

## IMAGES AS DISCURSIVE PRAXES: MICK JAGGER IN TANGIERS

Jamal Akabli-Abdeladim Hinda

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### Abstract

Images do not simply grow of their own volition in meadows unplanted and unwatered. Inundating screens and even walls, images pervade and invade every inch of our privacy. So pervasive and invasive has this presence become we have grown into the habit of consuming them as though they were born, not made. This naturalness will be denaturalized, denuded and shown for what it is and what it is not; what it reveals and conceals. This article will then tap into the images Mick Jagger circulates while en voyage in Tangiers recording *Continental Drift*. We will demonstrate how images come to be and to mean especially when commented upon, a cultural composition (trans)forming a composite of elements that go into its making and marketing. Before being marketed, images are made, aligned, sequenced, filtered, and brought together to become shots, and the shots to become scenes, the rearrangement of which gave the Rolling Stones rebirth caught on camera in *The Rolling Stones in Morocco*. This documentary film, a cultural rather than a natural composition, under study is impregnated with meanings and nuances one can hear if one listens closely. This film ought not to be «seen and heard, but to be scrutinized and listened to attentively» (Barthes, 1977, p. 68). While they purport to speak for Moroccans, the images in collusion with Mick Jagger speak against things Moroccan.

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### Parole chiave

images, presence, consuming, shots, scenes,  
cultural, natural, nuances, composition, collusion

### Contatti

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An image is a construct, a text with a texture in its own right, lending itself to multifarious interpretations, a woven tissue aestheticised and politicised. There is a predilection on the part of recipients to assume and presume that the images being televised «must be true and factual», and seldom do we wonder at and ponder over «the complex and lengthy process of editing and exclusion which is enacted on these images before they reach our television screens» (Mills, 2003, p. 72). As a matter of fact, images speak more eloquently than words would ever do, for an image is worth a thousand words. Alloula posits that «photography is worse than eloquence... it asserts that there is nothing beyond penetration, nothing is beyond confusion» (1986, p. 37). Though images have their own grammar and speak their own vocabulary, we trust them to duplicate reality because the eyes, ours and the camera's, cannot be belied. Sontag corroborates this idea by putting forth that «reality has always been interpreted through the reports given by images» (2005, p. 119). Even when reality is said to be recorded as such, «there will still be representations for so long as a subject... casts his gaze towards a horizon» (p. 120). Images are necessarily reflective of «the language of an interpretive community, and can be interpreted by the language of that speech community». (Barthes, 1977, p. 35). The language of stills, images, is also the language of stealth. This is so much the case that being filmed is tantamount to being robbed (Sontag, 2005, p. 123). The camera, Scott informs us, is an «agent provocateur» (1999, p. 319) which «colonizes reality, takes possession of it, turns it into the impotence of images, something without the right to reply, something subservient to the

photographer's gaze» (pp. 19-20). In his *Camera Lucida*, which is in reality a *Camera Obscura*, Barthes describes the power inherent in cameras that are used to «restore what is abolished by time, by distance» (p. 111). Their power resides, for one, in their capacity «to conceal elusively the preparation to which he subjects the scene to be recorded», (Barthes, 21) and second in obscuring the presence of he who stands behind the tripod. The subject being filmed becomes an object-to-be-possessed and «fitted into schemes of classification» (Scott, 1999, p. 121). In Barthesian parlance, «the emission and reception of the message» underpinning a documentary on third world societies «is a matter of studying human groups, of defining motives and attitudes, and of trying to link the behavior of these groups to the social totality of which they are a part» (1977, p. 15). The photographic images become iconographic in the sense that the photographed sets in train a chain of thoughts, «of associations of ideas» (Barthes, 1977, p. 22). Documentaries and images are mutually dependent and «find themselves in a palimpsest relationship» (Sontag, 2003, p. 68). without it being possible for either one to function to its best in the absence of the other. While an image, a shot, is an indispensable constituent of the documentary, the documentary is a stock of shots assembled, edited and presented in such an order, a disorder, as to produce the desired effect which is none other than a stock of stereotypes constitutive of «the perceptual... and the cultural message» (Barthes, 1977, p. 36).

