

**Three or Four Ir/relevant Stories
Art and Hyper-Politics**



Behzad Khosravi Noori

In this book, I reflect upon different modes of exhibition making and artistic research practices, however; this book is not simply a postscript to those works. It also serves as a form of marginalia to my artistic explorations in relation to art, history, and global politics.

It is a work all its own: one that foregrounds numerous compact stories, multiple histories, chronicles of failure, and competing interpretations, while tying all these elements together into the primary trio of narratives.

***Three or Four Ir/relevant Stories* presents an entanglement of collective histories that have shaped our existence today—believe it or not, like or dislike it. One cannot escape the past these stories present, nor erase their discomforts. Nor can we necessarily avoid the futures they invent or anticipate.**

To those who look at the past
and imagine the future

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Second story:

Myrornas Krig and Black-and-White Psychedelia / Confused Missiles / Traces of Memory: The Story of a Little Man at the Turn of the World / To East or Not to East / The Great Meeting / EXAT 51, Kristal, and the Link between, Zagreb Film and the Abstraction Movement / Abstraction against Disney / The Inventor of Shoes, the Sleep-Creep; or, An Animator Who Works like a Miner / The Shah's Quandary / Enough about the West; Let's Talk about the East / 1979 / From Tarkovsky to Balthazar / Superpowers: An Indirect Relationship between the Zagreb School of Animation and Iran / Once Upon a Time in Stockholm, a Pinko Communist Monument / The Future of Our Collective Past / Ivana Gundulića Elementary School

Third story:

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Prologue

This book documents and reflects upon three artistic projects and their processes. As “marginalia” to the projects, I present arguments, stories and ir/relevant discourses. It is partly a reflection on my process and experiences, but, more crucially for me, it is what I would like to call marginalia. It extends to aspects of a historical backdrop that were not necessarily present in the process of exhibition making.

In this book, I reflect upon different modes of exhibition making and artistic research practices. However, it is not simply a postscript to those works. It also serves as a form of marginalia to my artistic explorations in relation to art, history, and global politics.

Combining fragments of histories, it constitutes a bricolage of things, events, and narratives. The book itself comprises the fourth and final story.

“Three or Four Ir/relevant Stories” mirrors the conjunction of historical and cultural cases that, in my point of view, need to be acknowledged. It is an artistic research investigation, proposing a multi-sited, archaeological approach to histories of art and life that also constitute part of my lived experience in the Global South and the Global North. By bringing multiple subjects into my study, as well as historical reenactment in the form of a review of archival materials in the exhibition space, I explore possible correspondences, seen through the lenses of contemporary art practice, proletarianism, subalternity, and the technology of image production.

In my investigations of certain artworks and their histories, I aim to take everyday observations as a point of departure for archaeological interpretations—to displace the image from its past historical location and bring forth the question: What will happen to our collective past in the future?

My practice comprises artistic production and, more essentially, a process based on acts of itinerancy that constitute the historical art works I investigate and brings these procedures to light.

The exhibitions themselves embody a hybrid approach, an expression that portrays multiple combinations and interpretations of various art genres and subject matters. By their very nature, the works present multiplicities of materials, which through their collection into an exhibition amount to a sort of cabinet of curiosities.

I neither stick to one method of artistic investigation, nor focus on a single medium. Instead I aim to reconnoiter the possibilities that inhere in an artistic survey. At no point do I follow any fixed blueprint for, or definition of, artistic production; in short, I might argue that in my artistic practices, I attempt to avoid dividing method from life's experiences. It is, in part, the narrative fluidity of such a microhistorical investigation that enables me to imagine the exhibition as a point of departure for my artistic exploration and research of such micro elements of contemporary history.

I have begun to think about all my ideas as films. I often tell myself, "I have to make a film about that"; no matter the subject, I always imagine the camera's presence as an investigative tool. In fact, I can hardly elaborate my ideas unless I feel certain they will ultimately lead to a film. However, I cannot call myself a filmmaker, as the ultimate realization of my ideas and projects tends to take other forms.¹

A number of artists who are influential on my work, or otherwise reoccur in my thinking, tend to inhabit multiple identities in their artistic practice, often affording a significant role to narrative film.

Consider, for instance, Naeem Mohaiemen, who in the film *United Red Army* (2012; part of the trilogy *The Young Man Was*) examines the radical leftist movements of the 1970s. Through his essayistic approach, using archival footage and other unearthed

materials, Naeem investigates the global left's relationship to ambition and failure. The film departs from the 1977 hijacking of Japan Air Lines Flight 472, in which the Japanese Red Army, a communist militant group, forcefully redirected the plane to Dhaka.

Mohaiemen sets the story against the backdrop of Bangladesh's post-World War II history, specifically its partition from Pakistan in 1971 and the ensuing struggles. While focusing on a singular event, Mohaiemen also explores the political conditions within multiple newly independent countries, and the struggles between them. Remarkably, his retelling of a single story succeeds in imbuing in the viewer an understanding of these geopolitical relationships, as well as unpacking political struggle at the macro level, foregrounding most of all its underlying strangeness.

In the film *Madame and Little Boy* (2009), Magnus Bærtås discovers an unexpected entanglement between Choi Eun-hee (Madame Choi) and her fateful journey through the history of North and South Korea in the twentieth century. He creates bridges between geopolitical events small and large, offering a poetic narration that adopts the frame of a psychoanalysis of dictators and their love of cinema. The film is rife with paradox: the known and the unknown; the unfamiliarity that inheres in well-known moments of contemporary history; and, more importantly, the bizarre vernacular that attends conversations about nuclear weaponry.²

In the film *November* (2004), Hito Steyerl examines the continuum of interrelationships between territorial power politics—in particular, those practiced by Turkey in Kurdistan, with the support of Germany—alongside forms of individual resistance. Based on film that she shot in the mid eighties on Super 8 stock, the work takes the form of a feminist martial arts film. Her best friend, Andrea Wolf, played the lead role. The engagement expressed in the formal grammar of exploitation films would later

become Wolf's political praxis: she went to fight alongside the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the borderlands of Turkey and northern Iraq, where she was killed in 1998.

Steyerl's memories and accounts of Wolf's life provoke the filmmaker to engage in deep reflection, and she ultimately comes to understand fact and fiction as intertwined in the global discourse. Her friend's picture as a revolutionary pin-up would equally belong to either a genre of Asian cinema or a private video document. By bringing her own story and friendship into the film, she de-territorializes the idea of global politics itself.

Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica's *Videograms of a Revolution* (1992) encompasses another dimension in relation to the representation of a singular event through archival footage. It details the five days in December of 1989 during which a popular uprising in Romania overthrew and executed the country's leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu. The revolt first appeared on international news broadcasts in the form of images of corpses alleged to be victims of the army's recent attack on anti-government protestors in the western town of Timișoara. Constructed solely from recordings of Romanian state television broadcasts and what was captured by itinerant video cameras in and around the streets of Bucharest during that time, *Videograms* explores these five days of the revolution in chronological sequence. Long one-shot sequences from portable video cameras are intercut with images from the state archives, including both broadcast and off-air footage. Together, they comprise a diverse set of viewpoints on one specific event—a diversity that poignantly conveys the uncertainty and confusion of the nascent political struggle. As it ends, *Videograms* offers no conclusions; instead, it just explores what this perplexity might mean for politics and publicity. The film thus investigates the relationship between historical agency and the virtu-

alization of the event by asking how images might condition the extension of democratic demands.

Lina Selander, in her film *To the Vision Machine* (2013), investigates visual inscription's invisible center as an internal object and its relation to vision and different imaging technologies. Using methods similar to those in Bärtås's film, she narrates a story around the atomic bombing of Hiroshima; however, she takes the story to another level by exploring the detonation of the atomic bomb as a photographic event. In her description of the project, she emphasizes the temporal parallels between the photographic act and the blast:

The first atomic bomb created a flash that lasted one fifteenth of a millionth of a second. The light penetrated every building and shadows of objects and bodies were exposed and burned onto the city's surfaces. When bodies and objects turned to ash, their traces were left as unintentional monuments. But the detonation itself can only be witnessed at the expense of one's eyesight or life.

In the film, she also records the dismantling of a video camera, casting light on the banality of photography in relation to the machinery of the camera itself.

Stefanos Tsivopoulos, in his film *AmnesiaLand* (2010), undertakes an exploration based on a series of questions: Are archives places of remembering or, rather, of forgetting? Does their content tell the truth, or merely one's story? And if so, whose story? Is so-called collective memory dependent on visual imagery, and in which direction do these images reflect our memory—forward or backward? Such questions are in fact fundamentally related to the investigation in my artistic practices. Tsivopoulos takes as his starting point a photographic collection found in the public archives of the port city Carta-

gena, which leads to a poetic investigation into the questions of memory and forgetting, the role that images play in the construction of history, and their relation to reality and historical truth.

Another filmmaker whose work I have been following closely in recent years is Pirooz Kalantari, in particular his video essays, which exemplify the fluidity of his narrative approach. Among his many films, *Reading Salinger in City Park* (2010) is a significant example and akin to my own artistic explorations. The film is an autoethnographical video essay, in which Kalantari narrates his relationship to the oldest public park in Tehran. His depiction of the relationship between an individual and their surroundings emphasizes the connection between the filmmaker (I) and the surrounding environment (reality). Amounting to a grafting of reality and the “I,” the technique is the nucleus of his filmmaking. Such films call into question the foundation of documentary filmmaking as an act of observation, and the presence of the filmmaker becomes both definite and crucial. The intersection of reality and the “I” is an example of the relationship between aesthetics and the social presence of the artistic filmmaker. This distinctive social presence in Kalantari’s films is represented through varied faces. In *Reading Salinger in City Park*, he walks in the park, sits on benches and, all the while contemplating their social standing, watches people: the passersby, the men, the women, and even the crows. Kalantari brings the “other” into the heart of his micronarrative; for instance, in the film’s titular anecdote, one day, as he was reading, a young boy and girl who were sitting on either side of him passed a note over the book in his hands. Rather than ignore critical political and social aspects, Kalantari deliberately refrains from engaging a critical perspective.

Although films, and especially the artist-filmmakers who I’ve mentioned, play a significant role in my understanding of my own artistic practice, in my

PhD research, the idea of filmmaking was largely overshadowed by the process of tracing and excavating the archival materials and history. The filmic approach, however, came to define my approach to narrative. Perhaps it is from here that the notion of playfulness and craftsmanship departs: importing all the images, sounds, and footage into the timeline of my video editing suite, left hand on the keyboard and right hand on mouse. It is in the process of dragging, replacing, and cutting the clips that I eventually build the narrative. Sometimes I draw a short storyboard of images and idea to see how to put things together, but the story is mainly the result of improvisation based on the footage and narration; a dialogue with the materials. To paraphrase Harun Farocki, I talk to footage and it talks back to me.³

Sometimes film plays a supporting role. For example, in the project *A Monument to the Invisible Citizen*, by assembling a pair of films, I aimed to produce a montage—one that introduced not only facts but also hypothetical historical reviews—but they were received mainly as informative elements of the exhibition, rather than an artwork unto themselves. They were ultimately placed at the margin of the physical *Monument*. But conceptually, the films played the most crucial part, for they propose a speculative reading of politics and cultural production during the Cold War. Nevertheless, as in all my projects—including *The Life of an Itinerant through a Pinhole*, the artifact of the *Monument* itself, films, and the posters that accompanied them—my emphasis is not only the thing itself, but also the process of its production. In this spirit, my aim in this book is to foreground the marginalias of their production in order to make that process as transparent as possible. This approach also applies to my archival research, during which I have visited public and private archives such as ARYA Philatelic (Sam Shamsabadi’s private archive), which allowed

me to access a fascinating collection of postcards depicting the dervish. The online archive Human Zoo (humanzoo.net), directed by Clemens Radauer, was invaluable to my research for the first chapter. Borivoj Dovniković-Bordo's private archive was the source for exceptional images from the golden age of the Zagreb Film company. State archives proved a valuable resource as well, including Belgrade's Museum of Yugoslavia, which houses a unique collection of photographs and documents relating to the Non-aligned Movement. Zagreb Film's archive was a key point of access for episodes of the animated series *Professor Balthazar*, as well as during the research that led to the installation of the *Monument to the Invisible Citizen* in Zagreb and Belgrade. Nader Qashghaie's private collection provided the sole available documentation of the construction of the monument to Palestine that lies in the center of Tehran.

I would like to point out that all my experiences, investigations, and exhibitions played significant roles as "social condensers," a term coined by the Soviet constructivist architect Moisei Ginzburg to convey the premise that zones of collision lead to an environment where there is potential to allow for otherwise-disparate social communities to interact and play.⁴

Play and the capacity of playfulness to bring about an absent presence is another key dimension of my artistic exploration when I ask: *What is the future of our collective past?* Presence here takes the form of the act of play that creates an exceptional time and place: a brief utopia, or what I call *briftopia*.

A *briftopia* is produced when one inhabits a character in front of the pinhole camera (which I named Soul Catcher; روح کیچ), and lets it to take their soul.

A *briftopia* occurs when one rewatches, for the first time since they were a child, an episode of *Professor Balthazar*, and then, also for the first time

in decades, descend a slide attached to the *Monument to the Invisible Citizen*.

A *briftopia* is a space in which one can dance to Persian pop music in front of a projection of a film of the Iranian monument to Palestine. The concept infiltrates all my artistic attempts to achieve a sense of playfulness through the recontextualization of narrations, things, everyday objects, and history. I am keen to extract objects and narrations from their original aura, and place them in a new context to ask: *What will happen to them when they cross the border?*

The answers to these questions lie in my practice more than they do my theoretical arguments. This book is a representation and republication of the objects and stories that themselves inhabit a monumental format: the itinerancy of photographs taken by grandfather, Gholamreza, the ultimate installation of the *Monument* in public in Zagreb, my speculative proposal for a future Felestin Square.

My exhibitions function as a storyteller, through which I not only tell my own story but also make it our story.

I wanted to investigate whether it was possible establish a storytelling structure that would mirror the branching paths of the archaeological trace and its background—a transdisciplinary materialism that brings multiple dimensions of history into one temporary place called an exhibition. In so doing, I have sought to produce a cross-generational platform where the audience can engage with the multiplicity of the contemporary past, and perhaps also revisit their own memories.

1. For example, for the project *The Life of an Itinerant through a Pinhole*, I filmed interviews and collected archival footages in an effort to make a narrative film. I produced short clips, but never managed to finalize the film.
2. In 2013, I curated series of film screenings in Tehran as part of the *Limited Access* group show, under the title *The Strangeness of Banality*, focusing on the political dimensions of artistic practice. Bårtås's film brought an interesting angle to the subject of nuclear weapons particular to that geopolitical context, given that so much currently depends on the negotiations over international nuclear agreements.
3. Magnus Bårtås, *You Told Me: Work Stories and Video Essays* (Göteborg: Art Monitor, 2010), p. 13.
4. Brendan McGetrick and Rem Koolhaas, eds., *Content* (Cologne: Taschen, 2004), p. 73.

Introduction

Honorable Justice of the Municipal Court of Jam,

I write to respectfully inform you of the activities of Qatar Airways, an operator of large modern aircraft that fly all over the world, in southern Iran. Many of their flights reach destinations in Northern Europe and cities in the United States, including New York, Washington, DC, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, Miami, Boston, Philadelphia, and Dallas, as well as Toronto. All of them fly over the city of Jam, over the geographic coordinates 27°49'57.0"N 52°19'33.0"E. Despite the noise caused by their colossal engines, I am forced to rely on the Flightradar24 website to ascertain their destinations. Because Iran is under US sanctions, Iranians cannot travel to any of those destinations. I have always dreamt of flying Qatar Airways to one of those places, hence I spend all my time identifying and tracing their routes. I feel extremely depressed—like a bird trapped in a cage, while other birds fly freely around me. It is clear to me that redirecting these planes away from the skies over Jam would help heal my depression and anxiety. Therefore, I request you order Qatar Airways to cease flying through my city's airspace until such time as its residents may use this company's facilities, and legal obstacles to travel for Iranians have been removed.¹

Signed,
A resident of Jam

On June 5, 2017, Qatar's diplomatic crisis with Saudi Arabia escalated to new levels when the Saudis, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Egypt simultaneously discontinued diplomatic relations with Qatar. The Saudi-led coalition cited Qatar's alleged support of terrorism as the main reason for their actions, insisting that Qatar had violated a 2014 agreement with the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), of which Qatar is a member. Among the major sources of criticism by Saudi Arabia and others was the relationship of Qatar, and its state-owned broadcaster Al Jazeera, to Iran. On the basis of these complaints, the Saudi coalition banned Qatar-registered airplanes and ships from using their air and sea routes; simultaneously, Saudi Arabia initiated a military blockade of Qatar's only land crossing. Under these political conditions, Qatar was forced to reroute flights to Europe and North America through Iranian airspace.

And so, it came to be that a man in the small city of Jam, in southern Iran near Persian Gulf, suddenly began to see commercial jets in the sky overhead. By using a Swedish app called Flightradar24, he could trace their flight paths and discover their destinations. Hence, his complaint to the municipal court, quoted above. In the letter, he grumbles about his isolation, his lack of mobility, and the impossibility of pursuing a life of itinerancy, all of which came into his life as consequences of geopolitical tensions.

For him, to be old is already a form of death: he is conscious of his isolation and stagnancy, but he is powerless to change his situation. Seen in this light, his attempt to file a lawsuit is a dark satire, a hopeless attempt at formal documentation of his feelings. The predicament, it seems, is just as Antonio Gramsci imagined it: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."²

His is a state of isolation and permanent crisis, one in which the senescent order is crumbling but a new has not yet emerged and still lacks the capacity to do so. Indeed, the geriatric still control time and space, even though their dominion is breaking down before our very eyes. You hear the sounds of hollow bones shrinking and the body dwindling. It will collapse—today or tomorrow, now or then, sooner or later—but the new still cannot be born. Even revolution cannot bring us salvation from the nightmare. It is this condition of claustrophobia that I call *hyper-politics*.

The inhabitant of the hyper-political eventually adapts their way of life to the permanent state of crisis—a comprehensive, "organic" crisis, as Gramsci tells us, in the sense that it involves the totality of a "historical bloc." The crisis may last a long time, for, as Gramsci warily observed, "no social form is ever willing to confess that it has been superseded."³ The armies of death still march against each other.

To live in a state of hyper-politics is to reside permanently in organic crisis, condemned to remain, unconditionally, in a particular context or set of environments. It is a realm where any action or motion is immediately associated with one or the other side of a conflict that took place in the abyss of past millennia, or else will occur in the future—today, tomorrow, or decades from now. In this tyrannical space, there is no zone of liminality between the two sides of the conflict: on one hand, there is internal systematic discrimination and oppression in the name of religious ideology⁴ or any projected authoritarianism mentality; on the other, there is a campaign of far-right colonial barbarism prosecuted by a foreign power in the name of human rights and humanitarian action. This hyper-politicized character can be understood as a temperament that interferes with the whole realm of individuality and its fragmented public presence. It is characterized by a multiplicity of both marginal histories and omnipresent power.

The hyper-politicized realm is occupied by a hoary, dying political and historical order, an apparatus in which history has become a quarry from which we cut stones to hurl in each other's faces. There is no solidarity. Society has fragmented; otherization, the introduction of division and social separation, thus constitutes the primary "morbid symptom" of a hyper-politicized social environment.

The denial of politics within the realm of hyper-politics is an act of constant abrogation for those in any way active in the orbit of cultural production—an impossible task. In fact, the purpose of statements such as "I am not political" or "This is not a political art" is mostly to create a secure corner for oneself, thus preparing a temporary possibility for growth in a calmer environment in reaction to the exhaustion of mortal struggle. Anyone living within the confines of this geopolitical arena is well aware that such statements are completely devoid of meaning, and that political claustrophobia has taken over every aspect of our individual and social lives; one cannot live outside of history.

Not only does such a morbid condition of hyper-politicized instability become part of a particular geopolitical identity, in all its social and political guises; it also crosses the border, presenting itself as a generalized characteristic of everyday life. The inhabitant of the hyper-politicized realm always carries the hyper-politicized characteristic at their side. This is true not only within one's own society, but also from a multicultural perspective. In this emerging context, the fundamental, everyday question faced by those living under hyper-political conditions concerns not only one's political position, but also one's personal life: Who are you, really?

In my projects, hyper-politics is a term I have deployed to speak to a frustrated politics where the idea of political art has been limited to a predictable form of visualization. For the purposes of this book, and the arguments I put forward here, the concept

of hyper-politics allows me to relocate myself within the political dimensions of art. And by the end, the importance of hyper-politics will hopefully become apparent, especially when it comes to the question of art that crosses the border.

Three or Four: One Who Hopes⁵

When I was eight years old, my parents enrolled me and my sister in an Esperanto language course. Perhaps they went with Esperanto because the classes were cheaper than English courses.

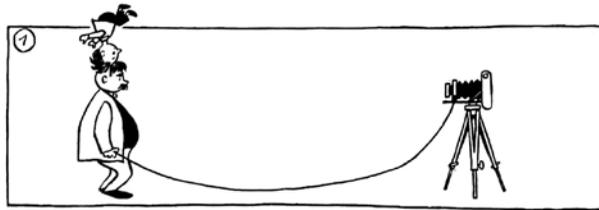
The course took place in an old house with a large dark-blue door and a front yard, near Revolution Square on Kargar Street (Workers' street). I split my time there between learning Esperanto and playing in the yard.

There, a group of escapees from war and devastations of political insecurity, led by the psychologist Naser Adin Sahebzamani, found hope in studying and teaching the international auxiliary language, invented by Polish ophthalmologist and linguist Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof. It was a language invented for communication between people from different nations who share neither a common first language nor a colonial language.

At the time, there was not yet an Esperanto curriculum for children, so the young teachers invented a new pedagogical system for me and the other newcomers. Ultimately, they chose an anthology of the comic strip *Father and Son*, illustrated by German anti-Nazi cartoonist Erich Ohser, as our instructional book. Appearing from 1934 to 1937 in the magazine *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, *Father and Son* was wordless and comprised five to six panels per strip. In the series, a stout, bald man with a large moustache and his young son, Eric, get into and out of numerous predicaments in their day-to-day life.⁶

Based on Ohser's stories, we learned Esperanto by narrating the tale of a single father in the middle of the war in Tehran. I may well have been the youngest Esperantist in Iran in the mid-eighties—a language I would eventually forget.

The notion of “three or four” as an indication of multiplicity stems from this early experience, and the multiplicity of events and experiences that have shaped me.



As the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser said, we must be born somewhere, sometime, and begin to think and write in relation to a given world.⁷ Identity derives from this conjuncture of images and memories. Should we fall into the trap of an institutionalized way of thinking and simply embrace a linear, monologic narrative, without regard to its margins? We need to start here, as legal sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos suggests: to “rethink” a modern history otherwise incapable of helping us live in a moment of danger.⁸

But is the subject of my investigation history on a micro-scale? Or is it, in fact, the immense proportion of history that is overshadowed by the commanding image of the one-way narrative? How can these stories and experiences be presented under the rubric of “representation of the other places,” from the colonial past to the multicultural present? Moreover, what role does my own political identity play here?

I feel a strong affinity for this kind of thinking: a rejection of any cultural identity that presumes I

will remain in a predefined location, either culturally and politically. Along the same lines, my adoption of the title “Three or Four Ir/relevant Stories” is an effort to challenge the notion of sedentary bias and representation of the other. In my projects I have decided to swim on the surface, rather than dive into the dark, lifeless abyss; to be able to breathe and observe my own itinerancy, fixed on one end and free on the other, as in Santos's image of a cantilever lamp.⁹

In my art practice I have tried to walk the line between such false divisions as here and there, and to problematize the very existence of such a line. Over the course of my PhD research, crossing the border has become a privilege I have enjoyed in life for the first time; an advantage afforded by itinerancy. I cannot take it for granted, and I remember it each time I pass through passport control with my proof of residency in the Global North in hand. This permanent act of legally crossing the border inherently affords me a comparative critical analysis of the geographies of “here” and “there”—and, correspondingly, a new sense of the territorialized experiences of the global North and South. Indeed, once you have crossed the border for the first time, you can never “un-cross” it.

By exploring the political relationships between multiple interconnected sites, my study itself follows an itinerant course: it travels from Iran to Pakistan to survey the effects of unconscious colonial memory on image production from the viewpoint of the proletariat; then, from Yugoslavia to Sweden, shedding new light on the global historiography of the Non-aligned Movement by placing it in conversation with the Zagreb school of animation and the animated character Professor Balthazar. I then connect this discussion to the ambiguous and problematic characteristics of representations of global resistance in relation to an urban political gesture in Tehran—the Palestine monument in the center

of the city—to foreground a question central to my research: What happens to art when it crosses the border?

Although these stories are unrelated and fundamentally distinct, they are inscribed in geographies that have been historically defined from the vantage point of Eurocentrism. The Eurocentric attitude is based fundamentally on the division between “here” and “there”: a border that divides two distinct realms. “Here” encompasses a dynamic of modern, progressive sociability, while “there” demarcates a location frozen in its history, simultaneously patronized and exotified—the mesmerizing, beautiful, naive Orient that, as Edward Said argues, was practically a European invention.¹⁰

Three or Four Ir/relevant Stories presents an entanglement of collective histories that have shaped our existence today—believe it or not, like or dislike it. One cannot escape the past these stories present, nor erase their discomforts. Nor can we necessarily avoid the futures they invent or anticipate.

My critique of Eurocentrism is not simply in relation to the reading of two geographies as divided territories. Rather, I primarily focus on the relationships embodied in the transnational historiography of, and entanglements between, East and West, global South and North. In so doing, I insist that there is no separation between ideas, images and representations and actual material reality.

As political scientist John M. Hobson explains, Eurocentrism is not simply stigmatization of the other’s geography as an image frozen in premodern identity; it is in fact an active attempt to erase Europe’s own history of its relationships with other geographies.¹¹ Thus, Eurocentrism is best understood as an effort to obliterate European history, rather than that of other places. The rediscovery of the other through the lens of multiculturalism in the mid 1970s didn’t change this mentality, either;

rather, culture was once again defined as a pure and unchangeable phenomenon.

Eurocentrism holds you in place and defines you as a sedentary phenomenon—one that is stationary in time and hasn’t yet achieved the dynamism of Western modernity and its embodied progress. Your journey of becoming modern might begin when you decide to cross the border, legally or illegally, as an immigrant or an asylum seeker. In short, your only opportunity to become modern, to reanimate yourself, is to change your geography and cross the border.

But what happens to the body when it crosses the border? The worst dimension of a border, according to Santos, is the one that cannot be seen.¹² The securitization of that border occurs not in checkpoints and barbed wire and security cameras, but as a state of mind. Even after crossing the border, it is expected that those who originate from the dark, dystopian land of hyper-politics narrate their border crossing, dramatizing their journey for the benefit of the utopian territory of modernity; or that they condemn the dark land from which they came, while simultaneously expressing gratitude toward the rich—all without insulting the (political) consciousness of the humanitarians who may aid the migrant. The process of integration into the new society is here characterized by condemnation of the dystopian land from which they came; it is a process of purification amid a permanent state of liminality, to be accepted by the new society. All this constitutes the expected narrative of escape from dystopia, as proof of the existence of the utopian West and North. As Santos suggests, such a way of thinking lies in the knowledge born in the struggle against capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy—a simultaneous fight against all forms of inequality and injustice.¹³ It is this characteristic that renders the task of positioning oneself within the complexity of history so difficult, and this struggle is present in

my project. I became worried and self-conscious when I witnessed how the life experience of people like me under such an oppressive ideological regime have become a tool to feed Islamophobia for the far-right Western political parties in the name of human rights, freedom of speech, and so on. Over the course of my time in the West, I have rejected the heuristic role of the “native informant” who risks his or her life to inform the “free and liberal world” about oppressive regimes.

By beginning with the question “What happens to art when it crosses the border?” this book, and its three ir/relevant stories, aims to elaborate, as much as possible, three cases— microhistories—that propose ways of knowing history through the global entanglements of inter-politics, interculturality, and translation. The challenge is precisely *not* to be accepted by those on either side of the border. In this book, instead I attempt to evaporate such boundaries by walking the lines of the border itself. Santos’s image of the acrobat is here apt: one who simultaneously inhabits multiple territories in order to introduce itinerancy as a foundation for political and cultural identity in the world in which we live today.¹⁴

The reduction of the sociopolitical complexity of the other into the immigrant or the asylum seeker is in fact another face of structural racism that resists acceptance of the other as an equal partner; rather, its recognition of you is framed through sedimentary bias from the start. This constitutes yet another challenge to my work as an artist in the Global North: your social and political agency as the other will be recognized only after you have decided to cross the border between West and East, South and North, and become recognized by the epistemological terminology of the Global North as either a legal or illegal traveler. Indeed, such a binary constitutes yet another face of Eurocentrism.

Irrelevant Stories

Contrary to what people say, using the first person in films tends to be a sign of humility: All I have to offer is myself.

—Chris Marker¹⁵

I have written the majority of this text in the morning and very late at night—the most productive hours for writing—while sitting on the sofa in my flat in South Stockholm. Nevertheless, itinerancy has been central to the process, and I have accessed it through my grandfather—an itinerant photographer—and my father—a bus driver and enthusiastic amateur photographer. Their lives were defined by movement, or the urge to move, from one place to the other. Similarly, mobility characterizes my movement through history. By moving out and moving in, I condemn the categorization of body and identity. I know the point of departure, and I imagine the point of arrival. Usually I arrive somewhere else, and not at the place I had imagined. Once again, as an artist I find myself acting as a cantilever, with one part connected to the structure and the other part floating free.¹⁶

I think about irrelevant stories. In the beginning, the concept was an attempt to challenge the one-way narrative by bolstering the historicism of my argument; but eventually another idea came into frame, a question I had always asked myself as I wrote about fragments of history—fragments I couldn’t relate directly to the current political situation, with which I remain very concerned.

Consider the events of the last six years (2015–2020), during which time I have struggled with these ir/relevant stories; taken together, they constitute a sequence right out of a dystopian fiction novel:

- A nuclear deal between Iran and the G8 changed the political makeup of the region for a short time.
- Russia launched its first airstrikes against targets in Rastan, Talbiseh, and Zafaraniya in the Homs province of Syria.
- The war in Syria reached its climax.
- ISIS's representations of their own massacres, in the style of Hollywood cinema, were widely disseminated on social media.
- Refugees became a crisis for the Western and Northern Hemispheres.
- The Mediterranean became a death trap for refugees escaping war.
- Brexit took place.
- The alt-right became a new phenomenon on the global political spectrum.
- An encyclopedic definition of "racism" became visible in everyday life.
- Donald Trump was elected president of the United States, and subsequently lost his reelection bid.
- The US withdrew from its nuclear deal with Iran.
- The US withdrew from the Paris climate agreement.
- Once again, the US declared new sanctions against Iran.
- Twenty environmental journalists were arrested in Iran.
- Saudi Arabia undertook an economic blockade of Qatar.
- Jamal Ahmad Khashoggi was murdered in the Saudi embassy in Istanbul.
- Iranian security forces killed 1,500 demonstrators in various cities who were protesting the increase of gasoline prices due to US sanctions.
- The US assassinated Iranian general Qasem Soleimani in Baghdad.
- Iran sought revenge by attacking a US airbase in Iraq, in the process shooting down a Ukrainian passenger plane, killing 173 passengers and crew.
- The Covid-19 virus emerged.
- George Floyd was murdered by white police officers in Minneapolis, sparking a new wave of Black Lives Matter protests in the US.
- A massive explosion rocked Beirut, killing at least 190 and causing thousands of injuries.¹⁷

Sometimes even I—a news buff—could not keep up the speed of events. The situation is similar to the one Winston Churchill described when he said that the Balkans produce more history than they can consume;¹⁸ indeed, coping with the news and making sense of it all has become a Sisyphean task. However, the relevance of contemporary art production lies along these lines: namely, in the media.

In 2012, Venetia Porter (a curator with the British Museum), Mirjam Shatanawi (of the Tropen museum in Amsterdam), and Janet Rady (a London-based dealer specializing in Middle Eastern art) wrote an article entitled "Guide to Collecting Art from the Middle East"—a sort of manual for aspiring dealers and collectors. In it, they offer readers a sneak peek at their art-buying advice, giving commonsense advice such as: "Trust your gut," "Look for a story," "Find untapped artistic communities," and "See the work in person."¹⁹

One of the experts' suggestions in particular caught my attention: "Watch the news; the more a country is mentioned in the press, the better its art will sell. The spotlight is currently on Syrian and Egyptian artists, who are the focus of exhibitions looking at the effect of the Arab Spring on contemporary art."²⁰ In fact, this modest suggestion seems targeted more toward the artists from conflict zones than it is the buyers. The authors convey a clear message to artists: be patient, for your time will come. And in the Middle East, an area of the world in a permanent state of crisis, their time will come sooner or later; war is always in our backyard, waiting to reveal itself. If you are fortunate, your area will be mentioned in the news due to war, foreign invasion, political and social instability, human rights violations, corruption, discrimination against women, and so on. It is not enough that we suffer from these afflictions across a large portion of the globe; for our suffering to matter, it must first reach the media.

Somehow, in the most earnest way, they state that your condition as “a successful artist” relates to the suffering of political and social devastation, and to the effect of these desolate events on contemporary art.

The role of the artist is crucial. This is more noticeable when art and issues of immigration combine—for art then becomes an instrument for integration and is utilized as a social and political means of purification. This mechanism functions when the foundation of established facts of the division between here and there, them and us, constructed on political devastation continually broadcast in the news, is conventional. But this time it does so in the name of art. A newcomer artist from a destabilized, hyper-political context feels the urge to integrate to find themselves in the new social structure; this tendency could be associated with the artist’s relationship to presentation and emphasis on image production; processes of disclosure, extension, or even exaggeration; and criticism of the dystopian political desolation of his origin. Somehow, the production of images or stories of the less-than-fortunate places and people that they have left behind is unavoidable. But after these images have crossed the border and are viewed by the inhabitants of “utopian” lands in contemporary art institutions, they may generate a paradoxical relationship between feelings of superiority, on one hand, and social engagement in something “morally right,” on the other.²¹

How should an artist react when they are not accepted by this utopia and lack either the capacity or the cultural capital to purify themselves of the rough characteristics of a hyper-politicized dystopian and stigmatized land? Surrender to shame and depression? Anger? Rage? Subversive art?

Irrelevant stories, on the other hand, defy such prescriptive conditions of media relevance, as well as preconceptions about what an artist from a

dystopian land is supposed to present, they are proposed as a way to sidestep this dilemma. The question here concerns the absence of a collective past: What alternative futures can be imagined for our collective past? How might our perceptions of the collective past be perceived in the future? What methods of investigation, or even interrogation, can be used to destabilize the given narrative of the past, according to the present?

In this dissertation, I attempt to address aligned forms of historiography within contemporary history in relation to the Non-aligned Movement, memory politics, and histories of the Global South. I approach these subjects from different historical perspectives, investigating the materiality of contemporary history and the multiplicity of interactions, connections, entanglements, and microhistories embedded in our near past. Through the reenactment of material history, this work investigates the necessity of artistic practice as an alternative way of historical engagement; in particular, it asks how art and artistic research praxis can excavate the image of contemporary history in the present and suggest a possible future for it. The image of our collective past demands reinvention in order to confirm the possibility of thinking about social transformation, emancipation, and solidarity: an alternative way of thinking that entails an alternative method of investigation. I remain optimistic that artistic research may create the possibilities for this alternativeness. Given the fact that knowledge can be grasped in relation to a certain kind of object, based on certain circumstances and established by certain methods, I employ three—or perhaps four—cases here that foreground the capacity of artistic research to challenge such certainties around knowledge production.

Microhistories: Thinking Case by Case

Now, I think that, basically, this is what micro-history is about: working on case studies, trying to build up more convincing, more fruitful generalizations. The notion of case studies can be regarded as more or less synonymous with microhistory—more or less.

—Carlo Ginzburg²²

I became interested in the term “microhistory” years ago, when I was part of a research group on the theme, led by Magnus Bærtås and Andrej Slávic, which resulted in the publication *Microhistories*.²³ In my PhD research, the concept has played a significant role, both in relation to the method of historical investigation, and with regard to its critical potential as situated within a hyper-politicized environment. Although microhistory is conventionally a way of seeking knowledge that focuses on a small scale, in my case studies a focus on the small scale leads to forms of connectivity and political relations more often associated with microhistory as fragments of history which are less recognized and represented. The approach gives me a certain freedom to pay attention to and survey events at close range; this freedom, in turn, works to infuse a new curiosity into global political history and its interpolitical, intercultural characteristic. It thus represents an effortless plan to bring forth an alternative, multiple historicism.

The relationship between micro and macro is present in all power structures and historical forms of domination. For example, in the first chapter, “The Life of an Itinerant through a Pinhole,” the process of image production is located overwhelmingly in the Global South, in countries that gained independence in the post-colonial area. However, the history of the pinhole camera and the itinerant photographers who captured images of proletarian life

has been obscured. Hence it is simply incorrect to reduce the lives of a vast proportion of the world population to “microhistory.” Perhaps we need to consider what sort of historical determinacy leads to such a scaling down and invisibilization of what is in fact a macro history. The prosopagnosia of history, as Shahram Khosravi observes in his article published in the exhibition catalogue,²⁴ leads us to understand the power behind naming things. For whom and from what position are micro and macro scales of history distinct? In fact, microhistory challenges the existence of the macro level of historical narration, which has previously presented itself as the sole narrator of more repeated history. The micro, on the other hand, names “something else”; it suggests an alternative history that poses arguments, proportionally, about the vast majority of proletarians in the world, whose history and desire is not necessarily invisible, but has been invisibilized.²⁵ In my case studies, the micro history takes place within a wider geography; they are in fact macro levels of understanding of the world in which we live. My use of the term “micro” is without regard to size and scale, but rather serves as a reminder of other possibilities of history.

The micro has the capacity to activate otherness. It presents “the others”; the others that, in this context, could be understood as life that has been permanently marginalized or hidden behind powerful narratives. By weaving tales about obscure individuals about whom no one has yet written, microhistory has a capacity to use various levels of evidence to fill in the story of how the past was lived. It is thus a malleable form of practice that is open to further transformations. Microhistory is a transformation that brings the “other” into the narrative. Its aim is not to kill historical relevance, but rather to question it by telling the stories that lie in between the lines of political struggles—stories we not only don’t know, but don’t know that we don’t know.

For me, microhistory is the connection drawn between life and history in which life experiences shock and irresolution; the quality of “being something else” at the core of microhistory could hold an appealing potential, as it intersects with what we have already learned from history. This intersection generates a space for a radical rethinking; a rebellion of history, as Santos suggests, and the destabilization of what is known as history, in order to revive the multiplicity of history that inheres in its micro/macro relationalities.²⁶

Carlo Ginzburg defines microhistory as “a form of research that goes beyond the normal characteristics of history and transforms it into a new phenomenon.”²⁷ This new phenomenon is not necessarily strange or bizarre, but is simply a different way of seeing the characteristics of common objectives. His difference can, at times, appear contradictory.

In these three of four ir/relevant stories, microhistory became an expository practice. It grew to encompass multiple case studies, through which I, in the vein of Ginzburg’s depiction of the concept, have tried to build up more substantial, more abundant generalizations.

History must provide a sense of historical justice, whereby the past—however selective our memory may be—is acknowledged and truth is finally served: the grand narrative of history that repeats itself over and over across the continuity of time. There is some kind of interconnection between a repetition of events, a succession of social systems, and the gradual development of social conditions—in other words, in some way, it is able to make sense of history to pose the question “What will happen to our collective past in the future?” It is a question I solicitously and apprehensively repeat, again and again, without giving a clear answer. Or, the answer could be a new rhetorical question: Could you even imagine a future without a collective past? I propose that our microhistories hold the

promise of solidarity in a fragmented, hyper-politicized era. Or at least that is the hope of this book and its stories.

The Fourth Story: Marginalia

Years ago, I was asked to write an article for an art magazine in Tehran, *Herfe Honarmand*.²⁸ The subject was nostalgia and the past, which immediately brought to mind Milan Kundera’s book *Ignorance* (1999). His novels were eagerly translated into Persian, along with the works of other writers exiled from the authoritarian communist regimes of Eastern Europe during the Cold War. As politically active students, we could identify on some level with the freedom fighters in Czechoslovakia. Hence Kundera’s book, from my point of view, deeply influenced our state of mind in relation to our condition; we shared a similar political identity.

