

Digital ethos and the communicative virtual construction of figures: An analytical study of a video sample on Malek Bennabi

الإيثوس الرقمي والبناء الافتراضي الاتصالي للشخصيات:
دراسة تحليلية لعينة فيديو حول مالك بن نبي

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Abstract

This study addresses the problematic of the digital resurrection of historical figures in virtual environments, shedding light on the mechanisms of re-engineering the ethos of Malek Bennabi through AI generative technologies. The research aims to deconstruct the semiotic strategies that transform thought from archival stagnation to interactive dynamism. Methodologically, the study adopts an integrated approach combining descriptive analysis with multimodal semiotics of digital communication -discourse and image- to analyze a purposive sample of algorithmically generated videos. The main results conclude that Artificial Intelligence acts as a semiotic mediator that reformulates the Ethos by shifting from realistic reference to the imagined image "Simulacra". This bridges the temporal gap with the audience through strategies of humanization and updating, thereby establishing a new cognitive authority that transcends the thinker's original historical context.

Keywords: Digital Ethos; Artificial Intelligence; Semiotics; Virtual Construction; Malek Bennabi

ملخص:

تبحث هذه الدراسة إشكالية بناء الإيثوس الرقمي وإعادة توليد تمثيلات شخصيات تاريخية سابقة في البيئة الرقمية الافتراضية، مع التركيز على تمثيل إيثوس المفكر مالك بن نبي باستخدام تقنيات الذكاء الاصطناعي من خلال عينة من الفيديوهات عبر المنصات الرقمية. بهدف تفكيك الاستراتيجيات السيميائية للاتصال الرقمي التي تنقل الفكر من الفيديو الأرضي إلى الدينامية التفاعلية بإحياء الشخصيات الميتة وتفاعلها مع القضايا معاصرة. وباعتماد التكامل المنهجي الوصفي والتحليلي السيميولوجي متعدد الوسائط (خطاب، صورة) لعينة قصدية من الفيديوهات المولدة خوارزمية. خلصت النتائج الرئيسية إلى أن الذكاء الاصطناعي يعمل كوسيط سيميائي يعيد صياغة الإيثوس عبر الانتقال من المرجعية الواقعية إلى الصورة المتخيلة. محققا استمرارية تاريخية تتجاوز الفجوة الزمنية مع المتلقي عبر استراتيجيات أنسنة الصورة الرقمية وتحسين تمثيلاتها الذهنية، ليؤسس بذلك سلطة معرفية جديدة تتجاوز السياق التاريخي الأصلي للمفكر.

كلمات مفتاحية: إيثوس رقمي؛ ذكاء اصطناعي؛ سيميائيات؛ توليد افتراضي؛ مالك بن نبي.

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1. Introduction

Contemporary digital communication is undergoing paradigmatic shifts driven by the advancement of Generative AI technologies. These technologies are no longer confined to mere information processing but have extended to the digital resurrection of historical figures, reproducing their presence within the virtual space. This technological advancement has reintroduced the concept of ethos -originally formulated by Aristotle as the self-image in discourse- as a complex digital ethos. This new form is constructed through algorithms and multimedia, transcending the boundaries of written text to include reality simulating imagery and sound. In the context of Arab and Islamic thought, the thinker Malek Bennabi represents a unique case study; his intellectual legacy is invoked today not merely through books, but via digital avatars addressing current issues, raising fundamental questions regarding the credibility of this new representation and the mechanisms of its semiotic engineering.

Numerous previous studies have addressed the subject of digital ethos from various perspectives. Maingueneau focused on the discursive dimension of self-image construction (Maingueneau, 2014), while Eyman investigated digital rhetoric and identity formation in networked environments (Eyman, 2015). Furthermore, recent research, such as Ohman & Floridi (Ohman & Floridi, 2017), has touched upon the ethical and philosophical aspects of digital afterlife and the deepfake industry. However, a distinct research gap is observable regarding the scarcity of studies that deconstruct the mechanisms of virtual generation for specific Arab intellectuals using semiotic analysis, and how AI is employed as a medium to reinterpret their thought and link it to the immediate context. Hence, the originality of this research lies in its attempt to explore the communicative strategies that transport Malek Bennabi from the stagnation of the archive to the dynamism of digital interaction, moving beyond traditional readings to a new visual algorithmic interpretation. Based on the foregoing, the research problem is crystallized in the following main question: How do artificial intelligence technologies contribute to reconstructing the Digital Ethos of the thinker Malek Bennabi through virtual media, and what are the semiotic connotations of the new visual and discursive representations produced by these technologies?

