

**Enfleshed Shadows and Cinecrophilic Images:  
A Note On *Indication* (Mojtaba Haghjoo, 2019)**

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Patricia MacCormack starts her essay 'Cinemasochism: Submissive Spectatorship as Unthought' by a quote from Deleuze's *Coldness and Cruelty*: 'The masochist needs to believe he is dreaming, even when he is not.'<sup>[1]</sup> She defines Cinemasochism as 'the openness of the spectator to images' in which each spectator experiences a kind of becoming-cinemasochist as becoming with the image's own becomings; 'like Deleuze and Guattari's call to becoming, it is neither imitation nor filiation, but alliance, that occludes the space between image as event and enfleshed spectator.' (ibid, 165) according to MacCormack:

Particularly in films that push the affect of the image to its extreme—**from horror to abstract films**—submission to the image beyond comprehension takes the viewer outside of film's metonymy, meaning, and time toward the kind of spatial ecstasy forged within the folding of film with embodied spectatorship. There is a risk in opening ourselves to cinematic affect, in experiencing the pain of loss of reified meaning in images. All spectators who open up to film potentially challenge their relationship to cinema in terms of gender, pleasure, and desire... Cinemasochism suggests a turn toward a nondialectical encounter with the outside or an alterity within self—the ecstasy of asignification and the experience of cinesexuality... What is at stake in Cinemasochism, however, are **excessive**, rather than absent, elements of representation'. (157-164, italics and bolds are mine)

With this introductory reference, I try to unfold the dark shadowy space of Mojtaba Haghjoo's short video *Indication* (2019) and what it does. If we were to speak of the *excessive* aspects of this visual work we have to map the contemporary socio-political context of the middle-east and its durable cultural codes with its roots in the notion of darkness as a weird thought-image. One of the first pre-Islamic theological and crypto-ontological examples of this notion can be found in ancient Manichean texts such as *Kephalaia* which polluted other interconnected geo-historical and psycho-geographical territories from China to Egypt. The effects of this fictional, semi-intellectual, semi-

mythological trace can even be surveyed in other heretical traditions from Suhrawardī's speculations in *The Philosophy of Illumination (Hikmat al-ishraq)* to Ayn al-Quzat Hamadani's heretical writings on Satanism and Black light of *Iblis*. But here in *Indication* that heretical resistance against the dominant discourse of the sovereignty redefines *nous* and tries to release its subversive potentialities from the bondages of neo-platonic hierarchies. Therefore, we mostly are encountered with a new reading of *darkness* under the secularization processes and the horizon of social movements in the middle-east countries and under the influence of the rise of new modern paradigms of critical thinking. Here we find ourselves in a realm of shadow-becoming, as Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh in his writings on some of the best known and seminal literary works of the contemporary Persian writers tries to theorize: 'a process of shadow-becoming, taking place across a deliriously non-linear and non-sequential trajectory, that primarily intersects the thematic currents' such as 'annihilation/wounding and hallucination/the unreal' [2]. As Bahbak shows,

for the annihilative subject, the executioner is not the one who commits the killing, but the monstrosity that stands behind him in the shades, clutching itself against intimations of order as if to a screen, thinking it has won... though not realizing that its adversary is itself the product of a shadow-becoming. (ibid, 263)

