

ART JOURNAL

03

Issue 03
February 2008
Published by MUSEION
Museum of modern and
contemporary art
Bozen/Bolzano

Fabrizio Gallanti

Laymert Garcia dos Santos

Jalal Toufic

Vincent Labaume

Jean-Luc Moulène

Maxi Obexer

Sandra Boeschstein

Nasrin Tabatabaei & Babak Afrassiabi (Pages)

Peter Fischli / David Weiss

Issue 03
February 2008
Published by MUSEION
Museum of modern and
contemporary art
Bozen/Bolzano

www.museion.it

Letters for possible publication are warmly welcomed and should be sent to journal@museion.it

Letters and unsolicited contributions will be published at the editors' sole discretion. The editors likewise reserve the right to edit, shorten and otherwise amend letters and contributions.

Contributors

- Sandra Boeschstein
- Peter Fischli / David Weiss
- Laymert Garcia dos Santos
- Fabrizio Gallanti
- Vincent Labaume
- Jean-Luc Moulène
- Maxi Obexer
- Nasrin Tabatabaei & Babak Afrassiacbi (Pages)
- Jalal Toufic

Translations

- Henry Martin
- Gila Walker

Director

Corinne Diserens

Editorial staff

- Brigitte Unterhofer
- Silvia Rissbacher
- Petra Guidi

Collaboration

- Caterina Longo
- Simonetta Nardin

Design

tomato - Londra

Graphics

typeklang - Bolzano

© by Museion, the authors and artists

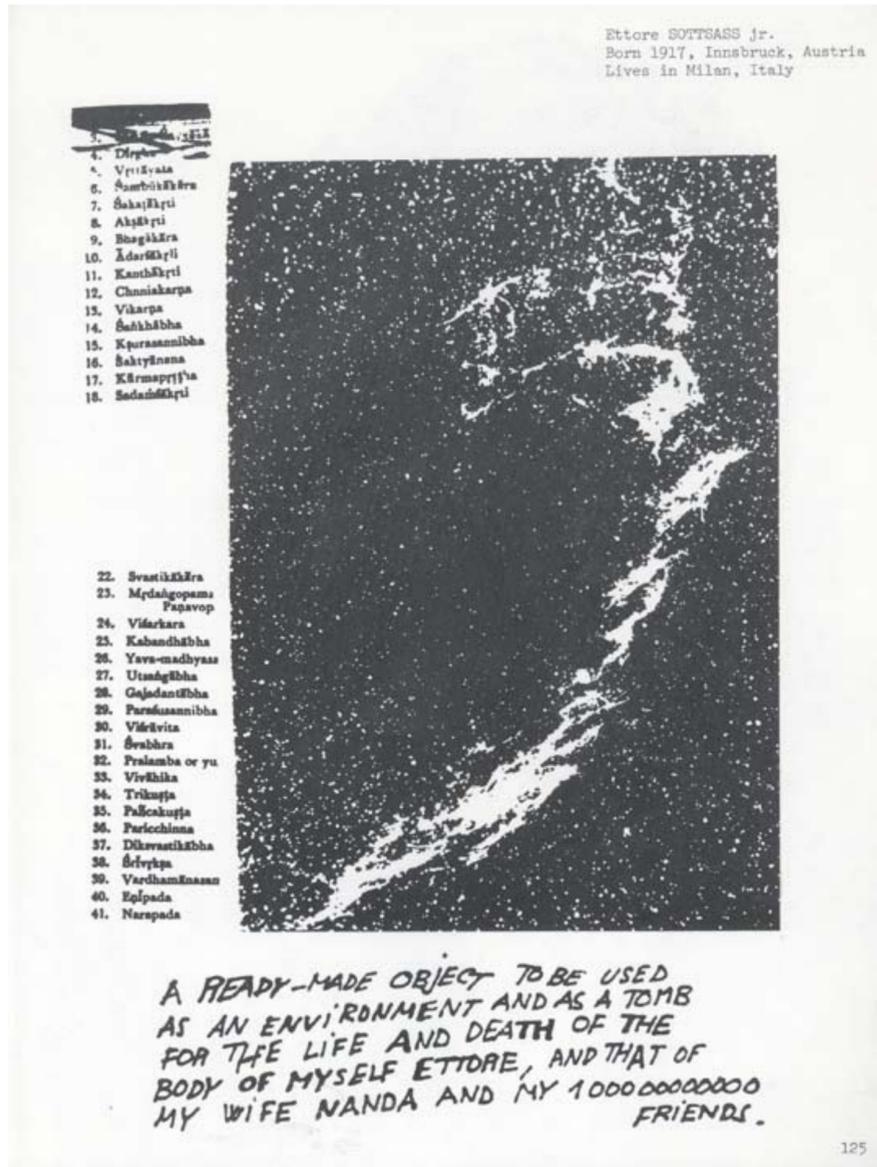
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form by any electronic means without permission in writing from Museion.

On the right:

From the catalogue of the exhibition INFORMATION, Summer 1970 The Museum of Modern Art, New York Kynaston L. McShine, ed. © MoMA, New York, 1970

Last page:

Peter Fischli / David Weiss
How to Work
1992, Silkscreen
© Peter Fischli, David Weiss. Courtesy Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zürich



Ettore SOTTASS jr.
Born 1917, Innsbruck, Austria
Lives in Milan, Italy

CONDENSED LANDSCAPES

Fabrizio Gallanti Milan

Translated from the Italian

From 2002 to 2006, I lived in Santiago de Chile. I liked to leave the house towards five in the afternoon, to take a walk through the streets of the neighborhood: a regular grid of some twenty streets, crossing each other at right angles, forming longish rectangular blocks of houses. When walking north-south, it would take me quite some time before coming to a cross-street, whereas once I turned a corner and walked east or west, the cross-streets, all parallel to each another, were much more frequent, at just a few minutes distance from one to the next. Since the lay of the land is nearly flat, only slightly tilted upward toward the Andes in the east, the sidewalks covered with slabs of cement scudded off to an infinite distance, meeting the horizon at a vanishing point where their sides converge, along with the double rows of great, majestic trees that line them.

Before moving into a place on Calle Lota – the street bears the name of a mining town in the southern part of the country, where coal was mined until the middle of the 1960s – we lived in a small apartment in a nondescript building of the 1950s, in the district of Providencia, just before the line where it borders with Santiago. The neighborhood is known as *Vaticano chico*, “the little Vatican,” since all its streets are named for bishops, archbishops, and Monsignors. The street on which we lived was Calle Monseñor Müller, but the street signs spelled it sometimes “Müller,” sometimes “Miller.” It’s a small residential neighborhood that flanks the major traffic artery – traveled every day by millions of people – that cuts across the city from east to west. It’s a very quiet neighborhood, to the point that we’d wake up in the morning to the sound of the street cleaner’s broom on the sidewalk. This street sweeper was really a man who parked his car there illegally, and who made his living – like so much of the urban population – from small commercial activities and various casual services (washing cars, collecting cardboard, delivering groceries to the homes of the elderly).

