

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT:  
TEHRAN'S EMPOWERING PROTEAN SPACES

by

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ABSTRACT

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Under the Supervision of Professor Linda Krause

As a recent citizen I noticed Tehran's urge for new kinds of public spaces. So, I initiated a dissertation that outlined a call for "protean space." Cities need protean spaces as a means to empower people, places that offer social interaction and support—spaces that are safe, accessible, and intriguing. Protean spaces empower people to create places for personal and interpersonal relationships, make social connections, gain information, and build trust across varied networks.

My dissertation examined how planning and design practices can enhance the possibility of protean spaces and therefore increase their number. While my research concerns Tehran, all cities benefit from their creation. Professionals can foster the creation if they could consider the *ad hoc* ways people—over time and within a given site—create opportunities for self-growth and human contact.

Tehran lacks accessible and welcoming public spaces and suffers from inadequate, inflexible, and expensive housing. To renew Tehran's public spaces, my dissertation mapped Tehran's marginal possibilities in unconventional urban territories, in the natural residues, ordinary streets, and domestic zones. There, I suggest alternative ways of recycling the city's fragmented space to foster protean spaces. I studied alternative processes that could enhance and increase protean spaces there. The process draws inspirations from how Tehranis have made places, for example, in patoghs. The process can accommodate Tehranis with better protean spaces for future adaptations.

Protean space opportunities exist at the intra-city residual natural landscapes: the leftover green patches on the Alborz Mountain ridges, half-erased river-valley corridors, and underground matrix of abandoned qanats. These sites are currently disconnected from the city's structure and its people. Mundane sidewalks—readily available, fully public, and free of charge—are opportunity sites. Due to the deficiency and hostility of public spaces, people appropriate sidewalks as *ad hoc* meeting places, but most sidewalks produce uninteresting and clichéd experiences. Average houses are private sites with public space design possibilities. Tehran's housing crisis has produced inadequate and pricey

homes, often poorly constructed and of singularly uninspired design. Despite being unexciting and lacking identity, they offer leftover space possibilities between, below, atop, and inside that could be repurposed.

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, father, and my husband whose support, encouragement, and constant love have sustained me throughout my life.

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studio. Since its museum reconfiguration, Saadabad has been housing a traditional art and craft section for pottery, sculpture, and carpentry. Pointed at in the picture, this section is somewhat hidden. Not many visitors would know about it. Although art spaces have pre-existed in Saadabad, the twin-studio is unique: an adaptive-reused greenhouse with a modern feeling for artistic expression. Darehbaghi who was directly involved in all planning, design, and construction stages made a resulting space that is in accordance with its initial drawings. The artist also wanted to turn the rest of the greenhouse into gallery space for group exhibitions. This idea never came true (Images courtesy of the artist).

**Figure 5.14:** The making process of the studio was under the artist's direct supervision.

# **Introduction**

## **Introducing Protean Spaces**

People need urban places that offer social interaction and support—spaces that are safe, accessible, and intriguing. Such spaces empower people to create places for personal and interpersonal relationships, make social connections, gain information, and build trust across varied networks. They at once allow self-representation and collective identity, individualism and pluralism. These spaces can be places of democratic discourse that allow the free exchange of ideas and information, where citizens, particularly, marginalized groups could offer one another mutual support. In my dissertation, I name these “protean spaces.” While my research concerns Tehran, all cities might benefit from the creation of such spaces.

Cities need protean spaces as a means to empower people. Design alone cannot answer this need. Typically, the creation of urban spaces is the purview of architects, designers, and planners. Rather than abandoning the project of design, professionals can foster the creation of protean spaces if they consider the *ad hoc* ways people—over time and within a given site—create opportunities for self-growth and human contact. Looking closely at how they do it is a form of design activism. Further, cities offer possibilities for protean spaces in numerous forms at different scales. Great places are not a given. Professionals should inventively seek possibilities in cities by learning from people’s smart placemaking ideas. With community awareness and participation, they can develop alternative processes to mainstream practices.

Cities designed via mainstream practices have only been partly successful and will not be enough to assure protean spaces. Individualistic architectural projects where the designer is the expert are often self-interested. Projects that stand out in the landscape designed by celebrity architects are self-referential and ignore the context. Projects where developer agencies are in total charge become political apparatuses based only on factual data and statistics.

Community participation alone also does not promise success. Although user inputs in the design process are valuable, the approach cannot single-handedly lead to success. This is particularly true when community participation is only used as a catchword to make people feel better and when their actual insights often fade away as the project moves forward. City planning efforts such as master plans and large urban schemes have often produced only abstract results. Many reasons, including the complexities of urban problems coupled with human resource turnovers, have contributed to their long-term failure in making tangible solutions for their time being. Other most recent approaches under titles such as New/Landscape/Ecological Urbanism, to name a few, have also had drawbacks and have not guaranteed success. Cities seek future actions that benefit from and expand on the existing.

Cities need other forms of practice with broader knowledge foundations. This knowledge should come from considering cities at different scales and from how people make great places. The urban understanding that precedes any design is a key to the design success. Design professionals should be able to shift between knowledge areas and scales, bringing in other-than-design urban

understandings on the nexus of the self, body, and place. Only in this way, I argue, can design professionals foster the creation of protean spaces.

### **Dissertation Outline**

My dissertation is an examination of how planning and design practices can enhance the possibility of protean spaces and therefore increase their number in contemporary cities. The practices, I argue, can nurture urban networks of accessible social places by looking into a city's spatial possibilities and how its people make living places. People are active agents who do not simply submit to existing choices. They are not only opportunistic in using and appropriating planned spaces, but also very creative in finding ways to improvise informal interventions in spaces. They reclaim available spaces and create places for self-growth and human contact. Protean spaces, I argue, can better support their *ad hoc* formations and empower them in making social connections, gaining information, and building trust from networks of all kinds.

This study offers the premise that, while people are the makers of great places, design professionals have an important role. Protean spaces are designable, can be intended as the platforms for people's placemaking, and can result from professional design interventions. My dissertation will engage the following questions: what alternative practices and processes can help the creation and nurturing of protean spaces? What roles do/can professionals play? How can they detect possibilities? What are the sites of opportunities and best locations of protean spaces?

Tehran is intrinsically the relevant case context for my study because, with close examination, protean spaces already exist. And where they don't yet exist, there is a special need for them because Tehran offers few officially-sanctioned public spaces for meaningful human interaction. The government is authoritarian and such spaces that exist discourage social connections. Despite the scarcity of welcoming public spaces (or perhaps because of it), Tehranis harvest marginal spaces of possibility; spaces that possess in-between qualities that allow spontaneous placemaking. Such impulsiveness allows Tehranis to live under restrictive conditions. My dissertation investigates and maps the city's marginal possibilities that exist at multiple scales. These marginalities become opportunistic platforms that design practices can draw on to propose solutions that can respond to this particular city's long-term needs.

I study protean spaces that can make informal meeting places possible in Tehran, but the outcomes will have broader applications. They enhance everyday qualities of spaces from within the cities themselves and through their people's creativity. They expand architectural and urban design knowledge that professionals can draw on to bring new and different spatial and temporal dimensions into their practices. Tehran offers realistic perspectives and imaginative ways for creative intervention through which protean spaces are possible.

Tehran inspired my research at the start because of its ad hoc social space type called “patogh.”<sup>1</sup> Patoghs have long been a protean space type in Iranian cities. They inform my understanding of how social spaces operate in Tehran. Their creation patterns, resiliency, creative capacities, and reasons for ending have informed my studies. Born of necessity and to overcome restrictions in a controlled public milieu, they offer opportunities for social interaction. They are unplanned responses by ordinary citizens seeking alternatives to sanctioned, but lifeless public spaces. Studying unauthorized patoghs, those ambiguous and not-clearly-demarcated corners of the city and its urban life, reveals specific use patterns, behaviors and topographies in which the future city’s protean spaces can dwell.

### *Design as if the Protean Space Matters*

Protean spaces should matter in the design of future cities. Cities are planable and protean spaces are designable. Protean spaces support and foster people’s placemaking formations. Designing with the protean space in mind is a way to empower the people. To empower is to increase people’s abilities of inhabiting, constructing, and imagining healthier built environments (Dovey, 1999). To enhance chances for protean spaces in a city, planning and design practices should learn how the city’s native people make places. Tehran, for instance,

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<sup>1</sup> Tehran harvests protean spaces such as patoghs that has a common modern-day identification as a hangout place for youth. According to the Dekhoda Persian Dictionary, patogh is a combination of the Persian word “pay” and Turkish word “togh.” Pay means place and location. Togh is a short spear with a horsetail and golden sphere on top. In wars, this was carried in front of the army’s head. According to the Amid Persian Dictionary (Amid, 1963), patogh was “pay-e-alam” or a place where a banner or flag was located for a group of people to gather in a particular time (p. 247).

offers protean space possibilities that people draw on to make ad hoc gathering places, for example, patoghs. To enhance and increase the city's protean spaces, design practices should look at how various patoghs are born, get nurtured, and ultimately expire. In terms of design approaches, many smaller interventions are more valuable than big urban schemes. Further, such small and fragmentary spaces can be quickly altered according to need.

## **Research Design**

Spaces are hostile in Tehran, but they possess porous characters that enable place embodiments bearing spontaneous events and experiences. In the introductory chapter, I integrate “tactile, abstract, and surreal” spheres of knowledge to create a basis to understand Tehran better. These are means for better understanding the city's permeable characteristics beyond its urban physicality and architectural object. “Tactile” understandings are related to the city's concrete realities such as the spirit, manners, and actions of private and public selves and bodies. “Abstract” understandings relate to concepts and qualities explaining spaces such as linguistic tropes and metaphors. “Surreal” understandings are found in studying urban artifacts discussing the city such as films, media, novels, memoirs, comics, fine arts, and journalistic matters.

My research applies a mixed-method, combining “qualitative” and “interpretive-historical” approaches (Groat & Wang, 2002). This is a *bricolage* that pieces together in-depth accounts of the social context by means of a variety of tactics

(p. 119). In my qualitative study, I have applied autoethnography (Chang, 2008; Fear & Miller, 2006; Spry, 2001; Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Charmaz & Mitchell, 1997; Ellis, 1997; & Neuman, 1996). I have used the tactics of observation, semi-structured interviews, and interpretation. Being a recent citizen of Tehran, I see my role in the research as active and inevitably self-reflexive. I cannot take a fully objective and distant position, like ethnographers, and filter out all my subjectivities and personal experiences. My fieldwork took distinct routes in Tehran by appreciating the context's impulsiveness and embracing the people-participants' needs for privacy.<sup>2</sup> In addition to contextual information, I examined such other sources as: archival information, building codes, urban design guidelines, implemented/theoretical projects, published/nonpublished materials, and urban artifacts such as films, novels, memoirs, and other media.

### **“Tactile” Extents of Urban Understanding**

Design practice should begin with a deeper and more tangible urban understanding that looks at a city as a concrete reality and considers the tactile scales of the self and body. How bodies mark anonymous spaces and the tactics they apply when living in and interacting with the city is an important tactile dimension of urban understanding. The body has permanent conditions

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<sup>2</sup> Tehran offers pockets of contact that are neither 'scheduled' nor 'pre-determined', as Balasescu (2009) calls; every moment is a field instance. Fieldwork in Tehran demands creative tactics and constant encounters (p. 4). In addition, Iran's socio-political consequences dictate distinct ways of looking at gender, age, class, ethnicity, and religiosity. As Khosravi (2008) argues, a "locale-centered ethnography" is needed in Tehran that takes ethical and political considerations into account to protect the people involved in the study (p. 11).

while experiencing the city. It is the primary container that the self carries in the city and the initial material boundary between the private and social self. It has a topography that at any time occupies a position in the physical and social space in relation to the anonymous space and others. The city and body engage in mutual relations. The body constructs meanings in the landscape by marking locations and making places and is also shaped by the spaces that design practices produce. No matter how well planned the city is, bodies grant it meanings. Bodies give places their identity and their mobility is their advantage. Bodies move and occupy anonymous spaces and make them into places that are significant for individual growth, sociability, and memory. Place is a concrete space. Pauses in body movements transform locations into places. Spaces are abstract, anonymous and boundless, but places are real and secure. Bodies are attached to places and long for the freedom that space offers them (Tuan, 1977). Anonymous spaces become places when bodies get to know them better and assign spaces values through actions in motion. The body has a dual urban function. Its outer shell shows individual differences. It also makes the primary separating edge between the private and inner spaces of the self and the public, interpersonal or impersonal spaces of the city. The boundary is rather ambiguous as the body is able to at once belong to both the inner and outer worlds.

Bodies take over and control urban spaces, but they themselves are also controlled at different levels. Self-control is the most clandestine level. Regardless of cultural differences, bodies are always mindful about their self-

representation in the city and the revelation of their attitudes and conduct, which is often in response to societal norms. They can censor themselves and hide their personalities as they mind how others judge them. Self-control also functions as a mirror to a given society and a reflection of accepted and dominating cultural values. Control of bodies by others including family, friends, and strangers is the next level. This is a form of control that happens in the everyday interactions between the self and others. Others may have a privileged symbolic power that can influence how bodies tend to occupy spaces. At the next level are the society and culture, traditions, rituals, norms and ideological beliefs that also control the bodies. These influence how bodies get permission or restrictions while using certain spaces at certain times. Spaces of rituals, for example, can dictate temporary restrictions in space and create impermanent geographies via temporal activities at certain times of the year/month/week/day. Self-control, control by others, and societal factors always accompany internal dimensions and mental negotiations. At the highest level is the official control. In this, the strongest form of control, state and local governments, along with institutions and authorities establish dress codes, and rules of conduct and behavior to regulate bodies and their presentation in the city.

Bodies exercise levels of privacy differently at various urban spaces as a territorial action. The house is their most personal retreat where their private selves feel at ease. Streets are a domain for social bodies and their first threshold to the social world. They are both interpersonal and impersonal where social bodies find zones of human contact, but they also practice privacy tactics

amid others to keep out unwanted intrusions. Bodies set boundaries to keep some in and others out. Their ability in setting boundaries is a territorial action to defend space against the unwelcome. The boundaries often are not very noticeable. They are mostly ambiguous demarcations that reveal disparities including: race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, class, ideology, and personality. They confer symbolic meanings and perceptions of the other; my place as opposed to someone else's. Bodies apply creative tactics of privacy that they develop as everyday ways of existing in the city. They acquire tacit forms of knowledge, what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) calls "habitus," to help bodies always remain in control of their outer social worlds. While applying tactics of privacy, bodies obtain other tastes and new dispositions towards certain social groups that become bases for new actions that impact bodies' future boundary embodiments. Some urban spaces restrict people, but every space has certain periods of not-completely-under-control conditions. The more sanctioned the space becomes, the more creative people become. They develop tactics to contest and transgress the space. Bodies cross the accepted boundaries. This is a powerful action that reveals topographies of power surrounding the city.

The body enfolds the inner, private world of an urbane, sophisticated self. Robert Lifton (1993) names this the "protean self," named after Proteus, the Greek sea god of many forms. Proteus was easily able to change forms, from a wild boar to wild dragon, to fire, and to blood, but, unless seized and chained, committing to a single form was difficult for him. The protean self is what Lifton referred to as the self in this modern age of fragmentation. It is the self that is

fluid, many-sided, and keen in finding many possibilities. The protean self is the active and insightful agent of our times. It continuously pursues spaces for personal experimentation. It shows actions that follow special patterns. This self easily shifts involvements with people, ideas, and activities. It at once conquers and understands multiple, even conflicting thoughts and meanings. The protean self can represent a variety of social expressions, sometimes conforming to and at other times contesting and going against the social world. It is highly resilient in coping with and standing against instabilities and tyrannies of modern times. The protean self stands against any form of totalitarianism in the city by cleverly applying tactics that can disturb established grids and geographies of power. Tactics, in Michel de Certeau's (1984) terms, are subversive and rebellious social practices that take advantage of available situations to make geographies of *otherness*. Spaces of tactics are invisible and transient. They are shaped via appropriation of the spaces of established powers and subversion of restrictive strategies dictated by the geographies of power. Unlike tactics that privilege time, strategies privilege space and represent the victory of space over time. Tactics "mark the preservation of time against the encroachments of disciplinary space ... retain in the collective memory traces of other ways of being in the world and carry within them promises of other spatialities (Gregory, 1994, p. 195)." The keen protean self is always opportunistically watching for opportunities where it can subvert urban hostilities to create preferred geographies.

## **“Abstract” Dimensions of Urban Understanding**

In addition to looking at a city as a concrete reality, design practice should engage an urban understanding that draws on abstractions such as theories, linguistic tropes, and metaphors. “Protean space” is an abstract concept that I apply in my dissertation. The protean self desires particular types of spaces to fit in and the protean space is one that can foster its needs. This abstraction is used to explain the gist and underlying complexities of the kinds of spaces that design practices should seek and create. These spaces are protean to allow a simultaneity, sociability, and creativity that can lead to ad hoc place making. The concept of proteanism impacts the making of places. Protean spaces continuously cause changes to the shape and identity of a place. They simultaneously disrupt the physical and social structure of a place and seek a new sense of place that is itself fluid, yet also, grounded. Protean spaces are loose. They are not structured; no definite boundary can contain them and they cannot be entirely held under any form of control. They are in a constant chase for unplanned, transient, or impossible occurrences. Appropriation, transgression, change, and discovery are amid their abilities. Protean spaces reject predetermined programs, and it is difficult to predict their use and future being. They have unrestricting rules, often relaxed and at other times negotiable and subverted. Protean spaces boggle the imagination. There are often gaps between the protean self’s expectations and the actual possibilities that a city and its planned spaces can offer the self. Protean space is the living place that

the imagination seeks to drift in, where the self can renew its sense of place and improve its connections with the city.<sup>3</sup>

“Rhizome” is another abstract concept applied in my dissertation. The assemblage of protean spaces in a city can map rhizomatic urban networks and connections that make the city’s entire experience not easily or neatly fit into a guidebook. Protean space connections do not have unified structures. They are aleatory, non-linear, non-hierarchical, impermanent, and in continuous development. They have unlimited entrances where each protean space is, itself, an entry to the city’s entire experience. Any given point on the network is linked to any other point. Their networks do not consist of distinct entities, but of dimensions in motion with no beginning and no end. Protean spaces are not distinct components, but dimensions that shape arbitrary and unregulated networks where any element can be linked to any other element. They have what Harvey (1996) calls “relative permanence,” occurring in and transforming space-time relations. Even disparate entities can be connected. Their networks have development patterns that are not associated with the logic of completion, but with the dynamics of transition. These qualities are presented in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) definition of rhizome.

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<sup>3</sup> This exploratory mode of observing and experiencing the city is adopted from Guy Ernest-Debord’s (1958) notion of the *dérive* (French) or drifting that is different from a detached *flâneur*. Ernest-Debord was a founder of the Situationist International Movement who criticized the utilitarianism of modern urbanism in search for new meanings and ways in urban life. The movement imagined an urbanism that would prepare the city for the emergence of new situations that reflect the spirits of discovery and pleasure. *Dérive* was explained as a technique of quickly passing through a city and its varied ambiances that also involved playful and constructive behaviors aware of the city’s psychogeographical effects. Ernest-Debord (1955) defined psychogeography as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.”

In botany, a rhizome is an underground horizontal plant structure that breeds asexually. The rhizome creates roots for new plants from its nodes. Plants developing from rhizomes are hardy, and have dense, non-centered, non-hierarchical development patterns similar to crabgrass. Deleuze and Guattari's conceptual analogy frames the multiplicity of events and experiences, paradoxes, and contradictions in the city. Rhizomes are the antithesis of a totalistic structural model such as found in a tree root structure that has imposing, limited, and regulated connections (Bogue, 1989). Rhizomes thrive in special environments that have similarities to a labyrinth (Graafland, 1999). They prevent places from finding perfect positions and permanent meanings. Their meanings are metaphors that change. A rhizomatic city offers a myriad of creative dimensions and diverse platforms for human imagination. Rhizomatic connections make protean spaces resilient and self-generative of impulsive events and experiences. New situations constantly shape urban exploration and delight. The situations are people's opportunities to engage with the city through drifting and improvisation. A city's tacit knowledge and everyday modes of being all belong to rhizomatic networks. They include a city's unofficial histories associated with people and places and its personal and collective narratives. Spaces of politics, commerce, and sources of power, art, culture, and sciences also connect to everyday spaces on the rhizomatic networks.

## **“Surreal/Reel” Planes of Urban Understanding**

Design professionals should study urban artifacts to inform their decisions. In addition to concrete realities and abstract concepts, practitioners can more creatively engage the city if they also draw on such urban artifacts as: films, novels, memoirs, comics, art, and popular media. The urban reality and urban artifacts have mutual and complex relationships and they offer parallel narratives. While design impacts the urban form, filmmakers, novelists, artists, journalists, and philosophers examine the city's operations and processes. Their narratives insert original discourses into our understandings with especially strong bonds. Cinema helps reconfigure reality and is bilaterally influenced by that. The city and cinema have mutual connections and the spaces that each generates support and enhance the experiences of the other. Film is an excellent medium for revealing the experiences of urban modernity; moreover, it captures the mentality of a society, its inner and outer life, and mutually influences how people construct images of the world and how they operate in it (Alsayyad, 2006).

Films, including documentaries, are relevant to urban research both in terms of content/narrative and technique. Film studies in urban research can lead to better design practices. Studying film content and technique can reveal and represent a city's inner operations. In particular, film is a poetic, enlightening, and powerful tool in exposing abstract concepts, for example, power dynamics, which are interwoven in urban spaces and landscapes. The lens through which a filmmaker looks at the city is unique, and from the most to the least fictive, there is an underlying exploration of reality. In every film, there are documented

moments of how design practices have been shaping a city in a society and influencing that city's cultural landscapes. Analyzing films is invaluable as a means to explore a city's specificities in the filmmakers' personal accounts of it. An urban understanding that extracts information from film can enrich design and, I argue, is also more capable of designing at a variety of scales. Beyond narrative content, cinema and urban space connect in terms of technique. Both film and architecture operate on the dimensions and phenomena of time, space, light, color, and sound. Design practices should apply cinematic techniques methodologically. Cinematic techniques are useful as descriptive and illustrative tropes to theorize for and present sublime and non-clichéd design solutions.<sup>4</sup>

Cinema is the closest art form to architecture. It is a functional art in many ways similar to architecture. Cinema historically defined itself as an architectural practice. From the beginning, urban images have been closely interacting with filmic representations (Bruno, 1997).<sup>5</sup> Films shot in cities provided a parallel narrative to augment the cinematic action where the urban setting is also seen as another "character." Architecture is figured into our understandings of film and film is unthinkable without it; architecture in relation to film finds multiple meanings: constructed studio sets, local built environments, and edited montages (Jacobson, 2005). The embodied space created in film is "architecture

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the technique of montage that is the art and process of juxtaposing or superimposing images and film shots can be applied as an alternative presentation tool. Designers can use the technique to sketch out design intervention ideas more dynamically, or storyboarding can be used to better show the design interventions as a scenario.

<sup>5</sup> Cinematic spaces are composed of objects, characters, qualities, and landscapes that are not mere backdrops for the film narrative. As Bruno (1997) puts it, streetscapes have become as much cinematic constructions as they have been architectural ones. The design of a cinematic space is a cognitive spatial practice where cultural space layers, densities of multiple histories, and transit visions dwell. Film narrative is a cultural mapping frame, a modern cartography, and a mobile map.

without architect.” A filmmaker, like a novelist or a painter, puts the action in a setting, a place. Therefore, the filmmaker “performs a job of architectural design without a client, structural calculation, or a building permit” (Pallasmaa, 1986). Cinema is a functional art with three major functions (Kracauer, 1960, p. 296). First, cinema reveals the “things normally unseen.” These are small things through close-ups, big things like the masses of people and vast landscapes through wide camera angles, and the most transient, least permanent elements such as impressions, attitudes, and behaviors. These are phenomena that form among the blind spots of the mind where our habits and prejudice prevent us from noticing them. Second, cinema helps to identify the “phenomena overwhelming consciousness” such as catastrophes and wars. Third, cinema discloses “special modes of reality.” These are physical realities that might appear to individuals in extreme states of mind (p. 451). Foucault (1967) defines a fourth function for the cinema, a “heterotopia,” a space of *otherness* that allows multiple conflicting spaces juxtaposed at one time on its screen. Foucault saw the theatre space as an uncanny architecture. It has a two dimensional rectangular screen that allows the projection of three-dimensional spaces and intact series of places foreign to one another (p. 354).

