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EXPERIMENTS IN DEVOTION ONLINE: THE YOUTUBE *KHUṬBA*

Abstract
This paper explores what I call "online experiments in ethical affect" through an analysis of one popular Islamic genre: the short video segments of Friday sermons (*khuṭub*, s. *khuṭba*) placed on the video-sharing website YouTube. In my discussion of this media form, I give particular attention to the kind of devotional discourse and ethical socius that is enacted online around these taped performances: notably, the practices of appending written comments to specific videos, offering responses to comments left by others or criticisms directed at either the preacher or other commentators, and the act of creating links between *khuṭba* pages and other web-based content. In examining these practices, I want to look at the way some of the norms of ethical and devotional comportment associated with the *khuṭba* in the mosque carry over to the Internet context of *khuṭba* listening/viewing while also engendering novel forms of pious interaction, argument, and listening.

A great deal of scholarly attention has been given to the role of the Internet in enabling new forms of association, interaction, and debate, in changing both economies of knowledge and the possibilities and conditions of collective action. Following these lines of inquiry, scholars of the Middle East have explored the use of the Internet as a vehicle for religious and political mobilization, including as a tool of militant recruitment by jihadist groups.[1] Another body of literature has focused on how mediatization in general and the Internet in particular have reshaped the sociology of Islamic knowledge, including the norms and institutions of religious authority.[2] While these issues are extremely important, in this paper I want to explore another key dimension of the Internet, one not easily examined through the sort of analytical lens that has generally governed the study of religion and politics online. My analysis takes as its starting point less a particular content than a style of online navigation, one strongly indebted to and encouraged by the technological architecture of the medium itself.[3] I will characterize this style as follows: to enter the Internet can mean that one embarks on an adventure, that one sets off across a quixotic, unpredictable landscape whose every twist and turn presents not the threads of an unfolding discourse or the development of a deeper understanding but the sudden surprise of an affect, the pleasure or shock of an unexpected discovery. To

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be online can bring a sense of vertiginous mobility, an urge to jump again and again, shifts too quick for the unfolding of an argument but enough to allow for the triggering of a fleeting sensation or psychic charge—a burst of excitement, terror, fear, silliness, sadness, sentimentality, amazement, and so on. Notably, the common expression used to describe the act of using the Internet—"web surfing"—points to this phenomenological feature of the medium's architecture (it is not web cycling, or web crawling, or web fishing—riding waves is exhilarating and unpredictable). This solicitation to set off toward what might amaze, or horrify, or enchant is particularly pronounced on sites like YouTube, where much of the content is composed of short fragments extracted from much longer productions.

In the discussion that follows, I explore how this functional possibility of the medium, this invitation inherent in its architectural form, is giving shape to particular styles of online Islamic devotional practice. To interrogate such practices, I start by examining some short video segments of Friday sermons (*khuṭba*, p. *khuṭub*) placed on YouTube, and then turn to some other video materials frequently accessed by visitors to sermon sites. What identifies and unites the variety of video clips I will talk about is not simply the fact of being linked together by the online tracks left by users; rather, what links and relates these clips to each other is a feature ascribed to them by their viewers, the quality of being *muʾaththir*. *Muʾaththir*, from the root *ʾathara*, embraces among its multiple meanings such ideas as effective, affecting, moving, emotional, impassionate, stirring, exciting, a kind of impact on the senses that—in accord with the noun form of *ʾathara*—leaves a track, trace, touch, taste, or imprint (specifically, on the heart or soul). Over the last twenty or so years, the term has increasingly come into use in the field of Islamic preaching, or what is called *daʿwa*, to indicate the effectiveness of a speaker's rhetoric in eliciting pious emotions from his or her listeners.[4] A *muʾaththir* sermon brings those who listen to it close to God by instilling in them such ethical and devotional dispositions as humility (*khushūʿ*), regret (*nadm*), fear (*khawf* or *taqwā*), hope (*rajāʾ*), states of the heart that within Islamic ethical traditions may lead one to the experience of pious tranquility (*itmiʾnān*) and a stillness of the soul (*sakīna*).[5] On video-sharing websites such as YouTube, the term *muʾaththir* (as well as a few other related terms) can often be found in the titles of *khuṭba* segments and serves to indicate a clip's capacity for engendering pious affects.

In my discussion here, I examine the kind of devotional discourse and ethical socius that is enacted online around these media artifacts: notably, the practices of appending written comments to specific videos, offering responses to comments left by others, and creating linkages between *khuṭba* pages and other web-based content. In examining these practices, I look at the way some of the norms of ethical and devotional comportment associated with the *khuṭba* in the mosque carry over to the Internet context of *khuṭba* listening/viewing while also engendering novel forms of devotional expression. These devotional repertoires, I argue, reflect the way sermon audition, in its shift from mosque to website, has been accommodated to the architecture of the Internet environment, to its specific modes of navigation, linking, and retrieval. Within this medium, Muslim surfers shift between sermons and other *muʾaththir* content (much of it not explicitly Islamic), seeking out new possibilities and sources of pious affect. In exploring this practice, I interrogate how this recourse to such heterogeneity of audio-visual materials by pious web surfers[6] shapes the devotional imagination, the sounds and images that

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mediate one's relationship to God. How do the forms of imagery and vocal performance accessed online by Muslims who use the Internet as a devotional medium impact upon the structure of affects that bind one to God? This question concerns the political geography of Islamic forms of knowledge and experience as it is refashioned in the context of new technologies of mediation.

Let me at the outset say a little about the research strategy I have employed in this paper. Although the analysis I present here draws on ethnographic research I undertook in Egypt in 2008, my research interests at the time were focused primarily on political blogging and only secondarily on styles of Internet *khuṭba* use. For that reason, the discussion that follows centers far more around styles of discourse and interaction *enacted online* than it does on the way those online interactions fit within people's daily lives. Although the websites addressed in my analysis are visited primarily (though not exclusively) by Internet users from the Middle East and North Africa, my inquiry leaves largely unaddressed the sociological dimensions of the practices I describe, including differences of nationality, issues of class, and questions about censorship and accessibility. Instead, I focus primarily on the interpretive protocols that are emerging around Internet-based Islamic sermons, evident in the styles of discourse, evaluation, and self-presentation performed by *khuṭba*-site visitors. Much as one might study the norms of religious expression governing the space of the mosque (and recognizing that norms are always contested and at times ignored), my aim is to explore how the Internet is being fashioned by some of its Muslim users as a unique devotional space with its own forms of expression and argument. One of the defining characteristics of the web-based discourse I examine is the prominence of a language of pious affect, one that differs in interesting ways from the forms of affective expression used by many Muslims in the context of devotional practice in the mosque. Importantly, in exploring the use of this language online, I am not making claims about the religious sentiments of actual individuals—something to which the analyst never has direct access, either online or off—but about the styles of emotional expression adopted by *khuṭba* consumers online that make the Internet a unique site of devotional practice.