Santiago de Chile in fact consists of thirty-six independent districts, or boroughs. The central borough, where the Spaniards originally settled, is the one that actually bears the name “Santiago.” When we moved, after remaining for about a year in that smaller neighborhood, we continued to live in Providencia, but more off toward the east, toward the Andes, in a neighborhood this time near Providencia’s border with Las Condes, which is the city’s as well as the country’s wealthiest district. The center of Santiago is progressively losing its population, as people move out toward the *cordillera*: the further east they live, the richer they are. The people who inhabit the villas that rise up the slopes of the mountains are attempting to escape from air pollution,

and speak of the center of Santiago as someplace exotic and unexplored. Their lives play out in a space made up of a walled villa, a number of shopping centers, and the skyscrapers owned by the financial corporations: these buildings shoot up like mushrooms in the wealthier sections of town. I was teaching at the University, at the Department of Architecture of the Pontificia Universidad Católica, which is apparently the appointed place for the sons and daughters of the upper classes. Frequently the students had never been in the center of the city, and it was only to fulfill the requirements of some course that they ventured out into such uncharted territory. In Chile, just as in all of Latin America, class differences are considerable and highly visible, and the students at the Universidad Católica – well-dressed and tending to blond (meaning mainly white: the richer people get, the less likely they are to be Indians) – were easily identifiable as *cucicos*, a derogatory term for “bourgeois.” The parts of the Chilean bourgeoisie with fascist leanings – the Pinochet constituency – are referred to as *momios*, “mummies.” The equation “*cucico* = *momio*” is often true. The reason for my great pleasure in walking around the neighborhood at five in the afternoon lay in the fact that that’s the hour when the doormen at the various apartment buildings go out to the sidewalk to water the plants and plots of grass that stand in front of them. Between five and seven o’clock when the summer heat dies down, daylight filters through the crowns of the towering trees that line the streets, immersing everything in a greenish atmosphere, and I could observe the daily ritual of the grooming of the microscopic landscape gardens at the feet of the apartment blocks and residential towers. I was taken not only by the thousand different attitudes and trajectories that come into play as the doormen, while remaining almost perfectly still, manage to douse water into all the most distant corners of these gardens of which they’re the little emperors. I could also watch the raking of leaves, the pruning of shrubs, bushes and trees, the weeding of grasses from flower beds. Ever since the early 1900s, the area where we lived had been characterized by small single-family houses with gardens. These houses, by now, have almost entirely disappeared, and have given way to buildings as much, at times, as fifteen stories tall. The zoning laws, however, demand that these buildings stand back from the street, with a space for grass and gardens before them, unfenced wherever possible, and in any case open to unobstructed, public view. While walking through the streets of our neighborhood, I’d stop to admire the numberless little landscapes which the imaginations of gardeners and architects had provided for these new buildings. I

only regretted (as I still do) that I haven’t the faintest knowledge of botany, and was therefore unable to identify the plants in these little enclaves of nature. My pleasure lay in my daily surprise at the meticulous care of the mowing of the lawns, in the variety of the colors and forms of the vegetation, in the refinement of the juxtapositions of the trees, the climbers, the bushes, the vines, among the contours of little hills and rivulets, stones and boulders that conceal the bases of the buildings, which are often quite uninspired. I was also fascinated by the density, the compression, with which a whole small world of vegetation was fitted, at times, into only twenty square meters. Despite my ignorance of botany, I had the impression of a medley of native, tropical species and evergreens more typical of the north: a freedom of expression that mixes larches, birches, cacti, bougainvilleas, irises and magnolias. The perfume given off by the flowers – which in Chile bloom throughout the year, changing week by week – gave a different rhythm of perception to my walks, quite decisively. These careful little stage sets – the public expression of the decorum and good taste that the neighborhood’s *cucicos*, generally somewhat elderly, like to display – are made possible by the daily labor of a small army of doorkeepers, workers, gardeners, electricians, permanently employed at the chores of keeping things clean and tidy. This discreet and nearly invisible army consists of workers from the western districts of the city, a great deal poorer, where the climate is different and in fact quite dry. Plants, there, as soon as they’re planted, are again dug up and stolen; and grass, there, at best, struggles to sprout at the edges of scraggly soccer fields. Every day, a migration of a million and a half workers carries domestic help from one side of the city to another. Every night, the *cartoneros*, rapidly pedaling from here to there on tricycles, rummage through the waste left on the impeccable sidewalks of Providencia, Vitacura, La Dehesa and Las Condes, recycling and recuperating everything that the affluent quarters of Santiago eliminate. On leaving the house, I would wave to Señora Mireya and her husband – the doorkeepers of our modernist apartment building – as they watered the hortensias, agaves, and succulents that gave a vaguely tropical atmosphere to our mini-landscape garden, and then set off on my explorations. Often I had the feeling of living in a gardening fair. Small boxes of translucent plastic lit from within by neon lights rise up above the lavender and rosemary bushes: these boxes display the house numbers that allow you to identify the buildings to the rear of those miniature forests.

During my walks I couldn’t help thinking that the chance to live in the midst of such a great and highly attractive woodland,

punctuated by often anonymous and nearly invisible buildings, depended on the rigid zoning laws of the borough of Providencia: they establish the norms for the maintenance of public spaces, and declare the borough’s private citizens to be responsible for their upkeep. There are cases, too, in which the application of these rules can seem quite paradoxical: in 2004, a woman – the mother of three children – who refused to water the flower beds on the sidewalk in front of her house, and who then had neglected to pay the fine for that infraction, was sentenced to a number of days in jail. I was comforted by the certain knowledge that at the building where we lived, Señora Mireya and her husband would never have failed to respect their schedule of daily watering.

YOUNG ARTISTS AND THE TOKYO-SÃO PAULO CONNECTION

Laymert Garcia dos Santos
São Paulo
Brazil

Translated from the French

In June 2008 the centennial of the beginning of Japanese immigration to Brazil will be celebrated (their descendants number about a million and a half in the whole country, and more than 300,000 in São Paulo). But there are already a series of documentaries, books, and exhibitions anticipating the commemorations. One exhibition was just inaugurated in the metropolis that I think is worthy of particular attention. It's a preview of sorts to an exhibition that is being prepared for next year, but it already displays its colors. "*Japao: Um perto distante*" (Japan: A distant kin), curated by André Oliveira, a Brazilian, and Sheila Oi, a *sansei* (grand-daughter of a Japanese couple), it brings together twelve young artists, whose works are conceived in the form of a dialogue, or rather as a doorway to the land of the Rising Sun.

For a long time Japanese art has exerted an appeal on the Western world. This fascination is also present here; but the difference is that we are dealing in this case with the paradox of a geographical distance bypassed by information technologies that now enable artists who are offspring of Far Eastern immigrants to be in everyday contact with Asian culture and to feel close to its sources, be they modern (pop) and contemporary or traditional. São Paulo is the antipodes of Tokyo (as we say: "Over there, today is tomorrow," since it is midnight in the

Japanese capital when it is noon here in São Paulo); but, more than ever, we're getting closer to those who live on the other side of the world – all the more since now the migratory tide is reversed: today, more than 300,000 Brazilians live in Japan, most of them children or grandchildren of old immigrants, who go there looking for work.

Let us, however, get back to the exhibition. Its curators explain that they have chosen the artists for the aesthetic and theoretical elements of Japanese art that can be found in their output. The techniques of manga (Japanese graphic novels), drawing, ceramics, traditional engraving and Kabuki theatre can indeed be perceived or sensed in works that evoke the Brazilian experience at times, and Japanese everyday life at others. The Asian mark is to be found as well in the construction of micro-narratives that portray São Paulo's urban life or a kind of Tokyo-São Paulo megalopolis mix. Elsewhere, tattoos and fans conjure up hybrid East-West situations, where the element of exoticism gives way to a more natural expression of the manner that Brazilians have of being in close contact with the most common traits of Japanese culture.

The works presented by Fernando Saiki are of the greatest interest, for they point out to us that the meeting point between what is created in Brazil and Japanese

art is, paradoxically, the deterritorialized *non-lieu*, or non-place, of the cybernetic complex. Firstly, let's take a look at the 2004 xylography series entitled *Strange Bodies*, which evidence the artist's passion for Japanese engravings, and particularly shunga (erotic engravings). We know that shunga were intended to shock the mind and sexually stimulate the viewer through the transformation of images into fetishes that strike the beholders through violence (just think of Yoshitoka Yoshitoshi's works, from the Meiji period, in which the crisis of a society that doesn't care about its warriors and its traditions anymore and that is diving headlong into modernization is displayed in an atmosphere of uncertainty and terror, sexual violence, mutilation of samurais, torture of women, suicides, etc.). Drawing inspiration from shunga, Saiki starts from a selection of transsexual images taken from pornographic sites on the Web, and after having cut out the silhouette of the bodies and removed everything explicit, he keeps only the image's fetish, it's peep show side. Thus emptied of all substance, the bodies become fluid images; moreover, through the transformation of digital images into xylographs, these "pixel-men" become "paper-women."