I felt a deep personal fascination with the 1967 Soviet occupation of Prague, which was subtended by a similar political identity: even though its people were under the heel of the authoritarian regime, they actively sought emancipation. The translation of Kundera’s book was, in fact, a way for us to simultaneously relate to the free world and to recognize an aspect of our own experience in that of the author. Hence nostalgia contributed to a state of mind that had multiple layers: a fantasy about the free world; denial of one’s own position in an isolated society; and growing feelings of sentimentality for a place one has never been (a feeling referred to in German as *Fernweh*). In our case, the focus of such sentiments was Prague, and it became a symbol of freedom and sympathetic political identities for our particular generation.

As I read *Ignorance*, I wrote my own stories in the tiny blank parts of the margins of the page. My

writing was not in response to Kundera, but an effort, somehow, to tell him my stories; a speculative dialogue between me and him, as if he could read my responses about unknowingness, resistance, ignorance, and crossing borders.²⁹

A Conversation 324 Years Too Late

In 924 AD, Hasan Ibn al-Haytham, better known as Alhazen, wrote one of the foundational texts on the logic of optics and the physics of light, writings that became the basis for the invention of the camera obscura and modern technologies of image production. In the first chapter, I attempt to understand his state of mind and the way that he convinced society to support his work on his scientific opus, the *Book of Optics (Kitab al-Manazir)*.

Years later, another Islamicate scientist, Kamal al-Din al-Farisi, who was fascinated with the mathematical observation of light and optics, was introduced to the work of Alhazen. Farisi's research was based on theoretical investigations in optics conducted on the so-called burning sphere (*al-Kura al-muhriqa*) in the tradition of Ibn Sahl (d. ca. 1000 AD) and Ibn al-Haytham (d. ca. 1041 AD) after him. As he illustrated in his *Revision of the Optics (Kitab Tanqih al-Manazir)*, Farisi used a spherical glass vessel, filled with water, as an experimental large-scale model of a raindrop. He then placed this model within a camera obscura that had a controlled aperture for the introduction of light. He projected light into the sphere and ultimately deduced, through several trials and detailed observations of the reflections and refractions of light, that the colors of the rainbow are phenomena of the decomposition of light. His research had resonances with the studies of his German contemporary Theodorich of Freiberg (with no contact between them, even though both relied

on Alhazen's legacy), and later with the experiments of Descartes and Newton in dioptric. Farisi's book is a long dialogue with Alhazen's *Book of Optics* about his arguments, taking the form "He says, I say." In some cases, his arguments prove Alhazen was wrong; in others, Farisi is amazed by Alhazen's analysis.

The story of Farisi and Alhazen and the dialogue between them is a simple yet potent analogy for my research and writing methods. Whether in the corner of the page, or in the margins, it is essential to find a place to tell one's own story. And indeed, Farisi was not the inventor of this form of intertextual engagement.

Peter Barker, in his article "The Social Structure of Islamicate Science," considers marginalia to be a foundation of the dialogical system of dissemination of a manuscript. He argues that in a manuscript-based culture, commentaries and glosses begin as notes literally written in the margins of the original work. When the work is then copied, these may be incorporated into the main manuscript, creating a new book with additional, original content. This process can go on as long as anyone is interested in the book.³⁰ He thus argues that a book manuscript is a wiki, while a print edition is simply a text. The failure to comprehend this distinction is an important cause of the undervaluation of Islamicate science.³¹ Barker situates the Islamicate scientists in chronological order, such that each comments on the others' work.

Barker argues that commentaries or glosses have often been dismissed, mistakenly, as "derivative" or a tool for teaching rather than an original contribution to research. But in the Islamicate sciences, this is one of the main places where you find original work:

The gloss is many times longer than the original. It supplies all the technical details missing in the first, non-technical book, for example definitions of concepts, and also refers to his original research. Other scholars immediately began to write commentaries on the gloss, a process that continued for at least two hundred years. In these marginalias, they introduced new topics. Hence the existence of an active tradition of glosses and commentaries is as much an indication of an active research tradition as the appearance of new stand-alone books.

He continues by explaining that marginalias are by no means a rehash of the original text, to be consulted when the original becomes difficult to understand; in fact, they are sometimes a goldmine all on their own, to be exploited for the original ideas they contain.³²

This book is the fourth ir/relevant story—the collaborative project between myself and the designer of the book, Lisa Olausson. And it is the story of the exhibitions, their historical itinerancy, and their marginalia—which together amounts to an exercise in vulnerability, an act of “doing one’s laundry in public,” as Tirdad Zolghadr says.³³

The design of this book aims to propose a solution to this struggle; the empty marginal spaces you see here and there on the page are the result of this tussle. If you, the reader of these pages, find my book worthy of a response, you have a small blank area in the margin in which to engage in dialogue with the text, and with me. And for me, this margin is also a possible location for future soliloquy—a device to converse with myself, relating thoughts and feelings, thereby also sharing them, giving off the illusion of a series of unspoken, continuing reflections.

This book is itself a form of marginalia, derived from the itinerancy of many locations and experi-

ences. It is neither a description of my art, nor a verbal explanation of it. It is a work all of its own: one that foregrounds numerous compact stories, multiple histories, chronicles of failure, and competing interpretations, while tying all these elements together into the primary trio of narratives. As the philosopher George Santayana wrote in his essay “Imagination,” “There are books in which the footnotes, or the comments scrawled by some reader’s hand in the margin, are more interesting than the text.”³⁴

Within this text the reader will find a variety of historical facts and accounts. Histories and stories that perhaps reader, if you excavate them deeply enough, could lead you to other sources and records. I have a leitmotif and several formulaic paragraphs that the reader will encounter repeatedly, as they reappear in each chapter. They reoccur not only to illuminate the topic of a given chapter but also to be empowered by the subject of the argument, topics, and problems examined in each chapter.

In chapter one you will encounter the story of Ármin Vámbéry and his journey to Persia in the disguise of a Dervish, you will discover how he became the source of inspiration for Bram Stoker when he was writing the novel *Dracula*. Or later in the chapter, you will learn of the history of Jewish polish refugees in Persia.

In chapter two, within the heading of *Enough about the West; Let’s Talk about the East* I argue that one of the most significant events after the 1978 revolution is the occupation of the US embassy. Following this, I share a story about the dissemination of Andrej Tarkovsky’s films and ask a question that if this is relevant to the Professor Balthazar chapter.

In the last chapter, I bring forward details of the partition plan in 1947 during the UNSCOP meeting and lead on to a story of the political relationship between Iran and the Soviet Union, titled: *Russophobia, Russophilia; or, The Enemy of My Enemy*. My intent is to dig into the history, the actual documented history. They for me are points of departure or another angle to the same story or even more ir/relevant stories. All those could create unnecessary pauses, and perhaps disrupt the

fluidity of narrations and stories. Maybe, the overall body of text and also my arguments could function even better without addressing or re-telling those histories. But I couldn't get rid of them; not just because they were too dear to me, but because they demonstrate how my state of mind maneuvers, functions, thinks and produces art. If I say tracing those histories and interconnected stories is one of the main characteristics and interests in my practice, something I carry out on a daily basis, then I wouldn't be exaggerating one bit. I call them useless knowledge. The useless knowledge, which somehow becomes the backbone of my argument. Small facts which don't change anything, but remind me yet again of the complexity of historiography. Hence, reader, please consider them as an effort towards transparency of my method of thinking and not the methodology of my writing.

In order to create a distinction in between these histories and other parts of this text, graphic designer Lisa Olausson and I, decided to present them with their own graphic profile. In one sense, it marks it an aside, a word to the reader which occurs slightly outside of the central narrative. In another respect, it breaks up the text slightly, signaling that this short section requires a different kind of attention or engagement than the rest.

There Is No “Once upon a Time”

This is an endless story, a true multiplicity; it is no small task to trace even a brief memory of the world we live in, to narrate the relevant (and irrelevant) fragments of history in our contemporary time. Such traces of memory can interrupt no longer; the itinerant modus continues its excavation of history, little by little, layer by layer; and when it arrives at the abysmal, it dives from it to another branch of the story. “Be water my friend, be water,” Bruce Lee suggests. As Santos notes, without addressing the complex relationship between the pathos of the tension, roots, and options, it is impossible to imagine social change.³⁵ Amid the upheavals therein, such diminutive fragments of history may be con-

sidered as irrelevant or even unnecessary—mere traces of memory, a cabinet of curiosities.

From the standpoint of the future of our collective past, the present is absent. But according to Walter Benjamin's definition of historical materialism, history cannot do without the notion of the present.³⁶ He underlines the notion of the memory that flashes in the moment of danger, a moment that is neither ephemeral nor a passage, but a permanent state; a before-after-conflictual mind and memory that flickers frame by frame, a déjà vu of history. The frame of “once upon a time,” Benjamin believes, resigns the other to the historical *bordello*. Hence, in this historiography I have relied not on “once upon a time” but instead begin all the stories by referring to someone else: “somebody told me,” not “once upon a time.”³⁷ *But what story down there awaits its end?*³⁸

What Santos proposes is the rebellion of history, the destabilization of what is known as history, in order to revive its multiplicity, which inheres in the relationships therein between micro and macro. We must not only replace memory with another image, but destabilize the image itself.

1. An image of the complaint, originally published in Persian, was distributed on the internet during the crisis; its original source is unclear, but based on my research I can prove the authenticity of the document. My translation.
2. Antonio Gramsci, "Wave of Materialism" and "Crisis of Authority," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 275.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
4. Religious ideology does not necessarily fall within my definition of "hyper-politics"; however as I am mainly writing from the perspective of an Iranian, the notion of religion comes into the general description.
5. "[One] who hopes," is a literal translation of the word "Esperanto" in English.
6. In total, Ohser, under the pseudonym E. O. Plauen, drew 157 strips, which were republished as a children book in the mid 1980s by Iranian publisher Vazeh in three volumes with yellow, orange, and blue covers. On April 5, 1944—the day before his trial for expressing anti-Nazi opinions—Ohser committed suicide in his cell.
7. Louis Althusser, "On the Young Marx: Theoretical Questions," *La Pensée*, March–April 1961.
8. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publisher, 2014), p. 88.
9. Similar to a simple desk lamp, it partly sits on a table or attaches to the wall, while the other part can be moved freely to illuminate different spots. See Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Maria Paula Meneses, eds., *Knowledges Born in the Struggle: Constructing the Epistemologies of the Global South* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 123.
10. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), p. 1.
11. John M. Hobson, presentation at the Academy for Cultural Diplomacy, January 21, 2013.
12. Santos and Meneses, *Knowledges Born in the Struggle*, p. 18.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
15. Chris Marker interviewed by Dolores Walfisch, *Vertigo*, Autumn 1997. The interview originally appeared in the November 1996 edition of the *Berkeley Lantern*.
16. Santos and Meneses, *Knowledges Born in the Struggle*, p. 120.
17. I need to clarify here that a list of events can never reflect what happens in the world. The list reflects my place in the world and my subjectivity and interests in relation to media consumption. Nevertheless, there are events and conflicts which don't manage to reach the media attention.
18. It seems that this quote is apocryphal, and that it was initially made in reference to Crete; nonetheless it resonates well with all those involved in the promotion of responsible history in this region.
19. Jessica Holland, "Guide to Collecting Art from the Middle East," *National*, November 22, 2012.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Tirdad Zolghadr, "Poornography," *Frieze*, January–February 2006.
22. "Microhistories," Carlo Ginzburg interviewed by Magnus Bårtås, Michel Teran, and Andrej Slavic (Stockholm: Konstfack, 2015), p. 79.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 156. I wrote an article for the publication about the marginal practice of video essay in Iran, focusing on the works by Pirooz Kalantary and his fluid narrative of "marginography." Pirooz and I began to organize series of film screening and collective writing about microhistory.
24. Shahram Khosravi, "Don't You Remember Me?," in *The Life of an Itinerant through a Pinhole* (exhibition catalogue) (Tehran: Aran Projects, 2016), p. 52.
25. In the use of the verb "invisibilized," I aim to emphasize the active process of making things invisible.
26. Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, p. 88.
27. Carlo Ginzburg, John Tedeschi, and Anne C. Tedeschi, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It," *Critical Inquiry* 20:1 (Autumn 1993), p. 12.
28. Behzad Khosravi Noori, "A Dialogue with the First Chapter of Kundera's Book *Ignorance*," *Herfeh Honarmand*, March 2014.
29. This is an idea that I would also like to explore with other authors, such as Marguerite Duras, Herta Müller, Gabriel García Márquez, Italo Calvino, Jorge Luis Borges, Nathalie Sarraute, Michel Foucault, and Walter Benjamin, among others.
30. Peter Barker, "The Social Structure of Islamic Science," *Journal of World Philosophies* (Winter 2017), pp. 37–47.
31. Early in the print era, Europeans continued to use manuscripts, and continued to use books in the same way that they had used manuscripts. Copernicus's main book was extensively annotated and exchanged among scholars, leading to families of copied comments, but no new printed books. See Owen Gingerich, *An Annotated Census of Copernicus' De Revolutionibus* (Boston: Brill, 2002). However, Emilie du Châtelet's printed French edition of Newton's *Principia* is really a commentary that updates the original and contains much new material. See Châtelet, *Principes mathématiques de la philosophie naturelle* (Paris: Desaint & Saillant, 1759).
32. Barker, "Social Structure of Islamic Science," p. 39.
33. Tirdad Zolghadr, *Traction* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2017).
34. George Santayana, "Imagination," in *Soliloquies in England* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), p. 124.
35. Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*, p. 88.
36. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, edited by Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968.
37. See Magnus Bårtås, *You Told Me: Work Stories and Video Essays* (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg Press, 2010).
38. Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1981 [1979]).



FIRST STORY:

The Life of an Itinerant through a Pinhole



This chapter and the exhibition with the same title undertakes a historical analysis of archival images produced by a working-class immigrant community in Tehran between 1956 and 1968, commenting on these artistic works and their exhibition, and examining the relationships they reveal between class identity and the means of production. The images, captured by a local itinerant photographer, Gholamreza Amirbegi, reveal diverse subjects within the context of urban life in the southwest of Tehran, at a time when the city had just seen a major influx of working-class immigrants from the country's smaller municipalities as well as the outcome of World War II and the ensuing economic devastation that accompanied the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran. It is the identities of this social group that predominate in his photographs. Only recently unearthed, the archive of images discloses the era's shifting relationships between global and local subjectivities of image production.

This chapter's overlapping fragments illustrate these shifting relationships. In so doing, they introduce and reinforce the necessity of itinerancy—not simply that of the photographer, Gholamreza, but of the image itself as global traveler, one that discloses histories of colonization and their effects on the social and political conditions of today. Moreover, this chapter highlights the absence of representation of the subaltern in the realm of contemporary art in Iran, as well as in the modern Iranian nation-state's attempts to construct a domestic “primitive” people as a foil to a Tehran-centric national culture. By re-narrating the archival materials, and thus re-signifying subaltern histories and dormant memories, I attempt to bring forward the stories embodied within this vagrant archive about social changes in contemporary Iran from below.

Here I explore possible correspondences between (and within) societies that share interconnected histories, taking into account cinema, traces of



unconscious colonial memory, and proletarianism, as well as their underlying technologies of image production. I thus propose a transformation of the merely *historical* interpretation of everyday perception—all too often taken for granted—into an *archaeological* one: that of the prestigious and valuable object. This approach begins from an excavation of a discovered archive, in order to both unearth lost identities in these images, and to displace them from sedimented historical positions. In so doing, I address the question: What happens to the past when viewed from the vantage point of the future?

The City of My Birth

In 1932, when I was abroad, it began to be clear to me that I would soon have to bid a long, perhaps lasting farewell to the city of my birth.

—Walter Benjamin, on Berlin

She asks, “Do you like them?”

“They’re amazing!” I reply.

It’s a winter evening, and the shadows are tall. We are standing in my grandfather’s small room, two years after his death. I know my grandmother can see how enthusiastic I am about the photo negatives, which she’s taken from one of her family albums.

She limps out, holding her back with her left hand, returning a few minutes later with an old plastic bag. The bag is full of dark images—photo negatives, printed on paper.

She says: These are your grandfather’s photos.

She says: I wanted to throw them away.

She says: I cannot recognize the people in them.

She says: Their faces are so dark.

She says: You can keep them.



This happened years ago. I don't remember exactly how many—maybe fifteen or more. Since then, I have been looking at these photographs, scrutinizing them. I have moved them to a shoebox instead of the old plastic bag, in an effort to treat them like a proper archive, like one in a museum, which visitors can look at and touch while wearing white cotton gloves; an acceptable archive.

It is purposefully from these banal conditions that I begin this chapter. For their very banality is, in fact, a driving force that renders the familiar strange, and the strange familiar; to dig into the prosopagnosia of our collective past, the in/visible of our contemporary history. By “prosopagnosia” I refer to Greek *prósōpon*, meaning “face,” and *agnōsía*, meaning “non-knowledge”—the non-knowledge of fragments of history.

This chapter is simultaneously an attempt to create an archive and to expose it in full view, placing the images in context, commenting on them, inviting new interlocutors, writing their marginalia and reclaiming their embodied, itinerant life. At the first public presentation of the photographs in Tehran, anthropologist Shahram Khosravi remarks in the exhibition catalogue that the images act as overlapping experiences through time and space that turn the photographer into a storyteller, in the sense that Walter Benjamin used the term.¹ In his 1936 essay “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Leskov,” Benjamin expresses his concern about the disappearance of the art of storytelling. For him, the modern format for stories—the printed novel—has led to a world emptied of shared, communicable experience. His storyteller, on the other hand, integrates the experiences of the audience into the tale. He transforms the listeners' experience into his own, depersonalizing the story and producing a phenomenon we can all share, understand, and imagine. Perhaps itinerancy departs from here: the moment when an individual story becomes the sto-

ries we together share and collect. The art of itinerant storytelling, then, emerges when the storyteller travels from one place to another—not only to tell stories from distant lands, but to observe, through the gazes and faces of listeners of his story; to collect fresh inspiration for the next story to tell. The photographs in this chapter tell stories of otherness. Otherness then, otherness now. Otherness experienced by the photographed subjects in this collection; otherness experienced by other migrant workers in today's Tehran, particularly those of Afghan origin. Otherness here, otherness there.

Gholamreza Amirbegi is the storyteller—an unintentional one, perhaps. From the close of the World War II until 1956, he narrates the life of a proletariat that migrated to Tehran. The majority of the people in these photographs came from Meymeh, a small city halfway between Kashan and Isfahan, in the center of the Iranian Plateau. They found a place to live in in District 10, in Tehran's southwest. Situated near Emamzadeh Hasan, a sacred mausoleum of one of the sons of Imam Hasan (the second imam, according to Shia belief), it is the most populous district in Tehran, with four times the population of any other.

“The Infinite Passion of Life”

I recognize some of the faces in Gholamreza's photographs: in one, my mother acts out a scene from a Hindi film. Not just any Hindi film, but Raj Kapoor's infamous, four-hour *Sangam* (1964), which screened in the only cinema in her childhood neighborhood, Cinema Jay. It tells the story of a love triangle, perhaps a typical imaginary among the lower working class in southern Tehran. It comes as no surprise that almost all the young girls whose photos appear in the archive play the role of Sangam, the female

character in the film, played by Vyjayanthimala Bali. My mother's face is tinted red in order to balance the light of the photograph—a common technique. She identifies herself as Sangam with a gesture from the film: a pointed index finger placed against her cheek. But this simple pose bestows upon her a new ability, allowing her to escape the banality of the everyday to become a fabulous singer and dancer, if only for an instant, in front of her father's camera.

Can these portraits be understood in terms of the spectrum of fact and fiction? In her analysis of Gholamreza's images, Charlotte Bydler expresses her curiosity about the images and the objective behind them, arguing that the intention of the producer is not easy to guess.² Rather, there emerges an ambiguous realm, between image making and artistry. She rightly argues that in the mind of their maker, the context of the art world, and its gravity, were nonexistent.

Bydler writes about another of these photos, in which a boy looks coyly out of the photograph, straight at the viewer.³ He is dressed up in a keffiyeh and is framed by an oval-shaped wreath, studded with angels and flowers. In fact, he is my uncle, smiling playfully. The aesthetic of the image reminds Bydler of a Palestinian martyr. One assumes that someone more grown up, possibly my grandfather, has dressed him in this costume and framed him in this saccharine way; indeed, he looks far too young to be a revolutionary. Could it be another scene adopted from the global cinema, in which he's pretending to be an Arab? As far as my family recalls, however, no Arabian films played at Jay Cinema. Unlike contemporary Arabian music, films from Arab countries during that period (most of them produced in Egypt) didn't travel to Iran. In fact, there was only one movie about Arabia shown at Cinema Jay: David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), produced in the UK, in which Peter O'Toole played the





lead. Was my uncle's costume an attempt to assume the role of white savior, immersing him in the explorer's adventures? Or was it just for fun, an act performed in front of a camera for the people who had just left the cinema and wanted to relive their memories of the hero? Or was it simply something my grandfather suggested in the moment, so that he could permanently imprint his memory of the film onto photo paper? And thus, was the portrait of his son, my uncle, simply that evening's practice round for his new business, before he left to wait for customers in front of Cinema Jay?

In another scene, a man of indeterminate middle age looks seriously out from the photo. With a gaze directed firmly into the camera, he looks slightly down. He is my grandfather, photographing himself as a test image for the business. He is dressed as a soldier in the Yugoslav Partisans, the Communist-led resistance to the Axis powers during World War II; he wears a fake uniform. The bandolier slung over his chest and shoulder is an obvious sham, as is the plastic toy gun in his hand. His vest is, in fact, a cheap version of traditional Bakhtiari shepherd's garb. This is a mysterious picture, full of incongruous details; it is playful, imaginative, and surreptitious. What is the relationship between the historical Partisan army and my grandfather? He did not identify as part of any global resistance. And indeed, when did the Bakhtiari vest become a Partisan costume? Or perhaps this was just another scene from a film, shaped by his imagination, in which he roams to somewhere else, becoming someone else. It could have been Yugoslav director Veljko Bulajić's *Battle of Neretva* (1969), a drama about a 1943 battle between Axis forces and Partisan units near the Neretva River. Perhaps this time he was trying to be the actor Yul Brynner.

As the Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini put it, "There is no end here. There is no beginning. It seems that there is only the infinite passion of life."⁴

As we review the pictures together, my mother knows most of the places. And, in the darkness of their unrecognizability, she recognizes some of the faces, and some names: Mehri, Jahanbakh, Jahan-gir, Azam, Rajab, Ghلامhossein, Maliheh, Mahnaz, Grandma ...

She points out a number of familiar locations around the city: the Emamzadeh Davood shrine, in the north of Tehran; the shops on Mahnaz Street, just ten minutes' walk from our house on Teymouri Street; Salar Street, where our old house was; Emamzadeh Hasan; the armory behind City Hall, Toopkhaneh; the police headquarters behind the Shahr-bani (the Police Station), Bagh-e Meli (National Garden); and so on.

Tehran: An Anxious First Encounter

Around ten years after I discovered my grandfather's photos in 2015, I attempted to exhibit them for the first time. They were placed on show at Aran Projects, located in the southern part of the city near the Russian, Italian, and British embassies, and the neighboring Bobby Sands Street, which memorializes the 1981 death a hunger-striking member of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA). I was nervous, perhaps too much so. I was forcing myself to organize the show, simply to reveal the archive—something that was impossible for me for a long time due to my proximity to the images. They are neither a family album, nor a private archive. Rather, they comprise an artifact of the public life of the people in the south end of the city. Today, the photos pose a question of location, from one public to the other. Their exhibition is an act of re-publicing, a reconfiguration of a set of already-public images—this time, in the name of art.

In Tehran, art institutions inherited upper-middle-class identity by default. For instance, some of



the old galleries were intentionally hidden away in the labyrinthine streets of wealthy neighborhoods on the north end of the city, in order to deter young students from dropping in at random. Perhaps it was bad for business. And regardless of which end of the city it is located in, north or south, the art gallery operates within a state of exception that promotes the class interests of its wealthier clients. Now, due to my class mobility, I had the opportunity to act as the images' narrator and claim them as works of artistic value. Indeed, who gets to claim art?

Through their digital reproduction and enlargement, the images from the archive were transformed into a classic photo exhibition. The glossy images of my grandfather in Partisan costume and of my mother dressed as a Bollywood actress dramatized the exhibition—especially for my family, who were VIP visitors before the opening. Perhaps their enlargement and the simplicity of their presentation made the images more engaging for my family than they had been before, lending an air of the value to the archive. Nevertheless, they remained suspicious about the real cultural value of the images. The question that I still hear from them is: Are they truly important photos? Such hesitations notwithstanding, they all insisted on having some of the images in their houses.

It was an anxiety-provoking time for all of us. For them, there was a feeling of alienation upon entering the bourgeois site of the art gallery for the first time, only to encounter their own image at a distance. They all read the exhibition catalogue. My uncle thought my explanation was too political, and that things were simpler than I had imagined them. Perhaps he was right. In particular, he expressed concern about the left-leaning orientation of my argument, and my focus on working-class identity. But he appreciated the history of the box camera and its function. When he was young he was the only one of the kids who had learned how to work it.

As we discussed the camera, it became clear that his muscle memory of how to operate it remained, in spite of the many decades that had passed. My description of the camera's functions in turn re-awakened his memory.

I remember my first short presentation of the project and archive, which I gave for two friends who came to the early viewing. I could hear my heart pounding in my ears. I'm still not sure whether they understood it or not, and we never again spoke about the exhibition. I felt naked before the audience, like I had been made to do my laundry in public.

This project remains unfinished, both for and in Tehran: the city itself as well as its scholars continue to grapple with its history of immigration and class identity, including the lives of itinerant photographers like my grandfather. My initial effort to exhibit the archive in Tehran was a failure in the sense that it lacked insights I have since developed based on transdisciplinary, multiplicity, global relationality, and their underlying politics. In that particular exhibition, I managed to elaborate neither my concept nor the relevant discourses pertaining to the subject. Its form was eminently traditional, albeit one that led me to reunite with my family from a fresh angle.

I never went back to the exhibition after the opening; indeed, the exhibition's failure was imbricated with my anxiety. But the experience made at least one thing clear: for the project to be more fully realized, it would need to depart from Tehran.

An Itinerant Man of Images

Central to Gholamreza's tiny, peripatetic business were acts of imagination and reenactment—in particular, ones based on the desire to travel to other places or to inhabit other bodies. Importantly, the imagined place presents itself not in the subject of

the image but via the medium of backdrop painting. Dissimilar to earlier studio portraiture in Iran, in which the common backdrops were European-inspired interiors or romantic landscapes, he used a backdrop of Emamzadeh Davoud—a sacred mausoleum in the northwest of Tehran that has become a popular holiday destination among the working class.⁵ The storyteller, in Benjamin's sense, finds freedom in such itinerancy; it is a form of emancipation, allowing him to move to other places and to reimagine himself.

One photo is especially eye-catching: perhaps taken in the middle of summer, when the shadows are short and the smell of sunshine on the beach beneath the street is pungent, Gholamreza sits in front of a pinhole camera. He is a young, masculine laborer; a peasant. He is smiling, wearing a hat and attire resembling that of a dervish, an oft-stereotyped Sufi order. Perhaps he has borrowed the costume to test out the concept; in fact, it was to become his most repeated theme, and the basis of a successful business model.

In the background is a naive painting: an airplane, bearing the name "Iran" (Nastaligh) in Old Persian typography, whose wings have been drawn out of perspective, in a melee with reality. The plane is flying above another sacred mausoleum, the Shah Abdol-Azim in Rey, south of Tehran. The image is again an amalgamation of belief and desire, mobility and playfulness.

The appearances of the mausoleum and the plane are both based on a similar desire—one for objects that transport you, that lead you somewhere else. One of these images in the backdrop does so physically, while the other accomplishes this spatially. Other elements in Gholamreza's photographs suggest the desire for mobility and itinerancy through the use of props—either intentionally or unintentionally. For instance, airplanes, bicycles, and motorbikes frequently appear in his images

as signifiers of a modern lifestyle characterized by mobility and speed. In an essay for the Tehran exhibition, anthropologist Shahram Khosravi interprets such use of diverse mobile machines as perhaps an unconscious gesture. He argues that by framing his subjects as mobile, Gholamreza demonstrates not only their urbanity, but also their class position: "Indeed, spatial mobility and social mobility are interrelated; they alter one another."⁶ Moreover, the desirability of mobility is notably present in the bricolage of diverse subjects: the airplane, the sacred mausoleum, and the man in the dervish costume.

The photographer who captured this image of my grandfather could have been Rajab, Gholamreza's brother-in-law and the one who taught him photography—a likelihood, given that Gholamreza had often served as a model in advertisements for Rajab's street photography business. Is it the first picture taken of Gholamreza as a photographer? Perhaps his faded smile, captured in the moment, is a consequence of the ironic setting. For Gholamreza's character was not coquettish; in fact, he was bitter most of the time, as I remember, with an expression of sustained fretfulness on his face. Or maybe it was just wrinkles, the result of years spent in the streets of Tehran under the harsh sun. He walked fast, and he smoked cheap, malodorous cigarettes that emitted blue smoke. He couldn't read, nor could he write. He knew arithmetic though; addition and subtraction were important for the business. His dark, yellowed nails were an effect of the gelatin silver process used in black-and-white photography. The yellow color was in fact silver sediment, as he forewent protective gloves. Was this a choice he made due to the masculine ideals associated with peasantry? A form of bravado demanded by male identity, to spurn safety and define life as harsh and perilous? His smell was a mixture of photo emulsions, cigarettes, and sweat. How is it that the figure of the dervish became the subject



of his itinerant photography business? And why did the working-class peasant immigrants of south-western Tehran become interested in dressing up as one of them? There is no filmic source material to be found here, no relation to Cinema Jay and its spectacular movies. That genealogy of reenactment doesn't apply here: there is no Sangam, nor is there a Lawrence. No love triangle, no Partisan struggle.

بین الاقوامی روانگی

International Departure

I'm sitting in a comfortable black chair in the Pakistani embassy in Stockholm, waiting for my visa. The occasion is an invitation from 12.0 Contemporary, an autonomous art center in Islamabad funded and run by artists and curators Safia Sher and Kamran Babrak.

Even though Pakistan neighbors Iran and shares with it substantial historical bonds within living memory, and even though I lived for almost seven years in Zahedan—a border city that triangulates Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran—to me Pakistan remained a distant land, even more so than Sweden. And, despite being host to two biennales and a sizable art festival, Pakistan has not yet become a destination in the contemporary art scene, either. But Pakistan's geography has a profound relationship to one of the questions of collective memory that I was exploring in relation to the archive: namely, the mysterious photos of the dervishes. My immediate response to their invitation was, rather than to suggest an exhibition, to propose a conversation—a symposium on the theme of “unconscious colonial memory.” It was a proposal that Babrak and Sher accepted. To them, they later told me, colonialism is not simply a memory, but a state of being that per-

vades everyday life, projecting itself as if a natural phenomenon; hence, to be unconscious toward the colonial past is to inhabit a disobedient reality.

I hear my name. "Mr. Behzad?"

"Yes. I am here."

The call shook me from my reverie; I had been taking in the posters on the wall of the small waiting room in the embassy. There was a large portrait of the nation's founder, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, as well as an assortment of images of iconic historic and modern sites in Pakistan—a typical way of presenting to foreigners the national identity of a country in the Global South.

"Your visitor's visa is ready," the clerk informs me. "Mr. Ambassador wants to meet you, if you have time?"

"Meet me? Is there a problem?"

"No. He just wants to meet you," she reassures me.

I agree. She guides me to a room at the end of a narrow corridor in a classic nineteenth-century apartment in Östermalm, an affluent neighborhood in the center of Stockholm.

A young man is sitting behind a large walnut desk. He stands up and shakes my hand, and offers me a cup of tea.

"I read your visa application," he says. "Very interesting subject, 'unconscious colonial memory.' Could you explain a bit more about it? I am curious."

I spent the next thirty minutes talking about my presentation: unconscious colonial memory in Islamabad; the possible historical relationship between Iran and Pakistan in the process of modernization; colonial memory in image production.

An Unconscious Colonial Memory

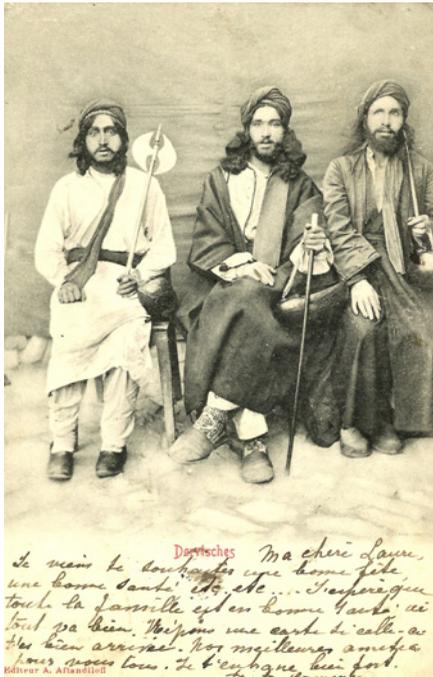
To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize "how it really was." It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger.

—Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940)



Dervishes have a long history in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Ottoman Empire, serving as an iconography of emancipation and salvation from the substantive challenges of the material world. The dervish attempts to liberate himself by crossing into the spiritual realm. Running through the city with his Sufi bowl, the *kashkool* (literally, "to carry on the shoulder"), he sings the song of truth, orienting people in their lives and enlightening them about abomination, hate, and obscenity. He is, in fact, a man of the truth.

The stereotypical image of a dervish is that of an old man who lives the life of an itinerant, begging for food in the street. He breathes in another world. He is a Sufi; a Muslim ascetic following a particular *tarigat*, a concept for the mystical teaching



Postcard, dervish, photographer unknown, late 1800s. ARYA Philatelic collection. (Sam Shamsabadi).

and spiritual practices of such an order whose aim is *hagihat*: ultimate truth. They are identifiable by their tremendous insufficiency and austerity. Their emphasis is on the comprehensive values of love and provision, and desertion of the illusions of the ego in order to reach God.

The term “dervish”—the most common term in the West to designate the Muslim mystic or Sufi in the Orient—appeared for the first time in the book dedicated to the Ottoman Empire by the traveler Georges of Hungary, in 1481, in the form *dermschler/durmishlar*.⁷ According to historian Thierry Zarcone, the word has a Persian derivation (*drigū, driyosh, daryosh*), and in the Zoroastrian culture before the emergence of Islam, it refers, on one hand, to a poor and impoverished man, and on the other, to a man searching for moral comprehension.⁸ The original meaning of this term was not lost with the collapse of Zoroastrianism; but its sense has become more ascetic and mystical.⁹

Zarcone begins his discussion of the history of the dervish’s European representation in the second half of the sixteenth century, when they were pictured in travelogues about the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰ In Europe, the figure of the dervish is exemplary of the Muslim Orient, and it is repeatedly pondered as an embodiment not only of mysticism but also of religious extremism or Oriental despotism. The word appears in this capacity in the writing of renowned French authors like Molière, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Hugo, as well as in various paintings, drawings, photographs, and postcards.

The Orientalist fever at the turn of the nineteenth century, followed by “Orient tourism” in the 1820s, and the subsequent appearance of the Ottoman Empire in photography beginning in 1839, generated attentiveness to the dervish in newfangled aesthetic realms.¹¹ According to Zarcone, the dervish was viewed through the paradoxical lens of beauty and fear; the figure’s portrayal, he notes “embod-



Postcard, dervish, photographer unknown, late 1800s.
ARYA Philatelic collection. (Sam Shamsabadi).

ied not only their latent beauty, and also a sense of dread.”¹² Their mystical identity signified the explicit pleasure taken in the other. For instance, Victor Hugo, without ever visiting the Orient, gave the title “Darvishe” to a chapter of his 1829 *Orientales*.¹³

In nineteenth-century iconography, the dervish served as a virtuous example of a figure who carried all the aspects of the other in the eyes of the Western traveler: frail, fragile, and eccentric, taking shelter in a narrow alley in a crowded part of the city, or in the corner of a bazaar. His whirling and howling represented the queerness of life and history. He was visible in the banality of everyday life, and hence easy to capture. At the same time, he was a spectacle that aroused desire in the Western tourist. European travelers drew, painted, and photographed the dervish.¹⁴

From the perspective of Western Orientalist photographer, the dervish has been presented and perceived as a pure “other,” representing another mode of existence. The appearance of dervishes, however, represents a different world entirely—though it does hold a relationship to nineteenth-century European romanticism, if unconsciously. Desperation, poverty, a gaunt body, a haggard face, and a deep gaze led to an association between Orientalism, othering, and nineteenth-century romantic paintings of ruins—reflecting the unconscious simultaneity of what they knew and what they had just discovered.

The notion of identity, of “them and us,” was closely related to a sense of place—a relationship between here and there. But there was no uncontaminated meaning of here and there, as isolated and disconnected territories; rather, one always engages in a discursive relationship of inclusion and exclusion, attraction and repulsion, acceptance and rejection—the fundamentally agonistic relationship between what we call here and there.

Such narratives located these representations of other territories and other people within the in-



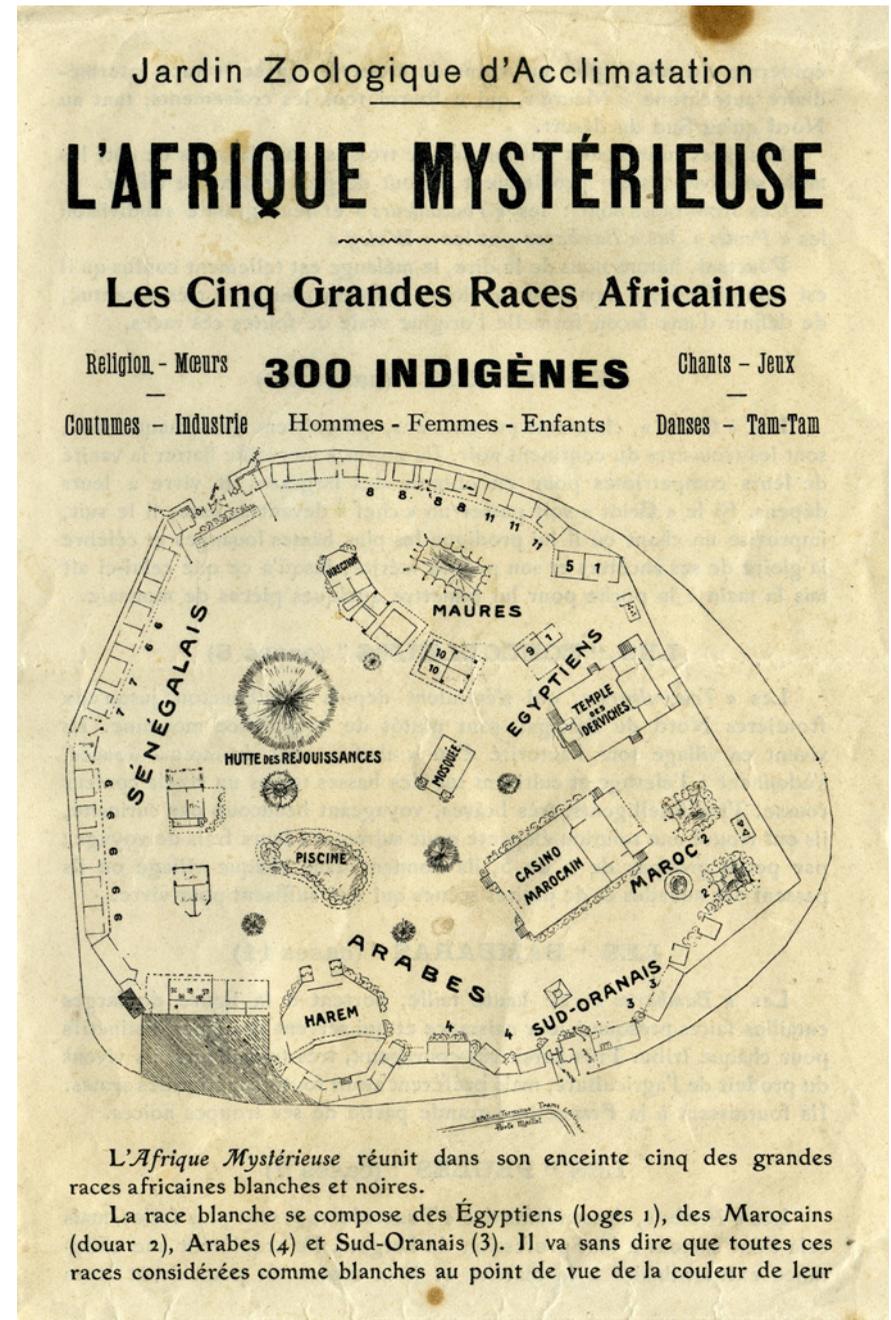
Photo: Dmitri Ermakov, 1870–1890 [?]; 1886 [?], National Museums of World Culture – Etnografiska Museum, Sweden.



