

The Fluid Narrative of Marginography

The Necessity of Microhistory in the Hyper-Politicized Time/Place/Body in Pirooz Kalantari's Films

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In the following text, I endeavour to argue for microhistory in artistic practice in relation to politics from three perspectives: individual, structural and artistic. In the third and final part of the text, I bring together parts one and two and discuss how they play out in the filmmaker, photographer and writer Pirooz Kalantari's films.

The first section begins with how I first encountered the concept of microhistory – a combination of words that caught my interest. It presents microhistory from the perspective of the individual in accordance with the microhistorical method of investigation¹. In other words, I aim to argue from my individual political and social agency and explain the understanding of the concept of microhistory from the perspective of an Iranian artist from Tehran who works in Stockholm.

In the second part of the text I will present my individualized understanding of microhistory in relation to the theories of microhistory as formulated by Carlo Ginzburg (1993), as a vital aspect of microhistorical narrativity in relation to macrohistory. I challenge and reject the notion that microhistory should be regarded as the branches of the macrohistorical tree trunk. Instead, I perceive it as “elseness” and attempt to explain the invisibility and hiddenness of the macrohistory as a doxa, or a part of habitual everyday life that eludes identification.

The third part of my text approaches microhistory in an Iranian context and elaborates this relationship and the necessity of microhistorical narrativity in the hyper-politicized time, place and body in Pirooz Kalantari's films.

¹ István Szijártó, Four Arguments for Microhistory, *Rethinking History* 6:2, 2002, pp. 209–215.

Expectation and Imagination

I begin the first part of my text not with an academic argument for the theory of microhistory and what the term or its discourse mean, but rather with an explanation of an individual's relationship to the new discourse. In the realm of academia, at various conferences and panel discussions, or even when reading an article or listening to a lecture, I unintentionally start to think about a term or philosopheme. While thinking about this new term, I apply my individual knowledge to it – again, this does not precisely follow an academic approach, but is more a result of an unconfined and fluid way of thinking. It is a mixture of imagination and expectation; imagining the term's capability and my expectations of what it actually is.

The first time I heard about the concept of microhistory was in 2012 at the School of Photography at the University of Gothenburg, at a presentation by Magnus Bårtås, professor at the Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm; I assume it was part of a conference. After Magnus' talk, Andrej Slavik, who was a respondent/commenter, offered his point of view on the relation between Magnus' films and Microhistory. I don't remember Slavik's exact phrase, but it was along these lines:

Magnus' stories are related to microhistory or they are microhistory or definable according to microhistorical approaches

As I remember it, this was Andrej's only mention of the concept of microhistory, yet the term was strong enough to stir my imagination, though I knew nothing of microhistory or Carlo Ginzburg at that time. What were the elements of this philosopheme that provoked such a strong desire for knowledge in me? 'Micro' and 'history' became two pieces of a puzzle, and I had to fit them together. Andrej's comment that day was what later motivated my microhistory research.

Perhaps what made it so enticing was the potentiality of the microhistorical concept to allow for an argument about “something else”. Or perhaps my expectations for this term were about that something else itself; the stories that we neither know nor don't know that we don't know. For me, microhistory has not come to represent a theoretical discipline, but rather an expository practice, with a shared aesthetic and a common interest between arts and science in fine-grained detail and dense connections.²

² Thomas Cohen, The Larger Uses of Microhistory The Microhistory Network, accessed 15 October. 2015, www.microhistory.eu/the_larger_uses_of_microhistory.html

Micro and 'elseness'

The quality of being something else

Microhistory is typically regarded as a way of seeking knowledge that focuses on minutiae. It might seem that this definition is sufficient and that enjoyment can be found in making such minor comparisons, but there is also a certain freedom at the heart of microhistory and its narratives. In addition to paying attention to and surveying events at close range, this freedom works towards infusing a new curiosity into grand historical narratives as well; it represents an effortless plan to bring forth a new narration into history. The tendency of the term itself is curious: 'micro' hints at a deep understanding of events or at least gestures in that general direction.

In the absence of Macro, Micro does not exist. As soon as we talk about Micro, we bring comparative logic into our argument, but claiming Micro reminds us of the possibilities of critical approaches in relation to Macro. In fact, the notion of Micro has a critical potentiality in its tendency. Micro is a reminder of other possibilities of history. In fact, microhistory challenges the existence of the macro level of historical narration that had presented itself as the sole narrator of history. Micro is a promise of "something else"; a something else that we could even call the elseness of microhistory.

