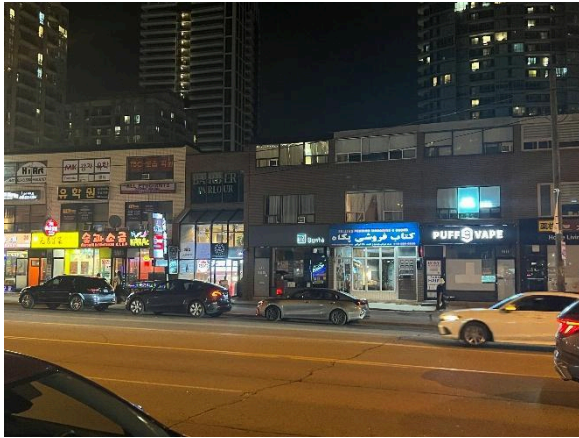


Diaspora as Dream-Work

From Displacement to Condensation, from Metonymy to Metaphor

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From Tehran to Tehranto © Tejpal Ajjii

The Omnipresence of Dream

Dream is not confined to the night. It is not a “second theater” in contrast to waking reality. Rather, dream is a space in which the symbols become real (take flesh): words that take flesh to allude a hidden Word.

Definition : Dream is a space in which the signifier takes the features of the signified: A space in which the Word takes Flesh.¹

This definition is inspired by what Lévi-Strauss wrote in 1950 in his introduction to the work of Marcel Mauss: “*Like language the social is an autonomous reality (the same one, moreover); symbols are more real than what they symbolize, the signifier precedes and determines the signified. We will encounter this problem again in connection with mana*” (Lévi-Strauss, 1950: 37)²

¹ Esmailpour Ghoochani, Iraj (2017): *Bābā Āb Dād: The phenomenology of sainthood in the culture of dreams in kurdistan with an emphasis on sufis of qāderie brotherhood*. Dissertation, LMU München: Fakultät für Philosophie, Wissenschaftstheorie und Religionswissenschaft. P. 38.

² Lévi-Strauss, Claude: *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*, translated by Felicity Baker, London: Routledge, 1987 (1950).

In this sense, dream is everywhere that the **index triumphs over what it indexes**. A grocery bag with Persian script, a samovar in Los Angeles, a cassette in Toronto — these are not inert things but **dream-objects**. They are condensed with meaning such that the signifier outweighs the flesh: “x in flesh.”

Displacement as metonymy, formalized as a vector

Now, I want to argue that *diasporic objects* are just *displaced indices*. In diaspora a sort of indexical structure forms around a decentered center. I explain: Let Tehran be the absent city, the impossible center. No single object can bear Tehran in its entirety. Each nostalgic object is only a **partial feature**, a partial failure in committing entirety, then, a fragment of Tehran displaced into exile. Now, Freud’s first mechanism of dream-work, *Verschiebung* (displacement), corresponds to **metonymy** in Lacan’s reading. One signifier slides into the place of another: the affect of the central idea finds lodging in a peripheral element. Formally:

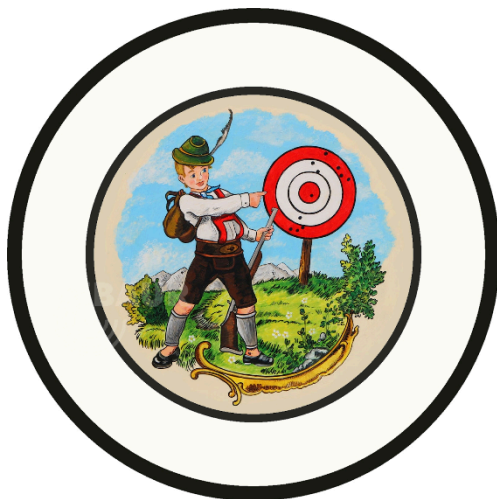
Let Tehran = T.

Let the diaspora city = D.

Displacement that could be shown with the following vector is the instance of every displaced objects as carriers of the cut of their owners:

$$T_n \mapsto D$$

Each n is an index of the cut (Pistachios, Samovar, Cassette ... in Toronto, Berlin, Losangeles,...): an absent trajectory lodged in an alien environment. The object “*re-members*” Tehran, but always as a decentered presence, never coinciding with what it *re-members*: It remains *missing*.



The *Schützenscheibe*, the traditional German shooting target, is more than festive décor or sport. Like the tale of Wilhelm Tell—where one must strike the apple but not the son—the disc stages the paradox of aim: what we must hit and what we must *miss*. Each bullet-hole does not merely pierce wood; it indexes an absence, the invisible trajectory toward a decentered center in favor of a dear center that we should miss: We *miss* what we *miss*.

