



And on a Different Note

a film by Mohammad Shawky Hassan



And on a Different Note (Wa Ala Sa'eeden Akhar) وعلی صعید آخر

Content

Today in this house nothing happens, nor does it in the homes of others. Time and place stand on parallel lines, refuting the coordinates of existence. The chronology of events is obscured, subversive noise is obliterated, elucidation impossible and language futile. All that remains is a soundscape perpetually occupied by self-proclaimed patriots, and scattered spaces carved by the rhythm of everyday life, all conspiring to maintain the status quo while hiding the humming background noise of the world.

And on a Different Note is a navigation of an attempt to carve out a personal space amid an inescapable sonic shield created primarily by prime time political talk shows with their indistinguishable, absurd and at times undecipherable rhetoric/ noises. Equally repulsive and addictive, these noises travel across geographies gradually constituting an integral part of a self-created map of exile.

Credits

Egypt 2015, 24 mins, Color, Arabic/ English with English/Arabic Subtitles

Director	Mohammad Shawky Hassan
Editor	Louly Seif
Cinematography	Michael Kennedy
Sound	Michael Kennedy, Mohammad Shawky Hassan
Producer	Mohammad Shawky Hassan

Film-maker Mohammad Shawky Hassan

Mohammad Shawky Hassan studied philosophy, film directing and cinema studies at The American University in Cairo, The Academy of Cinematic Arts & Sciences and Columbia University. His films include *balaghany ayyoha al malek al sa'eed/ it was related to me* (2011), *On a Day like Today* (2012) and *Wa Ala Sa'eeden Akhar/ And on a Different Note* (2015). He presented film programs at the Oberhausen Short Film Festival, Anthology Film Archives, The New York Public Library and UnionDocs, and is currently running the Network of Arab Arthouse Screens (NAAS).



From the Press

Everything's banal: Mohammad Shawky Hassan's new short hits home

By Amany Ali Shawky and Laura Gribbon for Mada Masr Independent on April 15, 2015

In recent years, living in Egypt, there have been many moments in which mundane normalcy is juxtaposed with the spectacularly dramatic, in which everyday life continues amid the grand narratives of revolution, coup and “war on terror.” Spaces where nothing happens and yet everything happens at the same time.

This is one reason why Mohammad Shawky Hassan's 24-minute film, *Wala Saeeden Akhar* (And on a Different Note, 2015), is so powerful. Quiet, largely static images from everyday life are paired with audio clips from Egyptian news, prime-time political talk shows and films, alongside sometimes seemingly unrelated diary-like subtitles.

“What have you done with the symphony? I don't know, but I think I found the beginning,” we hear at the start. A man then whistles an emotive tune that feels like reminiscing or longing. This exchange, probably from an old Egyptian film, is paired with a frosty image of slow-moving traffic in a foreign, snowy city.

“Today the plumber came,” writes the protagonist in white on a black screen, while the mellow whistling is still audible.

The many layers that make up the film are part of its genius. It's mainly in Arabic but some written parts are in English, and the two languages don't often match up. Shawky Hassan doesn't translate the Arabic dialogue into English word for word, but abbreviates the gist, picking out only certain words in English subtitles.

The blank spaces left seem to imply that not many of the words actually matter, and that there is something formulaic about them anyway. This, as well as the selection of the clips themselves, lends the film a wryly humorous aspect.

Sometimes there is no direct correlation between the text, visuals and subtitles as they're layered on top of each other, enabling bilingual viewers to get the most out of the film. But even then, there's a sense of feeling bombarded with visual and audio content to the extent that it's hard to focus on everything at once. Not just in the film, but in everyday life.

As a viewer you're bombarded, bemused and unaided, same as our mysterious protagonist. And this means that each time you watch the film, you notice something new in its rich layers, and block something else out to focus on it.

A bicycle, a pile of clothes and two posters for Egyptian movies, *I'm No Angel* and *Wolves on the Road*, clutter the corners of what seems like an apartment in a city elsewhere.



“No, no, no, no ... no, no, no ... stop right there ... in the army we trust ... nobody interferes in military affairs,” screams TV host Mahmoud Saad in response to a guest's suggestion that the military budget be monitored.

Piercing audio recordings continue to be paired with cloudy, dim and almost lifeless footage of a faraway land, signalling detached melancholy. Presenter Lamis al-Hadidi broadcasts an alleged leaked phone call featuring former President Mohamed Morsi. Saad interviews notorious lawyer and football executive Mortada Mansour — who hangs up on him. A female caller tries to relay information from a protest, but Saad starts flirting with her on air.

The missing protagonist keeps appearing momentarily through brief written notes. A typed chat slowly appears on a black screen, with references to quinoa and porn. At other points he seems to talk to himself: “Now I eat regularly, sleep regularly, masturbate regularly and talk to no one.”

When paired with scenes shot in a foreign country, this suggests homesickness. But the overwrought patriotism we hear from Egyptian TV presenters, and their focus on the flimsiest of conspiracy theories against the state, does not recommend a homecoming.

Hassan Shawky's approach is minimal, organic and rough at points. The early footage is shot analogue (in New York), for instance, while the material filmed in Cairo, which appears later, is digital and has a noticeably wider frame. The filmmaker decided against removing this discrepancy, and the visual twist adds substance to the bewildering experience.

Moreover, the Cairo part has a different visual quality — the image is still soft but free of the foggy quality that characterizes the previous footage. Overall, there's something of a very precise home movie about it, and despite — or because of — the bewilderment, a sense of familiarity is created.

A final hazy shot of a construction worker making a hole in a wall sums up the journey. The scene is shot through a transparent plastic curtain. The act of destruction is stronger than anything, although the persistent media dialogue suggests triumphant rebuilding and starting over.

The film spreads out two worlds through its dissimilar material: New York and Cairo, internal life and the world of media. It makes us wonder what has become more banal — the everyday and relational, or the grand political narrative? What is spectacle and when do we embrace, perform, or ignore it?

There is no real subversion to the “grand narratives” presented here, and the context and chronology of conversations are absent. Patriotism and the depressing status quo in Egypt take center stage, and the drama of it all is at once repulsive and addictive.

Through precise visuals and a messy maze of media noises, a filmmaker thus depicts his life. Although the result forces you to hear the clips you've probably tried to avoid over the past few years, in its ambivalence *And on a Different Note* doesn't push you down a specific path, and is all the more effective for it.



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