REPETITION BEYOND REPRESENTATION: MEDIA, HISTORY AND EVENT IN IRAN, 1951-1990

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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My dissertation draws together postcolonial theory, film and visual studies, and questions of aesthetics and politics in the modern Middle East. Looking closely at Iran in the latter half of the 20th century, I explore literary and artistic works concerned with the limits of representation and the political possibilities of aesthetic remediation. These various works are not simply representations of historical events, but are themselves instrumental in shaping history.

For scholars across the political spectrum, Iranian modernity has often been understood as a process of becoming Western, and postcolonialism has tended to frame modern Iranian history as a response to Western imperialism. In either of these two accounts, Iranians cease to be historical agents unless they either adopt or reject a modernist project understood to be Western. My dissertation refuses this contrast and considers history as a process that is not independent from literary and cinematic locutions.

Across my three core chapters, I am drawn to writers and artists whose work explores the complex dynamics connecting aesthetic form (in Mehdi Akhavan-Sales's poetry, Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's novel, and Abbas Kiarostami's films) and historical events (the 1953 coup, the 1979 revolution, and the 1990 earthquake). Weaving together

texts and events, I consider how each of these aesthetic forms (poetry, novels, and films) challenges a linear conception of historical progress with an alternate figuration of time. I argue that at the heart of these various textual examples is an aesthetics of repetition that capitalizes upon the unexpected. These various media, I suggest, not only engage and represent, but ultimately embody the form of the event itself.

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to my parents,
two fountains of benevolence

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

In this dissertation, I have followed the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (IJMES) as a model for Persian consonants and vowels. However, in keeping with Persian pronunciations, I have used "e" and "o" in lieu of the Arabic-sounding vowels of "i" and "u" recommended by IJMES. Further, I have avoided using diacritics for individuals' proper names, and I have applied the diacritical signs to the names of places or those of publications. In addition, in order to keep consistent, I have opted for the same spelling used in literary works when discussing relevant passages or stanzas. For instance, instead of "Foruz," I have utilized the spelling "Forouz," insofar as this is the spelling found in Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's novel.

I. INTRODUCTION
RETRIEVING THE EXCESS OF HISTORY: ON REPETITION BEYOND REPRESENTATION

> Persians were the first to take a broad and comprehensive view of history. Every series of evolutions, according to them, was presided over by a prophet; and every prophet had his '*Hazar*,' [a millennial cycle]—his dynasty of a thousand years.
> —Friedrich Nietzsche, quoted in Förster-Nietzsche's "Introduction" to *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

Beyond Linearity and Binarism

In the summer of 2015, I returned to the complex of the Museum of Ancient Iran (*Muzeh-ye Iran-e bāstān*) which is part of the National Museum of Iran (*Muzeh-ye melli-ye Iran*) in Tehran. Among the historical monuments hosted at the museum was one specific artifact which had drawn me back to the site. I was there to visit the earthen goblet recently uncovered in the UNESCO World Heritage site of the Burnt City (*Shahr-e sukhteh*) located in the southeastern province of Sistān and Baluchestān (fig. 1). Dating back to the Bronze Age in the third millennium BCE, the Burnt City is known to be part of the Jiroft civilization in southern Iran and has been the site of many "first" findings, including the first pre-Sumerian inscriptions, the earliest signs of brain surgery and dentistry, and the first artificial eye. A crucial item among the various "firsts" excavated

Fig. 1 Animated goblet uncovered in southeastern Iran in the Burnt City (*Shahr-e sukhteh*), dating back to the late third millennium BCE and known as the world's first example of animation. Visible in the photo is the trunk of the tree demarcating the space between the first and the fifth shots. Tehran, National Museum of Iran.

Fig. 2 The five frames on the goblet create the effect of a prancing deer when the urn is spun.

at the site is an earthen vase depicting a deer and a tree in five successive frames sequentially drawn around the relic (fig. 2). When the goblet is spun, the deer appears to be leaping ahead and eating from one of the two nearby branches. Since the movement of the deer is extracted from the repetition of the modulating shots, the vase has come to be recognized as the first example of animation in history.[1]

What is notable about this animated goblet is its conception of time *vis-à-vis* the relative continuity of the deer's movement. The continuous effect of the leap is interrupted by two intervening lines that separate the shots from each other. These vertical lines at once mark an intermediate space between the frames and a rupture in the temporal continuity of the leap. Meanwhile, they are meant to resemble the trunk of the tree on whose branches the deer feeds. Equally intriguing about these frames is the depiction of the leap not on the flat surface of a canvas or a screen, but on a circular object. Given the spatial ordering of the shots on a round vase, the determination of the beginning and the end of the progression proves impossible. The first shot depicting the

[1] To read more on this vase and the Burnt City, see Richard Foltz, *Iran in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 4-5. Also see Giannalberto Bendazzi, *Animation: A World History, Volume 1: Foundations of the Golden Age* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2016), 7.

deer standing on the ground can be provisionally considered to be the first in the sequence, and the fifth in the series, illustrating a prancing deer, can be taken as the concluding shot. As the frames are ordered on a circular goblet and the fifth frame is positioned in such a way to both follow and precede the first shot in the sequence, how shall one interpret the trunk separating the right side of the fifth frame from the left side of the first? Where, in other words, is that trunk situated if it needs to *exclude* the first shot that follows it in order to *conclude* the drama of the leap that *includes* the same first shot? Does the trunk precede the origin or does it follow the conclusion? Does it belong to the beginning or is it subsumed by the end?

Undecidable as its positioning is, the trunk remains the site of an anachrony wherein the beginning and the end, and before and after are not binary oppositions or sequenced temporalities, but instead "present" at the "same" time. The unique arrangement thereby blurs the duration of the "present" and of the "same." Having brought the end and the beginning within the same time-space, the round surface of the urn stages history's "first" animation and simultaneously forecloses the logic of beginning and the possibility of the first. The trunk does not negate the past, nor the future, but brings them into an asynchronous contemporaneity where those temporalities are negotiated. It supplants the logic of "either… or" with the logic of "both… and."

If the state of the trunk as the origin is already contaminated by the logic of the end, and if the trunk that culminates the drama of the leap is the same trunk that commences it, then the leap of the deer starts itself where it ends itself. The first trunk is already a repetition of the end. In the beginning, therefore, was repetition. The trunk is not an iteration that occurs within the binaries of a progressive narrative of the leap, but a

singular repetition whose duration cannot be assimilated to the dyad of past and future. While linearity and binarism are the warp and weft of narrative representation, as an originary beginning, the trunk forecloses the logic of binarity and the linear emplotment of the leap. The trunk is an opening that remains irreducible to the extracted continuity of the shots and their intervening breaks. It is an intermediary time-space that is both untenable and essential to the drama of the leap. In other words, the trunk is at once situated inside and outside that leap's movement: it is inside insofar as it is *integral* to the launching of the leap and, yet it remains outside as an *excess* since it is perched in the ambivalence between two irreducible temporalities. An account of this non-teleological movement would defy the conditions of possibility of a progressive emplotment of the drama of the leap. Having denied the leap its teleology, the trunk keeps the dear jumping ahead on the circular urn towards the future and at once towards the past.

How can one give an account of the urn's illustration of the leap if it cannot be assimilated into the binaries of representation, and if its trajectory resists the bifurcated path of being *either* towards the past *or* towards the future? How does one craft a proper narrative of the deer's movement if its leap defies an origin and a telos and thus rules out the possibility of a linear representation? What impact does the errant trajectory of the deer leave on our conception of history as progress as well as on the limits of a representational historiography? And, finally, what happens to a history whose "firsts" lack an ascertained first shot and an original beginning?

In this project, I investigate a similar movement of errantry and an excessive anachrony which obstructs figuration and forecloses a progressive emplotment of Iranian history. In so doing, I aim to reconfigure the predominant historiographies that cast Iran's

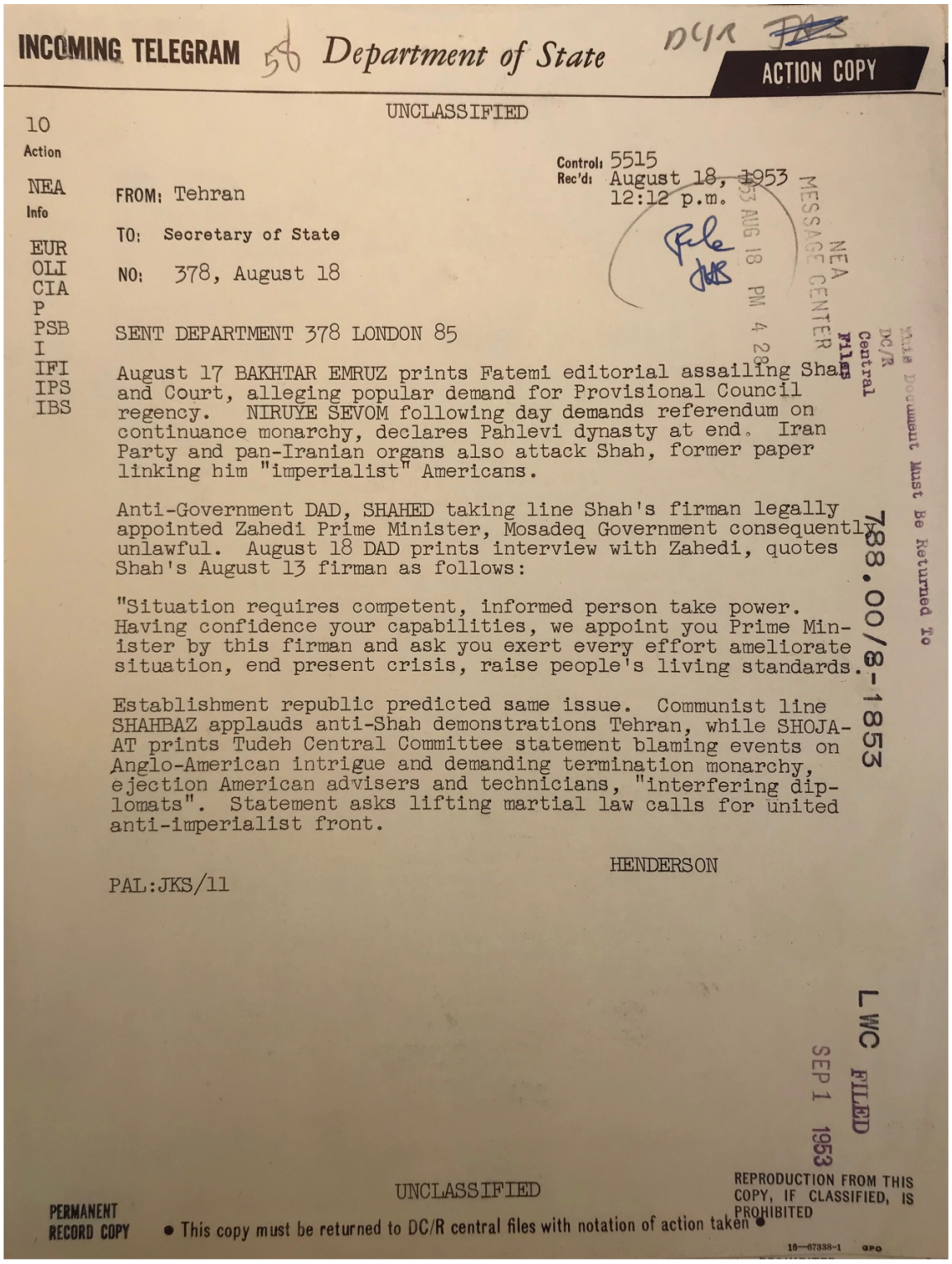
modern history in teleological narratives. On the one hand, orientalist accounts, such as those offered by Henry Corbin's work, represent Iranian history through a rhetoric of traditionalism, which casts the narrative of Iranian modernity in terms of belatedness or a "not yet." On the other hand, postcolonial historiography, crafted by such figures as Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati, emphasizes the intervention of imperial forces and tends to cast Iran's modernity as a mere response, part of a broader emancipation from tyranny. Insofar as orientalist and postcolonial accounts of Iranian modernity presuppose a narrative origin as well as a teleology, they tame and linearize the interrupted time of the event, and appropriate its intractable undecidability, by the binaries of a preexisting language. In such accounts, the aporetics of time, similar to the intermediary trunk dividing the last and first shots on the goblet, become synthesized and resignified in binaries, and are assimilated into an already-known linear trajectory of imperial domination or, on the contrary, anticolonial sovereignty. Thus, the identitarian historiographies crafted by orientalism and postcolonialism appropriate the particular into the universal and the *different* into the *same,* and thereby translate a singular idiom into a universal language which overdetermines the possibilities of any politics of emancipation. Such historiographies represent the event through preexisting binarisms inhering within representation, and thus turn the event's negotiation of "both… and" into a negation of "either… or."

Unlike orientalist and postcolonial historiographies of Iran, what I propose in the following pages attends to aesthetic repetitions whose particularity cannot be appropriated properly by universal binarisms: before/after, present/absent, inside/outside, domestic/foreign, etc. My consideration of the aesthetic excess in various art forms,

including poetry, the novel and cinema, reveals a distinct nexus formed between the aesthetic repetition and the interrupted time of the event. While representational narrative heals the broken line of time and reinscribes the particular into the universal, this project moves beyond narrative form in order to reconfigure the event in its particularity. Dismantling binary oppositions, teleology and the causality of continuous history, this dissertation proposes an alternate historiography of Iranian modernity beyond the teleological agendas of orientalism and postcolonialism. But why, one has to ask, is it imperative that a history move beyond representation's binarism and linearity? What other histories does a consideration of the excess make thinkable? And what are the political and ethical implications of such alternative histories?

Beyond Objective Representation of the Subaltern

Moving from the trunk and its challenge to the linearity of narrative form, I turn now to a different setting with implications for the sorts of stories told about modern Iran. In the summer of 2018, I spent a few weeks at the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland, researching written communications among various U.S. departments during the months leading up to the 1953 coup in Iran. Among the large body of documents was a telegram forwarded from Tehran, and received on August 18, 1953, at 12:12pm, precisely one day prior to the victory of the American-British *coup d'état* in Iran and the consequent overthrow of Prime Minister Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq. In this telegram, Loy W. Henderson, the incumbent U.S. Ambassador to Iran, briefs the Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, on the unfolding



INCOMING TELEGRAM — Department of State — ACTION COPY

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Control: 5515
Rec'd: August 18, 1953
12:12 p.m.

NEA MESSAGE CENTER

FROM: Tehran

TO: Secretary of State

NO: 378, August 18

SENT DEPARTMENT 378 LONDON 85

August 17 BAKHTAR EMRUZ prints Fatemi editorial assailing Shah and Court, alleging popular demand for Provisional Council regency. NIRUYE SEVOM following day demands referendum on continuance monarchy, declares Pahlevi dynasty at end. Iran Party and pan-Iranian organs also attack Shah, former paper linking him "imperialist" Americans.

Anti-Government DAD, SHAHED taking line Shah's firman legally appointed Zahedi Prime Minister, Mosadeq Government consequently unlawful. August 18 DAD prints interview with Zahedi, quotes Shah's August 13 firman as follows:

"Situation requires competent, informed person take power. Having confidence your capabilities, we appoint you Prime Minister by this firman and ask you exert every effort ameliorate situation, end present crisis, raise people's living standards.

Establishment republic predicted same issue. Communist line SHAHBAZ applauds anti-Shah demonstrations Tehran, while SHOJA-AT prints Tudeh Central Committee statement blaming events on Anglo-American intrigue and demanding termination monarchy, ejection American advisers and technicians, "interfering diplomats". Statement asks lifting martial law calls for united anti-imperialist front.

HENDERSON

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This Document Must Be Returned To DC/R Central Files

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Fig. 3 The telegram sent by Loy Henderson, the U.S. Ambassador to Iran to John Foster Dulles, the U.S. Secretary of State, on August 18, 1953. Retrieved at the U.S. National Archives in Summer of 2018.

developments in Iran and their coverage by the Iranian dailies in the last two days (fig. 3). For the most part, the letter consists in *a representation of representation*, i.e. an overview of how the unfolding events in Iran's political landscape have been covered and interpreted differently by various papers in recent days. Since the status of his letter as a representation of the media's coverage is taken for granted, Henderson uses no quotation marks when he summarizes the views of the papers on the unfolding political developments. In other words, Henderson mentions the political affiliations of his sources by name before going on to present their perspectives, and does not refrain from specifying their ideological backgrounds as "pan-Iranian," "anti-Government," and "Communist." Nevertheless, he does refuse to insert quotation marks when surveying their views and statements on current issues. Therefore, whether the papers "[allege] popular demands for Provisional Council regency" or "[demand] referendum on continuance monarchy," whether they "[take] line Shah's firman legally appointed Zahedi" or in their statement "[demand] termination monarchy, ejection American advisers and technicians," and whether their views endorse or oppose the Shah, their statements remain outside the quotation marks. In the middle of this message, however, Henderson directly quotes a few lines from the Shah's firman published alongside General Fazlollāh Zahedi's interview on the same day in the *Shāhed* Paper, which he characterizes as an "[a]nti-government DAD." In this royal decree of August 13, we come to read that the Shah, at the time having fled to Baghdad before flying to Europe, appoints General Zahedi as his Prime Minister of the post-coup military regime.

By employing the quotation marks for a few lines from the Shah's letter, Henderson repeats the Shah's firman of Zahedi's appointment accurately as it appears in

the paper, and yet elliptically as it must appear by convention in a telegram. If the quotation marks highlight the status of the Shah's statement as a verbatim reproduction of his letter, the telegram nonetheless renders his quote elliptical, eliminating the dead time of the prepositions and conjunctions in order to meet the urgency of the moment. The quote follows Henderson's own characterization of *Shāhed* paper as "Anti-Government[al]." These few lines from the firman are preceded by Henderson's own description of the paper's stance *vis-à-vis* the appointment of Zahedi for which he hardly employs any quotation marks whatsoever. Therefore, Henderson's reporting on the *Shāhed* paper's coverage of the appointment as "legal" and of "Mosadeq Government consequently unlawful" are included without punctuation. With the quotation marks missing, it remains unclear whether these adjectival modifiers are to be understood as indirect quotes from the paper or to be interpreted as Henderson's own characterizations of Zahedi's appointment and Mosaddeq's government.

There are two modifiers, however, that prompt Henderson to signal with quotation marks. In both phrases "imperialist Americans," to which *Iran Party* paper linked the Shah, and "interfering diplomats," whose ejection from the country *Shojāʿat* paper demanded, Henderson does utilize punctuation. The use of quotation marks for these adjectives cannot simply be attributed to their role as modifiers, since there are some other modifiers in the telegram which have been iterated indirectly. In addition, there are some other adjectives in the telegram with a vague origin, simultaneously attributable to Henderson's own voice and to the papers upon which he draws. So why has Henderson, who had thus far shied away from using his quotation marks, decided to make exceptions?

It is evident that the two adjectives Henderson has enveloped with his quotation marks are the sole modifiers describing Americans in negative terms, once as "imperialist" and once more as "interfering." By his highly selective punctuation use, Henderson has adroitly ascribed the adjectives to the voice of their original speakers or that of the reporting papers. Consequentially, he has managed to evade authorial responsibility for the inclusion of such unfavorable descriptions of Americans in a letter addressed to the U.S. Secretary of State, and the elder sibling of Allen Dulles, the incumbent director of the CIA. The Americans are imperialists, but perhaps only in quotation marks, and they do interfere, but perhaps only allegedly. Thus read Loy Henderson's best characterizations of an empire's interventions in Iran, disguised by a veneer of punctuational objectivity, less than a day before the British and the American sun rises once again on the oil fields in the Persian lands.

But "for the colonized subject," once suggested Frantz Fanon, "objectivity is always directed against him."[2] The gesture of the objective representation of the voice of the subaltern by Henderson's selective punctuation use is certainly not helping raise the voice of the subordinated subject, but, rather, locates her as the supreme other and a mere effect of the imperial discourse. Although the inclusion of a direct quote should presumably clear the space for the subaltern to directly speak the truth beyond the confines of a discourse adopted by an American diplomat, it hardly allows her to achieve the possibility of being heard and disclose the truth of her oppression. Speaking *for* subaltern cannot facilitate the expression of the subaltern experience since subalternity is a predicament that cannot escape the problem of representation. The predicament of the

[2] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 37.

subaltern obstruction to disclosing the truth of her oppression persists with such tenacity even when her speech is incorporated into the objective space of a direct quotation. As long as the speech of the subaltern is iterated verbatim in a language within which inheres the binary of the colonized and the colonizer, it is subordinated to the privileged speech of the colonialist who forges the discursive limits of subaltern speech and speaks *for* her. The extent to which such subaltern voice, be it within or without the quotation marks, can appear as objective disclosure of her oppression remains always already overdetermined by the conditions of enunciation set by the colonizer, and depends on the subsequent question of subaltern audibility and legibility. How, then, does the inclusion of the quotation marks in Henderson's representation of the Iranian papers overdetermine the discursive limits within which Iranians have the capacity to voice their objection against "imperialist Americans" and "interfering diplomats"? And additionally, how is Henderson's power to *intervene* in the punctuation the precondition for the imperial *interventions* in Iranian affairs? In other words, how does his exercise of the power to intervene in language and represent the subaltern speech solidify the predicament of subalternity and obstruct the subaltern access to power? And, finally, could Henderson's colonial project have succeeded without the white man having first colonized the realm of representation?

The example of Henderson's telegram reveals that it is not only the exercise of speaking *for* the subaltern which proves incapable of giving her any voice, but that even a verbatim iteration of subaltern speech under the guise of objectivity cannot allow her the power to voice her objections. In lieu of raising her voice, Henderson's use of quotation marks, exclusively for the adjectives that critique American interventionism, serves a

different purpose: he represents the subaltern speech by a direct quotation which helps provincialize the indexicality of her voice and, by implication, helps universalize the indexicality of Henderson's claims presented outside punctuations. While Henderson provincializes the subaltern voice and, consequentially, delegitimizes the imperialism that she blames on Americans, he simultaneously disenfranchises the subaltern within the domain of representation, keeping her outside the self-universalizing tropes of Western metaphysics that he exclusively maintains for the white man. Such is the aporia of subalternity: on the one hand, the subaltern silence ought to be obviated and the particularity of her oppression needs to be disclosed and, on the other hand, the subaltern silence cannot be given voice even by, what Rosalind Morris dubs, "representational heroism."[3] The representation of the subaltern speech in the discourse of Henderson has only helped subordinate the former's idiom to the hegemonic language of the latter.

While the example of the animated goblet in the Burnt City demonstrates the limits of binarism and linearity in representational history, we have observed in the example of Henderson's telegram the provincializing function of a verbatim repetition of the subaltern speech when it occurs within a hegemonic representation. To retrieve the history of the deer's drama of the leap, one needs to move beyond representation, and in order to inscribe the history of the imperialist interventions in Iran, one ought to attempt forging the contours of a historiography which surrenders an iteration *in representation* in order to embrace a repetition *beyond representation*. This repetition *beyond* representation is the precondition for the subaltern agency, without which the subaltern speech would remain a simple effect of the imperial discourse: while her iteration *within*

[3] Rosalind C. Morris, *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 13.

representation, even if spoken *for* with a veneer of objectivity by the imperialist, would only solidify her silence, her repetition *beyond* representation exceeds the ideological formations that structure the predicament of subalternity.