Macro, on the other hand, is not genuinely visible, and derives its power from this notion of invisibility.

Macro narration has become part of an unconscious 'where and how'. Moving from the notion of historical unconsciousness to consciousness is the first step of microhistory.

Macro-narration has a paradoxical character: from hyper-visibility it has become invisible and indiscernible, not unlike the state of un-questionability of natural phenomena. It exists as the sky or a tree, without arousing any critical thought. The invisibility and hiddenness of the macrohistory have made it a doxa, which is part of habitual everyday life and hard to identify. To understand how this occurs, we can turn to the way that Pierre Bourdieu sees power as culturally and symbolically created, and constantly re-legitimized through an interplay of agency and structure. This happens primarily through what he calls 'habitus', or socialised norms or tendencies that guide behaviour and thinking. Habitus is 'the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them'. (Wacquant 2005: 316, cited in Navarro 2006: 16)³

³ Wacquant, L., Habitus, International Encyclopedia of Economic Sociology. J. Beckett and Z. Milan. London, Routledge, 2006, p.16.

This habituality presents itself when it comes to the time, place or body. Habitus is not a result of free will, and nor is it determined by structures, but instead created over time by a kind of interplay between the two: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures and that shape current practices and structures, and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of them (Bourdieu 1984: 170)⁴. In this sense, habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously, ‘without any deliberate pursuit of coherence... without any conscious concentration’ (ibid: 170). In fact, macrohistory owes its existence to the paradoxical relationship between a hyper-visibility and invisibility that creates invisibility and indiscernibility.

In contrast, micro has a capacity of activating the otherness. It presents, or claims to present, “the others”; the other that, in this context, could be understood as life that has been permanently marginalized or hidden under powerful narratives. By weaving tales about obscure individuals about whom has never before been written, microhistory has a capacity to use various levels of evidence to fill in the story of how the past was lived. Microhistory and other studies in the recent past reached heights of sophistication in the constrained inspection of experience; many practitioners were masters in the use of multiple kinds of data.⁵

Microhistory is not really a method, but rather a malleable form of practice that is open to further transformations. It is a transformation that brings 'the other' into the narrative. Its aim is not to kill historical relevance, but rather to question it by telling an untold story.

The Finnish historian Matti Peltonen claims: “To me, the most interesting aspect of the new microhistory is methodological” (Peltonen 2001, p. 348)⁶. In my opinion however, speaking methodologically is the most unfortunate aspect of microhistorical theorizing. A generation ago, microhistory looked very promising – and its experimental character was the main source for the high hopes. This experimental character was ascribed to microhistory as a practice long before methodological articles started to appear.⁷

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London, Routledge, 1984, p.170.

⁵ Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, p.57.

⁶ Peltonen, Matti, Clues, Margins, and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research,” In *History and Theory*, Vol. 40, 2001, No. 3, 347-359.

⁷ Zoltán Boldizsár Simon, **Method and Perspective**, *Journal of Microhistory*, Vol, 13 January 2013.

If microhistory becomes what microhistorians make it out to be at every moment, it will lack the rigor of methodology.

Microhistory is the connection drawn between life and history; in which life experiences engender shock and irresolution. Microhistory brings to light the uncertainties inherent in the grand narrative of history, although perhaps not to the point of creating totally contradictory narratives, but instead proposing a fresh approach to history.

Microhistory is an investigation on a small scale. However, if it just becomes a subdivision of macrohistory, it will lose the potentiality of “eliteness”. In my view, the quality of “being something else” could be an appealing potential in the core of microhistory.

Micro is always in an active relationship with macro, creating an intersection with it. This intersectional point creates a space for a radical rethinking of the common norm. Ginzburg⁸ defines microhistory as: “a form of research that goes beyond the normal characteristics of history and transforms it into a new phenomenon. This new phenomenon is not necessarily strange or bizarre, but is simply a different way of seeing the characteristics of common objectives.” This difference can appear to be contradictory at times. Nevertheless, this distinction is the intertwined relationship between the individual and a section of society.