For more please check my article here:

Esmailpour Ghoochani, I. (2025). Schützenscheibe: Projection, Protection, and the Topology of the Signifier. www.echoespsy.com. URL: [\(1\) Schützenscheibe: Projection, Protection, and the Topology of the Signifier](#)

Human-made objects function in the same way of a *Schützenscheibe* above. They are not neutral tools but indices of the subject's cut — the trace of separation, loss, decentralization, and desire inscribed in matter. Objects bear witness to what has been cut away from the subject — **de-membered**, torn from the body of jouissance that cannot be held directly. And yet, paradoxically, the object exists to **re-member**, to stitch the absence into presence. But the attempt never succeeds. The *missing* member remains forever *missed*, like the hunt that fails or the point that cannot be struck: The *missing* of a point. Why? Because the object itself is decentered: displaced; and as such, its presence is structured by a fundamental absence.

The pistachio in Toronto, the kebab in Berlin, are no longer neutral commodities. They carry the affective weight of Tehran, displaced into metonymic fragments. Quinn Foerch's notion of the vector³ as index helps us see this as an act of orientation: the displaced object tags and orients the subject in the infinite field of the Other.

Condensation as overlapping displacements

Freud's second mechanism, *Verdichtung* (condensation), corresponds to **metaphor** in Lacan's reading. Multiple signifiers overlap, compress, and fuse into a new formation. Formally:

$$T_1, T_2, T_3 \dots T_n \mapsto D$$

The diaspora neighborhood becomes saturated by countless vectors from Tehran. Objects, foods, rituals converge and fold into one another. This is why *Los Angeles* becomes *Tehrangelles*: a new signifier produced by condensation, denser than geography.

From metonymy to metaphor: For Lacan, the difference is clear:

Metonymy = the sliding along the chain $S \rightarrow S'$.

Metaphor = substitution:

$$\frac{S}{S'} \Rightarrow S(x)$$

S is the signifier in the symbolic position, and S' is the signified it points to or replaces through metaphorical substitution. This is the "metaphor" matheme, where one signifier substitutes for another, producing a new meaning in the subject. When we move to **S(x)** notation, Lacan is formalizing the idea that the signifier operates like a function. Here, S is no longer just a static signifier; it acts as a function of an unknown variable x ; x represents the unknown element, the place of the subject or the gaps in meaning that the signifier acts upon. So $S(x)$ reads as: *the signifier produces meaning as a function of what is not yet determined, of what is unknown, of the subject's position*. This captures the Lacanian insight that *meaning is not fixed but emerges through the operation of the signifier on the subject's unknown*.

Now, diaspora condenses so many displacements that the register shifts from metonymy into metaphor. Quantity becomes quality. Metonymic fragments (the pistachio, the cassette, the samovar) collapse into metaphor: *Toronto* itself becomes *Tehranto*. Flesh collapses into word. This is precisely what Freud demonstrates with the joke of the **Famillionär** (*familiär* +

³ Foerch, Q. (2025, August 19). *Orientability, induction, inversion, and index: Fixing the knot in 2-dimensions*. Thoughts. <https://quinnfoerch.com/thoughts.html>

Millionär): a condensation of two signifiers into one witty formation. Freud graphically shows the letters bolded and compressed, what he calls the *zusammendrängende Kraft*, the “amalgamating force” of condensation. Diaspora formations repeat this logic:

Toronto + Tehran = Tehranto

Los Angeles + Tehran = Tehrangeles

These are not casual nicknames, but **condensed dream-words**, comparable to Freud’s *Famillionär* or *Autodidasker*. The diaspora city is overwritten by a dream-object in language.

Moreover, the Freud’s examples [on condensation] in his “*Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*” (*Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten*) are all about the words. For example in a sentence by which a normal person boasted that R. (Baron Rothschild) has treated him as an equal person: “*R. behandelte mich ganz wie seinesgleichen, ganz famillionär*” (GW: 423). Freud’s graphical demonstration of this joke is very instructive (GW: 424):

F a m i l i ä r
 M i l i o n ä r

 F a m i l i o n ä r

We see how some letters are bolded or densed in the writing of Freud on this witty sentence. It is because of the direct superpositioning of two first thought objects and the effect of that “*amalgamating force*” (*zusammendrängende Kraft*) (ibid.) that pushed them into one ‘object-of-thought’¹³⁶. Considerations of this kind opens the door to a kind of deconstructive discussion. From this perspective, Freud’s *zusammendrängende Kraft*¹³⁷ that produces a *Famillionär* out of *Familiär-Millionär*

