

British Theatre Guide

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Rich Kids: A History of Shopping Malls in Tehran

Javaad Alipoor

The Javaad Alipoor Company at Under the Radar Festival

Public Theater, New York

7–17 January 2021

Two of the leading productions in the Public Theater's annual Under the Radar Festival, taking place wholly free of charge online in 2021, hail from the United Kingdom.

At face value, there is little in common between Inua Ellams's [Borders and Crossings](#) centred on refugees and this Edinburgh Fringe First-winning production, although they share a deep interest in the nature of society and man's ongoing inhumanity to man.

This 70-minute piece, co-created by Javaad Alipoor and Kirsty Housley, partly looks at its subject from the opposite end of the scale, focusing on the activities of Hossein and Parivash, a pair of over-privileged Iranian twenty-somethings.

Rather than following their affair in a standard chronological fashion, the team has chosen to use what they regard as an Instagram approach. Using images, the plot moves backwards in time from the couple's death in 2015, high on drugs and alcohol in a yellow Porsche, eventually travelling through a generation and more to witness the seeds of a movement that eventually left Hossein's father as a leading light in the Revolutionary Guard and then an influential businessman.

Fans of Sarah Kane will not miss out on the coincidence that their death took place at the pivotal, suicidal *4:48 Psychosis* moment in the morning, while others might draw parallels with the tragedy of Diana, Princess of Wales and Dodi Al Fayed.

To get the most out of this strand of the production, viewers are encouraged by Zoom performers Alipoor and Peyvand Sadeghian to log in to Instagram and follow the story on their phones.

This grim tale of excess is then used as a springboard to explore the impact of modern media on society in the last few decades, the relationship between the privileged and those who are not so lucky and, more distantly, the impact that our conspicuous consumption is having on climate change, which they believe is going to change the nature of the planet for millennia to come.

As with much experimental drama, a question might arise as to whether the biographical tale of the young Iranians is based on fact or confected by the creative team to make their own political and social points from what it is predicted will eventually be known as the Anthropocene age.

There is much fascinating anthropological and scientific data disseminated along the way, although sometimes a little too much repetition. Regardless of that, the central story is always gripping as it heads back in time, while a good many of the powerful political messages come through loud and clear.

The thought-provoking and challenging production is enhanced by some inventive multimedia trickery and the lively presentation of the two actors, who make one forget that they are in reality little more than heads talking in their own living room / bedroom.

Javaad Alipoor spoke to the [BTG podcast](#) about the original production of this piece in 2019.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)