Saiki is well aware that preoccupations with the theme of the body in crisis, gender discussions and reflections on the impact of new technologies on social



Fernando Saiki, *Strange Bodies*



life are found in the work of several Japanese artists before him – Butoh, Takashi Murakami, Aida Makoto, the photographer Araki and the new Japanese cinema. But in his case, they are raised to the rank of *otaku* obsessions (*otaku* is a term that has been used since the eighties to refer, often pejoratively, to people who are fanatical about any one aspect of the information and consumer society: manga, video games, pop idols, models and dolls, computers, etc.). And indeed Saiki belongs to a generation that grew up in contact with TV super-heroes, a generation that aspires to become like them, that was exposed to the rise of video games and learned to communicate through interfaces. Moreover, as an *otaku*, it is the radical becoming-image of the body that mobilizes the artist, a schizophrenic experience by definition, developed by the proliferation of digital technologies.

To quote Saiki, "It is no longer possible to comprehend reality in the same way. However, what is displayed as an illness is in reality only the consequence of concerns with the body. Whereas in psychology, it is a psychosis by which the subject loses all contact with reality, in this case it is an immersion into such limits. In fact, it could be diagnosed as an intentional pathology. To allow it to emerge, one must first be ready to give up the benefits of one's former state. In front



Yoshitoka Yoshitoshi



Fernando Saiki, *SecondPeople*

of the screen, facing the instantaneous, constant updating, the specular body doesn't need to sleep, to eat, to procreate or to excrete anymore. It's the image-body that controls this interface. The physical body becomes obsolete since it is unable to operate in image-body conditions. From the moment that there is an understanding between the body, the machine and the network, another reality emerges of an aesthetic and logical nature, a reality that is not biological or physical anymore. In this 'simulated' universe, organs are no longer necessary. The genitals become images not reproductive organs."

The next step in Fernando Saiki's work has consisted in exploring these questions, over the past year, in *SecondLife* (not a universe, but a *metaverse* of virtual reality, visited at any moment of the day by at least forty thousand people around the world), where the body appears as an avatar. This began with the creation of the JEN project (Joyful Engine Nymph), which created Jen(nipher) Blackhawk, an avatar designed as the combination of elements inspired by *Idoru*, William Gibson's novel, *S1m0ne*, Andrew Niccol's movie, and the anime *Macross Plus*, by Shoji Kawamori and Shinichiro Watanabe. Jen is "born" in SecondLife as an autonomous digital construction to deliberately become an *idoru*, or idol. Unlike other avatars that function as the doubles of individuals living in our world, Jen was programmed



to capture and integrate the affects of the *metaverse's* other inhabitants – in that respect, she actualizes her potentials through her capacity to seduce and convince others of her own existence, absorbing and integrating their positive reactions. As a designer of accessories, she becomes known in the fashion circles of SecondLife, performs as a deejay at virtual parties, and directs and plays in machinimas (from machine and cinema, these films are entirely shot in virtual environments); she also paraded in the virtual version of São Paulo's Fashion Week.

The success of this avatar that embodies the features of contemporary success, has led Fernando Saiki to produce other avatars and to delve further into virtual reality, creating the photographer Genghis Canning, who decides to draw up an inventory of digital portraits of all sorts of bodies built in SecondLife. Entitled *SecondPeople*, the project has already brought together more than 350 snapshots, to constitute a whole network of image-bodies where we can see the production of a series of standards that vary and repeat the process and procedures governing the creation of avatars. In his forthcoming work, Fernando Saiki intends to use this inventory to answer the question: How can one "treat" the derealization of one's own body?



REALISTIC MAGIC; OR, I NEVER CARED ABOUT MAGICAL REALISM

Jalal Toufic
Istanbul
Turkey

André Bazin writes in “The Ontology of the Photographic Image”: “If the plastic arts were put under psychoanalysis, the practice of embalming the dead might turn out to be a fundamental factor in their creation. The process might reveal that at the origin of painting and sculpture there lies a mummy complex...” Films on mummies revolve around the preservation of the face primarily. Should we for that matter expect them to be about one face? No: they are about the several faces of the mummified person. 1) The ideal, eternal face on the anthropoid coffin and in the Fields of Offerings (aka the Fields of Reeds). 2) The face beneath the white bandages, either extensively damaged, or else, a more interesting condition, preserved but for a grain of dissolution, the sort Roland Barthes writes about in relation to the saint’s nose in Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*: “Ruysbroeck has been buried for five years; he is exhumed; his body is intact and pure (of course—otherwise, there would be no story); *but* ‘there was only the tip of the nose which bore a faint but certain trace of corruption.’ In the other’s perfect and embalmed figure (for that is the degree to which it fascinates me) I perceive suddenly a speck of corruption..... I am *flabbergasted*: I hear a counter-rhythm... the noise of a rip in the smooth envelope of the Image.”¹ This grain of decomposition is the present’s entry point into the corpse. It is the corpse’s (Ariadne’s) thread through the “labyrinth” of time to the present, where it becomes localized. It therefore makes possible the corpse’s reanimation. 3) The reanimated face of the mummy, usually incarnated by the face of a film star. 4) And then the swiftly disintegrating, decomposing body of the mummy once it is no longer protected by magic. Bazin continues: “Near the sarcophagus... the Egyptians placed terra cotta statuettes, as substitute mummies which might replace the bodies if these were destroyed... Another manifestation of the same kind of thing is the arrow-pierced clay bear to be found in prehistoric caves, a magic identity-substitute for the living animal, that will ensure a successful hunt.... No one believes any longer in the ontological identity of model and image, but all are agreed that the image helps us to remember the

subject and to preserve him from a second spiritual death.”² The last line is false: unconsciously, i.e. in the unconscious, and with rare exceptions, we still generally believe in the ontological identity of model and image, especially the photographic/cinematic/video image, since it is an indexical image, thus partakes of both contiguity and similarity to the model/referent. Now, the law of contiguity and the law of similarity are two of the main laws of magic: “The simplest expression of the notion of sympathetic contiguity is the identification of a part with the whole. The part stands for the complete object. Teeth, saliva, sweat, nails, hair represent a total person, in such a way that through these parts one can act directly on the individual concerned, either to bewitch or enchant him.... Everything which comes into close contact with the person—clothes, footprints, the imprints of the body on grass or in bed... are all likened to different parts of the body... all can be used magically.... The second law, the law of similarity... has two principal formulas... like produces like, *similia similibus evocantur*; and like acts upon like.... The image is to the object as the part is to the whole.”³ Prior to Saddam Husayn’s overthrow in April 2003 by the United States-led invasion, his images were ubiquitous in Iraq: on street panels, impressed on the country’s currency, in offices in public buildings, as sculptures in public squares, inside the “The Museum of the Victorious Leader,” etc., but, during the reign of terror that the dictator had established in Iraq, virtually nobody dared tear these images, disfigure them, step over them, spit on them.⁴ On 7 July 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority set by the occupying forces announced its intention to work with the Central Bank of Iraq to introduce a new Iraqi currency. Toward the end of the same month, the British firm De La Rue began printing the new, Saddam-free currency. The new notes were air freighted to Baghdad in 28 Boeing 747-loads of about 90 tonnes each. The exchange began on 15 October 2003 and ended on 15 January 2004. By the latter date, around one-third of the 10000 tonnes-plus of old currency (around 300,000 sacks) gathered in the course of the exchange had been incinerated. It is expected that the Central Bank will