Photo: Sven Anders Hedin, 1886–1890, National Museums of World Culture – Etnografiska Museum, Sweden.

significant relationship between fact and fiction; the desire to discover the fantastic in other lands and claim it as the reality. In the mid of 19th century the exploration of a dreamland of the other became a field of visual ethnography, and visual ethnography became documentary. The fictional capacity of documentary, in turn, proposed a new reality.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Western photographers, as they applied the new technology of photography, reiterated this historical pattern. And what began as historical curiosity eventually became an industry of image reproduction, with one minor distinction: some photographers were more attracted to making realistic pictures and providing visualization. The new industry of image production demanded a permanent and stable relationship to place in order to illustrate the day-to-day lives of the dervishes for travelogues, postcards, and studies by the first European researchers. And the visual ethnography and phantasmagoria of otherness only became more concerted. By 1840, one enterprising Western photographer opened a studio in Istanbul, and later another in Tehran. The new technology disseminated the European traveler's interest in both in the West and the East. The metamorphosis of the dervish from a social phenomenon into a photographic subject took place against the backdrop of an East that was emulating a European desire for technological innovation. Indeed, Easterners began to observe the banality of their portrayal from behind the lens of the new technology. Could it be that the process of internalization and subjectification of their own lives departed from here—a juncture at which a colonial body projected a new mode of valuation onto their lives? Or did it appear as a form of hospitality, an accommodation of the guest's desires and needs? Or, perhaps it was an amalgam of technological fascination and Eastern hospitality?



From the catalogue of the Pavilion of the Dervish at the Jardin Zoologique d'Acclimatation, 1899 (HumanZoos.net).

European readers, who had read and seen so much about dervishes in magazines, paintings, illustrations, and photographs, eventually sought to bring them to the West. And so, in 1899, an event was organized in Paris, coinciding with the zoological and ethnographic exhibition at the Jardin Zoologique d'Acclimatation.¹⁵ In the heyday of French colonialism, the curiosity of Parisians was piqued by the customs and lifestyles of foreign peoples; indeed, they exhibited “primitive” tribes in a human zoo. Among them was a “pavilion of the dervishes,” with about twenty Sufis, which also included the “Théâtre des derviches.”

The representation of the dervish as a desirable subject continued into the beginning of the twentieth century. Large numbers of postcards, mainly arriving from Persia, were produced and sent to Europe.¹⁶



After a nine-hour flight, I land in Islamabad. I try to find my way to the airport’s exit by reading the signs in Urdu and English. The Urdu ones are more legible to me, due in part to its proximity to my native Farsi. I notice the sign, in Urdu, for “International Departures” (بین الاقوامی روانگی). In fact, translating it to Farsi and then from Farsi to English transforms the dry, formal, and determinate characteristic of

an airport sign into something entirely different. The Urdu *ravanegi* (روانگی) is translated into Farsi as *ravan boodan* (روان بودن): “fluidity.” And *bain al-aghvam* (بین الاقوامی) becomes *mian do ghounm ya tayefeh* (میان دو قوم یا طایفه): “amidst ethnics.” And so, the sign for “International Departures” (بین الاقوامی روانگی) translates literally to “Entangle Ethnics Fluidity”—quite a premodern idea of the nation-state.

The symposium took place in Islamabad at the National Institute of Cultural Studies and was accompanied by a small-scale exhibition at the gallery. A panel of four attempted to tackle colonial memory from different angles: Artist Maryam Hoseini talked about the modernization and development of urbanism in Lahore, while anthropologist Nadeem Omar Tarar reviewed the work of a photographer from the 1960s. Nauman Naqvi, also an anthropologist, took a theoretical turn, complicating the relationship between colonial memory and the set of violent epistemological and institutional histories that undergird it; his analysis focused on the development of the term “nostalgia,” from its use in peasant-soldier armies to the emergence of modern criminology.

**In the Disguise of a Dervish,
the Dracula Nemesis: A Short Story
about Ármin Vámbéry**

Ármin Vámbéry’s flamboyant laughter was a blend of surprise and joy. “Are you certain?” he asked. His voice crossed the room, echoing through the main hall. He couldn’t stop laughing.

The young novelist was surprised. Stoker stopped in his tracks and looked Vámbéry directly in the eye. His companion replied confidently, in a baritone voice: “Yes!” Stoker couldn’t resist the idea of the new character, the conqueror, the protagonist. Finally, the story was taking shape. Who could defeat the bloodthirsty Transylvanian aristocrat, the lord Dracula? The answer was easy: the man

who knows true evil, Professor Abraham Van Helsing.

They might have met on the night train to London for the first time on Friday, March 16, 1866, after Ármin Vámbéry's lecture at the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, or during a dinner at London's Beefsteak Club in 1868. Or on another similar occasion. Both men had visited many countries, and were fluent in foreign languages. Vámbéry had heard about the new novel that Stoker was working on, about an aristocratic Eastern European, the bloodthirsty Count Dracula. However, he didn't know that Stoker had been influenced by a presentation he had given about his own adventures in the Orient. Stoker was in his early twenties, with a keen interest in theater. For his part, he had first heard Vámbéry's name when his friend, one Dr. Henry Widenham Maunsell, had mentioned the former's spectacular accomplishment: a journey to the Orient in the disguise of a dervish.

Vámbéry's presentation, entitled "The Most Dangerous Moment of the Disguise," became one of the most popular speeches given in the halls of academe in the Great Britain, based on an account he had recently published of the journey.¹⁷ Stoker was astounded by the presentation, Vámbéry's adventure, his bravery, and all his investigations and explorations—though he was even more stunned by the fact that the great globetrotter couldn't walk well. Whether because of a congenital problem, polio, or a dislocated hip, he was lame in one leg. When no camel, donkey, or cart had been at his disposal, Vámbéry insisted, he had made use of his own two feet, in spite of his disability. Indeed, he had struggled to get on stage to deliver his presentation. How could he possibly have managed to walk thousands of kilometers from Transylvania to Persia, and to explore the vast interior of Asia?

There were some veiled rudiments of *Dracula* to be found in Vámbéry's journey—not so much in the trip itself, but in his inspiration for the character. Dracula was reminiscent of characters in Gothic tales, like the one written by Sheridan Le Fanu—Bram Stoker's boss at the *Dublin Evening Mail*, where Stoker worked as theater critic.

In the context of a prevailing bourgeois class, it is interesting to observe that aristocratic whiteness came to be used as a metaphor for the debasement of the upper class in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From the white Count Dracula in Stoker's 1879 novel, with his thirst for transformation, to the pale and dolorous inhabitants of Mervyn Peake's 1940s and '50s fantasy series *Gor-*

menghast, a literary discourse emerged that portrayed aristocratic social death as physically personified in the hesitant and weak nature of their whiteness.

The notion of a mystic Orient presents itself in the introduction of Stoker's book, as the novel's narrator, Jonathan Harker, describes his journey: "The impression I had was that we were leaving the West and entering the East." Transylvania is in "the extreme east of the country" and "in the midst of the Carpathian Mountains; one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe," Stoker writes.¹⁸ Already, the East is associated with the wild unknown, as are the people there. He gives precise descriptions of four distinct nationalities: the Saxons in the south, intermingled with the Wallachs, who are the descendants of the Dacians; Magyars in the west; and Székelys in the east and north.¹⁹ Here, I'm concerned with the latter, who claim to be descended from Attila and the Huns²⁰—for whom Van Helsing later expresses contempt, referring to them as "the devil-begotten Hun." In Stoker's imaginary, the Saxons here have become "mixed" with the others, rendering them impure, and distinctions among these bloodlines are repeatedly emphasized.

Ármin Vámbéry as Abraham Van Helsing

Abraham Van Helsing is an aging Dutch polymath and doctor. In chapter nine of *Dracula*, he is described by a former student, John Seward, as a seemingly arbitrary man; in fact, he seems this way only because the depth of his knowledge is so unfathomable.

He is a philosopher and one of the most advanced scientists of his day with an iron nerve, a temper of the ice-brook, and indomitable resolution, self-command, and toleration exalted from virtues to blessings, and the kindest and truest heart that beats, these form his equipment for the noble work that he is doing for mankind, work both in theory and practice.²²

Ármin Vámbéry was widely renowned for the tales of his journeys, dressed in native garb, throughout the Middle East and Central Asia. But he also narrated the dark tales and superstitions kept alive in the Balkan valleys closer to his home in Hungary. The legend of Dracula likely emerged from Vámbéry's wanderings in the Carpathian Mountains, hiking across stark terrain and hearing from local wanderers the secrets of the land's often-gruesome histories.

In the autumn of the 1863, after receiving a stipend of a thousand florins from the academy, he set out from Constantinople disguised as a Sunni dervish under the name Reshit Efendi. His route took him from Trebizond, on the Black Sea, to Tehran, in Persia; there, he joined a band of pilgrims returning from Mecca, with whom he spent several months traveling across Iran, Tabriz, Zanjan, and Qazvin. He then headed to Shiraz, via Isfahan, and in June 1863, he reached Khwarazm, a large oasis region on the Amu Darya river delta in western Central Asia.²³ All throughout, he succeeded in maintaining his disguise. Finally, together with this band of travelers, he passed through Bukhara and arrived in Samarkand, in what is today Uzbekistan.

After a long and perilous journey, he arrived back in Pest in May 1864. This was the first successful journey of its kind undertaken by a European; because it was necessary to avoid suspicion, the only notes Vámbéry had taken were fragmentary, recorded surreptitiously. He then went to London to arrange their English-language publication as the travelogue *Travels in Central Asia* and its Hungarian counterpart, *Közép-ázsiai utazás*, both published in 1865.²⁴

On the basis of his adventures, Vámbéry soon became an internationally renowned writer and celebrity, finding himself acquainted with members of the British social elite. The Austrian ambassador in London gave him a letter of recommendation to the emperor, who, after granting Vámbéry an audience, rewarded his international success with a professorship at the Royal University of Pest.²⁵

It was not until 140 years after Vámbéry's trip to the Orient, in April 2005, that the British National Archives finally disclosed documents relating to his journeys, including letters between Britain's secret service and British spies. Among the documents were letters from a flamboyant professor:

Subject: Professor Arminius Vambéry:
Information supplied to the British
government and subsequent financial
arrangements; correspondence
including certificate of annuity.
Date: 1873 May 01 – 1914 Apr 3026

Vámbéry, it turned out, had been one of the first foreign agent prototypes in the British Empire. His presumed usefulness for the British was that he had the ear of the sultan of Turkey, Vámbéry's "friend in Constantinople," as his controller in London described him.²⁷

An Object in the Mirror Is Closer Than It Appears²⁸

For Vámbéry, the act of traveling was an amalgam of Europeanism and colonialism. Western travelers in the late eighteenth century had sought the origins of their identity; similarly, Vámbéry's main aim was to discover the origins of the Hungarian language, to undertake an archaeological excavation of the self by looking at the ruins of the past: specifically, ideas about the origins of humans and nature based on Greek mythology. This view forms the foundation of European identitarianism in today's politics—an assertion of the right of European peoples to a distinct cultural identity based in white supremacy.

As historian Robert Lacey explains, "It was the Spaniards who gave the world the notion that an aristocrat's blood is not red, but blue. At the time, a nobleman demonstrated his pedigree by holding up his sword arm to display the filigree of blue-blooded veins beneath his pale skin—proof that his lineage had not been contaminated by the dark-skinned enemy."²⁹ The metonym stemmed from the notion that the elite had enough power and wealth that they could afford to have peasants and the urban poor do their dirty work for them—and thus could stay inside, avoiding the sunlight.

Victor Kiernan, in his Marxist history of Eurocentrism, argues that much of the talk of barbarism and darkness of the outer world, which it was Europe's mission to rout out, was the transmutation of its fear and distress about the masses at home.³⁰ He thus discusses the representation of peasant spaces, such as the slum or the fairground, as having much in common with that of colonies. He uses a similar narrative, and even the same terms, to describe both groups: the other on the outside, and the other on the inside. Such comparisons of here and there, insider and outsider, constructed a "space of otherness," as researcher Irvin C. Schick defines it³¹—a



heterotopic place that lies in between utopian identification and dystopian materialization. This is akin to Michel Foucault's fifth principle of heterotopia, which he describes as a guest room in one of the large plantation houses of the Portuguese colonial era, which offers merely the illusion of an entrance to the main living area, but in fact remains fully isolated. He emphasizes a process of exclusion where inclusion also takes place:

The entry door did not lead into the central room where the family lived. Now these bedrooms were such that the individual who went into them never had access to the family's quarter the visitor was absolutely the guest in transit, was not really the invited guest.³²

Correspondingly, anthropologist George W. Stocking Jr. writes that among those who traveled overseas, as well as those at home who encountered the other through literature and images, the experience of others abroad was framed in terms of their own experience of shifting class dynamics in Britain.³³ Thus, he argues, the same shifts obtain within the hierarchal structure of British society in relation to changing class identity. The "dark" other came to be equated with the "dark" part of their own society.

Such developments in class relationships are an important factor here, for they show how the darkening of the lower classes followed the same logic applied to "savages" and barbarism on the "dark" African continent and in the Orient. This process of "domestic self-othering" took place at the same time as the institutionalization of race and whiteness studies in the late nineteenth century, and the otherization of various geographies and agencies. The irony is, however, that white privilege didn't pertain to the lower classes; rather, it was an attempt to redefine the privileged subjectivities of their those who ruled over them.

Alastair Bonnett, in his wide-reaching geographic research on whiteness and working-class

identity, brings forth the historical evidence regarding how the British working class became white.³⁴ He elucidates how and why the British working class, in the shift from being marginal to gaining white identity during the nineteenth century, came to adopt and adapt to this identity in the twentieth century.³⁵ He argues that white identity arrived in working-class politics when, and because, people of color arrived in Britain.³⁶ Working-class racism thus developed out of a perceived competition between “white residents” and “nonwhite immigrants” for access to resources such as housing and jobs.³⁷

In his book *The Meaning of Race*, Kenan Malik examines the way black people and the English working class were routinely characterized with reference to each other.³⁸ Bonnett brings another example to draw attention to the relationship between inside and outside. He quotes the *Daily Telegraph* from August 21, 1866, as referring to white working-class rioters as “negroes”: “There are a good many negroes in Southampton, who have the taste of their tribe for any disturbance that appears safe, and who are probably imbued with the conviction that it is the proper thing to hoot and yell at a number of gentlemen going to a dinner party.” He further discusses that “[t]he *Daily Telegraph’s* attack was not a case of misguided identity, nor merely one of harsh language, but rather the self-consciously ironic obedience of an increasingly influential metaphor of social difference—namely, color—in relation to two divided entities.” Bonnett thus argues that the process of whitening the working class is related to the fear of the rise of a politically rebellious, foreign-influenced proletarian culture.³⁹

Representations of plebeian spaces such as the slum or the fairground, in forms ranging from image production to literature, had much in common with those depicting the colonies. In fact, the representation of outside and outsider was an attempt to represent inside and insider. The creation





of this dichotomy entailed a similar defiance toward the representation of the suburban in contemporary Western multicultural urban life today, which makes it all the more likely Western adventurers will prepare further explorations for the investigators traveling to an unknown land to prepare for even further itinerancy and exploration.⁴⁰

In his adventure into otherness, the explorer ignores the resilient relationship between the Orient and the West that is imbedded in the European historical context, instead attempting to reposition himself by othering the other. The other became otherized in the process of the formation of European self-identity. Eurocentrism begins to erase this relationship to the other by actively obliterating not the history of the Orient, but the history of Europe's own deep-seated entanglements with Western Asian culture prior the eighteenth century. It is not merely a process of recognizing the enemy, but one of reducing the identity of the other to the subhuman; indeed, it is this same identitarian notion that undergirds explicit espousals of xenophobia in recent times.

Identity represents itself through enactment, through performativity, through action and reaction. Technologies of identification production enter the long history of the dialectic between self and other, or I and not-I, from the eighteenth century. In this conception, othering and colonialism go hand to hand; representation of the other and othering was not just an intellectual arm of the colonial enterprise to represent the others from far-off lands, but part of a process of self-representation and self-reidentification within the Western context.

Did Gholamreza, my grandfather, the itinerant photographer, attempt to reidentify himself—to embody the essentialism that “to be yourself, you need to be the other”? Or was a historical act of play snatched from its context—a reenactment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in

the streets of Tehran of the late '50s and early '60s? Or was he, rather, an unconscious storyteller, obliviously shadowing the history of image production via his street-performative business model? These acts took place during a time of urban modernization and new identity formation in Iranian society, giving way to a Tehran-centric mentality in the post-World War II era.

The Poetics of Politics

During Tehran's modernization and the development of its new urban identity, the presence of the dervish gradually faded. His tiny body and tattered clothes came to serve as icons of premodernity; in effect, the old other began to be replaced by *new others*. Society began to distinguish itself from "barbarism" via the claim to modernity, reproducing the history of Orientalism as a means to purify itself from a "ferocious" past; to become modern was thus to see oneself through the Western gaze.

These processes of modernization demanded a new sort of document: one with the bearer's photograph. As an essential step in applications for personal documents, portrait photography comprised the main source of revenue for the new business in Tehran. Situated close to the city's administrative offices, the business provided photos for passports, driver's licenses, and military service certificates. In fact, it was the four-by-six black-and-white picture that kept the business alive.

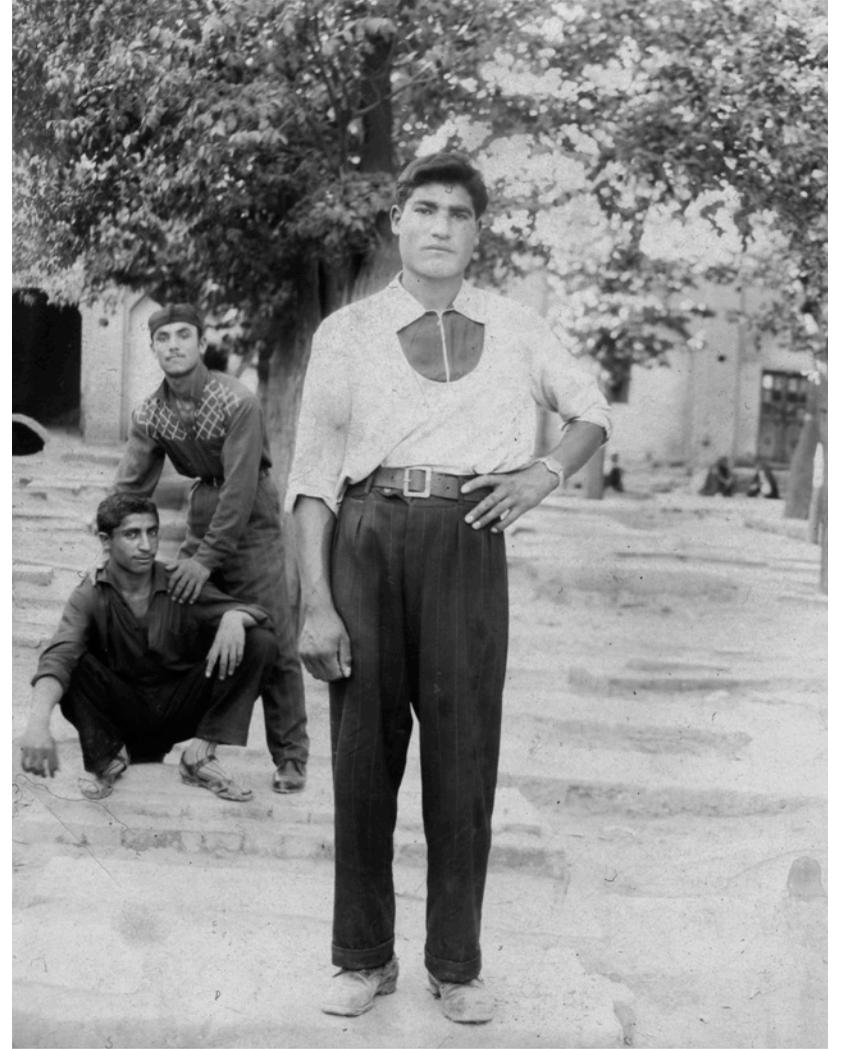
Neither my grandfather Gholamreza nor his brother-in-law Rajab had any education or knowledge regarding the history of photography, Orientalism, or post-colonialism. He couldn't read—so what was the source for this reinscription and reproduction of colonial memory? A family of peasants, they had no option but to immigrate to Tehran

after World War II. They left home because of drought, famine, and poverty, ending up on the fringes of Tehran as migrant workers—a docile, cheap, flexible, and disposable labor force on which the emerging middle-class Tehrani lifestyle would come to depend. Gholamreza and his brothers were among the unlanded peasantry, subalterns who lived day to day without any modern urban expertise. Shahram Khosravi writes about social agency and stigmatization in the newly pretended modern city based on a Tehran-centric national culture: the people in the photographs are *shahrestani* (literally, "from the provinces"). The term, he explains, is not merely a simple noun, innocently denoting a sociologically defined group of people. Rather, it is a term of othering, pregnant with bigotry, stigmatization, and marginalization.⁴¹ Khosravi also elucidates another patronizing term for non-Tehrani: *dehati* (villager), used to designate a person as deprived and uncultivated. The stigma borne by the status of *dehati* is palpable. Due to labor migration from the rural areas to the cities, the term "dehati" has become synonymous with unskilled laborers. The image of a *dehati*—a person seen as violating both ethical and aesthetic norms—was offensive to the bourgeois gaze.

Historically, official representations of the city have relied on an active unseeing of migrant workers. Though visible, they go unrecognized, in what amounts to a conscious act of exclusion and abandonment.

If it was to self-identify as a progressive society, the modern Iranian nation-state needed to construct a primitive domestic other. This self-identification was thus built on a prototypical act of partition: here and there, us and them. It is a classic strategy, calling for a scapegoat who is to be condemned and kept at a distance.

Social reproduction of the stigma didn't stop with their rhetorical classification as migrant work-



ers, but extended into their visualization in popular culture. For instance, dehati were portrayed as foolish and backward in the Iranian films known as “Film Farsi”⁴² as well as in the newspapers. It seemed that history was repeating itself. The same discourses that had formed the initial relationship between East and West (and Eurocentrism) now pitted center against margin once again—this time as a mechanism to preserve hierarchy in the urban labor market.

But these images do not serve merely to document an incipient modern society. They are also playful: a form of entertainment that explores what it feels like to be the other; a distraction from the banality of the everyday. Gholamreza’s photographs are an amalgamation of street amusement and urban memory. Perhaps they reflect an unconscious desire of the lower-class community to become dervishes, a continuation of down-to-earth working-class identity. Indeed, to adopt the costume of the dervish signified a strong desire to represent poverty as an acceptable form of social participation. In the south of Tehran, poverty and inequality were integral elements of urban identity. To impersonate a dervish had a different meaning here, as compared to the colonial history and the relationship between East and West; why would a commoner want to represent himself as a *commoner*? Such an urge to become a dervish, if only for a moment, in the streets of Tehran, and to etch this image forever in the silver photography paper, suggests an ironic playfulness. It is a performativity that connects the unconsciousness of twentieth-century working poor identity to nineteenth-century colonial memory. Narrative plays an important role in this self-creation and reproduction of identity. It is a signifier, the channel through which Gholamreza tells himself and others the story of their location in the world.

What Happens to Narration when It Crosses the Border?

In a series of lectures on the importance of place in fiction, the twentieth-century novelist Eudora Welty argues that every story could be another story entirely—and unrecognizable as art—if its character and plot were displaced somewhere else.⁴³ It is an act of translation that re-creates another cultural phenomenon in the process of translation. And it is not only the artistic and fictional character of a story that are important. The historical fact of ethnographical representations of the dervish holds fictional capacities: although photography was still in its nascency, and visual ethnography and its representations of reality supported some of the latter’s early claims, it would be incorrect to consider those images as straightforward documentation of everyday life. They were in fact a manipulation of the spectator, using elusiveness and conversion by photomontage to combine all the aspects of the Orient that seemed likely to satisfy the Western gaze. Some postcards, for instance, ascribed different names to the same photograph of a dervish; others mixed the paraphernalia of more than one Sufi order (Kalenderi, Bektachi, and Rifai), portraying all of them as borne by the same person.⁴⁴ Some of the people costumed as dervishes in the photos were not even locals, but Western tourists, seemingly posing for an exotic souvenir. Hence, Gholamreza’s dervish photos reflect a process of fictionalization of that which is already fictional; they effect the displacement and translation of one fiction into a second context. They are artifacts of a place that lies between the visible and the invisible, the seen and the unseen. The photos serve as a missing link between what is visible and what is intelligible, the place of imagination. Itinerancy, or even escapism, is an aspiration to change one’s conditions through an act of imagination—to become someone else,

still poor, but in a way that is acceptable; to depart permanently for the land of amusement, preserved for eternity on museum walls, or as postcards, able to travel elsewhere. It is the urge to attain immortality, not by being themselves, but by adopting an image or narrative that is deemed acceptable in the eyes of the beholder.

In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986), Peter Stallybrass and Allon White investigate the ways discourse undergoes displacement between sites—fairground, marketplace, coffeehouse, theater, slum—arguing that the very drive to achieve a singularity of collective identity is simultaneously productive of unconscious heterogeneity. Place, they argue, plays a crucial role in the process of meaning making, the construction of social identity, and the production of networks. Some places are labeled “here,” others “there,” but all simultaneously reproduce social cleavage in relation to race, class, and gender.⁴⁵ The division takes place within the historical characterization of places: gender, in relation to club and pub; class and race, in relation to suburb and inner city (or colony and home). Where is the site of discourse? Where is the site of practice? And what happens to both when they cross the border?

Funny that the photos are all tinted red, I write.

Why funny? Red is classically associated with labor, of course. I could frame it as a metaphor for labor, communism, and socialism.

But it would be obvious to do so, I continue.

Still, “red” has another meaning here. The only logical link that I think of is to orthochromatic paper.

Still, I don’t really get it. For the development process?

You can develop the paper under strong red light.

But what does this have to do with the camera?

Maybe it is a leftover color from something else? Darkroom red of course, but I also think about the circus ... which is usually a red or gold?

Well, yes, maybe because it was a more playful color.

It is a playful color ... it doesn’t look particularly alarming.

It is interesting to look at it that way. It seems everything in these pictures is lighthearted: phantasmagoria at its best.

Rajab the Photographer

A week later after a short conversation with my friend, I was interviewing Rajab Akbari, the photographer who built my grandfather’s pinhole camera. The one who, I presume, took the picture of Gholamreza as a dervish.

“Why did you use the color red to cover the camera?” I asked. “There wasn’t anything else. I could only find the red plastic curtain. It was the cheapest,” he replied.

Rajab is ninety-six years old. He hardly walks, and is delighted about our interview.

“Come for lunch,” he told me. “I will cook Kufteh.”

He sits on the wide sofa, his right hand resting on its arm, as we share steaming bowls of the

traditional meatball dish. The weather is still warm, normal for the first days of fall in Tehran, but Rajab wears thick, wintry socks. He says they are a souvenir from Romania. He doesn't wait for my questions, but begins his story:

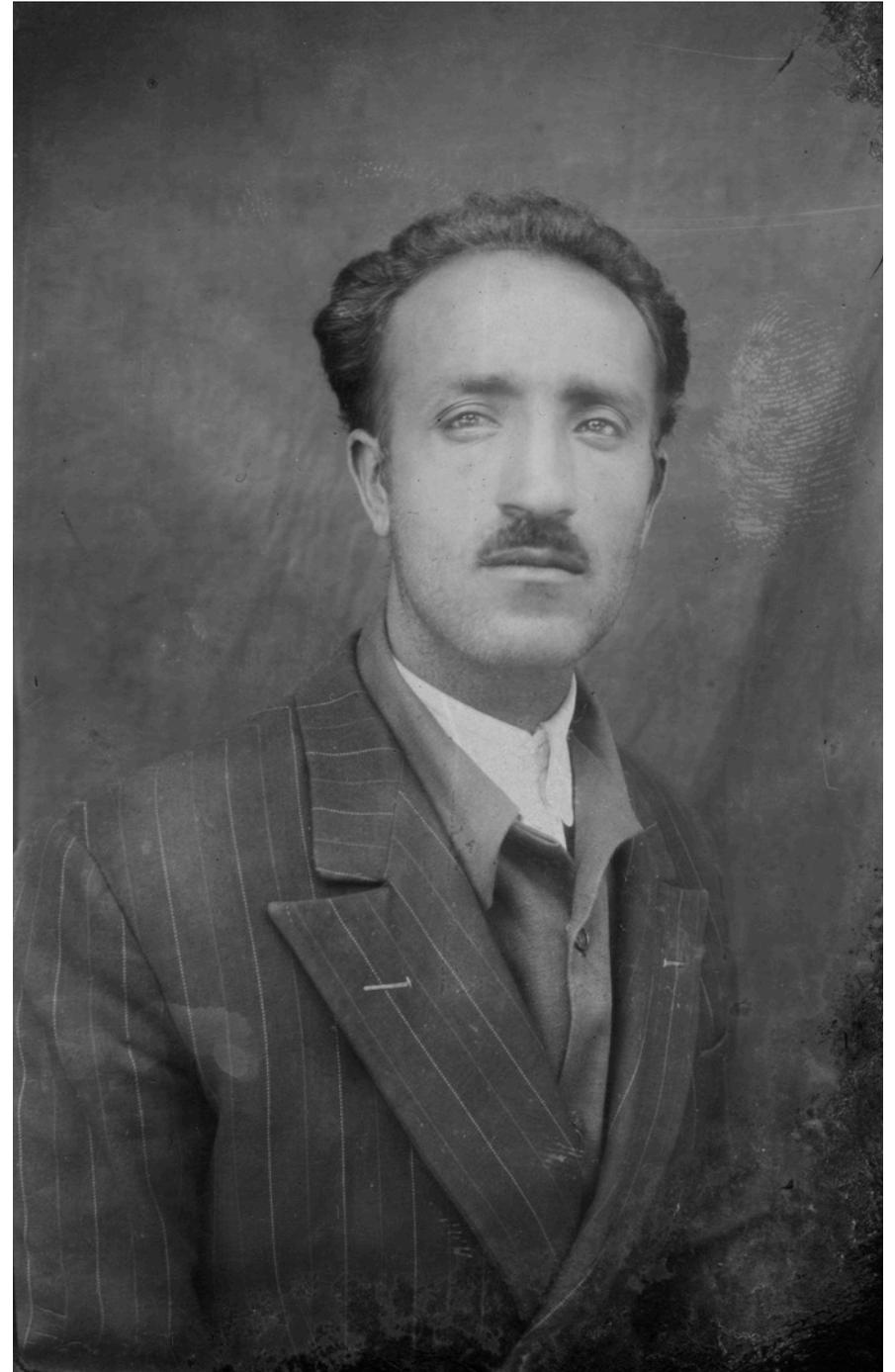
"I came to Tehran in 1937 from a village near Hamedan. I was fourteen," he says. "I didn't know anything or any place. I found a job in the house of a rich man named Dr. Marzban. I was working in the kitchen. His wife was Polish. He told me I should wear a necktie. I told him I couldn't. I told him, 'I am a simple laborer; people will laugh at me if they see me with a necktie. They will think I am pretending to be something I am not, that I am disrespectful.' After two years working, I left his house because of that."

Rajab took a job in a small restaurant. Every day, the same itinerant photographer came for lunch.

"He told me that if I was interested in photography, he could teach me," Rajab recalls. "When I was off after lunch, from about 2 p.m., I started to learn photography from him. I learned how to build the camera. I built four cameras after coming home from work; one was for your grandfather, Gholamreza; it was the first one that I built, in a small workshop on the roof of my house. I got the lenses from an Assyrian eyeglass maker, and the photography chemicals from a Jewish pharmacy."

I ask whether he still has any of these pictures.

He doesn't. "I gave the white ones to the customers and threw out the black ones," he explains.



The Dark Room, the Burning Sphere

In the hot summer of 1034, a man with the official title of Vaziri makes his way down the corners of the streets in Basra, taking his daily constitutional from his job as a *divani*—a bureaucrat and accountant—in the caliph’s palace.

“Nothing is very exciting these days,” he thinks to himself. “No new discoveries to be made, nor any important goals on the horizon.” He sits in the corner of his room, the big book of palace import and export calculations open before him, observing the light that trickles into his dark room from a tiny hole in the window in the early morning and the late afternoon. A tangled image of the building in front of his room, filtered through two trees on either side of the edifice. From his perspective, the sky is below, and the leaves are falling toward it. A small cloud touches the edge of the floor in his room. The world is upside down.

He’s made a name for himself with his knowledge of applied mathematics. In fact, he’s the most trusted administrator in the city, a post personally assigned to him by the caliph. But he is drained. The truth lies somewhere else. Gradually, he has found his own way, following the path to reach the truth based on positivism and experimental examination.

Hasan Ibn al-Haytham, known as Alhazen, was one the most influential Islamicate scientists,⁴⁶ but little is known about his life apart from his path-breaking scholarship in mathematics and optics—among them, the *Epistle on the Shape of the Eclipse* (*Maqāla fī sūrat al-kusūf*) and the *Book of Optics* (*Kitāb al-Manāzir*).

He believed it is the duty of a man who investigates the writings of scientists, if learning the truth is his goal, to make himself an enemy of all that he reads—to attack it from all sides. Alhazen also con-

sidered it paramount to remain self-critical in the course of such research, to avoid falling into either prejudice or unfounded leniency.⁴⁷

The modern photographic camera derives directly from the camera obscura; as its name implies, it was literally a dark room with a tiny hole in the roof, wall, or window shutter through which the view outside was projected on the opposite wall (or on a white screen opposite the hole). Its invention has been erroneously ascribed to various writers, from Roger Bacon and Leon Battista Alberti to Leonardo da Vinci and G. B. della Porta. In fact, it was described 250 years before Bacon, by Alhazen. The optical principle of the camera obscura had been known by Aristotle (384–322 BCE), who observed the crescent shape of the partially eclipsed sun projected on the ground through the holes of a strainer, and in the gaps between the leaves of a plane tree.⁴⁸ Moreover, knowledge of the camera obscura was in all likelihood widespread among Islamicate scholars, and Alhazen’s account in no way implies the divulgence of a novel observation. Alhazen stressed the significance of the relationships between aperture size and image sharpness, which in photographic cameras is regulated by a diaphragm. He also described a “dark chamber” and experimented with the images seen through the pinhole. In one, he arranged three candles in a row, placing a screen with a small hole in it between the candles and the wall. Among his observations were that images are formed only by small holes (but not by large ones), and that the projected image was inverted (i.e., the candle on the right produced an image on the left side of the wall).

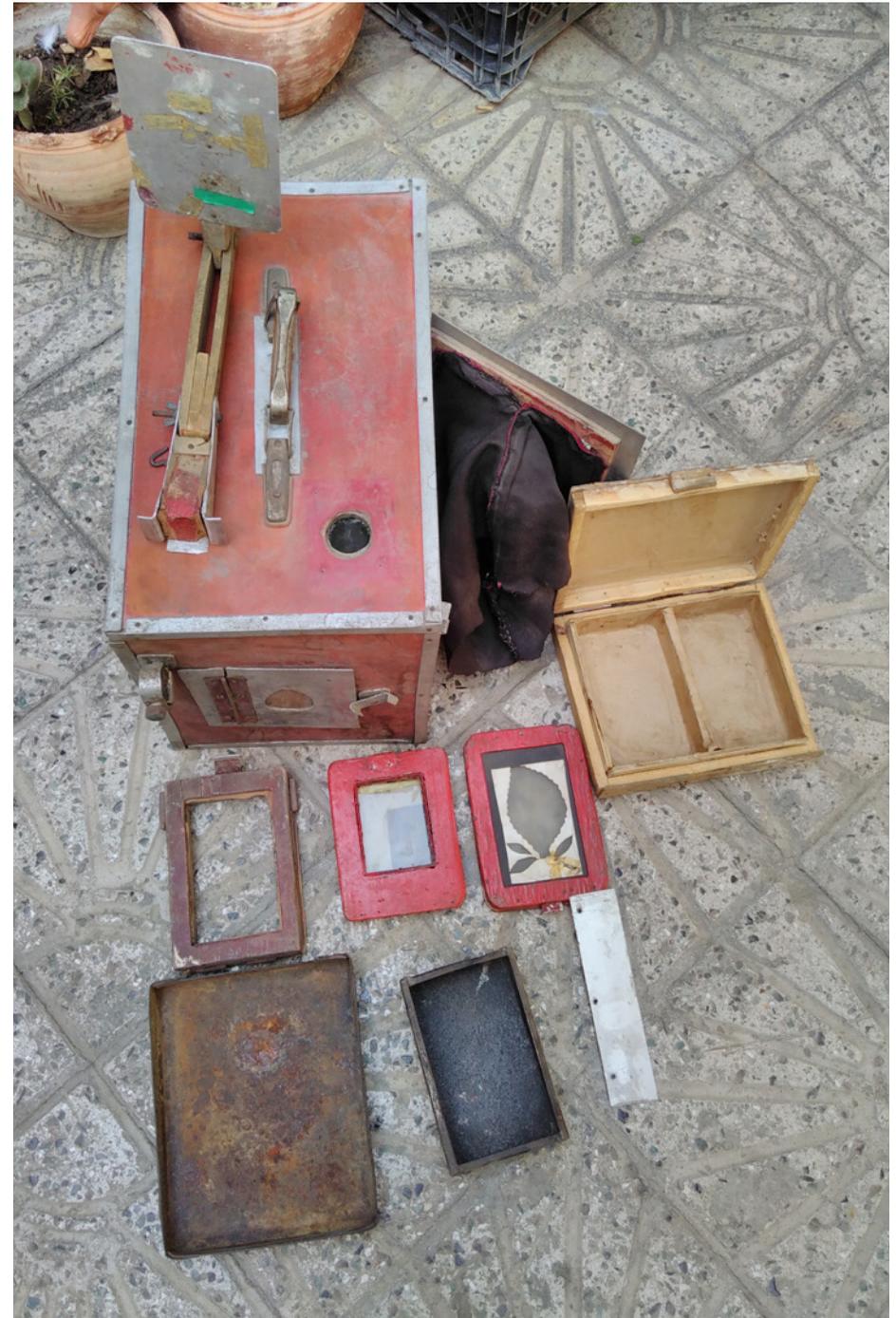
The discussion has so far centered on the camera obscura in its original form: as an actual darkened room in a house, rather than the modern box or camera with which we are familiar. The first proposal of an independent, transportable apparatus comes from Friedrich Risner (1533–1580), a German

mathematician best known for his 1572 Latin translation of Alhazen's *Optics*. Purportedly, the wooden box was to be used as an aid in the creation of artistic works. Risner also considers, referencing the nineteenth theorem of *Optics*, the camera obscura's use in the enlargement or reduction of drawings, suggesting one of its applications could be the easy and accurate delineation of topographical views. For this, he recommends the construction of a lightweight wooden hut with small holes fitted with lenses in each wall, and a cube of paper placed in the center for drawing.⁴⁹ His design was uncanny and prescient of developments to come.