Barthes claims that though «the photograph... can choose its subject, its point of view and its angle, it cannot intervene with the subject» (1977, p. 43). The choice of the subject to be shot, the angle from which to shoot and the type of the shot are ideologically loaded, and so Barthes' claim is groundless. These informed choices are indicative of what the shooter has in mind and in sight which he translates into shots that make scenes, and scenes that make the documentary. A shot is to a scene what a word is to sentence, and a scene is to a film what a sentence is to a paragraph. Order and sense can be made out of the chaotic arrangement of the shots, which speak a language of their own. A man in tatters, another riding a donkey, and hordes of women standing still watching a ceremony from their doorsteps are seemingly random shots deliberately selected and «shot through with intentions» (Adorno, 1993, p. 402). The camera is out there at the right time to eye it all as if «that is the way it is», giving the musical context an *effet reel*, «a character of authenticity» (p.403) and a naturalized tone which is in fact culturally laden and driven. Instead of being authentic, the scene is meticulously sifted out and sliced to communicate the illusion that time has stood still since Jones visited these people or rather these tribes. The feeling one gathers from such shots is that the people stand in awe transfixed and petrified unaware of what is taking place. The camera is partly «an extension of the subject» and partly «a potent means of acquiring it, of gaining control over it» (Sontag, 2003, p. 121). The voiceover comes in to further this effect by anchoring the tradition of Jajouka in the remote past, thus painting it with a mythical hue. Davies attributes the dance styles to a long held tradition handed down by the Romans (1993, p. 50). The dancing rites were inherited from the Roman festival Lupercalia, which was observed in celebration of fertility. When Morocco embraced Islam, the pagan rites were incorporated into the religious Feast of Sacrifice. The Minotaur, a half-god and half-beast, is believed to possess the power to fertilize barren women if he beats them with a whip or a stick. Reference to this pagan practice is made in *Julius Caesar*: «Forget not in your haste, Antonius, to touch Calpurnia; for our elders say the barren, touched in this holy chase, shake off their sterile curse» (Shakespeare, Act I, Scene 2). This quest for the mythical is no coincidence given the fact that Britpop has always been accused of «hankering after a mythical imagined exclusively white past» (Huq, 2006, p. 148).

Ironically but understandably so, camera tactics have tactfully and tacitly granted a handful of singers the upper hand and the ultimate say over the majoritarian natives on their own turf. From the very outset, it is made crystal clear that the central figure will be none other than Mick Jagger, who straddles at one and the same time the position of a singer and an expert interpreter and reporter. The «privileged position» he occupies, according to Talal Asad, does not compel him in any way to «engage in a genuine dialogue with those he once lived with» (1986) and now speaks about or rather against. His role, very much like that of an ethnographer, lies not simply in observing and describing the native's culture, but also in interpreting and inscribing it in a system of thought under the auspices of his camera (Robben, 2007, p. 446). His status as a star gives him «an additional dimension of power and legitimacy to evaluate... judge... and sanction» (Quail et al, 2005, p. 67) the natives.

Although the title insinuates that Morocco will be the hub of the uncoiling and unfolding experience, the focus is metonymically displaced, placing the Western subject at the heart of the story. This is made apparent through his filling in much, if not all, of the space of the screen and his consuming more time than is allotted to the saviors of the Ruling, excuse the lapsus, Rolling Stones. Jajouka imputes, Attar explains, a great deal of good on the rolling and falling Stones raising them from the abyss to eminence and prominence. The name Jajouka, Attar adds, means «something good come (sic.) to you». Throughout the whole program, the camera is programmed in such a way as would eventually make of Mick Jagger a titan and Bachir Attar a

nobody. The all-pervasive and invasive presence of Jagger in a territory over which he assumes an all-knowing expertise reduces Attar to a mere informant and relegates him to the background. Deceitful as he is, Jagger tries to atone for his overwhelming omnipresence and propitiate his intrusion in this milieu by ascribing it to the will(ingness) of the natives to have him present, notice the pun, and represent them «by transforming it into a putative appeal on the part of the (ex)colonized land and people» (Spurr, 1999, p. 27). Because the trauma incurred upon the forced loss of the colonies is so vivid, neither can it be suppressed nor surpassed, it resurfaces in the vocative ‘appel au secouuuuurs’ of the natives. The eerie inconsistency of Jagger’s discourse on Morocco is that, having spent a three-day sojourn in Tangiers, a city in the extreme north of Morocco, he speaks as though he had been living here for ages. The simulacrum effect the camera produces is worth noting, for the camera shuttles between Jagger, who speaks from Tangiers, and the desert, which lies to the extreme south of the country. The impression this shuttling induces is that Jagger is in the desert, leading to the foregone conclusion that «this is how it was» (Barthes, 1977, p. 44).