complete the destruction of old notes a few weeks after that. If there is equation, however tenuous, between a person and his/her images, then the defacing, through tearing and burning, of millions of Saddam Husayn’s images was bound to affect their referent, and that is what we witnessed. On 13 December 2003, within three hours of obtaining “actionable intelligence,” six hundred soldiers from the Raider Brigade of the 4th Infantry Division converged on a mud hut at a farm belonging to one of Saddam’s cooks in the village of Ad-Dawr. At about 8.30 pm Saddam was found hiding inside an 8 foot-deep hole covered by a rug and a piece of polystyrene. Major General Raymond Odierno, the commander of the 4th Infantry Division in Tikrit, said that Saddam had been armed with a pistol, but had showed no signs of using it on the soldiers who found him or on himself. “He was in the bottom of a hole with no way to fight back. He was caught like a rat.” The images of Saddam Husayn shown the next day at the Baghdad press conference where his capture was announced by the US civil administrator in Iraq, Paul Bremer, showed him submissively following instructions as he underwent medical examinations at the hands of an anonymous medic wearing plastic gloves, who inspected his unkempt hair, apparently for lice, and held his mouth open with a tongue depressor while shining a flashlight inside it, presumably to take a sample for DNA testing. Many in Iraq and the Arab world were confounded by the cowardly manner in which the ruthless dictator surrendered to the American forces and by his submissiveness during the subsequent medical examination. How little respect for the image Saddam Husayn would have shown had he resisted valiantly the attempt to arrest him. By losing face, he saved face for the image, maintained the magic of the image. Yes, Saddam Husayn turned out to respect the (*kitschy*) image—certainly far more so than any of the parliamentary members in Lebanon. During Lebanon’s parliamentary elections of 2000, the candidates could not prevent their myriad images, plastered all over the city walls, from being torn and/or covered by the images of other candidates. If the election candidates could without apprehension have their images open to being defaced, this could be either because they had such strong mana as to overcome and ward off any adverse magical effects that would result from the repeated damage to their images (is this partly the case in Haitian elections?), or else that they were and inhabited a world devoid of magic. Clearly, it was the latter. Returning to Lebanon in October 1999 after residing in the USA for fifteen years, I was disheartened to witness how far Beirut, inopportunistly designated by the UNESCO the “Cultural Capital of the Arab World for 1999,” had waned culturally. Soon enough, in the summer of 2000, my disheartenment was complemented, notwithstanding the city’s ruins, by disenchantment on witnessing ad nauseam the images of the parliamentary candidates lining the walls of the city in preparation of the elections, which finally took place on 27 August and 3 September. To think that these walls used to be lined not long before with pictures of “martyrs,” i.e. the kind of photographs affined to the cultic function: “Artistic production begins with ceremonial objects destined to serve in a cult.... In photography, exhibition value begins to displace cult value all along the line. But cult value does not give way without resistance.... The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture”!⁵ The kitschy parliamentary elections in many developing countries provide exceptions to the ontological

identity of model and image in our unconscious, inducing us to no longer feel *even unconsciously* that there is identity of the candidate and any of his myriad images plastered all over the city walls. Notwithstanding ‘Umar Amiralây’s smug expectation, the confrontation between him and Rafiq al-Hariri in his film *The Man with the Golden Soles*,⁶ 2000, was not between the self-professed “leftist filmmaker”⁷ and power, whether economic (the net worth of Hariri [and his family] in 2000, the year Amiralây made his film, was, according to *Forbes*’ yearly list of the World’s Richest People, \$3.5 billion), political (Hariri was Lebanon’s prime minister from 1992 to 1998, and he has assumed the same public position since 2000; moreover, he has been a member of parliament since 1996), mediatic (Hariri owns a television station, Future Television; a newspaper, *Al-Mustaqbal* [The Future]; and a radio station, Radio Orient), or social (the Hariri Foundation has granted, through its University Loan Program, loans to tens of thousands of students; and it runs through its subsidiary The Directorate of Health and Social Services a network of primary health care centers across Lebanon); it was, unbeknownst to the filmmaker, a confrontation regarding the status of the image: the challenge Hariri presents to any filmmaker, of any political orientation, is how to make images with someone who has so much divested image from model in the previous parliamentary election campaign and, as shown by a section of Amiralây’s film devoted to Hariri’s preparations for the 2000 elections, was gearing up to do so again. While normally “chimpanzees, orangutans, and, of course, humans learn that the reflections are representations of themselves,”⁸ in the specific case of the parliamentary candidates in many developing countries during their kitschy elections, who have undone the identity of model and image, humans unlearn, even at the level of the unconscious, that the reflections, including the variety called photographic images, are representations of themselves, treating them the same way most animals do: “Most animals react to their images as if confronted by another animal.”⁹ While the divine power of the monotheistic God is the site of full identity—“God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am.’ This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14)—power in the Middle East is exemplarily the site of disparity: when I see on 18 April 2003 on Abû Zabi television footage that the network claims was taken on 9 April, the day U.S. forces moved into Baghdad and assisted a crowd of Iraqis to topple a statue of Saddam Husayn in the main square, and that shows Saddam Husayn greeted enthusiastically by a crowd of debased and/or brutalized and/or ignorant and/or stupid and/or uncritical and/or fawning people in the streets of Baghdad, I am unsure that it is him rather than one of his reported doubles; and when I watch so-called Hariri (or any of the other candidates whose purported images lined the walls of Lebanon during the parliamentary elections of 2000) on television or in Amiralây’s film, I feel that the television program or Amiralây’s film should have started with the waiver “Any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely accidental.” A short section in Amiralây’s film shows Hariri’s own archive of media appearances; through Amiralây’s questions to the staff, we learn that the archive’s collection starts in 1991-1992 and that it includes thousands of news items, media appearances and reports. Notwithstanding this extensive archive, it does not presently seem that Hariri’s preservation for the future will happen through archival images of his

appearances on his Future TV, or other television channels, or through Amiralây’s film, but otherwise, probably through his pet project, the reconstructed and developed Beirut’s Central District by Solidère—this will no longer be the case only in a future where all reminders of the election campaigns (including my 8-minute video *Saving Face*, 2003), in which myriads of his images were torn, peeled, and/or partly covered by other people’s images, have disappeared. Strangely, it does not occur to Amiralây, who had earlier made a cinematic memorial to the Syrian playwright Sa’dallah Wannûs, to wonder whether his film can function as a way of preservation of Hariri when the ontological identity of model and image (especially an indexical image), which is a condition of possibility of photographic documents and cinematic and video documentaries, is no longer applicable to Hariri. It also did not occur to Amiralây, who uses and abuses the voice-over in his film, to ask this question either in voice-over or preferably to Hariri in person: “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world of images, yet lose the ontological identity of model and image in the unconscious?”

Jalal Toufic, “Saving Face,” *Two or Three Things I’m Dying to Tell You* (Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 2005), pp. 20-29.

¹ Roland Barthes, “The Tip of the Nose,” *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2002), p. 25.

² André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* Vol. I, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 9-10.

³ Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain, foreword by D.F. Pocock (London, New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), pp. 79-84.

⁴ This was exceptionally no longer the case during the brief 1991-uprising in Iraq’s largely Shi’ite south and its largely Kurdish north; and it was no longer the case after the establishment later in 1991 of a “safe haven” for the Kurdish population in northern Iraq, and then the establishment in 1992 of a Kurdish autonomous zone.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation*, ed. John Hanhardt (Rochester, New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1986), pp. 33-34.

⁶ Notwithstanding its suggestive title, Amiralây’s film disappointingly does not deal with fetishes and magic.

⁷ Quoted in Dominique Godréche, “Un film sur Rafic Hariri: Fascination pour le pouvoir,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 2001, p. 35. (<http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2001/04/GODRECHE/15049>).

⁸ See Gordon Gallup, Jr., “Can Animals Empathize? Yes,” *Scientific American Presents*, winter 1998, vol. 9, no. 4, p. 66. “I presented a full-length mirror to preadolescent chimpanzees at the [Tulane] university’s Delta Regional Primate Research Center. Initially, they reacted as if they were seeing other chimpanzees, but after a few days they grew accustomed to the mirror and began to use it to ... look at the inside of their mouths, and groom and inspect other parts of their bodies that they had never seen before.” (Ibid., p. 66).

⁹ Ibid., p. 66. See also pp. 66 and 68: “The failure to find self-recognition in other animals is not for want of trying. Susan D. Suarez of the Sage Colleges and I gave a pair of rhesus monkeys, reared together in the same cage, continuous exposure to themselves in a full-length mirror for 17 years (more than 5,000 hours of mirror exposure a year). Despite this extended opportunity to learn about the mirror, neither monkey ever showed any evidence of self-recognition.”