VIRTUAL ARCHITECTURES AND MORAL SPACE

Let me start this discussion of Islamic sermons on the Internet with what may seem like a deflating observation. Among the many genres of writing, speech, and performance that have proliferated on Islamic Internet sites, the *khuṭba* has been one of the less common. Some of the reasons for the relative scarcity of web *khuṭub* are not difficult to fathom. First, until very recently the technical capacities of the Internet had made the management of large video files slow and difficult. Audio podcasts of *khuṭub* are more easily produced and circulated, and such recordings are usually used in conjunction with a portable listening device (the iPod) so as to allow the listener to undertake other tasks while listening. A second feature of the Internet that has mediated against the widespread presence of *khuṭub* relates to the particular styles of storing, circulating, and accessing content that characterize the medium. The medium makes available a vast ocean of quickly accessible and readily applicable content. Popular Islamic websites like Islamway or Islamonline exemplify and exploit these dimensions of Internet functionality. The vast archives on such sites privilege short, quickly perusable, topic-specific

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information and therefore highlight such genres as fatwas, news briefs, short articles, thematized chat rooms, indexed compilations of *tafsīr* and *fiqh*, and so on. This is not to say that websites offering complete *khuṭub* are not found. Indeed, both Islamway and Islamonline include audiofiles of *khuṭub*, though they appear to draw far fewer visitors than do other areas of the sites.[7] My point is simply that the duration and formal requirements of the *khuṭba* present greater obstacles to its reproduction on the Internet than do some other genres of Muslim discourse and performance.

One *khuṭba*-based genre that does enjoy great popularity among Muslim Internet users, and that I explore here, consists of short video segments of Friday *khuṭub* on YouTube.[8] These *khuṭba* segments are usually between one and ten minutes long, and have been placed on the site by someone with a YouTube account. Such accounts are available free of charge to anyone wishing to either post videos on the site or append responses in the "Comments" section located at the bottom of the video window. In the upper right hand corner of the YouTube screen is a link to the YouTube account of the person who put the video on the site. This personal account page itself includes a number of different sections, including links to collections of favorite videos, comments by visitors, and whatever personal biographical information the page owner has decided to provide. All YouTube visitors who have left comments on a page belonging to the website must have personal YouTube accounts, accessible through a link embedded in each comment. In other words, the video segment serves as a jump-off site where viewers can explore each other's personalized collections of audio, visual, and graphic material.

In order to begin to explore the forms of sociability and devotional practice such *khuṭba* sites now give occasion to, I turn to one highly popular example, a sermon segment by the Egyptian preacher Muhammad Hassan hosted on YouTube and bearing the title "A Beautiful, Tearful, Fear-Inspiring Segment from the Honorable Shaykh Muhammad Hassan" (*maqṭaʿ rahīb wa-jamīl wa-mubakī li-l-faḍīlat al-shaykh al-ḥabīb Muḥammad Ḥassān*).[9] Throughout the 1990s, the cassette-recorded sermons of Muhammad Hassan were among the most popular of the genre in both Egypt and the Gulf. As satellite television stations took off at the end of that decade, Hassan began to appear regularly on Islamic programs and has continued to garner an ever-widening audience base. In 2007, after having left the Egyptian satellite channel al-Nass, following a rift with the channel's management over their refusal to ban ʿAmr Khalid from appearing on the channel, Hassan founded his own station, al-Rahma.[10] Hassan is one of the best-known exponents and practitioners in the Middle East of what has come to be called the *salafī* trend in Islamic preaching, namely, those preachers who strongly emphasize, often to the exclusion of other social and political concerns, the importance of adhering to Prophetic example in appearance and comportment and who are commonly identified by their long beards and white *jalabiyya*s.[11]

Since his first entry into preaching, Hassan has been known for his mellifluous voice as well as his ability to engender powerful emotional responses from his listeners with his impassioned rhetoric.[12] The "fear-inspiring" *khuṭba* segment on YouTube, like many of his best-known sermons, concerns death and Judgment and consists largely of Hassan's recitation of certain Qurʾanic verses where these themes are found. Besides Hassan's voice and image, the video highlights the collective weeping of those assembled in the mosque. This video has been visited by close to three million Internet users since it was

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first posted around three years ago, making it one of the most accessed videos of Islamic preaching on the YouTube site. The 1,300 "comments" on the video page provide an entrée into thinking about the practices through which such video consumption occurs. While only a small proportion of those who visit the page leave comments, they do give an indication of the form of activity within which the viewing of the video takes place for many. By far the most common type of response left in the "comments" section is the supplicatory prayer, or *duʿāʾ*. The following, taken from the site, are typical:

Allāhuma nasʾālak riḍak wa-l-janna [God, we ask for your contentment with us and for our entry into heaven].[13]
Allāhu akbār. Mā shāʾa allāh. Allāhuma irḥamunā wa-ighfar lanā innaka anta al-ghafūr al-raḥīm [God is great. May God's will be served. God, have mercy on us and forgive us, for You are the Merciful Forgiver].
Allāhuma ijalunā minʾahl jannatak [God, place us among those destined for Your heaven].

More than two out of three of the comments on the video are *duʿāʾ* of this sort, though many of these also include prayers and praise for Muhammad Hassan himself: *bārak allāh fī al-shaykh wa-razzaquhu al-ikhlās fī al-qawl wa-l-ʿamal* (God bless the shaykh and endow his words and deeds with sincerity) and *allāhuma iḥfaẓ al-shaykh* (God protect the shaykh). In the context of the Friday mosque *khuṭba*, such supplicatory expressions are continuously elicited from the congregation and are repeated in a crescendo at its conclusion by both preacher and listeners. Within Islamic homiletic traditions, they are the movements of the tender heart when, with both fear and love, one draws near to God aided by the pious speech of the preacher. Relocated here onto the YouTube page, these now written expressions from listeners act to mark and define the page as an extension of the moral space of the mosque and thus to delineate certain norms of participation for those who visit the page. Such comments do more than express a judgment; they perform an ethical response, and by their repetition down the page they secure the authority of a specific mode of listening/viewing. They provide a visual testament to repeated acts of drawing close to God, a record that serves to attune the eyes and ears of new visitors in a distinctly devotional and ethical direction. In short, this virtual space within which the *khuṭba* segment is presented has taken on a distinct moral framing through the practices of commentary and response. The force of this framing is evident in the scarcity of remarks that diverge from such standards of pious engagement.