At stake in this anti-representational historiography that moves beyond representation in order to retrieve the excess of history will be the valances of an alternate ethics and politics. While the subaltern access to power is inhibited in representation, and while the subaltern voice continues to be subordinated to that of the colonizer, she will find emancipation from her predicament once ceasing to seek the authenticity of her voice in the colonizer's language. It is only when the subaltern moves beyond the ideological formations of representation, which sustains her in a self-negating position designed to obstruct her from speech, that she begins to overcome her muteness and exert her political agency. Only then will the subaltern ultimately become a historical agent, inscribing the irreducible particularity of her agency beyond the conditions of domination and the possibilities of sovereignty overdetermined by the relations of causality, linearity and binarism inhering within the colonial and postcolonial discourse.

Repetition Beyond Representation

Moving from the animated goblet of the first section to the use of punctuation in the second underscores a broader trajectory of the project. I take these two examples to highlight an important framework for the three chapters of the dissertation. The "first" animation of history does not offer an origin story. It animates itself through a repetition of modulating shots ordered on a circular surface which is ruptured by the undecidability of a trunk. In the second vignette, the quoted iteration of the subaltern speech in Loy W.

Henderson's seemingly objective gesture provincializes the subaltern disclosure of her oppression and, under the guise of giving her voice, delegitimates her claim on universality. What could be then the condition of possibility of a history which inscribes what is excessive to representation without discursively forming the structured place of subalternity and subordinating it to the colonizer's speech? What image of Iranians would unfold out of such a history that defies binarity and obstructs teleology? How different would Iran's history emerge if it is construed to be a condition of alternate possibilities rather than an inevitable progression of the unfolding of events? And finally, how would such a history restore a historical agency to Iranian people and grant them access to power so they can speak for themselves?

My dissertation draws together postcolonial theory, film and media studies, and questions of aesthetics and politics in the modern Iran. Looking closely at Iran in the latter half of the 20th century, I explore the work of writers and artists concerned with the limits of representation and the political possibilities of aesthetic remediation. The cinematic and literary artifacts I explore are not simply representations of historical events, but are themselves instrumental in shaping history. For scholars across the political spectrum, Iranian modernity has often been understood as a transition narrative of becoming Western, and postcolonialism has tended to frame modern Iranian history as a response to Western imperialism. In either of these two accounts, Iranians cease to be historical agents unless they either adopt or reject a modernist project understood to be Western. My dissertation refuses this binary contrast and considers aesthetic repetition as the mode of expression of this historical excess. And it regards history as an aesthetic rather than a hermeneutic process which is intertwined with literary and cinematic

locutions. In dialogue with the scholarship in comparative literature and postcolonial studies, my dissertation demonstrates that aesthetics is capable of retrieving the excess of history which is essential to the subaltern political agency and the possibilities of her sovereignty.

I am drawn to writers and artists whose work explores the complex dynamics connecting aesthetic form (in Mehdi Akhavan-Sales's poetry, Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's novel, and Abbas Kiarostami's films) and historical events (the 1953 coup, the 1979 revolution, and the 1990 earthquake). Weaving together texts and events, I consider how each of these aesthetic forms (poetry, novels, and films) challenges a linear conception of historical progress with an alternate figuration of time. I argue that at the heart of these various textual examples is an aesthetics of repetition that capitalizes upon the unexpected. These various media, I suggest, not only engage and represent, but ultimately embody the form of the event itself.

The first chapter, "Untimely Repetitions: On Poetic Duration as Liberatory Politics," examines the nationalization movement of the Iranian oil industry in 1951, which was overturned by a U.S.-British orchestrated coup in two years. Against the backdrop of the politics of despair ensuing this event, and that of the Shah's implementation of the modernizing policies of the White Revolution in 1963, I focus on the rhythmic and durational character of Akhavan-Sales's poems, which replicate the duration of this failed modernizing revolution and the aborted movement for nationalizing Iran's oil. At a time when the Shah insisted on the glorification of a nationalist past to facilitate his modern vision of Iran's entering "the era of the Great

Civilization,"[4] Akhavan-Sales's poetry, not oblivious to the past, resists the modern scheme of a linearized narrative and the postcolonial conception of time as progress. I consider Akhavan-Sales's abrupt shift from the predictable rhythms of classical metrics in his work prior to the coup. This work employs the unruly rhythms of the so-called New Poetry (*She'r-e now*), especially prominent in his volumes published following the coup and the White Revolution. The rhythmic character of his poems gestures to a spontaneous turn of events in every line. In the poetry's capitalization on the unexpected, it offers repetitions that are not to be considered the fulfillment of normative expectations or as symptomatic of his hopeless defeatism, but instances of breaking with the status quo. With Akhavan-Sales's transformed poetic duration regarded as an opening to an historical agency that escapes representation, his poetics of unanticipated futures is not overdetermined by the agenda of capitalist imperialism. Nor is it to be subsumed under the postcolonial scheme of the ideological formations of international socialism, bourgeois nationalism, and political Islamism. In contrast to those who cast Akhavan-Sales as a defeatist and hopeless figure, I consider his use of the unexpected and the futureless as a key site from which to understand his revolutionary politics.

The second chapter, "Repetition Without a Past: On Novelistic Translation as Testimony," turns to the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. In doing so, I focus on Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's novel *The Colonel* (2011),

[4] "I think that we can very firmly and with absolute certainty say that Iran will not only become an industrial nation but in my assessment in 12 years' time enter what we say is the era of the Great Civilization. The era of the Great Civilization for those interested to know means the kind of welfare state where everybody born, until he is dead, will enjoy every kind of social insurances to permit him to go into industry, to other jobs, to work and to die in peace and tranquility. But also this welfare state doesn't mean that society will be completely undisciplined. It doesn't mean that our society will also sink into all the degradation that we can see in some places. Within the 12-year period illiteracy will be completely eradicated from this country." Quoted from the Shah's speech in Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921: The Pahlavis and After* (London: Pearson Education, 2003), 172-173.

which is centered on the story of a former colonel of the last Pahlavi Shah, his wife and his five children, and offers an alternate history of the years before and after the revolution as recollected by the colonel. Banned in Iran, the novel has only ever appeared in translation, first in German in 2009 and then in English in 2011, but notably not anywhere in Persian. Taking stock of the unique publication history of the text, I inquire about the status of this translation as a repetition without origin. If translation is already a way of avoiding the original text, how can a past memory, which is only accessible in translation, remember itself by avoiding itself? Is this remembering-by-avoiding different from history? What is the trace of the past in translation? And, under what conditions does the excess of history survive within a time which is neither linear nor binary, but translational?

The last chapter, "Repetition Without Return: On the Filmic Image as Immanent Politics," regards a cataclysmic earthquake in 1990 that destroyed the village of Koker in northern Iran. This chapter consists of an inquiry into the mechanism of repetition in Abbas Kiarostami's cinematic Koker trilogy, in which each sequel recasts the past films in a new light. Every sequel demands of the present a perspective informed by this newly illuminated past. In other words, the third film re-stages a key scene from the previous film, while the second film, which is re-shot in the diegesis of the third movie, survives and outlives the making of the last film. The trilogy discards the logical continuities of time and space, and in lieu of representing the earthquake, renders the event immanent to its film form. Countering the prevailing assessment that Kiarostami is an apolitical director, I argue that the trilogy alters the viewers' sensibilities by capturing in film the excess that is outside of the frame.

Conscious of its limited scope, this dissertation does not pretend to account for all Iranian history. As a modernist, in what follows, I focus exclusively on the latter half of the twentieth century. I situate the texts I examine within a wider set of concerns in comparative literature, postcolonial studies, and film theory. I take seriously Iranian history, language, and culture as much as the contours of aesthetic form—one is not subordinate to the other, but the study of aesthetics informs my understanding of the politics of history in modern Iran. In each chapter of this dissertation, I remain interested in the marginal, the contingent, the excessive: I explore a deictic ellipsis and a set of poetic ruptures in the first chapter on Mehdi Akhavan-Sales's poetry; a failed translation and a colon in the chapter on Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's novel; and, lastly, the outside of the frame in Abbas Kiarostami's Koker trilogy.

My concern in this project it to demonstrate that these texts open up new horizons for the enactment of political agency through their repetitions, and that the contours of this politics of sovereignty can be inscribed in their aesthetic excess. In each section of the dissertation, aesthetics does not simply reflect a historical event so much as it shapes how it is understood. It is not to be taken as a representation of the semantic content of the event, but rather, a singular time-space within which the event unfolds. The texts I examine in my chapters do not emplot the coup, the revolution, or the earthquake in grand teleological narratives of Iranian modernity. Instead, they reimagine the conditions within which these events are made to belong to an excessive politics. My project thus celebrates the potentials of repetition and remediation to both disrupt narrative form and to render an alternate history of the coup, the revolution, and the earthquake—and of modern Iran.

My aim in this dissertation is ultimately to deprovincialize Iranian history by moving beyond the preconditions of representation. It is to take seriously the oblique opening of the trunk on the earthen vase and the ruptured continuity of the deer's leap around the urn. It is to consider the anachrony of a movement which is at once directed towards the future and towards the past. It is to inscribe a history of the subaltern without representing her voice in the hegemonic discourse of the colonizer. It is to make the subaltern not the site of irreducible particularity, nor a matter of citable transparency. It is to listen to the echoes of the excessive and the cacophony of the untranslatable. It is to turn to repetition beyond representation. "The project of provincializing 'Europe,'" avers Dipesh Chakrabarty, "refers to a history that does not yet exist."[5] This dissertation is an endeavor in the interest of such a history.

[5] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 42.

II. CHAPTER 1
UNTIMELY REPETITIONS: ON POETIC DURATION AS LIBERATORY POLITICS

> Il n'y a guère d'histoire que de la perception, tandis que ce dont on fait l'histoire est plutôt la matière d'un devenir, non pas d'une histoire.
> — Deleuze et Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (428)

> All history is really the history of perception, and what we make history with is the matter of a becoming, not the subject matter of a story.
> —Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (347)

> هنگامی که زندگی مجموعه‌ای از دردهای خرد و بزرگ باشد و در مرحله‌ی توحش، هنر ناچار فریاد است.
> — مهدی اخوان ثالث، "هنر موظف" (۱۴۷)

> When life is comprised of a multitude of enormous and small pains, and when it remains in the state of savagery, art will be an inevitable clamor.
> —Mehdi Akhavan-Sales, "Responsible Art" (147)

In February 1948, Mehdi Akhavan-Sales (1929-1990) adopted the pseudonym *Mim. Omid*, literally M. Hope, as advised by Abodlhossein Nosrat.[6] In spite of his name change, he assumed a posture of hopelessness and defeatism commonly seen in the years following the 1953 *coup d'état* in Iran. Akhavan-Sales represents the most prominent figure of a generation of poets, literary authors, and political intellectuals whose emotive universe was largely under the sway of hope erupting around the nationalization of Iran's oil in 1951. Three years after the 1953 *coup d'état* immediately following his release from prison, Akhavan-Sales published his second volume of poetry entitled *Zemestān* (*Winter*). This volume registered not only a distinctly somber tone, but it also moved

[6] Morteza Kakhi*, Bāgh-e bi-Bargi. Yādnāmeh-ye Mehdi Akhavan-Sales. 1st ed* (Tehran: Zemestān, 2006), 398.

away from the poetic language of his first volume, *Arghanun* (*Organ,* 1951), published a mere two years prior to the coup. In *Arghanun,* Akhavan-Sales remained faithful to the metrics of classical Persian poetry, employing an equal number of feet as well as regular rhymes. That volume included classical poetic forms of *qasīda*, *rubāʿī*, and *masnavi,* among others. By contrast, in *Zemestān*, Akhavan-Sales shifted to employing *sheʿr-e now* (literally, "New Poetry"), also known as *sheʿr-e Nimāyi* after the founder of modern Persian poetry, Nima Yushij (1897-1960).[7] Having abandoned using lines of equal length and consistent rhymes, Akhavan-Sales's poems were still distinct from Nima's narrative poetry in that they lacked in, as scholars have noted, a narrative conclusion. Akhavan-Sales's lack of poetic closures has been critically received as a token of his defeatism in the wake of the politics of despair ensuing the 1953 coup. While Mohammadi Amoli dubs him "the true defeatist narrator,"[8] Najaf Daryabandari believes Akhavan-Sales "was never really very 'hopeful'"—even before the coup, he argues, the 18-year-old Akhavan-Sales's poem was rejected and torn up by the editor of *Mardom* daily who had found the poem to be irrevocably hopeless.[9]

Unlike the existing scholarship that casts Akhavan-Sales, due to his repetitive poetics and failed emplotment, as a "defeatist" poet,[10] in what follows I consider his

[7] Farzad Karimi, *Revāyat-i Tāzeh bar Lowh-e Kohan: Tahlil-e Revāyat dar Sheʿr-e Now-e Iran* (Tehran: Ghatreh, 2013), 297.

[8] Mohammad Reza Mohammadi Amoli, *Āvāz-e Chogur. Zendegi va Sheʿr-e Mehdi Akhavān Sāles* (Tehran: Sāles, 1380), 288.

[9] Najaf Daryābandari, "Akhavān Shāʿer-e Shekast" in *Bāgh-e bi-Bargi,* 247.

[10] See Abdolali Dastgheib, *Shāʿer-e Shekast* (Tehran: Amitis, 2006). For further reference, you can see Reza Baraheni, "Akhavan, Shāʿer-e Bozorg-e Sarzanesh-e Jahān," *Ādineh, no.* 50-51 (Mehr 1369): 82-89. You can refer to Simin Behbahani, "Rāvi-ye Vaz'-e Zamān, gāh ba Nāleh, gāh ba Faryād," *Donyā-ye Sokhan, no.* 34 (Mehr 1369): 50-54.

transformed poetic duration not as a token of his political defeatism, but as the site of his liberatory politics.[11] With *Winter*, Akhavan-Sales turned firmly away from the predictable temporality of classical metrics and pivoted to a poetics of transformed duration, a poetics of unanticipated futures, even of futurelessness. I argue that his politics relies less on the history reflected in his poetry than on this transformed poetic duration of irregular metrics, narrative repetitions, and unfulfilled closures.[12] While an exclusive consideration of its semantic content would cast his poetry as a representation of ontologically fixed events, my shift to his poetic duration refuses to take historical events as ontologically immutable and poetry as an epistemological site that merely reflects a fixed history. Instead of regarding poetry as severed from historical events, I consider it as an event within which the orientation and rhythm of history is reconfigured. Akhavan-Sales's poetry not only reflects and represents, it reimagines the conditions within which a historical event unfolds. The duration and rhythmic character of his poems following the coup, i.e. their repetitiveness and unforeseeable metrics, challenge the conception of history as progress and demand a story of the present that is not attuned to the contours of possible action overdetermined by colonial modernity and postcolonial resistance. I contend that the unforeseeable rhythms of his poems reject a linear history of

[11] To read more on the reception of Akhavan's oeuvre by Iranian scholars, you can see Simin Behbahani, "Akhavān joz az Ranj-e Digarān Nanālid," *Ādineh, no.* 50-51 (Mehr 1369): 73-78. Or you can see Ebrahim Golestan, "Ān Juri ke u Migoft ʿAruz Kāfi Nist, Sharaf Bāyad!" *Donyā-ye Sokhan*, no. 34 (Mehr 1369): 46–49, and "Si Sāl va Bishtar bā Mehdi Akhavān Sāles," *Irānshenāsi, no.* 8 (Winter 1369): 755–73. Also see Morteza Kakhi, "Rāvi-ye Qesseh-hāye Rafteh az Yād," Interview by Ruhollah Raja'i. *Sharq, no.* 12 (Shahrivar 1385): 19. And Esmʿil Khoʾi, "M. Omid. Shāʿer-e Shekast?" *Donyā-ye Sokhan, no.* 44 (Mehr 1370): 42–51. In addition, see Emad Khorasani, "Sheʿr agar Khub ast pas Shāʿer Cherā…?" *Donyā-ye Sokhan, no.* 34 (Mehr 1369): 62–63. You can also read Forugh Sahba, "Kohangarāʾi-ye Vāzhegāni dar Sheʿr-e Akhavan Sales," *Pazhuhesh-e Zabān va Adabiyāt-e Fārsi, no.* 5 (Autumn/Winter 2005–6): 41–64.

[12] Duration is employed here as one of the two components of representation, in the sense of the pure presence of time that is not spatialized and therefore is not imbued with extensivity. See Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 22.

progress and transfigure the defaulted ordering of the present as a progression pinned onto the futural orientation of hope. While the future-oriented hope gives direction to the progressive history of modernity, it renders the past as failed or accomplished and the present as either saturated in hope or in hopelessness. Akhavan-Sales's poetry in the 1950s forecloses the futurity of hope and, by its reconfigured poetic duration—that is by its repetitions, failed closures, and persistent returns to the present—demands a transfiguration of the world.

Rather than being emblematic of the failure of Akhavan-Sales's plot structures and his liberatory imagination, his repetitions speak instead to the aesthetic suspension of a historical despair stemming from a failure to fulfill the future-oriented hope. As he himself articulates, he essentializes the present and prioritizes it over past and future, asserting that it is only "present that really exists and nothing else."[13] The altered duration of his poems following the 1953 coup, i.e. their unpredictable repetitions and rhythmic character as well as their lack of narrative conclusions, serve as a key site from which to think through his liberatory politics.

Ellipses and Futurelessness

In the "Afterward" to the 1965 edition of his fourth poetry collection, *Az in Avestā* (*Of This Avestā*), Mehdi Akhavan-Sales makes a passing gesture to his inclusion of dates marking the composition of each of his poems. He singles out one particular piece, which

[13] "I do not have any conception of time in poetry. There is only a lasting and eternal continuity of the immemorial and eternal flow of the moments of existence. Past and future are arbitrary and relative concepts concocted by the figments of the imagination of historians, astronomers, and annalists. For me, there is only the present that really exists and nothing else." See Mehdi Akhavan-Sales, *Az in Avestā* (Tehran: Zemestān, 1965), 152.

he suggests not only needed the specific month and year, but also the particular day of its composition. He employs an Arabic imperative, "*Fa ta'ammal*," to urge his readers to "reflect" on his intention.[14] And he marks the poem in question, "Mard va Markab" ("The Man and the Vehicle"), as having been composed on the 4-6th of Bahman, 1341 (January 24-26th, 1963)—the precise days, in other words, when the reforms of the so-called White Revolution were embraced by Iranians in a nationwide referendum.

As a modernizing project, this bloodless revolution from above aimed at replacing the semi-feudal system of landownership with a capitalist form of agriculture.[15] Furthermore, the White Revolution was more of a political rather than economic policy which originally meant to strengthen the authority of the Shah at the time of both national and geopolitical uncertainties and to preclude the possibility of a red revolution. Geopolitically, the Shah was concerned about the revolutionary developments sweeping across the neighboring Iraq and Turkey. While a 1958 revolution had led to the carnage of Iraq's royal family, a coup against the Menderes government had shaken Turkey in 1960. Additionally, the pro-U.S. Shah faced domestic threats of the nationalist National Front, the Marxist Tudeh Party, and Mohammad Mosaddeq.[16] The Shah was promising rapid modernization through the White Revolution during the tumultuous years following his return to the throne. His reimposition to his office was preceded by a successful CIA-

[14] Akhavan-Sales, *Az in Avestā*, 111.

[15] The White Revolution was a program launched by the second Pahlavi Shah which included six proposals, namely, redistribution of land, nationalization of forests, privatization of state-owned factories, profit-sharing for industrial workers, establishing women's suffrage, and establishing rural literacy corps. In January of 1963, an absolute majority of voters approved the proposed program. See Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 424.

[16] Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, 147-8.

orchestrated coup in 1953 that had resulted in toppling of Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister, Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq, under house arrest at the moment. With Iran's oil revenues monopolized by the state, the reforms of the White Revolution could only reinforce state-based capitalism and only tighten further the government's control over the countryside.[17]

Confronted by the frustration posed by Shah's return to Iran and his promise of a modernized future, Akhavan-Sales faced this historical moment following a coup that marked, in the words of one scholar, "the most traumatic event in modern Iranian history, a trauma from which the people have yet to recover."[18] Caught in this delicate interplay between past, present and future, one finds oneself called upon to address the urgent question posed by David Scott in *Conscripts of Modernity*: what happens when "the imagined futures that had given point and direction to the intervention in the present and the rehistoricization of the past suddenly [evaporate] as a possible horizon of hope and longing?"[19]

Referring to the date of this historic referendum on the proposed articles of the White Revolution, "The Man and the Vehicle" contains an epigraph alluding to an earlier moment in an anecdote from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (c. 977 and 1010 CE). In the battle between Rostam and Ashkbus, Ashkbus humiliates Iran's legendary epic hero for his poor fighting capabilities, revealing his proclivity for deception to be his sole strength on the battlefield. "You are never a man capable of fighting and using weapons," thus

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[17] Nikki R. Keddie and Yann Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 148-9.

[18] Hamid Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted* (New York: The New Press, 2008), 127.

[19] David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*: *The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 40.

Ashkbus addresses Rostam, “I see nothing with you but deception and humor” [“To hargez neʾi mard-e razm-o selih/ Nabinam hami joz fosun-o mezih”]. The poem thus provides a spurious image of an ideal savior whose long-awaited arrival is promised as a possible end to the tribulations of the disenfranchised classes of the Iranian society. While this is a deception, it is also a warning against a popular tendency to believe in the false promises and hollow protections of the modernizing White Revolution implemented by an imposed despot who has unduly usurped his totalitarian scepter.

In this particular poem marked by its specific dates, Akhavan-Sales exclusively berates the proposed promises of the White Revolution as a subterfuge, putting the Shah, above all others, at the receiving end of his critique. Indeed, his poem casts the Shah in a banalized version of *Shahnameh*’s sublime world, replete with humorous hyperboles to parody the elevated significance of the epic hero. The initial lines from Ferdowsi’s epic do more than set the poem’s tone. While Ferdowsi’s Rostam eventually triumphs over Ashkbus and proves his mockery unfounded, Akhavan-Sales pictures his presumed hero as worthy of that initial humiliation. Akhavan-Sales’s critique is aimed at a national savior who, unlike Rostam, is depicted as a deceitful rider bearing fake promises for his people. The poem’s parody does not simply result in a degraded universe parallel to that of *Shahnameh*. Instead, it reclaims the false accusation against a just hero and turns it into a just accusation against a false hero. In doing so, the poem reverses the anticipated realization of the heroic promise in Ferdowsi’s narrative into an unfulfilled epic emplotment. It thus precludes the proclaimed parallelism between the epigraph and the rest of the poem and renders explicit the failure to accomplish a promise. And in stark contrast to the Rostam of *Shahnameh*, Akhavan-Sales’s modernized newcomer does not

ride the noble Rakhsh, Rostam's renowned stallion, but rather, he sits atop an assembled vehicle, an emblem of modernity, before he traverses deserts towards *Khandestān*, literally the Laughter-land, which Akhavan-Sales states, in a footnote, is located "between nothingness and wasteland":[20]

بار دیگر خویشتن برخاست

تکه تکه تخته ای مومی به هم پیوست

در خیالش گفت: دیگر مرد

رخش رویین برنشست و رفت سوی عرصه ی ناورد

گفت راوی: سوی خندستان

He stood up.

Assembling wood pieces using wax.

He thought to himself, "The other man,

mounted his stallion Rakhsh and headed towards the battle."

The narrator added: towards Laughterland.

[Bār-e digar khishtan barkhāst

Tekkeh tekkeh takhtehʾi mumi be ham peivast

Dar khiālash goft: "digar mard

Rakhsh-e ruʾin barneshast-o raft suy-e arseh-ye nāvard."

Goft rāvi: suy-e Khandestān.]