HISTORIAN OF DOUBT 4

Vincent Labaume
Clichy, France

November 6, 2007

*Le nouveau-né,
séparé de la souche
lumineuse, vit des
œuvres que crachera
son sang passionné,
tel est l'ordre divin de
celui qui est né.*
Mécislas Golberg

Translated from the French

I fell asleep again. Not without fear. When I'm asleep, I don't belong to myself anymore. I like the intoxicating feel of enduring fatigue, but I have a horrifying dread of the moment when I will have to surrender and sink into sleep, leaving my corporeal envelope defenceless, at the mercy of all forms of predation and degradation. Every night I renew my vain efforts to cling to wakefulness, but sleep relentlessly creeps up on me and carries me away from myself. This time again, I was unable to vanquish its narcotic power; my mind was ablaze as always, but it overtook and absorbed itself, the way a larva, preparing for its metamorphosis, will coil up into a cocoon. Sometimes, right after having succumbed to the overwhelming power of sleep – although I cannot estimate exactly how much time has actually gone by –, I abruptly wake up gripped by unspeakable anguish. I regain my breath amid a crushing swarming din. My head is an arena buzzing with flies. I want to get a hold of myself and, suddenly, without an effort, I do.

This awakening always finds me uncertain. And the more the doubt takes hold of me, the less able I am to keep a grip on it and on myself. Because I'm never really sure that I'm not actually sinking ever more deeply into sleep by means of doubt turned again my consciousness, which fans in return the doubts, like a hypnotic pendulum opposite which my slumbering mind loops around itself. And while the agonizing seconds that tick away thinking about all this resound in the midst of a present with no secure moorings, I am haunted by the fear of being trapped in sleep for ever.

Oddly, this has been going on ever since a dream I had when I was thirteen. I dreamt that I was sleeping and was having a dream. In this second-degree dream, some indeterminate person had slipped into my room. For the longest time, he looked hard at me with lidless eyes popping out of a featureless face. Soon, it was no longer his eyes but a red-hot finger traveling over every feature on my face, consuming them, one by one. I was burning by the bridge of my nose; I was burning by my cheekbones and by the fold of my mouth; I was burning

by my eyelids and by my pupils; I was burning by all the hollows and crests of my being. I was burning and did not react. Powerless to stop the inexorable combustion of my identity, I endured this torment in terror, until every last feature had been reduced to ashes, and I knew that the slightest breath of air could mix them up or scatter them to the night. And these were just the preliminaries. The real torture was yet to come. My tormenter leaned over my charred face and, in a gentle turning movement, pressed his face against mine, tightly fitting his forms into mine, hugging my orifices and pores, and taking away with him the ashes of my traits that settled on his elastic skin to recreate my face. There was my dear face, with its ever so delicate features and personal flaws effortlessly transferred on to this unknown being whose powers, desires and consciousness were at once completely alien to me, and seemed to me to hold over the world an inordinate criminal threat. Having purged my envelope and broken my will, there was my double ready to give free rein to his demonic designs.

For a long time, I laid there, an open sore, and the more and more patent theft aroused a less and less repressible torment in me. Then, everywhere, like under a scab of blood, pulsated the same desire to strengthen and unite, and my oppressed will became torn, prey to the agitation of two opposing feelings. The one rises up against this abduction of my identity and commands me to prevent it. The other rises up against the dream and urges me to wrench myself out of it. Both seem determined to make me do something, to break through this larval case around me that is but the image of my debased will, but neither manages to prevail over my lethargy. And I let myself get bogged down in the reasons given by each side to convince me. Should I do all I can to keep up appearances, to struggle against the fraudulent use of my corporal envelope, to fight for my moral integrity, and to do so with nothing more than the weapons that the dream has to offer me (and what exactly are they)? Or should I try to flee, to escape this panic anxiety whose pointless object could only be due to a simple dark nightmare?

Soon, as together thousands of forces clash, boost each other and finally lash down, my body is electrified with spasms; my head turns from butter to concrete; I cast an eye, then another, like shattered bulbs in the night. The last image is the most terrifying; in an immense lapping of sleep, all of a sudden, my head rose up... my own head peeled down to the bone.

And a voice from the bowels of time invades me with a single word:
- You!

Why am I telling this dream again? I don't know. Maybe I'm rehashing it to keep myself from the sleep I dread. But doesn't it engage much more underhanded effects than that which I am brandishing it against in vain? Imperceptibly, isn't it turning toward me, then more toward me, a body of presumptions against me, at the same time as a desire with more detestable designs? It seems to stretch out like a mirror that outstrips my expression. Here it is slipping its head through the curtain and slashing my mask of flesh to press itself against my skin, in this light that calls to mind the first flaming of the fetus outside the womb.

To be continued ...



Jean-Luc Moulène, *Lion*, Mexico D.F., October 14, 2002

THE EUROBEIGE DREAM PART 2

Maxi Obexer
Berlin

**Just how unnoticed
can a movement
be if it's still to be
perceived as having
existed at all?**

Translated from the German

If asked to sum up the political stance of my generation – the generation born in the late 1960s and early 1970s – I'd call us "antireligious," and especially so in regard to great mass movements, surely to wars, and as well to revolutions and grandiose mobilizations. Mistrusting their leaders is in fact quite simple, since they invariably offer proof of finally having no interest in anything other than power. Rejecting those leaders' radicalism was a somewhat harder trick to turn: we too pinned posters of Che Guevara to the walls of our rooms, and for a while we too found the posture of the RAF (the Rote Armee Fraction, or Red Brigades) to be quite cool. But seeing it as anything more than a cool posture was never much in the cards. We were far more seriously involved in an almost nonchalant rejection of the presumptiveness of provocations, extremisms, and polarizations, and all their claims to absolute truth. We were preceded in Germany by the movement of 1968, in Italy and France by the students' and workers' movements, just as they, in turn, were preceded by the Second World War, and by the process of facing up both to the war and to Nazism. Radicalization was a common feature of all these phenomena, everywhere in Europe, first with the Underground and as well, again, with the movements of armed resistance. And there's no great obstacle to understanding their need for radicalism, and their subsequent reliance on violence. But the things we learned to see as worthwhile lines of development toward a world of greater freedom, and also as a heritage in which we can participate, were discerned in far less spectacular situations. And it's not to be thought that we were sobering up. Even that sort of pathos is beyond us. What, after all, might have

prompted it? The lives we lived went all too well for anything like that. We grew up in far less problematic times than the generation before us. Our lives weren't shaped by experiences of war or revolution that might have given those who brought us up the feeling of having to make up for something. And then, as well, there was a new, young, wildish spirit, inherited from Flower Power and the Beat Generation: all those things to which we were exposed by our parents' younger siblings, and by many of our younger teachers: a free, festive, self-intoxicating spirit with plateau clogs on its feet and freely flowing hair. So, it also doesn't much hurt to hear ourselves accused of anti-heroism, or dubbed as the generation that produced no significant or visible movement. Our skepticism went hand in hand with learning to notice the quieter advance of a better, more free, more democratic era as signaled by the collective efforts of many who have made a conspicuous contribution in that direction while never claiming eligibility for the elevated status of heroic freedom fighters. The real improvements will be seen to have sprung from the efforts and activities of countless individuals who slowly, step by step, have done away with the limitations and angularities of unfair relationships, without distinction as to whether they were found between classes, sexes, or nations, and finally placing trust in an attitude of humility which allows a lot of room for such developments. We place our trust, when all is said and done, in the non-spectacular, and perceive it to be the place where change most likely asserts itself. The conviction might be put like this: when radical goals are reached, they're reached by traveling routes that aren't spectacular.

Now, however, there is also the question as to whether the effects of such non-spectacular processes can be perceived in times that present themselves as once again extreme and charged with polarizations. Just how visible must a movement be, in order to be noticed at all?