The moral norms governing the web page are not determined by the ethical-devotional quality of the video clip alone but depend on the record of devotional acts left behind by users. There are other YouTube pages, for example, that offer the same Muhammad Hassan clip yet have very few prayerful responses appended to them, as if the presence of non-devotional comments defiled the space where one might record the movements of one's heart. Further support for this interpretation can be seen in a pattern repeated on numerous *khuṭba* clips: once a clip has accrued a number of vulgar, crude, or abusive comments it is frequently abandoned or partially abandoned by users as a devotional space. It is also common to find messages suggesting that the "comments" section of the page be closed due to the misuse of the section, though this is by no means a rule.

Let me emphasize that my discussion here in no way implies a judgment about the ethical orientations and religious commitments of the visitors to the Muhammad Hassan web pages. Rather, my comments pertain to the norms of discursive interaction and

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self-presentation that are evident in the patterns of response and exchange left on these pages. Although the fact that many of the visitors to sermon web pages adopt an ethical-devotional language may tell us little about their personal piety, it does say a lot about how they envision such web sites, specifically, as spaces appropriate for acts of prayer and devotion. That some people may move on to a pornographic website after they have viewed a *khuṭba* site does not imply that the invocation of ethical norms on the first site was a sham, any more than the observation that some people lie and cheat after praying at the mosque implies that the mosque is not really a space of Islamic piety (though both instances do indicate the inadequately cultivated virtues of *imān* [faith] and *ṭaqwa* [fear of God] of some individuals).[14]

The moral and devotional character of such YouTube sermon pages is constituted not simply through the practice of *duʿāʾ* but also by the polite tenor of most other forms of commentary left at the site. Note the following examples from among the exchanges left on the commentary section of the Muhammad Hassan site. One person, writing in English, poses the abbreviated question: "What are they doing?" A first respondent writes, "This is Friday prayer brother, we have it every Friday." A second adds, "U see, this sheikh is one of the best in the world, and he reads the Quran wonderfully; there he is reading some verses from the Glorious Quran reminding the day of judgment and how Allah will be fair with us." The person who first posed the question returns again: "Okay I know the Friday prayer but I don't make it because I am a girl," to which a third respondent replies, "Actually women aren't forced to make this prayer but it can be good for them to listen to the imam's preach." While the style is informal (often bearing the imprint of Short Message Service typographic conventions), generosity and sincerity are expected. At another point in the list of comments, another visitor to the site notes (again, in English): "I am muslim person (sunni) then Kurdish. I love each muslim person. I hope the arab love us and don't hate us . . ." Various responses follow: "I love you my brother and I am not Kurdish"; "I love kurds . . . without kurds there would be no sala7 el dien . . . who was kurd."

As these examples suggest, the practices of commentary and response that the site gives occasion to generally accord with norms of polite interaction of the sort one finds in the mosque, or in practices of *daʿwa* (what is often described as *adab al-daʿwa*, the etiquette of pious exhortation). Questions asked are almost never left unanswered and are often treated with great solicitude and generosity. One person on this site asked if someone would make available an English translation of the video segment. Within a couple days someone had not only produced a version with a translation in subtitles but had also added English commentary indicating the relevant *sūra*s. On some occasions, commentators do adopt a more politically strident tone, and it is frequently met with disapproval, as in the following exchange:

Our prophet was cursed and insulted, O' Muslim. What will we do to avenge him? What will God say [about us] on Judgment Day? Look on the Tariq al-Islam website and you will see the list of Danish goods to be boycotted. I hope that everyone who reads this comment will copy it and send it to everyone they know, from this website or elsewhere.

Response: Extremism is not Islamic; our religion teaches us that those without complete knowledge of an issue cannot pass judgment on it. Your crude comportment here stands as a sign of your stupidity.

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It is interesting to note that, although political arguments remain rare in the commentary section of these videos, the personal sites of the commentators themselves often include some video material of a distinctly political sort, including film clips critical of Israeli oppression, of the brutality of the American occupation in Iraq, of the treatment of Muslims in Europe, and so on. It would seem that the norms of self-expression governing those sites that foreground pious exhortation—sites that are *mu'aththir*, in a devotional way—are not extended to other kinds of viewing/listening content. The commentary on these sites tends to remain attuned to the ethical demands of the segment—in the case of Hassan's sermon, its call to remember the eschatological predicament that awaits each and everyone—and only strays from this attunement for brief moments.

Before I turn to some other examples of *mu'aththir* content, let me address a possible objection to the line of inquiry I have pursued so far. Some readers might argue that I have left out of my analysis a crucial dimension of the phenomenon I am describing, namely, that the preachers whose sermons I focus on and the styles of commentary themselves are associated with what is called the salafist trend and should therefore be analyzed in relation to the style of religiosity characterizing that trend. My reason for eschewing this approach is that I find it has little analytical value when applied to actual practices of media consumption. Many of the people in Egypt with whom I worked and who found value in the sermons and televised performances of Muhammad Hassan also appreciated Brotherhood-associated preachers, such as Wajdi Ghunaym, as well as more recent stars like ʿAmr Khalid. Thus, when I asked my informants whom they most appreciated among popular Islamic television personalities, their answers would frequently include both Muhammad Hassan *and* ʿAmr Khalid, figures who have often been viewed by scholars of the Middle East as paradigmatic of two very distinct forms of contemporary Islam—Salafism and what is sometimes called modernist Islam.[15] Many religious media consumers in Egypt, in other words, appreciate a variety of preaching styles and may combine in their viewing/listening practices preachers representing distinct, and even opposing, interpretive trends. In addition, most of the people I have worked with in Egypt over the last decade and a half live in accord with styles of devotion and piety that cannot be easily parsed on a *salafī*/Muslim Brotherhood, or *salafī*/Muslim-modernist basis. This is not to suggest that there aren't consumers of so-called *salafī* media who try in their appearance, comportment, and speech to conform to the models of virtue propounded by exponents of this trend. There certainly are people who view ʿAmr Khalid and other non-*salafī* figures as having a false or distorted understanding of Islam and therefore avoid the programs or websites on which such preachers appear. I am simply suggesting that most Egyptians are less dogmatic in their use of religious media than the *salafī*/modernist dichotomy suggests.