Cool vs. Really

Hyper-politicized time, place and body

As I have already argued, historical narrations are typically perceived as unquestionable facts, not unlike natural phenomena. Yet, the grand narrative of the history of a given time and a given place is always, to some extent, the result of a political agenda. History must serve a sense of historical justice, whereby the past – however selective our memory may be – is acknowledged and truth is finally served; the grand narrative of history that repeats itself over and over within the continuity of time. There is some kind of interconnection between repetition events, a succession of social systems, the gradual development of social conditions, and so on – in other words, in some

⁸ Carlo Ginzburg; John Tedeschi; Anne C. Tedeschi, *Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It*, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Autumn, 1993, pp. 10-35.

way, it is able to *make sense of* history (or more specifically, when pronounced with a sneer – as it usually is – of the “grand narrative”).

Although grand historical narration claims factuality according to historical evidence, it creates an abstract idea that is supposed to be a comprehensive explanation of historical experience or knowledge. According to John Stephens,⁹ it "is a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience".

In geo-political locations with a long history of conflict and paradoxes, the relation between the individual and such a general notion of history takes on unique characteristics. Historical and political identity of the current period is branded by the past; the current period itself identified according to the grand narration of the historical past. The question of 'who one is' has a strong link to the social and political positionality that one claims.

History is a form of narration, which, in its ritualistic habitus, has become an absolute entity. History in this condition presents itself in an ostensive characteristic. Sometimes the political conflict derives its identity from the distinction between 1400 (referring to Islamic history) or 2500 years ago, back to nationalistic history of Pars Empire. For example, in Iran the government claims the Islamic Shia history as a political identity, and many people have embraced characters from pre- Islamic history in order to make an oppositional statement toward the government and the power structure. Hence, Iranian nationalist discourse often focuses on Iran's pre-Islamic history.¹⁰ In the 20th century, different aspects of this romantic nationalism would be referenced by both the Pahlavi monarchy, which employed titles such as ‘Aryamehr’ (‘Light of the Aryans’), and by some leaders of the Islamic Republic that followed it.¹¹

In short, for these historicized social and political claimants, history has become a quarry from which we cut stones to hurl at each other.

Let me tell you a story in order to clarify my point:

About those 5 Seconds

⁹ Stephens, John and Robyn McCallum, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature*, Routledge, April 1, 1998, p.250.

¹⁰ *Arshin ,Adib-Moghaddam, "Reflections on Arab and Iranian Ultra-Nationalism". Monthly Review Magazine, 2006.*

¹¹ *Keddie, Nikki R.; Richard, Yann. Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution. Yale University Press. 2006, p.178.*

Imagine a party. A typical, simple, friendly and informal party, like a birthday party, yet there are no signs of a birthday's attributes; it is just an excuse to invite friends who don't have any direct relationship to one another. You know the host, but none of the other guests. You are the new arrival. Holding a beer and trying to communicate with the others, you say who you are, what you are doing there and talk about your interests and knowledge. Nobody asks the very obvious question: where are you from? Perhaps this crucial question is postponed because of their appreciation of a person's individuality and identification regardless of his or her geopolitical context. But there is no possibility of ignoring or escaping the question: "Where are you from, by the way?"

Let's imagine that the response is "Iran" (or Syria, or Palestine, or perhaps one of the Balkan countries during the war in the 90s, or Iraq.)

Five seconds of silence.

From personal experience, in this situation there is almost always, without fail, a five second silence. I would like to call it 'active silence'. Your new acquaintance looks you directly in the eyes and in their eyes you can see REM (rapid eye movement). You can sense the activity in their brain, reviewing archives and memories and trying to match the unrecognizable phenomenon in front of them. After that five-second active silence there is always the same response: "Cool!" (Although my female friends from Iran somehow get a slightly different response: "Really?" – which perhaps warrants its own article.)

Usually, over the next few hours you must answer very specific questions about sweeping political agendas from deep in the past to the present. You must carefully position yourself with regard to any conflict or political agenda on a macro level, from west to east, and through this positioning purify yourself in the new political context. There is no escape from not being political according to the agreed-upon conventions. In this context, politics are an instrument for recognizing individual agency, and most of the time it follows the grand narration.

But why the surprise?

The psychological response to the question "Where are you from?" and the five seconds of silence that follow reveal the hegemony of macrohistorical narrativity, which conquers everything; a single story that doesn't allow any other storyline to present itself. What images and stories are going through the backs of their minds? And where do they come from?