Soul Catcher

This is the historical background of the camera used by Rajab and Gholamreza. In the early twentieth century, such devices—essentially a portable wooden hut with a lens—saw widespread use in places like Brazil and Cuba (where they were known as *camera minuteria*) and in Afghanistan (as *Camera e Foori*).⁵⁰ Public portrait photography was a common application. Employing paper negatives, the devices combined a box camera with a portable darkroom. Some types repurposed the front bellows section of an old camera, which was attached to one end of the processing box; others used an internal focus mechanism, comprised of a view screen and film-holder bracket that slid on internal metal rods, controlled by a focus rod at the rear of the camera. The operator's access to the camera was permitted via a sleeve that fit tightly over their arm. The process required only two chemicals: developer and fixer. From the posing of the subject to the production of a wet print, a typical session might take all of fifteen minutes.

Commercially available models of this camera emerged in the early twentieth century. Among



the first producers was the Chicago Ferrotypes Company, which started making its “postcard camera” around 1913. It was a direct positive camera. Using a sheet of paper with a blank postcard printed on the back, which made an exposure, the paper was then slid into a single chemical bath that would process the completed print. This provided a print without the need for a negative. The technological foundation of this machine was the camera obscura effect observed in earlier pinhole cameras.

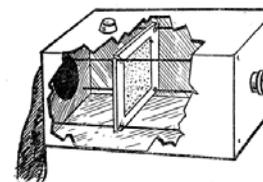
It quickly became common practice among aspiring hucksters to buy several cameras and then try to unload them at inflated prices. In fact, this type of pyramid scheme seems to have been encouraged by Chicago Ferrotypes. Prior to the Great Depression, traveling portrait photographers were a common sight, wandering from town to town taking photographs of people and getting paid on the spot: the foundation of itinerant photography.

Chicago Ferrotypes went out of business around 1920. No longer able to obtain the cameras directly from the manufacturer, nor the specialized paper and chemicals, photographers had to get creative. The new generation of itinerant photographers took bellows and lenses from secondhand cameras and mounted them on boxes, with trays for the requisite chemicals fitted inside.⁵¹ These homemade cameras often doubled as billboards to display their wares, many of them becoming what later critiques would refer to as craft art. Each camera was designed on the basis of personal taste, employing the same structure but articulating a unique identity; indeed, the process of building the camera itself became part of the art of photography. In stark contrast to the notion that it is the image made with the camera that constitutes the “art,” while the camera itself is merely a tool, these global machines were revealed as compelling subjects in and of themselves.

This camera turned the tables on the typical highbrow photography process, especially among

the lower classes of the Global South, who brought photography out of the studios and bourgeois circles and onto the streets. With these handmade cameras, street photographers disseminated a form of photography that was affordable for the working class—and, one that ultimately created its own photographic taste and aesthetics not just in Iran, but also in India and Afghanistan.

Rajab didn’t know this story about the camera’s arrival in Iran. In fact, the nomenclature he used to describe his camera would have seemed to have little to do with the terms in Chicago Ferrotypes’s instructional booklet. Notable among them was his use of the word *lopatka*—which in Russian or Polish means “shoulder blade” or “small shovel”—to describe the component that held the photo negative in front of the camera. It makes sense; the camera part bears a strong resemblance to such a tool.



I was certain. If the camera was in use in Afghanistan, Iran, India, Brazil and even more countries of the Global South, without a doubt we could find it in Pakistan. Kamran, the codirector of 12.0 Contemporary with Safia Sher, began his investigation. In his opinion, the most likely place to find this camera would be at a bazaar in Lahore.

After walking blindly and showing pictures of my grandfather’s red camera box to the locals, Kamran discovered the Urdu name of the camera model: literally, the “Soul Catcher” (روح کبچ). We bought three of the cameras. One for me, one for 12.0 Contemporary, and a third to be donated to Copenhagen’s Museum of Photography.



Exposition at 12.0 Contemporary, Islamabad, Pakistan, 2019. The camera (the Rooh Kich) is from Lahore, and was built in the late 1950s or early 1960s. Author's Photo.

The Landscape of Imagination

A woman sits on a chair, with her head turned toward her shoulder. She smiles nervously, perhaps due to the discomfort of being photographed, and the awareness that it is in fact a process of catching the soul. She holds a bag and a small package. A flower box is positioned near her left foot. It is winter, or at least the weather is cold enough to cover one's head with a hat or scarf. She sits in front of a painted backdrop: an image of nature, with a tree, bushes, water, and a shiny building in the distance. The painting is held up by a dilapidated wooden structure, with stones stacked around the base to steady it. The photographer, Rooh Kitch, smiles back at the woman.

The backdrop covers a ruined building in the background; a figment of a possible world in which there is no sign of war. Perhaps that speculative place empowers the subject of the photograph to transport herself to the land of imagination, that realm of fantasy beyond the violence of war. A *setting* for freedom and emancipation; one that allows the subject to reimagine herself. The image is from the Associated Press and bears a short description: "A photographer uses his own backdrop to mask Poland's World War II ruins while shooting a portrait of a woman in Warsaw, in November of 1946."⁵²

It is the oldest evidence of the handmade camera that I have found, historical proof of the use of such an apparatus in Poland.

My grandfather's use of the word *lopatka* brings a hypothesis to mind in regard to the origin of the camera, related to World War II. It was a nonaggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union that enabled those two powers to partition Poland between them. The agreement was signed in Moscow on August 23, 1939, by German foreign minister



Warsaw, November 1946 (Michael Nash/Associated Press).

Joachim von Ribbentrop and Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov and was officially known as the Treaty of Nonaggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (or, the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact). It also included a secret protocol: a definition of the borders of the Soviet and German territories across not only Poland, but also Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Speculation on the existence of the secret protocol was substantiated only when it was made public after the war, during the Nuremberg trials.

It took just a week for Germany to invade Poland, on September 1, 1939, an offensive that would be known as the September Campaign (or 1939 Defensive War) a day after the Supreme Soviet of the USSR had approved the pact.⁵³

Following the invasion, hundreds of thousands of refugees fled the German occupation into eastern Poland, expecting that the Polish army would impede German aggression in the west. The Soviet Union began its own game, based on the secret protocol, by invading eastern Poland on September 17. Poland was thus divided between the Soviets and Nazi Germany, and the refugees from German-occupied western Poland were surrounded.

In order to de-Polonize the annexed lands, from 1939 until 1941 four waves of deportations forcibly displaced entire families. The Soviet People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) deported between 320,000 and 1 million Polish nationals to the eastern parts of the USSR, the Urals, and to Siberia and Kazakhstan.⁵⁴

On Sunday, June 22, 1941, the Soviet–Nazi agreement was dissolved when the Axis invaded the Soviet Union. With their forces stretched thin, the Soviets lacked the means to keep the Polish refugees in the Soviet territory. Polish general Władysław Anders attempted take control of the situation and save the lives of the refugees by sending them out of the Soviet Union.

In 1942, about 120,000 refugees from Poland began their exodus to Iran from remote parts of the Soviet Union. Almost one-third of them were Jewish. The first departed from the city of Kransnovodsk, in the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, by sea for Bandar Pahlavi (Bandar Anzali), a port on the Caspian Sea in Iran. The Soviet oil tankers and coal ships reached the harbor on March 25, 1942.

A smaller-scale evacuation to Ashgabat–Mashhad followed.⁵⁵ Those who arrived in Bandar Pahlavi on the first transports were accommodated in small hotels and in the Cinema Shir-o-Khorshid movie theater.⁵⁶ The

gravely ill were transferred to local hospitals, the mildly ill were quarantined in a separate tent area, and the rest were shaved, stripped of their lice-infested clothes, given a blanket and a new set of clothing and underwear, and within weeks transferred to one of six refugee camps in Tehran, Isfahan, or Ahvaz.⁵⁷

Iran had been hobbled by the Soviet-Anglo invasion of 1941, and economic devastation and hunger were still widespread; the enfeebled nation was unable to permanently care for the large influx of refugees. Hence, other British-colonized countries began receiving Poles from Iran in the summer of 1942. The refugees who did not stay in Iran until the end of the war were transported to British India, Uganda, Kenya, and South Africa, among other countries. The Mexican government also agreed to take several thousand refugees.

On this basis I'd like to propose a rough hypothesis, though it lacks empirical evidence: perhaps the existence in the global South of cameras like the one owned by Rooh Kitch is related to the exodus of Polish Jewish refugees to Persia, British India, British Africa, South Africa, and Mexico.

We Are the Photographers: The Center of Photography, Stockholm

The occasion for the archive's first journey outside of Tehran followed a suggestion by Svante Larsson, a friend and colleague who introduced me to the Center of Photography (CFF), a nationwide educational membership association. The association of photographers was an exciting venue to present the archive, because it presented an opportunity to introduce Gholamreza Amirbegi not as a representative of a subaltern geography, but as a photographer among peers with the same interest and expertise.

The common Western reading of the images—as exotic artifacts—was displaced by a humanizing one, in which Gholamreza's identity was seen primarily as a photographer committed to his craft, and the grandfather of an artist who is a member

of their association. I was not the other, nor was I a body whose role was to legitimize the diversity of the institution by using my grandfather's images. Here, the process of photography itself was fertile terrain.

The exhibition was a chance to go beyond digital representation and activate the camera, after almost fifty years. For a couple of months, my work space was transformed into a photography studio to create positives from the original black negatives. Once the images were finished, a two-sided frame, designed and built by Kamen Zlatev, would afford the audience a playful encounter with each of the sets of negative and positive images, one by one. A millimeter gap between two sides of the frame revealed the lateral edge of the photography paper—a small gesture that was perhaps invisible to the eyes of the audience. There were also two mobile boxes, again design and produced by Kamen, with measurements similar to those of the camera, representing diverse images from state, municipal, and institutional identification cards. A magnifying glass placed on top of each box let the spectator enlarge each image, an act that simultaneously resembled the use of a loupe in a manual photography studio.

One of the images of the backdrop used in the street of Tehran became scenery for the photo shoot studio. The exhibition thus took on multiple identities: it was a workshop, a photography studio, and an exhibition—and, on top of it all, a pedagogical setting to review the unique expertise of a photographer from the Global South in Stockholm.

The smell of photographic emulsions—developer and fixer—as well as the sight of the wet images hanging in the corner, was in fact a nostalgic experience as I was told by older generation photographers who had worked with manual photography and developed images in the darkroom.

In collaboration with Svante and two of our students, Anna Zimmerman and Evelina Nolin, we held

a workshop, following a CFF call for participants. Participants were asked to act out scenes in front of the camera, which I dubbed the *Rooh Kitch*. The workshop was a place of reenactment, to practice mobility and imagination. It was an opportunity to become somebody else for a short time as one's soul was captured by a handmade apparatus.

The process took ten to fifteen minutes, and four to six seconds of exposure time. The seconds and minutes that have vanished from the digital production of images. Five seconds of soul catching. Dramatic seconds where one experiences the fear of being captured; a forgotten nineteenth-century bond to a known-unknown apparatus.

The paradox of the life of the itinerant is connected to the Urdu name of the camera. On the one hand, it is suggestive of the phantasm of the image, something like a Victorian black theater, in which frightening images such as skeletons, demons, and ghosts were projected onto walls, as in the nineteenth-century magician Paul Philidor's notion of phantasmagoria; the name evokes the joy of being captured by a strange apparatus. On the other hand, "Soul Catcher" points to the violence of being modern, the forceful transformation of a people into a citizenry. that is In fact, it comes as no surprise that we use the same terminology for hunting and photography: loading, capturing, shooting ...



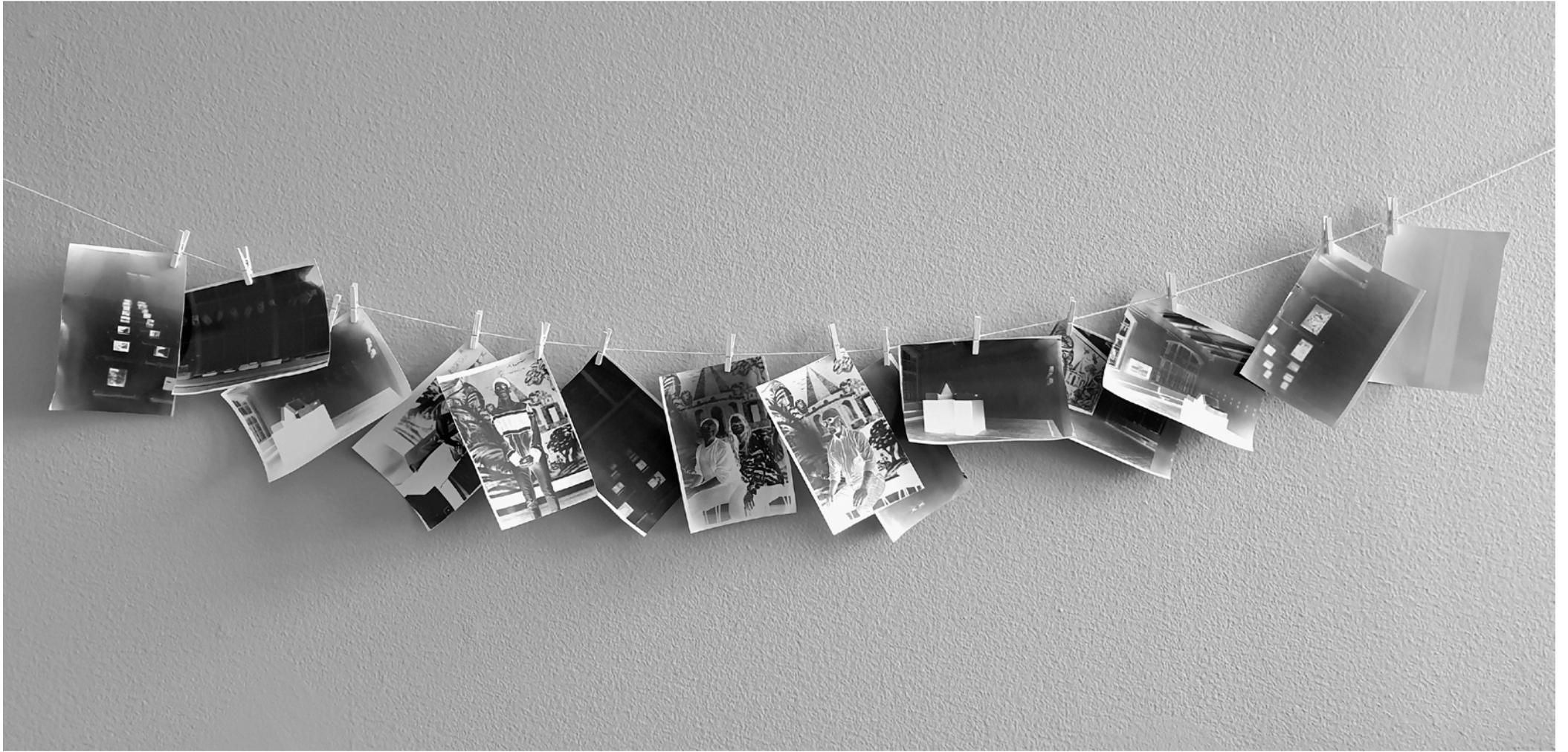
Laterna Magica, Museum for Visual Knowledge, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2019. Photo: Khaled Ramadan.



Center of Photography (CFF), Stockholm, 2018.
Photo: Anna Zimmerman.



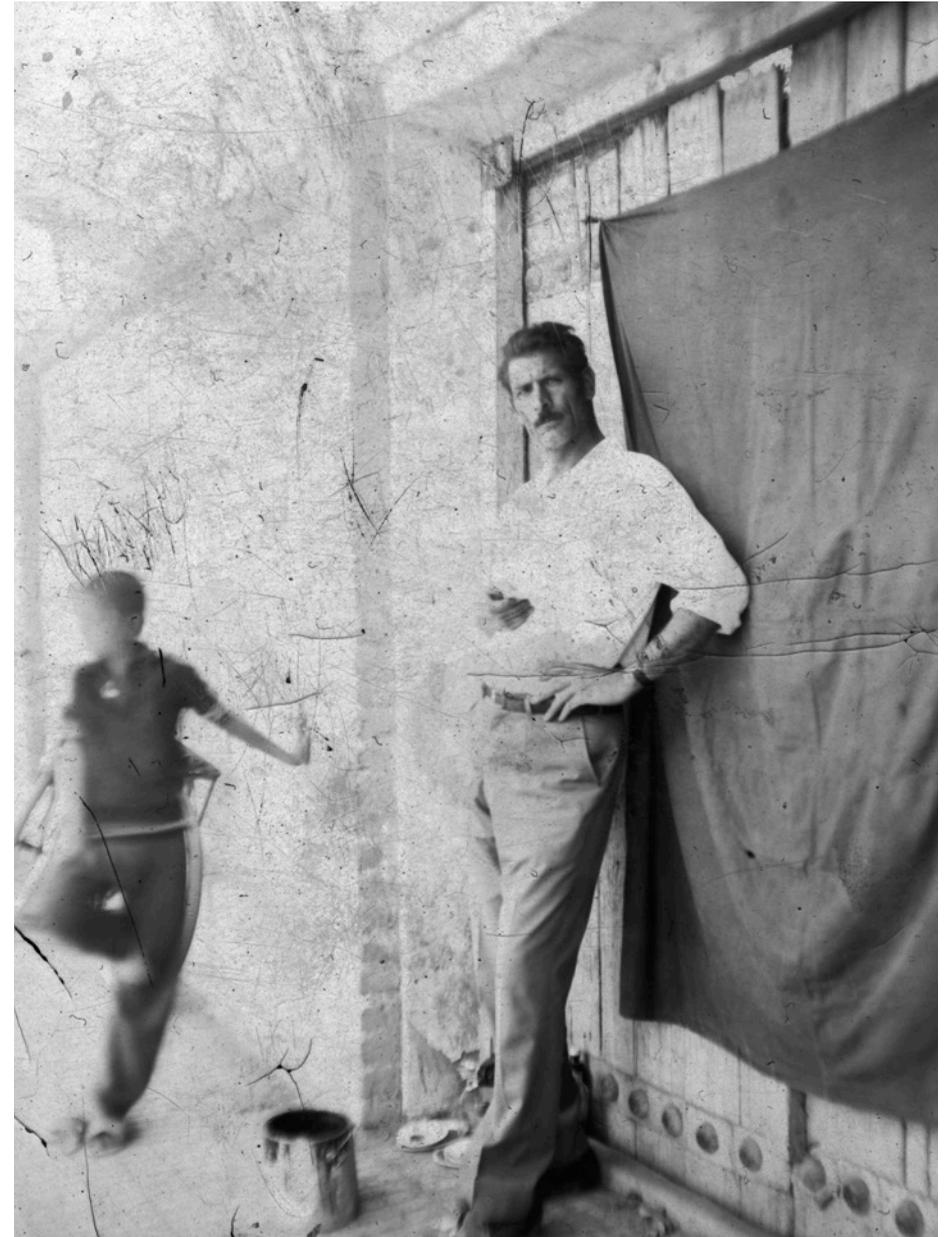
Center of Photography (CFF), Stockholm, 2018. Photo: Anna Zimmerman.



Gholamreza was right.

He unconsciously adhered to the pattern of history. He knew it within his unconscious colonial memory.

Here I am, writing about him and his dervish costume, showing his image in the global North, and historicizing the unconscious relational history from the nineteenth century to the twentieth, and beyond. Somehow, deep down, he knew that if he took a picture, they would archive it. But he needed to find a middleman—in this case his grandson, who has embarked on the journey of class mobility, and gained sufficient cultural capital to claim that Gholamreza was an artist, but didn't know it. The portrait is, in fact, his monument, a spatial memorial dedicated to an invisible, and now visible, proletariat after almost a century: a monument to the invisible citizen.



1. Shahram Khosravi, "Don't You Remember Me?," in *The Life of an Itinerant through a Pinhole* (exhibition catalogue) (Tehran: Aran Projects, 2016), p. 52.
2. Charlotte Bydler, "Travelling Portraits," in *The Life of an Itinerant through a Pinhole* (exhibition catalogue), p. 45.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
4. Anna Keel and Christian Strich, eds., *Fellini on Fellini*, Isabel Quigly, trans. ([New York:] Grantham, 1976).
5. Shahram Khosravi, "Don't You Remember Me?," p. 53.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
7. Klaus Kreiser, "Die Derwische im Spiegel abend-ländischer Reiseberichte," in *Istanbul und das osmanische Reich. Derwischwesen, Baugeschichte, Inschriftenkunde* (Istanbul: Isis Verlag, 1995), p. 2.
8. Thierry Zarcone, "Western Visual Representations of Dervishes from the 14th Century to the Early 20th," *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies* 6 (March 2013), pp. 43–58.
9. See Mansur Shaki, "Darviš," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. 7 (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1996), pp. 72–73.
10. Zarcone, "Western Visual Representations of Dervishes," p. 43.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
13. Victor Hugo, *Les Orientales*, Vol. 3 (Paris: Charles Gosselin, 1829), pp. 151–156. See Georges Thouvenin, "Le 'Derwiche des Orientales'. Les sources de Victor Hugo," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 37 (Fall 1930), pp. 347–367.
14. Zarcone, "Western Visual Representations of Dervishes."
15. The park was converted to the "l'Acclimatation Anthropologique" from 1877 until 1912.
16. Among the photographers who were discovering the Orient via the subjectification of human bodies were Charles Harvey Stileman, an Anglican clergyman who became the first Anglican bishop of Persia from 1912 until 1917; the German Ernst Hoeltzer, one of the pioneering photographers during the Qajar period (indeed, he worked for Shah Qajar for close to twenty years, until his death in 1911); W. Orden; Dmitri Ivanovich Ermakov from Tiflis, Georgia; Antoin Sevruquin; and Joseph Papazian, a royal court photographer of Armenian origin during the Qajar period. Papazian was one of the first photographers to have a studio in Tehran, which he opened in 1875. All of them produced and reproduced the image of dervishes while they documented other aspects of Oriental life. It seems that for them, the images of the dervish served as a means of financial security—their market value was all but guaranteed.
17. Ármín Vámbéry, *Meine Wanderungen und Erlebnisse in Persien* [Wanderings and Experiences in Persia] (Pest: Heckenast, 1867).
18. Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (London: Archibald Constable and Company, 1897), p. 9.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
23. Ármín Vámbéry, *Travels in Central Asia, Being the Account of a Journey from Teheran across the Turkoman Desert on the Eastern Shore of the Caspian to Khiva, Bokhara, and Samarcand, Performed in the Year 1863* (London: 1864).
24. Ármín Vámbéry, *Közép-ázsiai utazás, melyet a Magyar Tudományos Akadémia megbízásából 1863-ban Teheránból a Turkman sivatagon át a Kaspi tenger keleti partján Khivába, Bokharába és Szamarkandba tett* (Pest: 1865).
25. Ármín Vámbéry, *Sketches of Central Asia: Additional Chapters on my Travels, Adventures, and on the Ethnology of Central Asia* (London: 1868).
26. The National Archive, Record opening 24 March 2005, held by Kew, Richmond England.
27. Richard Norton-Taylor, "From Dracula's Nemesis to Prototype Foreign Spy," *Guardian*, April 1, 2005, theguardian.com.
28. The phrase "Objects in mirror are closer than they appear" is a safety warning that appears on modern cars. According to US Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards Section 571.111, convex mirrors are required to have the message indelibly marked at the lower edge of the mirror's reflective surface, in letters not less than 4.8 mm nor more than 6.4 mm high.
29. Robert Lacey, *Aristocrats* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 1983), p. 67.
30. Victor Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes towards the Outside World in the Imperial Age* (London: Zed Books, 2015), p. 316.
31. Irvin C. Schick, *The Erotic Margin: Sexuality and Spatiality in Alteritist Discourse* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), p. 25.
32. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," Jay Miskowic, trans., *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* (October 1984); originally published in March 1967 as "Des Espace Autres."
33. George W. Stocking Jr. "What's in a Name? The Origins of the Royal Anthropological Institute (1837–71)," Sep., 1971, New Series, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Sep., 1971), Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, p. 370
34. Alastair Bonnett, "How the British Working Class Became White: The Symbolic (Re)formation of Racialized Capitalism," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 11:3 (September 1998) pp. 316–340.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 316.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 317.
37. Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, Vol. 1, *Racial Oppression and Social Control* (London: Verso, 1994). It is worth noting, in this respect, the influence and effectiveness of novels and journalistic accounts concerning the "color divide" in American society that appeared in Victorian Britain. Consider, for instance, that Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*—which made direct comparisons between American slaves and the English working class—was the best-selling novel in nineteenth-century Britain.
38. Kenan Malik, *The Meaning of Race* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996); Charles Masterman, "A Weird and Uncanny People," in Peter Keating, ed., *Into Unknown England, 1866–1913: Selections from the Social Explorers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976).
39. Bonnett, "How the British Working Class Became White," p. 323.
40. One extreme example took place in 2007 when the Swedish military used the center of Rinkeby, a suburb in Stockholm, as a training field for six soldiers. They were supposed to walk around the neighborhood fully armed, say hello to the inhabitants, and become familiar with brown faces before they were sent to Afghanistan.
41. Shahram Khosravi, "Don't You Remember Me?," p. 55.
42. "Film Farsi" is a term used to describe popular films in Iran before the 1978 revolution. They usually included the same familiar themes: heroism, masculinity, love stories, and erotic encounters.
43. Eudora Welty, "Place in Fiction" *Collected Essays* (New York: House of Books, 1957).
44. Zarcone, "Western Visual Representations of Dervishes," p. 50.
45. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 121.
46. The term "Islamicate culture" was coined by Marshall Hodgson in the first volume of his posthumously published *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974). Hodgson invented the term in response to the confusion surrounding such terms as "Islamic," "Islam," and "Muslim" when they are used to describe aspects of society and culture that are found throughout the Muslim world. Hodgson used the term to describe cultural manifestations arising out of an Arabic and Persian literary tradition, which does not refer directly to the Islamic religion but to the "social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims" (59).
47. Alhazen, *The Optics of Ibn al-Haytham*, Books I–III, *On Direct Vision*, 2 Vols. (London: University of London Press, 1989), p. 40.
48. Michael Lahanas, "Ancient Greece: Optics," *Hellenica World*, n.d., hellenicaworld.com.
49. Alhazen, *Opticae Thesaurus: Alhazeni Arabis libri septem, nuncprimum editi; Eiusdem liber De Crepusculis et nubium ascensionibus* (Delhi: Gyan Books, 2017), Book X, p. 22.
50. Lukas Birk and Sean Foley, *Afghan Box Camera Project* (Vienna: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2011).
51. The last factory-made camera of this type was the Jano While-U-Wait Postcard Camera, circa 1954.
52. Michael Nash, AP Photo, 1946, <http://www.apimages.com/metadata/Index/WWII-Poland-Portraits/fc8e14c244e5da11af9f0014c2589dfb/37/0>.
53. Martin Collier and Philip Pedley, *Germany 1919–45* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 2000), p. 146.
54. Olga B. Semukhina and Kenneth Michael Reynolds, *Understanding the Modern Russian Police* (Cleveland, OH: CRC Press, 2013), p. 74; Michael Hope, *Polish Deported in the Soviet Union* (London: Veritas Foundation, 2000).
55. Andrzej Szujecki, "Near and Middle East: The Evacuation of the Polish People from the USSR," in Tadeusz Piotrowski, ed., *The Polish Deportees of World War II: Recollections of Removal to the Soviet Union and Dispersal throughout the World* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004), p. 180.
56. Mikhail Dekel, "When Iran Welcomed Jewish Refugees," *Foreign Policy*, October 19, 2019.
57. Szujecki, "Near and Middle East," p. 180.

SECOND STORY:

A Monument to the Invisible Citizen



7 IV (16)

Myrornas Krig and Black-and-White Psychedelia

We had a twenty-four-inch Philips brand black-and-white television with four detachable wooden legs. Its buttons allowed you to choose between channel one and channel two. And it had other buttons, too—which went as high as four or five. My sister, who is four years older than me, told me that before the 1979 revolution, channel three was an American TV station. She told me that she remembered the whimsical children’s programs and cartoons. Faithfully, I would change the channel to number three, hoping to catch a glimpse of the fabulous cartoons. But I never did—just noise and the *myrornas krig*, or “battle of the ants,” as one says in Swedish.

Our TV was old, and the internal sound system was malfunctioning, so we had to scan the FM radio for the sound that accompanied each program while we waited for the most magnetic animated character to appear on channel one—five or six minutes of pure enjoyment that would take us to the “realm of harmless irrationality.”¹

“Bal-Bal-Balthazar ... Bal-Balthazar ... Balthazar,” went the bright, jaunty theme song, leading into the introduction to the first-ever episode of *Professor Balthazar*, “The Inventor of Shoes”:

*Once upon a time there was a camel.
But that’s very long story.
How about another one?
By the way have you heard the story about twins?
No? You must hear it.
But first things first.
I start with the story about the camel:
Now! Once upon a time there was a camel.
No! I would rather begin with the story about twins.
You know what, I will tell you those stories some
other time.
Now, here is another one.*²

Confused Missiles

I was born in Tehran—very much in the center of it—three years before the 1979 revolution, and I grew up there during the Iran–Iraq war, which lasted almost eight years. We were far from the actual war zone, which was mainly in the western borderlands, from Azerbaijan to Kurdistan; the Iraqis were largely focused on Khuzestan, an oil-rich province in Iran’s southwest. However, Iraq succeeded in attacking Tehran, as well—first with Soviet-built Tu-16 and Tu-22 jets, and later with modified Mig-25 fighters.

Later in the war, Iraq eventually managed to build a high-altitude rocket that could reach Tehran. While many people had already fled the city to relative safety of smaller towns, others had no choice but to remain, holed up in underground shelters. The Iranian military’s defenses were limited, but somehow, they managed to procure a French radar system that was just capable of detecting the rocket, soon after it crossed their western border. Immediately after, the nervous but determined voice of a man was broadcast on national television and radio, warning us: “Attention, attention ... Attention, attention.” It felt like he was trying to hide his agitation. “The sounds that you are going to hear indicates an immediate threat or red alert. It means an airstrike is imminent. Leave your workplace and proceed to shelter.” A high-frequency siren followed this stressful announcement, sweeping up and down, for three minutes, followed each time by a ten-second pause.

The Iraqi invention was a modified version of the Scud-B ballistic missile, developed by the Soviet Union. The Iraqis called it al-Hussein, perhaps in allusion to the name of the attacker, Saddam Hussein. Iran tried to return fire using a North Korean version of another Soviet missile, the R-17 Elbrus. It was called Hwasong-5. But its capabilities were nowhere near those of the Iraqi weapon.

Tehran was al-Hussein’s primary target. Tehran at large, not any specific location, for al-Hussein lacked the precision to target any particular spot. Four minutes after the alarm, the Iraqi missile would make impact. Four minutes was all the time we had to escape to the underground shelter. However, we—the kids—always ran in the opposite direction: to the rooftops, to see the missile. As it approached the city, we would closely observe the detachment of the liquid fuel tank from the warhead before the final impact. The detachment caused a slight lurch, and an abrupt deviation in the missile’s final course—a random redirection, in fact.

To see the missile’s confusion was an amusing diversion from the war, and we placed bets on its new trajectory. Each time, a different neighborhood was the target—sometimes one far away, other times nearby.

Traces of Memory: The Story of a Little Man at the Turn of the World

In Professor Balthazar’s town, there was a man named Martin. He was an ordinary man, except that he had a big problem: nobody, absolutely nobody, ever noticed him. Martin was miserable. In an effort to get their attention, he once acted as if he were a clown. He also acted as if he were a Native American Indian, like those in American Westerns. But he was ignored; not even the town dog noticed him. He went so far as to play a gigantic saxophone, but that didn’t help, either. He was an invisible man, an invisible citizen.

One day, he told the amiable scientist, Professor Balthazar, about his problem. After this meeting, Martin left the town to fill the blank pages of the book Professor Balthazar had given him, invented with the help of a “hullabaloo machine” and three

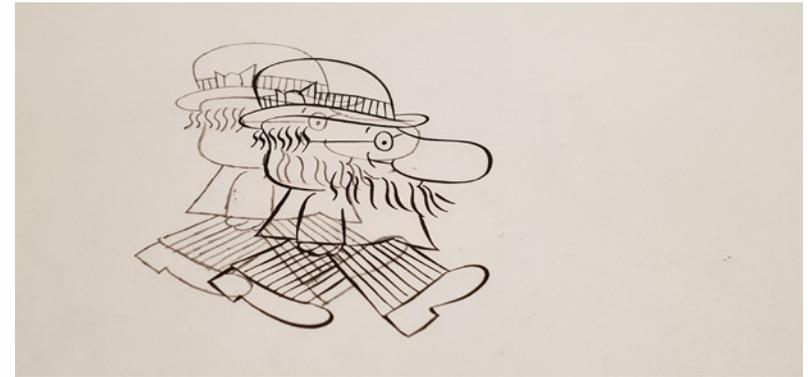
drops of magic potion. The title of the book was *How to Climb the Ladder of Success*.

Strangely, at that very moment people began to remark on the absence of a man whom they'd never noticed before. Suddenly, everybody missed him. Feeling a bit guilty, the people went to see Professor Balthazar. But even he didn't know where Martin was. The entire town was looking for Martin, but he had disappeared completely. In a special session, the City Council decided to erect a monument in Martin's memory, but unfortunately, nobody remembered what Martin looked like. And so, in an official ceremony, the city of Balthazar erected an empty podium dedicated to Martin: a monument to the invisible citizen.

The cartoon series was produced in a splashy, psychedelic, colorful form. Indeed, I understood later that its abstract, high-contrast style was a formal peculiarity at the time. Much later, when I was studying animation in Tehran, I learned that *Professor Balthazar* was, in fact, the crowning achievement of the Zagreb Film company, contributing to its fame as the birthplace of the so-called Zagreb school of animation.³

Another discovery I made was that people of my generation in both Iran and Iraq had grown up with the same childhood memory, produced by Yugoslavian and Czechoslovakian animation studios. And so, both war and *Professor Balthazar* pervade our collective memories of that time of hostility, anxiety, and political idiocy.

I eventually learned that the professor was not only a memory shared across Iran, Iraq, and Yugoslavia, but that some other peoples, within certain geographies, know the professor and can still sing the song. With the exception of one country—Sweden, where the cartoon was televised, along with a small minority in Finland who tuned in to Swedish TV signals during the Cold War—they are all from the Global South, and the majority were



Still from *A Monument to the Invisible Citizen* (Behzad Khosravi Noori, 2018), featuring a still from “How to Climb to Top of Success” (Zlatko Grgić, 1967).

Josip Broz Tito, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Jawaharlal Nehru at Brijuni Island, 1956. Courtesy of the Museum of Yugoslavia, Belgrade.



positioned politically between the two blocs of communism and capitalism.⁴ In fact, the countries where the animated series was broadcast could be distinguished by their membership in the Non-aligned Movement, a formation of countries that emerged at the height of the Cold War, in 1961, following the largest international summit in the world. It was founded by Tito, president of Yugoslavia; Gamal Abdel Nasser Hussein, the second president of Egypt; and Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India. NAM became what Nehru referred to as “a queer mixture of the East and the West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere.”⁵ The NAM eventually expanded to include Afghanistan, Algeria, Burma, Cambodia, Cuba, Cyprus, Ethiopia, Guinea, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Mali, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tunisia, the United Arab Republic, Yemen, and Yugoslavia.

According to the tenets of the Non-aligned Movement, each member was to act as a sovereign state that not only remains unaffiliated with either of the two power blocs, but also actively participates in international cooperation and harmony, toward the following aims:

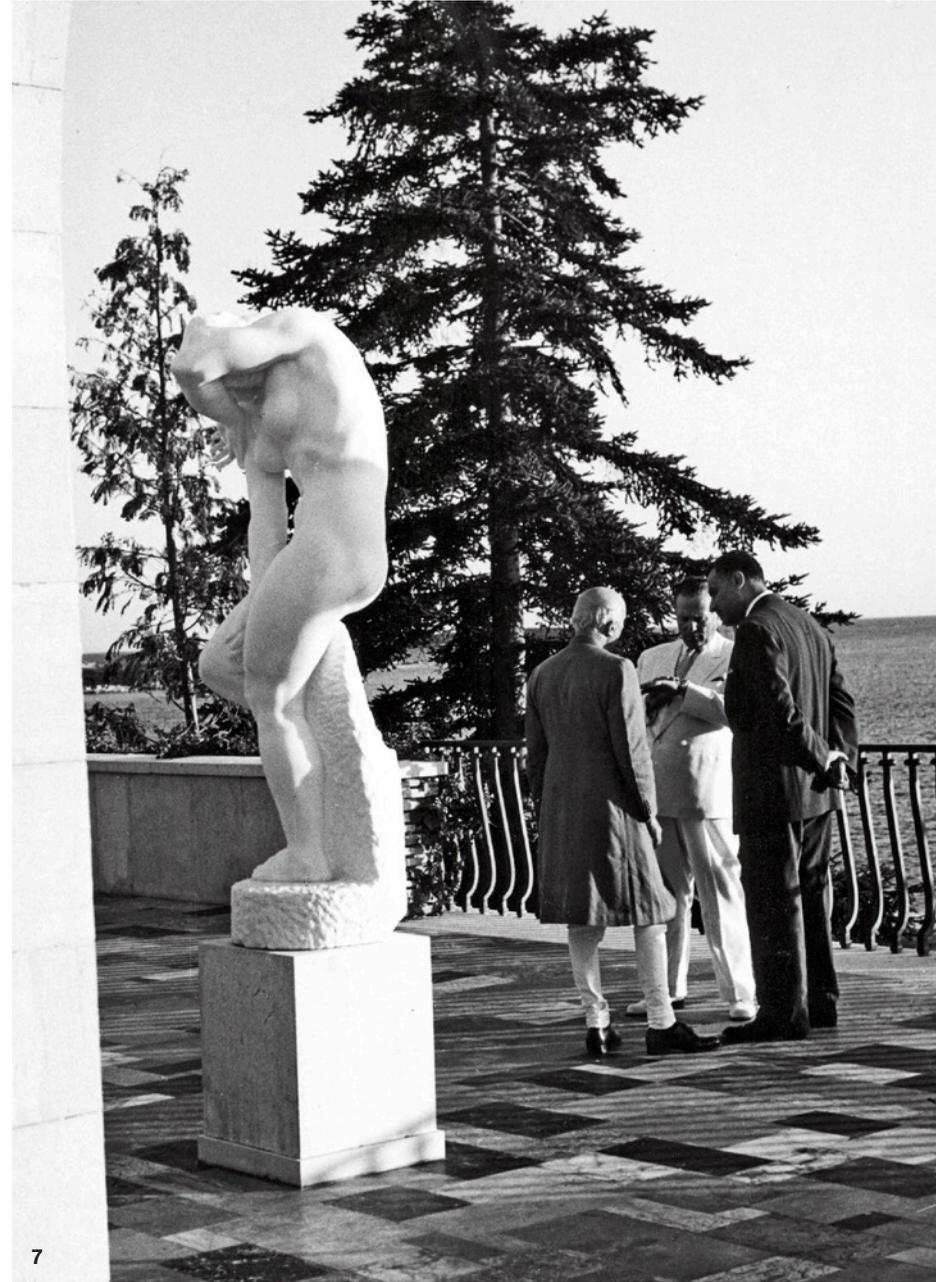
- To eliminate all causes that could directly or indirectly lead to war
- To build the NIEO (New International Economic Order)
- To protect human rights
- To promote scientific culture
- To preserve culture and traditions
- To strengthen world peace
- To strengthen the United Nations
- To discourage rearmament

The NAM also had these features:

- Opposition to any military alliance
- Opposition to racialism
- Prioritization of active participation over passivity⁶



1–5. First summit of the Non-aligned Movement, Belgrade, 1961. Courtesy of the Museum of Yugoslavia, Belgrade.



6–7. Josip Broz Tito, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Jawaharlal Nehru at Brijuni Island, 1956. Courtesy of the Museum of Yugoslavia, Belgrade.

Children from NAM countries or states without affiliation to superpowers like Sweden thus hold the same memory of the professor who lives in the colorful and quizzical city of Balthazargrad (“Balthazar-land”). Professor Balthazar works continuously to resolve the problems of his fellow citizens—like Martin—by way of his hullabaloo machine. He has a profound love for nature—indeed, all living beings—and he will offer his protection to anybody. Moreover, he fights against that which is wicked and malicious. And he is an ecologist who takes care of the environment. In short, he is purely devoted to what he is doing—a perfect human being.