### **Where is Tehran?**

Tehran has porous spaces that allow spontaneous happenings. The creation of a city at this site seems improbable at first. Unlike most major cities worldwide, Tehran has no sea or any significant water body. Its initial core did

not form around any water body. Tehran has always been in some ways isolated. In the eleventh century, Tehran was an isolated and minor village community. The inhabitants, known for their banditry, lived in cave-like underground dwellings, an inward-looking and protected city with actual walls, gates and moats. It was not until the twentieth century that Tehran became less isolated. Today, though less physically isolated, global economic sanctions, boycotts, and domestic power manipulations have contributed to its insularity.

Tehran is a mega-city assembled with no vision (Shahshahani, 2005). It is a misconception that Tehran's growth is organic. The city form is more an arbitrary outcome of radical shifts forced by federal and local tastes. The city form and planning have been prone to domestic power manipulations. Tehran has developed hastily, a consequence of autocratic powers at various scales. Reza Shah, Iran's ruler from 1920 to 1941, caused rapid and irreversible shifts to the physical structure and social meaning of Tehran streets (Marefat, 1988). His urban renewal project in the 1930s revamped Tehran; the old city walls were toppled to make way for a new open-ended matrix of standard streets and wide boulevards (Madanipour, 1998).

Urban planning has not been successful in Tehran. The city has never had any precise vision for development. Scientific planning tools such as master plans and large schemes have also failed. City planning became an official endeavor in Iran in the 1960s under the second Pahlavi rule and well into the 1970s the city saw ambitious design and planning projects. Mohammad Reza Shah and the former Queen Farah were both interested in grandiose plans. They

commissioned foreign professionals to conduct projects, including: Tehran's first Master Plan (1966-1969) by Victor Gruen, Shahestan Pahlavi Master Plan (1974-1976) by Llewelyn-Davies International, and Pardisan Natural Park master plan (1975) proposed by Ian McHarg. Since the 1960s, three master plans have been prepared for Tehran. None gained realistically planned for the needs of the people. At the end, none were fully realized. Rather, they produced abstract blueprints with inaccurate results based on obsolete statistics. Professional planning has typically proved ineffective in Tehran, incapable of predicting future growth patterns, let alone producing imaginative and long-term visions of the city.

Urban research on Tehran is rare and difficult to accomplish. Research gaps are considerable on the social history of places and the city's diversities and human geographies. In-depth research is needed on processes through which Tehranis simultaneously make sense of their local, urban, national, and global identities (Rouhani, 2003). The city deserves serious research that goes beyond the caricatured, clichéd images by Western media since the 1979 revolution (Stewart, 2002). Conducting research on Tehran has become more and more difficult since the revolution. Mostly due to political reasons, very little research has been published on Iran. Social, political, and economic isolation have obscured the true face of Tehran internationally. Research difficulties have affected both native and foreign researchers. Foreign researchers found it difficult to travel to Tehran to get onsite information. Hence, their studies have been limited. Native researchers have also found research on Tehran difficult. Access to information is hard even inside Tehran as government funding to

support research has been meager or highly selective. Such investigations are superficial and generic. Research difficulties have resulted in modest and incomplete published works and produced partial, deficient, and fragmented literatures.

Most of the research that is produced on Tehran is descriptive, abstract, and/or narrowly focused on the city's maladies. Some are also stereotypical, trying to link any characteristic of the city to preconceived notions of a so-called "Middle-Eastern" or "Islamic city." Tehran is not reducible to such geopolitical labels. "Middle-Eastern" and "Islamic" are misleading generalizations and their use brings the danger of exoticizing, hence, isolating the city's diverse populations. Studies that categorize themselves into such generalizations convey certain assumptions of religious, ethnic, and socio-political homogeneity that prevent researchers from presenting diversities, cultural variations, and complexities (Elsheshtawy, 2004). Architectural research on Tehran has also had the narrow focus on dialectics and dichotomies. Most studies only focused on distinctions between traditional and modern, and local and global architectural identities. The city's architecture was blamed many times for: lacking identity, being a mindless copy of western architectural styles, and failing to preserve the Iranian/Persian heritage.

Despite the lack of information on Tehran, the city has rare attributes that make it an intriguing and complex study field. It raises interesting questions regarding power and its negotiation processes, urban change, diversities, densities, and identities in flux. It also raises questions on how urban spaces

cope with, and how citizens meet their needs under, difficult and unstable urban conditions. Complexity and contradiction are parts of Tehran's everyday reality and essential vocabularies with which to interpret this city. To cope with difficult conditions, spaces and citizens seize "in-between" attributes. Phenomena find multiple, sometimes, contradictory explanations. Private and public spaces slide into each other. Identities are in flux and outside appearances only ambiguously relate to inside realities.

### **Hostilities**

Spaces are hostile in Tehran. The city has a long history, but a very short memory (Milani, 2004). Social memories embedded in cultural landscapes of places, buildings, and streets have constantly been erased by urban growth. The city has serious environmental problems. Tehran has become a generic-appearing metropolis with high rises and highway networks that create traffic congestion, environmental pollution, and housing shortages (Madanipour, 2006). Air pollution causes 4,460 deaths a year.<sup>6</sup> Like other large cities, urban growth has scraped the city's pristine landscapes and natural resources. For Tehran this means the loss of the river-valleys, ancient *qanats* (subterranean canals), Persian gardens, and the elevated green spaces of the Alborz Mountains.

Pedestrian activity underpins sustainable cities and Tehran is not walkable. Streets, sidewalks, and public spaces lack basic standards of safety and access.

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<sup>6</sup> Davidson, K. A. (2013), "Tehran Pollution Crisis 2012: Thousands Dead in Iran's Capital as Government Warns to Stay Indoors," *The Huffington Post*, retrieved from: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/08/tehran-pollution-crisis-thousands-dead-iran\\_n\\_2432637.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/08/tehran-pollution-crisis-thousands-dead-iran_n_2432637.html).

This has deprived people of basic rights-of-way and the ability to move and travel in the city without difficulty. Pavements are usually not leveled and random grade changes impede pedestrian circulation. ADA ramps are few and arbitrarily placed. Such problems make walking/riding difficult for the infirm and anyone trying to negotiate a wheeled conveyance (wheelchairs, strollers, bikes).

Tehran has uncomfortable densities where private and public spaces are rare. The nation's resources, amenities, and job opportunities are centralized in Tehran and this has encouraged migration from rural areas. Such migration and an increased birth rate have taxed the city's housing stock. Tehran has had inadequate housing for over half of a century and today it is not possible for young Tehranis to purchase of even the most modest accommodations. Further, the housing crisis affects both the lower and middle economic classes. Beyond the shortage of private living spaces, is the absence of usable and welcoming public space. Such public spaces that exist are especially restrictive for women. The 1979 revolution dictated female attire and behavior when outside the home.<sup>7</sup> During the 1980s, the "Cultural Revolution" extended restrictions to include: educational, cultural, and even private spaces. Universities were shut down and restructured. Street corners were cleared of discos, cabarets, bars, and liquor stores. Private homes were raided and emptied of politically suspect books, movies, images of Iranian royalty, and even playing cards, backgammon, and chessboards. The selling and consumption of

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<sup>7</sup> This was not the first time when conformative dress regulations were passed in Iran. The first Pahlavi king, Reza Shah had initiated dress codes as early as the 1930s. He forced a modern form of attire on Iranian men, along with a specifically designed form of hat, called the Pahlavi hat. Later, he passed another regulation that affected Iranian women. He forced women to go unveiled and to discard any form of Islamic coverage. Women were prohibited from wearing veils in public. Reza Shah's extremist approach was reversed after the 1979 revolution.

alcohol was banned in both public and private. Women became the most controversial target of the Cultural Revolution, and their public presence was highly circumscribed. The government held that, according to Islamic belief, women are men's object of gaze, hence, their main cause for sin. To protect men from sin and women from being offended and harassed by men, exterior spaces became gender-segregated and women's dress codes and rules of decorum were enforced. Gender-segregated spaces include: public transit, universities, and, more recently, female-only parks. Ironically, such segregation has not decreased the number of assaults on women.

The fully segregated, female-only park concept is a most recent government response to the need for safer public spaces for women. Responses to the new female-only parks has sparked varied public opinion as seen in the following headlines: "Miniskirts, Headscarves Don't Mix at New Tehran Park;"<sup>8</sup> "Sexist Apartheid or Opening to Fresh Air;"<sup>9</sup> "19 Hectares of the City in the Hands of Women;"<sup>10</sup> "Women's Paradise on Earth;"<sup>11</sup> and "Veil, No Veil."<sup>12</sup> There are a number of female-only parks in Tehran. Many conservative and religious women see female-only parks as positive spaces. They feel liberated by taking off their Islamic coverings in order to comfortably engage in physical and social activity with no man around. The city government defended female-only parks by claiming they increased per capita athletic facilities. State officials also supported the concept by drawing on the health research that reports common

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aqMF7\\_gsnjMI](http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aqMF7_gsnjMI)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.shirzanan.com/spip.php?article1729>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.aftabir.com/news/view/2008/may/14/c4c1210766965\\_social\\_directory\\_park.php](http://www.aftabir.com/news/view/2008/may/14/c4c1210766965_social_directory_park.php)

<sup>11</sup> <http://vista.ir/article/369915>

<sup>12</sup> <http://vista.ir/article/320843>

osteoporosis problems amid middle-aged Iranian women due to their lack of exercise and exposure to sun.

These gated parks, however, sparked criticism among secular men and women, and women's-right activists. They saw the concept insulting to both Iranian women and men, raising assumptions on the men's vulnerability in women's presence and the women's weakness under masculine gaze. They saw the concept as yet another step towards space segregation, hence discrimination, of women. The feminist filmmaker and architect Tahmineh Milani is a leading opponent of such discrimination. In her view, gender-segregated public spaces have not and would never produce successful long-term results. These gated parks or gender-segregated buses would not end harassment of women or increase their public safety. She argues for cultural reforms by comparing how, under different cultural conditions, for example, in America and Europe, women can jog at relative ease in public. She reminds the Iranian audience that men and women mix at workplace, universities, and other urban spaces such as shopping centers. Through an emphasis on unsafe public spaces, in Milani's view, gender-segregation is simply fear-mongering.

### **Porosities**

To live amid and rise above hostilities, the self, body, and space are all porous in Tehran. They conform to in-between properties and permeable boundaries by simultaneously belonging to two, often-contradicting, realms. The self is protean in terms of public conduct, hence, able to take multiple identities. The body

exercises versatility through choices of attire that vary, becoming indicative of certain identities in certain places. The self and body take multiple identities, shifting between expressing modernity and conservatism. These dual characteristics give the private self and social body more choices of space. The choice of dress is also an aspect that allows porous identities in urban spaces. It is an immediate mediator in the people's relations to places, connecting inhabiting bodies with architectural spaces. Spaces are also porous. They shift between being public and private, abstract and concrete, open and enclosed, and fixed or impermanent. Places hold complex sets of social connections where dress choice is an indicator of who wants to be/feels being "in" versus "out" of place.

Modes of dress trigger tactile urban understandings that complicate readings of Tehran, producing a subjective matrix and composing imaginary maps where social bodies mark manifold identities in spaces. What people choose to wear becomes a publicized expression of their interior self to the exterior space, a social imagery that becomes the self. Balasescue (2007) applies apparel choices as strong spatial indicators in sorting out Tehran's interior and exterior spaces. "Interior" (private) attire is worn, beyond state reach, in clandestine places like private fashion showrooms, private parties and reunions, and in homes. "Exterior" (public) attire is worn in institutional environments, gender-

segregated spaces, spaces of effective surveillance, and spaces of relatively decreased surveillance.<sup>13</sup>

Semi-public, commercialized spaces of commodity and consumption such as private taxis, coffee shops, shopping malls, and cinemas are relatively less watched in Tehran. Due to private ownership, they are not under absolute state control. Dual attributes make them less hostile, relatively safer and more desirable. Semi-public spaces have private ownership that allows them relatively easier, more negotiable dress and conduct rules. They are distinct from and more desirable than the Islamic Republic's intended public spaces such as parks, streets, and zones of transit. Semi-public spaces are not as closely watched by the morals police, as are public spaces. Architectural enclosures, along with private ownership, work in their favor in protecting bodies in space. Social interaction is less restricted in these semi-public spaces.

Dual attributes make semi-public space porous: public and private, open and enclosed, and abstract and concrete. They are both public and private: public, yet having attributes of the private, and vice versa. They are both abstract and concrete. In Lefebvre's (1991) definition, the abstract space is the space of the economy and state. It is the measurable space that architects and urbanists

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<sup>13</sup> Institutional environments are the Islamic Republic's rigid and official spaces like school campuses, banks, tribunal, television, and governmental (and sometimes private) work environments. These usually demand special dress rules. Segregated spaces like gyms, swimming pools, and female-only parks have easier dress and behavior codes. Women mostly prefer to dress invisibly in spaces of effective surveillance such as streets, parks, public transportations, and shared taxis; adhering to dress codes so as not to draw attention to themselves and avoid the morals police and male assaults. Private taxis, coffee shops, commercial galleries and shopping malls, and cinemas are spaces of relatively decreased surveillance. Though they are commercial, such spaces offer a safer and more desirable social milieu. Balasescue categorizes them as "other public spaces," which are not under absolute control and which benefit from private ownership (Balasescue, 2007, pp. 161-164).

work with. In contrast, the concrete space is the user's space, the practical space of lived experiences and everyday activities. Abstract spaces are conceived, but concrete spaces are perceived. The latter is the symbolic space of bodies and their gestures, journeys, memories, and senses. Tehran's semi-public spaces, although conceived as abstract spaces for businesses to thrive, possess concrete dimensions where user appropriations, contestations, and transgressions constantly create new place identities. For example, cars are at once open and enclosed, symbolic spaces that offer a safe transit into other spaces, *other* times, and *other* imaginings. A private car, as a commodity in flow, acts as a safe bubble of private freedom to travel from place to place but it is also used for social interaction. Due to its mobility, it can rove at ease and is able at any moment to escape any rigid and segregated urban space. Its mobile cabin is only partially visible. Moving fast makes the cabin is immune, almost inaccessible, to any kind of permanent control. Another example is the shared taxi. Tehran taxis, other than transferring passengers, are informal containers where random strangers can have relaxed conversations covering a wide range of topics—even political ones.

### **Spontaneities**

Tehran harvests protean spaces such as patoghs. Particular to Iranian cities, the patogh roughly translates in English as hangout, nest, joint, or place. The

term and its contemporary definition are rooted in traditions of the “lutis”<sup>14</sup> and “dervishes.”<sup>15</sup> Historically, patoghs were the lutis’s typical gathering places in a city. Lutis were men who roamed alone or with their comrades, called “noches,” to help the people in need. Each luti had an exclusive meeting place, for example, a coffeehouse or a street corner as the patogh under his control in the neighborhood. Dervishes also had exclusive patoghs where they gathered people and preached to them. Dervishes defined each of their territories by putting a long stick into the ground and hanging a piece of felt on its top. The stick and felt, called the “togh,” marked the place beneath the togh, called “pay-e-togh.” The place boundary was defined by the length of shadow created by the stick that made the radius of a circle.

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<sup>14</sup> See for detailed explanation of Luti, a Persian word that has various meanings with both positive and negative connotations: Willem Floor (2010), LUTI, In *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, retrieved from: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/luti>, last updated: March 15, 2010, date accessed: March 26, 2014. Also, see the short fiction “Dash Akol” by Sadegh Hedayat (Hidayat & Arbabzadah, 2008) best portrays the lutis’ characters. The *Encyclopædia Iranica* source is distinguishing two, characteristically overlapping, groups of lutis. The first included the dervishes and entertainers. The second group, related to patoghs, formed by “urban Robin Hood-type bandits:”

“... members of the neighborhood *fotovvat* association and they were not supposed to submit to anyone who did not abide by their code of *javānmardi* (‘manliness’), in other words, they constituted a *pentī*. This meant that they were supposed to work for their living, help others, and defend their neighborhood and town. ... They had games and pastimes that were peculiar to them such as pigeon flying, cock and ram fighting, athletic contests, and gambling, and they also used a kind of secret argot among themselves. ... They had their own habitual café or *pātuq* for drinking, gambling, and other amusements.”

<sup>15</sup> See for definition: Mansour Shaki & Hamid Algar (1994), DARVĪŠ, In *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Vol. VII, Fasc. 1, pp. 72-76, retrieved from: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/darvis>, last updated: November 18, 2011, date accessed: March 26, 2014. Based on the *Encyclopædia Iranica* source, like the term luti, the term dervish has also had various meanings and connotations at different times. It was used to describe a poor and needy person. In the Islamic period, however, the term has been applied to a person with spiritual poverty: “nonattachment, often in conjunction with deliberately chosen or passively accepted material poverty.” The term, beginning the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, has been applied to describe and praise a person who is practicing the undisciplined or antinomian forms of Sufism. Although dervishhood mostly had a solitary nature, dervishes, at times, congregated, notably, in shaded places such as beneath an ancient tree or a hospice.

In contemporary usage the patogh is an ad hoc, informal, and often unauthorized social space. It is not determined by private or public individuals, but by how people decide to use the space. It performs as a liberating alternative to rare and hostile public spaces. People make patoghs by momentarily taking over the more flexible existing spaces. They turn the spaces into informal meeting places that embody freedom of expression and open exchange of ideas. Patoghs form in various locales. People appropriate the space, turn it into place, create place identity and social memories, and maintain the sense of place. Patoghs expire when people can no longer sustain the boundaries that keep the unwanted out. Throughout Tehran's history, various regimes have imposed power over the city's public spaces. The regimes were not always successful as people appropriated other spaces for socializing. A consequence of extreme authority, I argue, is the ideation of patogh.

The earliest patoghs date back to 16<sup>th</sup> century. They since have had significant influence on Iranian modernity at large and the progression of secularism in Iran (Armaki, 2005). Armaki (2005) defines the patogh as a situation and/or a place where people of similar interest gather freely and make up a community. Patogh members engage in temporal activities of mutual interest, often unrelated to their job responsibilities. They usually act at variance with officially dictated behavioral norms (p. 21). Patoghs are places of resistance where intellectual discourses and social movements have challenged aspects of Iranian society and culture. They diversify based on various themes: social, educational, cultural, religious, and political themes.

Patoghs form in various locations. As Mohammad-Zaheri (2009) categorizes them, a patogh can form: (1) under a minimal shelter, (2) in/around an urban element such as a square, plaza, kiosk, bonfire, and water feature, (3) along the edge of a highway, street, or alley bounded by buildings, (4) in architectural enclosures such as coffee shops and restaurants, and (5) in automobiles. The car can make a mobile patogh and a linear street can form a drive-in patogh for car cruising. Ordinary Tehran streets may become popular patoghs and examples are the Iran-Zamin, Kooye Faraz, and Jordan streets. Patoghs can also shape virtually and can create imagined communities where people with similar interests do not necessarily need to gather in a real place. They form non-places that can be blogs, websites, and other cyberspaces. Virtual patoghs are not as effective as real ones, but many people prefer them because they believe, perhaps mistakenly, that such virtual patoghs are free from state surveillance.

People in contemporary patoghs may also discuss political grievances that articulate some of the needs of the society. This is close to Nancy Fraser's (1990) definition of "counterpublics." Created by marginalized groups, these are "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs (p. 67)." The most marginalized groups in Tehran are women and youths who often conceive patoghs as spaces outside the reach of a restrictive ideological majority.

## Chapters Descriptions

Tehran lacks accessible and welcoming public spaces and suffers from inadequate, inflexible, and expensive housing. Through a fresh look beyond the city's mainstream architectural and urbanist agendas, my study will suggest alternative ways of recycling the city's fragmented space possibilities in multiple sites at various scales. These fragments are presented at clandestine and mundane sites, in erased landscapes, and at residual, obsolete, and non-functioning places. A goal of all dissertation chapters is to foster Tehran's protean spaces by increasing or enhancing them.

In Chapter I, Landscape, I trace the protean space opportunities in the residues of nature—territories that Ignacio Solà Morales (1996) refers to as “terrain vagues.”<sup>16</sup> Connecting intra-city landscapes with the man-made city will open up new ways of reorganizing the entire urban form and restructure the Tehranis' understanding of the city's ecosystem. The chapter ends with ideas on the design of new spaces of social contact within the larger landscape.

Chapter II, Street considers mundane sidewalks—readily available, fully public, and free of charge—as opportunity sites. Due to the deficiency and hostility of public spaces, people appropriate sidewalks as ad hoc meeting places. Most sidewalks produce uninteresting and clichéd experiences. Design should restructure sidewalks as generative places that become capable of producing narratives beyond the existing ones. The chapter ends with concepts

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<sup>16</sup> Solà-Morales (1996) had introduced five constructed and interconnected realms with which the design practice should engage today beyond the architectural object: *mutations, flows, habitations, containers and terrain vagues*.

that can simultaneously increase the legibility of sidewalk corridors and break it at random intervals for spontaneous social gathering.

Tehran's average houses as private sites with public space design possibilities are examined in Chapter III, Opportunistic Dwelling. Tehran's housing crisis has produced inadequate and pricey homes, often poorly constructed and of singularly uninspired design. Average apartment houses are unexciting and lack place identity. Despite these deficiencies, such buildings offer many possibilities. They present spaces between, below, atop, and inside that can be repurposed. I maintain that planners and designers could recycle domestic residual spaces to invent new housing types that better connect people's private lives with their social and economic needs.

My concluding chapter collages the possibilities offered in the preceding chapters to present a cohesive scenario for future Tehran. This scenario imagines Tehran with more and better protean spaces capable of fostering informal meeting places for personal and social growth. My Tehran proposal is not rigid or fixed it does not, as most master plans offer absolute solutions. Rather it is flexible and contingent. It makes clandestine changes over time possible by drawing on the ad hoc nature of Tehran and the fluctuating character of its people and spaces. Protean spaces in any city should be guided by the native populations' needs, uses, and spatial appropriations. Given the specific nature of my research and its particular applicability to Tehran, I am not offering generalizable urban solutions. However, in my final comments I suggest possible

methods for a more widespread use of protean spaces—perhaps encouraging the discovery of a pathogen where least expected.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Landscape: The Horizontal Fields**

## **Unity of Natural, Man-Made, and Human Ecologies**

A city is the assemblage of man-made structures, residual natural landscapes that constructions left behind, and rare natural lands and forestry. This chapter looks at opportunistic ecological platforms within Tehran's landscape to pinpoint and conceptualize resilient urban landscapes for the future city. These landscapes could then support the creation of ad hoc, informal meeting places. Tehran's growth and the speed of urban life since the middle of the twentieth century have severed the city's natural landscape from the bodies that inhabit it. Disrupted and obliterated by highways and other human structures, the residual fragments of nature became inaccessible.

Future design interventions in Tehran's urban landscape should go beyond preservationist or restorative approaches. Rather, such interventions should reconcile the city with its natural features by applying a performative urbanist agenda. This is an urbanism that relates how bodies respond to their surroundings to patterns of performance in space among Tehranis. Design ideas must integrate tactile knowledge of how Tehranis perform or how their bodies want to act in urban spaces. The interventions should improvise an architecture that will recreate the city's residual natural landscapes by turning them into performative platforms. Tehran's residual landscapes include patches on Alborz mountain ridges, corridors of river-valleys, and matrices of abandoned Qanats. These open spaces can become performative stages for Tehranis' everyday actions and their ad hoc social event constructions.

Human bodies are important entities within urban landscapes. Body is that material boundary that people carry with them everywhere. It is through the acts of bodies and their inhabitations that spaces become places that have significance for sociability, memory, and identity. As Merleau-Ponty theorizes, “body is the meaningful core which behaves like a general function, and which, nevertheless, exists and is susceptible to disease (1995, 170).” Body is not placeless. It has “topos,” as Bourdieu (2000) asserts, a position in relation to others: “as a body and a biological individual, I am in the way that things are, situated in a place; I occupy a position in physical space and social space (p. 131).”<sup>17</sup> Body has a twofold function. Beyond differentiating self from other, it is a separating edge between the private and personal space of the self and the public and interpersonal or impersonal spaces of the city. Body is a boundary between the “non-physical, inner, private space of the mind” and the “outer space of the world.” It not only separates the realms of private and public, but also has the dual character of belonging to both spheres (Madanipour, 2003, pp. 8-11).