In Freud’s *Famillionär*, metaphor operates by condensation through elimination: two signifiers (*Familie / Millionär*) overlap, and the redundant segments are canceled by similarity. This eliminative force (*zusammendrängende Kraft*) reduces two chains to one, yielding the unexpected hybrid signifier. In Lacan’s terms, $S/S' \Rightarrow S(x)S / S' \setminus \rightarrow$; $S(x)S/S' \Rightarrow S(x)$, the signifier acts as a function: it takes an indeterminate xxx (the site of lack) and, through the selective elimination of similarities, produces a novel symbolic output — the paradoxical object of thought born from subtraction as much as from addition. Source: Esmailpour Ghoochani, Iraj (2017): *Bābā Āb Dād*: Dissertation, LMU München: Fakultät für Philosophie, Wissenschaftstheorie und Religionswissenschaft. P. 268.

Temporal layering: Retentions of Retentions

Merleau-Ponty adds another layer. Each present retains its past, but modifies it into a “retention of retention:”

Husserl uses the terms protentions and retentions for the intentionalities which anchor me to an environment. They do not run from a central I, but from my perceptual field itself, so to speak, which draws along in its wake its own horizon of retentions, and bites into the future with its protentions. I do not pass through a series of instances of now, the images of which I preserve and which, placed end to end, make a line. With the arrival of every moment, its predecessor undergoes a change: I still have it in hand and it is still there, but already it is sinking away below the level of presents; in order to retain it, I need to reach through a thin layer of time. It is still the preceding moment, and I have the power to rejoin it as it was just now; I am not cut off from it, but still it would not belong to the past unless something had altered, unless it were beginning to

outline itself against, or project itself upon, my present, whereas a moment ago it was my present. When a third moment arrives, the second undergoes a new modification; from being a retention it becomes the retention of a retention, and the layer of time between it and me thickens.⁴

So too with exile: Tehran in memory is not preserved but thickened. *Tebrangeles* is Tehran remembered *through* Los Angeles, doubly mediated. Every diaspora object is thus displaced not only spatially but temporally.

Toward a general thesis

Diaspora life reveals that dream-work is not exceptional but structural:

Displacement (metonymy): $T_n \mapsto D$

Condensation (metaphor): multiple displacements folded, producing *Tebranto*, *Tebrangeles*, ...condensed dream-words.

Temporal layering: retentions upon retentions, thickened Tehrans refracted through the present.

Thus, diaspora shops and in our case in point, *maghāze-ye Irāni*, are dream-scenes, their objects *famillionär-like* condensations that both displace and condense Tehran as the missed center. They are dense enough that metonymy collapses into metaphor, producing new signifiers that rename cities themselves.

Then, exile is dream-work on the scale of a people. Its objects are dream-objects, displaced and condensed. Its cities are dream-cities, overwritten by condensed names. *Tebranto*, *Tebrangeles*: these are not only places, they are functions, in the same way that jokes are functions yielding the X in flesh of a new word.

The singularity as room

Quinn Foerch speaks of the vector as fixing orientation by marking a center, like an X drawn across the middle of a tile. At scale, this produces a **room**, a bounded orientation within the infinite. In the Borromean knot, this function is carried by the vanishing point — the convergence of registers, the place of the *objet a*. So too with the *maghāze-ye Irāni*: it is not only a shop but a singularity, a *(k)not-space*⁵. It is a box in which the lost object (Tehran, the homeland, the Thing) is both absent and hyper-present. You enter, and you feel confined not by walls but by the density of displacements. It is an **architectonics of** nostalgia, a topology where the lost object is localized, circumscribed, staged. With Quinn Foerch, we can say: the vector's indexing power creates a fixed orientation: vanishing point. The shop is this vanishing point — a singularity where the lost *x* is both confined and revealed.

⁴ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (2005), *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge, via Wikipedia.

⁵ Comparable to non-place; Marc Augé defines non-places as spaces of transience where individuals remain anonymous and do not establish social bonds. Marc Augé, (1992) *Non-places: introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*, Le Seuil, Verso.

To enter the *maghāze-ye Irāni* is to enter a dream. It is a box where displacement thickens into metaphor, where the signifier triumphs, and where Tehran is missed and as such survives as Tehranto, an *x in flesh*, heavy with absence.