked Edward Nabil (production manager) to look for five missing locations with a limited budget in mind. These were a gas station where the protagonist Taheya works at night, a bourgeois bar where Taheya's brother Saqr meets with his middle-class love interest, a hospital where Saqr's lover works, Taheya's apartment in the tanneries, and a "high-class" apartment in Cairo, where Saqr's lover lives. Fawzi Saleh and I gave Nabil some short verbal descriptions of what we wanted in each case, and we provided him with a printed scenario to give him an idea of the movie's world.

A few days later, Nabil triumphantly walked back into the office, boasting that he had secured several locations. When Fawzi Saleh and I asked to see pictures, he showed us about one or two photographs of what he deemed to be "high-class" apartments and one long-shot photograph of a gas station, all taken on his Samsung phone (Figures 4 and 5). Fawzi Saleh swiftly told Nabil that the pictures were insufficient, as he (as a director) had no idea about the look of various angles within each location. Nabil proceeded to verbally describe what each location looked like, but Fawzi Saleh would not have it, for he wanted to see every angle, pictured in each location, and he even methodically demonstrated to Nabil how he should go about photographing potential locations.

When Nabil went on further scouting rounds, he brought back a more furnished portfolio of pictures, which eventually amounted to four or five "high-class" apartments, three hospitals, two gas stations, a few apartments in the tanneries, and a handful of bars. While Fawzi Saleh was impressed by the volume of images, he was not fully satisfied with the "high-class" apartments secured by Nabil, for some were oddly painted, some had unseemly furniture, and some were partitioned in inconvenient ways (in Fawzi Saleh's view). When Fawzi Saleh and I looked at these still pictures, he commented on the apartment's color (which would be difficult to change in set design, given our limited budget), the furniture (which would often need to be changed when props were to be chosen), the bathtub's size (as he had a particular scene in mind that required a big bathtub), the kitchen's position vis-à-vis the dining room (as he wanted enough space to shoot a one-shot take between the kitchen and the living room when Saqr first enters his love interest's house). These comments, which were



FIGURES 4 and 5. Exemplars of Edward Nabil's scouting portfolio, with a living room and a bedroom in a Mohandessin apartment, an upper-end neighborhood in Cairo. Courtesy of Al-Batrik Art Production.



FIGURES 6 and 7. Exemplars of Ahmad Fawzi Saleh's "minimalist" apartments, with a living room and a bedroom. Courtesy of Al-Batrik Art Production.

invariably made by the director whenever we discussed scouting, show how he was aware both of "the next operation" (e.g., how walls would be painted) and the overall film (e.g., how the color palette in the love interest's apartment would match the film's overall palette).

When I showed pictures to Omar Abdelwahab, then the art director, and Houssam Habib, then the cinematographer, they expressed similar views concerning the "high-class" apartments. The artistic crew's indecision led Nabil on more and more scouting rounds. Nabil grew increasingly dissatisfied with this indecision, given that the low-cost yet "high-class" apartments that he had found were being occupied by lenders over time. As he kept telling me, he thought that he had brought photographs of apartments with the exact specifications given by Fawzi Saleh (including a kitchen opening on a dining room, a large bathroom, "high-class" furniture), yet Fawzi Saleh was still not convinced. When I asked Fawzi Saleh what he had in mind, he gave me some evasive verbal detail, by mentioning that he wanted a "minimalist" apartment, a word that I had seen him discuss with Abdelwahab and Adel el-Siwi, his artistic adviser and one of Egypt's foremost contemporary visual artists. Yet I could not make out exactly what Fawzi Saleh wanted until he showed me a digital folder with generic pictures of "minimalist" apartments, which seemed to have been gathered from Google images (Figures 6 and 7). We showed the folder to Nabil, who brought back pictures of new apartments in a similar style. Interestingly, Nabil kept referring to the new apartments as "high-class," just like the old ones, yet the thin epithet that we had all been using masked a vast difference between the two types of locations, in addition to indexing a class difference between Nabil and us.[7]