To study the possibilities that the residual natural environment can bring to a future Tehran, this chapter looks through the lens of landscape urbanism combined with landscape ecology. Landscape urbanism, as the design of landscapes in cities, presents the evolution of a design theory that aims at unifying architecture and landscape architecture, and melding high style, elite designs with the ecology of the city (Steiner, 2011). Landscape urbanism

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<sup>17</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre (2000). *Pascalian Meditations*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press. Bourdieu defines topos or place as the location where a “thing” or an “agent” occur. It is a “localization, or relationally, topologically, as a position, a rank in an order.” The body is not placeless; it has topos and a positionality in relation to others.

encourages architects, landscape architects, and urbanists to work together and to take unconventional and critical positions. They seek innovative modes of description and conduct new forms of scholarship.

Landscape urbanism is mostly applied to urban issues related to North American and European cities, but is not discussed in the context of Middle Eastern cities. Cities like Tehran demand their own versions of landscape urbanism that are contextually and socially relevant to their particular issues and problems. In the case of Tehran a landscape urbanist approach could be a medium of resistance. It could resist further destruction of the city's natural landscapes by reclaiming Tehran's abandoned or unclaimed sites. These sites can become public spaces for user's interpretation, appropriation, and placemaking.

Towards the end of this chapter, I suggest several interventions that trace a network of Tehran's ecological possibilities on residual landscapes and use them as medium for social change. The ecology of the city must merge with the ecology of human body to balance the city's natural and man-made networks. Tehran's left over landscapes make platforms for new kinds of public spaces where bodies who take part in their making as desirable places where they can find refuge. The proposal presents ways that smaller-scale design interventions can take shape within intra-city natural landscapes including: river-valleys, underground water networks, and hills and mountainsides. Rather than their total "restoration" or "preservation," a "reclamation-creation" approach must be adopted to form a new ecosystem that connects to the city's hydrology and

morphology. Attempts at total preservation would only provide a fictional image, as natural systems alone cannot cope with the needs of future Tehran. The built landscape and its inevitable realities should also be regarded as part of a landscape to be integrated into the new ecosystem.

### **Landscape Urbanism and Landscape Ecology**

As formulated by Charles Waldheim (2006), a pioneering proponent of the movement, landscape urbanism is an interdisciplinary and holistic framework for rethinking the city. I use landscape urbanist concepts both as a method to look at contemporary Tehran and a medium to construct its future urban milieu. Ian McHarg's ecological activism was the influential theoretical foundation for landscape urbanism. He urged designers to combine ecological and social processes, by first understanding the city as a large-scale system and then allowing that holistic understanding to inform and structure design scheme proposals. Landscape urbanism offers a design approach that establishes human systems within natural systems with anticipated and unanticipated opportunities for interaction. Form does not follow aesthetic perfection, but is culturally derived from a need to perform within a process.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to landscape urbanism, this chapter integrates descriptions of landscape ecology. Landscape ecology as a foundation of landscape architecture (Makhzoumi, 2000) provides a scientific knowledge that informs the

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<sup>18</sup> Since the 1990s landscape urbanism has produced some notable projects including the Promade Plantée, Paris, High Line, New York City, and Madrid Rio, Madrid.

design process. The “patch-corridor-matrix” model developed by Richard Forman (1995) is used as an organization frame. It renders the landscape as a city planning and design unit made up of elements. Forman’s model conceptualizes landscapes’ spatial components in the three major categorical map pattern of patch-corridor-matrix. These components help define Tehran’s landscape pattern and ecological networks. Based on this model, landscape intervention methods may range from: ecosystem restoration, rehabilitation or fractional recovery, preservation, mitigation to acceptable condition, creation of new systems, enhancement, and reclamation or ecosystem change.

Landscapes include mosaics of “patches” that are defined as nonlinear areas of land that result from disruptive human activities, and are separated from their surroundings. Patches show dynamic characteristics, varying across a range of spatial and temporal scales (Forman, 1995). “Corridors” are linear, natural or man-made, landscape elements distinguished from patches based on their structure or function as habitats, distribution channels, or barriers. Forman and Godron (1986) defined corridors as “narrow strips of land, which differ from the matrix on either side. Corridors may be isolated strips, but are usually attached to a patch of somewhat similar vegetation (p. 123).” Corridors can have multiple meanings relative to the phenomena under study. “Matrices” are the most widespread, connected, and obvious landscape elements that surround patches. They play important roles in how the landscape performs (Forman and Godron, 1986). A description of a matrix element depends on the phenomenon under study and research scale. This selection and interpretation is important. It

should be evaluated in terms of a matrix's ecological meaningfulness depending on how the entire landscape and patch types are defined.

### **Features of Tehran Land: Patches, Corridors, and Matrices**

Tehran was once a tiny village of underground residences in the shadow of the important nearby city of Rhagae/Rey. In 943 AD, Abolqasem Mohammad ibn Hoqal described Tehran with its many and enormous gardens where residents lived mostly underground. In 1339 Hamdollah Mostoufi, in his book *Nuz'hat al-Qulub*, described Tehran as one of the summer resorts of Rey with a healthy climate and many fruit gardens. According to Ali Madanipour (1998), in 1404, Tehran had grown in size but still was not important enough to be walled (p. 28). In the 16th century, under Shah Abbas Safavi, Tehran was still a remote military garrison town with less than three thousand people (Milani, 2004). Tehran was born as a city in the early sixteenth century when Shah Tehmasp, the founder of the Safavi Dynasty, who was going on a pilgrimage to Hamzeh Shrine, crossed through this region and became fascinated with the climate of this medieval village. In 1553, he ordered the construction of first walls around Tehran with 114 forts, matching the number of Suras in the Koran. He also ordered the erection of new buildings, caravanserai (roadside inns), and protecting walls around the city. In 1795, Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar crowned Tehran as Iran's capital.

In the nineteenth century, under Qajar dynastic rule, Tehran's benevolent climate, fertile soil, and water resources fostered of the creation of the city's

many beautiful gardens. As Behbahani and Khosravi (2006) asserted, these quasi-natural landscapes have been the primary nuclei of Tehran's spatial makeup; the establishment and location of the old gardens later influenced the direction of Tehran's urban development. These gardens first led to an introverted expansion of the city inside its old walls and then led to its extroverted extension towards the mountains in the north. It was also at this time that villages formed outside the city walls. These separate municipalities attracted wealthy citizens who built palatial estates on the Alborz mountain ridges. Tehran's green corridors with garden patches shaped gradually along the river-valleys and connected urban elements in a north-south direction. These corridors then became the axes for the city's development during the Pahlavi dynastic reign (1925-1979).

Tehran's major reforms towards modernity took shape in the first half of the twentieth century under Reza Shah Pahlavi. He ordered the transformation of what was essentially an overgrown village into what would become a modern metropolis. During the 1920s, Reza Shah toppled the Qajar city walls and gates so that the city could expand within a new open-ended network of roads. For more than fifty years, Tehran's increasing growth towards the northern mountains has been destroying the remains of the Qajar gardens. Some of those gardens have survived and they offer rare opportunities for the city's rejuvenation.

Although partially faded, Tehran's seven river-valleys are still the most apparent intra-city natural corridors and ecological systems. These corridors have nurtured the creation and sustenance of other green patches and habitats.

Their running water, cool surrounding weather in the summer, and natural plant life have played significant roles in offering the city valuable bio-environmental diversity and fertile habitat.<sup>19</sup> With revitalization, these corridors can act as democratic bridges that connect the wealthier upland districts of the city with the neglected poorer areas south of the city. Highway networks, Tehran's man-made corridors, intersect, superimpose, and parallel the river-valleys. Although often seen as obstructive and disruptive, the highway networks must be an integral part of any revitalization scheme.

Tehran offers rare and dispersed landscape fragments: remnant patches of historic gardens, leftover public lands tucked away along the northern mountain ridges, smaller enduring public grounds along the city's seven river-valleys, urban forests, and large urban parks. There are also numerous small, man-made green areas called "boostan"<sup>20</sup> scattered among the city's neighborhoods. At the city center, the Abbasabad Hills area is a larger green patch encompassing partially built lands but still leaving decent open spaces for the city to breathe in. This area, representing one of Tehran's rare natural lands, has been the target and template for a number of large-scale design schemes since the 1960s.<sup>21</sup>

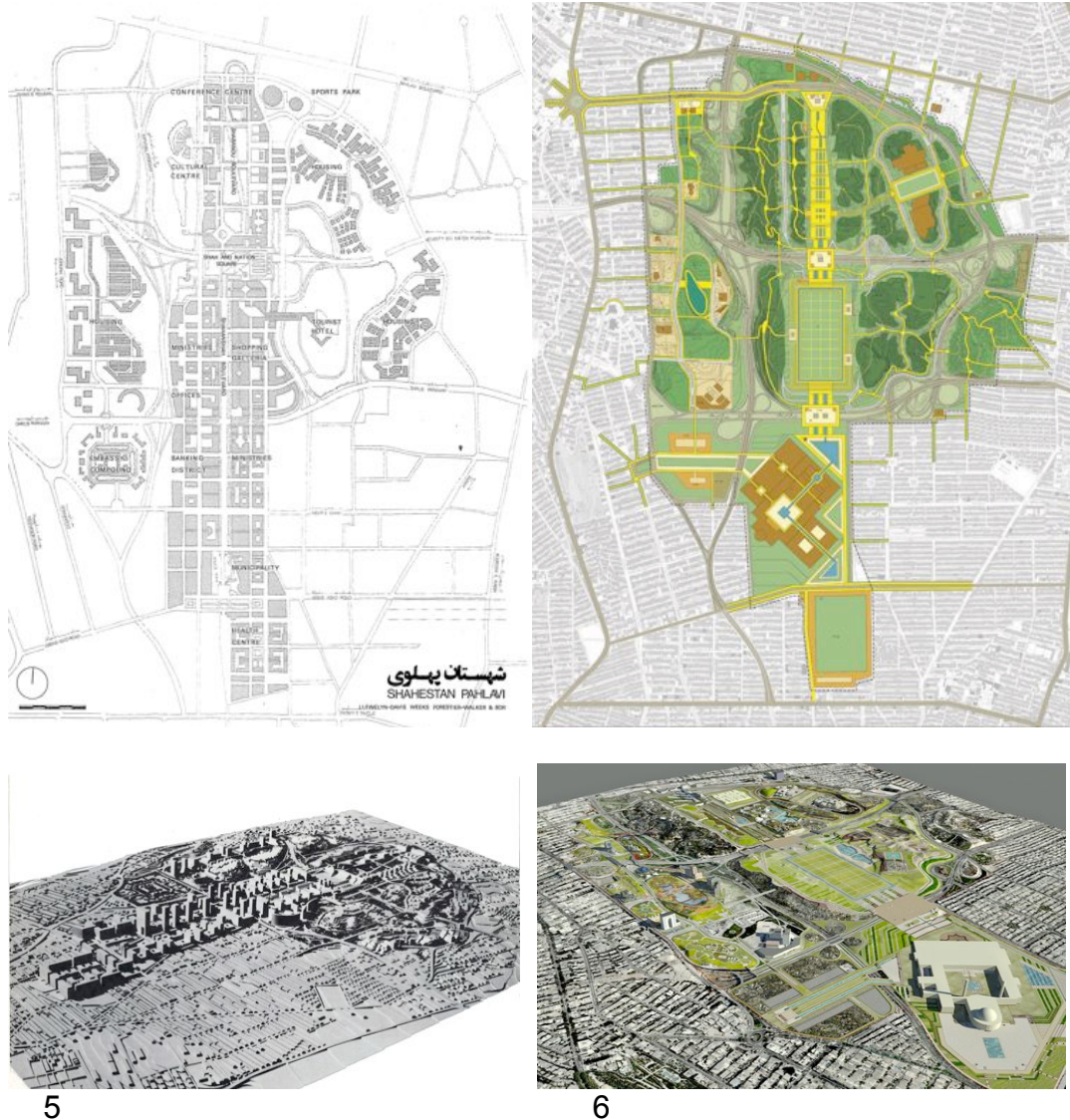
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<sup>19</sup> See for further information on Tehran's natural environments: (Aminzadeh, B., & Khansefid, M., 2009; Micarelli, R., Irani Behbahani, H., & Shafie, B., 2007; & Knill, J., & Jones, K., 1968).

<sup>20</sup> Boostans are small-scale local green spaces located at each neighborhood. An average one offers a couple of benches plus greenery, while some may also include a few low-tech sport equipments and a playground. Boostans are often not so well programmed. Some end up becoming empty green voids that are depleted of human presence and its range of experiences.

<sup>21</sup> Concepts for the area were first discussed, the area's development being given priority, in the first master plan for Tehran prepared by Gruen and Farman-Farmaian (1966-1969). The aim was to urbanize greater Tehran and to decentralize it. Their scheme gave birth to the Shahestan Pahlavi Master Plan project (1974-76) on the hills. The project was a joint venture between the Iranian firm Sherkat Sahami Nosazi Shahestan Pahlavi and the British firm Llewelyn-Davies International. The project covered 554 acres of land bounded on the north by Pahlavi (Mirdamad) Boulevard, on the south by Takht-e-Tavoos (Motahari) Avenue, on the





**Figure 1.1**

(1) Initially, the first Tehran Master Plan (1966-1969) by Gruen and marked the area's development a city priority (Image source: Emami, 2011, p. 40; original: Tehran Comprehensive Plan). Between 1973 and 1974, three architects (2) Louis Khan, (3) Kenzo Tange, and (4) Arata Isozaki sketched their distinct schemes for the site (Images source: Khosravi, 2013). Next was the (5) Shahestan Pahlavi Master Plan (1974-1976), the first official report in the formats of two printed books and a series of technical documents (Images source: Llewelyn-Davies International, Book I, 1976, Appendix drawings). Eventually, after the 1979 revolution, the (6) Abbasabad Revitalization Master Plan project was realized that today assembles the Abbasabad Hills area into a combination of open green and built spaces (Images source: Sherkat Nosazi Abbasabad).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Retrieved from: <https://abbasabad.tehran.ir/Default.aspx?tabid=88&language=en>, date accessed: January 1, 2014.

Tehran is a geographically legible city. The matrix of Alborz Mountains marks the city's northern edge. They offer the city a distinct quality and an immediate sense of place and direction. They also limit and control the city's northward growth. Since the mid-twentieth century, mostly over the past three decades, this unique geography has been interrupted, its view partially blocked by urban developments and excessive construction in the city's northern sections. Although high-rise buildings and other structures partially block views of the mountains, they are still the city's most impressive natural landscape feature.

Tehran's metropolitan area, which appears waterless because it lacks a natural body of water, actually hides a man-made network of underground hydraulic structures called *qanats*. There are over 500 derelict qanats under the city with a total length of more than 2000 kilometers. A qanat is a hydraulic passive system that originated in ancient Persia around 3000 years ago. It was built as a sophisticated underground channel to irrigate land and manage water resources. It operates when gravity forces the water from natural springs and streams from the Alborz Mountain aquifers into the city. Using passive mechanical systems, qanats were efficient and economical.<sup>23</sup> Qanats functioned well until their abandonment during White Revolution (1962-1963) reforms launched by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.<sup>24</sup> The government nationalized water resources and introduced modern irrigation systems by building dams to increase

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<sup>23</sup> For information on qanats, see: (Goldsmith & Hildyard, 1986; & Maliki & Khursandi, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Through the Land Reform Acts passed in 1962, the government bought land from feudal landlords and sold it back to peasants on a lower price. Although the impetus behind the Land Reform Acts was to cut short the impact of feudalism and to support working class peasants, it also caused the disappearance of qanats. Larger segments of farming land were taken from one owner and were split up into smaller portions to be given to micro-owners. This made the maintenance, coordination, and operation of qanats costly and impossible.

land irrigation possibilities. Modern systems eventually replaced qanats and negatively affected traditional farming practices that relied on qanats for irrigation.

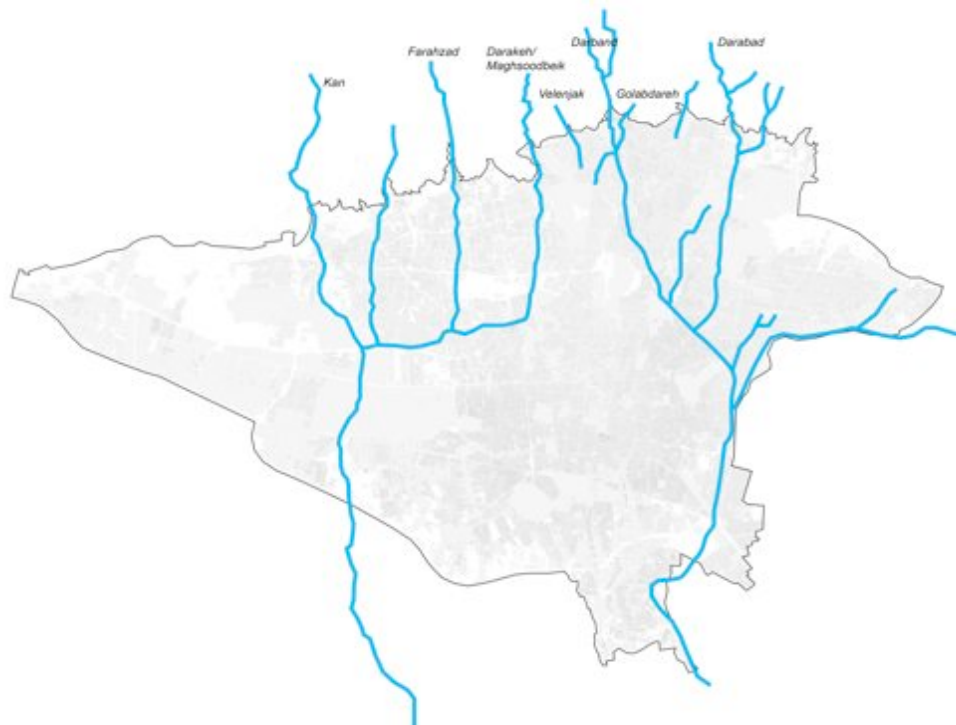
## **Tehran Landscape Possibilities**

At the larger, landscape scale Tehran's residual natural areas can become protean spaces that support ad hoc social contacts. Interventions should merge Tehran's natural and man-made landscapes with cultural processes. The new landscape can then engage human bodies in a dynamic and meaningful way. They can also provide new ways to reorganize the entire urban form based on restructuring its ecosystem. And, importantly, they could heighten Tehranis' understanding of their ecosystem. Mostly located in undefined territories, places that Solà-Morales (1996) would call the "terrain vagues," the intra-city landscapes can be retrieved from leftover green patches on Alborz mountain ridges, half-erased river-valley corridors, and abandoned qanats. Such spaces are currently disconnected from the city; hence, disconnected from the tactile scale of human bodies. Any future solution should resist further destruction of the city's natural ecologies and reject large-scale construction that further fray the urban fabric.

### **"Terrain Vagues:" Tehran River-Valleys**

Since the mid-twentieth century Tehran's seven green river-valleys (*rood-dareha*), owing to massive construction and neglect, have been partially erased.

The river-valleys include *darabad*, *velenjak*, *darakeh/maghsoodbeik*, *golabdareh*, *farahzad*, *kan*, and *darband*. These natural corridors bring linear green tapestries that weave through the city in a north-south axis. The residues are magnets for the creation of informal meeting places. With their roots on the foothills of Alborz Mountains, these corridors generate open green patches in their surrounding area as public lands that are often left unplanned. They provide the overly built contemporary Tehran with rare open spaces that Tehranis can appropriate and fill with new meanings and memories. These patches also connect to informal walking trails and ad hoc vistas on the mountains' ridge. Their unplanned quality allows for the creation of clandestine places that present opportunities for informal and ad hoc socializing.



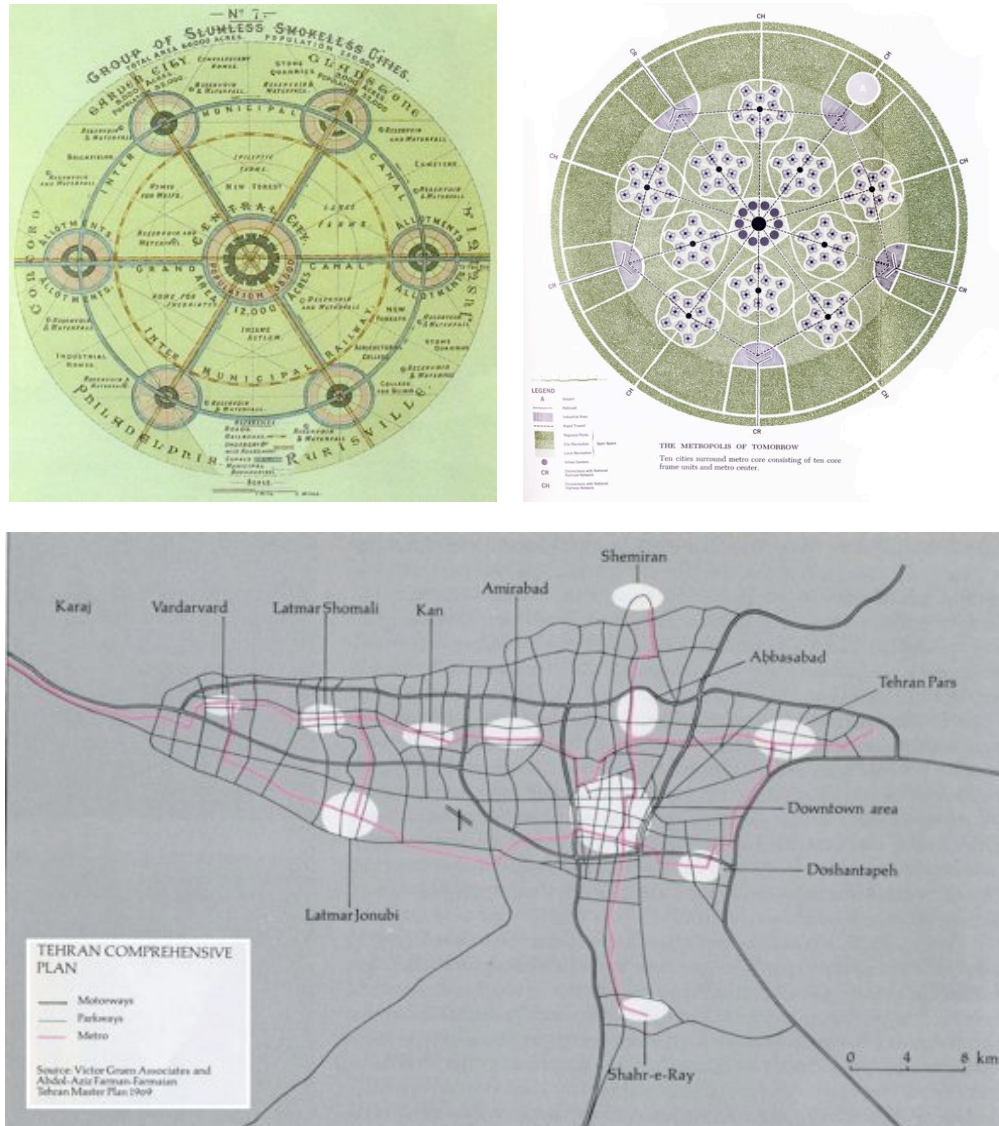
**Figure 1.2**

Tehran's seven river-valleys

Since the 1960s, three master plans have been prepared for Tehran, but only the third plan prepared in 2006 has discussed the significance of river-valleys in the restructuring of the city. The first two, one commissioned before the 1979 revolution in the 1960s and the other in the 1990s, imposed fragmentation of the urban fabric and grid patterns of urban development without regard to the city's ecological features and processes. Although neither was fully realized, random interventions based on those plans interrupted and deformed the river-valleys. The third plan focused on the city's legibility, historic and natural identity, and decentralized and linear urban development. It also envisioned a green belt around the city to limit its expansion. The plan had a new multi-body structure that was in part based upon revitalization of the river-valleys. Patches of green spaces and public activities were created along the corridors on a north-south axes.

