

*The Ta'ziyeh is a form of passion play that aims to blur the boundaries between the current actuality and the imaginary past. The body is an archaic form of memory conduit. But rather than a memory storage system that creates of the past an autonomous entity, this memory system does not access dead pathways or objects that have been registered, catalogued and stored. Instead it is a physical performance of the past that is staged over and over and over again. During the ceremonial re-enactments of this shared memory, there is hardly any distinction made between the actors and the public. They become interchangeable since everyone contributes to bringing the myth to life. Spectators may project their own private tragedies on to the larger screen of the epic tale of heroism – one with a higher objective than the strictly personal. (5)*

*There are several traits inherent to the Ta'ziyeh that promote its political instrumentalisation, among which are its power to bind people together and the access it provides to a mass audience. A more nationalistic concept can easily be selected. This has repeatedly occurred: for example, during the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and during the Iran-Iraq war that followed. The results of the first event and the traumas of the second are still being processed by Iranian society. The Ta'ziyeh served as a recruitment machine. Ta'ziyeh performances and Mourning Ceremonies are attended by huge crowds and are a part of the street life for at least 3 months of the year. This massive popularity and visibility makes it into a mass medium suitable for disseminating political messages. The side effect is that it automatically creates exclusivity. Many were condemned to homelessness. Bonds were broken due to different religious persuasions or a lack of religious conviction. The casual tent constructions, which aurally blend the inside and outside through their thin membranes, establish a single identity. The public space becomes utterly homogenous.*

*A binary system of authorisation and creeping prohibition produces actual expulsions: people are pushed “out”. This psychologically unsafe outdoor space encompasses everything, including interiors.*

Note (3)

The creation of a common enemy is a classic feature of all forms of repression. Demonisation is constantly there, lurking in the shadows, waiting to rear its ugly head when a sovereign power feels at its most vulnerable. The discourse in which I constantly seem to find myself - about the all-inclusive space that makes claims on universal truths - can only exist by establishing antithetical hierarchies in space and time. The demarcation lines are frequently contested, both there and here, and are dependant on both the position that is taken and the power mechanism that is considered acceptable, or, conversely, inconceivable. I believe that it is easier to fight a power that has a clear, concrete face than one that hides in an all-absorbent atmosphere that makes it impossible to know what or with whom one is fighting, let alone how to go about it. Resistance, in no matter what form, will then ricochet off an invisible wall of immunity, just as the drug soma in Huxley's Brave New World – non-toxic and freely available – created a paralysing acceptance in the people.

Political forms of censorship seem to manifest themselves violently; economic forms of censorship are silent as they are not imposed through prohibitions but instead through numerical mechanisms. (6)

Paranoia is a product of both: each produces imaginary enemies who wish to undermine the installed ideology.

I came across an installation, Silent Space, at an art fair in Berlin. This space provided an oasis of mental freedom; the emptiness had infinite possibilities and once outside again, the unequivocal contrast was breath-taking. Freedom in the form of endless options was replaced by a claustrophobic tunnel in which every opening was strategically closed. The silent space became a ghost of itself. It was swallowed up by a compulsive monoculture. It lost its boundless openness in which each identity is obliged to define itself over and over again due to the lack of boundaries. It dissolves as soon as it becomes exclusive rather than inclusive.

**5.**  
**Janet Afary & Kevin B. Anderson, Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism (University of Chicago Press, 2005)**

**6.**  
**Geret Beulens e.a. (ed.) De militanten van de limiet. Over censuur en vrije meningsuiting (Van Halewijck, 2000)**