This example illustrates how "executing" an artistic demand is never a mechanical matter, although executive crew members like Nabil have no say in the final film's appearance. Rather, execution in scouting relies on a representation of what the director or the art director or the cinematographer has in mind, which is admittedly difficult without tangible, visual proxies to anchor the discussion. In this context, it was vital to have enough scouting pictures to show Fawzi Saleh what a location looks like, just as it was necessary to show Nabil some pictures of "minimalist" apartments to better evaluate the kinds of "high-class" apartments that he needed to scout. These intermediary images are not only useful to the individual artist's creation but also to his or her discussions with collaborators. What should be clear here is the obvious asymmetry between the verbal descriptions given by Fawzi Saleh to Nabil and the intermediary images exchanged between them. Indeed, it would seem that the artistic crew will resort to a visual aid whenever it is available, to refine their idea about a location's appearance in the film and to discuss it in more concrete detail. Although trying to estimate the final film's image is not impossible without this aid, it is certainly made easier by it, especially when artistic and executive crew members are (mis)communicating.

It seems that answering Pinney's challenge to examine the visual "in itself" comes to be the prerogative of Egyptian filmmakers. Thus, it becomes relevant to understand how intermediary images are used in the course of filmmaking, not only because they are important in prompting filmmakers to think about the future of the film-in-the-making but also because they are part of the way in which filmmakers try to communicate "the visual." Overall, the necessary negotiations over the film's appearance are mediated by conversations among artistic crew members *and* by intermediary images. Given the particularities of each filmmaking process and its artistic members' aesthetic sensibilities, the particular negotiations that I witnessed in Egypt may not compare to similar negotiations in other film industries, but I would suggest that the role of intermediary images would remain comparable to the extent that the image's materiality matters to a situated anticipation of an unfolding filmmaking process.

## Conclusion

Farghalli's initial question—"what does it look like?"—captures the way in which filmmakers try to anticipate some aspect of the final film by using intermediary images. I have argued throughout this article that examining these images is an important task in media anthropology because, on the one hand, they give a better sense of the instability of the film-in-the-making, and, on the other, they allow filmmakers to imagine, at any point in this unstable process, how the eventual film will look on-screen. This visualization is usually deemed to exist in the director's mind, in Egypt as elsewhere. As Ganti notes, "All of the directors I met asserted that they had their films 'running in their heads,' discussing them in very visual terms, commonly describing onscreen action in relation to camera angles and movements" (2012, 223–24). Ganti's overall analysis centers on social relations of production in Bollywood; Grimaud's earlier monograph, by contrast, follows "the drift of the scenario until shooting, shooting until screening, screening until other scenarios, with its anchoring points, its little displacements, and sudden bifurcations" (2003, 12). This approach allows Grimaud to thicken the description of visual proxies used by Bombay filmmakers to concretely visualize their films, irrespective of individual claims to abstractly "seeing" a movie in one's head. With a similar objective in mind, this article has traced the way in which Egyptian filmmakers try to see and foresee each "artistic" element under their authority in scouting. While this is hypothetically possible on a purely cognitive and verbal level, it is in practice overwhelmingly mediated by intermediary images, which act as material anchors to ongoing discussions concerning the film, both in terms of its production process and its final form.

To be clear, I do not believe that intermediary images are necessary or sufficient to visualize the final film, yet I maintain that these images support the filmmaker's ongoing visualization in a way that is not identical to visualization in their absence. Thus, intermediary images are not only important as material *residues* of a film but also as material *potentials* allowing filmmakers to think through the future of their common endeavor. In this respect, I am trying to speak to ongoing research into the materiality of images to highlight how interpretations of the image's material presence, in the specific case of scouting pictures, are situated between near and far futures in a filmmaking process. To conclude on an example in *Décor*, it was never uncommon to see the art directors Ali and Farouk discussing a particular prop choice verbally, and to agree immediately afterward on sending pictures to each other via smartphone to settle what prop style they were envisioning. These pictures, physically located on their smartphones, are not marginal to what both art directors would have otherwise imagined. Rather, these pictures are integral to the thinking of art directors on props, and their material existence is qualitatively different from whatever mental image might have been produced by their conversation. Imagining the film, here, is materially anchored in intermediary images designed to approximate some aspect of an upcoming artistic operation or, indeed, the final film. This is not just by virtue of the iconic proximity between intermediary images and the film, but also by virtue of reducing the range of artistic possibilities on the artistic crew's minds with concrete, physical images, whose discussion can expose potential misunderstandings, or narrow down creative possibilities. In this way, the polysemic properties of the intermediary image are channeled into a specific, sociotechnical use, whereby the current image, the next filmmaking operation, and the final film's appearance are simultaneously and materially made present to the filmmaker's mind.