To address this question, the study adopts an interpretive semiotic perspective that considers meaning as a dynamic product of the interaction between visual representation, discursive construction, technological mediation and socio-cultural context. In this framework, AI generated content is not treated as a neutral technical reproduction, but as an active semiotic system that reshapes authority, presence, and symbolic legitimacy.

The analysis is guided by two main hypotheses. First, AI generated videos rely on strategies of humanization and temporal updating, aiming to reduce both the historical distance and the psychological gap between the

original thinker and contemporary digital audiences. Through these strategies, the virtual representation contributes to reinforcing Malek Bennabi's cognitive authority by repositioning him as a present and dialogical intellectual figure within the digital public sphere.

Second, virtual generation is assumed to produce a profound semiotic shift from a realistic ethos, grounded in historical reference and archival recordings, toward an imagined ethos based on simulacra construction. In this shift, the digitally generated image does not merely imitate the historical figure but becomes a more immersive, persuasive, and affectively influential representation, sometimes surpassing the authority of the original historical presence itself.

Accordingly, the study mobilizes tools from discourse analysis, visual semiotics, and digital media studies to interpret how AI mediated representations reconstruct meaning, reshape symbolic identity, and redefine the boundaries between authenticity, simulation, and cultural memory.

2. From discursive ethos to algorithmic re-construction

2.1. The epistemology of ethos: A discursive construction

The concept of Ethos, in its primordial roots, transcends any essentialist understanding of the speaker's identity and instead operates as a symbolic and discursive construct generated within communicative interaction. Rather than reflecting an ontological self, Ethos emerges as a semiotic effect of discourse—an image negotiated, perceived, and validated by the audience. This conception finds its earliest theoretical articulation in Aristotelian rhetoric, where Ethos is positioned as one of the three foundational pillars of persuasion alongside Logos and Pathos. Aristotle argues that credibility does not precede discourse but is produced through it, as trust is grounded in the moral and symbolic image projected during the speech act itself (Amossy, 2021).

From an epistemological standpoint, this Aristotelian insight prefigures contemporary discourse theories that reject the notion of a pre-discursive subject. Modern approaches conceptualize Ethos as a dynamic process of enunciation rather than a stable attribute of the speaker. Amossy extends this logic by framing Ethos as a socially regulated construction, shaped by shared norms, interdiscursive expectations, and rhetorical positioning. In this view, Ethos functions as a strategic mediation between individual subjectivity and collective symbolic frameworks, rendering credibility a relational and contextual phenomenon rather than an intrinsic quality.

Epistemologically, this discursive construction of ethos challenges positivist conceptions of communication by foregrounding the symbolic and performative nature of meaning production. Ethos is not a mirror of reality but a rhetorical configuration through which authority, trust, and legitimacy are negotiated. As such, it operates as a critical interface between discourse,

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power, and social recognition, revealing how credibility itself is constructed, circulated, and contested within communicative practices (Amossy, 2021).

2.2. The digital turn: From somatic presence to algorithmic code

The digital transformation has relocated ethos from the biological body to the algorithmic code, mediated by interfaces and protocols. Digital ethos is no longer solely dependent on traditional authority but is increasingly contingent upon technical competence, consistency and the quality of digital presentation. As St.Amant argues credibility in virtual environments -often devoid of nonverbal cues- is constructed through presentation attributes and cultural expectations of the interface (St.Amant, 2002). In this realm, the digital ethos becomes a techno-discursive phenomenon where the algorithm acts as a co-author of the persona (Eyman, 2015).