VISUALITY AND THE PIOUS IMAGINATION ONLINE

As I mentioned earlier, many of the comments left on sites like the Muhammad Hassan page discussed here draw attention to the emotional impact of the video, often using short descriptive terms like *mu'aththir* (impactful), as wells as such terms as *rahīb* (terrifying), *rāʾiʿ* (wonderful), and so on. Such personal testimonies to the different effects that *khuṭba* clips engender in viewers suggest another important dimension of these YouTube *khuṭub* that I want to address: they provide a place to encounter and experiment with pious

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affects. Users seek out, collect, circulate, and at times produce their own *khuṭba* segments geared to engendering powerful emotional-devotional responses. Accordingly, the short sections extracted from longer *khuṭub* tend to be those where the emotional intensity of the performance is at its most extreme. An Egyptian student from Cairo University whom I interviewed for this study, a young woman who expressed great appreciation for the sermons of Muhammad Hassan, explained this preference for emotionally moving clips:

> When I want to hear a *khuṭba*, I go the mosque on Friday and listen to the *khaṭīb* [preacher]. The Internet gives you something different. Online you find just the best parts of a sermon, those where the *khaṭīb* is describing the most amazing scenes [*mashshāhid al-rahība*] or reciting the most moving verses [*al-ayāt akthar al-muʾaththira*]. I always find something new and wonderful [*rāʾiʿ*].

Many of the users who link to such *khuṭba* segments also include on their personal pages video clips from other performance genres geared similarly to what might be called explorations in pious emotional expression. I want to turn to a few of these. One of the web pages visited by many of those who left comments on the Muhammad Hassan segment includes a recording of an Egyptian woman crying over the phone to a talk show host, in despair about her son's refusal to pray regularly.[16] The visual component of the clip is limited to a few still photographs of women with their children. Despite the simplicity of the visual element and a rather noisy audio track, this *mashshād rāʾiʿ* (wonderful scene), as the title describes it, has drawn close to three million visitors. Comments on this site (now numbering around 300) testify to the intensity of emotional response produced by the segment:

> *Allāhuma, yā rabbī, yā illāhiya, yā mawlā kathīr min amthāl hadhihi umm al-faḍīla. Bārak allāh bikum ʿalā al-video* [Oh God, Oh my Lord, this virtuous mother offers us many examples. May God bless you for the video].
> *Wa-Allāhi maskīnuhu Allāh yarḥamuhā wa-yarḥam jamīʿa al-ummahāt* [By God, the poor woman. God have mercy on her and on all mothers].

Another clip that a number of the visitors to the Muhammad Hassan site have linked to, one titled "A very, very, very moving segment" (*maqtaʿ muʾaththir jiddan jiddan jiddan*), begins with the (written) words, "What do you cry for?"[17] The clip, lasting roughly six minutes, is divided between two scenes, one of a young boy from the Gulf crying to a television announcer because his favorite soccer team has lost, and another of a group of tearful men reading the Qurʾan in a mosque. The video has drawn close to four million viewers and includes over 1,600 comments, almost all of them composed of or incorporating supplicatory prayers (*duʿāʾ*) similar to those cited previously, as well as testimonies to how powerful the clip is in its ability to solicit pious feeling ("oh God, this scene has drawn tears from my eyes"; "May God witness that my tears have run").

The three clips I have described so far share one notable feature: they are all visually quite basic, the images often moving out of focus. The Muhammad Hassan sermon was filmed with a hand-held camera by a member of the mosque congregation during a Friday sermon, and the image is jerky and at times out of focus. The radio recording has only the most minimal visual accompaniment, and the audio quality is mediocre. While the first part of the "What do you cry for?" clip was filmed by a television crew

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and reproduces a recognizable standard of televisual reporting, the second section, shot in the mosque, is of extremely poor visual quality, the image remaining blurred and fuzzy throughout. And yet these segments are among the most viewed of the *mu'aththir* pages[18] surveyed for this study. While Muhammad Hassan is speaking on hundreds if not thousands of YouTube videos, many of them with extensive visual enhancements, this one draws one of the highest number of visits despite its poor production values. Many of the other Muhammad Hassan clips available on YouTube are taken directly from his television appearances on the stations al-Nass and al-Rahma and are highly embellished studio-mastered productions yet nonetheless receive far fewer visitors.

A number of the Internet *khuṭba* consumers I interviewed in Egypt during 2008 suggested that, far from enhancing the power of a clip to stir pious affects, visual elaboration and the use of Photoshop-style visual and audio overlays actually inhibit or undermine that quality. The clips discussed previously bear this preference out. It is as if the image should remain subdued so as not to distract attention from the emotional purity of the voice, the primary avenue to pious feeling. The image in itself should not fascinate or introduce dimensions of experience that cannot be assimilated to the ethical performance of the voice. This is not to say that the clips aspire to visual realism. Rather, the attitudes of modesty, humility, and regret embodied in the vocal performances also find expression in the aesthetic values governing the image. Fuzziness, instability, and simplicity, in other words, serve as visual signs of the ethical virtues that mediate a relation to God, most salient among them, modesty and humility.

Another segment from the YouTube archive will help clarify this point: a sermon by the Egyptian preacher ʿAbd al-Hamid Kishk titled "Yawm al-Qiyama" (The Day of Judgment).[19] Although Kishk died in 1996, and had not preached for many years before that, he has remained a paradigmatic figure of the so-called *al-ṣaḥwa al-islāmiyya* (Islamic revival) for many, and his recorded sermons continue to find their way onto various Internet sites.[20] The "Yawm al-Qiyama" video combines the voice of Kishk, taken from a popular tape recorded in the 1970s; a visual sequence featuring an asteroid crashing into the earth, drawn perhaps from a science fiction film or a television documentary; and a musical accompaniment consisting of a well-known piece by the American composer Samuel Barber, "Adagio for Strings." The heterogeneity of source materials in the construction of this piece is remarkable.