The attacks on the World Trade Center were followed by the appearance of a concept that quickly grew quite popular, and much to the self-satisfaction of those who employed it: the "fun society." The label was bandied about as an accusation, as an attribution of guilt, as a description of something that to some degree contributed to the rise of radical Islamism. As far as I've been able to trace it, the term first appeared on the lips of Peter Sholl-Latour, the Islam expert and war correspondent, among other things, for Germany's ARD television station. Sholl-Latour, to be sure, made no attempt to specify exactly whom he meant to refer to, and the term's rapid rise to a kind of celebrity also surely has to do with no one's really being able to indicate the persons to whom it refers. And yet there can't be any uncertainty about the general area it intends to indict, and we felt ourselves accused: "we," meaning my generation, which in other circumstances too has heard itself described as lax, dumb, and naive. The "fun society" can be taken to refer to a small group of western Europeans that's often in a mood to party, and which carefree and happy in its lassitude and ignorance is not only incapable of battling the dangers of Islamism, but even unable, first of all, to perceive them. The accusation runs that we lack sufficient political and historical insight to be able to be adequately alarmed and vigilant. But one might also inquire about the nature of the scenario

to which this accusation belongs. There's reason to wonder if it isn't directly a war scenario, even if before the attack on the World Trade Center it hadn't yet become one. How deeply guided by thoughts of war, and not of peace, does one have to be, to be always alarmed and vigilant? How little trust must one be willing to show to thoughts of peace? Living as we did in a peacetime world, it's only a matter of course that we had no feeling of being at war with Islam. (This also explains why the period immediately following the attacks had to insist with so much emphasis on the notion of war.) Perhaps war reporters think of peace as a kind of "time out." Nothing's happening, nothing at least with the visibility of war. And all the same, it was a time that was full and overflowing, a time in which much was happening. People were coming together; borders were being crossed; encounters with diversity and foreignness were felt to hold a normalcy; and, best of all, it was generally a time of depolarization, a time when differentiations could more and more be dispensed with. The world was coming together. Much was already possible which historically had never been possible before. The attacks can also be seen as a sign of grave discomfort, as acts of rage in the face of so many different roads having suddenly run together. As the attacks ushered in an era of clashes (the clash of civilizations, the clash of cultures), with trenches being dug, and crusades decreed, the Apocalypse proclaimed, one was immediately able to grasp that so much already had been achieved, and stood once again on the verge of being thrown away.

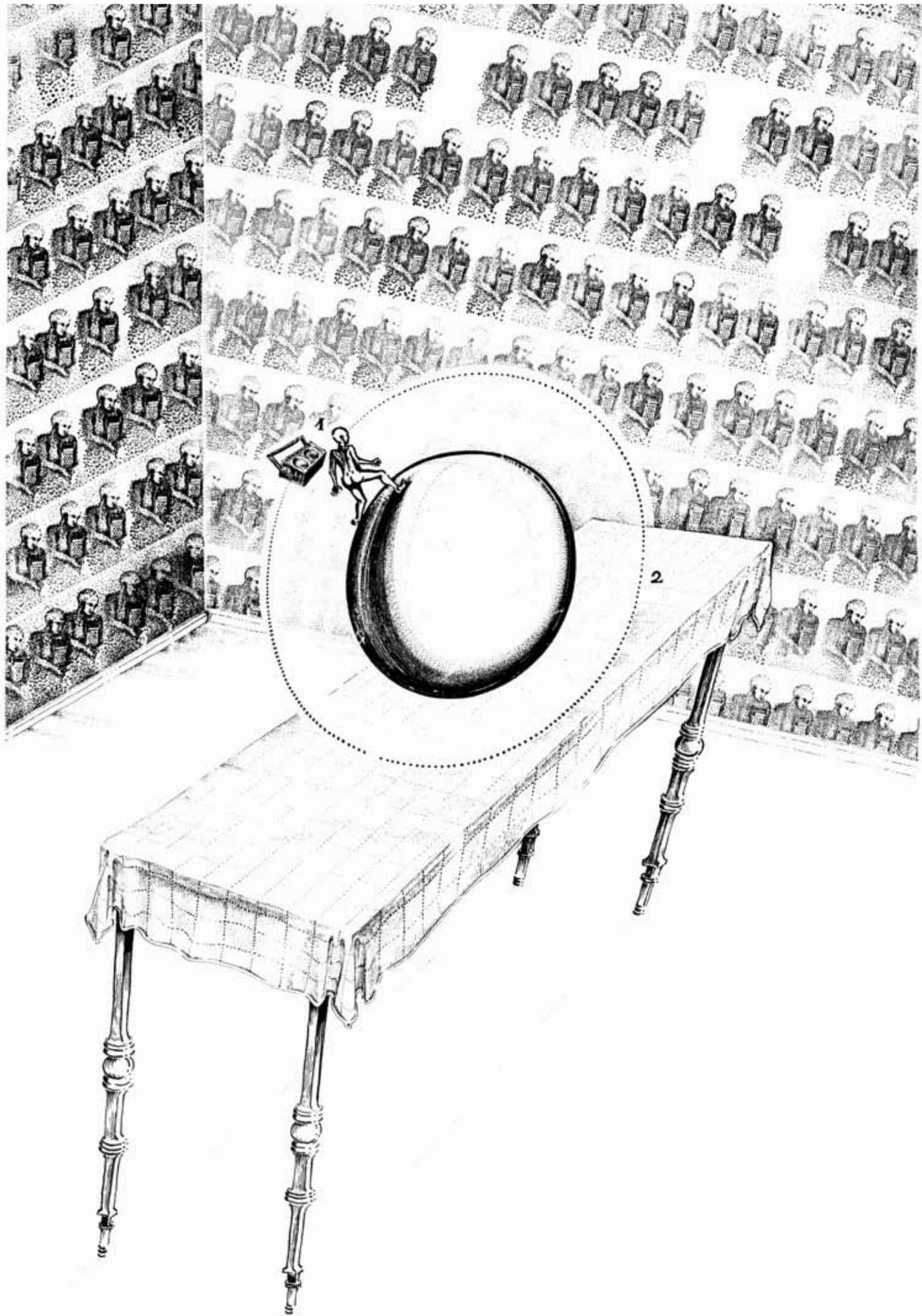
It meanwhile grows quite clear that the manning of the newly dug trenches has also led to a revival of notions of

statehood, and of nationalistic ideologies, that seemed to have been superseded; and the places in which they assert themselves aren't restricted to questions of relationships between Christianity and Islam. No, one can't declare that the newly discovered era of more free and open structures thus suddenly belongs to the past; but one sees a simultaneity of progressive and regressive forms of thinking, with manifold absurdities inside their twists and turns. This brings me now to South Tyrol, and not only because this is where I'm from: its minority status and border position make for a fine perspective from which to view the simultaneity of opposing tendencies. It's also a place where people will surely continue to ask if they're to preserve allegiances to old conflicts and dig away at trenches, or instead to make the more humble effort of taking a clearer look at developments which meanwhile have come to the fore.