Eyman further emphasizes that digital circulation operates according to a systems logic, whereby each digital system is defined by its components (texts, users, platforms), its environment (networks, algorithms, governing rules), and its structure (patterns of relationships and interactions). Within this framework, digital networks function as living ecological entities that continuously evolve, reproducing their relational configurations, formal structures, and discursive contents over time. One of the central characteristics of ecosystems -both natural and digital- is the presence of energy flows and material cycles. Eyman rearticulates these concepts within digital environments by conceptualizing energy as the rhetorical activity of authors and users, while material cycling manifests through processes of reuse, intertextuality, recomposition and remix. Consequently, the digital text is not a fixed or stable artifact, but a transformable semiotic material whose meaning emerges through its circulation and reappropriation within networked environments. Furthermore, Eyman highlights that digital circulation does not occur within a single, closed ecosystem, but rather through intersections among multiple ecosystems, enabling texts to move across communities, discursive genres, and media platforms. In this context, digital rhetorical practice becomes a collective and distributed activity, involving both human and nonhuman actors, including algorithms, platforms, and interfaces, all of which actively participate in shaping the trajectories, meanings, and effects of circulating digital texts (Eyman, 2015).

2.3. Operationalizing digital ethos

The concept of digital ethos in this study is situated at the intersection of mediated credibility, algorithmic representation, and symbolic authority within artificial intelligence driven environments. Contemporary research on online credibility demonstrates that trust and believability in digital spaces are no longer anchored primarily in the historical legitimacy of a source, but are increasingly constructed through perceptual, visual, and discursive cues that

operate within technologically mediated contexts (Metzger, Medders, & Pure, 2013), Credibility thus emerges as a cognitive and semiotic outcome shaped by interface design, audiovisual performance, and affective resonance rather than by direct epistemic verification.

Building on this shift, studies on youth and digital information credibility reveal that users-particularly digital natives- tend to evaluate information through heuristic, visual, and socially mediated processes, privileging coherence, fluency, and expressive plausibility over institutional or historical authority (Metzger, Medders, & Pure, 2013). These findings indicate a structural transformation in the logic of ethos itself: credibility is increasingly performed rather than inherited, enacted through representational efficiency rather than grounded in lived experience. In this sense, ethos becomes operational within the mechanics of digital persuasion.

Within this transformed epistemic environment, the digital self-determination framework further complicates the notion of agency by demonstrating that digital identities are not autonomously expressed but algorithmically shaped and constrained (Verhulst, 2023). Although digital systems appear to empower representation, they simultaneously reconfigure subjectivity into programmable, optimizable forms.

Ethos accordingly, is no longer an ethical disposition rooted in moral character but a designed output produced through computational assemblages of image, voice, gesture and discourse.

In the specific context of this study, Digital Ethos is operationalized as the aggregate of visual and discursive traits attributed to the thinker Malek Bennabi within AI-generated videos. This includes facial micro-expressions synthesized through deep learning models, voice-cloning tonality calibrated for rhetorical authority, and programmed body language engineered to convey intellectual gravitas. Crucially, this ethos is not derived from Bennabi's historical presence or lived intellectual practice, but from a technically reproduced performative structure designed to appear credible within contemporary digital perception regimes. This transition marks a fundamental shift from what may be termed Historical Ethos to Generated Ethos. While historical ethos is grounded in biography, textual legacy, and socio-political context, generated ethos operates through simulation and visual rhetoric.

The AI generated figure of Malek Bennabi thus does not merely represent the thinker; it constructs a persuasive digital presence that functions independently of historical verification. Such a transformation raises critical epistemological questions concerning authenticity, knowledge authority and ethical responsibility. If credibility in digital environments is primarily assessed through perceptual and affective coherence, the risk emerges that intellectual heritage is reduced to an optimized rhetorical surface. The virtual generation of Malek Bennabi therefore occupies an ambiguous space between

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preservation and fabrication: it may extend the visibility of his ideas, yet simultaneously reconfigure his ethos according to algorithmic logics of persuasion rather than intellectual fidelity.

Ultimately, operationalizing digital ethos in AI generated representations necessitates a critical awareness of the power relations embedded. within technological mediation, the generated ethos should not be understood as a neutral extension of intellectual legacy, but as a constructed semiotic artifact shaped by contemporary regimes of visibility, credibility and control. Recognizing this shift is essential for evaluating the implications of artificial intelligence in reanimating historical thinkers and for safeguarding the epistemic integrity of intellectual discourse in the digital age.

2.4. The ethics of re-presentation: AI as a semiotic mediator

The intervention of Artificial Intelligence in reconstructing historical figures constitutes a complex hermeneutic process. It is not a neutral transmission of knowledge but a reframing of the personality to fit contemporary digital contexts. Recent studies on digital afterlife suggest that these technologies create a new form of cognitive authority that may simplify or commodify the intellectual depth of the original figure (Ohman & Floridi, 2017). Ohman and Floridi provide a critical examination of what they term the Digital Afterlife Industry DAI, defined as the commercial ecosystem that manages, monetizes and repurposes individuals' digital remains after death. The study argues that posthumous digital presence is no longer a neutral byproduct of technology, but a phenomenon embedded within the political economy of informational capitalism.