The White Revolution, propagated by the Shah as an illusory compensation for the declining political freedom and increasing economic inequality, is held up to incisive

[20] Quite interesting is Akhavan-Sales's offering of a footnote on the geographical whereabouts of Khandestān, saying it is "a desert between *Hich* (Nada) and *Puchābād* (Wasteland)." See Akhavan-Sales, *Az in Avestā*, 28.

ridicule in the displaced narrative of the poem: the long-awaited arrival of the uncanny savior and the realization of his liberatory promises.

Against this backdrop, what is intriguing about the poem is not the semantic content of the poem or the historical context to which it alludes, but instead an ellipsis. Although in his "Afterward," Akhavan-Sales insisted on marking this poem with the specific date, this deictic supplement disappears in later editions of the book, making "Mard va Markab" the sole poem of that whole volume without a temporal assignation (fig. 4). Far from noting how the attachment of the date pertains to the represented content of the poem, I am intrigued by the politics that results from the initial inclusion and the subsequent omission of the date. The addition and the elimination of the date both come in response to the same political apparatuses that define the text as belonging to the institution of literature, delineating the limits of what is sayable and visible. The same censorship apparatus which lends to the added date a cryptic meaning, codifies the political meaning of the poem when the date is missing in later editions. On the one hand, the addition of the date allows the content of the poem to function almost metaphorically. It casts the world of the poem as a significant parallel to that of its contemporaneous society and, consequently, re-inscribes Iranian modernity and the figure of the Shah as spectral simulacra of that bygone epic universe and the lost national hero of *Shahnameh*. In other words, the past world of *Shahnameh* is parodied as a means of criticizing the current context, within which the poem arose.

On the other hand, the effacement of the deictic specification reconceptualizes the

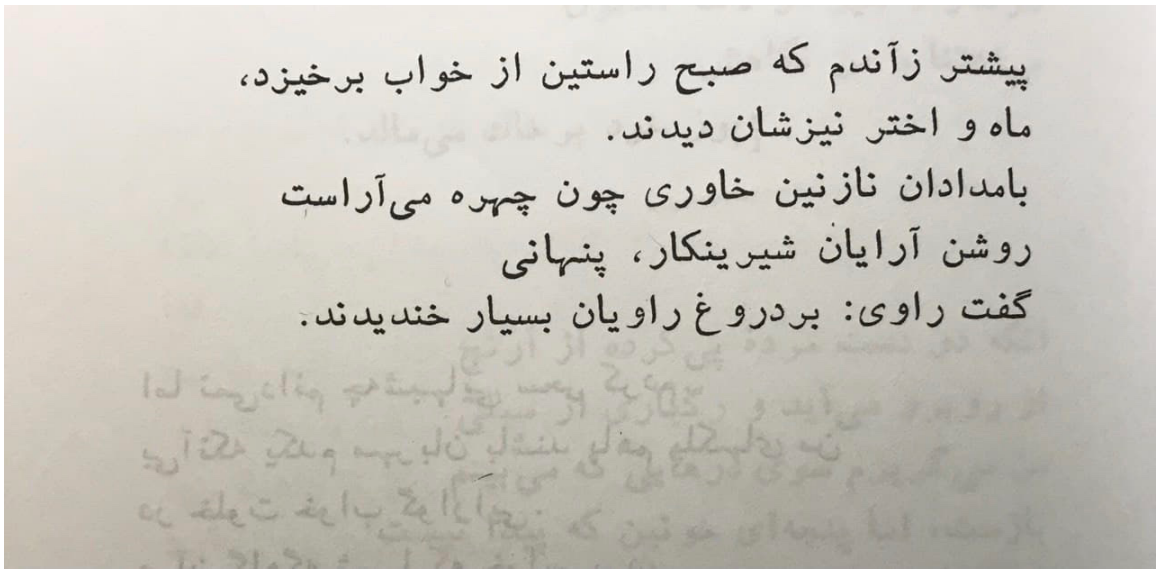
پیشتر زآندم که صبح راستین از خواب برخیزد،
ماه و اختر نیزشان دیدند.
بامدادان نازنین خاوری چون چهره می‌آراست
روشن آرایان شیرینکار، پنهانی
گفت راوی: بردروغ راویان بسیار خندیدند.

Fig. 4 Scan of the last stanza of "Mard va Markab." which is not followed by any dates. Although Akhavan-Sales asserts that "Mard va Markab" is the only poem in his book *Az in Avestā* that is marked not only by its month and year, but also by the exact day of its writing, this poem lacks a date in the later editions of the book.

local as universal. The elimination of the poem's date reconfigures an unfulfilled yet promised national future that could only appear within the terms overdetermined by an imperial coup and an anti-colonial past of a national polity. Released from its overdetermined colonial past of Iran, the poem can gesture towards a universal politics of emancipation. But if the date can impact the indexical meaning of the poem both when it is added and omitted, at what point does the poem come to a closure? Where does it complete its enunciation? Does it cease to speak in its last line? Or does the non-literary date added to the poem let the poem continue to speak and, in that excess, continue to demonstrate what it aims to say? And finally, what are we to make out of the function of that date, if the non-literary imperative of a "*Fa ta'ammal*" does not provoke us to read the literary otherwise? How are we to reflect upon an excess that both is and is not part of the poem, a date which alters the poem's meaning when added, but haunts it even more when eliminated?

Between the inclusion and subsequent omission of the date, “Mard va Markab” encompasses a politics that does not emerge from the poem's indexical relation to its event of the White Revolution or the figure of the humiliated Shah. In other words, it is not the result of the poem’s representation of a succession of political events. This excessive politics generates from the added and eliminated date, an ellipsis which haunts the poem and specifies its indexicality in the first place. On the one hand, although the date, as a paratexual supplement, is not subsumed under the same literary register of the poem, on the other hand, it does belong to the poem in how it determines its political indexicality, once added and equally so when omitted.

The poem’s politics is here performative—a politics that the poem manages to perform in spite of what it says or what it fails to say. Out of the economy of the deictic addition and ellipsis, both equally constitutive of the same poem, emerges a new politics as a surplus value which is excessive to the semantic content of the poem, heterogeneous to the value of representation and to all representational values. If emplotment requires that a narrative closure bestows a meaning on the whole of duration, its lack in this poem interrupts the duration and keeps the poem open onto other literary and nonliterary meanings. As a result of this deictic ellipsis, the poem performs a politics beyond its semantic content and determines the scope of its indexicality. This political gesture does not signify a resistance, but is rather performed as an enunciation without a signification. It is a performance that is not confined to the limits of possible action overdetermined by colonial modernity and postcolonial resistance. As a singular enunciation, this elliptic gesture elides the colonial and postcolonial regimes of sensibility as well as their overdetermined maps of the sayable and the visible. Without a semantic meaning, this

gesture is neither a postcolonial resistance, nor an affirmation of colonial conditions, but instead a singular performance beyond their overdetermined contours of possible action. This non-signifying performance evokes Akhavan-Sales's conception of poetry as what he calls "excessive," "irrelevant," and "nonsense."[21]

If Akhavan-Sales's work has been received as a protest against the universal oppression and the unjust human conditions all over the world,[22] its universality should be hardly ascribed to an investment in the empty cosmopolitanism of a neoliberal post-politics. While his poetry has been exclusively considered in terms of its represented content,[23] I regard its altered duration as his poetical politics generated beyond the overdeterminations of colonial regime of sensibility. It is the omission of the date and the use of the epic parody as a displaced story of the present which both lend "Mard va Markab" a universal address. The deictic and the narrative ellipses are the effects of the poem's material situatedness—they result from the poem's relation to the limits of the sayable terrains charted by the Shah's censorship apparatus. The state censorship has left its mark on the poem by having the poem resort, in the first place, to the use of parody as a narrative strategy for chronicling the present and, further, to the addition and omission of the date to specify its indexicality. Therefore, it can be argued that the poem moves towards a cosmopolitanism not despite but because of its local circumstances of censorship. It is owing to its local subjection to the legal institution that the poem is shot

[21] Mehdi Akhavan-Sales, *Ākhar-e Shahnameh* (Tehran: Zemestān, 2002), 141.

[22] Reza Baraheni, in *Bāghe bi-Bargi* (Tehran: Zemestān, 2006), 208.

[23] See Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, *Recasting Persian Poetry: Scenarios of Poetic Modernity in Iran* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2012). Also see Kamran Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000).

through with ellipsis of the date and includes a displaced story of the present, which in turn endow the poem with a universal significance.

Similarly, the collective subjectivity in Akhavan-Sales's poetry is deeply entrenched in the particularity of the poet's "I" and more so in the specificity of his socio-historical milieu.[24] The presumed politics of emancipation—that is, the content of the poem represented in the poetic displacements of its metaphors—does not exhaust the political critique developed in his work. Other forms of politics are indeed at work in liberating the poem not only from the orthodox tradition of metrical uniformity of classical Persian prosody, but also from its responsibility before a horrendous legal institution that enforces censorship. The universalism resulting from the material conditions of the poems' production gives rise to a politics that rules out the possibility of the exclusive attachment of the represented marginalized figures to an imaginary conception of the nation. This universalist politics alters the relationship between the literary and the historical, as it drives a wedge into the self-identificatory imagination of a nation-state, performing what Rancière identifies as the insertion of a "literary disincorporation" into the "imaginary identification" of the body politic.[25] This disincorporation reconfigures the overdetermined limits of possible action, and recasts the enunciatory limits within which the poetic "I" stands responsible before the legal institution. The poet can now speak locally, but mean it universally, and vice versa. The

[24] Akhavan-Sales distinguishes between an "I" referring to the poet's subjective experience, a second "I" which is more social and public, another "I" that speaks for humankind and, finally, a sublime "I" that is superhuman. In great poetry, he believes, the private "I" of the poet reflects every other human being and can express, whether in rage and despair or in exhilaration and hope, the common humanity that transcends the private self of the poet. See Akhavan-Sales, *Az in Avestā*, 113-116.

[25] Jacques Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*: *The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. and ed. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 35-6.

cosmopolitanism inhering at the core of Akhavan-Sales's poetry enables it to quit a Third-World nationalism as a reactionary return to the origin and, instead, lets it grow into an imaginary embodiment of the universal disenfranchised. This universalist politics, which is rooted in the poet's local situatedness, abstracts the legally responsible "I" of the poet into the expressive poetic voice of a universal subject that remains irresponsible, freely, before the Shah's enforced regulations of a procrustean censorship.

Therefore, from the very outset, the politics of Akhavan-Sales's poetry is two-fold. First, a semantic politics erected against the politics of despair, imposed on the Iranian society by Western imperialism. This politics is produced in response to, and within, the sayable and visible terms of the colonial and postcolonial regimes of sensibility. Second, a performative politics which interrupts the duration of the poem through deictic ellipses and displaced narratives, repetitions and new rhythmic characters, lack of closures and failed emplotments. This latter politics guards the enunciations of the poem against the intrusions of the censorship apparatus.

Critics have expressed uncertainty as to Akhavan-Sales's political leanings, speculating that he was a leftist Marxist opposed to Mosaddeq, or even aligned with the Tudeh Party at the time of the coup. Others, however, have cast a shadow of doubt over that view. Amongst the people who have argued for Akhavan-Sales's disagreement with Mosaddeq is the poet Esmaʿil Khoʾi, who, although acknowledging Akhavan-Sales's later disappointment with the prevailing politics of despair running from the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11 till the 1953 coup, believes Akhavan-Sales was categorically an opponent of Mosaddeq, at least initially, at the time of writing one of his poems entitled, "Setarvan" in 1331. He calls Akhavan-Sales, for the sake of registering

that despair in his poetry, "the affective critic of our history of loss."[26] Nevertheless, what is certain is that along with many other leftist intellectuals, he was arrested in the aftermath of the coup. But unlike others, he refused to sign a letter of apology and ended up in prison for a few months.[27]

Focusing on this hitherto neglected politics by scholars, I would suggest that a consideration of Akhavan-Sales's poetry with an exclusive regard to its semantic content and represented events stops short of reading the performative politics at work in his oeuvre following the 1953 coup. In my reading of his 1965 poetry collection *Of This Avestā*, the performative politics of his poetry can be traced not in his poetic articulations, but rather apropos of the gestures performed through ellipses, repetitions, and new metrical characters. These performative gestures interrupt the duration of the poems—i.e. they manipulate their presumed pasts and anticipated futures—and thus challenge the characterization of Iranian modernity as a progressive emplotment.[28] While colonial and postcolonial regimes of sensibility would define the present as a story of hopefulness progressing towards a state-sponsored capitalism, or towards a postcolonial nationalist or Marxist future, Akhavan-Sales's performative politics rejects hope and thus forecloses its futural orientation. It thus demands a story of the present that is unpinned from capitalist, nationalist, or Marxist futures he has seen through.

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[26] See Mohammad Reza Mohammadi Amoli, *Āvāz-e Chogur: Zendegi va Sheʿr-e Mehdi Akhavan-Sales* (Tehran: Sāles, 2001), 288-291.

[27] Ibid., 61-64.

[28] This performative gesture does not merely redistribute the memory of the literary text, that is to say, to borrow from Bergson, its past-oriented "recollection-memory" to which it refers, but also its future-oriented "contraction-memory" towards which it aspires. See Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonim* (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 52.

“The Man and the Vehicle”

Its semantic content and the performative of its supplement notwithstanding, “Mard va Markab” thematizes the failure of narrative emplotment through a set of repetitions with an increasingly hyperbolic weight, including the doubling rhetorical frame of parody itself. The poem borrows a line from Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh,* wherein Ferdowsi describes the rising dust in the battlefield in which Rostam encounters the king of Turān, Afrasiab, as a scene in which one of the seven floors of the earth joins the seven floors of the sky, turning into eight the layers of the latter:

ز گرد سواران درآن پهن دشت

زمین شش شد و آسمان گشت هشت

For the rising dust behind the horse riders in that vast field

The earth turned six and the sky turned eight

[Ze gard-e savārān dar ān pahn dasht

Zamin shesh shod-o āsemān gasht hasht]

Akhavan-Sales repeats this line three times in the poem until the skies turn ten, while each time the characters—which include two mice, two road workers, and a rural couple with eight children—voice their suffering and articulate their hopes for the arrival of the savior. And in each instance, they are always cut short by the rider’s swift passage on the road. Akhavan-Sales offers the account of the poem through the voice of a narrator, who is not spared Akhavan-Sales’s derision for his mental slip, as he once misuses verbs for his intended subjects: “The narrator said: the moon was not empty, but the desert was shining/ No God! The moon was shining, but the desert was not empty” [“Goft rāvi: māh khalvat bud, ammā dasht mitābid/ Na khodāyā, māh mitābid, ammā dasht khalvat bud”].

Additionally, Akhavan-Sales includes "…The narrator said" […Goft rāvi] as a statement in the beginning of the poem which opens the first line only after the arrival of three periods. A similar ellipsis marks the end of the epigraph—Ferdowsi's name is followed by the conjunction "and" as well as three periods. These successive ellipses suggest a continuity between Ferdowsi's epic hero and Akhavan-Sales's humiliated hero, but also places the poem's absentminded narrator in the position of narrativizing a world deflated compared to that of Ferdowsi's poem. The lofty register adopted by the narrator revealed in the repetition of the line from *Shahnameh* as well as his unreliability as a fallacious storyteller is corroborated by his utterance in the final line of the poem: "The narrator said: they laughed heartily at the lies of narrators" ["Goft rāvi: bar dorugh-e rāviān besyār khandidand"]. But what indexical relation does this unreliable narrative bear to the historical events and figures, especially to the projected reforms of the White Revolution and to the parodied figure of the Shah? Where is the principle of verisimilitude by means of which the poem can represent its history and speak its politics? If we were to consider its semantic content to have exhausted the politics of "Mard va Markab," what could we deem to be the poem's represented content if the poem declares itself as unreliable at the level of narrative, and if it is stuck in a non-place between an opening ellipsis and a final negation, between "the nothingness and wasteland" towards which the Shah too thinks he is destined? Which historical representation? What authorial defeatism? And wherefore the ellipses?

This poem does not simply proclaim that narratives are erroneous and unreliable, nor does it merely aver that the narrators cannot be trusted. It rather presents that presumable word of wisdom via the mouth of an absentminded narrator who can hardly

be trusted himself. Akhavan-Sales, the other narrator of the poem, who himself had resisted the Shah's didacticism by refusing to write a letter of apology in prison, is not out there to offer anyone a moral, a ground for yet another tedious judgement. An historicist reading of the poem's politics, predicated upon the assumption that the poem represents ontologically immutable events that are assigned a specific location in time and place, will regard the poem as an epistemological site of reflecting a world that precedes the poem. Such a reading will consider the poem's politics in terms of its chronicling of its own socio-historical events. This reading will focus on the represented figure of the Shah and the poem's critique of the White Revolution.

The shortcomings of such an historicist reading of "Mard va Markab" are threefold. First, it considers the poem a representation of fixed historical events, while turning a blind eye to its subversion of its status as a narrative representation. Second, it is informed by a conception of history that dissociates aesthetics from politics. Therefore, it considers poetry as a secondary site of epistemological unfixity which merely reflects the immutable events of history. In this view, "Mard va Markab" is not perceived to be capable of disclosing a world on its own, but is solely a capturing apparatus that represents a world which is passively waiting to be mastered by human rationality, is objectified by an anthropocentric representation, and is perceived to be a world of matter without a hidden power or virtuality.[29] This conventional reading thus neglects the world-making power of the poem itself, i.e. the political sensibilities it discloses less by the representation of a preceding world than by the generation of a world through its elliptic and repetitive performances. Third, this historicist reading is predicated upon a

[29] For Bergson, the world assimilates to an "image" only after it is deprived of its virtualities and turned into matter. See Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 41.

conservative notion of politics. It is only capable of reading such political acts that might appear within the overdetermined regimes of colonial and postcolonial sensibilities. Politics, in such a reading, takes place only in affirmation of, or reaction to, colonialism. Therefore, this historicist view not only neglects the fact that in either case of affirmation or reaction to colonialism it is indeed the colonial regime of sensibility that is being enacted, but it also fails to consider the politicality of any enunciation that does not appear within the contours of possible action delineated by the colonial and postcolonial regimes.

As against this historicist reading, "Mard va Markab" forecloses the futurity of its narrative by negating its beginning—through an ellipsis—and its end—by a second ellipsis. The progress of the humiliated savior, riding on his assembled vehicle, not only ends up in his ultimate fall into "the profundity of a valley" [dar zharfnā-ye darreh], but fails to find a closure once the forgetful narrator, at the end of the poem, calls out storytellers for their inherent lies. Positioned in a hiatus between two ellipses and related by a self-subversive narrator, the poem thus does not represent a fixed world that precedes it in a linear narrative. It brackets the conception of history as progress by releasing it from its temporal anchors of past and future and its commitment to a progress that renders the present as hopeful or hopeless, and past as either failed or accomplished. What the poem announces remains uncertain owing to its narrative suspension, but it certainly demands a new story of the present within that suspension, a story that rejects the historical projects mapped onto the future-oriented vector of hope. The poem does so by juxtaposition of the levity of the repeated hyperboles with the gravity of the political critique; by the coextensive presence of the sublime epic and the playful parody; by the

inclusion and elimination of a date that blurs the boundaries of literary discourse and legal institution.

The poem does not represent the world as what precedes it; it robs the world of its rational grounding by revealing the self-subversive irrationality of narrative representation. In lieu of perceiving a preceding world to conjure up a memory, it evokes a memory of the mythical past of *Shahnameh* in order to perceive the present. Conjuring up the mythical past in order to understand the present, the poem, therefore, transforms itself into what precedes the world that it discloses in its full irrationality. It becomes the memory of a world that has lost its grounds for significance. The emancipatory promises of the White Revolution cease to make sense, but only if the world remembers its poem.

"Inscription"

Another poem included in the volume *Az in Avestā*, which is a collection of 25 poems, is a curious piece entitled "Katibeh" ("Inscription"). In "Inscription," a group of prisoners bound by fetters are summoned by a spectral voice heard from an unknown place. The persona of the poem employs an inclusive "we" to speak of himself and these people whose only collective identification and commonality are the material chains holding them together: "Bound to each other, yet only through their feet" ["Hame bā yekdegar peivasteh, lik az pāy"]. The haunting voice, whose origin and reality the poetic persona is unable to ascertain, beckons the shackled inmates to seek access to a secret inscribed in a stone by performing a reading act.[30] Set against the background of their

[30] The poem opens with an epigraph of an Arabic proverb which reads: "more avaricious than the man who turned the stone" ["Atmaʿa min ghālib al-sakhra"].

desire for emancipation and cast in a setting with conspicuous resemblance to the revelation of Quran to Mohammad in his invitation to reading the first verse, that secret would reveal, we are told, a message inscribed by the ancient. The inscription withdraws its secret from one of the prisoners who eagerly approaches the stone to disclose its truth. To the bewilderment of all, it reads: "He alone who turns me around/ Will learn my secret" ["Kasi rāz-e marā dānad/ ke az in ru be ān ruyam begardānad"]. The act of reading fails to demonstrate the promised truth of the secret, calling, instead, for yet another reading attempt. When the prisoners join forces to turn the stone, they are enthralled as soon as one of them recites the inscription concealed on its opposite side: "He alone who turns me around/ Will learn my secret," reads this second revelation of the message as it defers, once more, the unveiling of its secret, and invites them, once again, to perform a further act of reading. For a second time, the concealed message hides itself in its aborted revelation. Upon turning of the stone, the same line is repeated in a loop of repeated trials and failures, now in a different temporality that is marked by the memory of an earlier attempt to read.

The secret that was to be actualized remains a virtuality:[31] it is thwarted not for having a fixed ontology inaccessible to their reading attempts, but rather since the secret has no ontology. As a hidden message that does not exist and reveals no content, the inscription on the stone bears no semantic revelation. And yet, that virtual secret manages to trigger a set of repeated reading performances, a repetition of reading attempts that

[31] I employ the term "virtual" as it is used by Bergson and Deleuze. The virtual apposes "the actual," but it is "real," either in the past, in memory, in dreams, or in intention. The opposite of the "really existing," however, is "possible," which is not real, but might be actual. So the possible is never real, but the virtual is. On the contrary, the virtual is never actual, but the possible might be. See Rob Shields, *The Virtual* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 18-44.

each time takes place with an altered temporality. The secret, therefore, is not a non-event, as it makes things happen in the world: it makes the inmates anticipate, climb the hill, persevere, turn the stone, and attempt to read. But if the inscription says nothing, represents nothing, and if it bears no semantic content, how does it call for a series of actions and how does it manage to manipulate the state of affairs?

The meaning of this repeated failure is not subsumed under the domain of representation and the semantics of the secret. The inscription contains no sense other than an invitation that indicates another act of reading, and in its invitation to a further reading of itself, the inscription confirms that this invitation is not its meaning. In other words, the inscription invites another reading act that would decipher its secret, and therefore renders that utterance of invitation as a surplus to its deferred secret semantics. It has not yet revealed its secret which is why it continues to call for another reading performance, which in turn demonstrates that the invitation does not exhaust the promised content of the inscription. While the call for a reading act is not the meaning of the inscription, the revelation of its meaning is deferred to another act of reading. Therefore, the repeated call, which is read as an invitation, is a performance that cannot be regarded as the semantic meaning of the inscription. The inscription, itself a performative call and a promise, fosters another act of reading and, in so doing, affirms a future identical to the past, a future that the past has already repeated in its performance of a failed act of reading. The inscription's call thus places the present in a hiatus between a past that strives for discovering the present and a future that calls for repeating the past. History is not a progress towards a future, but a repetitive event in the immobility of a futureless present, a happening between a repetitive past and a repetitive

future. Repeated and serialized, the poem's duration opens onto an enduring now that hinders and thwarts the progression of history as a succession of repeated trials and repeated failures. Like "Mard va Markab," this poem thematizes repetition as that which obstructs progression as the grounds for intelligibility and rejects narrative intelligibility as the source of significance. In such a nonsensical history, emancipation is not attached to the future-oriented vector of hope, nor is it the antithesis of the frustration of the now. Instead, it is a performance of a repetitive act that appears within the folded fabric of its own historical frustrations. It does not lie in pursuing the echoes of the past, nor in embracing of the future; it is an affirmation of a present that repeats itself hopelessly.