One might expect that this addition of a stunning visual sequence and a sonorous musical background track would result in an intensification of the sermon's passional force, its *mu'aththir* quality. Yet, despite its spectacularity and polished production values, this site draws relatively few visitors, not only when compared with segments by contemporary favorites like Muhammad Hassan but also when compared with other Kishk recordings available on YouTube. Indeed, some of Kishk's most unembellished video recordings draw far more viewers than this "Yawm al- Qiyama" rendering. Moreover, far fewer of the comments left on the page are supplicatory prayers.

A number of the viewers I interviewed for this study suggested that the striking visual scenes found on clips such as Kishk's "Yawm al- Qiyama" undermined the emotional impact of the sermon by usurping one's own imaginative powers, a critique that audiences in the Middle East have often leveled against films and theatrical performances that depict Qur'anic themes.[21] Islamic devotional forms, including Qur'anic recitation, have always ascribed an important role to the imagination. Classical recitation manuals, for example,

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have often encouraged the reciter to perform a variety of reflexive exercises in order to cultivate the attitudes and dispositions appropriate to Qurʾanic recitation. Al-Ghazzali's treatment on this subject, addressed in the eighth book of *The Revival of the Religious Science* (Ihya ʿUlum al-Din), instructs the reciter to undertake a number of imaginative tasks in order to hone his recitational skills. The treatise itself is saturated with images geared to deepening the aspiring reciter's affective responsiveness to the divine word, as in the following: "It is said that in the Qurʾan are to be found fields, gardens, closets, brides, brocades, meadows, and khans. All *mīm*s are the fields of the Qurʾan; all *ra*s are the gardens, all *ḥa*s are the closets, all *sūra*s starting with the glorification of God are its brides."[22] Likewise, Sayyid Qutb's well-known book on Qurʾanic imagery, *al-Taswir al-Fanni fi al-Qurʾan*, begins with an account of Qutb's childhood experience of being amazed and enchanted by the imagery that filled his mind upon listening to verses from the Qurʾan.[23] In short, it is not visuality per se that is a problem within this tradition of Islamic devotion but the way images (and sounds as well, for that matter) encumber the work of the imagination that leads one to God or distracts one from God in a way that may lead to *shirk*, the sin of worshipping other than God. It is in this light, I argue, that the preference among the YouTube visitors discussed here for what might be called the "modest image" must be seen: a practice of aesthetic discrimination that seeks to secure the possibility of a devotional imagination within the visual cacophony of the Internet.

GLOBAL AFFECTS

The exploration of emotional effects among YouTube viewers, as I mentioned previously, is not limited to performances marked by religious oratory. YouTube viewers who appreciate sites of pious exhortation and Qurʾanic recitation for their impact on the heart also frequently pursue ethical affect within a variety of other genres, some of them not explicitly marked as Islamic. For example, several of the clips posted on the personal pages of visitors to the first Muhammad Hassan site present scenes of people close to death, some of them filmed in the act of reciting the *shahāda*—the testimony of faith—a practice encouraged by Islamic traditions. Among the comments left by visitors to one such site, filmed in what appears to be a hospital room and described in its title as "A Very Moving Moment" (*laḥẓa muʾaththir jiddan*),[24] are the following prayers:

Allāhuma irḥamuhu wa-irḥamuna wa-ighfar li-nā wa-ijalunā min ʿibāduka [God have mercy on him and on us and forgive us and make us among your worshippers].
Allāhuma akhtam li-nā mithlahu. Allāh yarḥamuhu wa-yaskunuhu al-firdaws al-ʿalā [God give us such a destiny. God take mercy on him and grant him a place in the highest heaven].
Allāhuma arzuqunā bi-mithla hadhā al-famm al-ṭāhir [God grant us such a pure mouth].

A second "death scene" clip, one that has drawn over 4.2 million visitors, presents a still photograph of a man who, according to the clip's title, died in the act of prayer at the mosque.[25] An audio track of Qurʾanic recitation accompanies the photograph. Another genre popular among visitors to the Muhammad Hassan site consists of television announcers breaking into tears on camera in response to the tragic events they are reporting, often involving Palestinian or Iraqi victims. Comments on these sites testify to the virtues of the announcer, evident in the spontaneity of his or her compassionate

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response. While the context is not marked as explicitly devotional or religious, the scene portrays and elicits affects associated with religious virtue.

Another popular clip presents a short morality tale made by the Greek director, Constantine Pitavios, on the virtues of filial generosity and patience.[26] Drawing over a million viewers, almost all from the Middle East, the film depicts a father and his adult son sitting together on a park bench, the son ignoring his father while reading the newspaper. The son repeatedly dismisses the seemingly meaningless interjections of his father, until the father has the son read an entry from the father's diary in which he recounts the pleasure and patience with which he listened to the then three-year-old son's similarly meaningless interjections. His filial compassion rekindled through his father's example, the two embrace, at which point a number of Qur'anic verses addressing the importance of charity to parents comes on the screen, an addition to the original film added by the person who placed it on YouTube. The translation of the Arabic title of the film is "Generosity to Parents: A Very Moving Segment," and the person who posted it (whose website name is "Quraniforever") has appended the following explanation: "I undertook the translation of this film and added the Quranic verses at the end. [It presents] human feelings [*mushāʿir insāniyya*] not limited by languages, race, or color. Noble feelings, natural to every person as long as he retains his humanity [*insāniyyat al-insān*]." Most of the more than 1,000 comments left by visitors to the page—almost all of them in Arabic—are *duʿāʾ*.

While the explanatory gloss appended to the clip bears witness to a humanist conceptual vocabulary, evident in its reference to "human feelings," the practice within which such audio-visual content is incorporated, I argue, owes less to humanism than it does to the organizational form of the Internet. Insomuch as *muʾaththir* content is approached and appreciated for its capacity to animate and mediate devotional sensibilities—to emotionally "move" (*athara*) a viewer and within a very short span of time—then the social and political dimensions of the material lose salience. Consumed as fleeting moments of affect, the images and sounds are shorn of their national and religious specificity and are reduced to a generalized pious feeling (as the non-religiously marked term *muʾaththir* suggests).