Drawing on Marxist political economy and Floridi's philosophy of information, the authors conceptualize digital remains as an extension of the informational body a contemporary reconfiguration of Marx's notion of the non-organic body (Ohman & Floridi, 2017). Within this framework, the exploitation of digital traces through memorial platforms, AI-driven simulations, or posthumous messaging services constitutes a new form of alienation and raises profound concerns regarding human dignity, consent and symbolic integrity.

The study demonstrates that market-driven incentives often lead to the reconfiguration and simplification of posthumous representations to enhance their emotional appeal and economic value, regardless of historical accuracy or the presumed intentions of the deceased. Öhman and Floridi (Ohman & Floridi, 2017) argue that the absence of robust ethical and legal frameworks enables the commodification of death itself, and they advocate extending the ethical principles governing physical human remains to the management of informational remains in digital environments. Consequently, the digital representation of Malek Bennabi is not a mirror of history but a new narrative

governed by the logic of the medium rather than the conditions of the original reality.

3. Method and tools

3.1. Operational definitions of key concepts

Before proceeding with the analytical framework, it is necessary to define the key concepts operationally as they are employed in this study.

-Digital Ethos: In this study, digital ethos is operationally defined as the algorithmically constructed discursive and visual image of Malek Bennabi in AI-generated videos, resulting from the interaction between simulated audiovisual features and the historically established intellectual authority attributed to the thinker.

-Synthetic Representations: Synthetic representations refer to AI-generated images and voices produced through avatars or deepfake technologies that substitute the physical presence of Malek Bennabi and function as mediated embodiments reconstructing his persona and discourse within digital environments.

This study adopts a multimodal methodological framework, integrating mixed-methods content analysis quantitative and qualitative with film semiotics to deconstruct the digital ethos of Malek Bennabi. This dual approach allows for the statistical measurement of discursive patterns while simultaneously interpreting the deep symbolic structures of AI-generated imagery. In the context of the visual–technological era, a set of assumptions has become increasingly taken for granted, most notably what Régis Debray terms the “visual–real–true equation” (Dubri, 2002, p. 293). Within this framework, visual language displayed on screens of varying sizes comes to position visible reality and truth as ostensibly equivalent. Consequently, the study of video emerges as a field of substantial scholarly importance, particularly in light of the growing body of research that examines its core components from both semi-theoretical and semi-practical perspectives. These include, but are not limited to, editing, lighting, set design, cinematography, screenwriting, acting and related audiovisual practices. Specifically, the qualitative analysis utilizes Christian Metz’s grand syntagmatique to decode the visual grammar -such as camera proxemics, lighting and montage- and examine how these cinematic codes contribute to the transition from a realistic ethos to an imagined ethos.

3.2. Sampling Strategy and Corpus

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select a corpus of six distinct YouTube videos representing diverse communicative strategies in reconstructing the thinker’s image. The selection criteria focused on:

- Relevance to Malek Bennabi’s intellectual legacy;

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- Diversity of technical formats (Archival, Motion graphics, AI simulation);
- High engagement metrics, ensuring the sample reflects influential digital narratives. The corpus is categorized into two operational levels:

↳ Archival-realistic ethos (raw historical material);

↳ Fabricated/Digital ethos (AI and graphic reconstruction), Table1 details the technical specifications of the selected corpus.

Table (1): the study corpus (purposive sample of YouTube videos)

Code	Channel	Video Title	Representation Typology
V1	Ghayma	Malek Bennabi: The theorist of renaissance	Motion graphics / narrative ethos
V2	ReadTube	Summary: conditions of the renaissance	Whiteboard animation / didactic ethos
V3	AlArabiya	Sajal: Critical discussion on Bennabi	Tv debate / dialogical ethos
V4	Bahr	Podcast with Malek Bennabi (AI)	Ai simulation (deepfake) / virtual ethos
V5	Nebras	Between the lines: Intellectual analysis	Video essay / analytical ethos
V6	Archive	Rare interview (I will return after 30 years)	Archival footage / reference ethos