Jagger is posing cozily on sofa, legs crossed and hands gesticulating in confidence and in answer to the questions the interviewer poses. His disinterest, posture and gesticulations all betray his orientalist stance and ethnographic stand. Crapanzano explicates that an ethnographer’s, Jagger’s in our case, «disinterest, his objectivity, his neutrality are in fact undercut by his self-interest - his need to constitute his authority... to create an appropriate distance between himself and the foreign events he witnesses» (Crapanzano, 1986, p. 53) and reports on. That thing he came for, to do, is not as he ostensibly tries to sell it simply a ‘thing,’ but it is rather a mission which is part and parcel of a greater enterprise of looting, usurping and pilfering and not even acknowledging the (mis)deed. Making light of his being here and poking fun at the inarticulate aborigines are stratagems he uses and misuses to legitimise his presence and cloak his orientalist leanings. Jagger does not take it on himself to speak for himself, but also appoints himself as a spokesperson on behalf of Attar, his kin and kindred. In Faucouldian parlance, «in deciding to say something, we must as speakers focus on a particular subject, we must at the same time make a claim to authority for ourselves in being able to speak about this subject» (Mills, 2003, p. 57). In a rejoinder, Said makes it plain that «Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf» (1978, p. 28). Jagger despicably bites the hand that feeds him. He disparages the musicians who were generous enough to welcome him in their midst and treat him like one of their own. In return for their generosity, he refers to them as little more than tribesmen. In fact, his insistence on the appellation ‘tribe’ is far from arbitrary. Huq points out that «tribes are social groupings associated with third world societies, primitivism and savagery» (2006, p. 27). His misnomer dwarfs Moroccans to the state of primates in quest of his light, his civilising mission. In relegating Attar’s troupe to being no more than a bunch of backward folklorists, Jagger elevates himself, his own kind, to the status of artists. Having donned «a strange disguise», the lyrics of the song *Continental Drift* tell us that the singer, fearful lest his manoeuvres be dismantled, pleads time and again in a refrain so the Moors would «open the door» and «let the light pour over». Whose light is it? It must be the light of the civilising torch he brings along to illuminate the hitherto dark corners of Africa/Barbary (Conrad, 1995). These «people», as he condescendingly bandies them, come across as having no name to speak of, no voice of their own to speak with. They only exist by virtue of his copresence amongst them. Jajouka and «many of its legends», Davis daringly claims, «originated with foreigners» (1993, p. 3).

What Jagger is offering us is an alibi for being where he is. Having established Jagger as a figure with an incomparable authority, the camera travels skywards in a horizontal pan recalling the trajectory of the plane only to stop awhile on the first tribesmen whose features one can hardly make out. Jagger’s individuality cedes way to an overarching and oversweeping generalisation applicable across the board to all Moroccans. This effacement calls to mind Matisse’s oeuvre *The Riffian*, a tableau defacing and effacing all and every distinct feature of the Moroccan ‘object’ being portrayed. The only Moor the camera zooms in on cannot speak to us because he is denied speech. He is caught off guard perching in the act of piping at the mouth of a gaping cave, his seemingly natural habitat. The Marabar caves of India, where Mrs. Moore is said to have been raped in Forester’s *A Passage to India*, are here recaptured, lending this place an exotic and familiar air. Were it not for his being there, we would have been misled to think the voice was coming from the depths of the cave. The fable woven around this is worth rehashing. Legend has it that «people stayed out of caves, since they were entrances to the underworld realm of the Djinn» (Davis, 1993, p. 4). This caveman is everything that Jagger is not. Having just landed from the civilised world he represents, the latter is sitting on his comfortable sofa busy furnishing us with mysterious accounts and untold tales. The Moroccan piper, like many other denizens, is sitting on stone oblivious of the roughness. He melts into the scene of which he

is part as though he were nothing but another rock that cannot stir, yet one blessed with the power to stir when and only when Westerners upturn it. As it is the case with people Oriental, Jajoukans idle time away because they have nothing better to do than to «sit on their mountain, smoke kif, and play their music» (Davies, 1993, p. 14) the way any loafer would. As the camera cranes to a high angle shot of the cave(man), the first man of Hegel, the subject/object of the shot shrinks to an easy prey presaging the susceptibility and vulnerability of his kind compared to the might Jagger is imbued on a terrain not his in the first place. The viewer is left with the indelible memory that the caveman lives therein and, having come out of his hideout, is now basking in the sunlight which Jagger pours over him. The caveman makes a distant frenetic noise which will become distinct and make sense only when mixed with Jagger's organised and meaningful music. Being a mostmodernist text par excellence, music «opposes, celebrates and promotes the texts it steals from» (Quail et al, 2005, p. 78) aided and abetted by the «technological developments» (Huq, 2006, p. 135) which make stealth go down unnoticed.