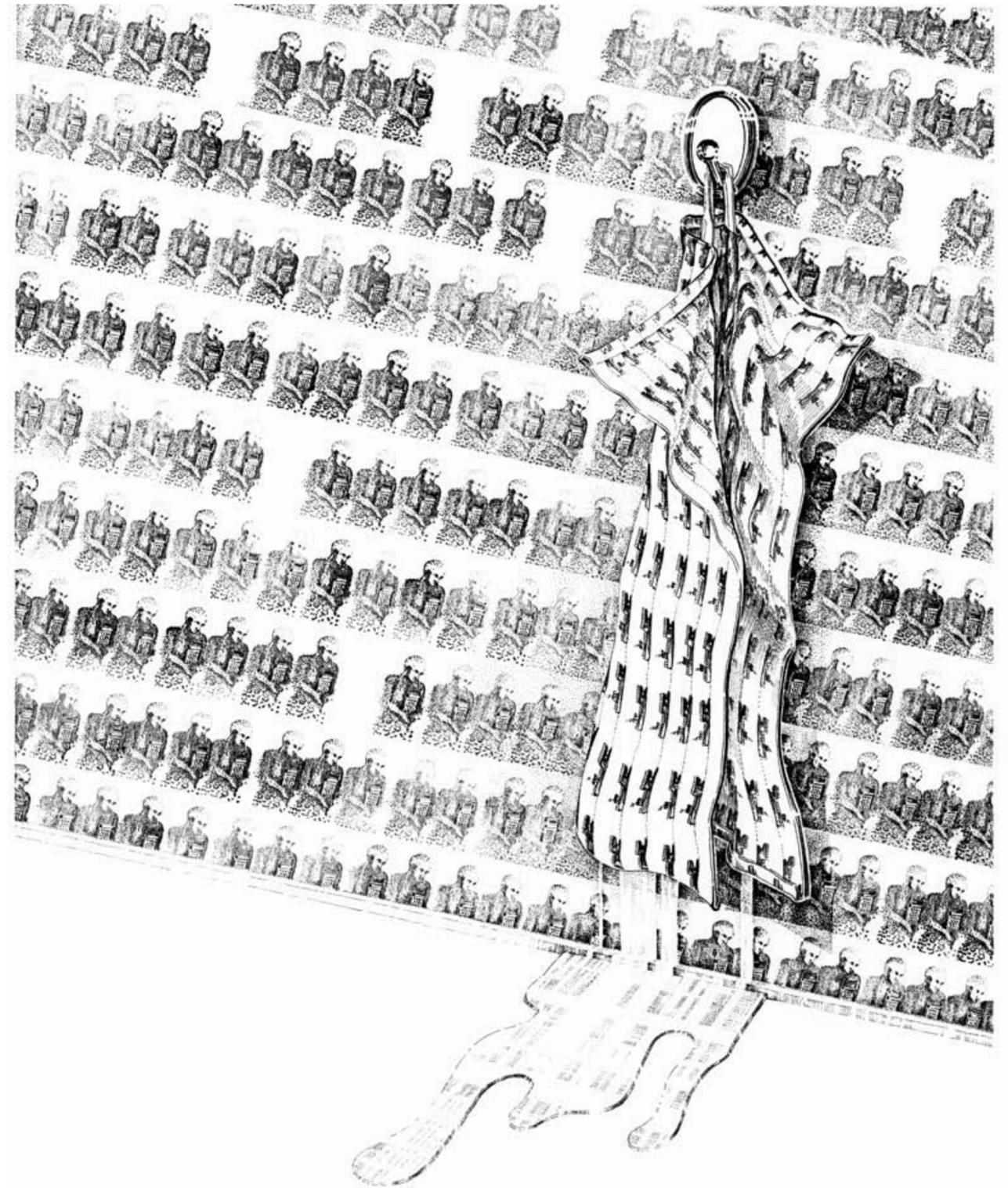
For many Europeans who look with interest at the experiment of the integration of Europe, South Tyrol is a very exciting place. Many see this border region to present a more incisive example of what it can mean to live with any number of pluralisms. And for my own generation the abandonment of nation-based thinking – which is finally tantamount to the development of the notion of a single Europe – also made a decisive contribution to solving the problem of how to think about ourselves, without being forced into nationalistic feelings. Such feelings after all – especially in our case – must always remain an irresolvable problem. The historical changes which have taken place in South Tyrol belong again to what I'd see as a quiet, unspectacular process, as a small achievement we've managed to pull

together: our discovery of the possibility of seeing ourselves as Italian citizens, and of cutting free from the historical memory of a minority that sees itself as the victim of a fascist occupation. So, I found it very odd when a young Italian woman remarked in the midst of a conversation: "But surely, after all, you people aren't Italians!" So how in the name of God, she seemed to ask, had we come up with the notion of seeing ourselves as Italian citizens? For a moment it was all right there again: the battles with those other South Tyroleans whose minds hold on more fiercely than ours to the Fascist era, and for whom the notion that we're Italian citizens was nothing less than treason; the venomous talk of old men at the annual Sacred Heart festivities, the memorial day of the Tyrolean Freedom Fighters; the contempt and derision that bristle through discussions controlled by notions of enemies and victims, oppression, exploitation, hate. And our rejection of all of that, the freedom we allowed ourselves, our breakthrough into a whole new way of thinking, and the happiness we found in its being possible. Was I perhaps a bit offended, to have to hear it said that none of that counted for anything? Was I looking for some sort of praise from Italy, where in any case we had risked being seen as traitors? For whom had this whole process taken place? Only for a tiny group of progressive idealists, who wanted to sport a tiny medal for even the tiniest historical achievement? An achievement, moreover, that apparently went unnoticed. There's no need, of course, to lend too much weight to the words of this young woman. Maybe she hadn't registered the changes in South Tyrol, since she had never bothered to survey them. And as often happens, the spectacular bombings

undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s by South Tyrol's extremists were still very much on her mind, nearly as current events. (Despite their having taken place by now some forty years ago!) You could also put it like this: she was simply in the dark. Still, however, it's once again germane to ask how long a large and radical course of action remains imprinted on the mind, and to wonder at the way in which quieter movements are apparently seen to be inconsequential. This young student, moreover, is no exception: even German and Austrian acquaintances sometimes surprise me with remarks that reveal a similar kind of heedlessness, even if it's only a question of stubbornly insisting whenever one talks about South Tyrol that in fact there's such a thing as a South Tyrolean identity. No, ignoring changes and the contributions of those who are actively engaged in creating an authentic coexistence crassly directs attention in all the wrong directions, and insists on seeing trenches where there may be roads or pathways. One notes that still today discussions of life in South Tyrol all too quickly and gratefully lend an ear to ominous admonitions on the nearly God-given differences that make its cultures irreconcilable. Dogged insistence on by-gone conditions and ancient polarities is always as well a relapse into old and simple-minded forms of nationalistic thinking: simple-minded, since they drag along behind themselves a vague canon of feeling. One returns again to the easiest thing to feel, and that's a "national" sort of feeling, even if no one has a clue as to what that means.



There are two interim spaces with radio at the back of the head
1. between the back of the head and the radio 2. between radio and nose



TRANSLATION

A conversation with Fatemeh Valiani* by Babak Afrassiabi and Nasrin Tabatabai (Pages)

Pages: Let's start with the place of translation in cultural life in Iran, in relation, say to the bookstores and to readers in general. What happens exactly when a new book is translated, published and distributed? How are translations received and perceived?

Fatemeh Valiani: There is great interest in translated works in Iran, and the number of books in translation far exceeds the number of indigenous, original texts. People, especially among the younger generation, are fascinated by foreign cultures, and in particular by Western literature. And, interestingly, when people propose a work to a publisher, they have a greater chance of seeing it accepted if the work is a translation, even if the original text is not so remarkable, and even if the translator is not famous, or does work of only mediocre quality. An original text written by an Iranian author is more likely to encounter resistance or even refusal on the part of the publishers. Contrary to Western publishing tradition, in Iran the name of the translator appears on the cover of a book. Translators' names, in fact, are known to the public, and often the name of a book's translator can encourage people to buy it.

The important thing to note about the practice of translation in Iran is concerned with the criteria of selection for the works to be translated. In fact, the attribution of an important place to translation has a long tradition in Iranian culture, and indeed in the whole of Islamic culture. But the new trend or movement in translation – which goes back to the Qajar era – is characterized by an absence of orientation or strategic planning. Choices on the part of the translator appear to be determined either by his or her personal taste or by the expectations of the public. So, it is either that choices are totally subjective, or dictated essentially by the demands of market. You see that the Iranian public is one day enthusiastic about Foucault or Derrida, but on the following day these French philosophers are supplanted by Negri, Agamben or Eagleton. But all of these intellectual figures have a kind of media-related reputation in Iran. So, when Derrida died, his picture and the announcement of his death were on the first pages of some newspapers; and in a similar vein, Rorthy was surprised when he visited Iran by the number of young people who attended his lecture, and he asked if the crowd had come there to protest against him! The people intrigued by the news of Derrida's death and those who attended Rorthy's lecture really knew little about them or their thoughts. In fact, intellectual figures from the West are rapidly turned into media personalities by the practice of translation in Iran. Still, however, it seems that the public's interest in these figures is a substitute for other concerns and needs which can't be satisfied within the current situation in Iran. Generally, I can say that Iran's spaces for discursive and intellectual expression are marked by a leaning toward abstraction, and it is not surprising that the greater part of non-fictional translations belong to the field of philosophy.