Source: the researcher

3.3. Photograms and Freeze-Frame Analysis

This refers to the act of stopping on an image a procedure based on temporarily freezing the film's flow by fixing it in the form of a photogram (Lawson, 1967, p. 105). This technique enables a meticulous selection of details and makes it possible to highlight situations, gestures, and the expressive nuances of actors or characters, thereby facilitating the identification and capture of elements relevant to the analytical process (Ronfard, 2009, p. 91). Photograms (Freeze-Frames) were employed as fine-grained analytical units within the visual frame, where the video is paused at pivotal moments to extract:

- Expressive details of the face or body in AI-generated simulations.
- Symbolic cues conveyed by the surrounding environment, lighting, and camera angles.
- Motion dynamics and scene transitions and their impact on narrative signification.

This approach enables the identification of micro-semiotic elements that may be overlooked during continuous viewing, thereby enhancing the precision of digital ethos interpretation.

3.4. Units of analysis and coding scheme

To ensure systematic analysis, the video content was decomposed into two primary units: a. The visual frame: defined as the smallest static unit of the moving image, analyzed to determine the technical quality of the AI generation and the semiotic significance of the setting.

b. The verbal segment: defined as the distinct thematic statements made by the digital avatar or narrator. The coding scheme was structured into two main dimensions:

↳ Morphological categories (Form); these variables measure the visual construction of the ethos, including camera angles, color, ai simulation quality and sound design.

↳ Semantic categories (Content); these variables track the discursive themes, specifically; Renaissance axes, critique of colonialism, colonizability (Al Qabiliyya) and futuristic prophecies.

3.5. Analytical Procedure

The data analysis proceeded in three phases. First, a technical inventory was conducted to categorize the production techniques. Second, a comparative semiotic analysis was applied to contrast the reference ethos (V6) with the virtual ethos (V4), focusing on the shift in iconic signs/visual likeness and linguistic signs/voice authority. Finally, Metz's syntagmatic analysis was used to interpret how the sequence of images and the juxtaposition of the past voice with present imagery create a persuasive "Simulacrum" that bridges the temporal gap for the digital audience. To achieve the highest scientific rigor, this study applies a systematic content analysis to the selected corpus. The analysis focuses on deconstructing ethos (mental image/ prestige) and examining its digital reconstruction through a multimodal lens. The following tables provide a detailed semiotic and linguistic interpretation based on the methodological integration of discourse analysis and visual semiotics.

Unit 1: the virtual persona (AI deepfake)

- Video Title: Elnahdha, Gaza wa Elyahood/ Podcast with Malek Bennabi
- Channel Name: Bahr.
- Publication Date: 2024
- Duration: 16:00 minutes
- Engagement Metrics: 51,000 views (High interaction in comments regarding the realism of the AI)
- Applied Technology: Full AI Integration (Deepfake facial animation, Voice Cloning, and AI-generated script).

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Table (2): Analysis of the Bahr channel video (full digital ethosai)

Category	Observed Indicators	Semiotic / Semantic Interpretation
Visual Identity	Utilization of Deepfake technology to animate facial features, focusing on penetrating gaze and micro-expressions.	An attempt to break the "temporal rigidity" of the past; the thinker appears as a contemporary living figure, granting him an "Ethos of Modernity."
Digital Setting	Modern podcast studio, cinematic lighting, and a professional microphone positioned in front of the thinker.	Transposing Bennabi from "Classical Lecture Halls" to the "Gen-Z Podcast Sphere," making his thought accessible to younger digital natives.
Vocal Level	AI-generated voice with a calm, solemn tone, utilizing robust Classical Arabic (Fusha).	Re-producing "Vocal Authority"; the resonant, steady tone instills trust and grants intellectual credibility (Ethos) to the content.

This analysis explores how hyper-realistic simulation creates a "Simulacrum" that bridges the gap between historical archival memory and contemporary digital interaction.

Figure (1): AI-Generated Frame of Malek Bennabi's digital ethos



Source: (Bahr, 2025)

This photogram captures the techno-discursive reconstruction of Malek Bennabi's persona within a modern networked environment. By utilizing an AI-generated frame, the creators perform what Eyman (2015) defines as material cycling the process of reusing and remixing archival semiotic material to produce a transformable digital artifact. The digital ethos observed here is not a mere imitation of the historical figure but a living ecological entity that evolves through its interaction with modern platforms and algorithmic rules. The video succeeds in creating a persuasive virtual ethos, effectively transforming Malek Bennabi from a "static archival text" into a dialogical persona. This transition significantly increases the affective engagement of the

recipient by presenting a simulated historical authority within a familiar, modern media format.