The voice of which the guardian of the cave is dispossessed is restored, albeit momentarily, to the head of the tribe. The first thing one learns about Bachir Attar is that he has been to New York before, and so he is worth hearing from because he has tasted of the cup of civilisation. Attar, one should be intimated, was married to Cherie Nutting, «an American photographer who took over Paul Bowles's apartment when he died in 1999» (Turner, 2008). Nutting later became the band's manager and eventually parted ways with Attar. After his father died, Attar led the Master Musicians of Jajouka, a group William Burroughs christened as a 4,000 year old rock and roll band, during one of their most successful phases. Dressed in the fashion of his forebears, Attar introduces himself in broken English welcoming the new-old guests to his dwelling place. As he utters his words, the pathway in the background is contrasted with the runway the mammoth aircraft is landing on, accentuating the divide between «the civilisational us» and «the extra-civilisational them» (Huntington, 1996, p. 129). Such discrepancies are worth recording «because they make good material for a spectacle» as «they can be easily staged, spectacularized, mocked or ridiculed» (Quail et al, 2005, p. 78). The sight of the jumbo plane as opposed to Attar's abode foregrounds this divisive chasm between us and them, a divide which cannot be bridged, yet one that must be crossed over to be brought home. No musical form other than rock and roll can «clearly cross geographical and territorial borders» (Huq, 2006, p. 135) as well as cultural ones, and leave unchecked and unsuspected. Being thus «sent on a wandering journey of endless mediation», Adorno would say, music alone is blessed with the power «to bring home the impossible», (1993, p. 404) to pillage without it being chided. Attar, having being transfixed, is immobile, static and, therefore, an easy mark. We can easily deduce that his standing like a statue, legs crippled because of the medium shot, conforms to the instructions he has been issued by the cameraman, whose complicity in broad daylight one can fathom. It is revelatory to take stock of the way Attar's freedom is contained and constrained within the claustrophobic shot whilst Jagger revels in being free to move as he wishes and to revile those who have magnanimously hosted him.

Even in lauding, praising and eulogising the Orient, as it were, lies latent the gaps and inconsistencies characterising most, if not, all Western canonised narratives as appears from Said's critique of the Orientalist package of thoughts (1978). Pictures of Tangiers in black and white flood the screen as if the passage of time means naught in the eyes of the city-dwellers, who have not changed a bit. This constancy of time is a consistent theme in writings which make of the Orient their staple food. In retelling the history of this place, the narrator stops at those moments where West meets East as though what makes the history of this part of the world worth its while are the Westerners – Matisse, Delacroix, Burroughs and Bowles among many others – who settled down here. History begins and ends when figures of this stature come and go. The picturesqueness of Tangiers, unlike the wilderness besieging it, emanates from its having become a contact zone where West and East meet in an accolade of affinity that has changed its facade for the better. Mary Louis Pratt contends that such encounters between historically and geographically separated peoples creates an accultured space (1992, p. 6).

In the eyes of Wharton, Tangiers «swarms with people in European clothes, there are English, French and Spanish signs above its shops» (1920, p. 23) The alluring city and the luring voiceover, by no coincidence a female's – an Edith Wharton –, is heard commenting on what she describes as «the liberal and exotic atmosphere of Tangiers», oscillating between «contempt for what is familiar and... fear of novelty» (Said, 1978, p. 59). It is no strange happening that the voice happens to be that of a female commenting on what appears to be a patriarchal society by distinction. Liberal as Tangiers is said to have become thanks to its proximity to Europe and its closer contact with Europeans, its alleys distinctively teem with men and only men marching to and from. The only visible female is a shrouded loner who does not look like an emancipated woman judging from Western standards, which makes her a weakling whose solitude points to the multitude of her kind in Harem circles. Her being thus veiled from head to toe adds to the exoticism and,

some would say, the eroticism of the scene forcing the recursive question of where the others have disappeared. The answer is self-evident from the many oriental accounts one can glean of a harem defined by its confinement, concealment, imprisonment and oversexuality. Throughout the mono-directional talk show, women are salient by their absence, absenting and exclusion. As much as this is a sign of an East caught in the fetters of patriarchy, profligacy, depravity and debauchery, it could be construed as a beckon of resistance. Foucault asserts that «where there is power, there is resistance». Surveying is all about scopophilia. That the Western voyeur is denied this privilege is in and of itself an act of defiance. Visual observation serves as the kernel of the observer's role as an eye-witness and «though the subjects are looked at, they are forbidden from looking back» (Spurr, 1999, p. 13). The power the camera is invested with is here divested as it fails to unveil that which the woman chooses to hide. What is even more disturbing for the voyeur is that his gaze is turned against him. The woman can boast of seeing him without her being seen in an inadvertant coup de theatre that strips him naked before the all-clad precluding object of the gaze, and «having himself become an object to be seen, he is dispossessed of his own gaze» (Alloula, 1986, p. 14).

