

RoboCup Image (s)

An example of Ethnographic Spider Webs (ala Geertz) or Transnational Networks (ala my paper "A Tale of Two Genome Centers"), or also ethnographic nodes and knots in *Probing Arts and Emergent Forms of Life*.

We went to Fukuoka for the 2002 Robo Cup competition that my cousin Gal Kaminka, then at CMU, helped organize. I had some experience watching the iGEM synthetic biology competitions at MIT and had become interested in the competitive teams as a mode of accelerating technology development. I was also interested in the fact that the largest number of college teams in Fukuoka were from Iran. (Gal had had an Iranian office mate at USC). Here's a picture of the Hanif Rescue Robot Team from Iran's Sharif University (Sharif has supplied a steady stream of students to MIT). The upper recent alum manager of this team, Navid Ghafarzadeh, and I made friends, and I helped bring him to the Sloan School at MIT where he did a PhD in Systems Dynamics in the group made famous by Jay Forrester. Navid's mentor at Sharif, Masayekhi, who did Systems Dynamics at Sharif, was also a Sloan graduate. Gal's CMU team competed in the simulation league, what today would be called multi-agent systems. 2002 was still a time when getting bi-pedal humanoid robots to walk was a big deal. Hiroaki Kitano from Sony, developer of the AIBO dog, as well as a founder of Robocup, and promoter of systems biology was fully present. (Among STS scholars, Joan Fujimora also spent time interviewing him, while heard him speak a number of time, including at MIT). Honda's ASIMO was also there, along with the then largest humanoid robot, Murphy, from Sweden, who lost his head going through customs (it was retrieved some days later).

I took several pictures of Iranian engineers in hijab and put one on the Cover of Mute Dreams with the Robocup logo on her hijab. I meant it as a sly two-sided subversive image: first for Iranians that women could be engineers, competitive on the global stage, against conservative restrictions on women; and also to remind Americans not to stereotype Iranian women as only oppressed. It didn't work: a book seller in upscale Tehran told me it wouldn't sell; what sold were books with cover images of ancient Iran, Zoroastrian images. My book cover has her filming a Buzkashi game (the image in the lower part, unfortunately hard to see), the national sport in Central Asia, subject of a well-known book analyzing the game as regional politics.

In my work throughout, I've tried to make images, like this one, do a lot of wandering-and- binding-together-work, and indeed in my account of a vision for the STS Program at MIT in the 1990s, (in *Emergent Forms of Life*), I wrote of hoping colleagues and students would help me develop what I called "the Visual Thread" of STS ("Delay, Call Forwarding"), not unlike Jacques Derrida's idea of messianism without a messiah, that is a hauntology that is the dreamwork of the future not just shards of the broken vessels of the traumatic or hidden psychological past. Derrida's idea is posed against utopian and ontological fundamentalism, be they Heideggerian or Marxist, neither transcendence nor immanence but a dialectic of betrayal to both, attuned instead to what I've called "In the Meantime", the here and now, with a vision of justice to come, democracy to come, against Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*,

oblivion or thrownness.¹ But that's an argument for another time, although I can't resist noting that I put on the same page Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*, that Walter Benjamin made famous as an image of catastrophe blowing us backwards, together with an Islamic calligraphic form of a bird from al-Attar's *The Conference of the Birds*. This line drawing is by an Englishman, but the message of al-Attar's *Si-morgh* by the thirty birds (*si-morgh*) is the same one of finding purpose in community rather than in hero worship or gods. The juxtaposition of the two images is another theme in my work, of doing what once was called "the comparative method", instead by juxtapositions that can mutually interrogate what is the same and what is different, trying to do justice to each point of view, without giving up on generating "the third" (again in **Emergent Forms**) the latent possibilities of doing and thinking otherwise. See particularly, "Philosophia and Anthropologia: Reading alongside Benjamin in Yazd, Derrida in Qum, Arendt in Tehran")

I digress into the philosophical register, when the point of origin was an illustration of community in friendly transnational competition to accelerate the learning of new technologies.

¹ I'm indebted in some of these phrasings to Agata Bielik Robson's *Derrida's Marrano Passover: Exile, Survival, Betrayal and the Metaphysics of Non-Identity* (Bloomsbury 2023).