Unit 2 : The authentic persona (Archival reference)

- Video Title: Rare Interview with Malek Bennabi “I will return after 30 years” recording (Ghayma, 2024)
- Channel Name: AL-Jazeera various historical archives (AL-Jazeera, 2021)
- Original Date: Archival reference 1972
- Duration: 05:20 minutes
- Engagement Metrics: High qualitative engagement; widely cited in academic circles as the definitive “living” record of the thinker.
- Applied Technology: Analog/archival footage (original 16mm film or early magnetic tape), digitized with minimal restoration to preserve historical integrity.
- Primary Target: Researchers, historians, and students of the “Malekian” school of thought.

Table (3): Analysis of the rare interviewvideo (reference ethos Archive)

Category	Observed Indicators	Semiotic / Semantic Interpretation
Visual Identity	Black-and-white footage, low resolution, formal suit, and the presence of a cigarette (symbolic of the 20th-century Francophone intellectual).	Represents "Raw Ethos"; the historical realism and temporal distance bestow an aura of sanctity, authenticity, and prestige.
Digital Setting	Simple office, stacked books, a natural and unmanufactured environment.	Reflects "Intellectual Asceticism"; a focus on substance over form, where the <i>signifier</i> serves the intellectual <i>signified</i> .
Vocal Level	Original voice with an Algerian accent blended with French nuances, accompanied by natural background noise/hissing.	The noise functions as an "Authenticity Marker," increasing the document's value for those seeking historical truth.

This video serves as the standard reference against which the audience measures the fidelity of all digital simulations.

Unit 3 : The didactic persona (Educational graphic)

- Video Title: Conditions of Renaissance - Comprehensive Summary of Malek Bennabi's Book.
- Channel Name: ReadTube.
- Publication Date: 2021.
- Duration: 08:30 minutes.

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- Engagement Metrics: 46,000 views (High educational save-rate).
- Applied Technology: Whiteboard Animation (Graphic icons and hand-drawn digital sketching).

Table (4): Analysis of ReadTube video (Graphic ethos/ Motion graphics)

Category	Observed Indicators	Semiotic / Semantic Interpretation
Visual Identity	Minimalist Whiteboard animation, icons representing civilization, gears, and societal structures.	Transformation of "Complex Ethos" into "Didactic Ethos." The absence of Bennabi’s physical image makes the <i>Idea</i> the protagonist.
Digital Setting	An expansive white space resembling a school blackboard.	Suggests clarity and systematic simplification, removing the "awe" of difficult philosophy and making it universally accessible.
Vocal Level	A young "YouTuber" voice, fast-paced, enthusiastic, with motivational background music.	A shift from "Solemnness" to "Enthusiasm," changing the mode of reception from deep contemplation to rapid information absorption.

This pattern reconstructs Malek Bennabi as an actionable methodology rather than a historical myth.

Figure (2): AI-Generated Frame of Malek Bennabi’s complex ethos



Source: (Media, 2023)

Unit 4: The narrative persona (Cinematic Motion)

- Video Title: Malek Bennabi | Theorist of Renaissance and Jurist of Civilization.
- Channel Name: Ghayma

- Publication Date: 2023.
- Duration: 05:40 minutes.
- Engagement Metrics: 732 views (Targeted intellectual audience).
- Applied Technology: Parallax Motion Graphics (Depth animation of archival photos) and professional dramatic voice-over.

Table (5): Analysis of Ghayma channel video (Dramatic ethos - documentary)

Category	Observed Indicators	Semiotic / Semantic Interpretation
Visual Identity	Parallax-treated photographs (depth animation) merged with expressive scenes of Algeria and France.	Construction of an "Epic Ethos." Bennabi is portrayed as a tragic hero struggling for his ideas, evoking a sense of "National Pride."
Digital Setting	Intersection of historical images with modern filters (Sepia and Grain).	A technological bridge simulating memory; the video attempts to link the past and present through visual aesthetics.
Vocal Level	Deep, documentary-style voice-over accompanied by an orchestral, melancholic soundtrack.	Reinforces the image of the "Oppressed Thinker" or "Neglected Theorist," serving the narrative of "Intellectual Restitution."