The range of web-based audio-visual material that can be harnessed to such a practice is immense. Video clips that depict the wonders of nature often serve as sites of such collective prayer. One clip containing images of space taken by the Hubble Telescope has drawn over seven million viewers from the Middle East and has accumulated over 1,000 comments, almost all of them prayers.[27] It is titled "The Tape that Made the Scientists Cry." Importantly, arguments about what is and is not appropriate devotional material are often found among the comments on some pages. For example, one video that has drawn close to four million visitors, primarily from the Middle East, is titled *ḍaḥika ṭifl suwīdī rahība* (the fantastic laughing Swedish baby) and features a baby who repeatedly bursts into laughter when prompted by a voice off screen.[28] While there are some prayers among the many comments left (most of them added right after the clip was made available and before the accumulation of a multitude of baser comments), there are also numerous responses questioning the suitability of such a clip for Muslim viewers. In other words, the clip lies at the outer edge of what at least one group of Muslim YouTube visitors considers appropriate, as evidenced by the debate and disagreement among those who have accessed it.

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DEVOTIONAL PLEASURE

Let me try to draw a few conclusions from what I have presented so far. The viewing practices I have examined here exemplify a dimension of the Internet I referred to at the beginning of this article. Beyond its utility as an archive for the storage and retrieval of useful information, the Internet serves as a tool for the pleasures of the unexpected, a space of possibility, testing, discovery, adventure. We see in the jump from intoned verses on death, to the tears of a desperate mother, to a laughing baby, to the words of a dying man, to a skit about filial duty and love a frenetic adventurousness, one that corresponds to and exploits the pleasurable possibilities of an endless catalog of affective fragments. What the Internet users I describe here explore is pious affect: images, voices, sounds that engage with and ramify pious sensibility, or ethical feeling. The attitude that orients this quest might be characterized as: "check out what this does to you!" Indeed, many of the responses on the videos mentioned previously make explicit this impact: "This one really made me cry," "This one is very moving," and so on. The style of Internet usage I have outlined here might best be conceived as a practice of experimenting with the ethical sensorium, with the affects and sensibilities undergirding a devotional attitude.

What distinguishes this practice from other styles of being online lies in the criteria of selection and assessment that these Internet users apply. That is, despite the limitless possibilities of experimentation, juxtaposition, and combination made possible on the Internet, actual practices bear witness to an emergent set of norms, evident in such things as the protocols of polite discourse I discussed previously, the prayerful responses, the particular selection of ethically oriented imagery and discourse, and the selectivity exercised in making choices about where to travel on the Internet and where not to. Of course, these norms only account for one of the many patterns of use and consumption that the Internet platform has given rise to among Muslims in the Middle East and beyond, and it is by no means the most common. But it does point to the way some Internet users are exploiting the distinct architectural and functional features of the Internet to develop a modern devotional exercise.

Such a practice is not without precedent in Islamic traditions of ethical storytelling and homiletics (e.g., *qaṣaṣ, waʿẓ*). Muslim preachers have long relied on ("sampled," we might say today) published collections containing short bits of ethical narrative geared to moving the heart toward pious feeling.[29] The art of preaching itself involves a continuous honing of the rhetorical techniques by which emotions can be solicited and oriented in the direction of virtuous action, a task that demands innovation if one is to break the heart free from the stultifying seductions specific to each generation.[30] Indeed, all of the Egyptian preachers I worked with during an earlier study had memorized a stock of images and expressions they could always rely on to shake an audience from its stupor and awaken in them the affects and sensibilities of one close to God. What is unique to the Internet context, among other things, is both the promiscuity by which an infinite variety of forms and materials are held at an infinitesimal distance from each other and the ease by which they are created, transformed, manipulated, and accessed by users.

What is also unusual (though not unique, given the ubiquity of television and film) is the recourse to an intensely visual medium for an Islamic devotional exercise. What is striking, in this regard, is the extent to which the voice seems to far outweigh any visual embellishment in determining the effectiveness, the excellence of a site by those who

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approach it as a context of devotion (or of what might be called devotional pleasure). High-tech visual effects may not only fail to dazzle and seduce but may actually deaden one to the ethical and devotional resonances of the human voice, to its power to bring one close to God. There is strong evidence here of the vibrancy of an Islamic tradition of acoustically mediated piety, even as it becomes instantiated in such a visual-centric medium as YouTube. It is not surprising, in this light, that many of the personal web pages I visited offered links to clips of Qur'anic recitation, particularly those of the well-known reciter ʿAbd al-Basit ʿAbd al-Samad. This is not to deny the importance of the visual dimension of such a viewing–listening practice. My claim, rather, is that the visual aesthetics governing the online devotional practices I address here are strongly configured by and subordinated to an acoustic imagination.

Finally, let me come back to the question of what I have called devotional affect. Within the mosque, the voice of a preacher may be *mu'aththir*, but it is so because it gives expression to those ethical emotions that constitute a faithful human response to the divine: the voice is full of humility (*khushūʿ*), shrouded in pious fear (*taqwā* or *khawf*), hollowed out by sorrow (*ḥuzn*) over our human predicament, emotions that awaken the movements of the heart from regret (*nadm*) to asking forgiveness (*istighfār*), to the peace that comes with recognizing God's grace (*itmi'nān* or *sakīna*). This emotional-ethical vocabulary is almost completely absent on the sites I have presented, having been replaced instead by less religiously marked notions, such as *mu'aththir* or *rahīb*. One is moved toward God—hence the prayerful comments—but as if along a broader, less defined emotional pathway. This homogenization and de-differentiation of affects reflect the phenomenology of the medium itself. In juxtaposing and interweaving a limitless variety of content, the Internet radically abstracts each piece of image or text it presents from the contexts of knowledge, experience, and action that anchors its specificity. The *khuṭba* is no longer delivered in a mosque, no longer takes place in the context of Friday worship, no longer occasions the weekly gathering of a collective—conditions of authority and doctrinal definition that shaped the norms of its audition.[31] Admittedly, this process of decontextualization and abstraction occurs with the introduction of any new media form (hence earlier concerns about the dangers of the printing press by both Muslims and Christians),[32] but the Internet carries this problem to a new extreme. When Qur'anic recitation, laughing Swedish babies, and Greek filial dramas all promiscuously commingle, the affects specific to each necessarily lose a good deal of their specificity and coloration, removed as they are from contexts that previously regulated their reception. All are capable of moving the heart, in a generally good direction, one that can be appreciated and consumed as a pious pleasure.[33]

