

Here There Nowhere, Flaccid Means Without End

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Ali Ahadi

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The black and white photographs in Ali Ahadi's exhibition, *Here There Nowhere, Flaccid Means Without End*, are striking, intimate and introspective. The photos are beautifully and technically well-executed and, upon seeing them, I immediately wished that the gallery was closed and I could spend time with the images alone.

Ahadi's *Wire and Wire-less* stills have a listless, quiet energy that reminded me of being unemployed, being heartbroken, being depressed or being misunderstood. It reminded me of those quiet mornings when you wake up to your biological rhythm because there was no reason to set an alarm and, looking out the window, you realize the world has gotten up and gone on without you.

Despite the darkness, there is a romanticism to having moments in life for personal evaluation of the world around us. Ahadi uses the term "naked solitude" in his film, *The Encyclopedia of Shabdolazimica* from this same exhibition, and it aptly describes the sentiment held in his photographs. The images become explorations of a personal space, a wandering of the immediate. "All of us are alone...but we should find a way to release from it." [1] These moments are the ones where you truly examine the contents of your surroundings and, despite having looked at them a million times, either see them for the first time or realize that you've never truly seen them from this angle before.

Ahadi's portraits mimic these feelings of personal exploration and evaluation but, unlike his other photographs, it is unclear whether or not the subject that is being photographed is alone. Despite the eye contact with the camera, the camera does not feel confrontational toward any of the subjects; there is a personal intimacy being held and trusted. There is a quiet honesty in the portraits, a 'this is it' type of modesty. It is only in *Striptease With Death*, the female portrait, where there is a sense of hesitation, a push and pull between camera and subject.

Encyclopedia made me feel ill-equipped for critiquing. I sat and watched it six times through, trying to see if osmosis would instill an understanding in me. It did not. The montage of still images, of what looks to be mentally challenged children, is paired with snippets of conversations about philosophy and philosophers, journalists, writers, the Iranian national anthem, French cafe music and recorded speeches. Walking away with a handful of notes, questions and having gathered as much reading material as grunt had to offer on the show, I went off to research and see if an understanding could be reached.

In Ahmad Tabrizi's exhibition essay for the exhibition, he compares his frustration of trying to explain Persian history to running into a busy intersection, ranting and attempting to be understood. This is where I came to realize that perhaps I was not meant to understand the film but rather to feel the sense of confusion and frustration. There are too many layers and too much history to explain at once. My confusion is Tabrizi's frustration. "Iranian people have withstood thousands of years of invasions, conquest, rape and murder, but nothing has challenged them as harshly as modernity." [2] Multiple elements of history, tradition, repression and culture, clashing with contemporary desires to conquer what the future has to offer cannot be summed up neatly and packaged into a tightly edited film. What you get is what Ahadi has given you: uncertainty, doubt and the evidence of your own ignorance.

In the film, the speakers are discussing Hedayat, Plato, Nietzsche, Fallaci and Pasolini, while at a French cafe. These are veiled allusions to Iran's complex history and the self-serving intellectualism of aristocracy. Tabrizi's insight to this dialogue and pairing with "the images of the disabled children become(s) a metaphor reflecting Iranian contemporary society as a whole: encountering intellectual sickness, oppressed and institutionalized by forces 'outside' and 'inside' the culture that have forced this society to develop a kind of very unfortunate split personality within the individual as well as a collective schizophrenia." [3] This "intellectual sickness" that he references is the pathological need to achieve the new in the pursuit of utopia, finding comfort in the glossiness of modernity, regardless of the consequence. It is in this expression that Tabrizi acknowledges a commonality with the rest of humanity.

As my initial encounter with this film was a cold reading, void of history or knowledge on the subject, I intend to return to the gallery, curious to see if my acquaintance with the work evolves now that I have more context. This time instead of struggling to understand the film I will just try to experience it.

For more information please visit grunt.ca and aliahadi.com

[1] *The Encyclopedia of Shabdolazimica*. Ahadi, Ali. 2012.

[2] Tabrizi, Ahmad. *Here, There, Nowhere, Flaccid Means Without End: Exhibition Essay*. 2012.

[3] Ibid

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