In "Katibeh," Akhavan-Sales affirms an enduring present that anchors history as a repetitive return to the stasis of the now. Gesturing to the hidden inscription that defers the secret of the ancient, he assures us about the potentials of unreadability and the suspension of a progressive history—they help us, Akhavan-Sales announces, to return to a transfigured present, unfettered from what makes us responsible before delusory pasts and what keeps us hopeful for elusive futures.

"The Tale of the Petrified City"

Only seven years after the 1953 coup, Akhavan-Sales writes an additional poem, "Qesseh-ye Shahr-e Sangestān" ("The Tale of the Petrified City"), also included in the same volume, *Of This Avestā.* This poem was inspired by the event of the coup and was written in response to the political despair that the downfall of Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq had brought about across the nation.[32] The poem, which draws upon Persian mythology,

[32] Mohammad Mohammad-Ali, *Goft-o-gu bā Ahmad Shamlu, Mahmoud Dowlatabadi, Mehdi Akhavan-Sales* (Tehran: Ghatreh, 1998), 260.

begins with a dialogue between two birds who converse about a man reposing in the shade of a tree. As they do not have much information about him, their conjectures as to his identity range from an ordinary citizen to the king of the Petrified City. The people of the Petrified City, we are told, turned to "cold stones" after they were attacked by their enemies and responded with a silence to the repetitive calls of their king who urged them to defend their homeland. We hear the king, who is profoundly in despair and dejected by the irredeemably silent stones that are the citizens of his city, speak in his own voice. He poses questions to his people, expecting their responses, yet always to no avail: "Is the brightness of the Divine Fire no longer sacred?/ Is it not time for the Seven Immortals to rise from their sleep?/ The earth has rotten, is there no one in the sky?" [Magar digar forugh-e izadi āzar moqaddas nist?/ Magar ān haft anusheh khābeshān bas nist?/ Zamin gandid, āyā bar farāz-e āsemān kas nist?] Struck by the silence of the petrified people, the king turns to a stony cave instead, pushing his head into its amorphous void to speak to its "uncrowded dark." He complains of "the violent actions of the West, of Moguls, and of Arabs," as does "a despondent Zoroastrian magus in an extinguished fire-temple." Then the final lines follow:

غم دل با تو گویم، غار!

بگو آیا مرا دیگر امید رستگاری نیست؟

صدا نالنده پاسخ داد:

آری نیست؟…

…I am telling you of my sorrow, o cave!

Tell me, is there no hope of salvation—yes, there is not?

The voice resonated mournfully:

- "… yes, there is not?"

[…Gham-e del bā to guyam, ghār!

Begu āyā marā digar omid-e rastegāri nist?

Sedā nālandeh pāsokh dād:

…Āri nist?]

This line is hardly translatable. As in the original version, the Persian verb occurs at the end of the sentence, the last word of this line is the verb "*nist,"* which means "there is not." However, the word immediately preceding that verb is "*rastegāri,"* which signifies "salvation." What we hear in the echo of the cave is the last segment of *rastegāri* (salvation), which is the word "*āri,"* meaning "yes" in Persian. This part is immediately followed by "*nist"* (there is not). Therefore, as uttered and echoed by the cave, the words "*rastegāri nist"* (salvation there is not) turn into "*āri nist"* (yes, there is not).

What kind of enunciation is at stake in this repetition? Are we offered an affirmation, or negation? Or perhaps neither one, and instead a question? The affirmative sense of the first part of the repetition is undercut by the negation of the latter segment. However, this sentence does not even end right there. It is followed by a question mark that rules out the possibility of a signifying synthesis. Akhavan-Sales casts a shadow of doubt on the possibility of a salvation that is anthropocentric, that is uttered by, and intelligible to, humans. The threshold of the cave marks the limits of human intelligibility insofar as it answers the king's question with a repetition that proves nonsensical. The poem which brings together speaking animals, nature, human, and a silent divinity, proposes a salvation in a nonsensical enunciation that returns and repeats itself. Although

what is enunciated remains far from being clear, the enunciation itself certainly has an echo. Repetition, above all, has interrupted the significance of the poem.

At a time when the Shah insists on the glorification of a nationalist past in order to facilitate projecting his modern vision of Iran, Akhavan-Sales's poetry, not oblivious to the past, resists the modern scheme of a linearized narrative and the postcolonial conception of history as progress. His poetry utilizes repetition as a way to subvert those narratives that have yoked man, God, and nature in the exploitative servitude of a colonial progress. History, in his poems, unfolds in the enduring duration of a present that repeats itself. Thus, his poetry is a site wherein past myths structure a future that the present anticipates, and where history is a restless chronology not of progress, but of interruptions and repetitions, a hallway of mirrors for lost origins.

Insofar as a (post)-colonial conception of history is predicated upon a linear logic of progress as well as a set of binarisms, it subjugates the otherwise multitudinous differences between cultures to their now homogenized temporal difference from the West. Since the historicist conceptions render Iran's contemporary history as no more than a "not yet," and insofar as a postcolonial historiography reduces Iran's history to a mere response to the imperialist interventions of the West, both historicism and postcolonialism tend to define politics as an emancipation from their regimes of sensibilities. The political desires and the historical agency of Iranians, therefore, are overdetermined by the colonial and postcolonial terms of possible action.

Akhavan-Sales's poetic politics is not based on the fantasy of redeeming time from the limiting conditions set by the anti-colonial history of the nationalization of Iran's oil. Nor does it emanate from the equally restrictive terms set by the imperial

interventions in that history. Confronted with the disappearance of "the imagined futures" following the coup, Akhavan-Sales generates in his poetry a repetitive temporality whose insistence on the present forecloses futures. His poetic politics is not directional or agential, but repetitive and futureless. To denounce futurity, his poetry rejects hope as an affective force that gives direction to the desire of fulfilling the failures of the present in the promised future of the White Revolution. His hopelessness, however, unlike what has been argued by other scholars, is not a token of his political defeatism. Rather, it is through his rejection of hope that he forecloses future and makes his poetry, by its repetitions and rhythmic character, eternally return to present in order to transform it without relying on a "horizon of hope and longing."

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This first chapter turned to the historical events of the 1953 coup and the modernizing White Revolution launched by the Shah in the following decade. Against such a historical backdrop, it treated Akhavan-Sales's politics as not represented within the semantics of his poetry, but as revealed by the repetitions and the durational character of his poems. His poem's repetitions, this chapter argued, perform the duration of the event instead of representing it, and thus make Akhavan-Sales's unexpected repetitions less an aesthetic sign of his defeatism and hopelessness than the site of the unanticipated unfolding of his liberatory politics. The next chapter will turn to the event of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and will treat a translated novel by Mahmoud Dowlatabadi as another form of aesthetic repetition. While this chapter posed the question of the relation between the historical event and aesthetic repetition by pairing the event of the coup and the duration of Akhavan-Sales's poetry, the next chapter moves us to the nexus between a different

historical event and a different aesthetic form. If a history is only available in the form of translation, and if translation is already a way of avoiding, how can a history remember itself by avoiding itself? To address this urgent question, let us move from the discussion of the poetic duration and the coup to a discussion of Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's novelistic testimony and the Iranian Revolution.

III. CHAPTER 2
REPETITION WITHOUT A PAST: ON NOVELISTIC TRANSLATION AS TESTIMONY

> People do revolt; that is a fact. And that is how subjectivity (not that of great men, but that of anyone) is brought into history, breathing life into it… All the disenchantments of history won't alter the fact of the matter: it is because there are such voices that the time of human beings does not have the form of evolution but that of 'history.'
> —Michel Foucault, "Useless to Revolt?"

> Every conception of history is invariably accompanied by a certain experience of time which is implicit in it, conditions it, and thereby has to be elucidated. Similarly, every culture is first and foremost a particular experience of time, and no new culture is possible without an alteration in this experience. The original task of a genuine revolution, therefore, is never merely to 'change the world,' but also—and above all—to 'change time.'
> —Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience*

The "Acknowledgements" in Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's novel, *The Colonel* (2011), contain a brief statement from the translator Tom Patterdale. Explaining his process, he informs his English-speaking readership that the "nature of the language" in Dowlatabadi's novel has been "inevitably lost in translation." He expresses his hopes that in his English translation of the novel, "sufficient poetry remains… to do justice to the power and feeling of the original."[33] Patterdale considers the persistence of poetry in his translation as the feature that helps diminish the effect of loss incurred in the English rendition. Meanwhile, he regards poetry as the definitive feature of Dowlatabadi's prose. The poetic trace, remaining even in the English version, is a sign of the translation's fidelity and what it means to do justice to the source text. Patterdale's reference to poetry

[33] See Mahmoud Dowlatabadi, *The Colonel*, trans. Tom Patterdale (New York: Melville House, 2012), 232.

echoes a common understanding of Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's prose, "the nature of [his] language," as lyrical.[34] Even in his other novels, Dowlatabadi's prose has been largely described in similar terms.[35] While he himself considers the prose of his ten-volume *magnum opus*, *Kelidar* (1984), as "epic and lyrical,"[36] Mehdi Akhavan-Sales claims that in that novel Dowlatabadi turned a local language into the language of epic.[37] Similarly, other scholars, including Houra Yavari, have described his style as "poetic."[38]

That one feels the need to consider Dowlatabadi's poetic language in his previous novels in order to make similar assumptions about his style in *The Colonel* might sound somewhat arbitrary, but it underscores an inevitable choice. The novel is centered on the events in the years around the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The history of those tumultuous years is remembered by an unnamed colonel who was a former officer in the last Pahlavi Shah's army, and who models himself on the historical figure, Colonel Mohammad Taqi Khan Pesyan, as a patriot officer. While Pesyan refused to collaborate with the central government of the Prime Minister Ahmad Qavam, he was finally killed in a skirmish with the Kurds in Astarābād.[39] Similarly, the unnamed colonel in the novel refuses to

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[34] Ibid., 223.

[35] To read more on Dowlatabadi's poetic and lyrical prose, see Simin Avazpur, "Sovar-e Khiāl dar Teʿdādi az Dāstān-hāye Mahmoud Dowlatabadi," *Faslnāmeh-ye Takhassosi-ye Zabān va Adabiāt-e Fārsi*, no. 14-15 (Fall 2018): 129-147. You can also refer to Ghahreman Shiri, "Nasr-e Mahmoud Dowlatabadi," *Majalleh Dāneshkadeh-ye Adabiāt va Olum-e Ensāni Dāneshgāh-e Ferdowsi*, Volume 4, 2003. In addition you can read Mohammadreza Nasr Esfahani and Milad Shamʿi, "Sabkshenāsi-ye Romān-e Jāy-e Khāli-e Soluch Asar-e Mahmoud Dowlatabadi," *Pazhuhesh-e Zabān va Adabiāt-e Fārsi Quarterly,* Volume 13, (Summer 2009): 185-204.

[36] Abbas Shirmohammadi, *Bist sāl bā Kelidar* (Tehran: Kuchak Publications, 2001), 417.

[37] Ibid., 166.

[38] Ibid., 152.

[39] Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921: The Pahlavis and After* (New York: Pearson Education, 2003), 29.

participate in the Shah's war of Dhofār in 1973, which was a war in which the Shah helped the Omani Army with 3000 elite Iranian forces who put down a Soviet-inspired rebellion.[40] The colonel has killed his promiscuous wife and has lost three of his children in the political struggles around the time of the revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. The novel, which takes place in the course of a single day, gives an alternative account of the 1979 Iranian Revolution as its history is recollected by the colonel.

Although *The Colonel*, with the original title *The Colonel's Decline* (*Zevāl-e Kolonel*), was written one year following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, it was only submitted for publication permit to the censorship board at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in 2008. For the radically different picture it affords of the revolution, the novel has never been published in Iran and continues to face censorship to this date. In 2017, one of the Members of the Iranian Parliament critiqued the ban in a session convened for casting the vote of confidence for the nominated Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance.[41] And at the other end of the political spectrum, the Cultural and Social Deputy of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps harshly criticized the rumors about an imminent issuance of a publication permit for the book. Lambasting Dowlatabadi for his "deep bonds to foreign countries," he identified *The Colonel* as a "major perversity… [and] the foremost post-revolutionary novel opposed to the Islamic Revolution."[42] Unlike other novelists confronted with the impenetrable barrier of the state

[40] Ibid., 237.

[41] https://www.radiofarda.com/a/f2-iran-parliament-culture-ministry-criticized-by-mps/28685593.html

[42] https://www.dw.com/fa-ir/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%87%D9%86%DA%AF%DB%8C-%D8%B3%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B2%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84-%DA%A9%D9%84%D9%86%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%A8%D8%B2%D8%B1%DA%AF%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA/a-17440945

censorship, Dowlatabadi has never sought to publish his book in Persian in any other countries. When in 2014 *The Colonel* was anonymously re-translated from its German version to Persian, he warned of his book "falling sacrifice to a nasty game." Later, he urged his readers to unequivocally "repel" the fake version, because "my prose is my signature," whereas the distributed volume is a "fake and distorted translation."[43]

It is intriguing to contrast Dowlatabadi's eagerness in having his oeuvre translated into other languages[44] with his unfavorable opinion on the news of *The Colonel*'s re-translation into Persian. Although he is concerned about his "signature prose" lost in the fake version, his signature style, one might assume, was already "inevitably lost in translation" in the 2009 German version published in Zürich and in Tom Patterdale's English rendition. That is, if the lost "nature of the language" undergirds Dowlatabadi's concern about the re-translation of his work, one might inquire whether "the nature of [his] language" is not already "inevitably lost" in Patterdale's English translation? Further, if Dowlatabadi brushes aside the "inevitable" loss stemming from the translation of his "signature prose" into German and English, why then does he fall short of admitting that "the fake and distorted" text of *The Colonel* is a translated version too—a re-translation into Persian with its own "inevitable" loss and incurred "sacrifice"? In other words, if both the German and English editions, on the one hand, and the re-translated Persian book, on the other, lose an excess and leave a remainder behind once they undergo the event of their translation, Dowlatabadi seems to approve the loss involved in translation from Persian into other languages, yet insists on repudiating the

[43] http://old.alef.ir/vdcizqarwt1ap52.cbct.html?236415

[44] Mohammad Mohammad-Ali, *Goft-o-gu bā Ahmad Shamlu, Mahmoud Dowlatabadi, Mehdi Akhavan-Sales* (Tehran: Ghatreh, 1998), 84 & 88.

re-translation into Persian. What is so sacrilegious about this "re-" that transforms an approved event of translation into the fake event of *a translation of translation*? And in which ways does the "re-turn" of the language to itself lay bare the Platonic idealism and religious undertones underlying Dowlatabadi's use of such descriptions as "falling sacrifice" and "distortion"? What loss continues to concern Dowlatabadi if translation has already taken place and if sacrifice appears to be only inevitable?

This chapter will proceed to look into Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's novel *The Colonel* (2011), and the limits of translating a textual recollection in a target language without a "pole of reference" and "without an itinerary," to evoke Derrida—a text that declares itself translation, although it does not know where it is coming from.[45] In this chapter, I intend to explore the remediation of the revolution in the novel both with regard to the form of the novel, and with respect to translation as a mode of repetition. The book's publication history testifies both to the history of the revolutionary moment and to its traumatic status as a sort of repetition without memory. What is the relation of the translated novel to history, I will inquire, if the novel dwells in a translation with no accessible past? If translation is already a way of avoiding the original, already a *vermeiden*, how can a past memory, which is only accessible in translation, remember itself by avoiding itself? And, finally, is this remembering-by-avoiding, I will ask, different from history itself?

The Interstice: The Indeterminacy of the In-Between

[45] Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, Or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998), 60.

The last section of the novel follows the moment when the colonel, before killing himself with his own sabre, states that he would "refuse to go quietly, not after all this," and then he cleans and hangs his musical instrument, *setār,* on the wall, predicting that "someone'll play it again one day."[46] The final section follows the scene of the colonel's defiant death, in which "the street people and the bazaar folk" are said to have "heard the strumming of an old *setār* reverberating in the darkness of the alleyways." They saw a man, who similar to the searching and lantern-bearing sage of a Rumi poem,[47] was "roaming the narrow little streets, holding a lantern in his hand as he chanted" a few lines from Rumi's poetry, which are followed by their original Persian (fig. 5):

> If you see on your way a severed head
>
> Tumbling along to that square of ours,
>
> Ask it, just ask it, how we all fare;
>
> It will tell you that buried secret of ours! (220)
>
> [Cho dar rah bini borideh sari
>
> Ke ghaltān ravad su-ye meidān-e mā

[46] Dowlatabadi, *The Colonel*, 218-219.

[47] دی شیخ با چراغ همی‌گشت گرد شهر
کز دیو و دد ملولم و انسانم آرزوست
گفتند یافت می‌نشود جسته‌ایم ما
گفت آنکه یافت می‌نشود آنم آرزوست

Last night the sage toured the town with his lamp:
"I'm sick of beasts and devils. I desire humanity."

It was said, "We've sought and not found it."
The sage replied, "The one who is never found is my sole wish!"

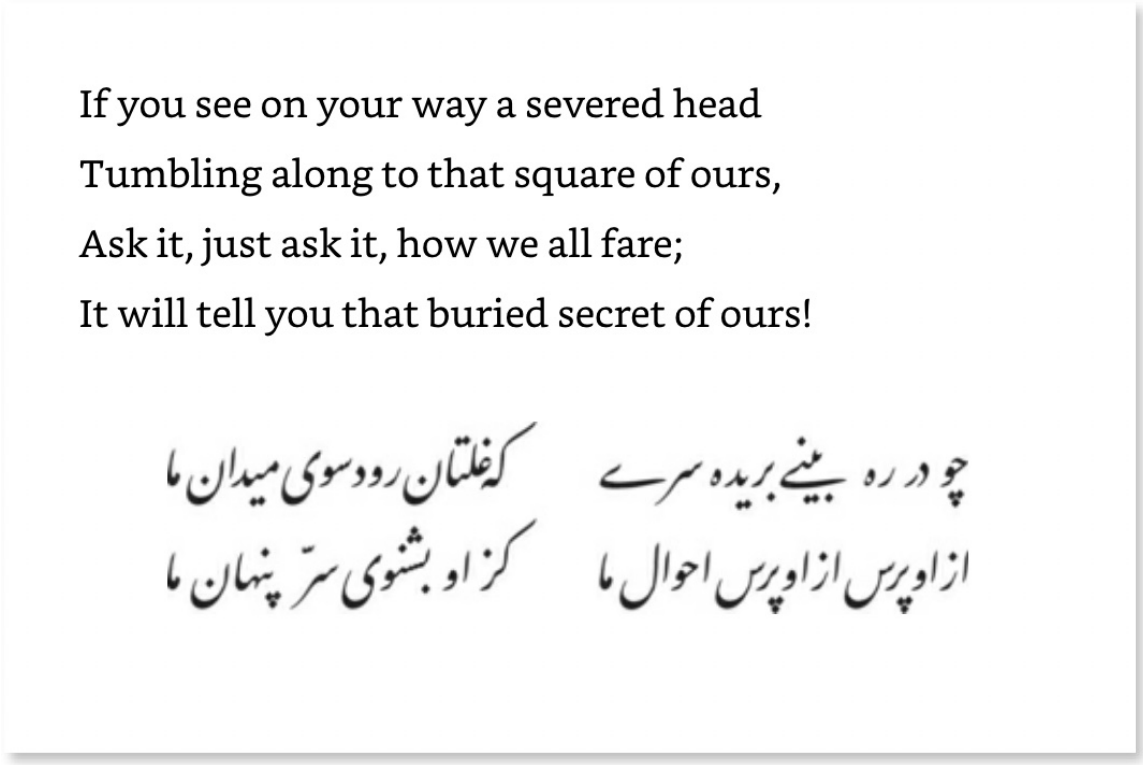

Fig. 5 Patterdale includes the original Persian lines from Rumi at the end of his translation of the book.

Azu pors azu pors ahvāl-e mā

Kazu beshnavi serr-e penhān-e mā]

These lines from Rumi contain an image of a severed head which carries a "secret" as to how "we all fare," that is to say the head carries the secret of our common history. The stark image in Rumi's poem is a clear reference to Mansur Hallaj, the Persian mystic and the epitome of a Sufi lover who was decapitated in the tenth century when he unapologetically declared, "I am the Truth." However, this image assumes further valances *vis-à-vis* the novel. It refers to the final chapter of Colonel Mohammad Taqi Khan Pesyan's life who, following his refusal to collaborate with the Qavam-Reza government, was killed in the eastern province of Khorāsān and his severed head was

sent back to Tehran.[48] Colonel Pesyan is a hero to the unnamed colonel in the novel who recurrently identifies himself with his role model and pictures himself in his idealized image: "I want to hear my own voice again: my own voice, The Colonel's voice!"[49] Similar to Colonel Pesyan, the colonel ultimately refuses to surrender himself to the worsening political circumstances around him and decides to end his own life in the penultimate section of the novel. In addition, the colonel's son, Masoud, "whom they called Little Kuchik at home… [and] because of his bushy black eyebrows and low forehead… the children had nicknamed him Kuchik Jangali…,"[50] comes to lose his head in the war. As a supporter of Ayatollah Khomeini, Little Masoud fought in Iran's war against Iraq (1980-1988), and his decapitated body is returned from the trenches with an attached head that remains deformed, foreign, and unrecognizable to his bemused father: "Gentlemen, my brothers, my sons… believe me, this severed head does not belong to my Kuchik."[51]

It is intriguing to take into account the fact that the only lines retained in Persian in this translation are the same four lines from Rumi which must be, presumably, the exclusive instances in this whole translated text that have not incurred a loss. Nevertheless, it is equally interesting that not only is the poem thematically concerned with a severed head, but it is constituted by a discontinuity: the first syllable of the verb "*bebini*" has been left out and the verb has been replaced with the more archaic version of "*bini*." Although this might be an *accidental* mistake, that it does not alter the meaning of

[48] Dowlatabadi, *The Colonel*, 234.

[49] Ibid., 176.

[50] Ibid., 4.

[51] Ibid., 168.

the line is only *accidental* too. However, this rupture certainly does disrupt the metrical rhythm of the line and, by extension, the flow of the *setār* melodies and the chanting of the man in "the narrow little streets."

Why has the translator inserted the lines after he has finished translating the whole novel, including those very lines? If his assumption as to his faithful translation of the "nature of the language" in Dowlatabadi's novel relied on his best hopes that "sufficient poetry remains… to do justice to the power and feeling of the original," does it not fly in the face of his translation's touchstone that the sole Persian lines in the novel are in fact quoted from a poem? Is this direct citation not symptomatic of the translator's failure to reproduce poetry in English? And, therefore, is it not a mark of a failure, the failure to translate?