The video focuses on the global thinker archetype, using digital aesthetics to compensate for the lack of sufficient archival film material.

Figure (3): AI-Generated Frame of Malek Bennabi's epic ethos



Source: (Ghayma, 2024)

Unit 5: The critical persona (Institutional Media)

- Video Title: Sajal | The Truth of his Affiliation with Political Islam.
- Channel Name: Al Arabiya
- Publication Date: 2022.
- Duration: 24:00 minutes.
- Engagement Metrics: ~4,300 views.

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-Applied Technology: Digital Studio Hybrid (HD Broadcast, Infographics, and digital archival inserts).

Table (6): analysis of Al Arabiya -sajal video (dialogical ethos - media)

Category	Observed Indicators	Semiotic / Semantic Interpretation
Visual Identity	Large-scale studio decor, screens displaying Bennabi's quotes, guests in modern attire.	Placing Bennabi within an "Institutional Media Framework," granting him an Ethos of "Strategic Importance."
Digital Setting	On-screen Infographics used to analyze his concepts.	"Digitizing Thought"; transforming abstract concepts (e.g., Colonizability) into measurable, visual data.
Vocal Level	Investigative journalistic language, critical questioning, and polyphony (host + multiple guests).	Shifting the Ethos from a "Monological Voice" (the Thinker) to a "Dialectical Inquiry" (Critical Study).

This mode transitions Bennabi from the circle of devotees to the sphere of formal critical analysis.

Figure (4): Frame of Malek Bennabi's graphic ethos



Source: (Arabiya, 2023)

Unit 6 : The analytical persona (Academic visuals)

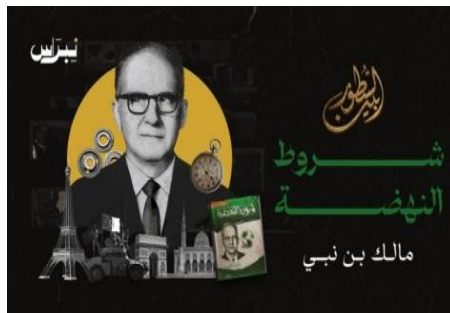
- Video Title: Between the Lines | Malek Bennabi | Conditions of Renaissance.
- Channel Name: Nebras
- Publication Date: 2022.
- Duration: 12:45 minutes.
- Engagement Metrics: ~108,000 views (Highest engagement in the sample).
- Applied Technology: Progressive Digital Presentation (Graphic-supported lecture style).

Table (7): Analysis of Nebras channel video (Analytical Ethos)

Category	Observed Indicators	Semiotic / Semantic Interpretation
Visual Identity	Focus on written text alongside a static image of Bennabi in the corner of the screen.	Construction of a "Digital Academic Ethos." The image acts as a "Signature" or "Seal of Credibility" for the presented information.
Digital Setting	Progressive presentation techniques (PowerPoint-style) supported by graphics.	Targeting students and researchers, thus maintaining the seriousness and formal weight of the persona.
Vocal Level	A very calm tone, mimicking a university lecturer.	Preserving the "Aesthetic Distance" between the thinker and the recipient; classical respect within a digital environment.

This video succeeds in maintaining a traditional ethos of dignity while utilizing the organizational advantages of digital tools.

Figure (5): Frame of Malek Bennabi's digital academic ethos



Source: (Nibras, 2024)

The analysis reveals that the digital reconstruction of Malek Bennabi's Ethos operates through three complementary strategies:

- Technical humanization via AI, which narrows the experiential distance and renders the persona vibrant and lifelike;
- Visual simplification through motion graphics, facilitating the decoding of complex intellectual concepts;
- Dramatic magnification using documentary and archival materials, which digitally reinstates historical and symbolic authority.

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The corpus itself spans a continuum from archival authenticity to digitally mediated simulation; V6 serves as the historical anchor, V1 and V4 exemplify technological displacement, and V2, V3 and V5 foreground discursive mediation through educational, narrative and analytical approaches. This structure provides a systematic framework for comparing technological fidelity, discursive emphasis and audience engagement, thereby offering a robust foundation for semiotic analysis across diverse digital modalities

5. Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate a profound transformation in the construction of intellectual authority within the digital public sphere. By analyzing the six selected units, we can synthesize the findings into three critical thematic dimensions that address the research problem regarding the "Digital Ethos" of Malek Bennabi.