The first master plan was developed in 1969 as a joint venture between Iranian architect and planner Abdol-Aziz Farman-Farmaian and Los Angeles Architect Victor Gruen. The plan's main concept was Tehran's linear restructuring on an east-west axis. Ignorant of Tehran's natural and historic contexts, this proposal divided the city into ten districts, each possessing their own cores. A network of highways was juxtaposed to connect the districts and cores. This plan was a modernist proposal focused on physical change, forcing a new order by placing a new grid on the city (Madanipour, 2006, pp. 443-438). Prior to this plan, the city had relied on the mountains for water, but the plan

disturbed the city's topography, land geomorphology, and erased its natural heritage.



**Figure 1.3**

Top left: The “Garden City of To-morrow” by Ebenezer Howard in 1898.  
 Top right: The “Cellular Metropolis” by Victor Gruen (1964, p. 273)  
 Bottom: Gruen’s Tehran’s first Master Plan (1969) was a linear adaptation of his “Cellular Metropolis,” a utopia for Tehran. The plan called out ten major district nodes connected through the highway system (Published in: Llewelyn-Davies International, 1976, p. 30).

Tehran scholar, Ali Madanipour (1998, p. 208) viewed Tehran's first master plan as a linear rendition of Gruen's "Cellular Metropolis" model that was discussed in Gruen's book *The Heart of Our Cities* (1964, p. 272). This scheme for Tehran created ten linear centers mostly along the east-west axis and proposed major rejuvenation of the residential zones in the southern parts of the city. Similarities also existed between this idea of the "Cellular Metropolis" and Ebenezer Howard's *Garden City of To-morrow* (1898). Gruen's schematic drawings fixated on the idea of centers to organize Tehran's future, defining ten boroughs added to the existing historic center/downtown. Each borough had a business core unified through a clear web of urban streets, highways, and over/underpass rapid transportation systems. The plan was approved, but did not go through as the 1979 revolution halted the master plan, but some of its elements such as major arteries were adopted in subsequent planning efforts.

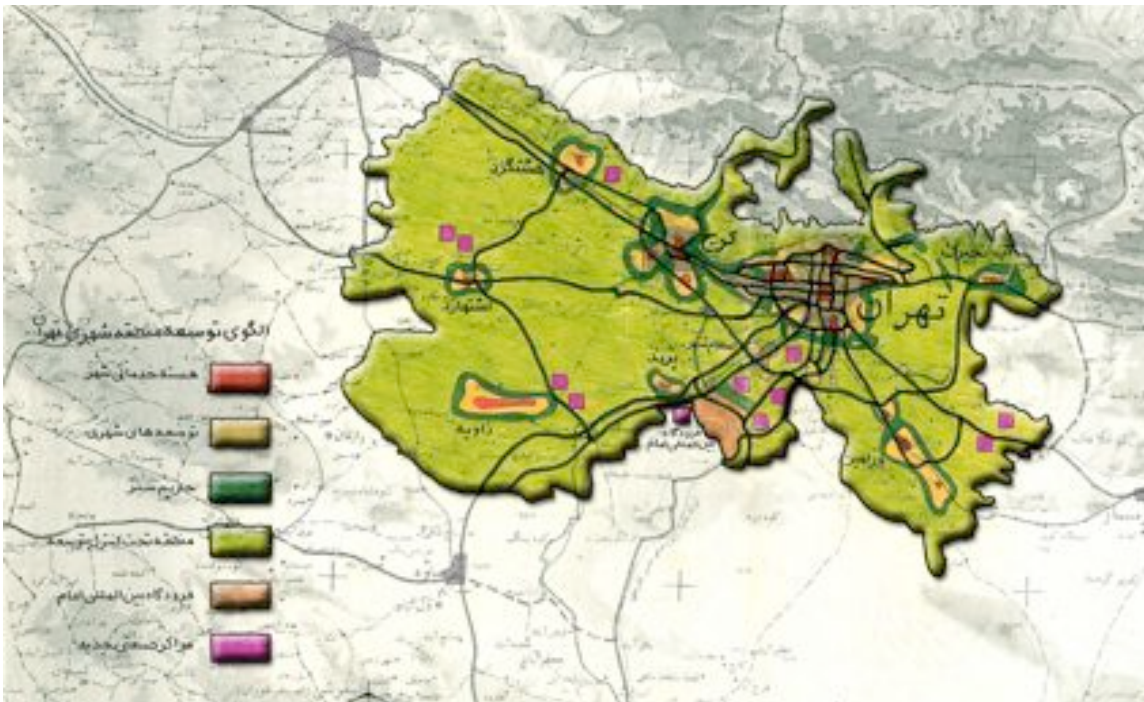


**Figure 1.4**

Tehran, prior to the first master plan's ideation, was surrounded by open terrains and natural features. The Abbasabad Hills area is hatched in black (Image source: Gruen & Farmanfarmanian, 1968; cited in Emami, 2011).

Tehran's second master plan that was based on a sprawl concept also did not take into account the city's natural and historic contexts. In 1996, the Ministry of

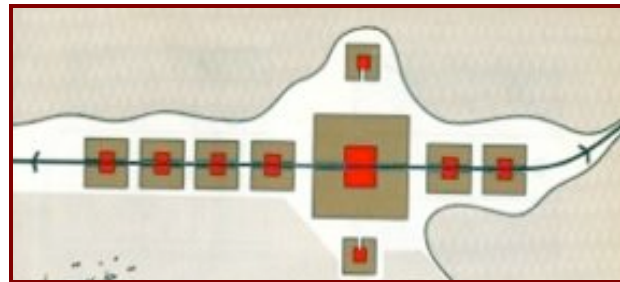
Housing and Urban Development commissioned ATEC Consultants to prepare the second master plan document. Stabilization of the city limits to control its growth and the city's restructuring based on five separate districts with separate cores were plan's main concepts. Additionally, the plan envisioned the five new suburbs of *Hashtgerd*, *Eshtehard*, *Parand*, *Andisheh*, and *Fardis* to house services such as: universities, an airport, industries, and a twin city to house excessive population growth and resolve traffic problems. This plan did not move forward due to changes in leadership and executive bodies.



**Figure 1.5**

Tehran's second master plan envisioned five new cities and a twin city. The goal was to solve the population intensity and traffic problems at the city center by pushing many of the urban services out of the city (Source: ATECT Consultants Archive).

In 2006, the third master plan was proposed. Boomsaazgaan Consultants prepared a plan that focused on the city's legibility, historic and natural identity, and decentralized urban development. It also envisioned a green belt around the city to limit its expansion. During preparation of the third master plan, the river-valleys' revitalization came to the attention of the Tehran municipal authority. The plan was adapted to a new structure that was in part based upon revitalization of the river-valleys. Small green spaces for public activities were to be created along the corridors on north-south axes.





**Figure 1.6**

Major structural concepts in the three master plans of Tehran:

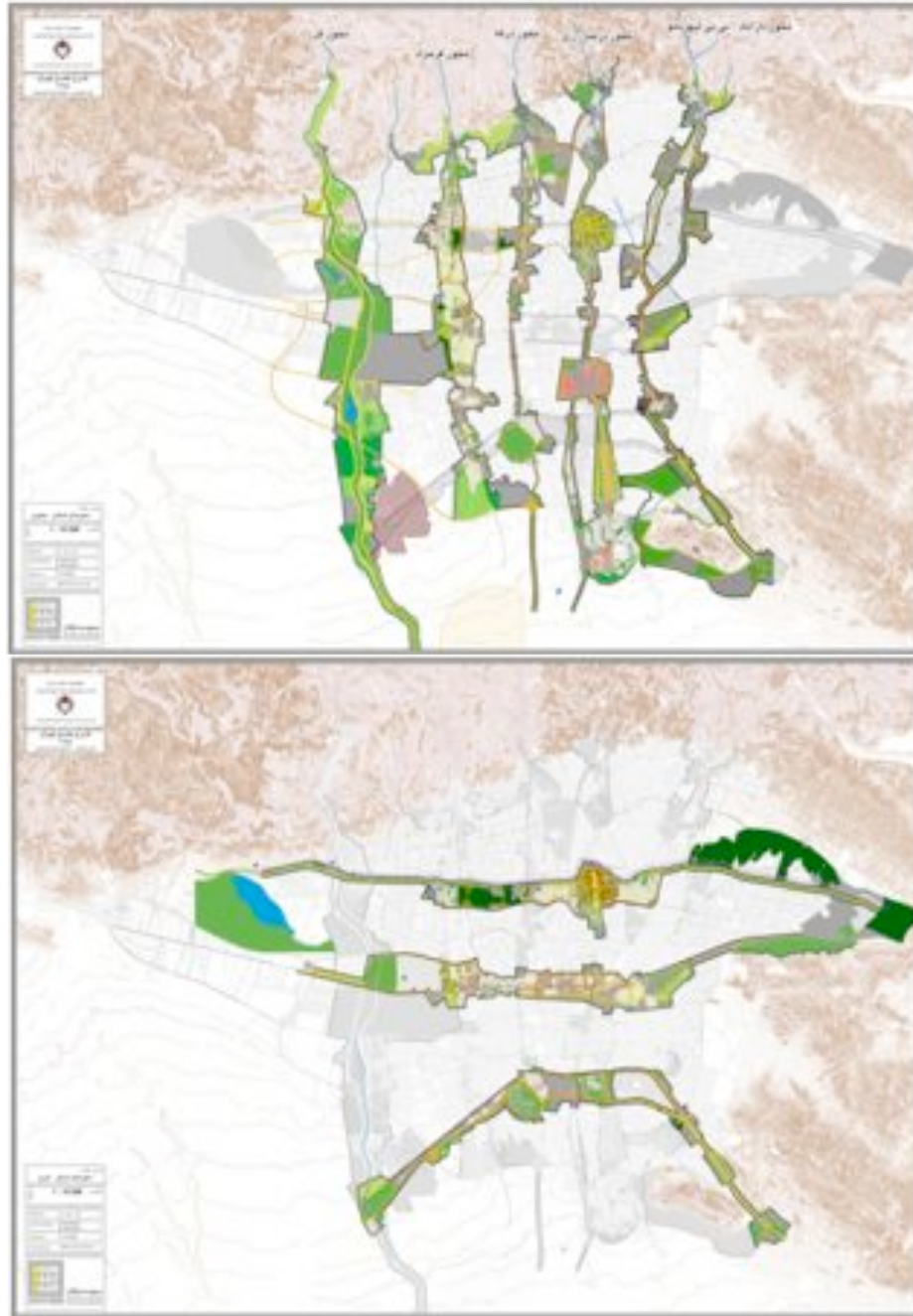
Top: The first plan laid on a linear, east-west expansion concept with (left) ten neighborhoods and (right) ten urban centers (Image source: Gruen & Farmanfarmaian, 1968).

Middle: The second plan arranged a radial growth, a sprawl to spread the city out into (right) new satellite towns and (left) five urban districts (Image source: ATECT Consultants Archive).

Bottom: The third plan based on limiting the urban expansion via a green belt around the city (right) and new spaces along the river-valley corridors on north-south axes (Image source: Boomsaazgaan Consultants Archive).

Well-known architect and planner Hadi Mirmiran presented a collaged concept where the new structure of the city would be based on the location and function of the river-valleys. His plan could be seen as the only local and context-driven concept so far presented for Tehran. Unfortunately, this resilient project was left without supervision and strong direction. Mirmiran died in 2007 and his scheme remains unrealized. His holistic approach, based on its natural, historical, and movement patterns along the north-south and east-west axes, could redefine the city's physical structure. The five river-valleys of *kan*, *farahzad*, *darakeh*, *darband-rey*, and *darabad-bibi shahrbanoo* were highlighted as the new major north-south recreational corridors to be designed with public amenities. In addition, a green axis of *Hemmat* Highway, a cultural axis of *Engheleb*, and an

active axis of *Shoosh-Besat* were recognized as three intersecting east-west axes to the five north-south corridors.



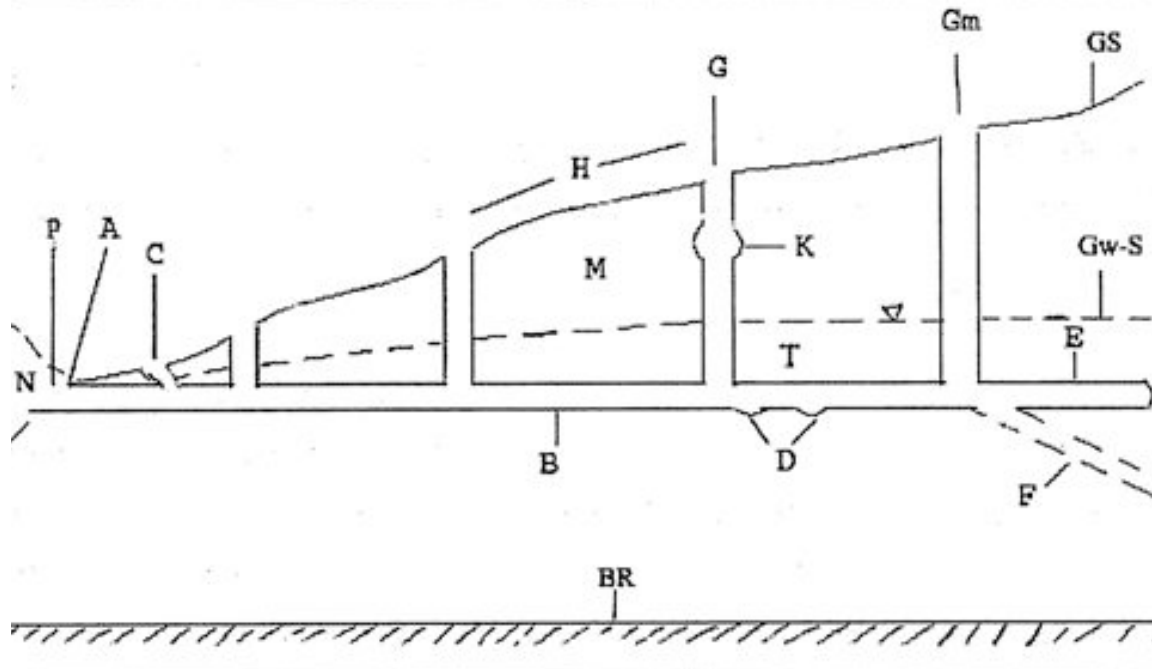
**Figure 1.7**

In the third Master plan of Tehran (2006), five major river-valleys are considered as the backbone and a tool to restructure the entire city (Courtesy of Hadi Mirmiran).

Mirmiran's master plan had the potential to reorganize Tehran as a regionalist vision grounded in nature and local culture, including the memory of its historic Persian gardens and the trace its of rivers and streams. The plan was a smart rethinking of the city's ecological future through watersheds by reviving its landscape terrain vagues. It studied Tehran's ecological river-valleys as waterway connections to the city fabric. The plan formed an ecological network by merging the natural and man-made and creating hybrid uses along the water flows. If realized, the plan and its platforms could have provided means of access between discrete islands created by highway landscapes.

### **Flows: The Subterranean Landscape of Abandoned Qanats**

Qanats are buried remains in contemporary Tehran. Originating in ancient Persia, as one of the world's most sustainable, gravity-fed, passive irrigation systems, the underground water infrastructure of qanats also made the creation of Persian gardens possible in uninhabitable deserts. Professional qanat diggers, called *muqannis*, traveled from city to city to build them. Constructing a new qanat required sophisticated engineering. First, a muqanni would determine the location of the mother well (*madar chah*) closest to the mountains and then he would position the qanat's origin, destination (*mazhar*), and shafts (*gamaneh*). Excavation would start from the down-slope site and work backward to the mother well. There are vertical shafts for every 50 to 100 meters. Due to the expertise required and hazards of construction, the vocation of a muqanni was highly respected.



**Figure 1.8**

The architecture, hydraulic, and main structure of a *qanat* consists of a horizontal cavity or gallery (B) that is connected through dotted vertical cavities or wells (G), along with a destination opening where water appears on ground surface (A) (Image Source: Maliki and Khursandi, 2006, p. 28).

Qanats derived from the particular natural environment of Iranian cities. The geo-morphology and topography of most mountainous Iranian cities encouraged ancient engineers to develop this system. For centuries qanats helped Iranian civilization to flourish. They led to the expansion of cities, the organization of their urban fabric, and the formation of Persian gardens. This durable and cost-effective system, beyond its agricultural uses, was the main source for potable water. During 1950s and 1960s, urban growth, particularly in Tehran, increased the demand for water. Modern hydrologic systems replaced the qanats.



**Figure 1.9**

Around the Tohid tunnel that was under construction, a street section collapsed. This was mainly caused by a qanat subsidence. Such scenes have become more common in Tehran. These are due to an increased road construction in the past decade that is putting further destructive impacts when intersecting with the city's obscured qanats (Source: PRESS TV, 2009).<sup>25</sup>

With modernization, qanats lost their former role and became wastewater conduits that negatively affected the environment. The discharged wastewater from northern sections reaches the upper wells and contaminates the downtown. The reality of buried qanats in today's Tehran impacts the design and execution of any urban and architectural project. Excavations often intersect this underground network. For example, for many years, the completion of Tehran's subway system was delayed due to issues caused by existing and interfering

<sup>25</sup> Retrieved from: <http://edition.presstv.ir/detail/102964.html>, date accessed: June 3, 2012.

qanat galleries. In 2011, construction at the Mellat Bank Office Tower was halted for three months as the project's excavation faced on-site encounters with two dormant qanats. However, as a result of this problem, its designers conducted extensive studies of Tehran's qanats.

The project's architect, Reza Daneshmir and Catherine Spiridonoff of Fluid Motions Architects, saw new possibilities for the city's extensive system of qanats. The architects traced logical relationships between the old Tehran's qanats and the city's remaining Persian gardens, courtyards, and green spaces. Qanats were threads connecting these large and small spaces (Daneshmir & Spiridonoff, 2012). The architects also presented a somewhat utopian proposal where existing qanats would be integrated with the subway system in order to create an "underground garden city." This subterranean city would green Tehran and reflect what early travelers had described as an underground city with many gardens. The proposal would start with scattered subterranean patches that would gradually connect and form a garden city in which pedestrian walkways would eventually replace the expressways (p. 69).

Although the city's master plans have mostly overlooked the existence of qanats under the city, fortunately in recent years, urban management bodies have started paying more attention to them. Tehran's GIS center has identified and mapped the qanats. Their revitalization has also received closer attention from foreign architects and scholars. For example, HydroCity an international research lab started the MesoCity's experimental research projects on Tehran. The lab that bridges art, ecology and the city has a mission to offer visionary

proposals for the city's timely challenges. The project formed in partnership with the postgraduate degree in Sustainable Development Project for Cities (ADM) led by French philosopher Chris Younès at the Ecole Spéciale d'Architecture in Paris. Through educational workshops, the group brought multidisciplinary and international views to the project. They engaged scientists, philosophers and artists to look at the condition of neglected qanats. The first workshop, titled "Art, Ecology and the City," was held in September 11-22, 2012 at the University of Tehran's School of Architecture. Four teams of artists worked with architects and a group of eight students on the *Darakeh*, *Youssefabad*, *Baharestan*, and *Oodlajan* neighborhoods by looking at their qanat networks. The projects' aim was not restoring qanats to their original condition, but imagined their position in the contemporary city.





The first MesoCity workshop on the possibilities of Tehran's resulted in several innovative concepts. "The inverted qanat" proposal envisioned pumping to the surface the underground grey water that has been infiltrating the qanats. The grey water would then be filtered with active cylinders, sand and gravel, and oxygenated plants, and be reused to green up the city. The project was especially aimed to clean up the historic section of the city and to revive downtown core. The Baharestan scheme proposed a public memorial for qanats and a cultural hub at the new gateway of the Qajar palace in Baharestan. The Youssefabad team also proposed grey water recycling. The Darakeh team was the most creative, preparing land art installations to commemorate the recent disappearing orchards of Darakeh, which were dying out due to a high-rise construction that sealed a still-operational qanat. The team imagined light wells to mark the city's landscape at night with qanats' vertical cavity spots. One team suggested the celebration of a national qanat day by painting blue spots on the ground to mark the wells throughout the city.

### **Temporary Habitations: Leftover Patches on the City "Roofs"**

The foothills of Alborz Mountains offer leftover landscape patches tucked away along the ridge and in the vicinity of river-valleys. Tehranis call them "roofs of Tehran" (*bamha-ye-Tehran*) or "Tehran's panoramas" (*manzareh-ye-Tehran*). These terrain vagues house everyday spaces where the lack of planned spaces serve as a platform for users' encounters and appropriations. The identity, spatial character, and life span of these urban "roofs" are in flux. To document

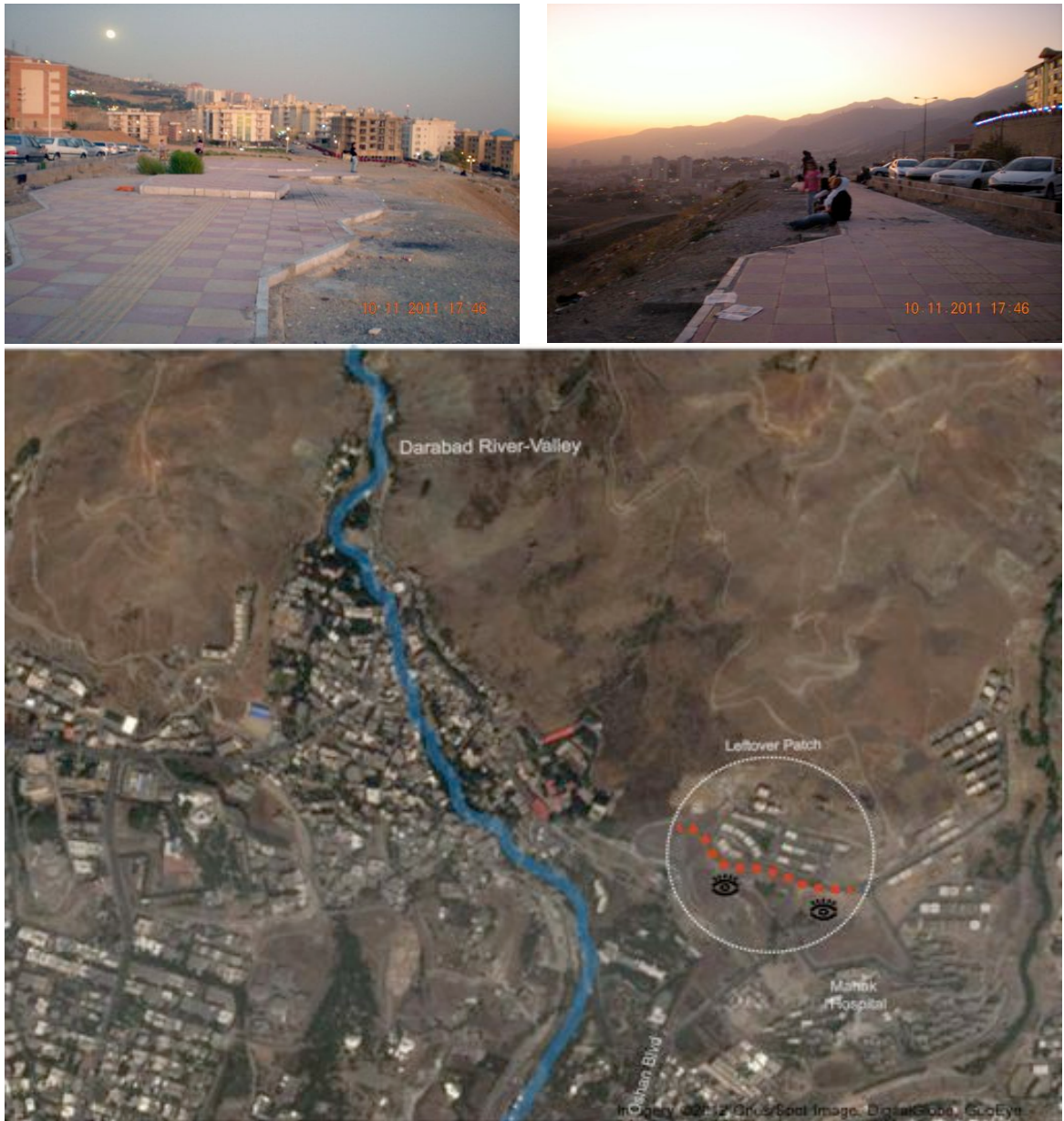
and analyze of these amorphous and unstructured territories, I conducted the on-site ethnographic studies.<sup>27</sup>

*Ethnography on a Roof: Manzareh-ye Tehran on the Oshan Boulevard*

On October 11 2011 at 6:30 pm, I visited one of Tehran's roofs located near the Oshan Boulevard, in vicinity of the Darabad Valley. I went to have conversations with the site's regular users. As I reached the boulevard's end and passed Mahak Hospital, I climbed the windy street of Jannat and arrived at the hangout place of the "roof" on the left. This residual strip of land is tucked away along the Alborz ridge in the vicinity of Darabad Valley offering a panoramic view of the entire city. Rows of mediocre housing appeared on the right side of the street with the view of mountains in the background. This is recent housing and prior to 2009 there was no road to this site. The housing resulted from urban expansion and a need to accommodate an increasing population. Built close to the mountains, the housing units left only a narrow strip of land on the left side of the street. This strip of land is publicly owned and managed by the municipality. It was not designed with the intent to become a place for gathering.