The Balthazar character was scripted and directed by Zlatko Grgić, Boris Kolar, and Ante Zaninovic. The utopian land of Balthazargrad, a semi-modern and abstract urban environment, was created and designed by Zlatko Bourek.

Through their use of metaphor, the productions of the Zagreb school of animation manifested characteristics of the Cold War period in a satirical way. Experiences such as the arms race, the inequality of the rich and the poor, environmental awareness, the alienation of contemporary humankind in the concrete jungle or an isolated island—all these global metaphors amounted to a colorful form of protest against their contemporaries’ fears for the future. The directors of the Zagreb school thus contributed to a humanist tendency in the face of the political dichotomy of the Cold War, attended by socialist self-management and the Non-aligned Movement.

To East or Not to East

While Yugoslavia had a fraught relationship with the West, for several years following the end of the

Second World War, it was the closest European country to the Soviet Union. The shared ideal of socialism led to a natural ideological affinity between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, and when Tito traveled to the East, he was welcomed as a hero.⁷

This budding relationship, however, was to be short-lived. In fact, the first signs of the split between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union—or, more precisely, between Tito and Stalin—had had already been visible in 1945, during preparations for an exhibition on the People’s Liberation Movement and liberation of Belgrade at the general headquarters of the Yugoslav People’s Army.⁸ The Soviet ambassador had brought along a series of photographs, which, from Tito’s point of view, overemphasized the role of the Red Army in Belgrade’s liberation.

Furious, Tito insisted on touring the exhibition before the opening, scouring it for signs of Soviet propaganda. In its depiction, the Yugoslav Partisan movement’s role, he soon realized, was vastly overshadowed by that of the Red Army. Tito was offended. Who had liberated Belgrade? Was there no Yugoslav army? Becoming even more aggravated, he struck a nearby windowpane, shattering it. He canceled the exhibition.

As Tvrtko Jakoniva notes, despite the disagreement over the exhibition, the relationship between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia went smoothly until the spring of 1948, by which time Russian culture had come to predominate in Yugoslavia. Russian language was now the most widely spoken foreign language in schools, and Russian classics—such as *How the Steel Was Tempered* by Nikolai Ostrovsky, the poems of Sergei Yesenin, the stories of Maxim Gorky, or *How Man Became a Giant* by Ilin and Segal—were compulsory reading. A host of Soviet cultural holidays were commemorated: Red Army Day, the October Revolution, Lenin’s Death Day, Maxim Gorky’s Death Day. And there were days of remembrance to mark the anniversary of the

German attack on the USSR, along with May Day parades. The Slavic Committee, a nineteenth-century organization dedicated to the political integrity of Slavic-speaking peoples, once again celebrated the brotherhood of all the Slavs. This time, however, it was through a Pan-Slavism that employed the ideological framework of socialism to address the history of oppression globally, as well as to respond to the Nazi Generalplan Ost (Master plan east), which was an attempt at ethnic cleansing and genocide against the Slavic ethnic group in the Balkans.⁹ Russians now clearly attempted to project their ideology into the Yugoslavian social fabric, just as they had promoted a Russia-centric doctrine in other Eastern European countries. Obviously, the United States was displeased with the ideological battle that the Russians had begun; their best response, it seemed, was the dissemination of cultural propaganda. As John Moors Cabot, the US ambassador in Belgrade, observed, it was crazy to hope that the truth would find its way to ordinary people “in a country like this one”; in his view, this could be achieved only by the spread of such counter-information.¹⁰

As historian Radina Vučetić describes, American films remained a fixture of Yugoslavian cinema following the liberation. *Frontier Fugitives*, a film about the Wild West, was the first Western movie screened in Belgrade, soon after its 1945 premier.¹¹

Such presentation of Western films did not escape the exacting gaze of the Soviet regime. In 1948, Boris Zihlerl, president of the Association for Cultural Collaboration between the USSR and Yugoslavia, excoriated the American films, calling them “means of indoctrination and grangerization,” bent on the “mobilization of all forces of darkness, bigotry, superstition, Ku Klux Klan, and lynching.”¹² Nevertheless, the films remained a presence that was used as a tool of provocation against Soviet cultural determinacy.

An aggressive exchange of letters between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) ensued. First, in a letter dated March 27, 1948, the Soviets directly accused the Yugoslavs of flouting Soviet socialism, declaring, “[S]ocialism in the Soviet Union has ceased to be revolutionary,” adding that they “could not consider such a Communist party organization to be Marxist-Leninist, Bolshevik.” The letter duly named a number of high-ranking officials in Yugoslavia and the Partisan movement as “dubious Marxists.”¹³

Another letter from the Soviets, thirty-one pages long and dated May 4, 1948, admonished the KPJ for being too proud of their successes against the Germans, arguing that the Red Army had “saved them from destruction”—a far-fetched statement, as Tito’s partisans had successfully campaigned against Axis forces for four years before the Red Army appeared.¹⁴ Consequently, the Soviets took the antagonistic symbolic act of foregoing recognition of Tito’s birthday on May 25, 1948. His portraits vanished from the shop windows of Moscow.¹⁵ He was considered to be no longer a Marxist, but a traitor to communism.

The official split between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union took place on June 28, 1948. Tito delivered a written speech to the Fifth National Congress of the Communist Party in Belgrade that lasted nearly seven hours, in which he condemned the doctrine of Stalin and the CPSU. He then inaugurated the new autonomous socialist state, which resulted in Yugoslavia’s immediate expulsion from the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform). This was the beginning of the “Informbiro” period (a linguistic twist on the Soviet counterpart), marked by limited interactions with the USSR. It was a state of affairs that would not come to an end until 1955, two years after the death of Joseph Stalin.

The new autonomous socialist state demanded a new economic system, distinct from the Soviet model. Indeed, as it formed this new political identity, one of the key challenges was how to redefine its relationship to Marxism.

On June 6, 1950, the declaration of a new model that combined market socialism and self-management offered a potential pathway for the anti-Stalinist reformers: initiated by Yugoslavian workers' collectives as an experimental political and social practice, it was termed "workers' self-management." And on June 26, Tito gave a speech outlining the Yugoslav version of socialism. From top to bottom, theirs was to be distinct from the economies of the Soviet Union and Eastern European communist countries. The new system went so far as to give workers the right to decide on the conditions of production and on the distribution of value. In his speech, Tito was at pains to differentiate the Yugoslav system from the Soviet one, including by raising the question of theoretical differences between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. He proposed four direct answers:

In order to answer that question even partially, it is necessary to consider what we are doing and what they are doing in the light of the science of Marxism-Leninism, that is:

- a) the role of the state in the transition period and its withering away.
- b) the relationship of the party to the state
- c) the question of the lower phase of communism, or, as it is called today; socialism.
- d) the question of state or socialist ownership.

Let us first take the example of our country. We destroyed the old state machinery and created a new, people's state apparatus, without which the working people of our country would not be in a position to retain power in their hands and carry out the ex-

propriation of the means of production and many other revolutionary acts absolutely necessary for the triumph of socialism in a country.

Tito distinguished the new economic structure as a continuation of Lenin's political ideology, offering an interpretation of the latter's idea of state power:

Lenin said: "The proletariat needs state power, a centralized organization of power, an organized force for suppressing the resistance of the exploiters and for readership of the great masses of the population, peasants, petty bourgeoisie, semi-proletariat, and also for the establishment of socialist ownership." "But it should not be forgotten," says Lenin, quoting Marx, "that the proletariat needs only the state which is withering away."¹⁶

In so doing, Tito positioned Yugoslavia's new configuration as following a pure Leninist ideological agenda; the skeleton that preserves the revolution by empowering workers within the self-management system; a permanent state of revolution.

However, the Yugoslavian state never withered away as Tito claimed it would. On the contrary, the controlling and repressive mechanism of the state remained visible and strong. It was a hybrid form that put both state and workers in charge of production.

The new system embraced not only industrial production, but also artistic endeavors. It was a brilliant moment for those artists and writers who had already disavowed Soviet socialist realism, including the Croatian writer Petar Šegedin. With his debut novel *Children of God* (Djeca božja), published in 1946, Šegedin broke away from the Soviet literary movement, introducing existentialism into Croatian literature. In 1949, during the Second Congress of the Writers' Union of Yugoslavia in Zagreb, Šegedin addressed his fellow writers in a lecture entitled "About Our Literary Criticism"—a moment that marked the beginning of the deconstruction of



Main production team of *The Great Meeting* at the office of *Kerempuh* magazine, Zagreb, 1950. Courtesy of the Borivoj Dovniković-Bordo private archive.



Production of *The Great Meeting* at the office of *Kerempuh* magazine, Zagreb, 1950. Courtesy of the Borivoj Dovniković-Bordo private archive.

socialist realism. At the end of the same year, Krsto Hegedušić delivered his lecture “A Word about the Organization of Art Criticism” at the annual conference of the Croatian Association of Artists. This was the first public attack on the aesthetics and doctrine of socialist realism in the visual arts, a demand for freedom of artistic expression that triggered widespread public debate. Concomitantly, on June 4, 1951, the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (CPY) issued the “Declaration of Critical and Creative Freedom.” This was part of a sequence of conclusions and decisions that proved crucial to the ongoing process of de-Stalinization. The declaration was interpreted as an indirect call for a “battle of ideas,” in a bid to reduce the influence of those individuals and institutions who still supported the Stalinist model of culture.¹⁷

The transition was anything but calm and peaceful. Documents published by the CIA in 1970 disclose that it was routine for political rebels, mainly Stalin supporters, to be taken captive and sent to Goli Otok Island, notorious as a prison island from 1948 to 1955. More than fifteen thousand people were estimated to have been sent to the tiny island, and as many as six hundred may have died there.¹⁸

The Great Meeting

By 1951, Yugoslavia had become more tolerant toward cultural production from across the Atlantic. The door had been opened to a torrent of animated films and comics.

In 1949, the brothers Walter and Norbert Neugebauer, along with Borivoj Dovniković-Bordo and other young comic artists, converged around *Kerempuh* magazine, where they published a series of bold and provocative illustrations: satirical render-

ings of Eastern European leaders, from Stalin to Enver Hoxha, the Communist leader of Albania.

Two years later, after the CPY's declaration of creative freedom, Walter and Norbert Neugebauer convinced the magazine's editor-in-chief, Fadil Hadžić, to produce an animated film. Hadžić agreed; however he expressed his concerns: "If you screw the thing up, my head's gone."¹⁹

And so, work began in the *Kerempuh* newsroom on the propagandistic cartoon *The Great Meeting*. The cartoon was an amalgamation of different design styles, largely borrowed from Disney. In fact, Walter Neugebauer had a picture of Walt Disney hanging in his office.²⁰ Written by political satirist and journalist Mirko Trisler and printed in Belgrade, *The Great Meeting* made fun of the Informbiro's style of propaganda.

Among its creators was Dvorniković-Bordo, then a young illustrator, and later one of the founders of the Zagreb school of animation. In an interview I conducted with him in 2017, he remarked: "We didn't have any experience producing animated film. We were just following the story and trying to animate it while making the story" ("an impossible task," he added).²¹

The twenty-two-minute animated film, completed in 1951, is a political metaphor that, according to film and animation scholar Midhat Ajonović, is hard to understand for non-Balkan people, due to its many regional symbolic references.²² But within Yugoslavia, it was a successful cultural production, and one that directly presaged a new political tendency. It was presented in different cities around the country, and even in a public screening in the central square of Zagreb; it soon came to epitomize criticism of the USSR.²³

Film theorist and historian Nikica Gilić, referring to the work of Ajonović as well as film maker and screen writer Zlatko Sudović and Ante Peterlić, argues that the classical style of animation of the



Still from *A Monument to the Invisible Citizen* (Behzad Khosravi Noori, 2018), featuring a still from *The Great Meeting* (Norbert and Walter Neugebauer, 1950).

Neugebauer brothers was in fact the driving force behind a new kind of animation in socialist Yugoslavia.²⁴

While the film wasn't meant for kids, children were by no means excluded from the political situation on which it commented. And some of the work that emerged at the time was geared toward a younger audience; for instance, Branko Ćopić, a Bosnian Serb, wrote a children's story in 1949 in which the protagonist, a hedgehog, leads a struggle of a little man against more powerful opponents. *The House of the Hedgehog* became a mainstay of Yugoslav children's literature²⁵—and perhaps a fitting replacement for M. Ilin and E. Segal's Soviet propaganda tale, *How a Man Became a Giant*.

EXAT 51, Kristal, and the Link between Zagreb Film and the Abstraction Movement

Against this backdrop of cultural and political upheaval, on December 7, 1951, during the plenary meeting of the Association of Applied Artists of Croatia, nine artists and architects founded a new group. Its aim was to condemn the hegemony of authorized socialist realism, along with state censorship of abstraction and the numerous motifs that were rejected by communist doctrine as decadent and bourgeois. Cultural historian Lidija Merenik argues that in this political climate, modernism's role was a politically convenient one, that of "providing an enlightened 'civilization wrapper.'"²⁶

The new social norm, which she defines as socialist "underdevelopment modernism," spurned socialist realism in favor of Western models of living, working, and creating. Merenik maintains that EXAT 51's ideological foundations were dissimilar to, and indeed disliked by, the party ideologues, who preferred to "recommend" an acceptable "modern"

manner of expression. While EXAT 51 is often considered an abstract movement, Merenik discards the historical classifications of "abstract" and "geometrical." In her reading, their determining characteristics are embodied in their overall ideological weight, in particular their conceptualizations of "progress." She argues that here, geometry is a tool, and progress the goal.²⁷ In their 1951 manifesto, EXAT 51 emphasized that the differences between so-called pure art and applied art were nonexistent, and that abstract art could enrich the field of visual communication.²⁸ The link between EXAT 51 and the foundation of the Zagreb Film company is an interesting fact. The combination of progressive, abstract, and unbounded forms of practice led artists to tendencies that focused on the production of new images and subjects. Two out of nine members of EXAT 51 were involved with film production: Aleksandar Srnec and Vlado Kristl. Their attitude toward moving images faithfully reflected the group's manifesto, which clearly states that there should be no separation between the fine arts and the applied arts. Hence, no obstacle stood between the artists and the exploration of new forms of communication that utilized moving images.

In June 1956, the animated film studio was formally established within the framework of Zagreb Film. There, Dušan Vukotić, Nikola Kostelac, Vatroslav Mimica, and Borivoj Dovniković-Bordo explored their new propensity toward animated production, following the new socialist modernism. While the school's style is characterized by flattened, geometrically stylized figures and backgrounds with a reduced or absent spatial perspective, as well as schematized and limited animation, neglecting organic and physical laws, Nikica Gilić articulates that it is representative of the tendencies toward modernist and "auteurist" cinema of its time, and significantly dissimilar from those of both the Eastern and Western bloc countries.²⁹ Instead, the Zagreb

school emblemizes the Yugoslav political position—a style of animation that lay between the established forms of either. He further argues that despite the title “school,” it is also vital to note that the artists in this grouping never shared a common style. As animator Paul Wells notes, they were strongly individualist, creating quite distinct works—a phenomenon explained only partially by the tendency of animated film toward a relatively higher level of individual control on the part of each artist.³⁰

The animation of Zagreb made its first major breakthrough with the short *Samac* (1958), by Vatroslav Mimica, which won the Grand Prize at the Venice Film Festival. When confronted in 1958 in Cannes by the achievement of the artist from Zagreb, for him an unknown, George Sadoul, a French scholar, critic, and historian replied that he had no idea that animated film comprised such a wealth of genres and different styles. And it was then that he coined the term “Zagreb school of animated films.”³¹

The international recognition and success of *Samac* were followed by the 1961 animation *Surogat*, by Dušan Vukotić, which won the Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film; in fact, it was the first non-American animated film ever to be awarded a prize at the Oscars. Animation thus began its relationship with the newborn socialist modernism by positioning itself between the Eastern and Western blocs.

Abstraction against Disney

In my interview with Dovniković-Bordo, who contributed to the Neugebauer production *The Great Meeting* (*Veliki Miting*), he told me that the school’s characteristic has its roots in its rejection of the latter’s Disney-influenced style of animation.³² Similarly, Gilić quotes another interview with Dovniković-

Bordo in which he defines the Zagreb school’s concept of animation as in opposition to Disney’s classical model of rounded characters, fully phased movement (twenty-four frames per second), and an orientation toward children’s themes and infantile cognition.³³

As Ajanović explains, the orientation of Disney’s productions toward children was, in fact, a capitalist strategy introduced by Walt Disney, in hopes of increasing the company’s income by selling two theater tickets instead of one.³⁴

The Zagreb school of animation could be understood as occupying the space between two artistic characteristics. On one side was Kristl, whose radicalism and strong tendency toward abstraction—characteristics inherited from EXAT 51—are most tangible in his 1961 masterpiece *Don Kihot*. On the other was Zlatko Grgić, director of *Professor Balthazar*, and, according to Ajanović, the most Americanized animator among them.³⁵ But despite their individual differences, the animators from Zagreb shared a general disposition against Disney’s classical style of animation.

In an interview by film producer and writer Nenad Pata, Vukotić positions his animation practice as a form of rebellion toward the establishment:

Upon taking my first unsure steps into this wondrous medium, I was far more certain of what I did not want than of what I did. I did not want to follow well-trodden path, I did not want to be an imitator or epigone; I firmly believed that animated film offered innumerable opportunities. There may have been a touch of youthful rebellion in this, rebellion against establishment, conventional forms, a wish to be new and original, but one way or the other, it was all quite enough to begin with.³⁶



Pata goes on to cite Grgić's position against American-style industrialization of animation production:

We Yugoslavs are not cut out for teamwork as the Americans are, for example. The Zagreb school consists of thirteen, fifteen, twenty-one people, their integrity, their independent personalities. This is the main characteristic, the value of the Zagreb school which should be preserved. If this cannot or will not be done, the whole thing will turn into an industry, and that would inevitably mean the end of this phenomenon in the world of animated film ... We feel we are all very different, but when we find ourselves competing against the world at large, it becomes obvious that we come from the same milieu.³⁷

Nevertheless, the anti-Disney style didn't emerge solely from the Zagreb school. For instance, Fadil Hadžić advocated the fight against Disney's model in his 1959, quoting Alexandre Alexeieff, Stephen Bosustow, Popescu-Gopo, Hubley, and other "anti-Disney" authors who gained international visibility well before the Zagreb school became a household name.³⁸

The Inventor of Shoes, the Sleep-Creep; or, An Animator Who Works like a Miner

Zlatko Grgić was one of the more eccentric characters, as evident from the title of his film *Sleep-Creep*, in which a worm sleeps and creeps across the ground, through the water and into the air, where it is hunted by one and all but caught by none; as Nenad Pata notes, it is, in fact, impossible to catch it.³⁹ As it happens, even Grgić himself is unable to catch it. At the Oberhausen International Short Film

Festival in 1969, the film was well received but unsuccessful in winning a prize. One West German journalist who attended thought it was the story of the underdog Yugoslavia, and the desire on the part of the Soviet Union and other superpowers to conquer it. This was not, in fact, Grgić's own idea; it had never even consciously occurred to him.

Grgić had begun his career studying journalism, following which he became a member of the Duga Film production team in 1951, where he worked as an "in-between"—the illustrator responsible for finishing the scenes by filling in the areas that the animator had left blank, ensuring continuity of motion.

When Duga Film filed for bankruptcy, Grgić started studying law, but once again changed course to join the Zagreb Film studio in 1956. In one of his only interviews, he told Pata that he thinks in lines and colors, and that he never used a script for a film. He preferred to let the plot unfold through a series of drawings. Thus, the details would emerge in the process—an unorthodox method of animation production. His mindset, and his artistic method of thinking through drawing, relied on a form of logic that words could not articulate. In fact, its humor reflects a form of absurdity that can be expressed only through movement. Indeed, he describes himself as an animator who works like a miner, digging and digging to discover the gem.

His basic approach to animation followed in the footsteps of old-fashioned American animators such as Tex Avery, Chuck Jones, William Hanna, and Joseph Barbera; this comes as no surprise, as it was quite typical at the time to treat the American way of production as canonical. The foundation of Grgić's creative identity was his first film, *The Musical Pig*, in 1965. It was his opportunity to demonstrate his own mode of thinking. It is the simplest of stories: the pig wants to sing, while the people want to eat it. The idea for *Professor Balthazar* took flight

two years later, when Grgić started work on “The Inventor of Shoes.” Dvorniković-Bordo mentioned that the idea came from a children’s book, and the initial concept for the character was a collaboration between him and Grgić: a crazy scientist, bespectacled, bald and bearded, performing experiments in his laboratory. There, he produced a magic potion that could be used to create something we all need: shoes. A strange situation, featuring strange creatures, from one of Grgić and Dvorniković-Bordo’s strange worlds.

For the first time, there was a propensity toward children’s television, a direction atypical of the Zagreb school.

The first-ever episode of *Professor Balthazar*, “The Inventor of Shoes,” was made in 1967 and was sufficient to persuade its producers that the idea was strong enough to support a whole series. The animation was awarded the Golden Pelican, the prize for best animation for kids, from Mamaia Festival of Animated Films in Romania in 1968,⁴⁰ the country’s second international animation festival (and its last, until the early 2000s). The film was screened in an open-air theater on the banks of the Black Sea. Subsequently, the series was formally announced as *Professor Balthazar*. The concept, in fact, draws its origins from *Alice in Wonderland*. While the storyline is rather disorganized, and sometimes ambiguous, it ultimately reveals itself to be not simply colorful and humorous, but also a very serious project.

Professor Balthazar breathed new life into the animation studio, enabling a new generation of filmmakers to join Zagreb Film from 1970 to 1972; it was also a springboard for many who had been working for years in the shadow of the great masters, allowing them to experience for themselves the world of creative possibilities presented by animated film. The new series was produced from 1968 to 1972, becoming the Zagreb school’s great-

est cultural export and its only successful cartoon series.⁴¹

The Shah’s Quandary

The unique evolution of the Zagreb school was in part a reflection of the country’s layered historical and political contexts—not only with the Soviet Union, but also with Iran.

The Iranian shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, had an obvious affinity for Tito, and they met several times in Iran and Yugoslavia. Undoubtedly, Pahlavi could comprehend the political situation from which Tito and Yugoslavia suffered; both their countries lay between the two superpowers, and they shared a desire to maintain their nations’ freedom and independence, in spite of this condition. Indeed, Tito was the guest of honor in the 2,500-year celebration of the Persian Empire, and was seated in the first row during the ceremony.

The entente between Tito and the shah had much to do with the centuries of political tension between Persia and the Russian Empire, and then between Iran and the Soviet Union. This had stemmed from the colonial affronts of the Russian Empire, as well as the all-out war the empire prosecuted in the north of Persia during the nineteenth century, which ended with Persia losing substantial territories in the Treaties of Gulistan (1813) and Torkamanchay (1828). Even though the colonial relationship between the Persian and Russian Empires had been thrown off balance, after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution the Soviet Union backed the Iranian Leninists. This remained the status quo until World War II. The Soviet occupation of northern Iran during World War II, as well as a 1943 meeting in Tehran at the Soviet embassy between Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin—held without informing the young Shah

Pahlavi—are just fragments of the tumultuous relationship between Iran and Russia.

Relations between the United States and Iran, on the other hand, had their own hurdles and complications, especially following Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh's nationalization of the Iranian oil industry. Mossadegh's foreign doctrine in favor of nationalization, and subsequent challenge to British hegemony in the International Court of Justice at The Hague in 1952, was one of the major thrusts of the decolonialization process—in fact, it emboldened newly independent countries across the Global South in their struggles toward decolonialization.⁴² However, the defiance of European and American hegemony would be short-lived; the anti-colonial project in Iran ended abruptly on August 19, 1953, with the CIA coup d'état known as Operation Ajax, following which Mossadegh was arrested and accused of conspiracy to overthrow the king and constitution.

Two years later, shows of solidarity among East Asian countries were nevertheless on full display at a conference held in Bandung, Indonesia. Historian Shahla Aminifar believes the Bandung Conference was, in fact, Mossadegh's suggestion, noting its adjacency to the movement for oil nationalization.⁴³ Iran joined the 1955 conference, but ultimately refused to engage actively in the discussion.

Shah Pahlavi believed that in order to be a strong nation, Iran needed to have a close relationship with powerful nations. Iran thus joined the 1955 Baghdad Pact (later known as the Central Treaty Organization), a military alliance between Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. In 1958, the United States joined the military committee of the alliance. The treaty organization dissolved in 1979, the year that Iran and Pakistan both joined the Non-aligned Movement, and it is seen today as one of the least successful of the Cold War alliances.

Just a couple of months after the 1979 revolution that resulted in the overthrow of the US-backed shah, Iran proposed its membership to the NAM committee at the Havana Summit. It would, however, prove to be a year of crisis for the NAM.

Enough about the West; Let's Talk about the East

One of the main slogans of Iranian revolutionaries following the overthrow of the shah in 1979 was "neither west nor east." The statement, which to this day adorns the entrance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tehran, is a straightforward declaration of the political situation as well as the foreign doctrine of the Islamic Republic of Iran: that of an autonomous territory between East and West.

In particular, anti-Western rhetoric stoked the ideological development of a group of Muslim followers of the imam, Ruhollah Khomeini, a grouping that continued to advocate militant action in defense of the revolution. In summer 1979, a meeting was held by student representatives from several universities in Tehran to discuss a bold proposal: the orchestrated takeover of the US embassy. It was Ebrahim Asgharzadeh, the representative of the industrial universities, who proposed the occupation. In the meeting, he expressed his belief that it was urgent to hold the United States accountable for the sabotage of its young revolution. Except for one other student—Mahmoud Ahmadinejad—no one opposed his plan. For Ahmadinejad, the danger of Soviet communism was equivalent to that of American imperialism, or worse. In his estimation, if the revolutionary students were going to occupy the US embassy and take its staff hostage for a short time, as Asgharzadeh had anticipated, they should first occupy the Soviet embassy.⁴⁴

However, Ahmadinejad's voice of dissent was not convincing enough; the United States and President Jimmy Carter were, after all, the main enemy, symbolizing imperialism, colonialism, and global injustice.

On November 4, 1979, the students executed the plan, and would end up holding fifty-two American diplomats and citizens hostage for 444 days, until January 20, 1981—a crisis that would be described in the US press as an imbroglio of "vengeance and mutual incomprehension."⁴⁵ Shortly after the occupation of

the embassy began, revolutionary students were hungry for evidence of American espionage, and proceeded to search through millions of shredded documents. Skilled carpet weavers were later employed to reconstruct the destroyed pages.⁴⁶

After the occupation, backers of the proposed attack on the Soviet embassy stationed themselves around the newly occupied US embassy, distributing posters and flyers to mobilize students to occupy its counterpart. In fact, one attempt to do so was halted by a direct order of Supreme Leader Khomeini just three weeks after the hostage crisis began. Khomeini, in his manifesto, determinedly stated his position that any attempt to occupy the Soviet embassy would in fact be a CIA conspiracy, and that the people should take action to prevent it:

Honorable people of Iran! Once again, American spies have thrown a new conspiracy to distract the world's public opinion from your significant carriage. This time by distribution of flyers inviting people to occupy the Soviet Union embassy. We urge the honorable nation not to be affected by these conspiracies in any way and I am certain it won't. Occupying an (Soviet Union) embassy in Iran today is a betrayal of our people's anti-American righteous struggle. Once again, we warn that anyone who commits such acts is condemned and he is without a doubt supported by the American agents and dear people of Iran will never allow them to do so.⁴⁷

And so the plan, and the idea behind it, vanished from the political imagination of the Islamic Republic of Iran forever.

1979

Tito faced multiple challenges during his final appearance at the NAM summit, held in Havana in September of 1979. On the one hand, Cuban prime minister Fidel Castro was attempting to take advantage of the NAM by reformatting it as a pawn of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. On the other, Iraqi president Saddam Hussein was trying to leverage the 1978 Camp David Accords to oust Egypt, one of the founders, from NAM. It was an attempt

to position himself as a leader of the Arab world, following Iraq's withdrawal from the Central Treaty Organization in 1958 and affiliation with NAM in 1961. For Iran, Havana was not just a new opportunity to demonstrate solidarity with other countries in the Global South, but a chance to renegotiate the territorial claims of their neighbor Iraq. There was long discussion between Hussein and Iran's minister of foreign affairs, Ebrahim Yazdi. The meeting, held in Saddam's villa in Havana, stemmed from a request by the prime minister of Algeria, Chadli Bendjedid.

Hussein conducted himself arrogantly, with his seat facing at a forty-five-degree angle away from Yazdi, smoking a Cuban cigar.⁴⁸ Hussein was still angry about the 1974 war between Iran and Iraq, which had lasted twelve months. Heavy on his mind were the number of bombs—three thousand—and the number of casualties—sixteen thousand. The war had stemmed from a dispute over the Iran–Iraq border, as well as from the shah's support of the rebellion of Kurdistan against Hussein's Ba'ath Party. It was a war over a river: Shatt al-Arab, or Arvand Rud, depending which side you stood on. The conflict concluded in the 1975 Algiers Agreement. In the meeting, Hussein expressed concerns that postrevolutionary Iran would follow the same path as before in supporting the Kurdish rebellion. He mentioned several of the rebels by name: Idris Barzani, Massoud Barzani, and Jalal Talabani. The discussion ended on a bitter note.

One year later, Iraq attacked Iran. Cultural theorist Aijaz Ahmad suggests that the attack was, in fact, the reason for the collapse of the Non-aligned Movement.⁴⁹ Although the war between Iran and Iraq played a significant role in the rhetorical end of the NAM, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan on September 24, exactly twenty days after the Havana Summit, traumatized the NAM and yet again laid bare memories of the rift between Tito and the Soviet Union.

From Tarkovsky to Balthazar

Mohammad Beheshti Shirazi is balding, and wears an ostentatious blond wig. At the beginning of the revolution, his blond hair had put him in danger when the revolutionaries, presuming he was a foreign spy, set fire to his car. He smokes a pipe. A distinguished visage, and a profoundly different from those of the other representatives of the Islamic political identity. Beheshti and his organization, the Farabi Cinema Foundation, were among the most influential figures on the cultural scene in Iran during the eighties and beginning of the nineties. The foundation, as Beheshti explains in a 2016 interview, acted as a catalyst between the Ministry of Culture and Islamic guidance and its restrictions on, authority over, and censorship of filmmakers.⁵⁰

Beheshti is known as the architect of Iranian cinema after the revolution. He is a man for all seasons and all places, and his roles have ranged from supervision of the national television broadcast, to administration of the country's only international film festival, Fajr, to directorship of the government's cultural heritage office.

Beheshti describes the similarities between the political doctrine of Iran and its cinema in the eighties as based in an imaginary of "neither West nor East."⁵¹ In order to directly challenge the prevailing ideological framework of film production in Iran, the Farabi Foundation began by critically examining Soviet cinema, making efforts to support films with novel storylines that did not necessarily cleave to the ideology of Islamic revolution or the delimitations of war propaganda.⁵²

Their efforts were, in fact, domestic as well as international; the organization sought not only to shift the identity of Iranian cinema, but also to introduce foreign films to the Iranian audience—in particular, those that were produced in neither the capitalist West nor the communist East. It also sought to present Iranian films at international film festivals.

As soon as the Farabi Foundation was founded in 1984, Alireza Shoja Nouri, director of international collaborations, began traveling to the world's major film festivals to promote the new Iranian current. Filmmakers such as Nasser Taghvai, Saeid Ebrahimi Far, and Abbas Kiarostami were among the pioneers representing Iran at international film festivals in the mid eighties, followed by Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Abolfazl Jalili, and Majid Majidi. Women filmmakers emerged later in the eighties, and especially in the nineties, including Rakhshān Banietemad, Pouran Derakhshandeh, and Tahmineh Milani.

In keeping with this support for and promotion of the new art films, the Fajr Festival commenced in 1982 with a review of Italian film history from Neorealism to contemporary times, as well as the presentation of film segments from marginalized cultural landscapes such as those of Cuba, Africa, and Native American Indians.

The sixth iteration of the Fajr Festival, in 1988, dedicated a special segment to the films of Andrei Tarkovsky.

Almost two decades after Farabi, in an interview with journalist Yahya Natanzi, Beheshti offers a more fulsome explanation for his promotion of Tarkovsky's work in Iran during the eighties. When Natanzi asks him to dig deeper into Farabi's strategy for promoting Tarkovsky's films, he laughs and responds ironically: "Apparently you are attempting to accuse me, too. I am not a criminal. Even if I have committed a crime, after twenty years' time it should have been absolved, but the eighties is and will remain a hot subject. Nevertheless, promoting Tarkovsky has always been one of my vices."⁵³

While it's certainly true that they sought to further Tarkovsky's standing in the eighties, the aims of Beheshti and the Farabi Foundation were more expansive: they sought to disseminate amazing non-American films from all over the world. It was an emancipatory act that aimed to go beyond Hollywood, whose films were well promoted in Iran before the revolution. Films from Japan and India (no longer limited to Bollywood, as they had largely been before) held particularly strong appeal. In order to increase their representation, Farabi promoted the films of Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, and Shyam Benegal, emphasizing the intellectual side of Indian cinema over its entertainment value; he was also interested in the work of Raj Kapoor. The main accusation from the critics, in fact, was that Farabi—and Beheshti himself—had disrupted the economy of cinema by supporting such artistic and intellectual films. The ironic reality is that those who most actively disapproved of and condemned Farabi's strategy were critics and filmmaker with direct ties to organizations with religious leanings—such as Hozeh Honari, whose main goal was to Islamize art, culture, and literature in Iran—which were mainly supporting American entertainment films and filmmakers such as Alfred Hitchcock and John Ford.⁵⁴

The discovery of Tarkovsky, as well as that of Soviet Armenian director Sergei Parajanov, Chinese director Chen Kaige, Danish filmmaker Carl Theodor Dreyer, Theo Angelopoulos, Werner Herzog, and even Ingmar



Reception of the vice president of Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, in Belgrade, June 1974. Courtesy of the Museum of Yugoslavia, Belgrade.

Bergman occurred through international film festivals in which Farabi was an active participant.

While Beheshti resisted any explicit political agenda of promoting alternative films and filmmakers, he and the foundation managed to do so by taking advantage of the "neither West nor East" doctrine. In this regard, Tarkovsky's films, as well as his approach to their production, made his work a suitable choice. Tarkovsky's spiritual approach to cinema, the political struggle depicted in his last film, *The Sacrifice* (1986; filmed in Nārsholmen, on the island of Gotland), and his life in exile all contributed to Beheshti's fascination with him, and Tarkovsky's resultant status as one of the most widely disseminated filmmakers in Iran in the eighties.

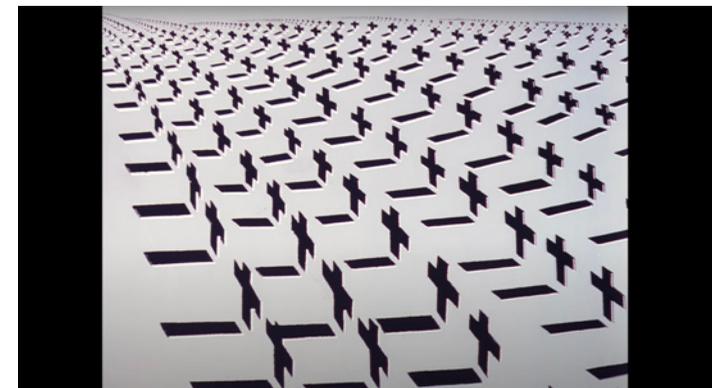
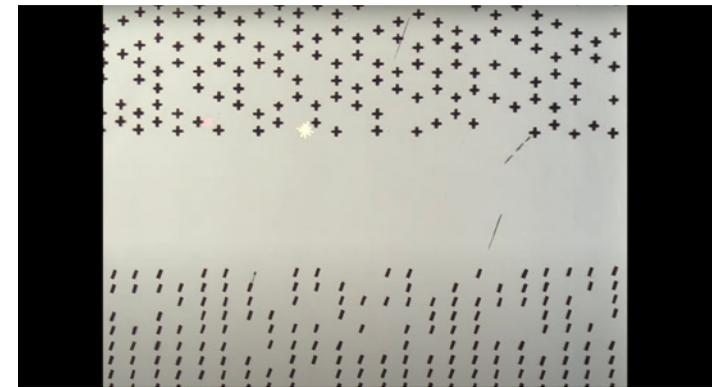
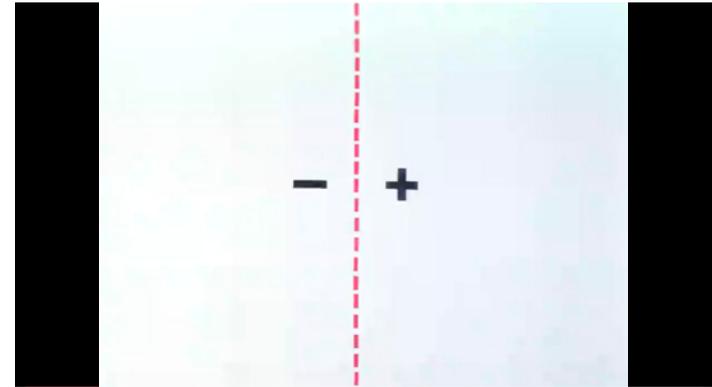
The wide-ranging response from artists and intellectuals was encouraging, too. For instance, Babak Ahmadi wrote a book about Tarkovsky's cinema, *Hope Regained: Andrei Tarkovsky Cinema*, which was republished eight times. In the introduction to the third edition, Ahmadi explains why he decided to write the book.⁶⁵ He recalls that the idea came to his mind on a Saturday in January 1987—a dark and lonely night during the war with Iraq, when he heard that Tarkovsky had died a week earlier. In spite of the ongoing missile strikes, he continued to write, and completed the book a year later. The first edition immediately sold out. Ahmadi's introduction invokes the memories of those sad winter nights, simultaneously melancholic and magical. The sounds of sirens and rockets; food shortages; the irrelevance of life in a time of crisis, under the shadow of death. He concludes his introduction by recalling his memory of reading an ancient Greek text when he was a teenager: "It is only those who have encountered the moment of death who have truly lived." He doesn't mention the origin of the quote, and I couldn't locate it either.

Superpowers: An Indirect Relationship between the Zagreb School of Animation and Iran

Red lines divide the screen down the middle. The short vertical lines represent the border shared by two neighbors. On one side, a plus; on the other, a minus. Illuminated by a small spotlight, they march along in darkness, avoiding one another. The soundtrack, composed by Mohammad Reza Aligholi, emphasizes the military dimensions of the abstract image: each nation's vigilance over the border, its preservation of territory, its unification against its enemy. Suddenly, a minus bumps into the dividing line, making a protrusion on the other side. The plus reacts in kind; soon, war breaks out between them. Other pluses and minuses are enlisted. For eight minutes and twenty-eight seconds, spectators observe the projected battle of the abstract symbols, which finally culminates in a vast necropolis. Now, the minuses are graves and the pluses their markers.

Superpowers, a short animation directed by Nouredin Zarrinkelk, is based on an idea Maria Scherameh had in 1988. It is clear that it was influenced by the famous *Don Quixote*, a 1961 short by Vlado Kristl, one of Zagreb's pioneers of geometric animation. *Superpowers* was produced by the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA, also known as Kanoon), an organization that was at the front lines of cultural production in the late sixties and early seventies, and served as a platform for many of Iran's most highly regarded artists and filmmakers.

Kanoon was founded in 1965 with the publication of its edition of Hans Christian Andersen's 1835 *The Princess and the Pea*, complete with illustrations by the queen of Iran herself, Farah Diba. Under the direction of Lily Amir-Arjomand, the institute was from the start one of the many cultural enter-



prises that fell under Diba's broad purview. Central to Kanoon's founding was Firooz Shirvanloo, who acted not only as its codirector but also as informal art director. Shirvanloo had studied the sociology of art in England at the University of Leeds and had returned to Iran upon his graduation in 1958 with newfound leftist tendencies, including the aspiration to examine the revolutionary capacity of Iranian society in the sixties.⁵⁶ He was a member of the British chapter of the Confederation of Iranian Students, known for its diversity of revolutionary political positions ranging from Marxism to Leninism to Maoism.⁵⁷ After the confederation became embroiled in a failed attempt to assassinate the shah in 1965, Firooz was arrested by one of the shah's insiders in the confederation and sentenced to death.⁵⁸ Europeans objected to the court sentence, and eventually he was forgiven. After he had won his freedom, he was offered leadership positions, in hopes that it might reconfigure his leftist ideas.