Between the severed head of which the poem speaks and the discontinuity the Persian line performs, between the signified decapitation and the metrical interruption, and between the English poem and the Persian line, there exists an interstitial time that is the time of translation. It is the untranslatable foreignness of that Persian line in the English text, and the untranslatable foreignness of the Persian ellipsis to itself that lays bare an interstice in which "the time of translation" renders the relationship between the original and translation unstable and, in words of Paul de Man, "puts the original in motion to decanonize it."[52] The interstitial makes the "original" Persian responsible for and incapable of doing justice to the English "translation," and thereby modifies their nexus into an unstable linkage. The Persian poem preceding the English "translation" is

[52] Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 92.

demanded by "translation" to re-inscribe and re-translate itself, and to lose its origin status in the time of translation.

The interstitial time of translation, therefore, liberates the novel from the binary of the "original" and the "copy," as well as from the progressive linearity undergirding the translated text's relation to its original Persian. Through its poetics of reinscription and re-translation, the novel thematizes spectrality not only at its performative level, but also at the level of its historical doublings and relocated characters. The unnamed colonel identifies himself with The Colonel Pesyan, while his son Amir is creating the bust of Amir Kabir, with whom he identifies too. Both Amir Kabir, the chief minister to Naser al-Din Shah Qajar in the 19th century, and The Colonel Pesyan appear in the novel with blood flowing from their arm and throat, referring to how they were murdered by the Qajar king and the Kurds, respectively.[53] Further, the colonel's murdered wife, Forouz, appears in the cemetery where the colonel wants to bury his daughter, Parvaneh. The colonel's voice is "not his voice, but someone else's,"[54] when he is expected to announce under duress that his daughter is "*mahdour ud-dam*… She must be killed," wondering if it was "my voice that I heard coming out of the loudspeakers."[55] He feels he is undergoing his "final metamorphosis": "I feel my voice is changing, which means my transformation has now started."[56] And so does Khezr Javid, the secret policeman of the Shah's repressive intelligence service of SAVAK. His surname literally means

[53] Dowlatabadi, *The Colonel*, 212-213.

[54] Ibid., 192.

[55] Ibid., 186.

[56] Ibid., 192.

"immortal," and his first name is that of the Qur'anic Khezr, a righteous servant of Allah who drank of the water of life and became immortal. In the days after the Revolution, Khezr Javid, a previous agent of the Shah's repression, is last seen metamorphosed, walking with "his new mullah's cloak."[57] In addition, the apparitions of Sattar Khan, Heidar Amu-Oghlu,[58] Ahmad Qavam,[59] and finally Mohammad Mosaddeq appear.[60]

Mohammad Mosaddeq appears on this "nightmarish old historical panorama"[61] not in person, but in the same posture with which he was captured in one of the photos remaining from him (fig. 6):

> At that moment, the colonel's gaze lighted on old Mossadeq, who was still sitting on the floor, wrapped in his old army blanket, with his right knee raised. The point of his walking stick was stuck in the ground, with the crook of it resting between his shoulder blades to support his back. He held his head down, looking at the ground. He looked like a dejected shepherd whose flock has been attacked by a pack of wolves. A knowing, distant smile played around his lips. Khezr's ghostly face can just be made out in the mist. (214)

The colonel has not merely spotted a photo of Mosaddeq capturing a past moment of the latter's posture. Instead, his gaze falls on Mosaddeq whose still body has *appeared* on the stage of history as a *phantasm*, as a *phenomenal* ghost that *feels*—"a knowing, distant smile"—but fails to *move*—"who was still sitting." And since he has appeared in an

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[57] Ibid., 198.

[58] Ibid., 213.

[59] Ibid., 203.

[60] Ibid., 214.

[61] Ibid., 212.

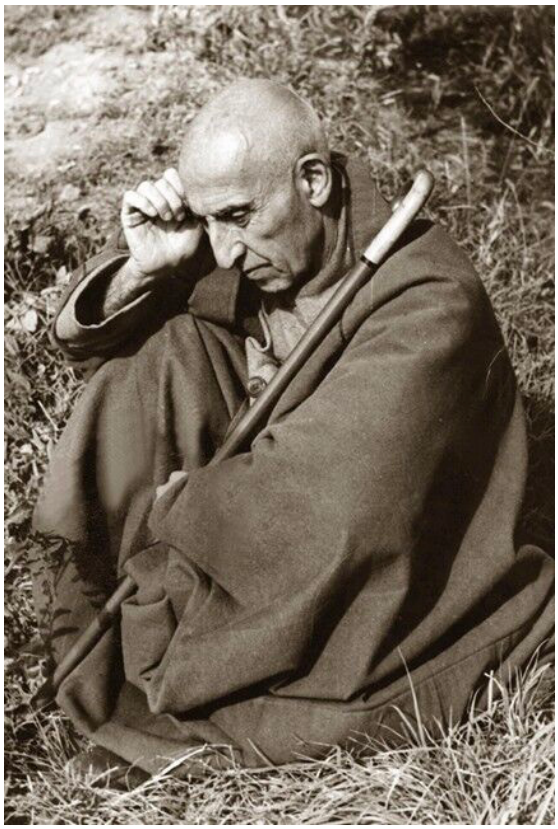

Fig. 6 Prime Minister Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq under house arrest in Ahmadabad, 1965

abiding *stillness*, Mosaddeq's specter manages to assume a temporal *stillness* too—sitting *still* and *still* sitting. This moment in the novel recalls Walter Benjamin's dialectical image in his philosophy of history which he defines as "dialectics at a standstill" in which "the relation of what-has-been to the now… is not progression but image, suddenly emergent."[62] However, unlike Benjamin's dialectical image, Mosaddeq's phantasm cannot be subsumed under the binary of "what-has-been" and "now." While in Benjamin, "what-has-been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation," Mosaddeq's image does not emerge out of a dialectical relationship

[62] Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project,* trans. Howard Eiland & Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999), 462.

between the *then* of Mosaddeq and the *now* of the colonel. Instead, this image "remains abidingly"[63] within a triangulation of diegetic temporalities. It brings the instant[64] of Mosaddeq's posture into negotiation with the *now* of the colonel, but also with the timeless duration of Khezr whose presence is "made out in the mist," deduced only in an imaginary background. Brought to the foreground is the instant of Mosaddeq's posture which negotiates the permanent duration of Khezr as well as a continued history of resistance against "a pack of wolves." Khezr Javid's immortal duration, representing the timeless oppression of history, is brought into a disjunctive juxtaposition with the instant of Mosaddeq's posture, whose continuous—"[he] was still sitting"—and thus iterative *stillness* resists Khezr's oppression both in the instant of Mosaddeq and in the now of the colonel, and thus testifies to the measureless dilation of a history of anticolonial defiance.

Beyond its stillness, Mosaddeq's instant resembles the testimony of the severed head in Rumi's poem. The severed head bore the promise of revealing "the buried secret of ours" by performing its incurred injustice in lieu of articulating the secret in signified terms. Here, too, the "knowing" and "distant[ly] smil[ing]" Mosaddeq does not speak of any secrets. Instead, *still* in his posture and *still* in the colonel's and in our time, he remains abidingly within an interstitial image that testifies not only to the enduring logic of colonial assimilation in its background, but also to the unassimilable instant of anticolonial resistance. This is not an instant negated in the continuum of a chronological history. On the contrary, this instant of Mosaddeq negotiates and survives the permanent

[63] Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press), 2000, 16.

[64] In this chapter, I use the term "instant" in the sense employed by Derrida as "the absolute acceleration of a time infinitely contracted into the point of an instant." See Derrida, *Demeure*, 62.

repression lurking "in the mist." If Tom Patterdale hoped that in his translation "sufficient poetry *remains*… to do justice" to the Persian text, Mosaddeq's *still* appearance *remains abidingly*, and translates the repetitive secret of history in a time that survives. He remains *still* in the image in order to *still* remain against the timeless duration of the eternal Khezr: the body in the image does not *move* in order to *feel* eternally. In his postural and temporal *stillness*, Mosaddeq remains the colonel's and our contemporary.

The interstitial time of translation and the ghostliness of the novel's historical characters disrupt the linearity of translation and reconfigure the progressive emplotment of history. History is a spectral and repetitive event. In a permanent errantry and in the time of a translation without memory, history remembers itself by avoiding itself, as its distinctions between the past origins and future destinations disappear. A spectral history without an origin—caught within, what Homi Bhabha calls, "the indeterminate temporality of the in-between."[65] … Interstitial … Errant … Translational …

The Voice: Relativized Locality of Speech

There is a scene in the novel in which the titular protagonist is taken to a graveyard by two policemen. The police officers, 'Abdullah and 'Ali Seif, have been assigned the task of assisting the colonel to locate a proper spot and dig the grave of her daughter, Parvaneh. A member of the group People's *Mojāhedin*,[66] Parvaneh has been recently killed. When Abdullah offers to lend some hand to the "sweat-drenched old man," the colonel stands aside in the rain, contemplating the future:

[65] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2012), 326.

[66] An underground group who were targeted after the revolution of 1979, and executed en masse in 1988.

> *Who am I trying to fool? I'm well aware that at every stage of history there have been crimes against humanity, and they couldn't have happened without humans to commit them. The crimes that have been visited on my children have been committed, and still are being committed, by young people just like them, by people stirring up their delusions, giving them delusions of grandeur. So why do I imagine that people might improve? Everything going on around us seems to indicate that the values our forebears passed down to us no longer apply. Instead, we have sown the seeds of mistrust, skepticism and resignation, which will grow into a jungle of nihilism and cynicism, a jungle in which you will never find the courage to even mention the names of goodness, truth and common humanity, a crop that is now bearing fruit with remarkable speed. We're obliged to dig our own children's graves, but what's even more shocking is that these crimes are creating a future in which there is no place for truth and human decency. Nobody dares to speak the truth any more. Oh, my poor children … we're burying you, but you should realize that we are also digging a grave for our future. Can you hear me?* (pp. 98-99)

At stake in the colonel's words is the question concerning the status of truth in historical accounts and what he pictures as a chronicle of truth rapidly degenerating into falsehood. Although, in the colonel's account, one can witness an acknowledgment of the continuous disposition of crimes committed against humanity "at every stage of history," the present cruelties, in his view, are rendered exceptional in their being committed increasingly by young people who, driven by "delusions of grandeur," are responsible for historic crimes against other youths similar to the colonel's young children. Striking as it

is, the colonel laments the generational discontinuity in the reverence for the values "passed down to us" against the historical backdrop of a continuous pattern of crimes that preceded his generation. However, while he recognizes that a long history of crimes prevailed prior to his time, he attributes a historical agency to his own generation for having generated another history of untruth, wherein "we have sown the seeds of mistrust" which will "grow into a jungle" where even naming "truth" is impossible. In other words, while he laments the "crop" of this history of "mistrust, skepticism and resignation" that has come to fruition right "now," he continues to claim that another "future" will emerge out of the grave of the present in which "there is no place for truth and human decency. Nobody dares to speak the truth any more." Why should the future of which the colonel speaks be worthy of his lamentation if its crop of cynicism is already "bearing fruits" in the present "with remarkable speed"? Meanwhile, why should the colonel express nostalgia for the values of the days of yore that "no longer apply" if the past was equally scarred by the same pattern of historic cruelties? What has changed about the present, and what is new about the future whose consequential arrival the colonel heralds?

The passage that opens with a rhetorical question, which demands and promises a truthful account of what it intends to describe, unfolds as an extended lamentation over the present cynicisms and future untruths. It castigates the ubiquity of the unreliable frames of the present in "everything going on around us" which will generate a future in which fiction and skepticism rather than truth will be the sole frame for naming and speaking. What is intriguing about this passage is not merely the account it offers about the truth of history and the history of truth. Rather, the passage affords an interesting

perspective into the authorial voice which has produced it and, in addition, it shows how what he states about a present of cynicisms and untruths impacts its own status as an utterance. Insofar as it is within the unreliable frame of the present that the colonel is generating his rhetorical question and promising a true account of history, it is interesting to consider the extent to which the present imbued with "nihilism and cynicism" allows him to "mention the names of goodness [and] truth" and create a true account of the past, present, and future. If the colonel speaks from "a jungle of nihilism and cynicism" and if he too is complicit in digging a grave for his children and future generations, under what conditions can his own voice stand outside the fictional frame of that history of skepticism?

So who is, indeed, the colonel "trying to fool?" And what is the place of speech as well as the status of his own voice which makes truth claims and mourns the generational loss of the epistemic grounds for generating a truthful account of history? And, further, who is this voice speaking to? Is he at all speaking to us if this passage consists in an internal monologue on which we have eavesdropped and have thus turned the exclusive "we" of his sentences into an inclusive pronoun? And if he is merely speaking to himself and not to us, then how does this contemplative passage count as an internal monologue if the colonel terminates his words with a question posed to his deceased children, thus awaiting a reassuring affirmation from them, attempting a dialogue with the dead?

The paragraph gestures as much to the relativized locality of the voice as it does to the relativized origin of history. The colonel addresses himself, us, or the dead from an indeterminate location in time that envisions the map of history as marked by a succession of generational repetitions without a memory of the past. The colonel

articulates his "obliged" complicity in the perpetuation of this history. This history of "crimes against humanity" is declared as new when committed by "our generation" and "our children" even though it remains the same. The present crimes of this history are distinguished from those in the past, not in spite of but because they are the same crimes. Undergirding this conception of history is an "experience of time" as amnesia and oblivion—a repetition that is hailed as new because it lacks historical memory. The colonel's history is an amnesiac account, unfixed and devoid of a designatable locality. It is recounted by a complicit character who from the indeterminacy of "a jungle of nihilism and cynicism" heralds the arrival of a new future, even though he tacitly determines, from the same nihilist position, that the mistrust of the future is already in full force in the present moment.

The Colonel and the Colon: The Event and the Discourse

Following the scene of burying her daughter, Parvaneh, who was tortured in prison and was then released to be killed for her membership in People's *Mojāhedin* Organization (MKO), the colonel makes up his mind to murder his wife, Forouz, of whose promiscuous relationships he has been aware for a while. Thus unfolds the account of the betrayed colonel's killing of his wife whose extramarital affairs has besmirched his honor:

> *I could feel the rain, which was still pouring down. Drunk and seething with rage, I was standing in the alleyway, bare-headed and with my collar undone, and staring at the drawn sabre in my hand, which I was about to plunge into my wife's heart.*

> That night was the first and last time that the colonel would drink himself nearly to death. While Amir was at his little table by the window reading his lecture notes, the colonel sat on the edge of the bed, tossing back glass after glass of arack. He did not know what he was doing, or more accurately: *I knew exactly what I was doing and I was drinking myself into oblivion.* (p 103)

To highlight the two modes by which the reader is presented with the events, the novel employs italics for marking the first-person narration. This section begins with italics since it is focalized through the colonel's first-person point of view relating the account of the day of his wife's murder. Throughout the novel, the focus of narration shifts between the colonel, his son Amir, and the third-person intrusive narrator. The colonel, says the narrator, was "drinking himself nearly to death" or, alternatively, the colonel recalls, "I was drinking myself into oblivion." While the first-person singular pronoun with which the section begins is the colonel's past "I" which was drunk to death, the present "I" with which the colonel speaks of his other "I" is supposedly sober. In other words, "the focus of narration," the one who tells the story, is supposed to be a reliable narrator, while "the focus of character," whose perceptions the focus of narration recollects and presents to the reader, was an unreliable narrator who was feeling drunk.[67] That will cast the colonel's recollected perception of murdering of his wife into an unreliable narrative. Then, there are the last sentences of the paragraph. The narrator claims that the colonel "did not know what he was doing," only to have that description

[67] See Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 161-211.

undercut by the abrupt shift to the colonel's voice who asserts that "*I knew exactly what I was doing."*

What is more intriguing about their diametrically opposed significations is the colon inserted between these two statements. The colon structures an expectation for the arrival of an equivalent, and postulates an equation between the past and the future. Yet what arrives is the opposite. Insofar as the time of the omniscient narrator's account envelopes the time within which the colonel's first-person point of view recollects, the colonel's statement does not violate the expectation of the narrator who himself has inserted the colon. Thus, the narrator's colon restructures the expectations of the reader alone by equating two opposites. And just in order to assure his reader's frustrated anticipation, the omniscient narrator has added an adverbial modifier: "more accurately." Who is a more unreliable narrator than the colonel "drink[ing] himself nearly to death"? The colon marks the performativity of translation as what negotiates and preserves the foreignness of the untranslatable. Within the indeterminate linkage of the colon, there exists an interstice whose temporality is being negotiated by two opposing propositions moved into the time of translation. They signify the same and, "more accurately," they differ in their significations: a repetition of the same differents and of the different sames.

The omniscient narrator continues:

> The sabre glinted in the dim glow cast by the streetlight. There was no-one in the alleyway save the colonel and a soggy stray dog with its tail between its legs. The colonel listens to the cars, as they roar past the entrance to his street on the wet main road. He is waiting for one to stop at the road end and drop

> off Forouz. She will open her little umbrella and head towards her house, and the car will move off. (pp. 103-104)

The narration in the third paragraph does not aim to capture the event as it happens or the memory of the event as it is recollected in the present. Instead, it encompasses a juxtaposition of disjunctive tenses which launch the event into the time of translation. The third-person omniscient narrator disseminates the singular time-space of the event into a series of happenings: before the event happened, as it happens, as it is happening right now, and as it will happen. But within what singular time-space does the event take place if it is already, and if it will be, disseminated between its past, present, continuous present, and future tenses? For the unfolding of this event, the binary of past and present, or the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation," have disappeared. The event's evolution can take place only within the time of translation that consists in the movement of the fragmentation of the event into its successive tenses.

Alongside the movement of that fragmentation, the narrator too has relocated himself *vis-à-vis* the disseminated axis of the event, as though through the movement of a circular pan rotating around a temporalized axis. With respect to the successive tenses of the event, the re-inscribed narrator brings himself into a fragmented temporality. Relocated in the future, he relates the event in its pastness, and re-inscribed in the past, he recounts the event in its future tense. Only in the present and the present continuous are the narrator's discourse and the event brought into a synchronous contemporaneity: "The colonel listens to the cars… He is waiting for one… ." Therefore, the event's fragmented evolution is placed into a disjunctive contemporaneity with the discourse of the narrator. Further, its unfolding in its tenses is inscribed by the fragmented movement of the

narrator's discourse. That is to say, without the disjunctive contemporaneity of the discourse and the event, there would be no event unfolding in its successive tenses.

Within the in-between of the event and discourse, the distinction between the event and the discourse is eliminated. The event and its account, history and historiography, and history as science and history as art become one and the same. In this history, the event evolves with no progressive emplotment since there is no fixed beginning, middle, and end. The event rather temporalizes itself as well as the discourse, which in turn inscribes the event and re-inscribes itself. The discourse and event are thus converged in the fragmented movement between a "too soon" and a "too late," and within the indeterminacy between a *no longer* and a *not yet*. Such a history finds no beginning nor an end and, thus, it wanders and repeats itself:

> *I never thought about the man behind the wheel, what he looked like. I'd always thought the man who brought her home was just a driver, and that, from where she was sitting on the back seat, Forouz probably couldn't, or didn't want to, see the driver's face properly in the rear-view mirror. But I remember that she always got out of the car left foot first. And then she would hug the wall as she came down the street towards the door, over a little road that bisects the street north–south, and then down our little cul-de-sac. On those nights her head was always held low, she never looked right or left. Even though she was drunk, she could always find her way and … then I thought about what was in my wife's mind and I supposed that she must be dying a thousand deaths as she made her way home. But who can say? I have no other choice. I wait as she approaches, thinking whatever she is thinking. I*

> *won't say anything stupid or insulting to her, I'll just thrust my sabre straight between her left ribs and drive it right into her heart. I'd done this in my thoughts at least a thousand times before, so my mind and hand were steady and I didn't miss, I got my wife bang in the heart. To make sure she was finished, I gave the sabre a full twist round in her chest and, as she fell back, I thrust at her once more, and once more after that. At the last blow it was as if I was trying to skewer her to the wall, like Shaghad.* (pp. 103-104)

Focalized by the colonel as he recollects his intoxicated perceptions of his crime, the paragraph contains another instance of relativizing the tense of the event. The colonel commences his account in the past tense, relating the moment of Forouz's return in a series of constative utterances. As though he is simply reporting facts that he recalls, he regulates the narrative information in such a way that his temporal "distance"[68] from the event gradually decreases. In so doing, the colonel's use of the past tense shifts to present in his "I have no other choice," and later it turns to future in "I won't say anything." Meanwhile, his constative utterances, wherein he recollected and reported, abruptly transform into performative enunciations in which he hopes and promises. The narrator enters into the scene where the event is unfolding and shifts his role from a teller to a performer. He participates once more in the time of the event which is now iterated and is unfolding once again in the diegetic world into which he has inserted himself. No longer a distant narrator of the past event but a participant in its present re-staging, the colonel's diegetic re-inscription negotiates the differences between the discourse and the event and brings them into a coextensive asynchronicity. In his movement from the pensive to the

[68] Ibid.

agential, as he recounts in his discourse what he *simultaneously* performs in the time of the event, the colonel re-inscribes historiography into history, and discourse into the event. Further, he brings into an asynchronous contemporaneity "my mind and hand," the signifying word of his account and the a-signifying flesh of "her heart," "her chest," "left ribs,"—his is the sacrilegious time of translation moving between the *loss in the nature of the language* and the *sacrifice* of the body.

The colonel compares Forouz to Shaghad, who was the jealous half-brother of Rostam, the legendary Iranian hero in Ferdowsi's Persian epic of *The Shahnameh* (c. 977-1010). In a complicit attempt to murder Rostam, Shaghad and the king of Kābulestān placed poisoned spears at the bottom of a deep well on the way of Rostam who fell into it while riding his horse, Rakhsh. Before his death, Rostam asked Shaghad for a bow and two arrows, and although Shaghad was hiding behind a tree, Rostam pinned him to the trunk. By alluding to Shaghad, the colonel as much invokes Shaghad's betrayal and undignified death as he summons the righteousness of Rostam's revenge and his heroic end. Inasmuch as this myth preserves the repetitive rhythms of history, i.e. how history has been, it anticipates and prefigures the future, i.e. how history will be. By recourse to this myth, the colonel's account of his revenge follows the ritualized rhythm of this fratricide, thereby appealing to its mythical drama of betrayal and vengeance. In the timeless appeal of its narrative, the myth condemns any similar iteration of betrayal to an equally vindictive retaliation. The killing of Forouz, mapped onto the rhythm of this myth, appears to the colonel as not only justified but even historically fulfilling.

Testimony and Martyrdom: Singularity and Reinscription

The colonel compares the recent history with the future and reflects on what the latter holds in store for him. He is now contemplating the death of his youngest son, Little Masoud, who, as a fervent supporter of Ayatollah Khomeini, has been killed in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). Masoud's dismantled body, marked by bullets and attached to an unrecognizably "disheveled head," has been just sent back home from the trenches. He is being hailed as a "martyr" by the revolutionaries:

> *Well, which way is it, my children?* But nobody answered. All he heard, coming from every door and window in the city, was the news that the great trial was about to take place. The great trial of the past. The one they had been promising for ages. It would be remarkable. The whole of history would be in the dock. It was possible that the funerals of the war casualties, including the colonel's Little Masoud, the news of whose return had been broken to the colonel by Qorbani, would all take place in the full, naked light of history. It was not unlikely that, for greater effect, the two performances would be combined into one, but this was all beyond the colonel's comprehension. (pp. 106-107)

The colonel engages in another failed dialogue with his children and poses a question to the dead and the absent, *but*, and "more accurately," *therefore*, receives no response from them: "But nobody answered." That he chooses to attempt a dialogue with the dead by recourse to an internal monologue testifies not only to the ghostliness of the present, but also to a spectral disjunction inserted into the conjunction "but." The colonel is worried about the ubiquitous news of "the two performances" of an impending "trial of the past"

and a "funeral of the war casualties," finding the combination of the two "beyond [his] comprehension." What is so uncanny and *unheimlich* about the "combination" of the trial with the funeral which the colonel cannot comprehend and which he cannot appropriate *properly*?