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<sup>27</sup> The following narrative is a vignette of my encounters with one of these "panoramas" or "roofs" collected from open-ended conversations with youth groups.



**Figure 1.11**

The ad hoc ethnographic site on Darabad River-Valley (Source: author)

This place acts as a boundary bridging two distinct types of neighborhoods: the lower class neighborhoods of Hakimiyeh, Babaei Highway, Resalat, and Tehran-Pars on its east, and the upper to middle-class districts of Niavaran,

Aghdasieh, and Darabad towards the west. One interesting character of the site is that users from both east and west mingle and interact.

The site's unique view of the city attracts Tehranis. Space users here are often regulars; most of the time they come across friends by chance. On October 11 2011, I chatted with a young woman:

My college friends introduced me to this site four months ago. Since then, I come here at least four to five times a week and often meet my friends by coincidence. Other times, I would call them and, if they would not pick up, I figure I can find them here. This place for me has a down-to-the earth quality. I like how there is no commercial building around here. Any fancy and lavish construction like the addition of a restaurant or a café would take away the mundane quality of this place and would stop me from coming here. Food and drinks would spoil this place, I believe; this is not a family camp area and people do not come here for food.

I do not like the mix of music sounds from the pulled-over cars. I prefer how distant the site feels from the chaotic spaces of the city; here, I find myself at peace. Looking down the cliff, I look at the roads that lead down to the city and the interplay of urban lights and shadows at night. Up here, I can imagine a new relationship with my city. When I am inside my car driving around Tehran, any intimacy with my city is interrupted when I roll up the windows to avoid the urban madness and to isolate myself.

The city is more desirable in this detachment up here. I love Tehran, but tenuously. When I am in the city, the city's maladies and its people's problems bother me, but there is none of it here. Besides the pollution, I do not find hectic traffic noises here. I prefer to come here than to go to even the coziest urbane café. I am more comfortable in nature where the landscape is open and there is no "ceiling" atop, where you can see the horizon line and its colors without being seen by others.

On October 19 2011 at 8:30 pm, I visited the site again. My newly met friend often came to the site to watch the sunset, but this time I asked her to come with me later so that we could experience the life of the place after dark. It is colder tonight. When we arrived, a youth group was setting a small bonfire in the empty street canal, and was also preparing their hookah. To avoid the wind some groups were lingering inside their cars with the doors open and their music on. The aroma of the bonfire filled the space. We heard the voice of a middle-aged woman who was inviting people to purchase *ash e reshteh* (Persian noodle soup), chicken wing kebab, tea, and *lavashak* (thin Persian fruit bar). The lady was covered properly with a tight scarf and a long *manto* (a coat-like garment women must wear in public). We approached her and started a conversation. She has been running the informal business of selling homemade food in this place every evening after dark for about two years. Regulars seemed to know her and called her "auntie." She lives in the neighborhood and arrives here

between 7-8 pm, in a red or black Pride automobile and often stays until around 12 pm. She advised us to stay close to where the lights are on.

Tehranis appropriate the ad hoc public space patches on the Alborz foothills differently. Some reclaim the space and construct places for social exchange while others benefit from the places' popularity by creating informal businesses to help support their households. Thus the under-designed character of the leftover patches—there is no café or restaurant in the vicinity—provides an opportunity for the unemployed to generate income. Owing to the weak Iranian formal economy the number of unemployed women who sell homemade meals in such residual spaces has increased in the recent years. Women, as well, package homemade food to sell in commercial areas like Tehran's bazaar and shopping malls. Packaged meals are also sold on underground subway trains and public buses.

*Where Cars Make Sociable Containers: Kooy-e-Faraz*

At the other side of the city, a section of *Kooy-e-Faraz* (Faraz Street) along the Alborz ridge creates another Tehran "roof." Due to its elevated position, the neighborhood's main street was named Faraz, meaning the "altitude" in Persian. Faraz Street is located in the vicinity of the Farahzad Valley and in Saadat Abad, a middle-class neighborhood in northwest Tehran. The street offers many opportunities for Tehranis to appropriate ad hoc spaces. Mostly in the evenings, this predominantly residential district with few local groceries and restaurants becomes a patogh, a hangout for people from around the city. Ten years ago,

this area was unbuilt. Carved from the tight vestige of buildable land left between Tehran's northern edge and the Alborz Mountains, the area was developed into a new neighborhood. It is today considered one of the relatively prosperous residential areas in the city. However, its hilly position and difficult terrain make it less favored by the elderly and more attractive to younger populations. Young artists, mostly actors, have chosen to live here because of its advantageous location with unique vistas and its bohemian character. Faraz, an ordinary street, became an unstructured social space that gains and renews its meanings everyday.

Superior views and free access alone are not the main factors that invite Tehranis to embody kooy-e-faraz. There are at least two public parks close by that offer views, as well as seating, and amenities, so it is not also the lack of public space in the area that attracts people to this place. What attracts people to this place and other leftover patches on the Alborz ridges are their indeterminate margins, amorphous character, and the way users can take up and claim "authorship" in their making. Users claim authorship through their actions and the boundaries they create. The interiors of private cars parked on the street side provide one effective typology of a mobile boundary that performs as a spatial and temporal bubble of relative freedom. This spatial boundary is an important component of this place and its temporal character. From everywhere in the city, people quickly arrive at and depart from this particular site. They turn their cars facing south, pointing to the city's panorama for a social gathering free of charge where they can meet people from all around the city.

Automobiles in Tehran, beyond their utilitarian purpose, take the form of semi-private containers of self-expression and a mobile urban space. The movie *Ten* (2002) by the internationally acclaimed auteur Abbas Kiarostami is made up of ten stories happening in urban Tehran, all recorded on a dashport camera. This zeitgeist movie features the uncanny role of the car and casts a critical gaze on Tehran's contemporary sociopolitical landscape. The narrative space portrays the car as a place of safety and protection. The car is the only safe platform for talking about social issues not often discussed in public sphere and mainstream media such as female jurisdictional rights to divorce and sex outside marriage. The car can also be viewed as a metaphor for a city in transition in a society that is challenged by dialectics such as tradition vs. modernity, ideology vs. secularism, and family values vs. individuality.

The interior room of the car becomes a "place" beyond a mere cinematic location. Filming inside the car is an intentional choice of the filmmaker. The choice creates a rare public podium to confront issues of gender, status, and difference. The filmmaker takes a strong stance by revealing the container of a car as the film's only social space. Streets are neutral backdrops for the dialogues inside the car. How the car windows frame the urban landscapes shows the filmmaker's lack of interest in the city's authorized public spaces and their uselessness as places for community interaction. Kiarostami presents the car as a symbolic space, a "third place" in Oldenburg's term (1989, p. 58). The car also becomes what Harvey calls a "relative permanence," an entity "occurring within and transformative of the construction of space-time (1996, p. 294)." All

social interactions happen in this protected, mobile third place, which becomes a comfortable and legitimate tribune for democratic discourse and criticism.



**Figure 1.12**

The film is a realist docudrama. It narrates ten, interrelated stories taking place inside a car passing through the city. It depicts the social relations of the main female character with other passengers. The entire scenario is filmed from only two camera angles, on the driver's and the passenger's side (Courtesy of the filmmaker).

In addition to private cars, the interior spaces of public taxis, shared by four to five passengers, are a common venue for social discourse and political debate. As Khosravi (2008) asserts, it is also a place where youths can take a romantic ride through the normally sex-segregated public spaces (p. 146). Anonymous individuals from various social backgrounds can meet and exchange views in a continual parade of random encounters:

In Tehran there is even a joke about it: Two men standing by a newsstand are looking through the newspapers. One of them says to the other, "There's nothing to read about. Let's take a taxi and get some news." Many taxi-drivers put a sticker on the dashboard that says "political discussion is forbidden" (*bahs-e siyasi mamnou*) (p. 147).

People of Tehran look for alternative social spaces because the city's authorized public spaces are often controlled by the state. Tehranis find ways to resist these limitations by appropriating ad hoc spaces for their public use. Leftover landscape patches on the Alborz ridges are among the reclaimed sites. Although an important factor, view is not the only attraction. Privacy, resiliency, remoteness, and affordability welcome many social types. They take their cars and park only a foot away from these panoramas. Private cars that can easily access the sites provide protean spatial containers that are convenient and portable and make places while inhabited. Mere preservation or restoration approaches are not the solution to revitalize Tehran's landscape patches. Those design interventions are more successful that improvise architecture and create possibilities that integrate the knowledge and performance of bodies in protean spaces such as a car or flexible and moveable containers.



**Figure 1.13**

Kouhsar Panorama on the Kan river-valley: people, all ages and backgrounds, drive up steep hills to take over the spaces with their cars (Source: author).

## **Theorization: Creating Performative Spaces**

Landscapes and anthrosapes do not merge to coexist in a harmony in Tehran. This is a disconnect between the citizens and city's, built and natural, landscape, and now hidden aspects of its historic man-made landscape of qanats. In large part this results from using urban space as an income generator leaving few, undeveloped, residual spaces for public use. Yet Tehran offers a mix of ecological possibilities such as mountainous patches, river-valleys corridors, and qanats. These are opportunistic platforms that can nurture protean spaces. My concluding remarks offer the kinds of design interventions that can turn the city's leftover spaces into "places" of social interactions. The ideas stem from Tehran's natural and man-made ecologies coupled with the city's ecology of human bodies. The aim is to nest the ideas at various scales to merge the city with its nature in a collaged fashion and connect its human and natural geographies by considering processes over time. Two themes are presented here on the design of future public spaces for Tehran: how to accommodate bodies in space when they are in performance, permanence, or pause, and how to reveal their presence when they are in motion within reluctant landscapes of roads.

Design interventions in Tehran's urban spaces must create a kind of "performative urbanism" where tactile knowledge of human body and its performance in space is integrated and connected with large-scale practices of landscape urbanism. The city's residual landscapes including patches on Alborz mountain ridges, corridors of river-valleys, and matrices of abandoned qanats

provide performative platforms. In his essay in *The Landscape Urbanism Reader* (2007), James Corner sketched out four provisional themes on the practice of landscape urbanism: ecological and urban processes over time, the staging of horizontal surfaces, the operational or working method, and the imaginary (pp. 22-33). Informed by these themes, design interventions in Tehran's urban spaces must shape imaginative projects within the residual landscape possibilities where ground planes and horizontal surfaces act as fields of action. These planes can also be understood as urban infrastructures or surfaces that provide continuity, for instance, connecting roofs and grounds and architecture and landscape.

Urban interventions at Tehran's roof patches should be small-scale public projects that bring temporarily shelter bodies. Small-scale creative projects anticipate landscape change, open-endedness, and negotiation over time. Such interventions temporarily generate material and immaterial enclosure concepts to nurture bodies in time and space. Some ideas include non-volumetric projects, earthwork and surface design, mobile enclosures and canopies, interactive art installations, sculptures, and furniture types that are portable and retractable. Embracing and sheltering bodies will shift the space towards further stability and permanence, and therefore, to a stronger feel for place. Design ideas for the edges on Tehran's roofs make the city's urban landscape unique. They offer Tehran an identifiable identity with new qualities where bodies in performance reconcile the city with its nature. These public spaces would not be simply for

recreation, but containers of memory and desire, and possible vessels for political change through practices of place construction.

The human representation, hence, the range of human experience is absent in Tehran's landscape of highways and roads. Man-made matrices of Tehran highways cut the city's fabric into pieces and their high vehicular speed detaches human presence mostly along the edges. Tehran's highways are often seen only as conduits of speeding traffic, air and noise pollution. Expressway construction disturbs the city's residual landscapes—invading the river-valley corridors and intersecting with and blocking qanat wells. Public grounds surrounding highways are often designed as green open fields not meant for human activity. Recently added to these high-maintenance and unsustainable grassy verges, are kitsch mural paintings and inaccessible water fountains. Open green fields alongside highways are treated as isolated islands that are disconnected from neighborhoods and the rest of the city. Pedestrian access is often denied or only possible by means of narrow and utilitarian pedestrian bridges. Future public spaces above and around highways would do well to focus on human scale and access.

Design suggestions include making horizontal and hovering surfaces that edging and above the highways. The surfaces provide plane continuity, connect river-valley corridors, and reveal or suggest the hidden qanats. Reclaiming the highway-scapes with horizontal surfaces and constructed grounds occupied with human activities embodies innovative ideas towards the exposition of bodies within these landscapes of flow. Visibility of human use on suspended platforms

and pedestrian passages, promenades hovering beneath or atop the roads, and urban agricultural lands coupled with creative uses of the natural elements of river-valleys and qanats can link the city's man-made and natural.

To preserve, manage, and reuse the city's landscape elements, they should be reintegrated into the operating mesh of the city. Tehran needs urban design ideas that acknowledge social limitations and Tehranis' needs and desires. They should also consider how man-made structures and roads could be integrated into the ecological fabric of the city. Design ideas should celebrate the absence of formal design in the leftover Tehran roof patches and should reclaim and recreate them with minimal interventions as places for ad hoc interactions and collective memory. Highways take over, overlap with, or run parallel to the river-valleys. Qanats come into view randomly under the roads, neighborhood streets, and allies. Rather than separators, vehicular passageways can act as linkages between disjointed river-valleys, leftover patches, and obsolete qanats. Horizontal surfaces within the highway-scapes create access points to and from neighborhoods and allow the human flows to become visible on the contours and edges of the highways.

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## **Chapter II**

### **Street: Embodying the Grey Zone**

## **On the Grey Zone: New Nodes, Corridors, and Linkages**

Streets and sidewalks are not mere functional conduits, nor simply a backdrop for pedestrian and vehicular flows. Often taken for granted by urban designers, I maintain that sidewalks are opportunistic social spaces. In Tehran they have become ad hoc venues for gathering, performance, and chance encounters. Their physical ground makes up an active, in-between territory that I call “grey zone”—the middle ground between the public domain of vehicular transportation and the private domain of buildings.

The grey zone is the uncanny locus of social relations and political processes. It is a contested realm where notions of public and private, planned and spontaneous, and resistance and control compete. This chapter looks at the improvised spatial opportunities found in the city’s sidewalks. It traces geographies of possible nodes and corridors within Tehran’s streets to theorize low-stake sidewalk interventions that would create vivid, generative places for ad hoc occurrences. The theorization section applies themes, techniques, and effects from the arts, cinema, and music that could inform the design of grey zones.

Design innovation can improve and restructure Tehran sidewalks if it recognizes the sidewalks’ capacities to generate and embrace creative, unplanned activities. I argue that embedding narrative spaces can turn sidewalks into “temporary habitations” and transcendental social places beyond clichéd urban experiences. Sidewalks become not just passageways, but places that encourage discovery and pleasure. They are the places of walking, drifting,

and appropriation. No matter how thoroughly planned a city is, people invent its everyday life and grant the city most of its energy and meanings (De Certeau, 1984). As a result of people's inventions, sidewalks find subjective meanings, "pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded like stories held in reserve (p. 108)."

To turn grey zones into richly embed narrative spaces, one could take a cue from cinematic techniques. Cinematic sidewalks have a horizontal continuity that is analogous to film storyline or narrative, and a vertical randomness that resembles the film sequences, shots, and cuts. At intervals, sequences of improvised occurrences cut the predictability of sidewalk movement in favor of new situations. Cinematic sidewalks are about multiplicity and non-linearity. Sounds, sights, and smells converge. Each step offers new opportunities as the linear space is intersected, disrupted, and overlaid with events and encounters. The cuts and framing shots of this imaginative sidewalk reveal a complex network—the grey zone as rhizome. Why rhizome?

Rhizomes<sup>28</sup> are non-centered and non-hierarchical development patterns, like crab grass with aleatory networks of pathways, or like a rabbit warren (Bogue, 1989). They are the antithesis of a tree root structure, which is "the structural model that has dominated Western thought (p. 107)."<sup>29</sup> Connection and

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<sup>28</sup> Britannica Online Encyclopedia, date accessed: July 31, 2009, retrieved from: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/501483/rhizome>:

In botany, rhizome is defined as an underground plant stem anatomy that grows horizontally from its nodes and is able to produce shoot and root systems of a new plant (Britannica Online Encyclopedia). This quality allows the parent plant to propagate vegetatively (asexually) and also enables a plant to perennate (survive an annual unfavorable season) underground.

<sup>29</sup> In Bogue's (1989) terms:

A rhizome is "an antithesis of a root-tree structure, or 'arborescence', the structural model which has dominated Western thought from Porphyrian trees, to Linnaean taxonomies, to Chomskyan

heterogeneity, multiplicity, asignifying rupture, cartography and decalomania are principles of rhizome theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).<sup>30</sup> On a prospective rhizomatic map of Tehran, streets will have development patterns not associated with any “logic of completion,” but with “dynamics of transition” (Iovino & Produzie, ?). Sidewalks will be “relative permanences” that occur in and transform space-time relations (Harvey, 1996, p. 294). They will generate new situations that foster multiple improvised occurrences and drifting practices.

*Dérive*, or drifting, is an exploratory mode of observing and experiencing the city that differs from how a passive citizen or a detached flâneur experience it. Guy Ernest Debord, a founder of the “Situationist International” movement (1957-1972), had criticized the utilitarianism of modern urbanism for being static and disconnected to human experience. The Situationist movement imagined an urbanism that prepares the city and its citizens for the emergence of new situations that reflect the spirit of discovery and pleasure. Debord (1958) theorized the practice of *dérive*, “a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances” that involves “playful-constructive behavior and awareness of

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sentence diagrams. Arborescences are hierarchical, stratified totalities which impose limited and regulated connections between their components. Rhizomes, by contrast, are non-hierarchical, horizontal multiplicities which cannot be subsumed within a unified structure, whose components form random, unregulated networks in which any element may be connected with any other element (p. 107).”

<sup>30</sup> Deleuze and Guattari (1987) rendered the rhizome principles:

- 1 and 2. Principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order....
3. Principle of multiplicity: it is only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive, “multiplicity,” that it ceases to have any relation to the One as subject or object, natural or spiritual reality, image and world....
4. Principle of asignifying rupture: against the oversignifying breaks separating structures or cutting across a single structure. A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines.
- 5 and 6. Principle of cartography and decalomania: a rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model. It is a stranger to any idea of genetic axis or deep structure.

psychogeographical effects.”<sup>31</sup> Drifting moments will renew the citizens’ sense of place and improve their connection with the city. Sidewalks that encourage drifting will become the lively public places they historically were.

### **Social Life of Tehran Streets**

It took Tehran six centuries to develop from a small, isolated village into the capital of Persia. That designation was conferred on the city in 1785 by Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar (Figure 2.1), but it was under his successor, Nasser Al-Din Qajar,<sup>32</sup> that significant urban expansion occurred. Nasser-al-Din with the help of his reformist vizier, Amir Kabir brought down old the Safavi walls and fortified the now sprawling city with new walls, gates, and moats. Towards the end of Qajar rule, Tehran grew rapidly, yet, still inside the walls put up by Nasser-Al-Din (Figure 2.2).

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<sup>31</sup> Ernest-Debord (1955) defined psychogeography: “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals.”

<sup>32</sup> Nasser-Al-Din Shah’s near fifty years in power is known as the Nasserite Era (*ahd-e-naseri*). Nasserite’s new city fortification method was inspired by the Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban’s engineering to fortify Paris. The city that previously had six gates became a twelve-gated octagon, and each gate was decorated with Qajar-style glazing tiles.



**Figure 2.1**

Tehran is shown in 1826, prior to major Nasseri transformation. This abstract map is drawn by Russian military officer Naskov.<sup>33</sup> Gardens and palaces are located outside the ancient Safavi walls on the north and are used by noblemen, elites, and European visitors.

Nasseri Tehran expanded beyond its ancient citadel, but was still a fortress within fortress: self-contained, centripetal, and cloistered. The city also kept its introverted, hierarchical structure and cell-like organization that separated and connected private and public spaces. The smaller fortress enclosed the government square (maydan), known as the Arg, the Golestan palace, religious buildings, and gardens. The market (bazaar) had a serpentine structure south

<sup>33</sup> Map source: Mehryar, M. (?), *Visual Documentations of Iranian Cities*, Shayid Beheshti University, p. 147.

outside this fortress surrounded by the four districts (mahallehs) of Bazaar, Oudlajan, Sangelaj, and Chal-e-Maydan. At the city's finest grain, the introverted courtyard houses, connected to social microcosms of district centers (markaz-e-mahalleh), and, then, joined social macrocosms of the Arg and bazaar. Major streets branched out from the Arg, joining minor pathways and the cul-de-sac of private houses in a pattern similar to the human brain and body. Overall, the city was multi-layered with many rhizomatic nodes.



**Figure 2.2**

The first accurate and official city map drew by Austrian August Kerziz in 1858, prior to Nasserī era developments (1869-1874). The map was used as the basis for the 1891 map drawn by Abdul Ghaffar after Nasserī interventions.



**Figure 2.3**

Tehran's most elaborate 19<sup>th</sup>-century map shows the Nasser era developments. This map is as significant as the Nolli map of Rome. It is the best record on Tehran's expansions before Pahlavi rule. Abdul Ghaffar Najm-ol-Molk, a math professor at the Dar-al-Fonun school, prepared it in 1891 with the help of a team headed by French General Bohler (Image Source: Bahrambeygui, 1977, p. 24). The map renders the four major Qajar city elements of walls and twelve gates, Royal Arg, religious structures, and districts. It differs from the Nolli map in not drawing distinction between private and public buildings (Marefat, 1988, p. 15-32).

Nasser-al-Din's urban projects, undertaken between 1869 and 1874, also transformed Tehran's ancient pathways. In the eighteenth century these were

unpaved passages with a single lane shared by people, animals, and horse drawn wagons. Like contemporaneous European urban reconfigurations (one immediately thinks of Haussmann's Paris which inspired it), the Nasserian urban reformation of Tehran boasted grand new avenues with broad sidewalks and many amenities—perhaps the most famous of which is Bab-e-Homayoun.