Firooz became a prime mover at Kanoon. After he took over its leadership, he launched a research department, a publishing department, and, based on a suggestion from Abbas Kiarostami, a film and animation department. Firooz directed all three, and in 1970, Kanoon produced its first short motion picture, *Nan o Kooche* (The bread and the alley), directed by Kiarostami, his first-ever film. Twelve minutes in length and shot in black-and-white, it tells the story of a boy who is walking home with a piece of bread when he was confronted by a hungry dog. In the end, the two get over their mutual uncertainties and become friends.⁵⁹

Through his liaison with Shirvanloo, Kanoon attracted many of the most famous names that are associated with the project today: Kiarostami, Zarrinkelk, Farshid Mesghali, and Ali Akbar Sadeghi. Shirvanloo's strong political leanings also attracted a momentous group of left-wing writers and researchers, up until he was fired in 1972.

Zarrinkelk was among the youngest artists in Kanoon. He studied pharmacy in the university of Tehran, but soon he found his desire in illustration and animation. And so, he moved to Belgium to study animation at the Royal Academy of Art under the tutelage of Raoul Servais, where he remained from 1969 to 1972. It was during this time that Zarrinkelk's intellectual and artistic characteristics formed, including his anti-war rhetoric, a concern with inequality, and a criticality toward mass production, imperialism, and capitalism. These would prove foundational to films like *Duty* (1970), *Association of Ideas* (1973), *The Mad, Mad, Mad World* (1975), *A Way to Neighbor* (1978), and *Superpowers* (1982).

Kanoon was the perfect place for Zarrinkelk to continue pursuing his passion, even after the revolution; he produced his last collaborative film with the institute in 1982. His works are perhaps an amalgamation of styles seen in Vlado Kristl's *Don Quixote* (1961), Borivoj Dovniković-Bordo's *Ceremonja* (1965), and *To Speak or Not to Speak* (1970), directed by his tutor Servais, in which a journalist asks people in the street: "What is your opinion about the current political situation?"



کانون پرورش فکری کودکان و نوجوانان

What is your opinion about the current political situation?

Am I on TV?

Yes!

Well ... I, I, I think of uh ... of course uh

[coughing] ... Well ... I, I, I uh ... I don't think uh we, we don't a positively ... No, I mean politically, well uh ... the situation [coughing] very ... critical.

It was during the period from 1981 to 1987 that Zarrinkelk began calling the institute “the commune.” Due to the Farabi Foundation’s support for film at the time, Kanoon could incorporate a diversity of artists from other form of disciplines into the industry—a tendency that would endure. However, within this “communal,” inclusive type of practice, the idea of the animation *Superpowers* was rejected in an early review. Zarrinkelk was told: “Don’t even think about it.”

The animation was not only anti-war, but specifically opposed to Iran’s policies of war against Iraq, which according to Supreme Leader Khomeini was a blessing.⁶⁰ Zarrinkelk’s anti-war mentality, as well as the fact that he was one of the Kanoon artists before the 1979 revolution, meant he faced strict oversight, against which he often struggled. In the end, though, he succeeded in making the film, an animation that, in my view, aptly captures the prevailing atmosphere of the Cold War (and warfare in general) in the 1980s, as well as a distinctive aesthetic sensibility and narrative technique contemporary to the Iranian film industry.

It was also during the mid 1980s that *Professor Balthazar* was introduced to Iran—almost twenty years after its production began. Indeed, it belonged neither to East, nor West. It was about science and imagination. It was playful; there was no violence, no sexism, no racism. It was safe for us—the kids—to watch, something we did without any inkling of its history.

But the state broadcaster had made an enormous mistake: there is no God in Balthazargrad, nor mosque, nor church. There is no trace of spirituality, something that was crucial for the promotion of the new influx of films, and to legitimize Farabi’s efforts to promote directors like Tarkovsky, among others; indeed, there spirituality served as a stand-in for religiosity. But Balthazar’s world is devoid of any sign of holiness. If you believe in Professor Balthazar’s aptitude, you endorse imagination and science.

According to the diminutive professor, in order to travel to the “realm of harmless irrationality,” as he invites us to do in the episode “Happiness for Two,” you first need to find your soul mate, then perform a series of absurd gestures. Finally, you will find yourself and your soul mate in that free world, the temporary utopia of Balthazar’s realm. But where is God in Balthazargrad, really? What message did Iranian state television send us by broadcasting images of a professor who could resolve problems entirely through the magic of science? The solution to all our problems, in such a worldview, lies in imagination and peaceful coexistence.

Once Upon a Time in Stockholm, a Pinko Communist Monument

Two days after the opening of the exhibition at the Center of Photography (CFF) exhibition *The Life of an Itinerant through a Pinhole*, Kamen Zlatev and I were celebrating our first collaboration. I told him the story of the “Martin” episode and the monument to the invisible citizen, Zagreb Film, and how it was part of the larger political cultural production. Then, I told him about my idea to build a real-life monument to the invisible citizen.

Or perhaps I didn’t explain all the details, but simply outlined the main concept. In any case, Zlatev was fascinated by the story, and especially the Cold War rhetoric; himself Bulgarian Swedish, he identified with the transnationalism embodied in the idea of the project. And so, Zlatev and I agreed to a second collaboration: the construction of the *Monument to the Invisible Citizen*, in the form of a metal labyrinth with an attached slide, including a podium on top.

The centerpiece would be flamboyant—a playground—but it would be built from simple materials,

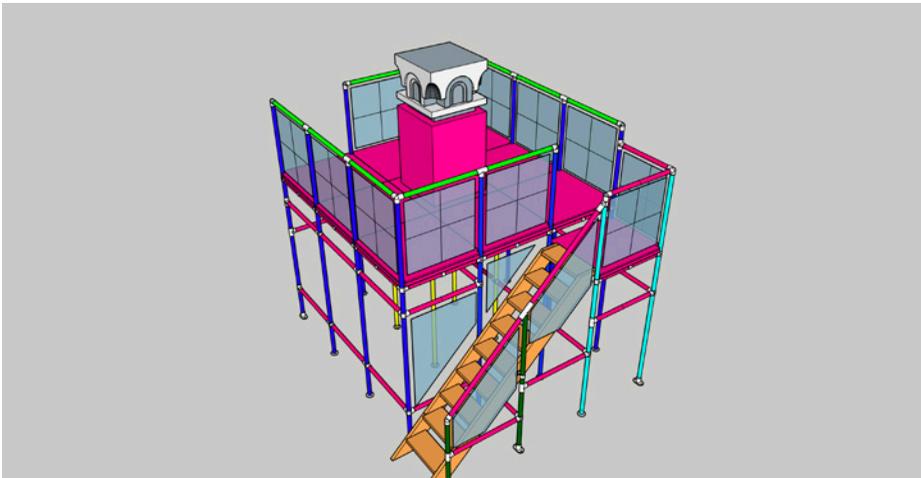
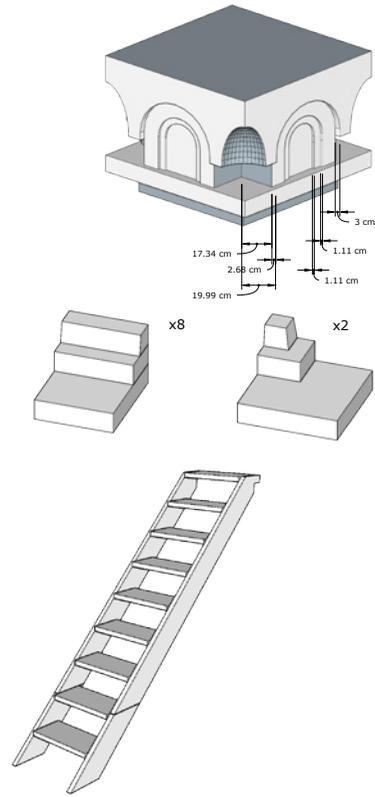
designed along the same lines as ones that were commonplace during the Cold War in both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres. The vast majority of these playgrounds were made of a combination of metal pipes that took diverse shapes and forms. Among them, one design was especially popular: a rocket, embodying and explicating the hyper-politicized condition of the time.

I sought to investigate whether the monument could serve as a multifunctional structure. One of its capacities would be as a memorial object, inviting a number of questions: Who do we overlook in the unending process of historical invisibilization? Children and childhood memory? The strange microhistory that covers the macro population of the world within those countries with a memory of Professor Balthazar? Or is it the intersection between macro and micro history that is itself the point of conflict and unrest? The *Monument* thus would question the capacity of history to contain otherness; to reveal, under the powerful light of macro history, those fragments that have remained hidden.

Once construction was complete, the *Monument* was exhibited at Malmö Konstmuseum, where it became clear that it serves not only as a playground, but also as a children's workplace, as art historian Sanja Horvatinčić notes in the exhibition catalogue.⁶¹ She begins her text by quoting Branko Petrović:

I'm more inclined to refer to playgrounds as "children's workplaces," because they are – from the children's point of view – a sort of working spaces. It is we who perceive them as playgrounds or amusement parks, where we take our children as pastime. It's because we cannot comprehend the importance of children's activities and dynamics; because we don't understand it as a form or labour. Compared to our labour productivity, it cannot be measured in





“norms,” but from the children’s perspective, a big amount of physical and intellectual effort is invested, and they, too, want to see the results ... The whole environment must enable children to build imagination, and to use it extensively and prodigiously in their work.⁶²

On the other hand, the monument is an attempt to transgress the boundaries of the actual place of exhibition and its orientation toward spectators—a perspective that art historian Rebecka Thor expounds upon via comparison to a similar practice that animated a 1968 exhibition at Stockholm’s Moderna Museet called *The Model – A Model for a Qualitative Society*, in which the artist Palle Nielsen transformed the museum into a children’s adventure playground. However, as Thor mentions, my exhibition also became an investigation of possible forms of aesthetic and historical knowledge production based on something that is supposed to be “just” children’s culture.⁶³

The monumental playground lends diversity to the way that one approaches an exhibition, and one’s point of departure for exploring it. The architecture of the building determines the chronology of the elements; thus, different settings have entailed distinct variations on the exhibition, ranging from Marabouparken in Stockholm, where the project was constructed in collaboration with Bettina Pehrsson; to Kalmar Konstmuseum; to Malmö Konstmuseum, where the *Monument* was exhibited on the invitation of director Cecilia Widenheim and curated by Anna Johansson; to the Art Encounters biennale in Timișoara, Romania, curated by Maria Lind and Anca Rujoiu; to its final destination Mestrovic Pavilion (HDLU) Zagreb, curated by Ana Kovačić and Lea Vene. Despite the itinerancy of the project, a crucial aim for me has been to simultaneously provide a transparent indication of the content of the exhibition, as well as hide treasures here and



Stills from the *Professor Balthazar* episodes “Happiness for Two” and “Martin Makes It to the Top” (Zlatko Grgić, 1967).



there for more curious spectators. Here there are parallels to the playful attitude in which the artists involved in the *Balthazar* production rejoiced. Their relationship is one of synecdoche that emancipates the spectator, not in the production of the content, as the philosopher Jacques Rancière would suggest, but rather through the possibility of discovery, as Horvatinčić proposes,⁶⁴ of a new historical relationship and shared memory that enhances one's perception of the political, aesthetic, and narrative functions of those elements.

The other materials included in these exhibitions further highlight and inquire into the political playfulness of the *Balthazar* series and its production team. For instance, the posters in the exhibition show the city of Balthazargrad, with its buildings, gloomy street corners, and of course advertisements, depicting it as a typical modern urban environment. The signs the series' creators illustrated on the walls of Balthazargrad served as inspiration for the exhibition posters. These aesthetic expressions were not necessarily part of the main story, but are indicative of the ways the scenographers were at liberty to make subtle additions. They also present different layers of artistic impulses and global influences within the Zagreb school. Here, for example, there are references to the Yugoslav abstract movement EXAT 51, as well as to global contemporary movements such as minimalism. Another example is the manipulated version of Andy Warhol's *Marilyn Diptych* (1962) in the 1967 episode "Happiness for Two." What is fascinating about these posters is that they are not part of the story line. Perhaps they are meant to simply lurk in the background, awaiting the viewer's discovery that the scenographer—perhaps Ante Zaninović—in the span of three seconds, makes fun of Warhol's infamous portrait of Marilyn Monroe, at a time when the general of Balthazargrad could not resist vandalizing such posters. Does the story again refer

to the “Neither West nor East” rhetoric of the Non-aligned Movement? Or was it merely an artistic satire, an inside joke among colleagues? Is the general in the episode impersonating Tito’s well-known white uniform?

In this multiplicity of stories and objects, I have observed that the children’s reaction is the most revealing one: they immediately run toward the monument, while their parents stop to reflect. And in the tumult of exploration and play, perhaps they find themselves in a moment of commonality as they watch a *Professor Balthazar* episode together.

As Horvatinčić argues, children’s animated film and the production of war monuments in Yugoslavia cannot be reduced to the same principle of production; nevertheless, they both presented fields of hybridity, lying at the intersection of different aesthetic influences and fields of practices.⁶⁵ The Yugoslav war monuments, as she describes them, are new forms of storytelling and memory politics, a proposition that aims to offer a creative collaboration. Storytelling thus became a central means of social engagement in the Yugoslav politics of memory, through the active production of memorials to valorize the role of Partisan resistance during World War II. Despite the fact of the relationship between the means of production, self-management, and the political relationship between East and West in Yugoslavian art production, storytelling and narrative strategy serve as the fundamental mechanism of memory politics in animation production and war monuments in Yugoslavia.

The *Monument* was an effort to investigate if it was possible establish the same storytelling structure following the same branching path path similar to the trace and its background—a transdisciplinary materialism that brings multiple dimensions of history into one temporary place called an exhibition. I intended it to serve as cross-generational platform, where the audience can engage with the multiplic-

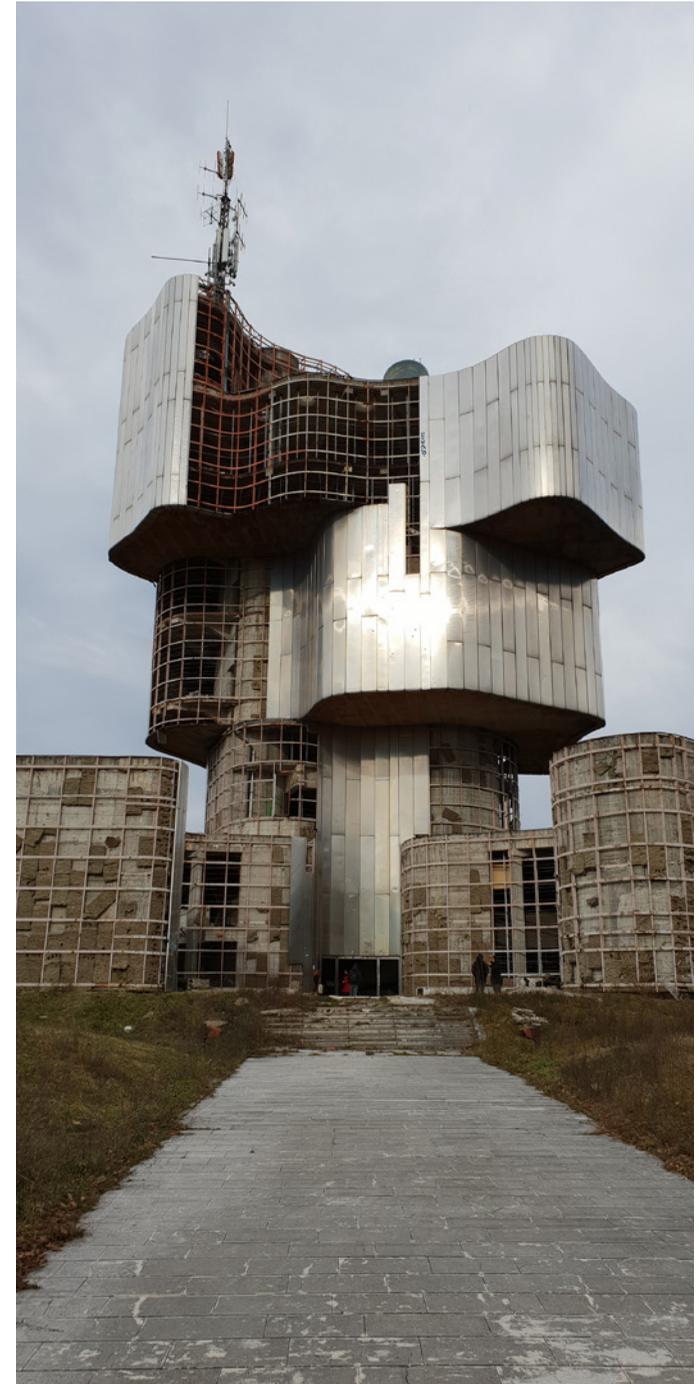
ity of the contemporary past, and perhaps also revisit their own memories.

The exhibition thus functions as a means of historical engagement as well as the culmination of the material production of the monument. As Horvatinčić suggests, the exhibition’s fragments together propose an *imaginarium* of historical fragments and localize the global promulgation of a relationship between supposedly unrelated geographies at a particular moment in time.

The Future of Our Collective Past

It was a blustery day. Here and there, patchy clouds wandered across the blue sky, and you could see thick gray gloom approaching. Along with Sanja Horvatinčić and other friends, I had made the short journey, a day trip from Zagreb, to visit the Petrova Gora Monument, which was built in 1981 as a tribute to the local anti-Nazi resistance during the Second World War. The monument’s entrance was guarded by a local man who served as keyholder. According to Sanja, he claimed that the monument had served as a meeting place of the NAM, though in the absence of evidence, it seemed more like a local rumor. Here had been efforts to conceal bullet holes in those portions of the facade that were still standing. Evidently, no battle ever took place in that particular location. So why shoot at the empty structure, then? Was it revenge against the distant past, projected on the material representation of a more recent past? Or was it just the adrenaline rush of war?

The building, it turns out, served as a headquarters and hospital for the Serbian military during the war in the nineties. A soldier’s old boots, a hospital bed, pale military uniforms, a prosthetic leg, empty plastic bottles of medicine, were scattered around the structure and the surrounding landscape. A dys-





topian scene, a location suspended in the violence of its history. Just as the deteriorating, eerily gaping metal structure—a case study in the aforementioned experimental field of Yugoslav memorial production—was an invitation to the viewer designed to emphasize the material basis of such memorials' construction, Horvatinčić suggests that the raw infrastructure that was alleged to have protected this amalgam, this memory-house, which now functions as a medium for the perpetuation of revolutionary memory.⁶⁶

The structure was never completed. Instead, it would go down in history as Yugoslavia's last, failed, attempt at monumental revolutionary memory politics.

While reflecting on the monument, I thought about the future of my own *Monument to the Invisible Citizen*. What would be its fate once it returned home to Zagreb?

The monument, we had decided, would be gift to the city of Zagreb. But where could we site such a monument, dedicated as it was to invisibility? Did we even *need* another public monument, in a city with such an exceptional monumental legacy?

Time will ruin the *Monument*. And its ruination will define a new materiality, just as it has with Petrova Gora, where the naked material of infrastructure is made explicit. The banality of time renders the Petrova Gora Monument a sight right out of a dystopian futuristic film, removed from its context, extirpated from its time. Are its shining, playful panels supposed to represent the immutable future of our collective past? In time the structure will become a ruin in a landscape of oblivion, separated from time and the violence of history, apart from physical space and geographic location. The same outcome inevitably awaits the *Monument to the Invisible Citizen*: being nowhere. It will eventually oxidize, daubed with graffiti here and there, with scarcely a kid sliding down the decrepit structure—a dystopian imaginarium.



Exhibition at HDLU, Zagreb, 2020. Photo: Juraj Vuglač.





1



3



2



4

1, 3, 4. Exhibition at Marabouparken, Stockholm, 2018.
Photo: Jean-Baptiste Béranger.

2. Exhibition at Malmö Konstmuseum, Malmö, 2019.
Photo: Helene Toresdotter/Malmö Konstmuseum.



Art Encounters Biennale, Shopping City Timișoara, Romania, 2019.
Photo: Andrei Infinit.

Once again, Skype isn't working right. Lacking either the time or the desire to search for an alternative, we, the curators and I, move our conversation, about the exhibition in Zagreb, to Messenger.

– Can you hear me?

– Yes! Go ahead.

– Okay. My main idea is to focus on the monument, not the story of Zagreb Film. The relationship between Zagreb Film and the self-management system in Yugoslavia is very interesting as well, and its foreign doctrine in relation to the Non-aligned Movement, in my point of view, plays a significant role. But now, in Zagreb, we have an opportunity to push the project one step further.

– What do you want to do?

– How about donating the monument to the city of Zagreb?

– I imagine that would take time and would be a long process.

– It can't be as easy as you say.

– Absolutely! Personally, I think it would be a great idea to learn more about public monuments and the possibility of donation.

– How do you see the exhibition, then?

– Well, how about a showroom? A temporary presentation of the monument in an ephemeral place; a place of conversation, where people can discuss where to locate the Monument to the Invisible Citizen. In some ways, this might mimic the Lenin monumental propaganda, in which the government erected vast temporary, plaster-cast monuments in different locations, in order to gauge the public's reaction and dress up the social and political aspects of the monument in an everyday object. A social trick. An innocent pinko playground.

– But there's no guarantee you could make that happen. Again, it is a long process, and a very unorthodox kind of public monument.

– I can imagine. I know that the juxtaposition of the Zagreb Film production house, Professor Balth-

azar, and the Non-aligned Movement is an interesting historical analysis. And I have tried to present it during the previous exhibition, but I think the exhibition in the context of former Yugoslavia needs to be elaborated further and needs to be curated differently.

– Maybe we'll fail.

– We need to have an alternative plan.

Because of the poor connection, or maybe because their laptop camera was malfunctioning, I couldn't see my interlocutors: Zagreb-based curators Ana Kovačić and Lea Vene, who were involved in the *Monument to the Invisible Citizen* from the very beginning. And now, after almost four years, we were discussing bringing a version of the exhibition to Zagreb, perhaps at the Croatian Society of Fine Artists (HDLU), in the center of the city, or at the Meštrović Pavilion, Croatia's largest mosque, located on the Square of the Victims of Fascism.

Even if the installation turned out to be ephemeral, it could still be considered effective, for reasons aptly demonstrated by the Soviet Robespierre Monument, a statue of the prominent French Revolution figure. Located in Alexander Garden in central Moscow and designed by the sculptor Beatrice Yuryevna Sandomierz, it was one of the first attempts at monumental propaganda erected in Lenin's Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. It was unveiled on November 3, 1918, and by the morning of November 7, only a pile of rubble remained.⁶⁷

Some newspapers said its failure was caused by faulty construction, while others claimed it was the work of counterrevolutionary "criminals." In reality, no one knows.⁶⁸ But was it, in fact, a failure? Or has the monument been sustained with the retelling of its story, rather than in its life as a physical object—narrative as a place of imagination, the story as imaginarium?

To ascertain such a memory could be viewed as act of hospitality, an archaeological attempt to trace the genealogy of memory to its historical location. Did I want to examine the notion of public art in this project? Or would it simply be an attempt to re-publicize a story that is already public? Or yet again, as Walter Benjamin said, perhaps it would be a process of “taking control” of my memory through the act of cultural translation. Or an act of rebellion against the abyss and the loss of memory in times of crisis.

Ivana Gundulića Elementary School

Almost four years after its initial exhibition in Stockholm, the Monument was installed at the Meštrović Pavilion in the center of the city of Zagreb. On the 25th of June 2020, The Croatian Society of Fine Artists (HDLU) made a public announcement, which local newspapers picked up immediately: “*A Monument to the Invisible Citizen* is looking for a permanent home. We invite institutions interested in hosting the monument permanently to contact us and to send a proposal with a statement of interest.”

The project had finally come “home.” However, this showing at HDLU was not a permanent installation. Rather, it was an ephemeral presentation of the monument in a temporary location: a place of conversation that people could visit and where they could engage in discussions about the future of the *Monument*. Where should such a monument, dedicated to that which is invisible, be permanently sited? HDLU received fourteen proposals. Ana Kovačić, Lea Vene, and I reviewed them, and ultimately selected the proposal submitted by Ivana Gundulića Elementary School, according to which

[t]he installation would be located in the schoolyard at Gundulićeve 23a and accessible to a large number of students. The location of the monument will be in the school yard and accessible to the large audiences. The yard is used for various activities, including dance, musical performances, and sports. We share the playground with the Blagoja Bersa Music School.

In our educational framework, we focus on national minorities students. The monument will be used by them as well as kids from the children’s hospital nearby.

In our school we have a large number of students with special needs and this playful monument would be part of their mental and psychological relaxation and therapy.

Every year, we organize Erasmus Day and welcome visitors from Radovljica in Slovenia and Szerench in Hungary. *A Monument to the Invisible Citizen* could be the location for our Erasmus Day and regional activities.

On September 7, 2020, *A Monument to the Invisible Citizen* was installed at the Ivana Gundulića Elementary School in the center of Zagreb, the last stop in its long itinerancy.



Permanent installation at Ivan Gundulić Elementary School, Zagreb.
Photo: Juraj Vuglač.

1. I have borrowed the idea of a "realm of harmless irrationality" from an episode of *Professor Balthazar* entitled "Happiness for Two" (1967).
2. The introduction of the first episode of Professor Balthazar, "The Inventor of Shoes" (1967), directed by Zlatko Grgić.
3. The term "Zagreb school" was coined by French film historian Georges Sadoul, to underline the similarities among the filmmakers' styles and understandings of the medium.
4. Although the TV series was televised in other western countries such as Britain, Canada, and the Netherlands, it was only broadcast for a brief time, and was quickly forgotten.
5. Chester Bowles, *Ambassador's Report* (New York: Harper, 1954), p. 59.
6. Singham A.W & Sheryl Hune. *Non-Alignment in the Age of Alignment*, (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1986), p. 14.
7. Tvrto Jakovina, "Historical Success of Schizophrenic State: Modernisation 1945–1947," in *Socialism and Modernity: Art, Culture, Politics 1950–1974*, ed. Ljiljana Kolesnik (Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art / Institute of Art History, 2012), p. 7.
8. Aleksandar Flaker, *Autopografija I (1924–1946)* (Zagreb: Durieux, 2009), p. 290.
9. Jakovina, "Schizophrenic State," p. 18.
10. John Moors Cabot to Leverett Saltonstall, May 10, 1947, embassy correspondence, American embassy, Belgrade (Washington, DC: US Senate Archives), reel 6. Two years later, Cabot became the chief advocate of Harry S. Truman's "Point Four Program," which aimed to protect certain geographies the Americans feared were on the verge of communism; this included countries such as Turkey, Greece, and Iran. As part of the program, film crews from Syracuse University traveled to Iran to educate peasants and promote capitalism.
11. Radina Vučetić, *Coca-Cola Socialism: Americanization of Yugoslav Culture in the Sixties*, John K. Cox, trans. New York: Central European University Press, 2018), p. 131.
12. Jakovina, "Schizophrenic State," p. 19.
13. Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation, 1918–2005* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), p. 177.
14. Jozo Tomasevich, *The Chetniks* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), p. 56
15. Jakovina, "Schizophrenic State," p. 19.
16. Josip Broz Tito, "Workers Manage Factories in Yugoslavia," speech delivered on June 26, 1950; subsequently published as a pamphlet (Belgrade, 1950), available at marxists.org.
17. Ljiljana Kolesnik, *Experimental Atelier 51: Synthesis of the Arts in Post-war Yugoslavia* (Krefeld: Kunstmuseum Krefeld, 2017).
18. US Central Intelligence Agency, "Yugoslavia: The Outworn Structure" (report), November 20, 1970, p. 3.
19. The quote came up during my conversation with Bordo.
20. Midhat Ajanović, *Karikatura i pokret* (Zagreb: Hrvatski filmski savez, 2008); Gianalberto Bendazzi, *Cartoons: One Hundred Years of Cinema Animation* (London: John Libbey & Co., 1994), p. 252.
21. The interview is included in the film *The Monument to the Invisible Citizen*, 2018, 42 min.
22. Ibid.
23. Branko Matan, *History in Verse, Gordogan* 11:14 (Autumn–Winter 2007), p. 318.
24. Nikica Gilić, "Zagreb School of Animated Film: Flourishing of Individualism in the Context of Collectivist Tendencies," *Contemporary Cinema* 33:11 (2016), p. 195.
25. Robert Edelman, "Stalin and His Soccer Soldiers," *History Today*, February 1995, p. 208.
26. Lidija Merenik, "Before the Art of New Media," *Mute*, October 3, 2007, metamute.org.
27. Ibid.
28. Jessica Lack, "M14: EXAT 51 Group," in *Why Are We "Artists"? 100 World Art Manifestos* (London: Penguin, 2017), p. 122.
29. Gilić, "Zagreb School of Animated Film," p. 196.
30. Paul Wells, *Animation, Genre and Authorship* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2002), p. 73.
31. Nenad Pata, *A Life of Animated Fantasy* (Zagreb: Zagreb Film, 1984), p. 9.
32. Borivoj Dovniković-Bordo, interview in the film *A Monument to the Invisible Citizen*.
33. Rade Dragojević, *B Is for Bordo*, Nikica Gilić, trans. (Zagreb: Srpsko kulturno društvo, Prosvjeta, 2006), p. 39.
34. Midhat Ajanović, interviewed in the film *A Monument to the Invisible Citizen*.
35. Ibid.
36. Pata, *A Life of Animated Fantasy*, p. 17.
37. Ibid., p. 18.
38. Gilić, "Zagreb School of Animated Film," p. 6.
39. Pata, *A Life of Animated Fantasy*, p. 9.
40. Borivoj Dovniković-Bordo, interviewed in the film *A Monument to the Invisible Citizen*.
41. Before the *Professor Balthazar* series, Zagreb Film produced another, less successful, cartoon series, *Inspector Mask*.
42. Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (London and New York: New Press, 2007); Hamid Dabhashi, "Mossadegh and the Legacy of Non-Aligned Movement," *Al Jazeera*, August 26, 2012, aljazeera.com.
43. Shahla Aminifar, "Iran, NAM, Iraq: Non-Aligned Movement and the Iran-Iraq War," *Zamaneh Magazine* 36 (August 2004), p. 24, my translation.
44. Ahmadinejad was student at the University of Science and Industry. Contrary to some narratives, he did not in fact take part in the attack, nor the occupation that followed. Following the meeting, he even threatened those who came up with the idea that he would inform the Americans; hence the attack took place earlier than they anticipated, to avoid the possibility he or his fellow students would leak information. An image was widely circulated among western media (including AP, among others), accompanied by claims that one of the students among the hostages was Ahmadinejad; this account was refuted by students who were involved, who identified the person in the image as either Taghi Mohammadi or Ranjbaran. Ahmadinejad has also said that he did not support the embassy takeover until Khomeini endorsed it—an account that was rejected by other students including Abdi. In a statement published by CNN in 2005, a CIA report determined with "relative certainty" that Ahmadinejad, by then Iran's president, was not involved in the taking of US hostages.
45. John Skow, "The Long Ordeal of the Hostages," *Time*, January 26, 1981.
46. Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah: The First Battle in America's War with Militant Islam* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006), p. 337.
47. Ruhollah Khomeini, public address, December 12, 1979 (Qom: Office of Imam Khomeini).
48. From Ebrahim Yazdi's personal diary, published by the Iranian History website tarikhiran.ir, September 24, 2014, my translation.
49. Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory* (London and New York: Verso, 1992), p. 17.
50. Interview with Mohammad Beheshti, *Ru be Ru* magazine (July 2016), p. 2.
51. Ibid., p. 1.
52. Behzad Eshgi, "The Challenge of Tradition and Modernity in Fajr Film Festival," *Farabi* magazine 11:4 (2003), p. 42.
53. Yahya Natanzi, "Tarkovsky: Religious Cinema with Spiritual Context, and the Eighties," interview with Mohammad Beheshti, *Cinema Magazine* 24 (December 2013), my translation.
54. Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up: Iranian Cinema Past, Present and Future* (London and New York: Verso, 2001); Hamidreza Sadr, *Iranian Cinema Political History* ([London: Verso], 2006).
55. Babak Ahmad, *Hope Regained: Andrei Tarkovsky Cinema*, introduction to the third edition ([Tehran: Markaz], 2002), p. 2.
56. Kelk-e Khial Angiz, *The Life of Zarinkelk* (London, H&S Media): Ebrahim Nabavi, 2016), p. 78.
57. "Confederation of Iranian Students, National Union," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. 6, Fasc. 2 ([New York: bibliotheca persica press], 1992), pp. 122–125.
58. Arash Sadeghi, Aliakbar Sadeghi, and Farshid Mesghali (in conversation), "Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults," *Bidoun* 16 (January 1, 2009).
59. Ibid.
60. Angiz, *Zarinkelk*, p. 378.
61. Sanja Horvatinčić, "Synecdoche, Yugoslavia," in *Professor Balthazar and the Monument to the Invisible Citizen* (exhibition catalogue) (Malmö: Malmö Konstmuseum, 2019), p. 22.
62. Branko Petrović, "Dječja igrališta" [Children's playgrounds], *Čovjek i prostor: Arhitektura, kiparstvo, slikarstvo i primjenjena umjetnost* 2:27 (1955), p. 1.
63. Rebeca Thor, "Professor Balthazar beyond History," in *Professor Balthazar and the Monument to the Invisible Citizen* (exhibition catalogue).
64. Horvatinčić, "Synecdoche, Yugoslavia," p. 23.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. Jennifer M. Bean, Laura Horak, and Anupama Kapse, eds., *Silent Cinema and the Politics of Space* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), p. 89.
68. Gabriel Schoenfeld, Gail M. Schwab, and John R. Jeanneney, eds., *The French Revolution of 1789 and Its Impact* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishing, 1995).

THIRD STORY:

On Top of the Mountain



In the Dermis of History

At the intersection of Felestin (Palestine) Street and Talaghani Street, in the middle of a large roundabout, there is an allegorical bronze-and-cement sculpture. Depicting several figures, one with a fist raised in a gesture of defiance, the work is a monument to the Palestinian struggle, and the First Intifada in particular. The First Intifada was an unceasing succession of Palestinian remonstrations against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. It lasted from December 1987 until the Madrid Conference in 1991, and it was precisely during this period that construction of the monument took place, from 1989 until its inauguration in 1990. The sculpture was the first public monument ever built in postrevolutionary Tehran.

The point of departure for this chapter is this monument at the center of Tehran and its historical background. Here, my analysis goes beyond the physical place to address the spatiality that surround it, viewed through the lens of the contemporary history of art and politics. In fact, the monument in Tehran is a site- and context-specific example that serves as a conceptual point of departure for a diverse array of analogous political contexts and historical entanglements, where might this lead me.

This chapter presents the research process through the frame of archival materials unearthed in the course of a collaborative filmmaking project, juxtaposing analysis and commentary on this footage with the materiality of the monument and Felestin Square. By elaborating the relationship between two hyper-politicized social environments—Palestine and Iran—I hope to bring micro levels of historical narration into dialogue in order to investigate this political relationship.

It was through grappling with the question of Palestine's identity that I began to collaborate with Benji Boyadgian, a Palestinian artist based in East

Jerusalem, soon after I came to Stockholm in 2015. He attended an art residency at Iaspis, the Swedish Arts Grants Committee's international program for visual and applied artists.

The conversation, which began in Stockholm, took the monument as its starting point. I showed him an image of the monument that appeared in a Google search.

"Why is the map upside down?" he instantly asked. I hadn't noticed the map was upside down. It was an agonizing moment, and I didn't have an answer either. I Googled "Palestine map." The first image that appeared bore the title "The Palestinian Historical Compromise," and comprised four maps arranged together: Historic Palestine, 100 percent; 1947, 44 percent; 1967, 22 percent; and present, 16 percent.

The next installment of our conversation took place at a conference in Ramallah, Palestine, entitled *Who Owns Walter Benjamin? On the Place and Non-place of Radical Thought*. Benji had arrived from Jerusalem. I was in attendance via Skype, due to the enduring immobility of Iranian passport holders; indeed, the document clearly states: "The holder of this passport is not entitled to enter occupied Palestine."

Only a week earlier, I had traveled back to Stockholm from Tehran, where I had been recording footage for the film on the Felestin Square monument. I had edited together some of the footage I had recorded and sent it to Benji. The journey had begun.

Soon, I began to dig deeper into the history of Iranian–Palestinian relations since 1947. I tried to trace the aesthetics of the fragments that appear in the monument, in the hope of locating them in the geopolitics of contemporary art history.

We eventually called the project *Around About*, a commentary on our shared confusion on the monument. It grew into a long conversation, driven by my curiosity about Palestine. Such inquisitive-

ness eventually led me to understand more about the Palestinian art scene as such, rather than as a political condition seen from a distance. In the course of this research, I wrote a short text for an artists book about Benji and his abstract painting, which in my view locates itself in the middle ground of a multilayered historiography, between flesh and skin. I thus called it "In the Dermis of History." In this chapter, it is in a similar vein that I explore the "dermis" of history and attempt a sondage of the stories buried beneath this upturned allegory—a deeper investigation of one part of a broad trench of history.

How could I talk about these stories? Was there a story camouflaged within the colonial past and present, one that had resisted and endured? I had to ask again: How can I understand the monument in relation to the history of Palestine?

There are resemblances between the Palestinian condition and the one I know as hyper-politics: a permanent life within an organic crisis; a realm where any action or motion is immediately associated with one or the other side of a conflict that took place in the abyss of past millennia, or else will occur in the future (whether today, tomorrow, or decades from now). That is to say, both Palestine and the hyper-political reflect colonization by the grand narrative of history. Nevertheless, there are even more discontinuities and dissimilarities. Layers of histories, from the colonial past to the post-1947 occupation, make it an eternal battle between colonizer and colonized, and between oppressor and oppressed. The colonial progression has proceeded, millimeter by millimeter, to subjugate the immense expanse of land that lies between two rivers,¹ the promised land that I cannot access—indeed this constitutes the main obstacle to my project. Over the past six years of exploration, this inaccessibility has been excruciating. Where does memory begin? Perhaps it emerges not as a tool to access the past, but from the earth in which the past lies buried.



To begin my historical excavation, to elaborate and deepen this purpose, I needed to interrogate history—to reread the passages of the past, looking again into the small fragments and details. I needed to make a collage of the historical facts. To control my memory, to expand my own subjective viewpoint, I had to assemble an encyclopedic account. To understand the foundation of the upside-down map of Palestine, I needed to find an answer to the question, who drew the map? Beginning from 1947 with the United Nations' deliberations on the future of Palestine, day by day I worked to decipher the history—or, “pull the hair out of the yogurt,” as we say in Farsi. I took a journey into the foundation of division and UN role in post Second World War. A bit of investigation into the details of history, the diary of politicians involves in the committee and their challenges.

The Minority Plan

On February 18, 1947, the British government proclaimed its decision to refer the problem of Palestine to the United Nations. This crucial decision meant that the issue of Palestine was no longer just a British problem, but an international one. The international community's reaction was immediate. On April 28, a Special Session of the UN General Assembly was called, the object of which was Britain's request. It was decided that a Special Inquiry Committee would be set up to look into the Palestine problem.² Britain wanted to solve it as quickly as possible; therefore, recommendations concerning the political future of Palestine were to be submitted to the General Assembly before its next meeting, that September. A thousand years of history, conflict, and confusion would thus have to be solved in five months. Whether this was possible or not, Britain wanted nothing more to do with it.