The "combination" will bring into an improper integration the singularity of a martyred attestation of Masoud and the dissemination of his ritualized funeral. It will bring into an asynchronous contemporaneity the irreplaceable truth of the legal testimony in "the great trial of the past" and the fragmentation of its staged testimonial. What the colonel cannot comprehend is this "combination" of the singular truth and the iterable fiction within the fragmented movement of the time of translation.

The trial, predicts the colonel, will be "remarkable." But can "the whole of history" stand "in the dock" and testify to the whole truth and nothing "but" the truth if the trial is already a performed fiction of testimony, and if the conjunction "but" is already marked by a ghostly disjunction? Like the severed head in Rumi's poetry, the "great trial of the past" will testify to the singular mark of history, revealing its truth with remarkable exemplarity. On the other hand, unlike the severed head in that poem, it testifies in a signified language, and thus it will sign the truth of history re-markably, i.e. by re-marking and re-inscribing the singular attestation to the past. The remarkable trial is already iterative and fragmented even before it is performed. It is remarkable *but*, and "more accurately," *therefore*, re-markable.[69]

[69] In this section of the chapter, I have been *re-marking* Derrida's discussion of the term "remarkable" in *Monolingualism of the Other, Or, The Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 19-27.

Later in the novel, the colonel offers his account of the funeral not only of the "martyr" Masoud, but also of his other son, Mohammad Taqi. The latter was a member of the left-leaning communist Organization of Iranian People's *Fadāyiān* (literally self-sacrificers), who was killed in the revolution, and who was first celebrated as a revolutionary but later regarded as a dissident. The colonel recalls both funerals:

> Qorbani launched himself into his funeral oration: "Masoud Forutan … this young man, so dear to us, yearned for martyrdom … he swore … that until … extinction … to avenge the blood of … never retreat … on the sacred path … till the last drop of his blood …" And then he held up Masoud as "the very model of righteousness and selflessness, whereas his sister and his brothers Taqi and Amir, well …"
>
> "I'm feeling dizzy."
>
> The colonel's world was spinning round and he was trying desperately to cling on to the idea that he had not lost his senses. He remembered that it had been sunny the day they buried Mohammad-Taqi. The sun was so bright that Mohammad-Taqi's blood turned the color of mountain honey and the bare arms of the men carrying the flower-strewn coffin to the graveyard were dappled with bright color, and the shoals of hands and arms reminded him of fish leaping out of the water and dancing for joy before dropping back down again. And in amongst all this, his son's coffin looked like a piece of driftwood being clung to by a thousand drowning men trying to save themselves from the deep. What a racket they made! They had whipped up the frenzied crowd with such a mixture of threats and exhortation that you felt

> that these lads flagellating themselves, with blood coagulating on their shirts and in their curly hair, wanted to dive into that flower-bedecked, tapestry-draped coffin and find eternal rest there themselves, in place of Mohammad-Taqi. *It would not be farfetched to say that some of those young men, deep inside, felt short-changed by not being where my martyr hero Mohammad-Taqi was.* (pp. 171-172)

As a revolutionary with a name that designates "sacrificial," Qorbani is the colonel's son-in-law who is called an "agent of death" by his wife Farzaneh. His account elevates the death of the colonel's son, Masoud, to the more exalted level of "martyrdom." Meanwhile, since his statements are perceived elliptically by a "dizzy" colonel who wonders if he is losing "his senses," Qorbani's non-narrative performs the failure of representation. The elliptical account oscillates between the indicative and the imperative moods, such that the curtailed "never retreat" lends itself to being read as a direct address to the reader. Taken as it is in its elliptical mode of reception, the account includes a performative speech act that demands its interlocutor to advance in order "to avenge the blood," and further warns her against returning: "…never retreat…" Recalling the funeral of his other son, "my martyr hero Mohammad Taqi," the colonel remembers a crowd of self-flagellating mourners who, carrying the coffin of his son, wished to join him similarly. His coffin, recollects the colonel, resembled a "driftwood" onto which "a thousand drowning men" clung to "save themselves," and since they could not fully "dive" into the coffin to join the martyr in his martyrdom, they "felt short-changed." But where is the addressee of Qorbani's funeral oration supposed to advance, and into where did the self-flagellating lads wish to dive? In other words, where is the martyr?

He is in the coffin and he is dead, *but*, and "more accurately," *therefore*, he is living immortally in an "eternal rest." Here's the aporia of being a martyr, or its singular anachrony: "I am dead, but, and *more accurately*, therefore, I am immortal." The martyr has no future in life, but only an immortality after death. He "yearned for martyrdom" when he is alive, and becomes immortal, when he dies—a posthumous immortality. Never retreat… Become immortal! But how does one become immortal? In other words, how to advance, and how to join the martyr?

The martyr testifies *faithfully*—"he swore"—to the singular and indivisible instant of his death. He is irreplaceable. And yet, his irreplaceability lends him an exemplarity: "the very model of righteousness and selflessness." Remarkable as the martyr is, he is re-markable too. The martyr, therefore, is repeated and re-inscribed, even by his blood. So his blood, that is to be avenged in its singularity, is disseminated such that it "turn[s] the color of mountain honey" and "dapples with bright color" the bare arms of the mourners. So the "frenzied crowd… [of] lads flagellating themselves" wish to advance and "dive into his coffin." So a "thousand drowning men trying to save themselves" cling to his "driftwood" and never retreat. The martyr's testimony to his death and to his immortality is always singular. It is always re-inscribed by the performative speech acts that mobilize the crowds to iterate the martyr and to generate a history of martyrdom. Perhaps it was this history of martyrs, converging the singular event of martyrdom and its ritualized iterations, that had Michel Foucault consider "a political spirituality"[70] as the definitive characteristic of the Iranian Revolution. Discussing Shi'a Islam as the religious ideology

[70] Michel Foucault, "What Are the Iranians Dreaming About?" in *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism*, Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 209.

of the revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini, Foucault observed, "[T]here is the principle that truth was not completed and sealed by the last prophet. After Muhammad, another cycle of revelation begins, the unfinished cycle of the imams, who, through their words, their example, as well as their martyrdom, carry a light, always the same and always changing."[71] The martyr testifies to his sacrifice irreplaceably, and yet his martyrdom remains always ritualized and always re-inscribed.

Willing to Survive: Writing the Will and the Just History

There is a moment in the final sections of the novel where the colonel, facing his own son, Amir, reflects on the nexus between historiography and justice and on the exigency to re-write a history that renders his own past and the past of his sacrificed children more justly and more properly:

> He wanted to impress upon Amir that this devastating tragedy should not lead people to question or mock his children's own genuine readiness for self-sacrifice. For the only reason they had entered the game and had honestly and laudably risked their necks was because they believed that their lives were inextricably bound up with their country and their people. This was what made them different from those evil bastards who were still alive and kicking today … *This is what I wanted to say to Amir, so that those people who won't let history be written down should not think that we come into the world as donkeys and leave it as asses. But it's all too late. Amir can't understand what I'm saying and I don't even recognize his voice, or even his language. And I*

[71] Ibid., 205.

> *should have explained to him that my killing his mother was not a crime, but just a natural reaction on my part. I had to kill her, so I did it. I killed my humiliation. Anyway, if regrets could change anything, I would regret killing my wife, even though Amir knows – and might even bear witness to it – that I should not regret what I did.*

What worries the colonel is the question of a truthful history that needs to be "written down" and be transmitted to others. To the inscription and transmission of that history, the colonel wishes to do justice against the will of those who "won't let history be written down." What concerns him, in particular, is to do justice to writing about "the genuine readiness for self-sacrifice" of his children whose trajectories of lives were one and the same with the "tragedy" of a revolution and the war afflicting their country. Further, in writing on that more proper history, the colonel wants to demonstrate how much of a justified and "natural reaction" his murdering of his wife Forouz was. He aims to write down a more just history in order to redeem his own past and the past of his children. But to whom does he intend to write? Faced with his son, the colonel "wanted to say to Amir" the truthful history, and at once his intention is to write down "so that those people… know." If Amir needs to know about the colonel's justified past, why does the colonel claim that "Amir knows—and might even bear witness to it," and if his "ideal receiver,"[72] to borrow that term from Benjamin, are "those evil bastards," why is then the colonel facing his son, and wherefore is this what he "wanted to say to Amir" since "I should have explained to him"?

[72] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schoken Books, 1968), 69.

The colonel is confronted with the thought of the undecidable. He states that Amir "cannot understand" his father's articulations and that, in turn, he cannot recognize Amir's voice, "even his language." As they both seem to be facing the problem of the untranslatable across unrecognizable voices and unintelligible languages, they find a testament to a more just history, exigent as it is, to be persistently halted at the threshold of representation. But if translation is a mode of avoiding, the untranslatable must be unavoidable.[73] The just history is untranslatable, *but*, and "more accurately," *therefore*, it is unavoidable. Is that the reason why this just history pertains to Amir and "those people" *simultaneously*, while being exclusively addressed to Amir who "cannot understand"? Is that why "it's all too late" for this history to be inscribed? The colonel and Amir try to determine an answer to writing about this singular history across the unrecognizability of their voices and beyond the unintelligibility of their tongues:

> The colonel… expected his son to have the intelligence to see, written on his face, his determination to fade away. Because a decision, even if that decision will result in certain self-annihilation, in itself counts as a sign of the will to live. Just because the colonel had decided to fade away, that was no reason for Amir to treat him as if he had already gone.
>
> *But what can I say, when he doesn't even understand me?* What was the colonel supposed to do? *Pen and paper!* He got pen and paper and began to put down what he had been unable to say to Amir. A will, after all, had to be on paper. That was why it was called a written will and testament. He was

[73] For a discussion of the unavoidability of the untranslatable, see Jacques Derrida's *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989)

> astonished to see Amir also take up pen and paper and begin writing. They were both busy writing now, but they did not look at each other's papers. They were both sure that what they were writing was for the writer's eyes only. The content of both wills was clear: "Death." The colonel wanted to tell Amir that he intended to die and that, before he did so, he wished to give his son the benefit of some of his long experience of life. But what was it that Amir wanted to commit to paper? Not another nightmare, he hoped.
>
> When he had put the last full-stop to his piece, the colonel looked up at Amir and saw that Amir had also finished writing and was looking up at his father. The colonel puts his sheet of paper in front of his son. Amir does the same. They pick up each other's letters and carefully study the writing. When they finish reading they stare at one another for an unusually long time, as if trying to get to know each other and place each other again. They seem like strangers in each other's eyes. Finally, they accept that they are two figures of death sitting opposite each other … (pp. 193-194).

Sitting face to face with Amir, in the face of the untranslatable—"*what can I say, when he doesn't even understand me?"*—and the failure of reading the face—"He expected his son… to see, written on his face"—, the colonel and Amir put their pens to paper. They both write *about* death, that is about the most singular event. Writing *will* supplement the irreplaceable articulation of the event they are "unable to say." "Pen and paper" will supply for "*when he doesn't even understand me."* About death but also a "sign of the will to live," Amir and the colonel's written wills will testify to the singularity of their "decision." The *will* is "written," but its meaning is not signified. It remains "for the

writer's eyes only." Even in the colonel's will, the untranslatable remains a performative promise: "The colonel *wanted* to tell Amir [my emphasis]." Therefore, we never manage to know what the colonel inscribed in his will. That inscription remains a secret to us, as does Amir's will whose secret is a performative hope: "Not another nightmare, he hoped." It is only Amir who knows what is in the colonel's will, and it is only the colonel who studies Amir's.

But if the will reveals its secret in a posthumous future, might one assume that the colonel is dead to Amir, and Amir to his father? They are, we are told, "two figures of death sitting opposite each other." They *appear* to be dead. But if the will's secret should survive its writer only to be received as a *secret* by the living, and if its "ideal receiver" is not the addressee of Amir's unrecognizable voice and that of the colonel's unintelligible meaning, then how have the colonel and Amir received the untranslatable secret of each other's wills? Is that anachrony of time the reason why the colonel has "decided to fade away," but is treated as if he is "already gone"? Is that why Amir's "masterpiece" would be to survive his own death and "bury his own corpse"?[74] Is their *dislocation* into "the *indeterminate* temporality of the in-between" the reason why they hardly "*place* each other again" [my emphases]? Has the time of translation beyond Amir's unrecognizable voice and the colonel's unintelligible meaning revealed the singular event of the untranslatable? Two figures of death and two ideal receivers of each other's posthumous secrets. Dead, *but*, and "more accurately," *therefore*, immortal.

Such an interstice lies at the heart of the will. This "will" is a "decision," but also a future verb and, lastly, a singular testament. Like the severed head in Rumi's poem, the

[74] Dowlatabadi, *The Colonel*, 114.

will reveals the secret of history within the time of translation, i.e. in a time that survives. A more just history is written when the colonel and Amir *remember themselves by avoiding themselves* in this time of translation in which they study the untranslatable that is for the writer's eyes only, which in turn estranges them from each other—"like strangers"—but synchronizes their time and allows them to concur and resemble: "[T]hey accept that they are two figures of death." Before ending his own life, the colonel turns on all the lights and takes another look at Amir's will. "He tried to read it, and also to remember what he himself had written: …" What follows the colon is the synchronized signification of the colonel's and Amir's wills, since we remain uncertain whether he reports his own thoughts or recites the written words of Amir's will. The colon, once more, has marked the performativity of translation.

Such, too, is perhaps the more just history to which this banned novel testifies: a history of "self-sacrifice" and naming of the truth, written against the *will* of "those people who won't let history be written down." The novel's written *will*, however, *will* survive the *will* of those people, because survival is a written will's temporality. Dowlatabadi's novel and Patterdale's effort to do "justice to the power and feeling of the original" safeguard the conditions of possibility of such a just history. They let the ghosts speak their unintelligible tongues in their own unrecognizable voices, and thus help preserve the untranslatable and protect the unassimilable in the time of translation. The secret testament of the novel will survive in the time of translation and will continue to name a history of truth as it attempts to remember itself by avoiding itself. The novel's will survives a time wherein it is all too late for a single language to represent and to appropriate, and that is precisely why multiple tongues begin to operate and other voices

begin to be heard in between its lines. *The Colonel*'s secret testimony will be addressed to us, too, if we re-inscribe ourselves into the time of translation, give up on the temptation of *placing* others within already-known languages, and manage to listen to the cacophony of the untranslatable. We will be, then, the "ideal receivers" of Dowlatabadi's translated novel should we sit face to face with it and stare into the eyes of its specters as strangers who name a more just history of truth with *proper* nouns, as uncanny characters that our known tongues fail to *appropriate*, as figures that we cannot figure *properly*.

***

As we move on to the next chapter, we will transition from a discussion of Dowlatabadi's translated novel to explore the relationship of a film trilogy and the event of an earthquake that took place in northern Iran in 1990. In the first sequel of his Koker trilogy, Abbas Kiarostami's character revisits the village of Koker in the aftermath of the earthquake, searching for a trace of the young actor of his previous film and, in the second sequel, he returns once more to Koker to reshoot a few scenes from the former film. If the first chapter considered poetic duration in Akhavan-Sales's poetry collection against the backdrop of the 1953 coup and the White Revolution, and if the second chapter examined the novelistic testimony in Dowlatabadi's translated novel in relation to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the following chapter will pivot to the filmic image of Kiarostami's Koker trilogy with respect to the earthquake. How can the filmic image, we will ask, embody the event of an earthquake?

IV. CHAPTER 3
REPETITION WITHOUT RETURN: ON THE FILMIC IMAGE AS IMMANENT POLITICS

> Whenever we are trying to recover a recollection, to call up some period of our history, we become conscious of an act *sui generis* by which we detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves, first in the past in general, then in a certain region of the past—a work of adjustment, something like the focusing of a camera.
> —Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (73)

> Filmmakers do not need philosophy in order to think.
> —Gilles Deleuze, quoted in Alain Badiou's *Cinema* (225)

Operating at the heart of Abbas Kiarostami's Koker trilogy is a mechanism of repetition that relentlessly recasts the past in a new light while demanding of the present that it be revisited from the perspective of this newly illuminated past (figs. 7-9). The second film of the trilogy, *Zendegi va digar hich* (*Life and Nothing More*), made two years after the 1990 earthquake in Northern Iran, features the character of Farhad who, playing the role of Kiarostami, returns to Koker in hopes of finding a trace of the young actor of the first film, *Khāneh-ye dust kojāst?* (*Where Is the Friend's House?*), from 1987. Asking the natives of the village for any information about the young actor's whereabouts, Farhad shows them the French poster of the first film, recasting thus its reality into fiction. The third film, *Zir-e derakhtān-e zeitun* (*Through the Olive Trees*, 1994), in particular, re-stages at its center a key scene from the previous film. Going through frequent takes, this scene pivots on an encounter between Farhad and a recently married groom, Hossein. Although in the first sequel, Hossein informs Farhad about his marriage only one day following the earthquake, in the last film of the trilogy he acts in the role of the same groom, uttering the same lines to Farhad, while this time both standing before the camera of another director who plays the role of Kiarostami himself (figs. 10 & 11). Interrupted by a clapperboard read out by an assistant, and repeating the reality of the first sequel as

Fig. 7 A still from *Khāneh-ye dust kojāst?* (*Where Is the Friend's Home?*, 1987). Ahmad climbs up the zig-zag path three times in the movie, traveling to the adjacent village of Poshteh, in order to return the book of his classmate, Mohammadreza Nematzadeh.

Fig. 8 A still from *Zendegi va digar hich* (*Life and Nothing More*, 1992). As the director searches for the young actor of his previous film, he looks at the same hill which Ahmad used to climb in *Where Is the Friend's Home?*. Instead, in a shot that resembles a vision, he sees a stranger climbing up the same hill.

Fig. 9 A still from *Zir-e derakhtān-e zeitun* (*Through the Olive Trees*, 1994). Hossein climbs up the zag-zag path on the hill, persistently chasing his lover Tahereh, who refuses to talk to him.

fiction before a new camera, each take refers to itself by no other title than that of the third film.

Acknowledging this mechanism of repetition in the trilogy, Laura Mulvey states that the shock of the 1990 cataclysmic earthquake prompted Kiarostami to rework the "realist aesthetic" and to revise the means of representation that characterized the first film in the trilogy, *Where Is the Friend's House?*. She posits that many of Kiarostami's narrative features, including the appearance of the director, Farhad, in front of the camera in the first sequel, *Life and Nothing More*, "brings to consciousness the process of filmmaking" and renders visible what has been "invisible" in the previous film.[75] Mulvey

[75] Laura Mulvey, "Repetition and Return: The Spectator's Memory in Abbas Kiarostami's Koker Trilogy," *Third Text*, vol 21, Issue 1 (January 2007): 21.

observes that the films are marked either by a realistic aesthetic or "a critique of realism in favor of an unrepressed and more 'Brechtian' reality."[76] With her focus on dramatic spectacle—hardly aberrant within Kiarostami's critical reception—Mulvey identifies a Brechtian metafiction that reveals the process of production either, at the level of narrative, by the presence of the director before the camera (which in turn leads to "an awareness of film, its realities and distortions") or, at the level of style, by a camera that "delays" narrative progress while being "detached from its function of recording."[77]

Mulvey's view is emblematic of the predominant disposition of Western metaphysics to conceive of the self-reflexive mode of metafiction as the privileged form

Fig. 10 A still from *Zendegi va digar hich* (*Life and Nothing More*, 1992). Having survived the earthquake, Hossein appears in front of the camera for the first time, speaking of his recent marriage.

[76] Ibid., 22.

[77] Ibid., 23–24.

Fig. 11 A still from *Zir-e derakhtān-e zeitun* (*Through the Olive Trees*, 1994). Hossein appears in front of the camera again, cast in a film directed by a person who seems to be playing the role of Kiarostami himself in the film. In several takes of the same scene, Hossein repeats the same dialogues he uttered for the first time in *Life and Nothing More*, acting as a recent groom who has survived the earthquake.

of critique, and to treat a detached framing or various other externalizing techniques as being synonymous with critique. This treatment of Kiarostami's politics as "transcendent" is not only upheld by Mulvey, who has recognized an agential politics in his critique of realism, but is also espoused by those who castigate him for his detachment and lack of critical involvement with the aforesaid event insofar as they fail to observe an agential politics in his films. The reasons for the often harsh criticism of Kiarostami include the alleged neutrality of those of his films made during the Iran-Iraq war, and his detached camera, which in the Koker trilogy observes dispassionately the catastrophic aftermath of the earthquake. While some scholars have entirely rejected the possibility of a political

Iranian cinema,[78] certain others regard Kiarostami in particular as the epitome of the apolitical filmmaker: his films, they believe, remain emotionally distant from their political milieu, or rather subscribe to an aesthetics that persistently refuses to resist either the official political narratives of the Islamic Republic or, on a different front, the hegemony of the West. Among the latter camp is the renowned Iranian director, Ebrahim Hatamikia. His 1999 film, *The Glass Agency* (*Āzhāns-e shisheʾi),* caricatures Kiarostami through the fictional figure of a Westernized pseudo-intellectual, who like Kiarostami is wearing sunglasses indoors. He is taken hostage at a travel agency while making arrangements to travel abroad for the purpose of attending a film festival—an allusion to Kiarostami's desire to cultivate an audience in the West rather than at home.[79]

There are further instances wherein Kiarostami is subjected to the same meta-mode of critique of which Mulvey's view is emblematic and which, on the other, Hatamikia's portrayal, for having failed to find the same resistance, exemplifies. To both those celebrating his films for their Brechtian estrangement and those who castigate them for their political escapism, politics holds an exclusive agential sense—it is a form of agency and designates the execution of an action upon the world. Derisive characterizations of Kiarostami which range from "culture-seller" and "identity dealer"[80]

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[78] Alireza Haghighi, for instance, posits that a cinema reflecting on the "elements of realpolitik" and offering a critical examination of "the structure of power" is an enterprise far from being realizable in the Islamic Republic. He perceives the governmental funding as well the high prices the politically incorrect directors should pay as the major reasons for the absolute dearth of this phenomenon. See Alireza Haghighi, "Politics and Cinema in Post-revolutionary Iran: An Uneasy Relationship," in Richard Tapper, ed, *New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation, and Identity* (I.B.Tauris Publishers, London, 2006), 109–114.

[79] Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, Vol. 4: The Globalizing Era*, *1984–2010* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 29.

[80] Alberto Elena, *The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami*, trans. Belinda Coombes (SAQI and Iran Heritage Foundation, London, 2005), 103.

to a calm "Tibetan Buddhist,"[81] lambast Kiarostami for his failure to register such a political engagement with the event and thus reveal a specific conception of the spectacle-politics that equates politics with agential resistance, which it in turn conceptualizes in terms of action.[82] These critics unanimously presume that the political event takes place when it is represented in a cinema that produces spectacles resisting that which transcends them, while referring to a transcendent beyond. Therefore, both those who view Kiarostami as a politically neutral director, insofar as he is seen as not directly engaging political matters, and those who acknowledge his mode of critique yet in a Brechtian manner and in the mode of revealing the apparatus, are seeing him as a filmmaker of transcendence, and essentially have their presumptions as to what counts as a political cinema based on a transcendent notion of politics as well as upon the quintessence of the spectacle. For them politics takes an exclusively transcendent form and cinema, whether classical or modern, is a medium of producing transcendent spectacles.