Bab-e-Homayoun, also known as Almasieh Street, was laid out as a majestic esplanade within the Royal Arg that was widened and paved in 1871. The street was connected to the Almasieh Palace on north. The masonry facade of the palace was ornamented with brilliant glazed tiles and floral designs surrounding the state and royal emblem, the Lion-and-Sun (Bani Masud, 2012, pp. 97-98). Storefronts, sidewalks, tree lines, oil lamp poles, and bollards flanked the street. The street's aesthetic was eclectic. Festooned with circular arches and latticed arcades, it combined Iranian and European features. It was a grand processional route used by kings and nobles, but ordinary Tehranis also flocked there in summers to enjoy its shops and gracious promenade (Shahbazi, 1988, pp. 284-285). Bab-e-Homayoun, which has kept some of its historic qualities, is used today as the major connection to Tehran's bazaar. Reza Shah's urban renewal in the 1930s eliminated Tehran Arg's walls and gates, but left Bab-e-Homayoun in place. In the past decade, the City has restored the street, always meant for pedestrians, with new cobblestone pavers and no-fare horse-drawn vehicles

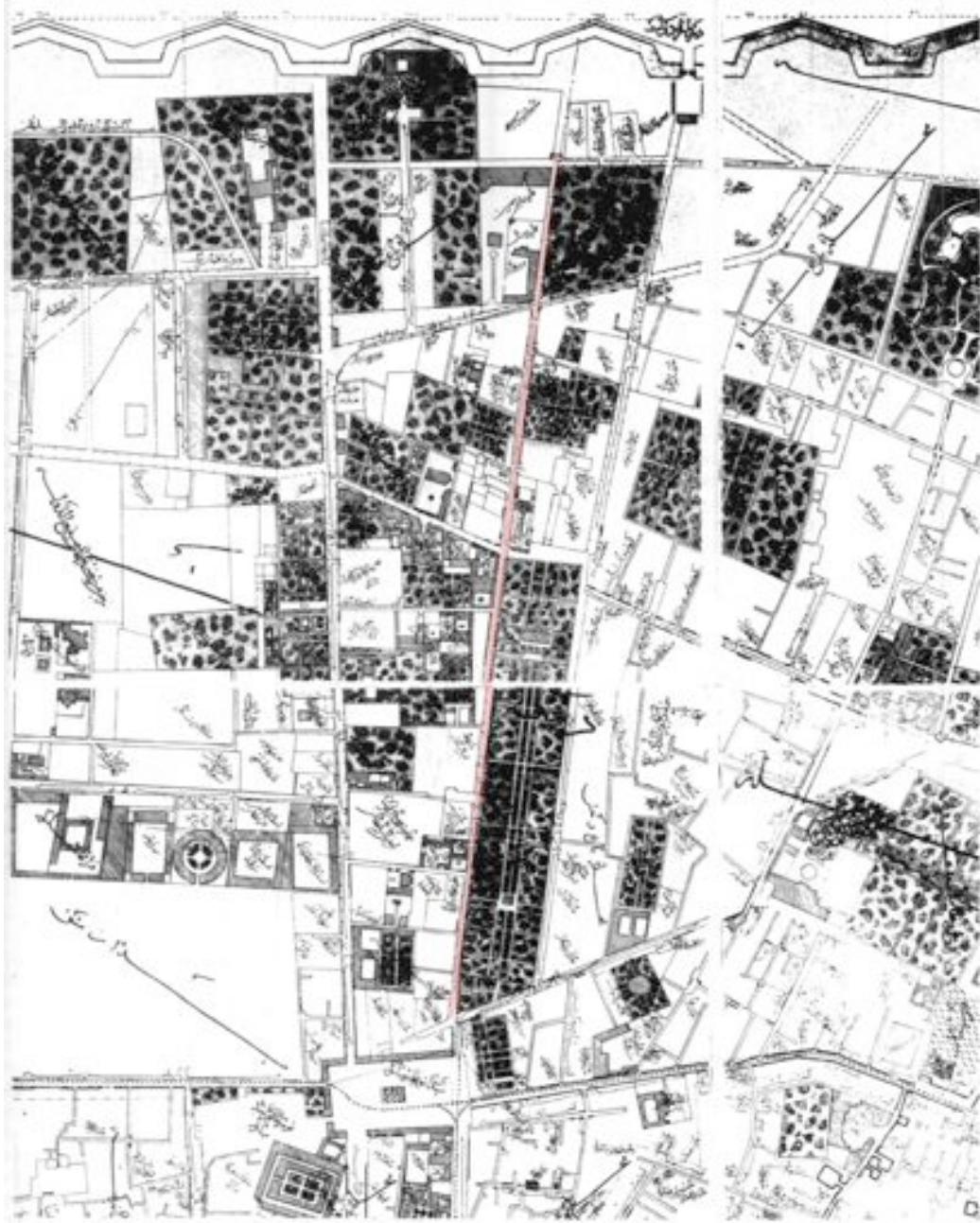




**Figure 2.5**

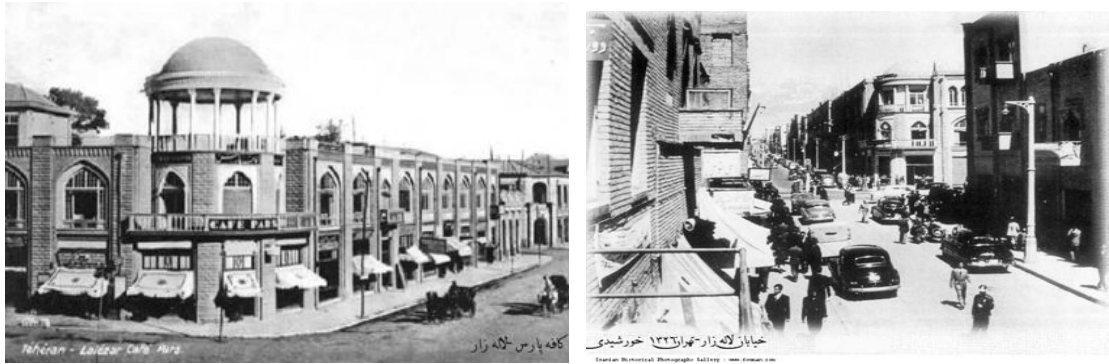
Top right: Mohamood Khan Malek-osh-shoara depicted Bab-e-Homayoun Street in his 19<sup>th</sup> century painting. Almasieh Palace is the focal point (Image source: *Herfeh: Honarmand* magazine, 13, 2006).  
 Bottom right: A coffeehouse on Bab-e-Homayoun (Image source: Cresson, 1908).

Lalehzar was Tehran's first modern street. In Nasser al-Din's reign, it was a pleasant avenue for strolling. "Lalehzar" means a place with abundant groves of wild tulips, named after the garden district the street replaced at the Nasser era. The former gardens had belonged to Qajar noblemen and were used for their recreation and entertainment. Nasser Al-Din, following two visits to the Champs-Élysées, turned the garden district into a street. Indeed, Tehran's modern history is tied to the birth and boom of Lalehzar in the first half of the 20th century, when the street became a meeting place for artists and intellectuals and leisure pursuits. Lalehzar cafés were popular with intellectuals. The first Iranian silent films were produced in the filmmaking studios located on Lalehzar and screened in its cinemas. Under Reza Pahlavi (1920-1941), the sidewalks there were filled with nightclubs, restaurants, and tourists.



**Figure 2.6**

The Lalehzar garden district can be recognized on Abdul Ghaffar's 1891 map (the current Lalehzar Street is marked in red; for larger context, see Figure 2.3).



**Figure 2.7**

Top right: Pars Café on the New Lalehzar (source: Iranian Historical Photographs Gallery, Iran's National Library's Document Center).

Middle right: Lalehzar in 1947 (source: Iranian Historical Photographs Gallery).

Bottom: The vibe of Lalehzar in the 1940s (Source: [www. IRANOSTALGIA.com](http://www.IRANOSTALGIA.com)).

Significant urban structural changes under Reza Pahlavi recreated social meanings of Tehran sidewalks. The Shah's 1930s urban renewal marked the second, rapid, and irreversible transformation of Tehran's urban fabric. The

Nasseri fortifications were removed, allowing the expansion of urban streets on a new city grid. Unlike the former enclosed urban plan, the new one was an open-ended matrix with standardized streets and wide boulevards (Madanipour, 1998). The renewal project had a straightforward agenda: to give Tehran national and international significance. It emphasized the street as the locus and focus of majestic power. The Street Widening Act passed in 1933 legitimized wide avenues and large roundabouts (often adorned with commemorative statues). New thoroughfares cut through an organic city fabric provided easy access, not only for everyday use, but also for displays of arms and troops that projected modern military power. Streets, on the new grid, became geometrical impositions bordered by impressive buildings and designed for pedestrians and cars (Figure 2.8).

Two wide streets, Shahreza (now Enghelab), and Pahlavi (now Valiasr), became the city's major thoroughfares close to its northern and western limits. Streets began including modern infrastructure, civic spaces, institutional and educational buildings, and new residential types that, compared to courtyard houses, had a rather blurred public-private division. The street, in addition to increasingly becoming the main stage for political power (also true under Nasser-al-Din), had to also accommodate more cars. So, the sidewalks were renewed as major thoroughfares with more social gathering opportunities.



**Figure 2.8**

Left: Tehran streets pattern in the 1940s, open-ended matrix bordered by Pahlavi on the west and Shahreza on the north (Drawing Courtesy of Mazumdar, 2000, p. 10).  
 Right: Street extension pattern until the 1970s (Drawing Courtesy of Madanipour, 1998, p. 41).

Other political messages were also read in Tehran's sidewalks where Reza Shah dictated rules on the habits and ways of social bodies. New dress codes were put in place to standardize apparel for men and women. The Dress Unification codes were aimed at removing regional and tribal attire from public places. The goal was to replace the artifacts of a heterogeneous culture with an image that expressed a homogeneous national unity (Balasescu, 2007, p. 128). As the first target for clothing reform between 1926 in 1928, men were forced to wear Pahlavi hats and western-style clothes. Next, in 1935, women were forced to remove the head coverings that, among conservative women, suggested

modesty.

Although for more progressive women the head covering removal was emancipation, for the more traditional and pious women and their related men, becoming unveiled in public was intolerable. Hence, many traditional women did not enter the public realm and had no access to public education. Wide gaps formed between the men and the women, as well as between the newly emancipated, well off and middleclass, and the homebound, poor working-class, women. Tehran, by the time, reflected the social division of the city north for the wealthier and well educated and the city south for the lower, working classes. Progressive men and women went out in public to socialize, which made north Tehran streets more popular, hence, well kept with appeal. South Tehran people rarely ventured outdoors to use the sidewalks as public space, which made the streets there less popular, hence, less maintained and physically appealing.





**Figure 2.9**

Top: Tehran's actual growth by the 1970s (Courtesy of Mandala Consultants, Pardisan report, 1975, p. 10).

Bottom: City expansion envisioned in Gruen's plan laid a systemic network of roads that ignored the city's actual growth pattern.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi commissioned several urban renewal and planning projects. Those considered Tehran at a macro-scale, but perhaps more important was what occurred at the micro-scale—in the grey zone. For it is here that new avant-garde arts programs transformed the cultural landscape of Tehran streets. Galleries, offering alternative and provocative artwork, proliferated in the 1960s.<sup>34</sup> These were sites of both art exhibition and lively social discourse. Contemporary artists<sup>15</sup> went beyond traditional vocabularies and experimented with a broader range of creative production. The Tehran Biennial art exhibition, which began in 1958 and

<sup>34</sup> *Galerie Esthétique* was probably the earliest Tehran art gallery established in 1954 by the vanguard modernist painter Marcos Grigorian who was educated in Italy. Four years later, under the Ministry of Culture's sponsorship, Grigorian became a steering committee member at Tehran Art Biennale (1958-1966). Iran's modern arts movement has roots in the 1940s.

<sup>15</sup> Before that time, when European artists explored cubism, surrealism, and a host of other avant-garde movements, in Iran realist 'academic painting' was the most accepted style. Kamal al-Mulk (1852-1940) was the first artist who took broke away from this style. Iran's modern arts prospered from the 1950s to the 1960s. On Iran's modern art movement see: Emami (1986); Ekhtiar & Sardar (2004); & Mahdavi (2010).

continued until 1966,<sup>16</sup> was a noteworthy program that was largely supported by the Queen Farah.<sup>17</sup> Through new modes of visual/artistic production and distribution, the Shah's enlivened the city's streets and ushered in a period of artistic experimentation that engaged an increasingly sophisticated and westernized urban population.



**Figure 2.10**

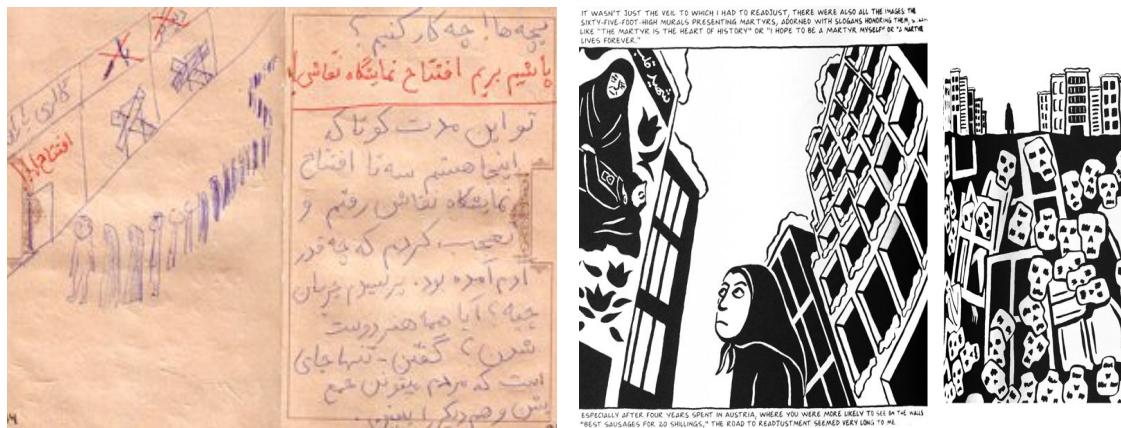
The famous artist, Hannibal Alkhas and Audrey, his American ex-wife, are portrayed in the modest setting of the Gilgamesh Art Gallery in Tehran in 1962. This gallery was one modern Tehran's first art venues. Seen here is the artist's

<sup>16</sup> Artists educated overseas ran the Biennials. Among the most prominent were Parviz Tanavoli and Parvaneh Etemadi. Tanavoli (born 1937) is an avant garde modernist sculptor and founder of Saqqakhana School. In the 1960s, he established the art club of *Rast* that was a gathering place for artists, architects, musicians, and writers. His works integrates figurative forms of the Persian word "*heech* (nothing)." This is a symbol rooted in the mystic poetry of Molana (known as Rumi), signifying God's creation of everything out of "nothing." The artist carves out subjects such as locks, keys, knobs, grillwork, prayers, talismanic messages, tribal rugs, and gravestones. Parvaneh Etemadi (born 1947) was an important player in the alternative discourses of the 1960s. Her creative works convey an individualized rebelliousness and originality.

<sup>17</sup> Farah Diba, who had studied architecture at Sorbonne and was interested in the arts, founded cultural establishments to preserve and advance art and literature, and disseminate them into concurrent international discourses. The Iranian Culture Foundation (1964), Department General of Fine Arts (later, the Ministry of Arts and Culture), and Shiraz International Art Festivals (1967-1977) were formed under her supervision. These institutions were either renamed or became controversial and discontinued after the revolution.

realist exhibit; the room and its furniture represent a generic Tehran apartment in the 1960s. In this confined space even the windows are appropriated for art display (Image courtesy of Hannibal Alkhas).

All of this, of course changed after the 1979 revolution. Initially the street became the paradoxical site of a modern, urban Tehran espousing ancient proscriptions. In the new Islamic Republic, streets became the contested arenas of orthodoxy versus modernity. During the 1980s, a “Cultural Revolution” targeted anything that was considered infected by the culture of the previous regime. The city came under the direct control of revolutionary disciples. Commanded by Khomeini, they forced new conventions on public and private domains. Universities were shut down to purify higher education. Every street corner was cleaned up; discos, cabarets, bars, and liquor stores were closed down and boarded up. Cinemas were closed. Private homes were raided and emptied of anything that was considered obscene: politically-suspect books, movies, pictures of the royal family and aristocrats, even playing cards, backgammon, and chess boards. The sale and consumption of alcohol was banned in public and private. Post-revolution streets became heavily politicized. Propagandistic murals, proclaiming the state’s new ideology, appeared on Tehran’s streets. The murals’ locations, huge scale, and high visibility were striking. They often decorated the unfinished side and rear elevations of taller buildings. As Grigor (2002) asserts, murals became places where everyday life, publicity, and artistic expression crossed paths.



**Figure 2.11**

Left: In 2008, the queue at a Tehran art gallery surprised Buna who had returned to fatherland after 25 years. First, he thought that Tehranis at once became art lovers, but later realized that the gallery is amongst the few interesting social spaces to meet and exchange ideas (image courtesy of Buna Alkhas, 2012).<sup>18</sup> Right: After four year in Vienna, Satrapi's first contact with the city was striking. She faced large propoganda murals that were portraying scenes of conflict, martyrdom, and war (Courtesy of Marjan Satrapi, 2007).

After the heavily political themes of the 1980s and 1990s, twenty-first century murals reflect changing times. The Tehran Beautification Organization (partially recalling Lady Bird Johnson's endeavors in both name and action) has recommended that street and highway verges be adorned with non-propagandistic themes including: nature, rural landscapes, and literary heroes. Despite a few meticulously designed murals with meanings based on historical and literary themes, most are little more than artless kitsch. Such attempts at "beautification" remain superficial.

<sup>18</sup> The Persian text translation of the image (pp. 34-35):

"Hey, Guys, What can we do? Let's go to the art exhibit opening!

In the short time I've been here [in Iran], I've gone to three painting exhibition openings and I was surprised to see so many people coming there. I asked what was going on? Have all Iranians become art lovers at once? They responded that [art galleries] are the only place where we can meet and see each other." [In the sketch above, the queue of people leads to Baran Art Gallery for an exhibition opening ceremony. The two adjacent spaces are a boarded up bar and a disco].

## **Tehran Street Possibilities**

As we've seen, for at least the last four centuries Tehran's streets and their adjacent sidewalks have been the site of top down projections of political power and bottom up expressions of economic, social, and cultural embodiment. They are also the locus of popular resistance to (and reaffirmation of) state control. Tehran's streets today are also the site of traffic congestion, air and noise pollution. The city's sidewalks lack accessibility standards and make mobility difficult for many citizens. Existing public spaces such as parks and boostans, the neighborhood green spaces, are hostile and inadequate. They offer few activities and virtual none that would attract Tehran's urbane and eclectic protean selves (Lifton, 1993). Yet, people still find ways to meet in public and semi-public places and commonplace alternatives for social interaction is the sidewalk. Designers can take their cue from how Tehranis embody ad hoc sidewalk spaces. Examples include place nodes with porous and nested qualities on street edges, such as malls and café-galleries, and corridors, such as the old Tehran shopping streets. Intervention strategies at these thresholds anticipate impromptu possibilities of social encounter. New linkages reconnect the nodes and corridors and reset Tehran sidewalks on a new rhizomatic map.

### **Porous Spaces**

In Tehran, semi-public spaces of commodity and consumption are amongst the nodes that open streets to other possibilities. Balasescue (2007) identified

such spaces as: private cars, taxis, cafes, eateries, malls, and theatres, into the category of the spaces with relatively decreased surveillance and “other public spaces.” These, due to private ownership, are not under absolute control (pp. 161-164), not as closely watched by the “morals” police. Semi-public spaces are safer and more desirable social milieus, compared to the fully public parks, streets, and public transit zones. Their architectural enclosures work in favor of protecting bodies in space. They conform to in-between properties and permeable boundaries, simultaneously belonging to two, often contradictory, realms.

Tehran shopping mall nodes are spread throughout the city. The mall, introduced in the late 1960s, is the contemporary equivalent of Tehran’s Grand Bazaar. Western-style indoor shopping streets such as Lalehzar, Mehran and Berlan (Khosravi, 2008, p. 93) were introduced earlier in the 1940s and 1950s. Bab-e-Homayoun is presumably one of the oldest examples of Tehran’s display and commercial corridors (Figure 2.12). Located in Arg Square entered through Sabz-e-Maydan, the bazaar is still an important commercial place. From there, uptown storeowners and businesses often buy items wholesalers located in the bazaar. However, the introduction of the mall has decreased its economical relevance and centrality as a place for human contact. Much of the city’s commerce and social bustle is now happens at prosperous North Tehran malls.



**Figure 2.12**

Lalehzar's dilapidated street houses Iran's main retail corridor for electrical appliances. Entered via Lalehzar, Mehran and Berlan Alleys are bargain shopping districts for clothing, goods, and accessories. They, despite their hectic aesthetics, are rich in narratives and sensory experiences. Bab-e-Homayoun is revitalized into the main pedestrian connection to Tehran's Grand bazaar from the north. The bazaar was once the city's commercial heart and social hub, which today is physically marginalized in the derelict south city section.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century Tehran had a hierarchical and cell-like structure where major and minor roads connected the Royal Arg, bazaar, and the four neighborhoods of Bazaar, Oudlajan, Sangelaj, and Chal-e-Maydan (Figure 2.2). Minor streets connected smaller cells of private houses to clustered units of neighborhoods that were then connected via wider roads to the public realms of the Arg and bazaar. The bazaar was divided into intelligible corridors that were called *rasteh-bazaar*. The bazaar also included mosques,

Public spaces are rare and limited in Tehran, so people find substitutes for them inside shopping malls. The mall is a place of defiance and self-expression in an otherwise restrictive society. This semi-public space allows more choices of human contact, compared to the fully public space of a park or *boostan*. Tehran malls are popular hangouts that are appropriated and contested by non-conformist women and youth. The mall, which is about consumption, becomes their place of deviation from approved norms of behavior. The mall has a fairly relaxed environment where private ownership reduces state control and comparatively easier dress rules allow more cultural diversity. Such relatively relaxed milieus trigger imagination, subjectivity, and defiance. As Shahram Khosravi (2008) notes, the mall is a space of defiance; although not deliberately political, Tehran malls are counter-public spaces of banal politics via users' appropriations and their spatial resistance (p. 145). Tehran malls mark geographies of deviation in the city that are used as alternative public spaces for social actions and ideas. Non-conformist women and youth, who more than other groups struggle over their rights and identity, find the mall to be an emancipatory space. There, they rehearse their individuality and express a cultural and global consciousness of modernity. The mall becomes their space of imagination, a safe transit into *other* imaginary spaces and *other* times.

The preceding paragraphs represented malls as contested spaces inside architectural enclosures with porous characters. However, my point is not arguing for more malls. Rather, it is to encourage designers to compose

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traditional coffeehouses, public baths, and financiers. Each dedicated to a particular product, for example, copper, gold, spices, and carpet.

perimeter buildings as permeable nodes at sidewalk edges. The mall enclosures have ambiguous public-private boundaries that, at thresholds, create in-between spaces, a grey zone. This grey zone generates new experiences that cunningly slide into and join the action on the sidewalk. Large shopper capacity inside the enclosure allows the leaking of commercial grey zone activities where many social classes mingle. For example, different vendors sell items ranging from clothing and accessories to underground music records. Today's Tehran mall has become a special zone for women and youth, catering to these more urbane and non-conformist populations. The mall, as a public macrocosm containing many private microcosms within, makes a hybrid social milieu. The vibe that attracts more shoppers in a rather relaxed zone benefits business owners.



**Figure 2.13**

“Tehran Shopping Malls” is the title of a number of paintings by Saghar Daeeri. Dress choice and body aesthetics are major themes. The artist draws on multifaceted selves in Tehran. Grotesque-looking female bodies show contradictions that are proliferating in the bodies’ struggles for/with modernity and asserting superficial self-expressions in confrontation with the city. Like the malls, coffee shops, cyber spaces, media centers, and bookshops similarly confront issues of modernity and restriction. They all linger on the verge of entering a world that is trying to accept elements of modernity. The mall in the paintings becomes an architectural container that is protecting social bodies. No man is painted in any of the frames. The male presence outside the frames may (or may not) be implied by the different roles played by the women inside the frame. (Paintings courtesy of Saghar Daeeri).

## Nested Spaces

Nested spaces are containers within containers that are also node possibilities, combinatory spaces that nest one function into another. Nested spaces that use innovative space combinations enhance sidewalk possibilities for impromptu social encounters. Modern art venues have become alternative public spaces. In the 1960s, Tehran art galleries boomed as single-function space types for artistic and avant garde exhibitions. These private establishments survived the post-1979 revolutionary changes and have remained not just places for artistic discourse, but also safe places to see and be seen. Today many galleries have merged into other, mostly commercial, spaces such as the coffee houses. These café-galleries have become unconventional art venues in contemporary Tehran where both the avant garde artists and ordinary citizens mingle.