The debate raised another important question: Who would be on the Special Inquiry Committee? Among the five permanent members of the Security Council, which included the Soviet Union, the United States,

and Britain, the British and the Americans opted out. On the one hand, they requested to be excused from taking part in the inquiry because they had bigger fish to fry in the aftermath of World War II. On the other, they were wary of Stalin—their biggest competitor—and wished to exclude Soviet influence from the committee. Here there was no doubt concerning the opinion of the Soviets. Andrei Gromyko, head of the Soviet delegation to the UN General Assembly, expressed his country's wish to participate in the committee and criticized his colleagues—the Great Powers—for their unwillingness to take on this responsibility and commitment.³

Divisions among the British, the Zionists, and the Arabs quickly became apparent, as each supported a different approach to the committee and its inquiry. In the 1947 proceedings, Britain abstained from imposing concrete recommendations or solutions; however, this contrasted with the stance it had taken in 1917, when Lord Balfour, then British foreign minister, stated in a letter to Lord Rothschild (known as the Balfour Declaration), that the British government was sympathetic to the Zionist movement and would use its “best endeavours” to ensure the creation of a “national home” for the Jewish People in Palestine.⁴ According to historian Elad Ben-Dror, the British had grown increasingly ambivalent to the Zionist cause, due to the rise of the Jewish anti-British movement. The Jewish insurgency in Mandatory Palestine, known in the UK as the Palestine Emergency, was a Zionist underground paramilitary campaign carried out against British rule. The tensions between the Zionist underground and the British mandatory authorities, which had begun in 1938, deepened with the publication of a policy paper by the British government known as the White Paper of 1939. The paper sketched new government policies that would place further limitations on Jewish immigration and land purchases, and declared the intention to grant independence to Palestine, with an Arab majority, within ten years.

The Haganah, the largest of the Jewish underground militias, which was under the control of the officially recognized Jewish leadership of Palestine, remained cooperative with the British. But in 1944, two smaller, rebellious militias—the Irgun and Lehi—launched a resistance against British rule. The British media didn't hesitate to call them terrorist organizations.

In 1947, the British newsreel producer *Pathé* reported on a “terrorist” attack on the Goldsmith Officers' Club in Jerusalem, sparking outrage. Martial law was declared.⁵

In the end, both the Great Powers and the Arab states were excluded from the Special Inquiry Committee. Ben-Dror argues that it was the Americans who took the initiative in securing this outcome.⁶ They declared that it was crucial, above all, that the committee be comprised of neutral states—those that had no direct relationship to the issue, nor any self-interest in it—and demanded that the Great Powers therefore be excluded. The Americans explained that only those countries passing these criteria would be led to a “product” devoid of interests and prejudice.⁷

The Special Inquiry Committee, which took shape along the lines of an Australian proposal, included eleven countries: Australia, Peru, Guatemala, Uruguay, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Canada, India, Yugoslavia, Iran, and Sweden. Known as the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), it was active from May 26 to August 31, 1947. Being the only non-Arab country in the Middle East, Iran was the only candidate from the region with no direct interest in the Palestinian issue.

Following a couple of weeks of intense meetings and debates, the committee's report was submitted to the UN General Assembly on August 31, 1947, one month before the deadline. It included two major proposals. The “majority plan” was proposed by Uruguay, Peru, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, Canada, Guatemala, and the Netherlands, which supported dividing the country into two independent Arab and Jewish states. According to this proposal, Jerusalem was to remain under the administration of the UN and remain an international territory. Except for the retention of Jerusalem, the proposal aligned with the Zionist plan for Palestine. However, bringing the issue to the General Assembly had not been part of the initial plan; rather, the committee was supposed to craft a solution to the problem on its own. The Arab League boycotted the UN committee from the very beginning, arguing that the committee's agenda was pro-Zionist, and therefore that any referendum on Palestinian independence was essentially condemned. The Syrian delegate mocked the necessity of appointing a commission of inquiry on Palestine, stating: “We have had about fifteen committees investigating, starting with the one appointed by President Wilson in 1919. Hundreds of thousands of pages have been written but nothing done.”⁸

Although some countries on the committee had strong Zionist tendencies, during the debate on the plan to partition Palestine and produce a binational solution, one con-

cern was crucial: the land belonged to the Palestinians.⁹ Three countries criticized the partition plan known as the “majority plan”: the Indian delegate, Sir ‘Abd al-Rahman; the Iranian delegate, Nasrollah Entezam; and the Yugoslav delegate, Vladimir Simic, all took different stands on the matter.

Iranian historian Hamidreza Dehghani notes that Fazlullah Nooreddin Kia, Iranian deputy director of the Department for UN Affairs, wrote about Iran’s position toward the Palestinian issue in his memoirs, including in regard to Entezam’s very detailed report to the Iranian foreign ministry about the decision to partition Palestine. In the report, Entezam clarified the characteristics of the “minority plan,” and mentioned that to accept it would be in the Arabs’ best interests:

I didn’t want to be accused of supporting the Arabs, but at the same time I wanted the resolution to meet their interests. I therefore proposed the minority plan, and managed to convince the Indian and Yugoslavian representatives to back it. My proposal was to form a federal government consisting of Jews and Arabs that would maintain the unity of Palestine. It can be summarized into a situation where Jews and Arabs are independent when it comes to solving their internal issues, while the central government would govern the country with two Parliaments, one of them with representatives directly elected by the people, while the other should be divided into two equal groups of Arabs and Jews. The head of state should then be elected by the two Houses, who would in return be responsible for the two chambers. All laws must be approved by both Houses, and if differences occur between the two chambers, a special commission should carry out a vote. The commission should include the head of state, one representative from each of the Houses, and two representatives from the Supreme Court. If this proposal was accepted, all Arab interests would be preserved, because the central government would have absolute power, and the issue of immigration which is the basis of the differences, would be resolved by the central government. Therefore, Arabs should not have any concerns about the plan.¹⁰

If Entezam declared Iran’s position in relation to Arabs, there were other factors that led him to the minority plan, ones that had to do with shared geopolitical interests of Iran with the

two other countries that supported the minority plan: India and Yugoslavia. The ethnic diversity of these three countries, as well as their strong separatist political parties and activities, made the alignment of their positions toward Palestine more comprehensible than those of the other delegates in the committee.

After World War II, Yugoslavia had drawn up a constitutional-political plan aimed at the promotion of regional diversity within Yugoslavia based on a federative strategy, while remaining united under a single political framework. Therefore, there was little chance of Yugoslav support for the partition, as this might be viewed as a model for nationalist separatism at home—indeed, such a movement took place forty years later.¹¹

India had the most similar geographical and political situation to Palestine. For one, British India was in the midst of a struggle for independence; moreover, a plan to divide Pakistan from India was under development, and would be implemented at almost the same time as the partition of Palestine, in August 1947. Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian leader, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the All-India Muslim League, had approved of the partition plan for the subcontinent. The two newly independent states soon found themselves entangled in war over Kashmir—an area that India had seized in October 1947 on the grounds that its ruler was Hindu, despite Jinnah’s claim that because it was heavily populated by Muslims, Kashmir should naturally become an integral part of Pakistan. “The violence unleashed by the transmutation of religious into political-national consciousness,” as historian Ira Lapidus describes it, “destroyed forever the civilization shared among peoples of different religious persuasions.”¹²

Rami Ginat, a political scientist and historian, explores the motives behind the stance India adopted as a member of the committee. In particular, he asks why they refused to support the partition of Palestine and the creation of a Jewish state, given that the national and religious context was so similar to that of Pakistan and India. Indeed, in 1946 Nehru had rejected the British plan for a federated government in India, while at the same time touting a similar solution as appropriate for Palestine.¹³ Nehru and the Indian National Congress (INC) rejected religion as the basis for nationality; instead, they approved a solution based on the idea that Indian Muslims be allotted a separate state—Pakistan. Ginat argues that the Palestine question for India was to have ramifications for the evolution of Arab–Asian

relations and future international collaboration—a development that consequently led to the emergence of the Afro-Asian and Non-aligned Movements.¹⁴

On the other hand, Nehru's support for the partition plan of India was also based in his view that it was a temporary measure; as he described it in an April 1947 letter to K. P. S. Menon, the Indian ambassador to China, he was in "no doubt that eventually India would have to become a single country, and it could well be that partition was but a stepping stone on the path towards that goal."¹⁵

Ginat explains, quoting Lamb, that according to India, Pakistan was no more than "a temporary expedient devised by the British to solve a transient problem."¹⁶ India already opposed the idea of a separate Jewish state in Palestine in 1946, and it continued its opposition in 1947. In addition, India was afraid that if it showed support for a Jewish state, it could provoke the Arab states. Majority-Muslim countries might, in turn, exert influence over the Muslims in India and Pakistan. In fact, by supporting Arabs they sought to avert the increasing possibility of conflict with the Indian Muslims on their own border.¹⁷ The Indians even went so far as to consult with the Arab states and Pakistan before bringing forward their plan for discussion in the General Assembly.

Iran saw the debate from a different angle; it wasn't controlled by any colonial power, nor was it subject to foreign mandate. However, the relationship between Iran, Britain, and the Soviet Union became even more multifaceted after the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran in August 1941. The coordinated surprise attack took place along Iran's borders with Iraq, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan in the north and south of Iran. Beginning on August 25, the invasion concluded on August 31 with the Iranian government's formal surrender.¹⁸

Prior to the invasion, on July 19 and August 17, two diplomatic notes had been delivered to the Iranian government demanding that it exorcize German nationals.¹⁹

Immediately following the termination of the war in Europe, the British military departed from Iran on March 2, 1946, in agreement with its treaty obligations. However, Russia delayed its withdrawal from the northern provinces of the country, as part of an effort to prolong its occupation of Azerbaijan, where it supported the Azerbaijan communist separatist movement under the leadership of Ja'far Pishevari. The campaign eventually resulted in the formation of the autonomous communist state of Azarbaijan, followed by Kurdistan; it also led to the founding of the communist

Tudeh Party of Iran. Iran's official complaint to the UN Security Council against Soviet occupation of the North of Iran was the first formal complaint filed by a country in the history of the UN.

As I discussed earlier in relation to UN-SCOP, the Soviet Union was the only country among the victors of World War II who strongly believed that the Great Powers should be part of the committee in favor of the Zionist partition plan. On May 14, 1947, the Soviet ambassador, Gromyko, announced:

The fact that no Western European State has been able to ensure the defense of the elementary rights of the Jewish people and to safeguard it against the violence of the fascist executioners explains the aspirations of the Jews to establish their own State. It would be unjust not to take this into consideration and to deny the right of the Jewish people to realize this aspiration.²⁰

On May 17, 1948, three days after Israel's declaration of independence, the Soviet Union became the first country to recognize it de jure (i.e., legally, regardless of whether its existence was confirmed by reality). This is compared to other Great Power, the United States's, de facto recognition (i.e., under the presumption that Israel's existence was factual, even if it was not legally accepted).²¹

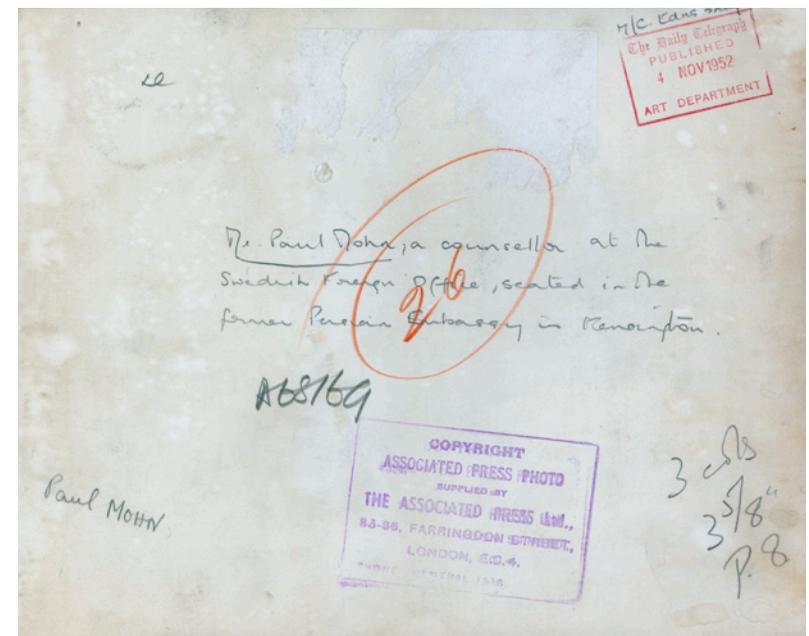
Did Iran and its representative, Entezam, take into consideration the recent skirmish between Iran and the Soviet Union over the minority plan? Perhaps so. However, it appears that by bringing the issue of the Arab states into its justification for its position, Iran managed to camouflage its divergence from Stalin's partition plan for the north of Iran, thus avoiding further complications.

The Cartographer

What went on in the mind of the person who drew up the partition map that paved the way to the founding of the state of Israel?

"I tried to reconcile ideas that are irreconcilable: Hope for Jewish-Arab cooperation and fear of Jewish-Arab animosity," wrote Dr. Paul Mohn, Swedish alternate delegate on UNSCOP, in his memoirs. "Should the sides want to live in peace, that could happen with my Partition plan ... Should they want to separate and turn their backs on each other—there are also theoretical possibilities for that." As David Horowitz, the Jewish Agency emissary to the UN who guided the UN delegates during their visit, emphasizes, Mohn is, more than anyone else, the person who established the boundaries of the future Hebrew state.²² Toward the end of August 1947, about a week before UNSCOP was supposed to submit its recommendations concerning the future of Palestine, he wrote, "I learned that the report was also supposed to include some sort of drafting of borders."²³ Hence, at the very last minute, he set about the important work of drawing a map of the land's partition. "I was there in order to save the situation," he noted, and related how he was left alone till very late at night to visualize a more comprehensible form for the "map of patches." He gave the future Jewish state 62 percent of the territory, despite the fact that demographically the Palestinian population was double that of the Jews.

An unassuming signing ceremony took place in the conference room on the first floor of the Palace of Nations, where UNSCOP had met since its arrival in Geneva on November 29. Emil Sandström of Sweden invited the delegates to join him in appending their signatures to the report. The delegates signed in alphabetical order. With minor changes, the UN adopted Mohn's partition map. In December 1947, a couple of days after the establishment of the







plan—UN Resolution 181—Entezam gave a speech before the UN General Assembly. The Iranian delegate expressed his view that implementation of the partition plan would turn the Middle East into a permanent battlefield.²⁴ Iran, together with twelve other nations, voted against partition, and chose not to formally recognize the new nation.

Immediately following the Israeli Declaration of Independence at midnight on May 14, 1948, war broke out, resulting in the vast Palestinian exodus. About half of the prewar Palestinian Arab population was expelled from their homes. It would be known as Nakba Day—the day of disaster, catastrophe, cataclysm.

A Letter from an Exiled Kid from Palestine

In the mid 1980s, I was eight years old. One of my second-grade assignments was to write a letter to a Palestinian kid. The Palestinian kid in our school textbook had already sent us a letter, in which he told us his story, and talked about the situation in Palestine—the suffering, pain, death, murder, and inhumanity of their condition.

He wrote:

Do you know me? I am your brother. I am Palestinian. We Palestinian kids are Muslim. The name of our country is Palestine. You in your own country live in your home, but we live homeless in the deserts in exile, because the enemy occupies our home and our country. We spend day and night under the tents, where we study, too. The enemy kills us and burns our tents. I must say that since your revolution began, the enemy is more fearful, and because of that they torture us more.

To practice writing a letter, we had to send our replies. It was perhaps the first letter that I ever wrote. I don't remember the content; perhaps I repeated whatever our teacher told us to write. In the process, we learned new words and phrases, such as:

Occupy (اشغال): to take by force

Return (بازگشت): to come back

Adrift (آواره): to be without a home, to be forced out of one's country

Exile (تبعید): to displace, to banish

Protest (اعتراض): to disagree, to oppose something

Tabernacle (چادر): tent

Executioner (شکجه‌گر): killer, murderer, torturer

Break the silence (شکستن سکوت): to begin to talk

And there were more new terms, such as struggle, combat, and explosion.

The illustration that accompanied the letter was a portrait of a Palestinian kid, gazing out with his big eyes—very large eyes, I must say—wearing the Palestinian keffiyeh. In the background were a couple of tents in a phantasmal desert. The illustration served as the basis for my impression of Palestine for a long time. Representations of distance and barriers seemed to play a defining role in our understanding of Palestine and Palestinians. Indeed, in 1980s Iran they were a vehicle for the production of a collective imaginary of Palestine and the Palestinians; they were a means for the continuation of notions of occupier and resister, and for the associations between war and anger, between emancipation and occupation.

When did the imagery of exodus and resistance become representative of Palestine in Iran? And what happened to these images after they crossed the border?

The adoption of a stance on the pain of the other eventually became part of Iran's political agenda,

used to clarify its foreign political doctrine and, perhaps even more importantly, as a domestic tool to differentiate between friend and foe.

**Russophobia, Russophilia;
or, The Enemy of My Enemy**

The Soviet ideological position on Zionism condemned the movement; Lenin described it as bourgeois nationalism, socially regressive and reactionary. Indeed, he took a clear position against such national identity: "The proletariat cannot support any consecration of nationalism; on the contrary, it supports everything that helps to obliterate national distinctions and remove national barriers; it supports everything that makes the ties between nationalities closer and closer, or tends to merge nation."²⁵

However, over the course of Stalin's rule, this anti-Zionist position would eventually transform into a pro-Zionist one. He had initially accepted a limited emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union to Israel, in hopes that it would result in a socialist Israel in the future. And the Soviet Union played a significant role in its provision of military support for the newly formed state of Israel during the 1948 war, via Czechoslovakia.

The communist ideology posed a real threat to the shah of Iran, especially after the Soviet invasion of the north of Iran, when the resulting increase in economic inequality had helped lay the foundation for the rise of the Soviet-backed Tudeh political party. The only solution for the shah was to strengthen his affiliations with the Western camp, in hopes that this would help Iran (both economically and militarily) prevent the possibility of reoccupation by its neighbor to the north. As historian and political scientist Trita Parsi argues, the shah adopted a policy of "calculated ambivalence," maintaining distance from the Jewish state, while simultaneously waiting for it to clarify its loyalties. Thus, for the first two years of Israel's existence, Iran recognized it neither *de facto* nor *de jure*.²⁶

The honeymoon between Israel and the Soviet Union soon gave way to friction. From an ideological point of view, the Soviets' pro-Israeli policy was destined to be short-lived. Stalin rejected the initial agreement between Israel and the Soviet regarding Jewish emigration to Israel from the Soviet

Union, which could create controversy about the utopian socialist proletarian culture of the Soviet Union. The Jewish minority was regarded as happily assimilated and integrated. Stalin himself saw in the Jewish state no threat to his own policy toward the Jewish question in the Soviet Union. However, when Zionist sentiments resurged among Jews in the Soviet Union as a result of the proclamation of the Jewish state, Stalin's reaction was swift, and he angrily used all his totalitarian means to ensure that the Russian socialist solution to the Jewish problem would prevail over that of Zionism.²⁷

Elsewhere in the region, Arab socialism eventually grew into a strong movement, including in Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt. In fact, the modernization process of Egypt went hand in hand with an anti-imperialist position. However, Nasser's political perspective was based in neutrality. In spite of being one of the founders of the Non-aligned Movement, he decided to cooperate with the Soviet Union on the construction of the Aswan Dam on the Nile River, in order to replace funding that had been withdrawn by the United States. In addition, the Soviet Union promised Nasser a quantity of arms in exchange for deferred payment on its purchase of Egyptian grain and cotton. On September 27, 1955, Nasser announced another arms deal, this time with Czechoslovakia.²⁸

Iran's relationship with the Arab states was quickly weakening.²⁹ Although Iran identified with Arab nationalism, the shah felt deeply uncomfortable with its pro-Soviet expressions.³⁰ It was not an option for either Israel or Iran; both soon found themselves confronting a security predicament. The feeling was mutual; as R.K. Ramazani notes, quoting Fereydoun Hoveyda, Iran's ambassador to the UN during the 1970s, the Iranians "felt like [they were] surrounded by the Arabs. And the Arabs always adopted policies that were anti-Iranian."³¹

From the perspective of Iran's Tudeh Party, the relationship between Israel and Iran was an unambiguous indication of imperialism and colonialism, given the occupation of northern Iran during World War II. The Soviets' skeptical view of Israel and Zionism, which it regarded as militant chauvinism, was adopted by the Iranian left and the Islamic Republic of Iran after the revolution. It would also come to be a defining characteristic of revolutionary art in Iran after the 1979 revolution.





A Postmodern Bricolage

On Monday, February 19, 1979, Iran ended its alliance with Israel and voiced its support for the Palestinian struggle for national liberation. The Israeli embassy in Tehran was transformed into Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) offices, and later became the Palestinian embassy; likewise, a nearby street's name was changed to Felestin (Palestine) Street, while its intersection with Talaghani Street became Felestin Square, a roundabout.

Before the 1979 revolution, the square's center had been occupied by a fountain, surrounded by statues of putto and swans. Today, its focal point is the monument to Palestine that I described at the opening of the chapter—and its central feature is the map that, as Benji Boyadgian dutifully pointed out, is upside down.

During the 1990s, the square became a location for anti-Israeli demonstrations, which took place on the last Friday of Ramadan (known as Quds Day). But this location is not defined solely by its political connotations: there is also an art school near the intersection between Felestin Street and Enghelab (revolution) Street, along with several small optometrist shops on both sides of the street, pointing to the square's everyday identity.

On one side of the bronze-and-cement monument, a mother protects her child, in a reinterpretation of the *Pietà* by Michelangelo. On the other, there are two masked men; one marches, right fist in the air and a book in the left hand; the second impersonates an Intifada stone thrower. In the middle of the map, there is a hollowed-out silhouette of the Dome of the Rock. Social realism and neoclassicism fuse in this bricolage. How did this amalgamation of themes take shape in the sculpture?

The Trembling Hand of Socialist Realism

On November 6, 1979, just two days after the occupation of the US embassy in Tehran, Amirzargham Adham, an art student from the University of Tehran and a Muslim revolutionary, approached his Assyrian Christian Marxist teacher, Hannibal Alkhas, who was affiliated with the Tudeh Party. As Alkhas later described their conversation,³² it centered on the essence of the art—the notion that painting is a form of labor, and a reflection upon events that serves as a means to communicate with people. He expressed a strong desire: if only they would let the students paint a mural on the wall of the embassy!³³

Adham took the proposal seriously and sent a letter to the embassy's administrators. Just four days later, they received permission to narrate the event on the wall of the embassy on Talaghani Street. The fifty-square-meter wall thus became the first revolutionary street art in Tehran.

Immediately after the first wall painting, Alkhas's other students began to scour the city for more walls they might adorn according to their revolutionary desire.

Nilofaur Ghaderi Nejad, one of the young and ambitious students, described the environment: "We learned and talked a lot about social realism, Mexican revolutionary painters such as Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco paintings in Alkhas Atelier. We were very excited and looking for an opportunity to do similar things on the walls of the city of Tehran."³⁴ Tehran had become an open canvas for Marxist art students to practice and explore what they had learned from their teacher.

Alkhas was a child during the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran. Because of his father's job as a customs officer, travel was a permanent feature of his family life. In the summer of 1942 while on a trip to the city Ahwaz in the southwest, which was under



the occupation of British military, his father decided find lodgings for his children in Arak, a city in the center of Iran, to avoid the hot southern climate. To pass the time while waiting for his father, the thirteen-year-old Alkhas was sent to the workshop of a sixteen-year-old Alexi Georgiz, a Russian painter and illustrator who had learned his craft in the Soviet Union.³⁵ Alkhas's role was to assist Alexi, cleaning his pallet, organizing the colors; from time to time, he had the opportunity to paint, too. Alexi's customers were mainly the occupying British and Soviet soldiers who missed their lovers back home, and thus contracted Alexi to paint their portraits from dilapidated old photos.

Alkhas left Iran for the United States in the mid 1950s, hoping to be a medical doctor—however, he immediately changed his mind, deciding on philosophy, and then, not long after, settling on art and painting. He studied at the Art Institute of Chicago under the supervision of Boris Anisfeld, a Jewish Russian-American symbolist painter and theater designer, and a close friend of Maxim Gorky.³⁶ Perhaps the development of Alkhas and Anisfeld's close relationship was due to shared views on the multiplicity and complexity of their social position, something each expressed through the eclectic use of religious motifs and symbolism; in Anisfeld's work, this tendency was surely a reflection of his need to at once assume several identities, including as Russian, Jewish, and an artist. For his part, Alkhas's work reflected his positionality as an Assyrian, a Christian, an Iranian, and later as a Marxist artist.

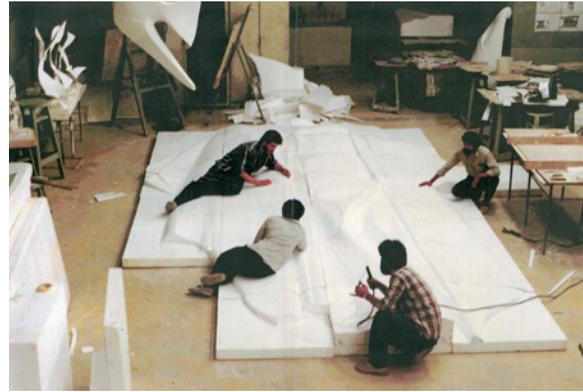
It was around this time that Alkhas became increasingly mesmerized by Marc Chagall's painting and Mexican revolutionary muralists, along with prehistoric Assyrian motifs from ancient Mesopotamia. After returning from the United States and joining the Tudeh Party, he sought to introduce muralism to urban postrevolutionary Tehran. Because he be-

lieved galleries were ill-suited for proletarian art, he saw it as essential that he to bring art to the public in the streets.³⁷

Alkhas soon became an influential professor at the University of Tehran, particularly among revolutionary students, whose views represented a wide range of Marxist and Islamic ideologies. Although his Muslim students engaged with his socialist approach toward art and painting, they eventually tried to claim an autonomous position as Muslim revolutionary artists. The distinction was apparent by the time his students painted the mural on the wall of US embassy, after which Alkhas was accused of supporting Islamists. He elucidated his political position by pointing out the specific features he painted: "I simply painted the first stage of the revolution, which was about proletarians and farmers, independence and anti-imperialism. And Adham painted Khomeini." He continued, "I won't be ashamed of my actions in the future."³⁸

Alkhas's activities as a teacher and an artist played a significant role in the introduction of socialist art to the scene in Tehran. His hands had an essential tremor, a condition that meant he couldn't hold the brush properly, and that affected the realism of his work. Were all the exaggerated features, the free-form lines, the deformed bodies in his work in fact the result of his tremor? Could he have become a renowned social realist painter if he hadn't developed this condition? In any case, the fact remains that socialist realism painting was introduced to Iran by an artist with an unsteady hand.³⁹

Although there are marked resemblances between Islamic revolutionary painters such as Gholamali Taheri, Mostafa Gudarzi, Morteza Asadi, Hossein Khosrojerdi, and Kazem Chalipa, and Russian social realist painters like Vladimir Servo, Piotr Krivonogov, and A. P. Krasnov, from the beginning the Muslim artists attempted to distinguish themselves from their Tudeh counterparts. Their first exhibition,



under the title *Death to America*, took place in the basement of Hosseiniyeh Ershad, a non-traditionalist religious institute that was influential in the development of Ali Shariati's revolutionary Shia Islam. The exhibition started its journey on April 9, 1979, in Tehran, and later traveled to other cities in Iran.

The struggle between the Islamist and Marxist ideologies soon led to the onset of the Cultural Revolution. Attacks began against foreign forces on university campuses. On April 18, 1980, following Friday prayers, Khomeini gave a speech harshly condemning the universities. "We are not afraid of economic sanctions or military intervention," he declared. "What we are afraid of is Western universities and the training of our youth in the interests of West or East."

The universities were shut down, and would not reopen for three years, one of the deepest historical legacies of the Cultural Revolution. Leftist ideology once again turned out to be stigmatized, and was frequently viewed as a vestige of the political situation that had preceded the revolution. Before long came the arrests of members of left political parties, including Ehsan Tabari—the head of the Tudeh Party who had been involved in the establishment of the first government after the revolution—and Saeid Soltanpour, the director of the Iranian Writers' Association. Following show trials, both were executed.⁴⁰

The first revolutionary mural on the wall of the US embassy—a visual collaboration between a Marxist and an Islamist—was soon concealed by a coat of white paint.

In the absence of university art programs, and with their leftist adversary vanquished, Islamic revolutionary artists took the opportunity to establish a center for art and culture under the name Hozeh Honari, which was a branch of the larger Islamic Development Organization, on the site of the former Headquarters of the National Spiritual Assembly of

the Bahá'ís of Iran, Hazirat al-Qods, in the center of Tehran.

Hozeh Honari became a hub of diverse artistic practices. Film, literature, graphic design, poster art, and above all painting came to comprise the majority of the center's activities, leading to a peculiar amalgamation of Islamic ideological themes and symbolism with Russian and Mexican revolutionary aesthetics.⁴¹

Morteza Goudarzi Dibaj, in his book *Art and Revolution*, argues that the reason the practice of sculpture was absent in the first decade of Hozeh Honari's activities had to do with the economics of producing sculpture, as compared to painting. An additional, and possibly more crucial, reason was the uncertainty about the official Islamist stance on statues, and the ambiguity of the supreme leader's position on the medium. However, when the University of Tehran reopened after the Cultural Revolution, it actively anticipated the emergence of the medium with the creation of a new department of sculpture.⁴²

The Sculptor

October 2015, I called Nader Qashghaie and told him briefly about my work. He invited me to visit him in his studio at the Hozeh Honari complex.⁴³

He met me at the entrance of the institute, shook my hand, and led me to his workspace—a large sculpture studio at the far end of complex. His small desk was located in the corner.

A framed photo of a study for one of the Palestinian stone throwers in the Felestin Square monument sat atop Qashghaie's desk, though the glass had been broken at some point. It was flanked by two small study models. On the cabinet behind it, next to an empty Coke can, rested two images of Michel-



On Top of the Mountain

It was during the holidays, at the beginning of December 2015, and early in the morning. The empty streets afforded a view all the way down Taleghani Street, from east to west; a very rare experience, I must say. The north side of Felestin Street was empty of traffic, too. On both sides of the street grew old, tall plane trees, their branches bare of leaves, one of the more romantic features of the most secure part of the city. The presidential residence is situated to the south; and a bit further south, another landmark: the home of Supreme Leader Khamenei. Closer to the monument are the Palestinian embassy and, to the east, the Palestine Museum of Contemporary Art, designed by Mir-Hossein Mousavi. The museum, inaugurated in 2005, includes 692 square meters of exhibition space dedicated to the Islamic world.

Day one of shooting. I borrowed a police-issued media pass, which allowed me to film in public, from another film crew who were working on a feature film called *On Top of the Mountain*. It is common practice among film crews to lend out such passes, usually to smaller, more experimental projects, to help them avoid the process of applying for police authorization. At the end of the day, Nader Qashghaie joined us, the spitting image of a nineteenth-century Parisian painter with his black beret, handlebar mustache, and black umbrella; we had arranged to shoot a short interview on the street corner in front of the monument.

He began by introducing himself: "I am Nader Qashghaie, sculptor. To me, this work is one of my most beautiful. I've always liked it and considered it one of my special works, not only because of its political aspect, but more importantly because it reveals human relationships—what exists between people. That is more valuable to me than anything else."





Still from *On Top of the Mountain* (Behzad Khosravi Noori), featuring a still from *Tazeh Nafasha* (Kianoush Ayari, 1979).

Qashghaie continued: “It was a competition, and the committee accepted my proposal. My ambition was to make it into a unique project, incomparable to anything yet done in Tehran, or any other city. To create the scene depicted in the project, I had to think through my relationship to the oppressed people of Palestine. This made it possible to develop the project according to my emotional response.”

Rather than revolutionary painters, Qashghaie used as references artists who, from his perspective, had undertaken similar projects—artists like Picasso, Dalí, and Goya. He also complained about the lack of art and artistic expression in relation to the Palestine–Israel conflict.

“I tried to transmit this feeling by way of the relationship between the elements I have put into this work and historic works of art such as Michelangelo’s *Pietà*,” he explained. “In that case, I tried to connect the Palestinian mother and her children with Jesus and Mary.” Qashghaie concluded the interview by expressing pride that he had succeeded in conveying the voice of the Palestinian people to the world.

Meanwhile, I was wondering: Who could lay claim to Palestine? When had Palestine become a land of fantasy for Iranian revolutionaries? At what point had the imaginary of Palestine entered the purview of the Iranians? And again: What happens to such art when it crosses the border? Was the monument a propaganda tool?

Rain served as the soundtrack—an unusual phenomenon in Tehran’s dry climate, and one that rendered the footage an atypical representation. The Tehran depicted in these images appears almost tropical, rather than as the furious, masculine, polluted megacity that it is.

An Unknown Plane

Early in the morning of Monday, February 18, 1979—a week after the Iranian military's declaration of neutrality and the announcement of the victory of the Iranian revolution—the control tower staff at Mehrabad International Airport received a landing request from an unknown foreign plane. Due to the environment of political uncertainty, Iran's airports had become accustomed to such irregularities over the preceding two months.

The plane carried Palestinian Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat, together with fifty-eight other PLO officials. The irony of Arafat's visit was evident: Arafat was treated as a hero in the same land that had supplied much of Israel's oil; the country where Israelis had participated in training the SAVAK, the shah's secret police; and where both Israeli and Iranian pilots had trained on US-supplied F-4 Phantom fighters.⁴⁴ As Trita Parsi argues, Iranian opposition to both the shah and the Palestinians shared common historical ground. Some of the Iranian revolutionaries had trained in PLO camps in southern Lebanon, where they had merged with the Lebanese Shia villagers and their militias.⁴⁵

During his visit, Arafat proclaimed that Ayatollah Khomeini had assured him Iran's revolution would remain unfinished until the Palestinians achieved their goal. The PLO had established a mission in the former Israeli embassy in Tehran, as well as in Ahwaz and Khorramshahr, in the center of the Iranian oil province. The PLO representative in Tehran became Hani al-Hassan of Fatah, its conservative Muslim wing. By selecting a more Muslim-oriented representative, Arafat sought to send a clear message of adherence to Khomeini's ideas on the Islamic identity of Palestinian resistance.⁴⁶ At an official ceremony attended by both the prime minister of the interim government of Iran, Mehdi Bazargan, and

the short-term foreign minister, Karim Sanjabi, the keys to the Israeli embassy were ceded to the PLO leader. It was then that Felestin Street, on which the embassy is located, along with nearby Felestin Square, received their names.

Some members of Arafat's entourage eventually stayed in Iran, managing the PLO offices in several cities.⁴⁷

The divergence between the PLO and the Iranians began immediately after Arafat's arrival and his two-hour meeting with Khomeini. As Parsi describes it, based on his interview with an Iranian political analyst named Nader Entessar, Khomeini leveled deep-seated criticisms at Arafat and the PLO. The Palestinians were shocked to encounter the angry imam, rather than a welcoming spiritual leader. Khomeini lectured Arafat on his obligation to get to the Islamic root of the Palestinian issue, and warned against his leftist and nationalist tendencies.⁴⁸ In addition, the Iranian suggested an Islamic orientation of Palestinian resistance would increase their chances of victory, as well as preclude a takeover by Marxist and communist tendencies among their ranks.⁴⁹

The anti-left rhetoric would eventually prove influential within postrevolutionary Iran. However, when it came to Palestine, such political rhetoric constituted an Iranian attempt to take over leadership of the movement. Ultimately, Iran's efforts to influence the direction of Palestinian resistance, whether on the basis of Arab nationalist identity or in its opposition to socialism, would not play a major role. This identity crisis unfolding between the Iranians and Palestinians was not just at the meta level of political ideology: as one Iranian who hosted the Palestinians complained, none of the Palestinians were religious. Most of them drank alcohol, and they wanted to watch films. "Were these really the Palestinians?" the Iranian revolutionaries asked themselves. The image of Palestine that the Iranians



had created in their minds didn't resemble the reality. Such ideological dissimilarities between the Iranian revolutionaries and the PLO representatives led to an atmosphere of ambiguity that would prove damaging for future attempts at collaboration. When tensions emerged between Tehran and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, soon after the revolution, Iran began to publicly accuse the PLO of exacerbating the impasse between the Arabs and Persians in Ahvaz, a city largely populated by Arabic speakers.⁵⁰ Only a few months after the inauguration of the PLO's Ahvaz office, it was shut down; meanwhile the PLO embassy in Tehran was placed under close surveillance. In order to compensate for his actions against the Palestinians and appeal to the broader Arab and Muslim masses, Khomeini turned to rhetorical means to cover up Iran's actual policies. It was then that he declared the last Friday of Ramadan each year to be Quds Day, exhorting Muslims worldwide to demonstrate on that day in support of the Palestinians.⁵¹ However, as Parsi argues, the Quds Day celebrations demonstrated only that Iran's disinclination to deliver concrete support to the Palestinians had become more sedimented as an ideological position.⁵² Khomeini's strategy may have been an aesthetic one, too.

On the other hand, the PLO comprehended that Iran was too significant to give up on—the same calculation made by the Israelis. As Parsi describes, during this period of bitterness between Khomeini and Arafat, the PLO turned to its friendly relationship with the Marxist-Islamist organization Mujahedeen-e Khalq and its leader, Massoud Rajavi. In February 1980, the Mujahedeen leader received Arafat during his second trip to Tehran, which marked the one-year anniversary of the revolution. Rajavi pledged his support to the Palestinians by giving Arafat a captured Israeli machine gun. "It was the Palestinian revolution that first placed arms in

our hands," Rajavi told Arafat, "but our battles with imperialism and Zionism are still going on. Please accept this machine gun as a pledge of action from the Mujahedeen that, by this means, we will meet one day in a free Jerusalem."⁵³ As Arafat strengthened his ties with the Mujahedeen, his relations with Khomeini further deteriorated. By November 1980 the Iranian–Palestinian honeymoon was over, as Khomeini refused to recognize a Palestinian mediation effort to win the release of American diplomats taken hostage by Iranian students at the Iranian embassy.⁵⁴

Then, the war between Iran and Iraq broke out. Arafat sided with Saddam. The hero thus became a tabloid caricature. Hyperbolic depictions of Arafat's secular, Marxist, Arab-nationalist identity became a permanent feature of Iranian revolutionary narrative.

أن تكون ملكيا أكثر من الملك

More of a royalist than the king

On Wednesday, March 31, 1990, at 11 a.m., the inauguration ceremony began for the nine-meter-tall Palestine monument, organized by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard and the local branch of the municipal government.

Ata'ollah Mohajerani, a senior member of President Hashemi Rafsanjani's cabinet, gave an opening speech to an ambassador from the Palestinian embassy, a representative of Hezbollah from Lebanon, and representatives of the Palestinian movements Fatah and Hamas. He detailed the two years of planning and competition that had resulted in the bronze-and-cement sculpture. Mohajerani emphasized that the monument is a representation of the close relationship between Iran's Islamic revolution and the revolution of the people of Palestine—which, in fact, was both a continuation of and strongly in-



Yasser Arafat's first visit to Tehran, February 1979.
Courtesy of *Ettelaat* newspaper, Tehran.

fluenced by the Iranian revolution. To back up his argument in regard to the international impact of the Islamic revolution, he cited former Fatah activist Mounir Chafiq, as well as the Irish political scientist Fred Halliday.⁵⁵ He concluded his speech by proposing an idea for a new monument—one that would emphasize the Islamic basis for solidarity between Iran and Palestine—located in front of the presidential building, at the south end of Felestin Street. It was an idea that would never be realized.⁵⁶

At the end of the ceremony, two of the guest speakers—a representative of the Palestinian embassy in Tehran named Mohammad Mostafa Jahir, and PLO ambassador Salah Zawwavi—expressed the hope that in the very near future all Muslims in the words could pray together at al-Aqsa Mosque. The PLO delegates were actively engaged and involved in the design of the monument by suggesting an additional element, a Palestinian mother.

A Fat, Lazy Cat

In the summer of 2014, I published what may have been my most bitter essay yet. The one-page text was published in *Tandis*, a weekly art magazine in Tehran, as part of a visual companion to the opening of an exhibition about Gaza and the Palestine occupation, which was sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and curated according to official Islamic guidance. The exhibition took place in the midst of Israel's renewed siege of Gaza and the West Bank. The devastating news and horrific images repeatedly detailed the timeline of the Israeli military operation and the mercilessness of its incursion into the occupied territories.