I believe that this active five seconds of silence is the key element to understanding the invisibility and hiddenness of macro; the hyper visibility that creates the invisibility and indiscernibility of the micro.

I would like to call it 'hyper-politicized'. Hyper-politicized character is not only linked to a time and place, but also to an individual body.

The 'hyper-politicized space' (hyper-politicized social climate) is where any action or motion is immediately associated with either side of a previous conflict. In these conditions, we are mostly witnessing the grand antagonistic narration of historical events and their direct results on society.

This notion of uncertainty has been relationally shifted between state power and the politics of everyday life. It is a hyper-politicized instability that has not only become part of the geo-political identity in its social and political guises, but which also presents itself as a characteristic of everyday life outside the state borders. This paradoxical personality includes the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, and of the dispersed.

The hyper-politicized character can be defined as a temperament that interferes with the whole realm of individuality and its fragmented public presence. It is characterized by multiplicity of both marginal lives and omnipresent power. The character of this society itself presents forms of spatial, transversal and virtual characteristics that produce paradoxical conditions. The 'hyper-politicized' is the condition of permanent marginal life in relation to the political context. In its essence, the hyper-political is politics in practice in everyday life. This means that everyday life is colonized by political narration, and politics itself has become an instrument that gives rise to a specific attitude. In this condition, an individual is expected to position herself with regard to the recognition of the political and historical narrativity, whether or not the individual is a political activist. To live in a hyper-politicized condition is to connect every other issue to the grand narration and to the generally recognized political and historical stories. In short, hyper-politicized time, place or body is colonized by the grand narration of political and historical narration.

But what holds weight here is the fact that a hyper-politicized society is not a passive one. Rather, it is always pregnant with probable incidents, actions, reactions and resistance.

Everyone from the hyper-politicized realm always carries the hyper-politicized characteristic at his or her side. This is true not only within their own society, but also within a multicultural social environment. The fundamental question that one must answer in everyday life is not only about one's political position, but also about one's personal life, in order to present oneself clearly in a

Western context. The hyper-politicized does not necessarily deal with the power structure directly in an absolute space or place. In my terminology, it is the role and the agency of one individual in relation to society. This relationship is enacted at the intersection between grand and marginal, and macro and micro multiple narrations. In this specific situation, the cultural translation of representation into images of political regimes often occurs to conflate and blur the vectors of different power structures and movements. It is important to route all of these issues through the delicate landscapes of intercultural environments and contexts.

Microhistory is macrohistory's agonism. And through its narration, it brings a state of elseness and negotiation by creating a brief pause in the accepted historical narration.

The Fluidity of Narration of Marginography in Pirooz Kalantari's Films

Iran and its capitol Tehran – the city where I was born and schooled – is a clear example of a hyper-politicized environment. I believe that the political practice in this environment derives its identity from the interactions between people. The denial of politics is a constant struggle for those in some way active in the production of concepts, art and culture. Perhaps the main reason for frequent claims of "I am not political" and "This is not a political article" is the obvious extensive denigratory portrayal of political art and political artists by multiple actors: by the Iranian government and the powers that be and, in another form, by the Western media in today's geopolitics. In fact, the purpose of statements such as "I am not political" or "This is not a political article" is mostly to create a secure corner for oneself, thus preparing a temporary possibility for growth in a calmer environment. "I am not political" is in reality a description of the obvious large numbers of apolitical members in Iranian society today. Anyone living within the confines of this geopolitical arena is well aware that such statements are completely void of meaning, and their macro political narrative has taken over every aspect of our individual and social lives. Due to this complex definition of socio-politics, the documentary filmmaking and the position of a documentary filmmaker have become more difficult and involved. Documentary film and documentary journalism typically claim a direct relationship with reality and its representation. The possibility for a critical presentation lies with the government/powers that be, causing difficulties for documentary filmmakers in Iran and giving the films themselves a contrary character.

Documentary cinema constitutes a circular connection between individuals and society through the lens of the documentary filmmaker. The important point to understand this relationship between individual and society is to concern ourselves with what the reality is, and to have faith in what is represented as the reality.

