



DON'T PERFORM WHAT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND

Artist Statement

In reading Quirashi's enticing essay (in the timely coincidence) after producing my own final project, called "Don't Perform What You Don't Understand," I find Quirashi's assertions to be biting, and refreshingly clarifying. As I explore my own relationship to Islam growing up— which can be described as a rather confusion relationship: hypocrisy, longing empathies, fear, and perhaps even contradiction— I promote my piece in the form of a video grid to resemble my mind as both prism and memory. The grid is my own prism-- a way for me to recollect my memories as associations (perhaps even disambiguations) to Islamized sound, as both structured, and re-structured representations.

While I will always be moved by the intonations of the dreamy suras (or poetic verses) of the Quran, the constant perversions of it through politics (and lack thereof), sonic translations because of technology, and possibilities of mass-distribution (even in the way it is sung through the Ad'han) is now, and has been taken advantage of by powerful regimes-- for example in reference in my piece to the archival footage of the Shah's takeover before the Iranian Revolution. "Performing the text" becomes rendered and censored, selected and de-selected to recite certain lines over the radio, and for intrinsic, nation-hood methods of justification— a performance of confusion and wonder, and simultaneous existence of movement, kinetics, and resonance through the body, whether this is resulting in spiritual uplifting, but also the very opposite.

Through my piece I continue to ask myself: is performing the text indeed a hypocrisy, or recollection and reverberation of how it can resonate through the body outside of the holy space?

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SOUNDS

(i.) As the piece proceeds, a statement becomes increasingly tautologic to me from a childhood anecdote-- and increasingly abstract, perhaps even perverted when layered with poetry, destructed thoughts, and sounds of the sonic. Don't Perform What You Understand serves almost as a traditional demarcation of a playwright, in its bland, introductory intonation, but to me, becomes both lost and amplified through the erosion of different subjects-- the time they appear-- and the importance (and non-importance) they gain by the end of the video. It is my brother's voice telling me strictly to not perform Namaaz for the sake of mimicking others (in this case, I was trying to mimic my mother as a child) or performing the prayer as ritual-- that is, without understanding fully the complex context of Islam I am worshipping.

(ii.) The impartial recitation of holy text, via the learning experience of the child: Arabic recitations of the Koran only sung by the octave, but not pronounced in completion making it ambiguous, and perhaps even ridiculous to the extent that the child recites "crucial" text half-heartedly.

(iii.) The internal voice: frustrated, compelled, but also splicing in itself-- the structure of thoughts become non-sequential, but more rhythmic, by questioning the performance of ritual (i.e., "What am I doing? To memorise! / On the skin...")

(iv.) Poetic recitation of Omar Khaiyyam vs. Rumi (Farsi): to me, Omar Khaiyyam and Rumi serve, and have survived, as the emblem and didactic of contemporary conversation in Iran (both as an omnipresent, scholarly conscience, and even a rather humorous reference in everyday Persian conversations)-- one poet is overly passionate, often times controversial, in denial he worships a "higher power," and seduced by the idea of love (Rumi), while another is posed as the more rational, self-enlightened, questioning the essence of human encounters as something concrete and structural.

CONTENT

Recorded Footage

- A brief performance art piece of a woman reciting Khaiyyam and Rumi as a physical performance-- moments of the mouth pronouncing the words themselves, of her wandering herself, and becoming detached from everyday spaces using the body itself as a prism of non-understanding.

- Petri dish: milk boils in the dish while ink circulates in the center. To me, this is my own, strange representation of the Shah's fetishes and greed for power in pre-revolutionary Iran: for example, forcing female civilians to bathe in milk, a tradition admired from a rather lavish Persian antiquity (despite milk in itself being a crucial recourse for Iranians [both diet and health wise]), but also a recourse which accordingly became highly-scarce during his reign. In this way, this contributed to an increasing image of a famished population from the 1950s to 70s in Tehran, and as milk served as the basic base of multiple dishes in the Iranian diet.

- Myself, actively scrolling (perhaps omnisciently) and searching the internet in an effort to "learn about Koranic text" (this is my own amusement in the availability of holy material as mass-distribution through technology), and the frustrating variations of Farsi when it comes to accurately translating Khaiyyam versus Rumi.

- A video of myself swimming as a child: to me, this is simply my ordane and holy interpretation of water as an embodiment and constant learning experience.

Found Footage

- Archival footage of the Shah when he was inaugurated

- Woman performing Namaaz, or Islamic prayer

- Tourists video-taping themselves skiing in Tehran during the winter

- A spinning Dervish performing the Sufi mystic, or cyclic dance as a form of consistency, kinetics, and increasing abstraction