Such bombastic political rhetoric against Israel became even more visible in Iran during the siege of Gaza Strip. During that time, a group of contem-

porary artists decided to have an exhibition at the Niavaran Historical Cultural Complex, located in northern Tehran, near Pahlavi Castle. The complex is known for its distinctive architecture, which was designed by Queen Farah Diba's cousin, Kamran Diba. The exhibition included visualizations of violence, romantic observations on the devastated landscape, and poetic criticism, accompanied by soft background music and the scent of perfume and cologne—questionable features that were only compounded by the social and political implications of the bourgeois location. Perhaps it was the combination of these elements that so aggravated me, the audacity to define this as “politically engaged art” while surfing upon a river of blood. The artists' engagement with their practice was like that of a fat, lazy cat living in a bourgeois house: they were simply waiting for an opportunity to catch your eye and get petted. It seemed that the bloodbath in Palestine was an opportunity for them to pantomime political engagement—or even activism—from a privileged place of safety and comfort. And even more importantly, their artworks realigned them with the official stances of the Iranian government and Ministry of Culture, including formal Islamic guidance, following eight years of interruption during the Ahmadinejad government.

I left the essay unfinished, perhaps unintentionally. Among those who agreed with the premise, the most common criticism I received concerned its failure to recommend a path forward: “Sure, but what should we *do*?” Indeed, how can one adopt a critical stance toward the occupation without feeding into yet another state of propaganda?

I didn't have an answer to this question then, and perhaps I still don't. How is it possible to talk about a territory where even the gaze is forbidden? What is the language of critique when critical language has become a commodity—a salable object of desire that follows the capitalist logic of reproduction?

Is critical language still *critical* if there is a market for it? And how much does it cost? What do I know about Palestine when I cannot travel to occupied Palestine, as stipulated by my Iranian passport?

What happens to the image when it crosses the border? The fact that the article remains unfinished somehow states the impossibility of the situation.

Palestine becomes a “phantasmagoria,” in a sense similar to that Walter Benjamin defined in his *Arcades Project*.⁵⁷ It is a phantasmagoria of resistance—an object that is seen not in terms of its functional or financial value, but for its lyrical assessment and construction of a form of romanticism, or *romantivism*: romantic-activism. It is in the context of such a sentimental value that imagination comes into play, that is, in the fiction of a place where one has never been. It is a phantasmal geography of the other, the narrative that makes this sculpture a monument. In some way, phantasmagoria is not a micro concept here, but a primary state of mind: it is a grand concept that defines what things should look like, a fetish. Iran's political role in relation to Palestine has become more than that of a back-seat driver, shouting unwanted advice or arguing against their actions.

Benjamin once said history breaks down into images, not into stories.⁵⁸ But what profoundly confronts the orthodox understanding of the past—Benjamin calls it historicism—is that, rather than finding its basis in the material evidence of the past, the explicit object of this new approach to history is not the missing past, but in fact the present. What institutes the materiality of the present is, undeniably, nothing other than the bricolage of all the aspects of the past that are conserved in the present. Thus, what he proposes constitutes an archaeology of the present. Iran and Palestine are two distinct geographies, and though they have shared histories, they remain distant from one another. Their only relationship is through representation and images,

but these images alone are not enough to undo history. Is there a way to bring the art of storytelling back into such a hyper-politicized history?

After the “Lazy Cat” essay was published, I hoped to travel to Jordan to climb to the top of Mount Nebo, a place mentioned in the Hebrew Bible as the site where Moses was granted a view of the promised land. The view from the summit provides a panorama of the land and, to the north, a more limited one of the valley of the River Jordan. Apparently, the West Bank city of Jericho is usually visible from the summit, as is Jerusalem on a very sunny and clear day. It was a chance to see the land of milk and honey from afar. And as an Iranian passport holder, it would perhaps be the closest I would come to reaching Palestine.

While Jordan has a friendly relationship with Saudi Arabia, its sole fellow Sunni monarchy within the region, Saudi Arabia and Iran are in a disobedient political relationship, the hostility of which has escalated periodically through the Houthi movement in Yemen and uprisings in Bahrain. Due to Iran’s tensions with Jordan’s close regional ally, it has become impossible to receive a visa from the Kingdom of Jordan, and I’ve had enough experience to know not to waste my time only to receive a rejection letter at the end of the day.

And so, the only potential way to gain a vantage into Palestine was to travel to southern Lebanon, which I happened to visit during the first-ever Historical Materialism conference in Beirut in 2017. It was my best opportunity to get close to the promised land. I traveled south after the conference to Mleeta, a small village on top of a mountain that lies just forty-five kilometers from the border. It lies deep within the territory controlled by Hezbollah, the Shia militant and political party in Lebanon. Hezbollah has developed the site into the Tourist Landmark of the Resistance, also known as the Museum for Resistance Tourism.

On a rainy day, I climbed to the top of the hill, the place from which one can see Palestine. The promised land lay in front of me, completely concealed behind voluminous brume.

How Beautiful Life Is with You, My Dear

With this image of unattainability in mind, I turn to the history of this land in its contemporary time. To be able to think about an alternative history, I ask: What could have gone differently? What if the minority plan had instead been accepted at the UN summit? What if the Jewish Territorial Organization led by Israel Zangwill who ultimately rejected Herzl’s search for a Jewish homeland, had held wider influence, instead of Theodor Herzl and his modern Zionist politics? What might have gone differently if the Arab League hadn’t boycotted the 1947 summit in the early days, and instead pursued stronger and more effective negotiations?

Despite all the dilemmas these questions present, from the vantage of Felestin Square, the everydayness of life continues its course, circling the roundabout. Indeed, what remains of the monument but an ironic object at the heart of the city?

On one hand, the sculpture suggests an ideal that still persists. On the other, however, it hints at its reversal. Does this ideal betray itself?

How could I narrate the film? What were the words that best described such images? First, in dialogue with Benji Boyadgian, my Palestinian colleague, I wrote a narration that sought to bring in the question of my subjective experience of a territory I cannot visit. It was about Tehran, as a city, alongside Jerusalem—two disconnected territories with different histories and paths. The film was edited partly to correspond to the narration, but what I had written was not enough; it seemed that

any attempt to describe the Palestinian condition was bound to veer in the wrong direction, that any effort to rationalize the situation would neglect key historical points and add unreliable layers of interpretation. The subject is complex enough as it is, and I wondered if the film truly needed narration to depict such complexity. And so, I found myself at the original point of departure for this project: the bronze-and-cement sculpture at the intersection of Felestin Street and Talaghani Street, with its upside-down map of Palestine.

Once again, the existential question challenged me: What were my hopes for this project? Who was I talking to? In the end, was the project a soliloquy, a monologue in which I was merely speaking to myself in the mirror? And yet, a mirror that also reflected into an abyss. After five years of research and thought, I felt paralyzed: no progress could be made, everything was repeating itself. I found myself in a *mise en abyme*, a story within a story. I found myself in a state of procrastination and obsession, alone at the heart of a subject that is by far the best-known contemporary struggle.

I looked back at my footage from that rainy day in 2015, circling the roundabout again and again. Had I come to the end of the project?

It was in this moment of thought when I received an invitation from the artist and curator Michele Masucci, for his upcoming group show *A Careful Strike*, at the art space Mint. It was to be a mobile exhibition, initiated by Emily Fahlén and Asrin Haidari and located in the basement of the Workers' Educational Association (ABF) in Stockholm, the educational arm of the Swedish labor movement since 1912.

A group show was to depart from the monumental painting *The History of the Workers' Movement*, painted during a ten-year period around 1940 by the sheet metal worker, musician, and artist Ruben Nilson (1893–1971). The work is permanently

installed at ABF Stockholm. According to the exhibition statement:

The exhibition follows Nilson's artwork both in its ambition and challenge: What does the reproduction of a movement's history entail? What different roles can art play in social movements and through which expressions? How is art engaged in today's movements? A dialogue with the specific struggles and the histories that inform Nilson's composition of intertwined visual narratives, structured through visible conjoined cuts form the curatorial framework of the exhibition. The works historical connections to contemporary situations are put in relation to what is missing within the frame – the histories and experience that are left out while establishing a prevalent worker's history.

Could this invitation be an unexpected light at the end of tunnel? Perhaps so.

In the context of a group show that asked similar questions to my own, perhaps the project would discover a new interpretation in its reproduction. What missing element might the proposed reproduction reveal? I imagined it might unveil a missing link, explicating the relationship between the seen and the unseen, the known and the unknown, the expected and the unexpected (as Rancièrè might argue).⁵⁹

ABF was, in fact, a suitable setting for a site-specific exhibition of the project. The invitation encouraged me to revisit my idea, and yet again to ponder the question: What is the future of our collective past? What will happen to Felestin Square under future political conditions in Iran? This question became a mainstay for the continuation of the project. In my conception, the monument to the Palestinian struggle in the center of Tehran will be the first public art to vanish from the public eye; the



mural in the square will be coated in white paint, as the Palestinian embassy is handed over to Israel. In a stroke of revenge against the past, the monument to the Palestinian resistance will be brutally demolished. The enemy of my enemy will become my friend, and the friend of my enemy will become my enemy. An augury of the future, this site-specific work would visualize one of the first attempts at a new revolutionary position, a new form of art as revenge against the past.

How could this work both remonstrate the hegemonic ideology of the Iranian political mindset, and at same time stand in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle? It is a question that juxtaposes the roles of the public monument now and then.

Such visualization of a possible future might serve as a kind of public artistic proposal for the location of a different monument. For in my point of view, the rebuke of the monument's underlying motives cannot be reduced to a simple act of an iconoclasm. In this spirit, I propose a mural that will be painted on the wall across from the square, facing toward the embassy. It would be a mural narrating the history of Palestine from 1947, according to the version I have outlined in this chapter, emphasizing the role of Iran in the political struggle, from the origins of UNSCOP in 1947 to the 1979 revolution. And so, I began to create a collage for the exhibition, a montage of images and documents, the result of a couple of years of collecting that had begun with the work on this project. It would be a historical re-enactment, a playful and legible interpretation of history.

I imagined the mural would advocate for public gatherings in the center of Tehran to discuss the political triangle between Iran, Israel, and Palestine. In so doing, the mural could be a form of public art that plays a storytelling role, engaging with the audience in a lighthearted way, while giving voice to this hyper-politicized history.

My contribution to the exhibition was also to include a suggestion for improving the existing Palestine monument. The upside-down map would be righted. And the monument itself would be located above the distracting objects that line the square—the bushes, the CCTV camera poll, the trees. In fact, it would be removed entirely, and placed instead at the top of a mountain.

The exhibition at Mint would be an opportunity to examine the possibilities of the imagination, and forms of activism that might be possible in the near future. The exhibition as postrevolutionary exercise. In the exhibition, seven collages would be hung on the wall, visualizing the political history of Palestine from 1947 to 1990. A storytelling session as a form of workshop would be held to describe this history, along with the speculative plan for a future site, situated in another geography entirely.

Ultimately, the film would be included without the voiceover. I understood quite late that the film doesn't need it. Rather, the montage of the images accompanied by the ambient sounds were sufficiently provocative, encouraging the audience to ask their own questions and to think beyond the mere interpretation of a propaganda piece.

We planned to screen the film at the end of the large and lengthy corridor at ABF, projected against a mirror that covers the whole wall. A pair of speakers would present the sound of Tehran on that rainy day. A day that Tehran was not itself, an oddly empty, tropical image of a desert city.

There are few cities in the world where Persian pop music from Los Angeles can be heard blasting at full volume in a shopping mall.⁶⁰ Yet this is a daily, natural occurrence at Jerusalem's high-security downtown bus terminal, where Persian pop legends Moin and Ebi pound in commuters' ears. Most of the CD stores there are owned by Iranian Jews, and over the past twenty years they have created a market for Persian pop in the very heart of the Jewish state.

This is a fact that comes to mind every time that I think about Palestine, where eighteen-year-old Israeli soldiers wait for their rides home, assault rifles slung over their shoulders, listening to Moin sing about how beautiful life is when he is with his lover.

This story was an important link in the political triangle between Iran, Palestine, and Israel, and I wanted to include it in the exhibition. The Iranian pop music displaces the notion of political geographies, and in an unusual way, acts as a site-related phenomenon while being informally determined or directed by it. It is an interruptive hint, one in which the music functions as a critical intervention into the existing order of the exhibition format. In the exhibition, a speaker was to play a loop of thirty minutes of Iranian pop music from LA, while a Persian dance workshop led by a professional dancer and teacher would be held in front of the video projection, at the end of the corridor.

In the invitation letter to the workshop, I write:

We are going to dance for one hour. We are going to learn how to dance in an Iranian way to the music composed by Iranians in exile in Los Angeles and distributed by Iranian Jews in Israel, in front of a film that presents a monument to Palestinian struggle. Please join us, and let's dance together; "If I can't dance, I don't want to be in your revolution," as Emma Goldman, feminist, anarchist activist, editor, writer, teacher, jailbird, and general trouble-maker believes.

It was not long after that I received a brief email from the curator, Michele:

Dear Behzad,

As mentioned earlier the current situation with the Covid-19 pandemic and the increased rate of infection, ABF Stockholm has decided to pause all public activities in their facilities. Therefore, the exhibition *A Careful Strike*, planned to open next week, will be postponed until fall 2021.

Yet again, the idea of an exhibition had become an imaginary of a possible future—a future that was simultaneously nearby and just out of reach.

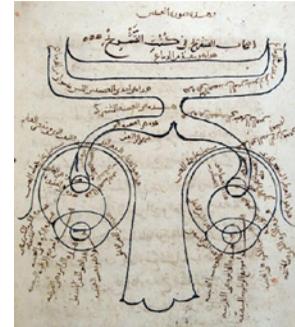


1. On the basis of the description of the borders of the promised land given in the Book of Genesis, Arafat had claimed that the two blue stripes on the Israeli flag represent the Nile and Euphrates Rivers, and alleged that Israel desired to eventually seize all the land in between. See, for instance, Daniel Pipes, "Imperial Israel: The Nile-to-Euphrates Calumny," *Middle East Quarterly* (March 1994).
2. "A/RES/181(II) of 29 November 1947," United Nations General Assembly.
3. Minute by Martin, April 14, 1947; New York to FO, February 26, 1947; and FO to New York, March 3, 1947, PRO CO 537/2335; Thompson to Rusk, April 11, 1947, NA 501. BB Palestine/4-1147; FRUS, 1947, pp. 1070–1073; United Nations, Official Records of the First Special Session of the General Assembly, Vol. 111, p. 148.
4. Balfour Declaration, as published in *Time*, November 9, 1917.
5. "Palestine: Martial Law Declared," British Pathé, [March, 6,] 1947.
6. Elad Ben-Dror, "The Arab Struggle against Partition: The International Arena of Summer 1947," *Middle Eastern Studies* 43:2 (March 2007), p. 262.
7. New York to FO, May 9, 1947, PRO CO 537/2336; UNA DAG 5/1:1:9 Box 1; "Report of the First Committee," May 13, 1947; Jacob Robinson, Palestine and the United Nations (New York: Public Affairs Press, 1947), pp. 147–150.
8. Rami Ginat, "India and the Palestine Question: The Emergence of the Asio-Arab Bloc and India's Quest for Hegemony in the Post-Colonial Third World," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40:6 (November 2004), p. 191.
9. Ben-Dror, "Arab Struggle against Partition," p. 262.
10. Hamidreza Dehgahni, "Iran's Role in Opposition to the Partition of Palestine," *Iranian Journal of International Affairs* 21:3 (Summer 2009), pp. 37–92.
11. Ben-Dror, "Arab Struggle against Partition," p. 262.
12. Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 741.
13. Ben-Dror, "Arab Struggle against Partition," p. 262.
14. Ginat, "India and the Palestine Question," p. 190.
15. Nehru to Menon, April 29, 1947, cited in Alistair Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy, 1846–1990* (Karachi and Islamabad: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 102. Words in the same spirit were uttered by Nehru in a letter he wrote to Nawab of Bhopal on July 9, 1948. See the text of the letter in Rafiq Zakaria, "A Personal Statement," in *A Study of Nehru* (Calcutta and Bombay: Bupa & Co., 1997), pp. 7–8.
16. Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy*, p. 102.
17. Ginat, "India and the Palestine Question," p. 202.
18. Steven R. Ward, *Immortal: A Military History of Iran and Its Armed Forces* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), p. 169.
19. "Anglo-Iranian Relations iii. Pahlavi Period," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, online edition, iranicaonline.org.
20. UN Debate Regarding the Special Committee on Palestine: Gromyko Statement at UN, 1947, United Nations, Official Records, May 14, 1947.
21. Philip Marshall Brown, "The Recognition of Israel," *American Journal of International Law* 42:3 (July 1948), pp. 620–627.
22. Ofer Aderet, "Why the Mysterious Swede Who Drew Up Israel's Map Favored the Jews," *Haaretz*, November 25, 2017.
23. Paul Mohn's personal diary, Uppsala University.
24. Official Records of the Second Session of the General Assembly, Supplement No. 11, United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, Report to the General Assembly, Vol. 1, Lake Success, New York, 1947.
25. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 20 (Moscow: Progress, 1977), p. 35.
26. Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the United States* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 21.
27. Walid Sharif, "Soviet Marxism and Zionism," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 6:3 (Spring 1977), p. 97.
28. Jean Edward Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace* (New York: Random House, 2012), p. 242.
29. Robert Reppa, *Israel and Iran: Bilateral Relationships and Effect on the Indian Ocean Basin* (New York: Praeger, 1974), p. 91.
30. Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p. 22.
31. Ibid.; R.K. Ramazani, "Iran and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Autumn, 1978).
32. First Book of *Iranian Writers' Association* (Tehran: Autom, 1979).
33. Ibid.
34. Niloufar Ghaderinejad, interviewed by Ilina, Reza Yasini, *Iranian Labour News Agency*, May, 22, 2018, ilna.news.
35. "Conversation with Alkhas," National Library and Archive of Iran, audio file, available at [www. http://www.nlai.ir/](http://www.nlai.ir/).
36. Eckart Lingenauber, "Boris Anisfeld: A Wanderer between Russia's Silver Age and America's Golden Twenties," available at anisfeld.org.
37. Nameh Mardom, 5 Mehr 1389, Issue 852, year 25th. my translation. Available at: www.tudehpartyiran.org.
38. Ibid.
39. The Moscow-based publishing house Progress played a significant role by distributing inexpensive books in Farsi in front of the Soviet embassy, which helped familiarize many people with Marxist-Leninist philosophy, as well as art history, and even children stories. Progress became a well-known publisher before the revolution; remarkably it was not banned by the Secret Police (SAVAK)
40. It is crucial to mention that the left-wing political party in Iran, as in any other geopolitical context, was not a homogeneous group. The history of the Iranian left is a complicated one, on account of the numerous splits and internal conflicts. Among them, the Tudeh Party, especially after the movement for oil independence, became the major political party in Iran, and somehow the representative of Marxist-Leninist ideology.
41. Morteza Asadi and Ahmad Nadalian, "Ideology and Political Thought in Islamic Revolutionary Arts," *Negareh* magazine, March 2013.
42. Although in ideological terms they were quite different, both groups represented middle-class communities, and the foundations of their educations and desires were similar in their disconnection from proletarian identity.
43. I read somewhere, a long time ago, that the sculptor who crafted the Felestin monument was Malakdadyar Garousian. I found his cell phone number and called him. Garousian told me that Nader Qashghaie was, in fact, the artist, and that he had merely helped him during the construction. He gave me Qashghaie's number.
44. John K. Cooley, "Iran, the Palestinians, and the Gulf," *Foreign Affairs* 57:5 (Summer 1979), p. 1017.
45. Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p. 84.
46. Cooley, "Iran, the Palestinians, and the Gulf," p. 1017.
47. Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p. 85.
48. Ibid.
49. Confidential State Department telegram from the US embassy in Iran, October 1979, sent by Chargé d'Affaires Bruce Laingen. Available at the National Security Archives.
50. Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p. 86.
51. Nader Entessar, "Israel and Iran's National Security," *Journal of South Asian and Middle, Eastern Studies* 4 (2004), p. 6.
52. Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p. 88.
53. *Mojahed* magazine, February 28, 1980.
54. Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 129.
55. Interestingly, while Fred Halliday was an Irish scholar, Mohajerani represented him as British.
56. Municipal publication of the city of Tehran, no. 11 (Spring 1990), pp. 10–11.
57. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 7.
58. Ibid., p. 476.
59. Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (London and New York: Verso, p. 113)
60. Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, p. 4.

Map of events and dates

924

Ibn al-Haytham (أبو علي، الحسن بن الحسن بن الهيثم) writes one of the foundational texts on the logic of optics and the physics of light, *Book of Optics (Kitab al-Manazir)*, which will become the basis for the invention of the camera obscura and modern technologies of image production.



1309

Kamal al-Din Hasan ibn Ali ibn Hasan al-Farisi (كمال الدين فارسي) writes *Kitab Tanqih al-Manazir*. Farisi's research is based on theoretical investigations in optics conducted on the so-called burning sphere (*al-Kura al-muhriqa*) in the tradition of Ibn Sahl (d. ca. 1000 CE) and Ibn al Haytham (d. ca. 1041 CE) after him. As noted in his *Revision of the Optics (Kitab Tanqih al-Manazir)*, Farisi uses a spherical glass vessel, filled with water, as an experimental large-scale model of a raindrop. He then places this model within a camera obscura that has an aperture to control the introduction of light.



1572

The first independent, transportable camera apparatus is proposed by Friedrich Risner (1533–80), a German mathematician best known for his 1572 Latin translation of Alhazen's *Optics*. His wooden box is used primarily as an aid in the creation of artistic works.

1820

"Orient tourism" begins from the West to the East.



1829

Victor Hugo gives the title "Darvishe" to a chapter of his 1829 *Orientales*.

1839

Photographs taken in the Ottoman Empire generated attention toward the Dervish in new aesthetic realms.



1840

An enterprising Western photographer opens a studio in Istanbul, and later another in Tehran.

1855

Joseph Arthur de Gobineau travels to Persia to become the first secretary at the French embassy in Tehran. While there, he researches the origin of the Aryan race.

Despite having no small amount of love for the Persians, Gobineau is shocked to learn that Persians lack his racial prejudices and are willing to accept blacks as equals. On this count, he criticizes Persian society for being too "democratic." Preferring to contemplate past glories, Gobineau is satisfied to visit the ruins of the Achaemenid period.



1863

Ármin Vámbéry travels to Persia beginning in the autumn of 1863. After receiving a stipend of a thousand florins from the academy, he sets out from Constantinople disguised as a Sunni dervish under the name Reshit Efendi. His route takes him from Trebizond, on the Black Sea, to Tehran, in Persia; there, he joins a band of pilgrims returning from Mecca, with whom he spends several months traveling across Central Iran, Tabriz, Zanjan, and Qazvin.



1879

Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* is published in London.

1885

The Moral and Intellectual Diversity of Races, by Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, is published in Paris.

1887

The Esperanto language is invented by Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof, a Polish ophthalmologist and linguist.



1899

The Jardin Zoologique d'Acclimatation event is organized in Paris. The zoological and ethnographic exhibition included a "pavilion of the dervishes," with about twenty Sufis, along with a "Théâtre des derviches."



1913

The "Postcard camera" is invented by the Chicago Ferrottype Company.

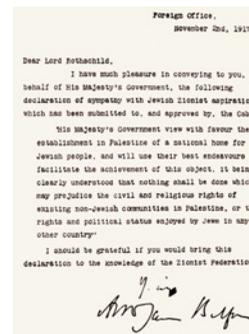


1917

The Russian Revolution takes place. It was a period of political and social revolution across the territory of the Russian Empire, commencing with the abolition of the monarchy in 1917 and concluding in 1923 with the Bolshevik establishment of the Soviet Union at the end of the Civil War.



Lord Balfour, then the British foreign minister, states in a letter to Lord Rothschild (known as the Balfour Declaration), that the British government is sympathetic to the Zionist movement and will use its "best endeavours" to ensure the creation of a "national home" for the Jewish People in Palestine.



1918

The Soviet Robespierre Monument, a statue of the prominent French Revolution character, is erected. Located in Alexander Garden in central Moscow and designed by the sculptor Beatrice Yuryevna Sandomierz, it is one of the first attempts at monumental propaganda to be built in Vladimir Lenin's Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

1920

The Chicago Ferrottype Company goes bankrupt.

1934

The series of illustrations *Father and Son*, by German anti-Nazi cartoonist Erich Ohser, begins publication in the magazine *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, where it appears regularly until 1937.



1937

Rajab Akbari emigrates to Tehran from Hamedan.



1939

The Treaty of Nonaggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (or, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact), is signed.

A British Mandate "white paper" sketches new government policies to further limitations on Jewish immigration and land purchases, declaring their intention to grant independence to Palestine, with an Arab majority, within ten years.



The Soviet Union occupies the Baltic region and Finland, according to the terms of a hidden agreement within the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. Nazi Germany occupies Poland



1941
Anglo-Soviet forces invade Iran.

1942
Polish refugees arrive from the north to the Iranian port of Anzali.



1943
Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt (known as the Big Three) meet at the Soviet embassy in Tehran.



1946

Michael Nash takes a picture of a photographer, his subject, and their backdrop in Warsaw. A woman sits on a chair, with her head turns toward her shoulder. The painting is held up by a dilapidated wooden structure, with stones stack around the base to steady it.



1947

The UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP, comprised of representatives of eleven nations) responds to a UK government request that the General Assembly make recommendations under Article 10 of the charter concerning the future government of Palestine. The British government also recommends the establishment of a special committee to prepare a report for the General Assembly. The General Assembly adopts the recommendation to set up the UNSCOP to investigate the cause of the conflict in Palestine, and, if possible, to devise a solution.

Tito shuts a Soviet photography exhibition about the liberation of Belgrade.

A Partition plan for Palestine is established, following UNSCOP meetings.

The map showing the divisions between Palestine and Israel is drawn by Swedish politician Paul Mohn.



1948

Tito and Stalin split, making Yugoslavia the only independent socialist state in the eastern bloc.



The Nakba ("catastrophe") occurs, leading to the expulsion or flight of more than seven hundred thousand Palestinian Arabs.



1950

Yugoslavia's model of economic self-management is launched.

1951

The Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (CPY) issues its "Declaration of Critical and Creative Freedom."

The film *The Great Meeting*, directed by Walter and Norbert Neugebauer, is produced by Duga Film.

Exat-51 is established in Zagreb, aiming to condemn the hegemony of authorized socialist realism, along with state censorship of abstraction and numerous motifs that Communist doctrine rejects as decadent and bourgeois.



1952

Mohammad Mossadegh issues his foreign doctrine in favor of nationalization, leading to the subsequent challenge to British hegemony in the International Court of Justice at The Hague.



1953

Joseph Stalin dies.



The CIA coup (Operation Ajax) takes place in Iran.



1955

The Bandung Conference is held in Indonesia. Iran joins the Baghdad Pact (later known as the Central Treaty Organization), a military alliance between Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

The first massive wave of immigration to Tehran takes place. Gholamreza Amirbegi and his family are among them.

1956

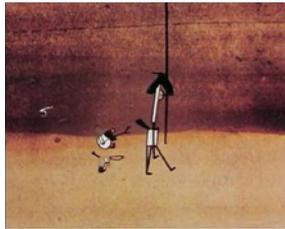
Rajab Akbari builds a box camera (the *Rookitch*) for Gholamreza. Gholamreza Amirbegi becomes an itinerant photographer.

The Brijuni summit between Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser and Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito, takes place.



1961

The film *Don Kihot*, directed by Vlado Kristal, is produced in Zagreb.



Drawing on the principles agreed at the Bandung Conference in 1955, the Non-Aligned Movement is established in Belgrade, through an initiative of Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah, Indonesian president Sukarno, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser and Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito. This leads to the first Conference of Heads of State or Governments of Non-Aligned Countries.



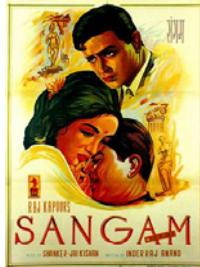
1962

David Lean's film *Lawrence of Arabia* is produced in the UK, in which Peter O'Toole plays the lead role.



1964

Sangam, the first color Bollywood film, is produced by Raj Kapoor.



1965

The Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA, Kanoon) is founded in Iran, directed by Lily Amir-Arjomand.



کانون پرورش فکری کودکان و نوجوانان

Members of the Student Confederation, an Iranian leftist student organization based in European universities, attempt to assassinate the shah.

Firooz Shirvanloo becomes codirector and informal art director of Kanoon.

1967

The first episode of *Professor Balthazar* is produced, directed by Zlatko Gercic.



1969

Veljko Bulajic's *Battle of Neretva*, a drama about a 1943 battle between Axis forces and Partisan units near the Neretva River, is produced.

1970

Kanoon's first animation, *Nan and Koocheh*, directed by Abas Kiarostami, is produced.

1976

The term "Non-aligned Movement" (NAM) first appears at the fifth Summit Conference in 1976, where participating countries are denoted as "members of the movement."

1977

Carlo Ginzburg introduces the term "microhistory."

1979

The Iranian revolution leads to the overthrow of the shah and the installation of the Islamic Republic of Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

At the Havana Summit, Iran and Pakistan withdraw from the Baghdad Pact and become members of the NAM.

Iranian students occupy the US embassy in Tehran.



1980

The construction of Petraqo Gora, the last Yugoslav anti-fascist memorial, begins.



The first revolutionary mural, by Hanibal Alkhas and his student Adham, appears on the wall of the US embassy in Tehran.



The cultural revolution begins in Iran.

1982

Iranian state television purchases the *Professor Balthazar* series.

1987

The First Intifada begins in the occupied West Bank.

1990

The first public monument since the revolution, by Nader Qashghaie, is erected in Tehran's Felestin Square.

2017

Qatar is engulfed in a diplomatic crisis with Saudi Arabia.

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Abstract

This book documents and reflects on three artistic projects and their processes. As a “marginalia” to the projects I also presents arguments, stories and ir/relevant discourses. What I call marginalia extends to aspects of a historical backdrop of these three projects and the stories behind them. It is partly a reflection on my process and experiences, but, more crucially for me, it is what I would like to call marginalia. It extends to aspects of a historical backdrop that were not necessarily present in the process of exhibition making.

In this book, I reflect upon different modes of exhibition making and artistic research practices, however, this book is not simply a postscript to those works. It also serves as a form of marginalia to my artistic explorations in relation to art, history, and global politics.

Combining fragments of histories, it constitutes a bricolage of things, events, and narratives. The book itself comprises the fourth and final story.

“Three or Four Ir/relevant Stories” here mirrors the conjunction of some historical and cultural cases that, in my point of view, need to be acknowledged. It is an artistic research investigation, proposing a multi-sited, archaeological approach to histories of art and life that also constitute part of my lived experience in the Global South and the Global North. By bringing multiple subjects into my study, as well as historical reenactment in the form of a review of archival materials in the exhibition space, I explore possible correspondences, seen through the lenses of contemporary art practice, subalternity, and the technology of image production.

In my investigations of certain artworks and their histories, I aim to develop everyday observations into archaeological interpretations—to dis-

place the image from its past historical location and bring forth the question: What will happen to our collective past in the future?

The exhibitions themselves embody a hybrid approach, an expression that portrays multiple combinations and interpretations of various art genres and subject matters. By their very nature, the works present multiplicities of materials, which in their collection into an exhibition amount to a sort of cabinet of curiosities.

I neither stick to one method of artistic investigation, nor focus on a single medium. Instead I aim to reconnoiter the possibilities that inhere an artistic survey. At no point do I follow any fixed blueprint for, or definition of, artistic production; in short, I might argue that in my artistic practices, I attempt to avoid dividing method from life's experiences. It is, in part, the narrative fluidity of such a microhistorical investigation that enables me to imagine the exhibition as a point of departure of my artistic exploration and research of such micro elements of contemporary history. I aim to investigate whether it was possible establish a storytelling structure that would mirror the branching paths of the archaeological trace and its background—a transdisciplinary materialism that brings multiple dimensions of history into one temporary place called an exhibition. In so doing, I have sought to produce a cross-generational platform where the audience can engage with the multiplicity of the contemporary past, and perhaps also revisit their own memories.

Tre eller fyra Ir/relevanta berättelser

I denna avhandling har jag genomfört tre konstnärliga projekt som jag reflekterar över och dokumenterar. Som en form av "marginalia" till projekten presenteras argument, berättelser och relevanta diskurser. Dessa omfattar aspekter av den historiska bakgrunden till de tre projekten och deras huvudsakliga ämnen och berättelserna bakom dem, vilka når bortom själva utställningsprocesserna.

I *Tre eller fyra Ir/relevanta berättelser* sammankopplar jag ett antal historiska och kulturella fall och händelser. Undersökningen tar sig från från Iran till Pakistan för att kartlägga effekterna av vad jag kallar ett "omedvetet kolonialminne" av bildproduktion ur proletariats synvinkel. Sedan sker en rörelse från Jugoslavien till Sverige som belyser den Alliansfria Rörelsens globala historiografi genom att sätta den i samband med Zagrebs animationsskola och den animerade karaktären professor Balthazar. Därefter kopplas denna diskussion till de tvetydiga och problematiska egenskaperna hos representationen av globalt motstånd i relation till en specifik politisk gest i Teheran – Palestinamonumentet i centrum av staden. Utifrån exemplet ställs en central fråga: vad händer med ett konstverk när det passerar gränsen?

Även om dessa berättelser är orelaterade är de inskrivna i geografier som historiskt har definierats från en eurocentrisk utsiktsplats. Den eurocentriska attityden baseras i grunden på en strikt uppdelning mellan "här" och "där": en gräns som delar upp två åtskilda områden. "Här" innefattar en dynamik av modern, progressiv socialitet, medan "där" avgränsar en plats som fryst i sin historia, på ett både nedlåtande och exotifierat sätt. Dikotomin målar upp den fascinerande, vackra, naiva orienten, och skapar representationer och minnen som internaliserades på båda sidor.

Tre eller fyra Ir/relevanta berättelser är en mångsidig konstnärlig undersökning som föreslår ett arkeologiskt förhållningssätt till berättelser om konst och liv vilka också utgör en del av min levda erfarenhet i den globala södern och det globala norr. Genom att inkludera flera ämnen i min studie, såväl som ett återskapande av arkivmaterial i utställningsrummet, utforskar jag möjliga korrespondenser, sedda genom linserna av konstpraktik och subalternitet, samt studier av obsoleta teknologier inom bildproduktion.

I mina studier av specifika konstverk och deras historier och kontexter strävar jag efter att utveckla vardagliga observationer till arkeologiska tolkningar – att förskjuta bilden från dess tidigare, etablerade historiska läge och ställa frågan: vad kommer att hända med vårt kollektiva förflutna i framtiden?

Utställningarna i sig är exempel på en hybridstrategi; ett försök att använda kombinationer och tolkningar av olika konstgenrer och ämnen. Jag har undersökt möjligheten av att sammanföra en mångfald av material, som i viss mån bildar något som kan liknas vid ett kuriosakabinett. Jag har alltså inte varit trogen en viss konstnärlig undersökningsmetod, inte heller har jag fokuserat på ett enda konstnärligt medium. Istället har jag strävat efter att använda de möjligheter som ligger i en konstnärlig undersökning, en öppen process som delvis formas efter omständigheterna. Inte vid något tillfälle har jag följt en fast ritning för eller definition av konstnärlig produktion; kort sagt kan jag hävda att jag i min konstnärliga praktik försöker undvika att skilja metoden från livserfarenheter.

Det är delvis den narrativa rörligheten i en sådan mikrohistorisk undersökning som gör det möjligt för mig att föreställa mig utställningen som en utgångspunkt för min konstnärliga utforskning och som en form av utforskande av mikroelement i samtids-historia. Jag har strävat efter att undersöka om det är möjligt att upprätta en berättarstruktur som kan spegla de arkeologiska spårens förgreningsvägar

och deras bakgrund – en tvärvetenskaplig materialism som för med sig flera dimensioner av historien till en tillfällig plats som kallas en utställning. Inom ramen för den undersökningen har jag försökt skapa en plattform för flera generationer där publiken kan engagera sig i mångfalden av det samtida förflutna och kanske också återvända till sina egna minnen.

De konstnärliga verken som ingår i avhandlingen kan beskrivas som bricolage av fragment; saker, händelser och berättelser. Boken i sig konstituerar den fjärde och sista delen/berättelsen. Den här boken är alltså inte bara en efterskrift till de tre verken utan fungerar också som en *marginalia* till min konstnärliga forskning med förbindelser till annan konst, till historia och global politik.

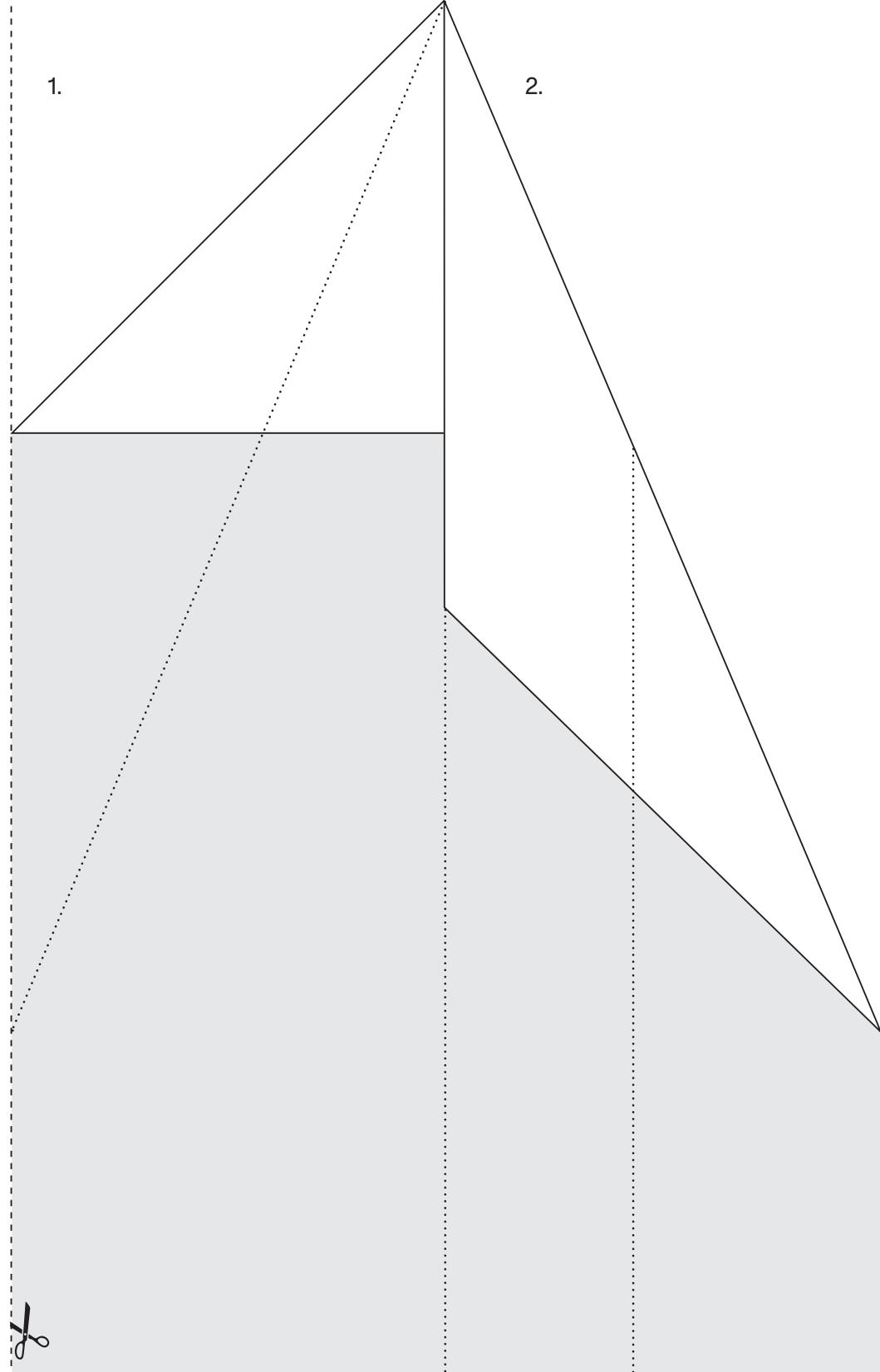
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Thank you

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