*Indication* begins with a slowed mobile movement of the camera in a darkly enclosed space in which our vision is limited to a low-level shot and we are banned to see any perspective; this shot moves near the ground and we cannot see the other side of the space because there is nothing but an absolute darkness. Next shot shows also a low-angle shot; an upside-down image from within another barred space, and at the end of this closed space we see an obscure figure at the threshold of the space shaking his hand slowly from an intensely bright window that highlights the function of contrast between the outside and the inside spaces; but we banned to approach this obscurity and we have to distancing and moving back and down as much as possible. The next few shots push forward this strategy of distancing and detachment as if we are entrapped in a dungeon. However, this middle-eastern dungeon hardly reminds us those kinds of obsessional prisons of Genet (*A Song of Love*, 1950) or Bresson (*A Man Escaped*, 1956), especially in terms of temporality and duration. The entrapped eye of camera, the dense perplexity of the view, affirms the fluid free-floating images of a daydream as much as affirms the micro-politics of a nightmarish exhaustion; this is not a human gaze that postulate an absolute abyss as an existence but a non-human gaze as a consequent fold of *the outside* itself; a gaze that unfolds itself in-between the wall-layers, window-stratum, and hole-zones of indiscernibility; a shadow-gaze that extensively forced to persistence and encapsulated within the striated spaces while intensively digs the white wall, call for a smooth space, and opens our eyes to a cold dark desert of another earth laden of shadow-closures; a darkness beyond snow and fire that insofar as fights against, within, and in spite of becoming-shadow, transcends the dialectical opposition of the inside and outside; and thus, this video with its tendency to an Artaudian '*cinéma brut*'<sup>[3]</sup>, consists of shattered disjointed blocks of black-and-white images of leaky interior spaces and bounded exterior space. Syptomologically speaking, the

onerous burdensome atmosphere of *Indication* hints at a poisonous morbid effects of reactive forces; a clash between the State apparatus as the axiomatic pole of the thought and the nomadic war machine as the problematic pole of the thought; shadowy space of the video stand at the edge of a process of marginalization which is inherent in this struggle between the constituted Power vs. all the constitutive powers. This home-made low-budget video comes from a condition of socio-political crisis, suppression and censorship, and from a country that its government had prisoned more than 7000 protestors and activists in 2018<sup>[4]</sup>. This elimination of various kinds of alterity and otherness which asphyxiate all the different voices operate as an index of endo-colonization and pave the way for disappearance of othered groups, minorities and marginalized populations. In a different context, Deleuze diagnoses the function and role of Nietzschean symbolism of shadow in terms of becoming-reactionary, and concerning the negativity of a passive nihilism which arise from the above-mentioned condition of Iranian suicidal State which eats the meats of its own civilians we can quote his words:

The shadow is the wanderer himself, species activity itself, culture and its movement. The meaning of the wanderer and of his shadow is that only the shadow wanders... the shadow is this activity itself insofar as it loses its aim and searches for its principle.<sup>[5]</sup>

*Indication's* liminal defamiliarization fights against the gregarious and resists to the negativity of deathly sphere of monotheistic fundamentalism, and at the same time it becomes shadowy, and bears this toxic shadow in itself or in its tomb; however this murky tomb is also a nonproductive gloomy womb which problematizes the common-sense notion of fertility and manifests the antithetical facet of a familiar productivity: *Indication* crystalizes a lithopedion.

*Indication* eerily shows us the shadows of a few bodies on the road and then by its application of an 'irrational cut' we see a dark cloudy sky, and then a single clothed body walks in a snowy space: we cannot define them obviously and easily, we don't know if we are allowed to have sympathy with them or not. The strangeness of their gaseous states of (non)beings put us in an obscure indeterminable position which make us anxious and dazed: here we find ourselves in an enfolded spacio-temporal plane that forces us Cinemasochistically to chase the continuum of image-blocks in their schisms: here our micro-perceptions open themselves to the duration of the inessential. 'The anxiety of the masochist divides into an indefinite awaiting of pleasure and an intense expectation of pain.'<sup>[6]</sup> Haghjoo don't try to symbolize a notion of tyrannical enslavement, or to express a political manifesto, but this is the unstable immateriality and formlessness of the shadow as the basic matter of his work that fascinates him; and this shadow stutteringly puke itself through the body of his video.