In this chapter, however, I will attempt to demonstrate that this spectacle-focused politics "represents" the event as epistemologically transcendent and temporally linear, whereas Kiarostami's mode of critique does not represent the event through the transcendent perspective of the camera, but rather grasps the event, without the mediation of representation, as immanent to an untimely image. The spectacle necessitates an agential politics distinct from the non-agential politics of the untimely image owing to the

[81] See Maziar Eslami and Morad Farhadpur, *Paris-Tehran: Cinemā-ye Abbas Kiarostami* (Tehran: Farhang Saba, 2008), 58. My translation.

[82] For a further example of Kiarostami's reception as an apolitical director, see Azadeh Farahmand, "Perspectives on Recent (International Acclaim for) Iranian Cinema," in Richard Tapper, ed, *New Iranian Cinema,* 99.

different economies of knowledge into which they cast the event. As Rancière has noted, spectatorship as a position held at the mercy of the spectacle has been historically deemed negative for being construed as obstructing, first, the power of action and, second, the capacity for knowledge.[83] Although a spectacle-focused critique fosters an agential politics in order to eliminate the spectator's passivity induced by a perpetually deferred knowledge of the event which is withdrawn by the spectacle into a future, an image-focused mode of critique conceives the event not as unfolding in its progression towards a transcendent future, but rather as an untimely coevalness of the past and present, of recollection and perception, of virtuality and actuality. Those distinct economies of knowledge—a transcendent deferral on the one hand, and an immanent simultaneity on the other—result in distinct forms of politics. Since the spectacle entails a transcendence, and hence a deferral, of knowledge from the here and now, it encompasses a lack of knowledge, a constitutive ignorance, that is capable of generating a passivity in the spectator which has to be overcome by her joining with the spectacle or taking a contemplative distance from it. Artaud's theater of cruelty, Rancière has told us, for instance, prescribes the removal of distance whereas Brecht encourages intensifying that estrangement from the spectacle. An untimely image, on the contrary, produces no passivity insofar as it includes no transcendence, no deferred knowledge whatsoever. I will propose, therefore, that Kiarostami should be seen as a filmmaker of untimely images rather than one who manufactures spectacles, and his politics too should be deemed as image-politics.

[83] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2011), 2.

Kiarostami himself asserts his political neutrality to the degree that politics is understood as overt partisanship or activism stating that he does not wish "to overthrow anyone."[84] However, he maintains that his work is indeed strongly political provided that politics is employed as a notion inclusive of contemporary human problems as well as social engagement. On this note he has averred: "When you get involved in someone else's suffering and you try to convey it so that other people can feel it and understand, then this is political." "Today," he has gone on to add, "a filmmaker must necessarily question the nature of images rather than just to produce them."[85] Kiarostami distances himself from agential politics by not only refusing to commit to political entities or causes, but also, aesthetically, by hardly wishing to engage politics beyond the realm of the image itself. Unlike other politically-oriented Iranian directors such as Rakhshan Banietemad, Jafar Panahi, or Mohammad Rasulof, Kiarostami does not evoke the image in order to redirect the viewer's attention to what lies in excess of it. Nor does he employ the image, as in the counter-cinema of Jean-Luc Godard, to expose the mechanism and contrivance of the cinematic apparatus itself, where the spectacle is that which should rather be resisted through distanciation. Rather than manufacturing spectacles, Kiarostami produces untimely images, his aim being that of making the political critique immanent within the image itself. He thus effectively undercuts the analysis that attends to a politics defined exclusively in terms of explicit resistance. He likewise dismisses a simple framing of the spectacle as opposed to conveying an image that enables "someone else's suffering" to be felt.

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[84] Alberto Elena, "Re-educating the Gaze: The Cinema of Abbas Kiarostami," *Cinemaya: The Asian Film Quarterly*, vol. 63–64, 2004, 73.

[85] Ibid., 72.

In "question[ing] the nature of images," Kiarostami's immanent method primarily distinguishes him from the critics of the spectacle, such as the members of the Soviet avant-garde, who since the 1920s had been trying to displace and pierce the spectacle through the transcendent modality of metafiction. Secondly, as a postcolonial filmmaker, he parts company with the spectator-focused aesthetics of the third cinema, which mobilizes the spectators and enjoins them to enter into the spectacle, opening up new possibilities for participation.[86] Finally, Kiarostami's refusal to engage a transcendent critique of the spectacle does not merely differentiate him from those critics who want to overcome the passivity induced by the traditional spectacle. It further distances him, as I will demonstrate more elaborately, from such thinkers as Jacques Rancière who, in his own critical reading of the critics of the spectacle, and in his own efforts to rethink the transcendent "practice of the step ahead" intrinsic to the relationship between the spectator and the spectacle, tacitly reinscribes the temporal transcendence of the spectacle that he aims to obviate.[87]

Apart from the empirical grounds based on which any reading of Kiarostami's cinema as transcendent and, in particular, apolitical can be refuted,[88] there remains an epistemic problem which casts politics exclusively as a readiness to overthrow a regime

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[86] Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, "Toward a Third Cinema," *Cinéaste*, vol 4, no 3, 1970, 9.

[87] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 9.

[88] Construing Kiarostami's aesthetics as politically neutral can be refuted on two empirical grounds in terms of the assumptions that an agential politics is predicated upon when more broadly conceived in the context of the Iranian cinema. First, to limit the definition of political films such that it can be exclusively applied to those which circumvent censorship will cast the final products into a necessarily apolitical light, rendering the films as the cut and curtailed remnants of an atrocious censorship, and thus nothing more than the surviving yet harmless residues of a state-run machinery of political correctness. Under this assumption, there can exist no political films in Iranian cinema. Second, although many of the films produced in the pre- and postrevolutionary eras were banned after their release, they were initially endorsed and even funded by the Iranian government itself. A conception of politics defined in terms of oppositional resistance will fail empirically to tackle that contradiction.

or lead a charge. Under what epistemic conditions would it be possible to read the politics of Kiarostami's trilogy as more than an instrumental strategy for circumventing either the oppressive restrictions of a state or the hegemony of the West? To define his politics other than in terms of the order he wishes to resist or overthrow? What other forms of politics remain indeterminate to a critical optics solely focused on the ways a phenomenon reveals its own modes of production through the assumption of a meta-mode of critique?

Due to their investment in spectacle-focused politics, Kiarostami's critics fail to regard his politics beyond this epistemic problem in its creative singularity, and instead tend to read it back into the representational binaries inhering in the spectacle. Owing to what can be identified as its representational character, the spectacle makes any attempt to grasp an event in its singularity fall short insofar as it assumes a necessarily binary modus operandi that cuts and splits the fluid passing of the event into bifurcated binarities in order to make the event signify and to further render it significant within the existing binaries of representation. This representational quality of the spectacle casts the event within an economy of knowledge in which the event becomes representable at the cost of its division between its known present and its unknown future, i.e. by its subjection to a linearized temporality. The spectacle, thus, captures the event through representation, which is to say, in Jean-Luc Nancy's terms, as "an unfolding," as "a process or a procession" of instants and states, identified with various episodes, reducing, therefore, "the event-ness" of the event to content, and turning its eventuation (*Geschehen*) into a

narrative rendition (*Geschichte*).[89] By absorbing the becoming of the event into a progressive content, and by turning its agitated "passing" as such into a stable, substantial truth, representation therefore represses what Nancy names the "logic of the 'to happen'"[90] by imposing a substantial logic of the event which, in turn, tames and linearizes temporality. It conceives the event through the binary modality of narrative, a G*eschichte,* constantly unfurling towards an absent yet gradually actualizing future, structured around a linear conception of time. The political event is no exception to that principle, when its taking place is temporally linearized and its becoming is subjected to the all-is-given logic of representation, that is to say to the already existing representational binaries. How can then a representational grasp of Kiarostami's politics be overcome?

I intend to follow Nancy's identification of the first two films of the trilogy as rendering visible "the immediate reality" of life through the presentation and linking of images that are in need of no signs and that move towards no "mystery" or "revelation" but rather towards "insignificance." Nancy has regarded the first sequel of the trilogy as encompassing a parallel movement of two registers, namely the register of "mobility as essence of presence and presence as a coming, coming and passage" as well as the register of "passage through the image, or to the image."[91] With the intertwinement of these two registers, Kiarostami crafts, according to Nancy, a cinema in which the image

[89] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000), 162–3.

[90] Ibid., 163.

[91] See Jean-Luc Nancy, "On Evidence: *Life and Nothing More*, by Abbas Kiarostami," *Discourse* 21, no 1 (Winter 1999): 81.

is not an alienated "representation" of existence, but its "figure,"[92] its "evidence" or "*patence*"[93] as well as the visibility of its "immediate reality."[94] Nancy has argued that this cinema is marked by a new mode of signification, a Spinozist "perseverance of being in being"[95] and the meaning of life as something "continuing," a truth "that manifests itself… and has no need for a sign." Nancy argues that this immanent mode of signification without signs is "another way of producing meaning,"[96] as it slides "indefinitely… toward insignificance," and suspends all meanings and myths. As to *Life and Nothing More*, Nancy writes:

> Being is not something; it is that something goes on. It is that it continues, neither above or below the moments, events, singularities and individuals that are discontinuous, but in a manner that is stranger yet: in discontinuity itself, and without fusing it into a *continuum*. It continues to discontinue, it discontinues continuously. Like the images of the film.[97]

I would regard this immediacy, therefore, as opposing the signifying binaries and the rational cuts of the spectacle, and as what grasps the event, instead, through the irrationality, and hence insignificance, of a non-representational, immanent image. In order to further develop Nancy's reading and circumvent the epistemic conundrum of

[92] Ibid., 86.

[93] Ibid., 87.

[94] Ibid., 85.

[95] Ibid., 78.

[96] Ibid., 87.

[97] Ibid., 77–88.

representation, I treat Kiarostami's politics as a "question[ing] of the nature of images" in the creative singularity of his cinematic language and as an event immanent in his cinematic images themselves. His is a politics in which the "logic of to happen" is distinct from the "all-is-given logic" of the existing binaries of representation and its agitated passing elides the transcendent linearization of time integral to representational modalities. Kiarostami's politics should be grasped outside the representational binaries of the spectacle and the transcendent linearization of time. This politics, which happens at the level of the image, should be conceived as a non-representational event, heterogenous to the temporal linearization of narrative, passing in its radical newness, and therefore becoming, to evoke Nancy, in its "suddenness" and "surprise."[98]

This radical newness, further indicated by Kiarostami's status as a postcolonial filmmaker, is the result of his new filmic grammar, which dismantles the transcendent linearization of time and continuity of space. As Negar Mottahedeh has observed, like other Iranian and post-colonial directors, Kiarostami had to develop a new cinematic grammar, which unlike "the conventionalized language of Hollywood … could not make use of the filmic codes that have habitually rendered time and space continuous."[99] In recasting his cinematic language and crafting what David Rodowick has dubbed "patois"[100] or a "minor language,"[101] Kiarostami is able to generate a new tongue as he transforms a language structured around the linear temporality of spectacle into the

[98] Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 165.

[99] Negar Mottahedeh, *Displaced Allegories: Post-revolutionary Iranian Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 179.

[100] David Norman Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 156.

[101] Ibid., 167.

discontinuous images of his own "minor cinema."[102] Dismissing the transcendence of the spectacle and its linearization of time, Kiarostami's new grammar dispenses with an agential politics and the concomitant action thereof. Instead of encouraging action for the removal of a passivity induced by a constitutive lack of knowledge, his politics is hardly the result of a desire for eliminating any lack or for bridging any transcendence. His untimely images, having discarded spatiotemporal continuities, rule out the possibility of a lack of knowledge about a progressive event, the possibility of a knowledge deferred from the here and now while being withdrawn into a transcendent future. Instead, he founds his politics upon the gaze, on the very act of seeing itself, by consolidating what Alberto Elena has rightly identified as an "ethics of vision."[103] He does so by conveying how "someone else's suffering" feels without the mediation of representation, without the spatiotemporal transcendence of the spectacle, immediately, in the immanence of an untimely image which has radically forgotten the continuities of time and space.

Although his films in fact prioritize seeing over action, establishing a cinema of the gaze largely received in the light of its relation to directors like Rossellini,[104] any reading of his ethics of vision as a second-hand version of Italian Neorealism fails to do justice to the creativity of his image-making politics.[105] Mulvey, drawing upon Deleuze,

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[102] Ibid., 141.

[103] See Elena, "Re-educating the Gaze," 72. As he himself expounds, he places the gaze of children "behind my own camera, and [brings] it before the eyes of their elders." On this note, see Lila Zanganeh, *My Sister, Guard Your Veil; My Brother, Guard Your Eyes: Uncensored Iranian Voices* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2006), 83.

[104] Elena, "Re-educating the Gaze," 70.

[105] For instance, Laura Mulvey ascribes the realism dominating the films by the directors of the new Iranian cinema, including Kiarostami, to the popularity of Italian neorealism in the post-revolutionary era. See Laura Mulvey, "Kiarostami's Uncertainty Principle," *Sight and Sound*, Vol 8, Issue 6, 1998, 26.

gestures tacitly towards the substitution of a cinema of an agent in Kiarostami with what Deleuze, in reference to Italian Neorealism, has called a cinema "of purely optical situations … a cinema of the seer, and no longer of the agent."[106] However, she remains invested in a reading of his politics through the constitutive dualisms of the spectacle. Dismissive of the immanence of its images, Mulvey's critique subscribes to a reading of Kiarostami's cinema as transcendent, consigning its politics to the arena of narrative history—of G*eschichte.* Contrary to this chronological representation is a non-representational history of the event called forth by the modern cinema—one that has replaced the continuity of rational cuts with its irrational interstices. It is through the spatial deframings of its discontinuous images, Deleuze has told us, that a new politics in modern cinema finds a space in the "irrational … interstice" rather than the spatial continuity of a "rational" cut.[107] In this irrational interstice lies a political event whose history should be written without a representational linearity produced by a transcendent perspective—either of the camera or of the spectator—and devoid of the continuum of time and space, while being capable of the expression of, without representing, the interstice. It calls for a different way of grasping the event, for an immanent history. "If we want to grasp an event," contends Deleuze, "we must not show it, we must not pass along the event, but plunge into it, go through all the geological layers that are its internal history."[108] In Deleuze's geo-philosophy, the geological mapping counters the transcendent "passing along" the event. Calling for a different engagement with the

[106] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone, 1989), 2.

[107] Ibid., 181.

[108] Ibid., 254–5.

event, it is opposed to a representation enabled by the event's spatio-temporal transcendence. Outside the conceptual frame of representation, the event qua event is turned non-representational and the immanent image depicting it avoids referring to a beyond. The event is conceived when its "internal history" is explored, in its immediate reality, by a plunging into it, rather than perceived externally, through mediation, as an appearing phenomenon or a signifying sign. Deleuze's relegation of representation and the importance of "plunging into" the inner history of the event recall Kiarostami's rethinking of politics beyond the realm of representation, as an attempt to "question the nature of images" in order to convey how an event "feels." An internal history has replaced a representational history narrated through a transcendent perspective, and an immersion into the event has superseded a transcendent separation from it. So if there is an interstitial image-politics in Kiarostami's trilogy, its creativity can be expressed without any recourse to the linearity of representation.

Here, in order to facilitate an understanding of how his "purely optical situations" develop a politics far removed from the agential politics demanded by any transcendent reading, I propose to critique the representational mode of reading politics in Kiarostami's critical reception. Regarding Rancière's account of the spectacle, I will demonstrate that the problem of spectacle and Rancière's solution to that problem are based on a transcendent temporality lacking in Kiarostami. Although Kiarostami's critical reception has consistently subscribed to a politics predicated upon the existence of the spectacle in his films, my wager is to replace the transcendent notion of politics with an immanent one—one that takes place at the level of images rather than spectacles, where the linear temporality of the narrative and "the filmic codes [rendering] time and

space continuous" are ruptured, and where a non-representational aesthetics with no transcendent possibility to resist emerges. I will argue that Kiarostami's politics occurs in neither the spectacular nor spectatorial resistance to transcendence but in the immanence of the image itself, which is no longer a spectacle, and which finds itself inexorably emptied out of any transcendence and thus, by necessity, of all possibilities for an agential politics.

Rancière's Transcendent Temporality

In his *The Emancipated Spectator* (*Le Spectateur émancipé*, 2008), Jacques Rancière has reconsidered spectatorship as a quintessential question at the heart of the relationship between art and politics. He has addressed what he has called "the paradox of spectator[ship]" which dismisses the possibility of any spectacle without spectators, yet aims to abolish spectatorship as such. Rancière has read the problem of spectatorship as an obstacle to the power of action and the capacity for knowledge.[109] One can assume that the major issue with the spectacle in this particular mode of its conception is that before a spectacle the spectator is kept helplessly passive by her constant desire to achieve a knowledge which is denied her until the spectacle comes to a close, i.e. until ultimately "the gaze in thrall to shades" receives the deferred truth.[110] What the spectating person contemplates is not the truth of the spectacle, but rather, following Rancière, her own "self-dispossession,"[111] her own separation from the truth, or the alienation of her

[109] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 2.

[110] Ibid., 3.

[111] Ibid., 6.

own essence. Conceived as such, the spectacle has functioned as a "machinery of ignorance, the optical machinery" which has to be overcome.[112] While in Antonin Artaud's theater of cruelty, for instance, the mediation and the distance separating the spectacle from the viewer should be abolished by removing her from the position of observation into that of self-possession, and by transforming her passivity into activity, in Bertold Brecht's epic theater as well as in Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (*La société du spectacle*, 1967), Rancière has suggested, the viewer should be allowed some distance of estrangement or alienation for the spectacle to be contemplated. Therefore, to the spectacle as an obstacle to knowledge and action, Artaud and Brecht respond by a dismissal of the gaze through reconceptualizing the spectator as one who seeks to take part in the spectacle as an active participant rather than a passive beholder.

A set of presumptions, one can deduce, undergird this particular conception of the spectacle. One is that the spectator's ignorance as to a deferred future, which the spectacle keeps concealing, comes to function as the driving force of her passivity. And the transcendent knowledge, located beyond the future collapse of the spectacle, and withdrawn from the present of the spectator, can turn the passivity into action if it is revealed. Thus, the revelation, to the gaze, of the knowledge withdrawn by, and located in the future of, the spectacle can not only efface the spectacle as such but will primarily undo the futurity of that knowledge, as well as, and indeed more significantly, the futurity of the future itself. Therefore, the problem of the spectacle is fundamentally a temporal one.

[112] Ibid., 3.

As opposed to its conception, including by Mulvey herself, as an atemporal stasis halting narrative progression,[113] I approach the spectacle as a temporal positioning of knowledge, as a machinery for the reproduction of its deferred futurity. Yet, if the futurity of knowledge and, consequently, the futurity of future, collapse, there will remain no spectacle anymore, nor any transcendence, nor *a fortiori* any distance to be abolished or contemplated as a possibility for resisting the spectacle. The presentation of the future to the gaze will enable the gaze to see through the spectacle and what is concealed beyond it, and thus no longer observe in a present of ignorant passivity.

While critics of the spectacle aim to either make the audience refine its gaze by taking distance from the spectacle or to simply abdicate its gaze by relinquishing its distance, Rancière draws on the analogy of the relationship between an "ignoramus" and a "schoolmaster" to refute their assumptions. He posits that the schoolmaster is not more knowledgeable than the pupil; he only has, Rancière argues, a "knowledge of ignorance," that is, a knowledge of what he knows and the ignoramus lacks, a difference which is a matter of "position,"[114] and which should be firmly maintained and constantly reproduced by the schoolmaster for the stability of their positional differences to be retained. For Rancière, the passivity of the gaze should be resolved by the ignoramus's replacing of "the knowledge of ignorance" as the desired knowledge, with the knowledge she lacks but still can achieve through associations, "by observing and comparing … a sign with a fact, a sign with another sign."

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[113] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 198–209.

[114] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 9.

Although in Rancière's proposal for what he calls "intellectual emancipation"[115] the receptive and passive presumptions *à propos* an image are eliminated, the knowledge itself keeps inexorably inhabiting a transcendent future. While the spectating person, according to Rancière, should not strive to bridge the gap between her own knowledge and the spectacle, which are kept at an irreducible positional distance, she needs to keep translating signs into the host of other signs she possesses in order "to cover… the gulf"[116] between what she already knows and what she does not have yet any knowledge of.[117] The "practice of the 'step ahead'"[118] of the spectacle interminably separating a concealed knowledge from the spectator has thus turned, in Rancière's formulation, into a perpetually deferred knowledge of signs, growing in meaning as they approach a transcendent future. In his associative model, it is now only language and its representational binaries that ceaselessly withdraw the knowledge that the spectacle used to conceal. Not only does Rancière's effort to undo the ignorant passivity associated with the spectacle fail by reinscribing the same temporal transcendence it seeks to eliminate, his reading keeps operating in terms of the very same binaries he is trying to combat. The transcendence of knowledge still obtains. Owing to her ability to observe, to select, and to link what she sees to a myriad of other things, "the spectator also acts," but only in the sense that "viewing is also action."[119] We are back to the binary field of action prioritized

[115] Ibid., 10.

[116] Ibid., 10.

[117] Ibid., 11.

[118] Ibid., 9.

[119] Ibid., 13.

over passivity, of a privileged knowledge over ignorance, of what would undergird an agential politics over "an ethics of vision." The transcendent futurity of knowledge in the spectacle is in full force in Rancière's associative model. An "intellectual emancipation,"[120] according to him, is bestowed upon the viewer only once she becomes cognizant of the fact that in her "passive"—and by extension, ignorant—viewing, she has in fact been within the terrain of a privileged "action," busy comparing and associating signs, that she has been, so to speak, actually "acting."[121] Although Rancière had initially intended to take to task the presumption of a necessary distance between the spectacle and the spectator held by critics of the spectacle ranging from Artaud to Brecht, in his own effort to replace that irreducible distance, he presumes viewing to become political only provided that it be construed as acting. Acting is privileged and more importantly made possible as a result of an emancipating knowledge, a knowledge about a previous ignorance. We can discern in Rancière's formulation nothing less than a schema of reversal wherein he reinscribes the representational binaries of the spectacle.

Kiarostami's Untimely Image

As opposed to Jacques Rancière's conception of the spectacle, Gilles Deleuze sees all things in relations of an indivisible becoming, rather than implementing binary distributions. He posits a non-representational relation to the internal history of an event, only grasped through an immanent immersion into it rather than a transcendent separation from it. Insofar as he conceptualizes the history of the event without reducing its "event-

[120] Ibid., 10.

[121] Ibid., 9.

ness" to its content, one can contend that his G*eschichte* in the sense of history remains far from *Geschichte* in the sense of narrative. It is not represented in the transcendence of the spectacle. Rather, his is a non-narrative history crystallized in an immanent image. Deleuze's notion of difference undergirding this immersion into an internal history differs from the binary differences of representation, insofar as it is meant "to resist transcendence in all of its forms."[122] In the light of Deleuze's aim to grasp the internal history of the event, what can Kiarostami's initial articulation of politics signify if he defines it as "question[ing] of the nature of images" so that "people can feel" the "sufferings" of others? How does his new filmic grammar, which discards the continuities of time and space, generate an interstitial space which, in lieu of representing an event, renders it available in its immediate reality?