Café-galleries are relatively successful as nested spaces. They are multifunctional, combining the public place of a coffee shop with the private institution of an art gallery. The earliest café-galleries, shaped as new *containers* within old *containers*, were located inside a few surviving garden-mansions. These properties had formerly belonged to Pahlavi and Qajar aristocrats and after the revolution they were confiscated by the government. For about two decades, they were abandoned or appropriated for government use. During the presidency of Mohamad Khatami (1997-2005), acknowledged as a period of reform and dialogue between conservative and progressive factions, renewed attention was paid to the city and its public cultural institutions. Tehran

Municipality's Art and Cultural Organization<sup>20</sup> piloted a handful of large-scale cultural projects including the adaptive reuse and repurposing of historic gardens. Eminent architects like Kamran Safamanesh were brought onboard to convert some of the remaining garden-mansions and their surrounding open space into places for art and culture.

It was during the 1990s that a group of avant-garde artists recognized the potential for new mixed-use café-galleries. During my ethnographic studies inside Tehran, I had the chance of an interview with one of their founders. He mentioned how café-galleries were formed as means to foster a new, urbane Iranian café-society. The spaces, as he believed, have not quite fulfilled that role, as most simply became commercial spaces for popular culture, but such integrative spaces did have an impact. They provided alternative artistic venues and proved more popular with the general public than traditional art galleries. With their intentional spatial ambiguity and placement inside commercial spaces located within rehabilitated historic sites they invited a more diverse clientele. Being containers within containers gives Tehran's café-galleries a rhizomatic quality: they are multi-layered, non-hierarchical spaces with multiple real and imaginary entry and exit points that encourage exploratory drifting and new encounters.

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<sup>20</sup> *sazman e farhangi va honary shahrdari tehran*

## Layered Corridors: The Case for Revitalizing Lalehzar Street

Tehran streets offer possibilities, even or perhaps especially, in their ruins as places of urban revitalization and reclamation. The old downtown's corridors, such as Lalehzar, Marvi, Mehran, Berlan, Pol-e-Choobi, Hassan-Abad, and Naserkhosro streets, can serve new, autonomous communities. This is especially the case for Lalehzar Street. As earlier noted, Tehran's modern history is tied to the birth and boom of Lalehzar in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The street, once a symbol of modernism is now a derelict zone in the congested downtown. Filled with abandoned and crumbling buildings, Lalehzar today is Iran's main retail corridor for electrical appliances, a far cry from what was once considered Tehran's Champs Élysées. Gone are the historic gardens that graced Nasser al-Din's thoroughfare, but Lalehzar still bears traces of its former glory in its more than fifteen vacant and boarded up theatres and its ornate early twentieth century architecture. Not all buildings on Lalehzar have historic architectural significance, but even the minor works constitute an urban social memory. It is an altogether appropriate setting for the rebirth of Tehran's art communities. Lalehzar is a place of nostalgic vibes, the "terrain vague (Solà-Morales, 1996)"<sup>21</sup> of Tehran's neglected theatres that are amongst Tehran's "heterotopias (Foucault, 1967)"<sup>22</sup> lingering on urban cultures that have reversed post revolution.

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<sup>21</sup> Coined by Ignasi de Solà-Morales, *terrain vague* is associated with forms of absence in contemporary metropolis such as the city's abandoned, obsolete or unproductive spaces and buildings. He argues for the reincorporation of those places and their transformation into productive spaces.

<sup>22</sup> Michel Foucault described *heterotopias* as places and spaces that function in non-hegemonic conditions or the spaces of *otherness*. Theater room is the third category of heterotopias, a genuine space holding and juxtaposing many imaginary spaces within it.



**Figure 2.14**

Some noticeable theatre ruins on Lalehzar, amid the electrical shops, from top left: Cinema Iran, Cristal, Tehran, Laleh, and Roodaki (photos by author).

Total restoration and preservation of derelict streets is unrealistic, but creative reclamation approaches should be adopted where possible. Lalehzar Street would be an excellent place to apply such approaches. Barcelona offers a relevant precedent in its treatment of La Rambla. There, a large corridor was turned into a pedestrian thoroughfare bounded by theaters and museums that create a lively cultural district. Similarly, Lalehzar's vacant theatres, along with

the edging buildings, are architectural containers with adaptive reuse potential. As Tehran's "Ramble" the street could be a pedestrian zone for the culture and art. The corridor could house independent film studios and the live-work places for the artists and musicians. In others words a lively, 24/7 space for residents and visitors. In recent years, Tehran Municipality has sponsored revitalization schemes that recreated the street as a pedestrian zone. But the proposals are formalistic, mere "face-lifts" without regard to either the street's history or true potential (Figure 2.14).



**Figure 2.15**

The district 12 of Tehran Municipality, in collaboration with Tehran University's research center, has prepared a façade revitalization report. The plan has envisioned Lalehzar as another banal, mixed-used "Main Street" of trendy shops, offices and residences. Although a detailed existing conditions study was conducted, the final vision only explains the corridor's material face without rigorous programmatic solutions to revive the social life of the street (Courtesy of Tehran University).

## Theorization: Sidewalk Cadenza

I posit that sidewalks can be fruitfully compared to film. In both cases there is a linear strip—film, pavement—extended both in time and space. What’s interesting to the director is how the film’s narrative or storyline may be interrupted by cuts, shots, and framing devices. Likewise the sidewalk designer may interrupt the pedestrian “actors” with nodes, nested spaces, and folded edges. In both cases, the interruptions enhance the narrative possibilities. Rather than experiencing the sidewalk as simply a conduit to get from point A to point B, the filmic walkway has many junctures or nodes. Each node offers alternative or intersecting narratives—stopping to chat, to listen to street musicians, to observe the scene. Generative place nodes support the sidewalk as narrative space.



**Figure 2.16**

The street musicians, as “actors,” are interrupting the narrative space and movement of other pedestrian “actors” at a Mirdamad Street sidewalk (photos courtesy of Roozbeh Roozbahani, source: [www. Shahrefarang.com](http://www.Shahrefarang.com))

The sidewalk designed with cinematic experience<sup>23</sup> is phenomenological, tactile, and intimate. They synchronize sequences of improvised occurrences

<sup>23</sup> See for cinematic experience definition: Barker, 2009; & Casetti, 2009. Casetti (2009) defined:

and non-clichéd social spaces that produce an imaginative rhizomatic layer on the city map. Cinematic sidewalks are filled with contradictions, at once: predictable and random, harmonious and discordant, continuous and fragmented. They are filled with textures, spatial orientations, attitudes, patterns and vivacity, and intimate spots for artistic performance and self-expression. Cinematic techniques can be used as tropes to describe the kind of design solutions that can generate narrative-rich sidewalks. At intervals, sequences of improvised occurrences cut the predictability of movement in favor of new situations that reflect the spirit of discovery. Drawing on a few cinematic techniques, this chapter theorizes three concepts that promote Tehran sidewalks as narrative space for ad hoc invention: the folded edge, nesting spaces, and autonomous communities.

Folded edges make porous spaces by inserting parts of the building at threshold into the flow of the sidewalk. A folded edge is akin to a film cut that links two shots together and splices two sets of events sequences, one on a perimeter building and the other on the sidewalk. Building facades form perpendicular architectural planes that can pour out, expand, and stretch onto the sidewalk and street. The vertical planes' horizontal extensions interrupt prosaic sidewalk passage, and break the continuity of street corridor to generate vertical randomness. Any tight vestige of sidewalk space is an opportunity for the insertion of folded edge.

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"...moment when images (and sounds) on a screen arrogantly engage our senses and ... trigger a comprehension that concerns, reflexively, what we are viewing and the very fact of viewing it." It is a situation which combines sensory or cognitive 'excess' (there is something that touches or addresses us, outside the taken-for-granted) to the 'recognition' of what we are exposed to and the fact that we are exposed to it (a recognition which makes us redefine ourselves and our surroundings)."

Nested spaces, are earlier discussed, are containers within containers. They make intersecting narratives similar to film within a film, or story within a story, where an actor or character in a narrative also narrates. Nested spaces are multi-layered spaces with multiple entry and exit points. Each container captures a thematic spatial designation that overlaps with another container. Spatial thresholds that appear in the overlapping zones instigate spontaneity and support social space improvisation. Café-galleries have already been mentioned and there are many other potentially fruitful combinations like performance art and music, or poetry readings and writing workshops. Historic sites, such as residual Persian gardens and boostans, can become the larger containers that nest sub-containers.

Autonomous communities can reclaim Tehran's derelict, downtown streets as reconfigured, self-sufficient, live-work-socializing, zones. Each community offers unique narrative experiences comparable to cinematic plots. Their collective positioning, akin to a filmic montage, maps the city's experiences in new ways. Residual architectural containers on the street edge, for example, the abandoned theaters of Lalehzar, offer adaptive reuse possibilities as live-work units. Autonomous communities not only offer residents a place to create and display their work but also focus public attention on a specific site as the locus for such endeavors. An art or music community becomes known and appreciated for its unique character. To encourage the development of such communities, urban designers and planners working with municipal authorities could provide

incentives like subsidized, affordable, and spatially flexible studio and housing spaces.

These sidewalk concepts form generative place nodes on and recreate corridor legibility within the street edges that, on the city scale, establish exceptional linkages. Atypical linkages de-territorialize, and then re-territorialize Tehran sidewalks on a new imaginative rhizomatic map. Unlike an actual city map, this map is not static but dynamic—continuously developing and leading to other developments. This structure has no beginning and no end and prevents urban spaces from finding definitive meaning; unlike a tree structure, any given point on this map is linked to any other point and even disparate elements are linked together (Graafland, 1999). This structure is a labyrinth of metaphoric spaces that cannot be reduced to a number of discrete components. This map does not include units, but dimensions in motion. On the map, the street edge nodes and corridors are not isolated, but cluster and link up. Sidewalks are the main between-cluster connection. Multimodal loops and multiple transportation modes focused on walking people and their constant succession throughout the city make sidewalks more accessible and legible.

Other creative urban dimensions can also be visualized on multiple rhizomatic maps. For example, maps of embodied narratives. These are not the official histories, but social (hi)stories experienced in everyday places. Such rhizomatic maps reconfigure Tehran's urban experience based on dynamics of transition and offer the city other strata with multiple emerging and alternative access

points. On these maps, human perception finds diverse platforms not to be condensed into any systematic Tehran tour or visitor guide.

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## **Chapter III**

### **House: Opportunistic Dwelling**

## **Introduction**

Tehran needs better, safer, and more housing options. Like most major cities, Tehran is facing a housing crisis. Space for new housing is limited, housing is expensive, and new housing is banal and poorly adapted to the needs of diverse residents. The most common type of residence is the generic flat in three-to-five story buildings that offers little more than shelter. This chapter looks at ways of improving Tehran's average housing. Despite their unpromising aspects, I argue that such housing is filled with potential. That potential is found in the residual or unused spaces within and around Tehran's contemporary residential architecture. These are protean spaces capable of offering new and important opportunities for social interaction.

Design professionals often overlook these protean spaces, but they could, instead, focus on them as design opportunities. Compared to those in public/semi-public spaces, domestic residual spaces are more easily reused and repurposed. Designers should take their cue from inventive Tehranis who have turned unused or underused residential spaces into commercial and social opportunities. Such adaptations are especially valuable for younger residents and women. Rampant inflation has put home ownership beyond the reach of most young Tehranis and women's activities outside the home are severely circumscribed. By creatively using these residual spaces, design professionals could invent future residential types that include inexpensive living options, informal places of human contact, and integrative alternatives for in-house work and socializing.

Tehran has inadequate and pricey housing. For half of a century, the city's rapid population growth has increased housing demands and inflated property prices. Property and rent prices rise daily and most people can no longer afford to buy or rent homes. In Tehran, where half the population is under age thirty, expensive housing has especially impacted younger populations for whom home ownership a distant dream. Further, high rents make even modest apartments beyond reach. The average worker's salary has not increased with inflationary rental prices in Tehran. A typical flat apartment worth 500 million Rials in 2006 is today worth more than 7000 million Rials.<sup>35</sup>

Another segment of the population that would benefit from creative use of protean domestic spaces is women. In Iran, women suffer legal and cultural unfairness at many areas. In Tehran many women are well-educated. Yet despite their academic or professional competence, they face significant employment discrimination. A smaller percentage of Iran's working population is women.<sup>36</sup> Based on marital laws, a husband can legally prevent his wife from working outside home. Women working outside the home earn less than men for equivalent work. Public spaces are particularly rare and hostile to women. Sidewalks lack accessibility and safety standards making it particularly difficult for elderly wheelchair-bound women and young mothers with strollers to safely navigate the city. Authorities mandate how women should appear in public with much criticism focusing on their appearance, make-up, and ways of dressing. For non-orthodox women strict dress and behavior codes limit self-expression.

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<sup>35</sup> In January 2006, the value of Dollar was 9,096 Rials and, in March 2014, the value was 30,480 Rials. On Iran's currency exchange rate changes, see: <http://www.farsinet.com/toman/exchange.html>.

<sup>36</sup> See: [http://worldsavvy.org/monitor/index.php?option=com\\_content&id=476&Itemid=894](http://worldsavvy.org/monitor/index.php?option=com_content&id=476&Itemid=894).

## Generic House: Description

Tehran's landscape is filled with banal apartment units inside characterless three-to-five-story buildings that face minor streets.<sup>37</sup> Tightly attached with limited space between adjacent buildings, they sit in densely packed rows on regular land plots. These ordinary buildings have minimal open space either outside or within. A shared staircase and elevator on the front offers residents access to upper floors. There are no spacious lobbies. They have no courtyard, spacious balconies, or any splendid gardens. Unlike some high-end North Tehran apartments featured in architectural magazines,<sup>38</sup> ordinary buildings do not have interesting design elements and distinguishing features. Despite complying with minimum codes, square footage, safety, light and air, access and egress, these buildings have poor tectonics and inferior interior qualities. They are constructed with low, at most, average construction materials, weak joineries, cheap furnaces, and poorly executed final finishing. Generic houses are often duplicates. They adopt similar plan arrangements, space layouts, and inside connections and put on identical unexciting envelopes, distinguishable from their neighbors only by superficial and kitsch decorations. A typical generic residence is described as:

The kitchen is located near the entrance door. It gazes at the living room and/or guestroom through an open counter. The living room is more modest and the guestroom is more ceremonious. The guestroom is the finest and most spacious room of the house. The living room narrows into a tight corridor and lead

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<sup>37</sup> Minor streets: *koocheh* (Persian)

<sup>38</sup> The "Honar e Memari" and "Memar" magazines present housing projects. Number 25 of the Honar e Memari in summer 2012 was solely dedicated to contemporary housing design projects since the Pahlavi era.

to one, two, or at most three small bedrooms sharing one bathroom with a shower. Better bedrooms are those with unblocked walls that can have opening to the outside. Other bedrooms may have exterior faces that are blocked by neighboring properties, a common issue caused by tight building arrangements on the city block. In such cases, a building code requires a minimum of 2-3 square-meter void space called the “reclusive yard.”<sup>39</sup> This is like an inserted box that works as a light-well for air and daylight. A reclusive yard is only accessible from the ground level, and on the upper floors, it only has interior windows. Ordinary apartment houses have no courtyard, but a reclusive yard can be seen as their unusable version of a courtyard: impractically small, dark and dim. Generic masses locate at the north side of land plots, taking up no greater than sixty percent of the entire site. A code dictates the yard<sup>40</sup> feature on either property ends. Having replaced the courtyard feature halfway through the twentieth century, the yard should take up at least forty percent of the entire site.

Building affordable housing has been a state challenge since the 1970s, an issue tackled by every candidate running for presidency.<sup>41</sup> To ease housing needs over the years, the state has devised various housing plans such as the “Institutional Housing”<sup>42</sup> in the 1980s, the Satellite Towns<sup>43</sup> and “Navab Project”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Reclusive yard: *hayat khalvat/pasio* (Persian)

<sup>40</sup> Yard: *hayat* (Persian)

<sup>41</sup> When in May 2013 the Iranian presidential candidates met in a televised debate, they mainly focused on the issues of unemployment, inflation, job creation, and affordable housing. The candidate and current mayor of Tehran Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf declared affordable housing as his top priority. Also in the June 2009's presidential debates, nearly all candidates addressed the country's housing needs.

<sup>42</sup> Institutional Housing: *khanehaye sazmani* (Persian)

<sup>43</sup> Based on Tehran's second master plan, the new Satellite Towns of Pardis, Hashtgerd, Eshtehard, Andisheh, and Parand were planned around the city to house surplus working-class populations. The new towns produced lackluster regions with no identity and sense of place. These towns invite too many commuters to Tehran everyday for work. The result: intensifying the city's traffic congestion, hence, the air pollution problems and increasing uncomfortable densities of all kinds in the capital.

in the 1990s, and a more recent scheme called the “Mehr Housing.”<sup>45</sup> These public-sector solutions produced poor-quality residential buildings that also lacked effective infrastructural bases, architectural character, inside amenities, and public spaces. Concurrent private construction has proved no better. Except for a few photogenic buildings featuring in architectural journals, most private construction is unattractive. Their quality has been negatively affected by building material shortages, high costs, and instabilities coupled with other uncertainties in Tehran’s housing market.

### **Housing Evolution: From Subterranean to Generic**

Tehran houses historically ranged from ancient underground, to courtyard, to frontage houses of which generic houses are a descendant. Pre-11th century Tehran was a village of underground dwellings that protected residents from enemies and bandits. The Islamic cultures popularized courtyard houses that were introverted, secluded, and faceless in the outside. Such houses offered protection against weather conditions and become suitable for the high privacy needs of conservatively-Muslim Iranian families of the time.<sup>46</sup> They were self-

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<sup>44</sup> The Navab Regeneration in central Tehran is another failed project mainly due to low-standard urban design that has torn historic neighborhoods apart and ignorance of land value changes that have left many residences empty in the area (Bahrainy & Aminzadeh, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> Mehr is a recent countrywide mass-housing scheme implemented under the president Ahmadinejad’s administration with public money. The general scheme has failed mainly due to inappropriate site selection, insufficient public space, and distance from the basic infrastructures of electricity, water, and sewage. Most of these large-scale housing projects also faced financing problems halfway through construction process and are not yet resumed until today. The poorly executed, substandard apartment units positioned on wrongly selected sites with insufficient public spaces resulted in intentional neighborhoods with no sense of community.

<sup>46</sup> In Muslim cultures, women should be kept away from the male gaze. “Andaruni-biruni” was a major concept in the house formation. “Andaruni,” meaning the inside, was the privately enclosed and controlled part of the house set apart as female zone. “Biruni,” meaning the outside, was a male-dominated zone where men socialized and outside visitors were received. Andaruni was physically and socially protected

sufficient. The kitchen was small, but the house offered a large underground space for storing non-perishable edibles such as rice, grains, and dried fruits.<sup>47</sup> The courtyard was the central house feature, unifying the built and open spaces and making inner circulations legible. It was the heart and the social hub of the house and a naturally-ventilated light/air gateway. The frontage house replaced the courtyard houses towards the mid-twentieth century (Marefat, 1988; & Ardalan, 1986). The courtyard was eliminated. The new houses were turned inside-out and became extroverted buildings that were facing streets. The early versions were mostly walk-up apartments that were placed side-by-side in rows on regulated grids and land divisions. Unlike courtyard houses, frontage houses had faces. They enjoyed more apertures and ornamentation on their exterior facades. Their private and public boundaries were rather indistinct. This was more suitable for the emerging modern families of the time whose lifestyle and culture were undergoing dramatic changes.

The mid-twentieth century housing change was a consequence of various structural, professional, and social forces.<sup>48</sup> Reza Shah Pahlavi's urban renewal

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against the outsider male gaze. Women did not have to wear Islamic dress in andaruni or cover the hair. The women's place to socialize was mostly situated in a courtyard located in the andaruni or bordered between the andaruni and biruni. Biruni was for men to socialize and outside visitors. Most average courtyard houses did not have expensive decorations, but some had more than one courtyard. One courtyard was used for internal family get-togethers, as an andaruni. The other courtyard was used for external guest visits, as a biruni. Most of the time, when more than one family lived in a house, both courtyards were used as andaruni, each serving as a private space for the female members of each family.

<sup>47</sup> The basement of courtyard houses were called *sardab* (Persian).

<sup>48</sup> A number of outside forces also impacted the Iranian daily life at domestic spaces (Karimi, 2009). Foreigners, mostly Anglo-Americans, carried out educational programs and dispersed publications that were targeting Iran's housing reform. The Truman's Point IV program, for example, exported the American dream and taught home economics, housekeeping, family care, suitable house furnishing, social living, and hygiene to young girls (p. 101). People desired that their homes be modeled after the religious missionary homes in Iran and the fully furnished model homes built for foreign oil-company workers mostly in the south of Iran. These types of homes were importing new concepts. They, at the time of Iran's modernization, seemed simple and efficient to many Iranians with minimal ornamentation, and demanded new neighborhood planning, new rooms, and modern furnishings (p. 55). As Grigor (2005) describes, rooms that in the traditional house were anonymous found single functions, named like the dining room and guestroom,

project (1920s -1930s) was the first and foremost irreversible change. The project expanded the city on an open matrix of orthogonal grids with modern streets, boulevards, and infrastructures. The new structure reversed the traditional house-street connection. Prior to the renewal, the city was not layered on regular street grids and courtyard houses formed on randomly divided land plots. After the renewal, new houses had to follow regular land divisions based on a new grid and facing new streets. Founding of Iran's first architecture school was a second force of housing change. Early Iranian modernist architects, mostly returning alumni educated abroad, promoted a new culture of housing design and construction. Housing construction, until then being the monopoly of craftsmen builders, became an experimental domain for these professionals. The changing needs and roles of women inside and outside the home was a third force of housing change. In the courtyard houses, the most private courtyard space was designed to seclude a female socializing zone that, halfway through the twentieth century, became obsolete. Women no longer needed the courtyard as their only retreat, as Tehran was offering new social spaces outside home. Western-style furnishings, home goods, and kitchen appliances were saving modern housewives' time at home.

Urban renewal was part of larger state-endorsed modernization that impacted not merely public streets and private homes, but also human bodies. The "Mandatory Unveiling Act" of 1936 was passed to control women's bodies and their public presentations. The act required women to remove their traditional hair

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each being arranged in convenient furniture and integrating hygiene. Modern houses were equipped with modern and spacious kitchens with electric appliances. They adapted previously unknown spaces of leisure from the model homes such as the reading room, piano room, and basketball backyard (p. 171).

and body coverage and to adopt western-style clothing.<sup>49</sup> The modernization plan also affected how women used domestic spaces by suggesting new lifestyles and consumer cultures. The state, which had leaned towards Europe and America as models of progress, welcomed new imported goods and commodities. These included modern home furniture and kitchen appliances such as refrigerators and stoves. Women were affected more than man as they spent more time at home. Newspaper ads became more and more popular as an effective way to attract female consumers. New imported goods and commodities fashioned a more enlightened housewife with new expectations in/of a house. She found new tastes and aesthetics in home furnishing. She also became more sociable. Her domestic life was less labor-intensive as new commodities freed her from onerous, time-consuming tasks.

Founding of Iran's first architecture school led to new discourses that became influential as forces of housing change. Most pioneer architects who led the first Tehran University School of Art and Architecture<sup>50</sup> believed in modernism's emancipation. They believed that modernism emancipated the traditional house from its isolation by ripping off its uninteresting envelope and exposing a sociable house.<sup>51</sup> Their unprecedented practices also resulted in novel intellectual

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<sup>49</sup> Reza Shah forced the Mandatory Unveiling Act (*kashf-e-hijab*: Persian) in 1936. Although the act was discarded at the time of his son's rule and totally reversed after the 1979 revolution by the new Islamic state, the cultural changes it brought for women has been lasting. Although for some women the Reza Shah's act was emancipatory, allowing self-expression and freedom and new ways of socializing in new public spaces, for most women it was further limiting. Iran was, and in some ways still is, a patriarchal society. Men did not allow many women to come outside the house; hence, those women could not even receive the education that was available outside.

<sup>50</sup> Vartan Havanesian, Mohsen Foroughi, Gabriel Guverkian, Paul Abkar, Keyghobad Zafarbakhtiar, and Ali Akbar Sadegh were amongst Iran's pioneer architects.