Bahbak in his another work, *New Literature and Philosophy of the Middle East: The Chaotic Imagination* (2010), talks about anti-epistemology of *blurring*, 'one that is persistently unknowing itself'; a 'recurrent technique of self-blurring that in turn allows the shadow to become a prosthetic for both *obscurity* and *distortion*', and one that 'possessed of accurate and amorphous contours, stranding itself between opacity and translucence, awakening and sleep'; he talks about 'an exodus without exit, one of infinite *distance*, surrounded by

debris and ruin', and of 'permanent *midnight*' and finally he tell us about 'the banished' and 'the sensation of the waste based in *deprivation*'.<sup>[7]</sup>

This video as I know is a part of an ongoing project; it is going to be an ever-unfinished project, or a project in-process which promises us an open time of non-productive expenditure; a non-restricted time for any kind of destructive creation and manipulation as an interplay between nonsense and meaning in which possibilities of diverse modalities of temporality and duration for sensory configurations can be examined again and again. This viewpoint affirms the heterogeneity and multiplicity of our ever-changing moods, fluidity and plasticity of inter-subjective processes of cognizing, the perpetual need to produce new affects and new semio-spheres, and the necessity of infinite revolutions as energetics of micro-event and openness to the outside.

Eugene Thacker in *Horror of Philosophy* (2015) argues on Bataille's 'excess of darkness' and his unfinished project of unknowing, in which darkness is not the absence of light but absorption of the outside; therefore he suggests two kinds of horror: the horror of something in the dark and the horror of darkness itself;

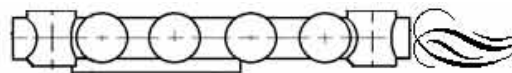
Bataille's texts opt to darken the human, to un-do the human by paradoxically revealing the shadows and nothingness at its core, to move not towards a renewed knowledge of the human, but towards something we can only call an unknowing of human, or really, the *unhuman*.<sup>[8]</sup>

In this regard, it seems to me that Haghjoo's work looks at the eeriness of our limits of knowledge and calls us to pass over the human: in this horizon Haghjoo's problem is the freedom from the bond of the human (and not merely the freedom of all humans/prisoners from a supposedly prison). In terms of libidinal economy, *Indication* paradoxically unfolds an iconoclast impulse that builds a simulacrum in which a Thanato-regressive anxiety collides with a geo-traumatic desire and the toxic fruit of this dark interaction can virtually be termed as 'cinecrophilic image'; an image that can operate as a hinge between darkened singularities and a coming community and stands against the despotic body through intensifying the putrefaction processes. Alexander R. Galloway in the end of his essay, "What is a Hermeneutic Light?" believes that we have to talk about a crypto-ontology for oil or petrol as a dark matter or black being <sup>[9]</sup>. And now it seems that a-cinematic schizo-trategy of *Indication* suggests a kind of necrophilia in its corrosive approaching to image, duration, and temporality that attacks the despotic body and resist to any inclusion or assimilatory trap of the capture apparatus, to a the point that spectator's nervous system and cerebral circuits can be pushed to a kind of cinemasochism.

It seems that this *cinecrophilic* materiality as a elemental component characterizes some spectrums of other middle-eastern artistic-activist products. Here and now we smell the corrosion and decay of old illustrative paradigms in which a singular glocalization of middle-eastern thought-image can manifest itself in an exhaustive expression. And it is just started.

## References

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- [2] Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh, *The Chaosing: The Annihilation of Consciousness, Shadow-Becoming, and the Midnight of the Unreal*, Columbia University, 2004, 83.
- [3] Antonin Artaud, "Sorcellerie et cinéma," *Oeuvres complètes, vol. 3* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 83.
- [4]<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/24/iran-arrested-more-than-7000-dissidents-last-year-says-amnesty>
- [5] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Translated by Hugh Tomlinson, The Columbia University Press, 2006, 166.
- [6] Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. Jean McNeil, New York: Zone Books 1989, 71.
- [7] Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh, *New Literature and Philosophy of the Middle East: The Chaotic Imagination*, Palgrave and Macmillan, 2010, 134-139.
- [8] Eugene Thacker, 'Excess of Darkness (George Bataille)' in *Starry Speculative Corpse [Horror of Philosophy, vol. 2]*; Zero Books, 2015.
- [9] Alexander R. Galloway, "What is a Hermeneutic Light?," in *Leper Creativity: Cyclonopedia Symposium*, Edited by Ed Keller, Nicola Masciandaro, & Eugene Thacker (Punctum Books, 2012), pp.159-173.



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