Kiarostami's immanent image crystallizes the forces of a new history of the event by not only depriving time of its linearity and thus ruling out the transcendence of the spectacle, but also by the inclusion of the irrational interstice into the image itself. It thus forges an untimely image which grasps an event in its fluid passing yet fails to signify insofar as it entails an irrational cut in lieu of the rational cuts, binaries, and bifurcations of the representational spectacle. In its fundamental re-orientation of temporality, the Koker trilogy gives the moment the infinite possibility of a radical renewal, marked by a constitutive repetition. Characterized by a successive revisiting of the reality of each preceding film as merely a fiction, Kiarostami's trilogy synthesizes a temporality which ascertains a new history of "someone else's suffering" on the assured ground of its

[122] Todd May, *Reconsidering Difference: Nancy, Derrida, Levinas, and Deleuze* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 177.

repetitions as against the contingencies of an earthquake, which has not only eradicated the horizontality of time, but has also leveled out the horizons of space. Repetition therefore assumes a political valance, hardly, however, by virtue of having developed a transcendent critique of the spectacle to reveal the contrived fictionality of reality. Rather, repetition is the site of a politics insofar as it grasps the event in its newness, without appropriating it into the all-is-given logic of representation, without reducing it to the already existing binaries. At one point in the third film, *Through the Olive Trees,* the main character, Hossein, pondering over his rejection by his lover, walks through the olive trees as he unwittingly enters into the shooting location of a film and is consequently asked to walk out of the frame. We recognize the scene that is being shot, during which Farhad rocks a moaning infant in a hammock who has been temporarily left alone by her mother, as one belonging to the previous film, *Life and Nothing More*, while we get a glance, in the interim, of the crew—including Kiarostami and his assistant, a young Jafar Panahi—standing behind the camera (figs. 12 & 13). As one of the crew members calls 'cut' to halt the shooting of the scene, others wait till Hossein sits down on a corner before they resume the shooting. Although the scene being shot belongs originally to the first sequel, *Life and Nothing More*, the clapperboard placed by one of the crew members beside Hossein gives us a different title, the title of the third film, *Through the Olive Trees* (fig. 14).

Hossein's presence has interrupted the making of the second film which has been revisiting itself in the second sequel by the untimely name of *Through the Olive Trees*.

Fig. 12 A still from *Zir-e derakhtān-e zeitun* (*Through the Olive Trees*, 1994). Having entered the shooting location of a film, Hossein is asked to leave the frame by a member of the film crew, Jafar Panahi.

Fig. 13 A still from *Zendegi va digar hich* (*Life and Nothing More*, 1992). Stopping by the olive trees, Farhad rocks a moaning infant in the hammock.

Fig. 14 A still from *Zir-e derakhtān-e zeitun* (*Through the Olive Trees*, 1994). Sitting on a corner, Hossein's gaze rests on a clapperboard that bears the title of the second sequel.

His unwelcome entry, however, has temporarily kept the crew from shooting, while the third film has in the meanwhile continued to capture Hossein in his speechless bewilderment. In following Hossein's perplexed gaze, however, *Through the Olive Trees* has ceased to capture its other continuity happening elsewhere, external to this shot, unfolding in the resumed shooting of the scene of Farhad's rocking of the baby in the hammock, a scene which is itself the reality of the first sequel now recaptured as fiction in the second one. These scenes elide a presence, and their time and space are divided and rendered discontinuous while the film has continued itself, in two locations, simultaneously, twice. Once Hossein's gaze meets the clapperboard, he observes the title of the third film which has continued to capture him while at the same time it has resumed elsewhere, taking a different continuity. The film which has externalized him after his interruption of the frame, has outlived the interruption of the announced cut in

order to keep capturing him by the very same camera of the very same film the frame of which he had been just asked to leave. As Hossein's gaze meets the title of the film now stopped, the same film persists to continue without interruption.

When is *Through the Olive Trees* being made, in which time, and where, in which location, within the rational continuity of which space? How can it be assumed that it is the previous film which enters the current second film, but how can that precede the third one anymore when it does survive, and one when recurrently in the film the clapperboard gives us a different title? The scene which is being shot also belongs to the outlive, the making of the current film? How can *Through the Olive Trees* be positioned in the future of *Life and Nothing More* as long as the former incorporates in itself an inchoate production of the latter? And how should the film in question not be treated as belated vis-à-vis *Life and Nothing More*, which it finds temporally ahead of itself? To which film does this image belong?

This interstitial space-time is barred, and externalized, from the third film, which has been halted yet has still continued and, at the same time, is interrupted by the title of the current film which is referring to a scene from the previous film it now revisits as a framed fiction. This scene is the site of an ontological crisis, belonging neither to the past, nor to any present, but to a coevalness of the past and present, an interfolding of the actuality and virtuality, a coextensive persistence of the outside and inside. It is a repetition without a presence, but also a repetition without a return of the past. The second sequel does not find itself in the future of the previous film now actualized after its past-ness. *Through the Olive Trees* repeats itself in each single instance of repeating the first sequel. However, through the reference of the first sequel to itself by the title of

Through the Olive Trees, not only does the former erupt into the presence of the current film, but it also empties out itself of a past present. We face a composite of images formed on the plane of immanence. Oriented simultaneously towards the past and the future, this impossible temporality is without a self-presence, one which resists presentation, which breaks with all ontology. The spectacle has no present to be able to dispossess the viewer of her own self-presence, as it was hoped to do so in Artaud, Brecht, and Debord, nor can it enact an "interminable practice of the 'step ahead'"[123] as was the case in Rancière's reformulation. Without a present, it has exhausted all possibilities for a transcendent future. The spectacle has collapsed. It has turned into an immanent image, into a singular space-time. Although the spectacle-focused politics of Brecht and Rancière are founded upon a transcendent concept of time that entails a present as its quintessential feature, Kiarostami's untimely image lacks a present, and thus fails to possess a transcendent future. It therefore forms an economy of knowledge that rules out the possibility of ignorance, and by extension, the possibility of any passivity. One knows everything insofar as one finds simultaneous the actual present and virtual past and future, and yet one knows nothing of "significance," since the image does not linearize time nor the space, that is to say, since it hardly "signifies." The simultaneous juxtaposition of the actual and virtual as both immanent to this image brings to a close the constitutive dualisms of the spectacle which cuts and bifurcates the event in order to render it significantly representable. Kiarostami's "ethics of vision"[124] forecloses an agential politics formulated upon the dichotomy of passivity and activity.

[123] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 9.

[124] Elena, "Re-educating the Gaze," 72.

His framing functions as a spatial deframing wherein the image does not "[define] a space, but [imprints] a time."[125] This scene and the constitutive repetitions in the Koker trilogy, erode the faith in the having-been-there of an image, with no pre-existing subject inhabiting a real time, thereby turning all purported reality into overt fiction. This is not simply metafiction, however. The political in the Koker trilogy, that is the relentless revisiting of the past as no more than fiction, is irreducible to the content, to *Geschichte*, or to what is happening; the political is the very peculiar mode in which these films repeat themselves. It is presented by a temporality in which not only the present is always another repetition of the past, but more importantly, the past becomes a repetition of the present. Repetition, here, is not a simple iteration of the past, a simple return of the past now in a different context. Its logic has been contaminated by the irrational interstice included in the image. Rather than a simple iteration of the past, repetition turns radically new. This is the result of a time emptied of presence, a ruptured Chronos, no longer continuous, and far from being representable. While the representational spectacle appropriates the newness of the event into the already existing binaries of the present and future, the seen and unseen, the known and unknown, i.e. into the all-is-given logic of representation, the new remains immune from being conditioned within an immanent image; the event, instead, is framed in its radical newness, in its singularity, when the earthquake, in this trilogy, is not a matter of a recollected past nor of an anticipated future, but that which shatters the presence of the image itself, that which remains irredeemably non-representable. With the past of the image surviving its future, and its future taking over its past, the untimely image is bereft of a perpetually deferred yet

[125] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 319.

gradually actualizing future. It is rather marked by the inclusion of the outside into the inside, of recollection into perception, of the past into the present. Kiarostami questions the nature of images by questioning the nature of repetition.

Instead of falling back into the transcendence of the spectacle, Kiarostami's untimely image, by including virtuality into actuality and rendering past and future coextensive, emancipates history from casting the event as a simple repetition of a linear past. His untimely image, lacking in presence, barely opposes what lies beyond it. Instead, it achieves a capacity to consummate its image-focused politics by refuting the binary of action and passivity, knowledge and ignorance. The viewer perceives the past and future at once, loses her transcendent perspective towards, and her separation from, the event once the spectacle turns into an immanent image, once the continuity of time and space is ruptured. She can plunge into the internal history of the event to "get involved in someone else's suffering," without appropriating the alterity of that lived experience into his own language, into the already existing, and thus reductive, binaries of representation. She grasps the suffering of others in its radical newness, "feeling" the forces of the earthquake in the untimely image itself and its seismic forces now released in "the geological layers" of its "internal history." Inasmuch as Kiarostami's trilogy lacks spectacles, any critique of his films for their consummation of, or failure to register, an agential politics fundamentally misconstrues them by attempting to detect in them a politics predicated upon a transcendent engagement with the event, demanding thus a resistance in his images against what transcends them.

V. CONCLUSION
SINGULAR REPETITIONS: TOWARDS A POETICS OF AN INTERSTITIAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

Following the disputed 2009 presidential elections, Mohammad Khatami's website was blocked and he was subject to a travel ban for his perceived "sedition" against the state in supporting the reformist leader of the Green Movement.[126] Khatami, who had served as Iran's president from 1997 to 2005, was officially targeted by a state-mandated media blackout on February 16, 2015.[127] "There is an order that bans the media from publishing photos or reports about this person," announced Iranian judiciary spokesperson, without even mentioning the name of the former president.[128] Within five days of this official announcement, a similar effacement of his name marked the statement issued by Iran's supreme leader who, in his message of condolence for the passing of Khatami's sister, refused to mention his name and, in a typical instance of his nuanced rhetorical twist, instead addressed his letter to Khatami's bereaved mother.[129] At the same time, owing to flouting the ban, two news outlets, including *Jamārān* which was associated to the late founder of the Islamic Republic, were blocked on February 26.[130] The ban on any mention of Khatami's name or publishing his image arrived only two years after his

[126] https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2015/12/khatami-media-ban-and-etelaat-newspaper/

[127] https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2015/03/iran-khatami-media-ban.html

[128] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/17/iranian-media-banned-from-mentioning-mohammad-khatami

[129] https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2015/03/iran-khatami-media-ban.html

[130] https://www.dw.com/fa-ir/%D9%BE%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AD%D8%B0%D9%81-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B1%D9%81%D8%B9-%D9%81%DB%8C%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF/a-18286581

endorsement proved instrumental in the rise to victory of Hassan Rouhani as the president of Iran in 2013 by a slight margin. Denounced as "illegal" and a "jest" by President Rouhani,[131] the ban's public announcement indicated the hardliners' best attempt to curtail Khatami's political influence one year prior to the elections for the parliament as well as the Assembly of Experts[132] scheduled for February 2016. Replacing his name in the news outlets, therefore, were descriptive phrases such as "the leader of the reformist government,"[133] bracketed ellipses,[134] or images framing him in extreme long shots.[135] Absent from all domestic media was, however, his name and his photos.

On February 21, 2016, Khatami issued a four-minute video statement on his social media outlets.[136] Naming the proposed electoral lists for both elections as "The List of Hope," he urged the individuals "concerned about the country's interests, progress and obviating the threats and limitations ahead" to take part in both the upcoming elections for the Iranian parliament and the Assembly of Experts. Tacitly naming his victorious

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[131] https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/08/world/middleeast/hassan-rouhani-mohammad-khatami-iran.html

[132] A committee of 88 clerics overseeing the incumbent supreme leader of Iran and responsible for electing his successor.

[133] https://www.mardomsalari.ir/news/69949/%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%AA-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%DA%A9%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AF

[134] https://www.ana.press/news/6653/%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B8%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%85%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B9%DB%8C%D8%AA-%DA%86%D8%A7%D9%BE-%D8%AA%D8%B5%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA

[135] https://mobile.twitter.com/SharghDaily/status/865450800759185408

[136] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcSYNfNpDZw

support for Rouhani in the 2013 elections as "the first step," he demanded a repetition of the triumph over the domestic hardliners, saying that our reformist coalition should now take "the second step" for the legislative branch. He urged the people to "vote for all individuals on both lists," going on to emphasize the significance of his request: "For all individuals on both lists, I repeat (*takrār mikonam*)," stated Khatami with his accented pronunciation of the word *takrār*, meaning "repetition," in lieu of the more common *tekrār.*

The video went viral, and the hashtag "*takrār mikonam"* ("I repeat") started to circulate quickly on social media. Out of 30 parliamentary seats assigned to Tehran, as many as 30 seats were won by the reformists, and out of the capital's 16 possible seats in the Assembly of Experts, only the last seat was gained by the hardliners.[137] Thus, the so-called List of Hope had gained the majority in both the parliament and the Assembly of Experts. In the wake of this landslide victory, Saʿid Hajjarian, the former advisor to president Khatami, suggested that "Khatami's brief video melted the immense apparatus of the state TV,"[138] while Mohammad Naʿimipur opined that it was Khatami's "I repeat" which ultimately changed the trajectory of the elections.[139] Further, ʻAli Shakuri-Rad,

[137] https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2016/02/160229_ir94_u04_election_results.amp

[138] https://sahamnews.org/2016/03/297620/

[139] https://www.rouydad24.ir/fa/news/52623/%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%AA%D9%8E%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D9%86%D9%85-%D8%AC%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%BA%DB%8C%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF

Iranian physician and reformist politician, concurred that Khatami's "I repeat" was wholeheartedly accepted by the majority of people and "generated an enormous wave."[140]

One year later, on May 14, 2017, another 8-minute video was published by Khatami on his social media channels, five days prior to the elections in which President Rouhani was running for a second term. "We will step in and vote for Rouhani," said a confident president Khatami, "to secure freedom of thinking, logical dialogue, lawful action, citizenship rights, and social and economic justice. And this time," he added, "it is you who should repeat."[141] On his channel on the popular Telegram application alone, his statement calling for agential repetition was viewed over 5.8 million times, and his video message was widely shared across numerous pages and multiple platforms. While he was barred from the domain of representation, Khatami's "repetition" stood in for his name and his image. It was largely covered by reformist dailies, which marked the letters of the word not only by a coded green color, but also by an accented vowel feature which had signed "repetition," in Khatami's peculiar pronunciation of the Persian word, as a singular event (fig. 15 & 16).

I mention these various repetitions for their underlying significance to the broader questions at stake in my dissertation. What is the significance of this "repetition" if it

[140] http://bamdad24.ir/fa/news/3288/%D9%88%D8%A7%DA%98%D9%87-%DB%8C-%D8%AA%DA%A9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D9%86%D9%85-%D8%A2%D9%82%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AF%D9%84-%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%86%D8%B4%D8%B3%D8%AA%DA%A9%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%87-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%B4%DB%8C%D9%86-%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%B4%D8%AA%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%AF

[141] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCGR4RnxgH8

Fig. 15. *Mardomsālāri* daily, Monday, May 15, 2017. The headline repeats Khatami's sentence in the video message, marking his word by the distinct vowel in his pronunciation as well as the green color, associated to the Green Movement: "Now, it is you who should repeat Rouhani."

Fig. 16 *Etemād* daily, May 20, 2017. "The nation repeated," reads the headline, one day after Rouhani is re-elected as the President of Iran, spelling the word as *takrār* in lieu of the more common pronunciation *tekrār*.

appears on the front page not despite but because of the *ellipsis* of the forbidden memory, invoking it and letting it continue to speak itself? Does this "repetition," which is in excess of the continuous histories of domestic tyranny and foreign interventionism, push at the limits of possible political action? And does its excessive status have a bearing on Iranians' political agency in overcoming, *simultaneously*, the false binary of the "limitations" inside and the "threats" outside? These questions subtend both Khatami's situation and a broader trajectory for thinking about the relationship of history and repetition.

Takrār was not only the mode of emergence of a political agency that defied a state's historical revisionism effacing the name of a president from a polity's collective memory, but it was also the temporal structure which invoked the space of experience of the violent crackdown of the Green Movement in order to reanimate the social bonds of its democratic imaginary. In this sense, much like various instances traced across the dissertation, *Takrār* opens up the revolutionary aporetics of time: an accented pronunciation of "repetition" turns the written word into a singular idiom of political defiance, and yet its singularity is signed and re-signified in every citation of a hashtag on social media. *Takrār* reveals the trajectory of history as ruptured and divided between what it *has been* and what it *should be*, as the site where the event of an idiosyncratic pronunciation is also a citable signature, and where an accented particular is also a disseminating universal. A singular repetition and a repetition of a singularity: *takrār* did not only mean and represent, but it was an enunciation doing things with the world.

If Khatami's *takrār* brings the particular and the universal into an asynchronous contemporaneity and if it thus gives a political valance to "repetition," it is because at the

heart of his repetition lies a disjunction between the *performative* pronunciation of "repetition" qua *takrār* and the *constative* semantic of the word qua *tekrār*. On the one hand, as a constative speech act, his repetition iterates the continuity of history as a flow of predictable events: voting in the legislative and presidential elections every two years. On the other hand, as a performative speech act, his repetition reveals an impulse that elides history, and interrupts the flow of its continuity as the site of a predictable causality: repeating as an affirmative mode of disobedience in order to exert one's national sovereignty and international agency and thus overcome "the threats and limitations ahead." Lastly, *takrār* turns the binary logic of "either… or" into an interstitial logic of "both… and." It changes the *iterable* semantics of "repetition," residing within language, into the event of a *singular* pronunciation, which is in turn infinitely reproduced, repeated, and *disseminated* on social media.

While the existing history of modern Iran has predominantly inscribed the *semantic* content of political enunciations, in this dissertation I aimed to draw the contours of an alternate historiography which attends to the *performative* politics that elides representability. Further, if Iran's existing historiography presumes the temporality of the modern to be linear, progressive and binary, my project construed the history of modern Iran as non-linear, durational and interstitial. My dissertation examined aesthetic repetitions in modern Iran as the sites in which a universal language was enunciated as a singular idiom. Additionally, it interpreted aesthetic repetitions as singular time-spaces wherein the binaries of time come to be negotiated in an asynchronous contemporaneity. Construed as such, in my three chapters, aesthetic repetition revealed not only a semantic politics of history as *tekrār*, but also its performative politics as *takrār*.

In the first section of my dissertation, I discussed the nationalization movement of the Iranian oil industry in 1951, which was overturned by an imperial coup in two years and resulted in the failure of the modernizing White Revolution of 1963. I focused on the rhythmic and durational character of Akhavan-Sales's poems, which replicate the duration of this failed modernizing revolution and the aborted movement for nationalizing Iran's oil. At a time when the Shah insisted on the glorification of a nationalist past to facilitate his modern vision of Iran's future, Akhavan-Sales's poetry, not oblivious to the past, resists the modern scheme of a linearized narrative and the postcolonial conception of time as progress. I considered Akhavan-Sales's abrupt shift from the predictable rhythms of classical metrics in his work prior to the coup. This work employs the unruly rhythms of *she'r-e now*, especially prominent in his *Of This Avestā* published following the coup and the White Revolution. The rhythmic character of his poems gestures to a spontaneous turn of events in every line. In the poetry's capitalization on the unexpected, it offers repetitions that are not to be considered the fulfillment of normative expectations, but instances of breaking with the status quo. In contrast to those who cast Akhavan-Sales as a defeatist and hopeless figure, I considered his use of the unexpected as a key site from which to understand his revolutionary politics.

In the second section of my project, I turned to the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. In doing so, I focused on Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's novel *The Colonel* (2011), which is centered on the story of a former colonel of the last Pahlavi Shah and offers an alternate history of the period. Banned in Iran, the novel has only ever appeared in translation and notably not anywhere in Persian.

Taking stock of the unique publication history of the text, I inquired in this chapter about the status of this text as a translation without origin. If translation is already a way of avoiding the original text, how can a past memory, which is only accessible in translation, remember itself by avoiding itself? And is this remembering-by-avoiding, I asked, different from history? I suggested in response that the novel, similar to Khatami's *takrār* , reveals the aporetics of time and brings the binary oppositions of the past/present, original/copy, and constative/performative into the suspended in-betweenness of translation. If *takrār*'s idiosyncratic pronunciation marked word by a surplus performance on top of its universal semantics, Dowlatabadi's translated novel, too, performs a testimony beyond its represented content. The novel not only testifies to the traumatic events of the revolution and the war, but as a text without an origin, it attests to its own traumatic status. This attestation, however, is only performed in translation. Therefore, for the traumatized novel to testify and to remember itself, it has to avoid itself by launching itself in the time of translation.

In the last section of the dissertation, turning to yet another event in Iranian history, I addressed a cataclysmic earthquake in 1990 that destroyed the village of Koker in northern Iran. In doing so, I analyzed the mechanism of repetition in Abbas Kiarostami's cinematic Koker trilogy, in which each sequel recasts the past films in a new light. Every sequel demands of the present a perspective informed by this newly illuminated past. The trilogy discards the logical continuities of time and space, and in lieu of representing the earthquake, renders the event immanent to its film form. Countering the prevailing assessment that Kiarostami is an "apolitical" director, I argued that the trilogy alters the viewers' sensibilities by capturing in film what is outside of the

frame. The structuring of time in Kiarostami's films and their coextensive persistence of the outside and inside prioritize seeing over action and replace a politics of agency with that of vision. While agential politics understands political action in terms of the binaries of representation (self/other, past/present, surface/depth, etc.), Kiarostami's politics of vision moves beyond binarism and linearity. Through non-linear repetitions, his films perform an excessive politics marked by a disjunction between the iterability of what they say and the singularity of what they do, hardly unlike the performative politics of Khatami's *takrār*.

By engaging the formal dynamics of rhythm, translation, and repetition, my dissertation has charted an alternate historiography of modern Iran that is attentive to the constraints of both orientalist and postcolonial histories. Working against such linear conceptions of history, I have focused on repetition and interstices that interrupt the continuous flow of historical time. Connecting and interweaving aesthetic repetition and historical events, my dissertation has focused on formal and syntactical details: the excess of a deictic ellipsis in Akhavan-Sales's poetry, a colon in Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's novel, and the outside of the frame in Abbas Kiarostami's Koker trilogy. Each of these details serve as interstitial sites to draw binary oppositions into an asynchronous contemporaneity. In so doing, instead of *representing* the events of the coup, the revolution and the earthquake, the three aesthetic forms across my three chapters (poetry, the novel, and film) *embody* the form of the event through their durational character, testimonial translation, and the untimely image.

This engagement with formal details from specific texts in modern Iran reveals the performative rather than representational politics: the semantics of hopelessness in

Akhavan-Sales's poetry *performed* a revolutionary politics through its unexpected temporality; the represented ghostliness of Dowlatabadi's translated novel *performed* a testimony to the spectrality of the post-revolutionary era, where not only the ghosts of the war and revolution, but also those of Iran's more remote history appeared to have returned; and, the filmic repetitions of Abbas Kiarostami refused to represent the earthquake, but instead *performed* the duration of the earthquake and made it immanent within the filmic image as a "happening" rather than as "what has happened." Much like Khatami's *takrār*, these performative acts, which are shared across all these chapters, are in excess of representation. To inscribe their irreducible history, we need to let the contours of a new historiography emerge at the limits set by singular repetitions beyond representation. This new historiography, traced across the various pages of the dissertation, offers both an insight into the persistent repetition of the past and an opening onto possible futures ahead.

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