From this perspective, Iranian documentary cinema has a paradoxical character. Films are made, and in general the content is of a personal narrative or testament in which a type of relationship between the individual and society is portrayed. The finished film is first shown a few times to groups of friends or at small public gatherings. Limited gatherings of a constructive-critical nature are held with the director, and afterward the DVD becomes an object in the director's bag, and the distribution phase, presided over by the director himself, goes forward without any prospect of financial gain. The filmmaker is turned into a traveling salesman, giving his wares away to his would-be customers. With this charity and adaptability, he goes on with his life; a life based on a passion to document. Upon examination, the reasons for the existence of such an operation include the difficulties of obtaining permission to make the film, the difficulties of distribution, and the lack of an organization or administrative association to assist in the screening, archiving and distribution of the films. Yet the important point in this style of presentation, regardless of the type of film, is how it presents its attitude toward society. Iranian documentary cinema, with its fluid nature, carries on its flexible life. According to unofficial count, there are 500 to 600 documentary films made in Iran annually, without the backing of any sort of association (or financial support) – this is a phenomenon that calls for our attention, asking us to observe not merely aspects of Iran today, but a specific socio-political cross-section of today's variable Iranian society. These films portray a lifestyle transformed into another life, shifting from one shape to another, whose existence is unhindered by socio-political difficulties. They portray an identity based on the basic elements of life that attempts to persevere in the life flow. This form of narration is a cinema that is at times difficult, at times poetic and gentle. Yet regardless of its multiple forms of narrations, it tries to address the complexity of co-existence within the current social and political situation.

Piروز Kalantari is one of the most experienced practitioners of this style of filmmaking. He is a 61-year-old Iranian filmmaker, photographer and writer with a degree in film studies, and he has been writing and directing films for 30 years. In general, the subject matter of Kalantari's films is directly related to familiar post-revolution socio-political events and conditions, such as the war, the revolution itself, poverty, and other, similar narratives that relate macro-narratives to individual lives. His films and their narrative style have a distinct

Iranian socio-political post-revolution macro-narrative, which also presents a micro-narrative of everyday life in this hyper-politicized concept.

Kalantari calls his films documentaries without attempting to explicitly define the term 'documentary'. His films are not a mere reflection of reality; because Kalantari does not consider the camera neutral, he chooses to always emphasize it as a challenging connection between the filmmaker (I) and the surrounding environment (reality). The grafting of reality and "I" is the nucleus of his filmmaking. Such films bring into question the foundation of documentary filmmaking as an act of observation, and the presence of the filmmaker becomes both definite and crucial. According to this detailed view, everyday life and its micro-narration comprise the main elements of his films. The intersection of reality and "I" is an example of the relationship between aesthetics and the social presence of the artistic filmmaker. This social presence in Kalantari's films is represented through varied faces. In his film *Parseh* (Stroll), he sits in the front seat of a communal taxi and films the different passengers in the backseat. *Parseh* was filmed in 2001, during the second presidential election for Khatami. It fits into the above definition by not ignoring politics in the flow of Iranian society. Because it is filmed in the semi-public/semi-private space of the taxi, it brings to mind a lifestyle buried under the political macro-narrative through the images of a young girl and boy (seemingly lovers); a grumpy old man; a middle-aged man who has found an opportunity to talk about his ideas and beliefs; a youth who idolizes Khatami and wishes to meet his political idol. The camera shows us the crowded streets before the election. After the war, in the time frame surrounding the presidential elections, the atmosphere of the city is changed. At times, this transformation is apparent as a celebration in the street, and at other times it is a protest. This exercise in politics manifests itself in its own western democratic form, and both government and grassroots campaigns, officially and unofficially change the face of the city. The election becomes an excuse to take to the streets. Kalantari defines Iran's post-revolution atmosphere in all the ways it is connected to an oppressed society and the political, social and economic pressures, conveying it as an unpredictable melting pot that gives birth to a new story each day. *Parseh* takes this celebration in the streets and turns it into a single personality. The individual enters this half-public space from the hustle and bustle of the streets. Kalantari records this short time between the two actions, watching with childlike curiosity from the front seat of the taxi. In *Parseh*, Kalantari does not tell a strange story that is unheard of in Tehran, yet he is curious to find a narrative that he knows and enjoys hearing again himself, and then sharing his pleasure with his audience. Even though *Parseh* establishes a direct connection with its audience, the presence of the curious filmmaker nullifies any neutral perspective of a simple spectator. As a result, the film becomes a dialogue between the filmmaker and the passenger in the backseat.

