

A Manifesto for *Problematica*

First. Every manifesto is perhaps shaped by the idea of emancipating itself from the past and paving the way for the future. In this sense, every manifesto moves in reliance on new forces it summons now out of history to foster new hopes, and motivate novel passions. This, however, does not imply total negation of the past, not only because the past is constantly chasing us with all its determinations stamping its signature on the present and leaving its fingerprint behind, but also because the past is no more a burden on the shoulders or an evil we have to get rid of. It is rather the very history with which we should clarify our relation. And this 'being in a relation with the past' entails no less than rereading the *historical* roads either taken or untaken; it decrees no less than reviewing the failures and triumphs, and desires for nothing less than redeeming past promises and hopes – if there ever was a promise or hope. In this sense, the differentiation of 'the present' or spread of the future horizons is only achievable through a redefinition of the relationship between 'us' as historical subjects with the past. In the meantime, distancing is as much an essential issue as is persisting, and it's as necessary to negate and refute as to endorse or acknowledge.

Second. *Problematica* wants to begin, but a beginning in media res. First of all, it must set free of the illusion that creation of the new is similar to creation from nothing (*ex nihilo*). We embark on action not in vacuum, rather within the history, which means involving in forms, experiences, and determinations. The new is a result of different ensembles of the same old belongings, and of new relation between the almost already available things, rather than a novel invention of nonexistent things out of nowhere. Accordingly as far as *Problematica* is concerned, we are to reevaluate a number of old deeds, continue some trodden paths, and repeat many old endeavors, yet via a different articulation from the past. It is a matter of sublation (*aufhebung*), rather than abstract negation or euphoric affirmation of the past.

1

Third. At least three distinct trends are traceable in the Iranian intellectual movements, each of which claim a distinct treatment of the issue of 'thought': the vernacularists, the translationists, and the impossibilists. We are more or less familiar with the claims of each trend: The vernacularists take as given a radical and rapturous opposition between self and 'other' which is often personalized in the shade of the totality of 'the West' – and belief in the extractable treasure of traditions and knowledge of the 'self'. According to the vernacularist discourse, thought is achieved only through iterative confrontation with the familiar, only through its relation to the always present that has already been around awaiting to be discovered, enacted or revived. The vernacularists believe that the answer to all questions, even the ones not yet asked, are already given in the context of tradition or culture and all to do is to retrieve such obsolete and partly long-neglected questions. Confrontation with the other at all levels or extensions for the vernacularists is an *ipso facto* threat, simply because it continually implies violation of the borders of the self's identity and menace its accustomed serenity.

The translationists, on the other hand, are fascinated with the Other's discourse. For them, thought is another word for translation, or to put it better, thought is impossible without translation. They think not in conversation with the other, but within the world of the other. Accordingly, their questions and concerns are in fact the same questions and concerns the other has proposed. Presuming that he's involved with the universal and contributes with the universal, the translationist already exempts himself from confrontation with the particular – the historical. He lives as an alien in his life world and is alienated from its heritage, tensions, lacks and possibilities. His voice is so much accorded with the voice of the other that no more has a voice of his own, therefore, he cannot narrate his life, problematize it, and think about it. The impossibilist discourse takes a totally different rout. The impossibilist believes that 'thought' has basically become impossible 'for us' due to certain habits of mind or 'blockage in traditions. Meanwhile all that Thought can do is to paradoxically think about its impossibility. The impossibilist is perpetually

enchained by negative concepts of blockage, decadence, or degeneration. The impossibilist thinks within a conceptual setup that is fond of blockages and impossibilities, hence he or she is incapable of forward thought to any creativity or potentiality so as there is no trace of positive forces leading to happiness or hopeful challenge towards progress. The impossibilist is, instead, woeful, devoid of any sap for future. If the vernacularist is a narcissist naively delighting 'whatever one had once' and attracted to the rich reservoir of cultural and historical knowledge of the world at large, the impossibilist is an overheated masochist who would not suffice with anything less than proclamation of the historic downfall of 'us' (the Iranians). The translationist is, nonetheless, a heteronomous authoritarian whose peace of mind is only achieved in the shade of the 'other'.

Nevertheless, The problematic discourse and the problematician's figure makes clear distances with all aforementioned trends: thought moves through its confrontation with the problems, and is nothing other than the process of problematization, configuration and reconfiguration of problems. But what is a problem? It's a crisis at the core of a situation, chaos – huge or small – that disarrays the established order of things, an inflammation on skin, a blind spot, a moment lost in the maze of relations with the past or future, a chronic sceptic scar, a gap or lack that would not allow a whole becomes a totality; a purple patch in the line, institution, apparatus or city; an exclusion in law, a part of a whole which upsets it, is extruded by nature or intruded by force. However, there are no a priori problems; they are rather made out of discourses or through contentions. An illness can cause a problem to be confronted by thought. A death can cause a problem, and so do an accident, a revolution, a bad failure, a catastrophe, a translation, a poem, a film, a novel, an Afghan, a Queer, a worker, a minority, a corpse swinging from the gallows pole, a working child, a woman, a piece of news, a photograph, etc.

Problematica attempts to jump over vernacularism, translationism and impossibilism by means of problematizing issues and confrontation with problems which may or may not be vernacular, translational, or abstainable.

Fourth. A new debate has long been reignited over what could truly be 'our' problem worth giving attention, and what is not 'our' problem and hence should be avoided. The other form of the debate is to decide on priorities of problems: which problems are our high priorities and require a more urgent and essential response, which problems could be assigned lower priorities and therefore should be postponed to another time. *Problematica* is, however, also concerned with a totally different question. How do matters become problems? In other words, how could we spot problems within this or that matter? Accordingly, *Problematica's* main goal is not only to decide on whether matters are problems or not and to prioritize them (no need to mention that none of such matters are finally erasable), but more importantly is problematization *per se*. Each matter is essentially a problem once it is set in an array of active field forces – such as institutions, a media, a powers, a people or a mass – and bears a relation to them. Yet none is turned into a problem unless it is defamiliarized by the mechanisms of critique and questioning, hence made an *Problematic*. In this sense, problematization of things equals an alteration in their relation to their surrounding objects, their extraction from the position they had taken in the natural order of things, and finally, problematizing the things is to revolutionize the world.