In any case, even in the absence of any truly critical attitude concerning the choice of works that appear in translation, the quality of translations is regularly criticized. Whenever a new book is translated and published, the public is informed by the journals and the broadcasting media. And it's easy, of course, for regular visitors of bookstores to recognize new publications from the way the books are displayed. The way in which books are displayed is also an effective indication of the intellectual and literary trends which at any given time are dominant in the country. There is quite a rigorous critique of the work of translators, and one even sees that meetings are often organized for the discussion of newly translated and published works, especially of works that enjoy public success. So, translations of non-fiction may often be mediocre, but true and proper literature has seen a great improvement in the linguistic and stylistic aspects of translations.

Pages: It goes without saying that translation is inherently concerned with an "other." From one standpoint, this "other" is the original text itself; from another, it's the person who reads the translation. In any case, translation's involvement with the "other" already endows the reception of the translated text with a certain displacement, with meaning being communicated as it also shifts in relation to, or between different contexts. Your description of the Iranian affection for works in translation might almost lead one to think that this affection derives from the way translations offer a route of access into an "outside world." Would you agree with that?

FT: I see the space of translation as a space of otherness or alterity, rather than as a space of shifting, displacement, or difference. The essence of translation is an encounter with the "other" at various levels. The concept of the "other" here embraces a variety of levels of meaning, at one and the very same time. But what characterizes the act of translation is first of all the encounter with the original text, through which the translator confronts

the public of his translated text, his own "self," his own culture, etc. I believe that the primary "other" with which translation concerns itself is the original text. But this otherness is not a pure, sublime, or transcendental concept; it is an historical one. I don't think that the position of a French translator/reader who is dealing with an African text is comparable to that of a translator/reader from a post-colonial society who is dealing with a French text. Both of them experience themselves to be an "other" with respect to the text in front of them, and are "outsiders" with respect to it. But an outsider is not always an "out-sider." And, it is here that we see the importance of the particular standpoint from which one approaches a text. The "other" is something you would like to get to know, but for a variety of different reasons: to preserve yourself with respect it, or to take control of it, or to have it take control of you. The attitude you adopt depends on your concrete, historical situation. Although the act of translation in necessarily rife with violence, transgression, discontinuity, and negation, it does not always imply self-denial. In former times – for Iranian translators of the pre-Islamic era, for the Muslims who translated the Greeks, for the Iranian translators of Arabic texts in the era that followed the arrival of Islam – the encounter with the "other" didn't have the same significance and meaning that it now takes on in contemporary Iranian society. Greek civilization was a great empire, a great culture, a great stranger, a great foreignness, a great "other," and one attempted to get to know in order possibly to hold one's own against it, or to take control of it. Islamic culture built entire philosophical systems – and they were very solid systems – on what it managed to appropriate from the Greeks. In all contexts, translation, as you put it, necessarily generates shifts and displacements. The question of translation is essentially hermeneutical. But if the reception of translated texts is always accompanied by shifts and displacements, this also lies in the fact that the translator/reader is seeking a kind of reconciliation, communication and dialogue with the "other."

Pages: Translation of Western texts in various fields has been one of the means of encountering, incorporating and interpreting modernity in Iran, as in many other developing countries. In order for modernity to be drawn fully into the Iranian context, numerous translations were commissioned and conducted by the state in the period before the revolution; this was especially the case – as an integral part of the so called "White Revolution" – in the fields of design, architectural theory, and city planning. Even books on the history of Iran were mostly translations of texts by non-Iranian – often Russian – authors. But that was also a period that witnessed the independent production of numerous, leftist-leaning literary translations. It is worth mentioning that Iran never became a signatory of the international copyright treaties, and that this was due to the insistence of the period's Iranian intellectuals, who were anxious to facilitate their translation of as many books as they wanted. Then there was a sudden interruption in this flow of translations immediately after the revolution, and especially during the Iran-Iraq war; a period which kept the country in isolation, culturally no less than economically. Now, however, as you mentioned before, there is an ever-growing increase in the number of published translations, as though to catch up with translations that were formerly neglected. But this is clearly a different "sphere" of translation, with respect to the works that appeared in the period before the revolution. Still, however, questions of modernity and cultural identity continue to be subjects of popular as well as intellectual discussion, and have also been the themes of many recent books, both translations and otherwise. What do you see as distinctive of this new sphere of translation, and how do you see your own work to be affected by it, if at all? Do you see yourself as part of it?

FT: The new phase of translation in Iran, which actually began under the Qajars (1794-1925), was part of a process of introducing modernity into the country. The state established a translation bureau for Western literature. This process, in a more programmed and rigorous way, continued under the Pahlavis (1925-79). However, the practice of translation in Iran was not exclusively controlled by the state; there was also, as you mentioned, an influential movement of independent translation (not always leftist) which revealed the society's profound desire for knowledge of the West. One can discover the dominant intellectual and cultural trends in Iranian society by reviewing the titles of the works translated in various periods. The desire, in Iran, to be acquainted with Western literature is, *grosso modo*, accompanied by a kind of fascination, though there have also been moments of rejection and denial of the West. I don't know if we can speak of a new "sphere" of translation after the revolution of 1979, but I can definitely confirm the increasing number of translations (while official discourse is mostly introverted); and this is so much so that intellectual "production" in Iran has

become somewhat pathological. There is little intellectual production in Iran that's really concerned with the current situation of our society; and the same is true in the field of translation. Your own writings have less chance of being published than the writings you may translate, even if such works are of little relevance to the country. A great part of communication takes place by way of translation. But translation is Janus-faced, two-sided. While permitting you to familiarize with the "other" by displacing the "other" into your own grid of signifiers, and while opening up the sphere of dialogue, it can also reveal the presence of non-dialogue, of things that remain opaque, of a sphere of the untranslatable, all of which is to speak of the epistemological gaps between cultures, and such gaps have grown wider and deeper since the rise of modernity in the West. I think we should ask if the Iranian reader of Western intellectual productions can be a productive "user" of these texts. That's to ask if Iranian culture is currently able to appropriate and integrate Western intellectual productions into its own fabric, as it did in the past. I also wonder if the Iranian translator/reader is fully aware of the position in which Iranian culture now finds itself. Or is this culture merely a spectator, completely "other," an "outsider," and "marginal" to the text? This tends to be more the case in the domain of philosophical and theoretical writings. In literature properly speaking, an Iranian – or any other non-Western reader – isn't entirely a stranger to the text, since his or her life is also marked, at least superficially, by modernity. So, it is astonishing that philosophical texts, the most abstract form of literature, constitute such a large part of the works that appear in translation in Iran. How can we explain their reception? If we admit that the act of translation is a violent act, that it bears within itself a possibility of death and annihilation, doesn't this extraordinary, passive reception of the "other" betray a desire to be an object of violence? A desire for death? Herder saw a language into which nothing has yet been translated as comparable to a virgin. So, what's the metaphor with which to describe a language that has translated too much? This issue has a bearing on my existential position as a translator, and it pushes me permanently to call my practice as a translator into question.

This conversation took place via e-mail in December 2007 and will continue in the next issue.

* Fatemeh Valiani is a translator based in Tehran. Her Persian translations of texts in the fields of philosophy and the social sciences include, among others:
La lumière vient de l'Occident, Daryush Shayegan, 2001
Histoire de la folie, Michel Foucault, 2002, (awarded the "Best Translation in Philosophy" prize, 2003)
Hannah Arendt, David Watson, 2006
Soon to appear:
Cogito et Histoire de la folie, the collected essays of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault
Naissance de la clinique, Michel Foucault

HOW TO WORK BETTER.

1 DO ONE THING

AT A TIME

2 KNOW THE PROBLEM

3 LEARN TO LISTEN

4 LEARN TO ASK

QUESTIONS

5 DISTINGUISH SENSE

FROM NONSENSE

6 ACCEPT CHANGE

AS INEVITABLE

7 ADMIT MISTAKES

8 SAY IT SIMPLE

9 BE CALM

10 SMILE