5.1. From Somatic Authenticity to Algorithmic Simulation

The transition from the reference ethos (Unit 06) to the virtual ethos (Unit 01) represents a shift from historical somatic presence-grounded in the physical body and archival recordings- to what Baudrillard calls the Simulacrum. In the archival footage, credibility is derived from imperfections such as analog noise and historical attire, which act as indexical signs of truth. Conversely, the AI-generated frame in Unit 01 (Bahr Channel) achieves persuasion through technical humanization. By animating facial micro-expressions and utilizing voice cloning, the algorithm acts as a co-author of the persona, shifting the source of trust from historical accuracy to technical fidelity.

5.2. Material Cycling and the Ecological Evolution of Thought

In alignment with Eyman's (2015) theory of digital rhetoric, the virtual generation of Malek Bennabi is not a neutral reproduction but a process of material cycling. Digital networks function as living ecological entities where the energy of modern users and material of old archives are remixed. Unit 03 (ReadTube) and Unit 05 (Nebras) illustrate this by digitizing thought converting abstract philosophical concepts like colonizability into visual data and infographics. This re-contextualization moves the thinker from the stagnation of the archive into a dynamic digital interaction, making his 20th century ideas compatible with the systems logic of 21st-century platforms.

5.3. The Convergence of Multiple Ecosystems

The analysis shows that the digital circulation of Bennabi's ethos occurs through the intersection of multiple ecosystems:

- As seen in Unit 04 (Al-Arabiya), where the media framework grants the thinker strategic importance through professional studio aesthetics and dialectical inquiry.

-Where the graphic ethos (Unit 03) simplifies complex philosophy into an actionable methodology for a digital audience.

The dramatic ecosystem; Unit 04 (Ghayma) constructs an epic ethos to evoke national pride, compensating for missing historical footage through digital aesthetics.

Ultimately, the reconstruction of Malek Bennabi's digital ethos creates a present and dialogical intellectual. While this algorithmic mediation reduces the historical gap and humanizes the thinker for contemporary audiences, it simultaneously raises ethical questions about the digital afterlife. As the AI avatar begins to speak on contemporary issues (e.g; Gaza in Unit 1); the boundary between the original thinker's historical reality and the generated simulation becomes increasingly blurred, leading to a new form of cognitive authority governed by the logic of the medium rather than the original historical conditions.

6- Conclusion

This study investigated the digital reconstruction of Malek Bennabi's ethos through the lens of artificial intelligence and digital rhetoric. The research concludes that the transition from a historical ethos to a generated ethos is not merely a technical reproduction but a profound semiotic transformation. Artificial intelligence technologies contribute to this by creating a Simulacrum that bridges the temporal and psychological gap between the original thinker and contemporary digital audiences, effectively humanizing the intellectual through hyper-realistic animation and vocal cloning.

The analysis reveals that these representations are governed by a systems logic, where the digital text is a transformable semiotic material shaped by the intersection of multiple ecosystems-institutional, pedagogical, and dramatic. Through processes of material cycling, AI mediated content repositions Bennabi as a present, dialogical figure, thereby reinforcing his cognitive authority in the 21st century digital public sphere while simultaneously blurring the boundaries between archival reality and algorithmic simulation.

Proposals and recommendations:

It is recommended that platforms hosting AI-generated intellectual content implement clear synthetic media labels to distinguish between historical archival records and algorithmic simulations to preserve historical integrity.

- Educational institutions should adopt material cycling strategies- as described

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by Eyman (2015)- to remix classical Arab thought into modern digital formats (podcasts, motion graphics) to ensure cultural continuity among younger generations.

- Researchers and educators should develop frameworks for digital rhetorical literacy to help audiences critically decode the techno-discursive construction of virtual personas.

- This research was limited by its focus on YouTube as a primary medium and its purposive sample of six specific video units. While these units represent diverse communicative strategies, they do not encompass the entirety of Bennabi's digital presence on emerging platforms like TikTok or VR environments. Future research should expand into the "Metaverse" to explore immersive 3D reconstructions of historical figures. Furthermore, a quantitative study measuring audience "trust" in AI avatars compared to archival footage would provide empirical validation for the semiotic shifts identified in this study.

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