To make up for his short stay, Jagger solicited Paul Bowles, the American novelist and music collector who had been living in Morocco since the thirties. Fieldwork, one ought to be reminded, is largely attendant, dependent and incumbent upon the encounter between the inquisitor and a native-like participant straddling an insider-outsider position. These informants «are ideal cultural interpreters because they have the ability to view several worlds», (Robben, 2007, p. 443) their world, the native's and a blend of the two. This is one of two strategies at the disposal of the ethnographer. The long field experience of the informant, an «old and particularly knowledgeable» (Beattie, 1994, p. 88) one, makes up for a life spent away from the terrain (p. 86). Another stratagem is for the explorer to take an active and participative part in the life of the community he seeks to understand in compliance with the dictates of fieldwork «through close personal acquaintance» (p. 39). However, before any of this takes lieu, the visitor, Jagger in this case, bumps into «urchins, beggars and hustlers» (Davies, 1993, p. 17) who imprtune him every now and then. The moment the band sets foot in Morocco, they are approached on every side by Moroccans ready to serve their masters. The master-child, master-servant, master-slave, master-apprentice dichotomy is once more revived. Jagger's tea-drinking ceremony side by side with Bowles is very telling. He does not only drink tea, but he also listens avidly to stories Bowles is telling. In so doing, he also takes on some of the presumably incontestable authority Bowles possesses and delegates.

It is common practice for cameras to take «us on journeys we did not expect» (Scott, 1999, p. 317). This device procures inaccessible experiences of the sort we are relating, and ones the audience can relate to because of their familiarity and defamiliarisation. The lenses of the camera zoom in on a poster that reads as follows: «Brian Jones Presents the Pipes of Pan». The myth goes that Pan is the god of flocks and pastures. That the name of Jones appears first indicates the position of authority and superiority he allocates and arrogates to himself over Jajouka, which is visually placed underneath his name. The way the headline is phrased is reminiscent of Jones' album when he first came to Morocco. Though dead, his legacy still lives on. Upon reading the title of the album, one is prompted to expect to find Jones on the field in keeping with the promise made apriori to present Jajouka, but as it turns out the musicians are on their own «drumming, beating, striking», (Mowitz, 2002) and expertly reporting on things Jajoukan.

The effect the camera produces is achieved through its recourse to pastiche, as we have demonstrated. Pastiche, one of many distinct features of postmodernism, hinges on the juxtaposition and superimposition of incongruous elements onto a canvas which the screen substitutes. The screen is turned into a patchwork which shuttles between the ubiquitous Westerners and the less present natives. This insistence on the part of the director on Jagger's presence is only equated by his persistence to screen the natives out. This double discourse grows more insidious when the natives are denied speech, and when they do speak, they do so in broken utterances in the language of Shakespeare. The only voice that makes any sense in this polyphony, this monophony we should say, is that of Jagger's, for his stands out as the voice of reason, composure and wisdom.

The spectral vision the camera provides to the «stay-at-homes» (Sontag, 2003, p. 131) makes it possible for the sofa travelers, the couch potatoes we mean, to project themselves into a distant locale beyond their reach. In the discourse of cameras, «anything can be said, and any purpose served» (p. 137). Thus, far from being whole and sound, reality is never rendered in its entirety, and its fragmentation has been caught in this essay. Filmic seeing is then an act of mutilation, of dimemberment, as Sontag prefers to call it (p. 135). The camera licenses to itself the right to be there where it wants to see «the whole by means of the part» (p. 133). Therefore, not all members of a given community need to cross borders to experience what it really feels like to live elsewhere, for the documentary film supplants the pleasures of mobility, allowing viewers to vicariously identify with the fieldworker. As such, the documentary interpellates the affective side

of the viewers, who yearn to time-travel to a world apart, the world of their ancestors. This voyage en Orient, as Nerval calls it, is seen as a healing process, therapeutically enabling the voyager, a voyeur, to surmount his anguish through sentimentalising and romanticising the encounter with the natives. Having tried at some length to convince ourselves and the readers that camera effect is incongruous with reality, we need to acknowledge that it is at times more real than reality itself (Sontag, 2003, p. 141).

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