How might we view this practice in relation to recent developments within Islamic ethical and aesthetic traditions? One common argument would interpret the web-based practices I have described here as evidence of a process of secularization. Olivier Roy, for example, in his analysis of what he calls "neofundamentalist" or "Salafi" trends among Muslims in France, argues that "neofundamentalism is a paradoxical agent of secularization, as Protestantism was in its time (although this is far from obvious in reading Calvin) because it individualizes and desocializes religious observance."[34] The Internet practices I have explored here seem to exemplify the process of individualization and desocialization indicated in Roy's statement. Web surfers choose what they view and when and how they view it on their own and with little institutional constraint. Moreover,

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the very process of selecting, combining, and juxtaposing content drawn from radically different sources might be seen to further disembed the individual from the structures of collective discipline and practice that ground Islamic devotional and ethical traditions. Yet, this interpretation does not do justice to the practice I have described. For one, the emphasis on individual choice in Roy's account of Salafism fits uncomfortably with the structured dimensions of the practice, the emergent norms of devotional expression and visual aesthetics evident on the YouTube pages I discuss. While participants are not spatially and temporally co-present to each other, it is the status of a page as a *collective* moral space that shapes the styles of commentary and consumption. In this sense the practice neither individualizes nor desocializes in quite the way proposed by Roy. Rather, visitors to such pages are asked to accommodate their behavior (i.e., their styles of commentary and the selection of links they embed on the site) to the patterns of ethical–devotional engagement left by previous visitors, patterns that have the quality of norms insomuch as they are upheld and reinforced through practices of argument, criticism, advice, and example enacted on the pages themselves. These patterns of online sociability do not reflect some fixed or doctrinal model of Islamic devotion but are an attempt by contemporary Muslims to extend and sustain Islamic ethical and aesthetic traditions within the technologically structured architecture of this media form. As I suggested previously, the fact that some visitors to the pages I have discussed here may act in total disregard for these norms does not invalidate them or render them nonexistent, any more than the fact that some members of the congregation speak loudly and aggressively during a sermon at the mosque would invalidate the norm of quiet attentiveness.

Let me conclude with a caveat. My observations here aim to delineate an emerging media practice, not a particular kind of religious actor nor a new religious identity. Indeed, my sense of this practice is that those who undertake it do not cohere around any of the reigning sociological categories of religious identity (such as "*salafī*," "neo-fundamentalist," or "Muslim modernist"). Rather, the form the practice takes owes to the way people from a range of different religious orientations have exploited the architectural affordances of Internet technology in similar ways and in doing so have collectively crafted a shared devotional space. Of course, the implications of such Internet usage in the long term are impossible to predict. From the standpoint of the present, however, the practice can be seen as both an asset and a liability: an asset insomuch as one can redefine one's relationship to a vast range of sounds and images that before may have stood outside the boundaries of ethical relation; a liability insomuch as the specific sensibilities and discriminations that opened up a distinct world of experience and action may wind up covered in dust—at least as long as one stays online.

NOTES

[1]Gabriel Weimann, *Terror on the Internet: The New Arena, the New Challenges* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2006); Gary Bunt, *Islam in the Digital Age: E-Jihad, Online Fatwas, and Cyber Islamic Environments* (London: Pluto Press, 2003); David Faris, "Revolutions Without Revolutionaries? Network Theory, Facebook, and the Egyptian Blogosphere," Arab Media and Society 6 (2008), http://www.arabmediasociety.com/topics/index.php?t_article=232 (accessed 5 June 2010); Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London: Hurst, 2004).

[2]Peter Mandeville, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001); Jon Anderson and Dale Eickelman, "Redefining Muslim Publics," in *New Media in the*

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Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere, ed. Jon Anderson and Dale Eickelman (Indianapolis, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1999); Jon Anderson, "New Media, New Publics: Reconfiguring the Public Sphere of Islam," *Social Research* 70 (2003): 887–906; Jon Anderson and Yves Gonzalez-Quijano, "Technological Mediation and the Emergence of Transnational Muslim Publics," in *Public Islam and the Common Good*, ed. Dale Eickelman and Armando Salvatore (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), 53–74; Bruce Lawrence, "Allah Online: The Practice of Global Islam in the Information Age," in *Practicing Religion in the Age of Media,* ed. Stewart Hoover and Lynn Schofield Clark (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 237–53; Jon B. Alterman, *New Media, New Politics: From Satellite Television to the Internet in the Arab World* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998); Gary Bunt, *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Kristen Zahra Sands, "Muslims, Identity, and Multimodal Communication on the Internet," *Contemporary Islam* 4 (2010): 139–55.

[3]Lev Manovich has written insightfully on the spatial logics of the Internet. See *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001). For a thoughtful discussion of the embodied dimensions of Internet use, see Mark B. N. Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006).

[4]Among the more popular instructional guides on the practice of *daʿwa* from the late 1990s was Jamal Madi's *al-Daʿwa al-Muʾaththira* (Mansura, Egypt: Mutabiʿ al-Wafaʾ, 1995). Notably, a study of preaching in Egypt conducted by Egyptian sociologist ʿAbd al-Fatah ʿAbd al-Nabi was titled *al-Muʾathirin: Dirasat Namadhij Aʾimmat al-Masajid* (Zaqaziq, Egypt: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Misriyya, 1995).

[5]For anthropological analyses of sermon practices in the Middle East, see Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Patrick Gaffney, *The Prophet's Pulpit: Islamic Preaching in Contemporary Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press, 1994); and Richard Antoun, *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World: A Jordanian Case Study in Contemporary Perspective* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989).

[6]As I will explain, my use of such expressions as "pious web surfers" or "pious affects" is meant to indicate a particular genre of expression found in the commentary section of the videos I analyze. "Pious," in other words, does not reflect my assessment of someone's religious commitment—something I am not in a position to judge—but rather the form of discourse certain web surfers adopt online.

[7]Performance genres like the *khuṭba* that have ritual entailments tied to a specific place and time, and that are not easily disaggregated into information bites for rapid consumption, would seem to be less adaptable than other genres to the protocols of the Internet. *Khuṭub* have a deep anchor in some of the more abiding structures of Muslim social and religious life, a point inadequately understood in many media-centric analyses of the genre.

[8]*Khuṭba* clips are also found on other video-sharing web sites, such as Arabtube and Islamtube. In addition, many of the preachers whose sermons are found on these sites also have fan pages on Facebook as well as blog sites dedicated to their careers. Much of the material on these sites consists of laudatory statements left by followers as well as occasional responses and commentary by the preachers themselves.