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## Notes

[1] Note on transliteration: I use a simplified version of the Middle Eastern Studies Association (MESA) transliteration chart, reflecting the phonetic particularities of Egyptian Arabic and omitting diacritical signs for the sake of readability. Proper nouns, however, are transliterated in the form preferred by my interlocutors, or in the form prescribed by convention (e.g., Youssef Chahine, not Yusef Shahin).

[2] These images are not the only intermediating documents employed in film production—one may cite the scenario, the continuity script's notes, shooting reports, audio files in sound editing, and the image editor's notes among many artifacts playing a similar role. For reasons of space, however, I focus my analysis on intermediary *images*, with the understanding that they similarly mediate between the present and the future of the film-in-the-making.

[3] This is the case whether in Meyer's (2003, 2004) attention to popular Ghanaian cinema and its insertion within local Pentecostal discourses, in Larkin's (2008) attention to the aesthetics of outrage in Nigerian video film, in Ortner's (2013) attention to the discursive links between "generation-X" and indie film production in the United States, in Martin's (2012a, 2012b) attention to the risky labor of stunt workers in Hong Kong cinema, in Wilkinson-Weber's (2005, 2010) attention to costume-making work in Bombay cinema, or in Ganti's (2012) attention to common "production fictions" and professional "boundary-work" in Bollywood. A similar argument could be made about ethnographies of television production (e.g., Ginsburg 1993; Dávila 1999; Abu-Lughod, 2005) and advertising (e.g., Dávila 2001; Mazzarella 2003).

[4] This particular problem has been extensively considered in anthropological studies of photography, whether the photographs in question are made by anthropologists (see Edwards and Hart 2004; Edwards and Morton 2006; Marion 2010) or non-anthropologists (see Frank 2012; Gürsel 2012, 2016; Pinney 2001, 2004, 2005). Without neglecting the image's physical features, these studies tend to show how particular meanings accrue to a given image by virtue of the socially learned skill and knowledge deployed by each interpreter.

[5] Today's film industry is very male dominated, except in certain roles considered "feminine" (e.g., female stars, stylists) or with a significant female representation (e.g., directors, screenwriters, scripts, art directors, editors). Although I can-

not delve in great detail into the gender imbalance in the industry, I wish to make clear that the imbalance is well and truly present and that it colors the way in which certain roles are perceived. To this effect, I have used male pronouns throughout the article with the understanding that most roles are almost exclusively male, while my use of female pronouns in some cases is aimed at alerting the reader to the fact that women are somewhat more evenly represented in some roles in the industry.

[6] In concrete execution, each operation is not exclusively or even primarily visual. After all, a soundtrack consists of sounds and a costume consists of cloth. However, to the extent that these elements are allied within the film's image, they are approached by filmmakers via a variety of intermediary images, as the sound editor, for instance, watches a rough cut of the film to adjust sound volumes "on the image," as it were, and the stylist, in a similar way, is more interested by the "look" of the costume on-screen than by the tactile feeling of the fabric with which it is made.

[7] Indeed, the division of labor between artistic and executive workers in Egyptian film production often maps onto a class distinction, as "executive" workers tend to come from a more popular (*sha'bi*) background, with associated taste hierarchies, whereas "artistic" workers tend to be middle or upper-middle class, with a more educated eye in Bourdieu's (1984) sense.

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