This brief description of Kalantari's style of filmmaking resonates profoundly with microhistory as characterized by Ginzburg:

*Microhistorical analysis therefore has two fronts. On one side, by moving on a reduced scale, it permits in many cases a reconstruction of "real life" unthinkable in other kinds of historiography. On the other side, it proposes to investigate the invisible structures within which that lived experience is articulated.*¹²

(Ginzburg – Poni 1991, p. 8)

But whose life is *Kalantari* trying to reconstruct? I would argue that Tehran is the main subject of Kalantari's films. The city is either the subject itself (e.g. in *Tehran in Poetry*; *Reading Salinger in City Park*; *Tehran*; *What Richter?* and *Four Views of Kahrizak*) or the center of action (such as in *Alone in Tehran*; *This is Life* and in *The Endless Streets*).

Kalantari does not seem to be a political filmmaker in the sense of the acknowledged form of political work, which tries to define the political situation pedagogically, and even ostensibly. The quiet logic of his point of view creates an obvious distance from what is called 'Middle-Eastern political art'. This form of art and narration leaves a clear dialectic imprint in the audience's thoughts and follows the basic fundamentals which, according in its own historical logic, have been over-repeated. Kalantari does not describe politics as an artistic manifestation in order to clearly show or embody the society and, without claiming to be politically active, he challenges his audience. *Reading Salinger in City Park* seems to be a self-narrative in relation to Tehran's City Park. He walks in the park, sitting on benches and, taking in their social standing, watching people: the passers-by, the men, the women and even the crows. Kalantari brings 'the other' into the heart of his micro-narrative, such as the day he was reading J.D. Salinger in City Park and a young boy and girl were sitting on either side of him and passed a note over the book in his hands.¹³ This is the anecdote which gave the film its title. Instead of ignoring the critical politics and social aspects, Kalantari knowingly refrains from using a critical point of view. He does not create from the critical positions of criticism or from the policies of political art. In *This is Life*, Kalantari focuses on the first generation of the

¹² Carlo Ginzburg; John Tedeschi; Anne C. Tedeschi, *Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It*, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1993, pp.10-35.

¹³ Behzad Khosravi Noori, *In the Endless Streets*, *Aftab Network Magazine*, Tehran, February 2014, pp.42-44 .

university student movement and, without using macro-narrative to address the demonstrations, opposition and imprisonment, he lets the story be told through the everyday issues of the students active in the uprising, focusing on their relationships and their financial and family problems. In this other narrative, he creates a metaphor that falls between narrative and image as well as between micro and macro narration. His films are the meeting place of the two narrations. Kalantari's storytelling demonstrates the fluidity between them. This crossroads of hyper-politics in today's Iran results in a collage-like narrative. Through this type of sequencing, he is able to recount a micro-narrative that has been buried beneath the macro-narration.

The relationship of Kalantari's films to microhistory lies not only in his view of the subject matter, but follows the necessity of the logic of microhistory. His films contain an individual voice. In fact, they can be watched without video, that is to say, they can be read, and the voice of the narrator imagined. The imagery in his films is also watchable without narration. The different parts of Kalantari's films are connected: sound, narrative, script, and meaningful images allow conclusions to be drawn and create a micro-narrative that scrutinizes the amazement of everyday life and is able to express the action of political logic without putting on airs. He enters the heart of narration and blends historical narrative with storytelling. Kalantari's history *from below*, to borrow the term used by historians such as Peter Burke, occurs beneath the foundation of everyday living history; it is a narrative which must be told in all of its complexity in order for us to understand hyper-politicized time, place and body.

In his slow narrations, Kalantari is far more skilled than most political historians at the subtle reading of evidence. He squeezes his material from the experience of everyday life. By paying scrupulous attention to nuance and language, he is able to crawl into, and even behind, his sources. An appreciation for nuance, a strong sense of ambiguity and a healthy skepticism are central to his practice; these are all good models for intelligent reading and investigation and for understanding banality in all its complexity.

He takes the storyteller's art to heart. In this, he is not altogether alone, though he remains nevertheless somewhat lonely.

Kalantari is eager to assemble, as far as he is able, the entirety of past moments. He somehow manages to aim for totality -- every human sense, every quality, every tone, every source -- within his finite scope and his eager grasp.

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