[9]http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=qqstPZ0S0jw&feature=related (accessed 21 May 2010). The career of Muhammad Hassan has been discussed by a number of scholars including Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape*; and Wael Lutfi, *al-Duʿat al-Judad . . . Tahlil Ijtimaʿi* (Cairo: al-Usra, 2005).

[10]For a very informative account of Hassan's recent career on television, see Nathan Field and Ahmed Hamam, "Salafi Satellite TV in Egypt," *Arab Media and Society* 8 (2009), http://www.arabmediasociety.com/topics/index.php?t_article=266&p=0 (accessed 3 June 2010).

[11]I find that the variety of features often used to define "Salafism" do not cohere or fit together in a unified bundle in the way the term suggests, especially when one considers actual practices. For an attempt to develop "Salafism" as an analytical category, see Roel Meijer, *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

[12]See Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape,* Chap. 6, esp. 169–72.

[13]All comments taken from the YouTube website and cited in the paper are originally in Arabic unless otherwise noted. Translations by author.

[14]Samuli Schiekle has suggested that, in focusing on the cultivation of Islamic virtues by contemporary Muslims, scholars (including me) fail to take into consideration the extent to which most people do not act solely in accord with a religious frame of reference but, on the contrary, invoke a plurality of often mutually incompatible frameworks of discrimination and judgment depending on the activities they are engaged in. In developing this argument, Schielke emphasizes the extent to which Egyptians, even those who are committed to living piously, frequently fail to live up to their religious commitments and often must invoke nonreligious

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ideas in order to try to make sense of their experience. In my view, Schielke is right to view ambivalence and contradiction as common elements of many people's experience but wrong to interpret this as incompatible with a commitment to live in accord with Islamic virtues. To abide by a religious model of virtue is not to become a saint or to expect all of one's actions and thoughts to conform to a religious ideal. Religious people generally recognize that life pulls one in many directions other than those authorized by such an ideal—indeed, the idea that it is virtually impossible for humans to live in this world without ever straying into error is at the heart of both Islamic and Christian traditions. The attempt to live in accord with pious ideals does not eliminate contradiction from one's life but, rather, shapes the way one interprets and responds to it. This does not mean people do not invoke nonreligious notions to justify their actions, only that those attempts at justification will be seen as erroneous deviations when one assesses them from the standpoint of one's religious tradition. See Samuli Schielke, "Ambivalent Commitments: Troubles of Morality, Religiosity and Aspiration among Young Egyptians," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 39 (2009): 158–85.

[15]This pattern is also borne out by other studies of religious media consumption in Egypt. Comments like the following, from a young woman in rural Egypt interviewed by the media scholar Sahar Khamis, are common: "Although there are now five mosques in the village, and there is a special place for women to pray, I really prefer to watch Amr Khalid, Sheikh Mohamed Hassan, and Khalid El Gindi on satellite television and the Internet rather than listening to the imam in the mosque." Sahar Khamis, "New Media and Social Change in Rural Egypt," *Arab Media and Society* 11 (2010), http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=758 (accessed 28 July 2010).

[16]http://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=D8795DoX9YE&feature=related (accessed 4 May 2010).

[17]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_e_E8Dst5s&feature=related (accessed 4 May 2010).

[18]Namely, those eliciting the devotional responses that I described previously.

[19]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDY9lhycl_s (accessed 4 May 2010).

[20]Kishk's preaching and politics have been examined by a number of scholars. See Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and the Pharaoh* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986); Gaffney, *The Prophet's Pulpit*; and Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape*. Many of his sermons are available on the "Islamway.com" website.

[21]This exact critique was leveled against a theatrical performance written by the popular Egyptian author and onetime television personality Mustafa Mahmud. A number of the comments left on the "Yawm al-Qiyama" page also criticize the use of a musical background for the sermon, invoking the popular claim that music is illicit within Islam.

[22]Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *The Recitation and Interpretation of the Qur'ān: al Ghazāli's Theory*, trans. Muhammad Abul Quasem (London: KPI Press, 1984).

[23]Sayyid Qutb, *al-Taswir al-Fanni fi al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Maʿarif, 1993). See also Issa Boullata, "La pensee visuelle et la memoire semantique arabe," *Science Sociales, Societes Arabes: Peuples Mediterranees* 54–55 (1991): 93–110.

[24]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8z67rwGrC4A (accessed 5 May 2010).

[25]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RS01dlPIA1A (accessed 11 May 2010).

[26]This film clip has since been withdrawn from the YouTube site due to a copyright claim.

[27]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JByUxa9ZXaw&feature=related (accessed 11 May 2010).

[28]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1X0cmGihlYc&feature=fvw (accessed 11 May 2010).

[29]See Jonathan Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2001); and Khalil Athmina, "*Al-Qaṣaṣ*: Its Emergence, Religious Origin and Its Socio-Political Impact on Early Muslim Society," *Studia Islamica* 76 (1992): 53–74.

[30]Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape,* 68–74.

[31]As I have discussed elsewhere, the use of cassette tapes to record and circulate sermons effected a similar dislocation of the *khuṭba* from the conditions that had previously governed its reception (*The Ethical Soundscape*, 55–60). What is unique to the Internet, however, is the way it provides immediate access to a limitless archive of heterogeneous contents.

[32]The impact of changing media technologies on Islamic ethical and epistemological traditions is discussed in Charles Hirschkind, "Media and the Quran," in *The Encyclopedia of the Quran*, ed. Jane McAuliffe (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2003).

[33]It is interesting to compare the loss of emotional specificity I have described here with what Eickelman and Anderson refer to as the "reintellectualization of Islamic discourse." These authors argue that one effect of the emergence of globalized mass media has been a shift within Islamic forms of knowledge toward more

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accessible, vernacular styles of reasoning and argument. What had once been provinces of Islamic learning restricted to the erudite and scholarly, they argue, have been increasingly recast in popular languages, readily apprehended and applied by ordinary Muslims ("Redefining Muslim Publics," 12–13). The recourse I have described here to a language of emotional generality might be interpreted, in light of Eickelman and Anderson's thesis, as a vernacularization of affect, one propelled by the democratizing force of the Internet. Before making such a claim, however, one would want to explore how the forms of sociability enacted online articulated with other domains of Muslim devotion and expression, a question I have yet to investigate.

[34]Olivier Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam*, trans. George Holoch (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 76. A useful discussion of Roy's argument is found in Kristen Zahra Sands, "Muslims, Identity, and Multimodal Communications on the Internet," *Contemporary Islam* 4 (2010): 139–55.

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