<sup>51</sup> Vartan was ahead of other modernists on this, an Art Nouveau follower whose works were influenced by the French architect Henri Sauvage. In the first issue of the "Memari Novin" magazine, he compared Iran's emerging modern architectural movement of the time with the Iranian women's emancipation that happened

discourses through publications and creation of building code. In 1934, the newly-established city planning commission documented codes for massing, spatial arrangement, and density that posed new challenges in and morphological/aesthetic effects on housing design. The earliest Persian-language architectural publications<sup>52</sup> also opened up new discussions on modernism. They circulated cutting-edge information on residential projects worldwide, and on construction technologies, materials, and modern furnishings. New houses adopted the imported technologies and new materials such as concrete, steel, and glass, making the tacit knowledge of previous local builders and craftsmen insufficient.<sup>53</sup>

Frontage housing became the average Tehran living unit halfway through the twentieth century. Despite a lack of technical, material, and conceptual knowledge on modern architecture, non-professional builders built initial frontage house versions for the average citizen. They could not afford hiring professional architects who, at the time, were selectively designing upper-class villas for well-off clients on larger properties. The early frontage houses designed by local builders were frequently criticized; tourists described them as “hollywoodesque

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through the removal of “hijab.” It is the Arabic word used in Iran to refer to a woman’s Islamic body coverage:

Those remembering that time know well that the buildings of this large city [Tehran,] like the group of women concealed beneath black chador [,] were enclosed with tall and monotonous mud walls and except for a wooden door ... did not have any means to connect to the outside world. At that time ... was there anybody who could have taken this dark and tedious enclosure off of its own residence and open up a window from its living room towards the street, and erect a balcony in its building? Those days, the same way that women were confined at home and living like a prisoner buildings and gardens and other places in our capital were delimited and concealed in betwixt tall walls. ... [just like] the look of those days’ women [that] had no lustrous sign of smile and confidence [,] the face of buildings ... also appeared to be stern and melancholic (Havanesian, 1960, p. 7; translation by author).

<sup>52</sup> “Memari Novin,” “Arshitekt,” and “Honar va Memari” were amongst the influential architectural magazines that promoted discussions on modern architecture.

<sup>53</sup> A standard material in courtyard house constructions was a mud brick and mortar combination called the “kahgel.”

(Forbes, 1931)” and kitsch, as blind replicas of Western examples. The housing style changes also hurt many average citizens who had been forced to give up their properties for limited or no compensation at the expense of the citywide renewal project. They saw their courtyard housing bulldozed in exchange for modern houses conditioned by planning regulations and prescribed codes. Average citizens eventually had no other choice but to accept living in the frontage-style houses.

Generic housing in the 1970s is a product of hasty housing markets caused by large urban-rural migrations and irregular population growth. The 1973's OPEC oil price increase turned the Mohammad Reza Shah's last six years into a building boom (Ardalan, 1986). As more people were migrating to the capital in search of new jobs, inexpensive housing became a state and professional concern.<sup>54</sup> Housing shortage coupled with higher rent sparked unrestrained sprawl in fringe villages and satellite towns and informal, unregulated settlements. To ease housing issues, the state provided public funding and land subsidies and planned inexpensive housing for white and blue-collar workers. The Shah's overthrow in 1979 interrupted the plan. Two years after the revolution, in 1981, the Urban Land Organization and Housing Foundation were formed and privatized public lands. State-sponsored programs such as the Institutional Housing, Satellite Towns, Mehr Housing and Navab have produced uncomfortable densities, incongruent

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<sup>54</sup> Although the need for affordable homes had formed earlier, inexpensive living options did not become part of the academic and professional discourses in Iran until the 1970s. Ali Akbar Sadegh was amongst the few professional architects who brought affordable housing into academic discussions before the 1970s (Salek, 2007). He planned the low-income project of “400-unit (charsad datstghah)” that set the prototype for some years after. He solidified public funds due to his vice presidency of the Bank-e-Rahni. It was later named the “Housing Organization” that started putting land grant subsidies towards co-operative housing developments (pp. 12-13). On the 400-unit project information and archival drawings, see: Merefat (1988, pp. 167; & 540-542).

communities, and poor architectural character. Through public land subsidies, the state has planned affordable homes, named under Institutional Housing, and formed “Housing Co-operatives”<sup>55</sup> to be in charge of these constructions. Government organizations have dedicated large undeveloped land to new communities of inexpensive homes for white/blue-collar public-sector employees. The revolution invented a nouveau-riche class of stakeholders and developers—people who owed their jobs to the existing government. They have benefited from the public land privatization in exchange for political support and loyalty to the new regime. Their private constructions developed in generic houses built in a style known as “besaz-befrooshi.”<sup>56</sup> Since the 1970s, both public and private sector construction have produced generic houses.

### Generic House on Reel

A number of Iranian films can expose many of issues associated with generic housing. *The Tenants*,<sup>57</sup> an acclaimed 1986 film by Dariush Mehrjui, shows substandard housing constructions emerging in the post-revolutionary housing market chaos and the kinds of practices engaged in their production. The 2008 satirical film directed by Parisa Bakhtavar, *Tambourine*,<sup>58</sup> shows how cultural differences between sharing neighbors make incongruent communities in an

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<sup>55</sup> Housing Co-operatives: *taavoni-ye-maskan* (Persian)

<sup>56</sup> The housing style was started in Iran in the 1970s. During the 1990s, at the time of controversial Mayer Gholamhossein Karbaschi, it became associated with a practice known as “Foroush-e Tarakom.” The City legalized higher-density residential constructions. Prior to the 1970s, many Tehran apartments had no more than two stories. Towards the end of Iran-Iraq war, growing housing need and land scarcity coupled with illicit sprawl in agricultural fringes resulted in a municipal decision to allow increased densities in Tehran from two stories to up to four and five stories. The rule became manipulated in many ways and became an income apparatus.

<sup>57</sup> *Ejareh-Neshinha* (Persian)

<sup>58</sup> *Dayereh Zangi* (Persian)

average Tehran apartment. This film uses the semi-private space of an apartment rooftop as a main mise-en-scène to expose clashes over the rights to control this shared space. *Fireworks Wednesday*,<sup>59</sup> a 2006 urban drama directed by Asghar Farhadi, reveals the unremitting grimness of an average apartment house in Tehran and how over-crowding, uncomfortable next-door interactions, and workspace intrusion become everyday challenges.

### *“The Tenants”*

The plot is timed in the decade followed by 1979 Iranian revolution. The main cinematic location is a substandard apartment building with typical housing units inside. In the entire dull building location, the rooftop and the small, cubic-like room on the rooftop that is called a “kharposhteh”<sup>60</sup> are the only exceptional and nurturing places. The building is constructed with a kitsch shoebox-like architectural character, punched-hole windows, and a naive eclecticism in the façade expression. The entrance is decorated with two mock-Corinthian columns and a random blue-brick ribbon running throughout the exterior. The entire building is in a run-down condition. Housing units are crumbling; their features and furnaces are falling apart due to wrong engineering, weak foundation, and poor construction. The kharposhteh is rented and appropriated by a creative and romantic opera-singer who creates a delightful roof garden that becomes the sole

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<sup>59</sup> *Chaharshanbe-Soori* (Persian): the naming has relevance to the story that is taking place in a last Wednesday before the Persian New Year when the entire city is celebrating outside the feast of fire called *Chaharshanbe-Soori*.

<sup>60</sup> Nearly all Tehran apartments contain a kharposhteh that is a single-room space designed as an access point to the building’s mechanical systems. Although the space is not designed to function as a fully livable story and has not much amenities, the housing shortage, coupled with high rents, has turned this roof level into an illegal rentable floor for very low-income individuals.

memorable image of the cinematic setting. He invents a drip irrigation system that, overtime, undermines the building's structure. The city is a filmic background. The film shows 1980s Tehran on much undeveloped land. Low-rise, characterless apartment houses surround the main location and the neighborhood appears dull and empty on screen. The film opens up with a few emerging higher-density modern constructions dating from the 1970s. The building is a metaphor for all that is rotten, greed-driven, and fake in society. The one bright spot is the roof where the creative resident creates the small and lovely garden. It is this small gesture that undermines all that is bad in society. A small leak brings down the whole thing.





**Figure 3.1**

Line 1 – The filmsetting is a typical, poorly constructed building with rentals units inside and an atypically delightful roof space at the top.

Line 2 – The film represents Tehran in the 1980s with much undeveloped land and mostly low-rise constructions. The City-established new regulations of the time increase density.

Line 3 – The filmsetting is a battleground between different agents against the house. The building has no current owner. The actual owner, an ex-regime supporter,<sup>61</sup> fled the country after the revolution and got killed with his family in a train accident abroad. The building has an in-house manager. He poorly maintains the units. He knows the truth about the former owner's sudden death, but hides it from the tenants. He lives at the building, but intentionally refuses repairs to help accelerating the building's demolition. He colludes with a corrupted local agency in forging a new property title deed in his name. They want to force the tenants to leave the building, topple the existing structure, and cooperate in a profitable high-rise apartment development on the land. The architect, a long-time student of architecture also living at the building, denies reliability for any building malfunction. The building malfunctions and gradual decay bring about constant tenant-tenant and tenants-manager clashes. Tenants are constantly asking and doing while the manager is resisting repairs to force them to leave the building.

Line 4 - The rooftop leakage, manager's intentional neglect for repairs, and tenants' amateurish patches contribute to the building's failure. A dramatic flattening ends the film.

### *"Tambourine"*

The film collages multiple narratives in a North Tehran middle-class apartment setting: cultural class disparities, fuzzy public-private boundaries, right to the house shared-space, and unresolved apartment living relations. The rooftop is a domestic semi-public domain where some of these issues play out. Here

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<sup>61</sup> In the aftermath of 1979 Iranian revolution, many properties, previously belonged to the ex-regime affiliates, left without owners. They were confiscated and, along with much undeveloped public land, were distributed amongst the new regime's affiliates. With the properties in custody, new affiliates formed real state agencies.

sophisticated North Tehran residents now must confront newly rich and religiously orthodox residents who formerly lived in South Tehran. The apartment building is a microcosm of the culturally divided larger society. The rooftop is the dramatic location where disparate classes mingle and shape new identities. Since the 1990s, rooftops became the optimal location for satellite dishes, which also became a source of clash between neighbors. By the film's end, the rooftop has become a collective place, a domestic site, and a common ground of discourse and reconciliation where neighbors find consensus through exchange of ideas and the acceptance of the other.



**Figure 3.2**

Line 1 – In most Tehran apartments, rooftops accommodate satellite dishes. In the film, the rooftop is a domestic site of culture-war clashes between neighbors. By the film's end, the rooftop has also become a collective place of reconciliation, self-expression, and democratic discourse, all leading to a better acceptance of the other. Except for one neighbor who is orthodox, all others have dishes on the roof. The atypical neighbor is a nouveau-riche family newly arrived from poorer South Tehran. The family is not used to the social life of a shared apartment house, and sees the rooftop as their private domain. The wife hangs clothes on the rooftop while her husband fumes about his neighbors' satellite dishes as immoral and anti-religious.

Line 2 – A young, unsophisticated South Tehran satellite-installer enters the North Tehran apartment to reinstall dislocated satellites flipped the previous night due to windy weather.

He is educated but underemployed, and installing dishes is his second job and informal economic source.<sup>62</sup>

*“Fireworks Wednesday”*

The film is a drama of location. It digs into a day in the life of a typical poorly built 1990s’ apartment where uncomfortable densities, thin walls, and intrusive informal workspaces make privacy impossible. The film is a close-up at how such issues can impact personal behaviors and interpersonal relations. The poorly constructed building is also overcrowded, where thin partitions offer little privacy and neighbors have to encounter each other in a manner that their daily affairs meddle to a greater extent. Female-led business intrusion in domestic spaces is a common urban issue in Tehran. Some women attempt to gain financial and social independence by starting businesses in their homes. In many apartments, informal economies inside private properties become a source of neighbor discontent. This is mostly due to public trespassers that shorten privacy and safety. Although an invasive workspace can diminish an apartment building’s safety and privacy, this may be the only choice of a stay-at-home woman for financial and social independence.

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<sup>62</sup> A state law forbids any household possession of satellite dishes. Since the 1990s’ introduction of satellites to Iran, the moral police force has randomly raided many homes and their semi-public domain of the rooftop, collected the dishes, and fined their possessors.



**Figure 3.3**

Line 1 – The film begins with Roohangiz entering Mojdeh’s apartment unit to help in spring-cleaning. Roohangiz, a commuter living in Tehran outskirts, travels to the city everyday for work.

Line 2 – Mojdeh is a sad housewife who is entrapped in her everyday-life monotony. She, despite her education, stays at home. Her house is not a nurturing place, a dismal and overcrowded apartment unit with dull exteriors and thin walls.

Line 3 – Simin is a neighbor at the building, a single-mom divorcee who is in a hidden love affair with Mojdeh’s husband. She is a tenant who also runs an unauthorized beauty salon at her rental unit. Simin should soon move out of the unit as the owner receives much complain about her intrusive business.

Line 4 – Mojdeh sends Roohangiz to Simin’s home-salon to discover more about the secret affair.

## Informal Economies

The house and the housewife are interconnected. Understanding women's roles and practices in domestic spaces can offer clues to improving residential environments. For many Tehrani women, the house is not just a home but also a place of business. As such, the home may also be the locus of female economic and social exchange. As revealed in *Fireworks Wednesday*, these home businesses can lead to safety and privacy issues among the residents and certainly can strain relations among neighbors. However, these unauthorized businesses are many stay-at-home women's only source of emancipation and inspiration, and their only chance for financial independence. These women use the house not just as the place where they live, but also as a place where they work and hangout.<sup>63</sup> Female entrepreneurs, mostly middle and upper class, conceive of and run informal home-based businesses both to earn income and, importantly, to participate in relatively unrestricted social environments.<sup>64</sup> For many, these businesses are a major income source while for others they provide access to otherwise unattainable consumer goods. Informal home-based businesses have become an integral part of Iran's post-revolution economy. And they are especially important outlets for women who were barred from or restricted in the workplace.

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<sup>63</sup> Ray Oldenburg (1989) defined the "first place" as where one lives, the "second place" as where one works, and the "third place" as a place that is used for the leisure time purpose.

<sup>64</sup> Women make up a smaller percentage of Iran's working population, as many educated women today face employment discrimination. Despite their noticeably low formal labor, their home-based businesses have increased and shaped informal labor domains influencing traditional and modern markets. In a contrast to countries where such informal labors are mostly associated with poor working class, in Iran, they are mostly associated with educated, middle-upper class women (Bahramitash & Esfandiari, 2011; & Moghadam, 2009).

“Mezons,” beauty salon, art/music/theatre venues, fashion runway, and public kitchen are some typical examples of home-based female-led businesses at Tehran houses. Adapted from the French term *maison* (house), the term *mezon* refers to a place that is not a store, but accommodates fashion garment businesses. Tehran *mezons* mostly form inside residential settings. Women traveling to neighboring countries such as Turkey and Dubai bring back items to sell at their home *mezons*. They sometimes pass the excess items through airport customs via smugglers and hire working-class female tailors from South Tehran to replicate the imported items. Another popular female-led business type is the home-based beauty salon. Many Tehrani women choose going to such local beauty salons over other more famous and pricey urban salons in order to avoid commuting in Tehran’s traffic. Creative venues are other types that women use their houses for. After the revolution, state laws forbid women singing in public unless in a choir. Although the state has been silencing the voices of many talented women, several of them have creatively reclaimed their domestic spaces to hold classes, rehearsals, and concerts. Using the house as a creative venue does not just affect women; restrictions have forced both male and female avant-garde to seek alternative venues. Clandestine Tehran fashion shows go underground at Tehran houses. The exhibits feature outfits forbidden by Islamic dress codes and, particularly, the parading of them before mixed audiences. Below are a few ethnographic accounts of such home-based economies.

Anoush,<sup>65</sup> a 47-year-old Iranian-Armenian woman, runs a massage business in a house basement in the Seyed Khandan neighborhood. The house, last in a cul-de-sac, appears in the 1960s low-rise style. The main access to the business place is through a large garage door, which opens up into a small yard used for parking. The basement steps down from the yard. Anoush has a local clientele. Another Iranian-Armenian lady works as her secretary. Professional massage is not the sole activity in this basement; the interior is divided into two sections: a massage section in the back is partitioned from a full room of clothing and accessories. Miscellaneous clothing brands and accessories ranging from Victoria's Secret to Turkish imports are randomly positioned on the room sides. Anoush's clients are also her business associates and help run the shop; when traveling abroad, they bring fashion items back and twenty percent is Anoush's share on a sold item.

Avish, in her sixties, has turned a bedroom of her middle-class apartment unit in the Aryashahr neighborhood to an outfit mezon. She travels to Turkey regularly, nearly every two to three months, with a community of other mezon-owners. They purchase seasonal fashion garments and accessories wholesale. Due to the large quantities, they cannot carry them back themselves, for it would be impossible to go through airport costumes without having to pay for

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<sup>65</sup> Names are pseudonyms when I intend to protect the participants.

extra luggage. The items are shipped via informal freight networks. Mezon owners know people in Turkey who pass the items through borders and deliver them to their mezon door. Surprisingly, the process is legal. Border residents have passport permission coupons to bring items from Turkey for free. The mezon-owner shippers pay these residents and use their stamps. For most Tehrani women, home-mezone are the best alternatives to public malls. Avish has regular costumers who never shop anywhere else. They consider Avish's clothes "original," unlike counterfeits in Tehran malls. The world sanctions on Iran since the 1990s have made the legal shipping costs of importing original goods very pricey. Many storeowners in Tehran malls have been going bankrupt and, to survive, sell famous label knock-offs.

Avina, 52, mother of two, runs a home-salon on her West Tehran apartment balcony. She is educated, urbane, and well traveled. Her daughters both live abroad who she visits nearly every year. She holds an undergraduate accounting degree, and used to work, but quit a while ago, finding the former workplace masculine and undesirable. She learned to be a hair stylist at a well-known public salon about two decades ago. After leaving her accounting job, she started working as a hair stylist at a North Tehran salon, but soon left that workplace. This was due to a long live-work distance that put her in the high Tehran traffic nearly everyday for hours. Running her

small home-salon is simply more convenient and profitable. She is not exhausting her life in unfavorable work environments. While still being able to work and socially be productive, working at home allows her to at the same time perform other house chores. She does not need to pay for renting a separate workplace and she is not a salaried personnel at somebody else's salon. The city's high densities also assure her a steady stream of clients. Customers entering Avina's private salon immediately feel at home. The house setting is familiar, much like the houses where most of them live, and, unlike most public salons, this setting is not overcrowded. The house is a typical three-bedroom middle-class apartment with generic plan. The design separates the bedrooms zone from the more public, living room and guestroom areas. The living room is partially invisible, hidden behind the load-bearing kitchen wall in front of the entrance door. Persian carpets cover half of the interior floor area. A finely carved chair and table set and few realist paintings decorate the guestroom. Family wedding pictures appear partly from behind the load-bearing living room wall. To access the balcony-salon in the smallest bedroom, one has to pass through the private zone. The balcony is concealed on three sides with simple removable fabric panes decorated with dense vines on the inside. For customers who feel more at ease in private salons, getting hair services there is also an opportunity for social interaction. Most

develop deeper friendships with their hairstylist alongside services received.

Zarir Fashion Design, a company known for its luxury brand “mantos,”<sup>66</sup> is a successful model of entrepreneurial home-based business. Established in 2002, Zarir bloomed in an ordinary North Tehran house basement. The founders are three young, talented textile-engineering graduates and the house, located in the Velenjak neighborhood, belonged to the parents of one of the founders. The firm made simple changes to the basement’s interior space. The space is minimal. Clothing racks are efficiently placed against the walls to accommodate Zarir’s seasonal fashion shows. The naming “Zarir” was taken from a plant used in traditional Iranian fabric dyeing cultures to generate a particular yellow tint. The founders believe people make statements about who they are through their choices of attire. The founders apply novelty in their use of colors, merging of modern and traditional patterns, and tailoring and printing production. Zarir is also helping some South Tehran women, paying them for their tailoring services. The firm now exports overseas and has become the choice of many Iranian artists, musicians, and TV stars.

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<sup>66</sup> Manto, also spelled out as manteau, is the Iranian women’s most common everyday apparel. A manot is a long-sleeved, knee-length garment that women have to wear with a headscarf outside home (See for further definition explanation: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=mantos>). Although the best acceptable in the Islamic Republic’s eyes is still the more conservative long black chador, the state still allows mantos for women as their minimum form of body coverage in public. a long-sleeved, knee-length garment



**Figure 3.4**

Left: The simple basement interior held Zarir's fall 2011 collection. The collection theme on Russian nesting dolls celebrated womanhood, fertility and creation (photo by author).

Right: In its first-ever fashion shots from Iran, FSHN Magazine featured the works of Zarir Design in October 2013 (photo courtesy of Afra Pourdad).

### **Public Space Transformations**

Tehran's nineteenth century public spaces were the neighborhood centers, bazaars, and mosques. In the patriarchal society of the time these spaces were mostly male-dominated. Women were suppressed and had few social gathering places outside the home. They only left their residences for shopping and praying. Fully concealed, women were almost invisible outside the home. And even within it, to avoid unrelated male gaze, they remained in the andaruni (the private quarters of the home), and the interior courtyard.

The early twentieth century changes under Reza Shah Pahlavi emancipated many women and reversed the use of interior and exterior spaces. Reza Shah

Pahlavi's modernization plan in the 1920s to 1930s changed women's attitudes towards their domestic surroundings. Started from public streets and filtered into private houses, the plan, through the 1936's mandatory unveiling act, also entered the domain of private bodies. The plan changed women's actions and appearance both in private and public realms. A new urban grid reversed traditional house-street relations. The courtyard as a predominantly feminine social gathering place disappeared. Courtyard houses declined, giving way to new frontage houses facing public streets. Unlike courtyard houses, the emerging house types had blurred public-private boundaries. The courtyard had become an obsolete, as new places offered more choices for men and women to meet outside the houses. Later, under Mohammad Reza Shah's rule, the modernization continued to manifest itself in a changed urban scene. The mid-twentieth century market flows of international home goods into private spaces fostered a new, progressive housewife with raised expectations about home and housing. More women entered the higher education, and imported home commodities led to their much less labor-intensive lifestyle and new tastes in home furnishing. Avant-garde art and cultural venues appeared and new places for socializing opened many Iranians to urbane lifestyles in larger cities. Public spaces for socializing further diversified in the capital. They ranged from nightclubs and bars, to places where one could hear contemporary music, to cultural events, and folkloric art exhibitions. During the Pahlavi regime, men and women, who had taken social roles outside home, had become used to culturally diverse and mixed gender public spaces.

These social opportunities ended with the 1979 revolution. Yet, despite the many proscriptions concerning their behavior, Tehranis have opportunistically exploited the residual and forgotten spaces of basements, rooftops, and indeed any available space in order to explore, expand, and enhance their identity.

### **Tehran House Possibilities**

Tehranis have appropriated residual spaces in their houses and turned them into protean spaces. At the houses, they animate basements and rooftops as art, music, and party venues and run entrepreneurial and tax-free, home-based businesses. For better understanding, design professionals should look closely at what and where people make these protean spaces and apply solutions that enhance capacities for social interaction. Protean spaces appear below, within, and between Tehran's typical apartment houses. I identify adaptive reuse possibilities in obsolete swimming pools, clandestine basements, balconies, reclusive yards, and imperceptible rooftops.

#### Obsolete Perforation

Abandoned swimming pools are adaptive reuse opportunity sites. These blue holes punching the landscape are left behind from the revolution. Among the mid-twentieth century changes, from introvert vernacular to extrovert modern house, swimming pools were added in middle and upper class Tehran houses and, later

in the 1970s, in the lofty apartment buildings. Swimming pools replaced the middle fountain<sup>67</sup> of the courtyards predominantly used for rinsing dishes and washing clothes. After the Islamic revolution, however, many of these outdoor pools lost their actual purpose. The pools became unusable due to issues of privacy and control. As adjacent buildings became taller, pools and their users became more visible. Many eyes—male eyes—could gaze at the swimmers. Such a situation violated the state’s privacy and dress codes. The pools were emptied. Yet, as the aerial view reveals, the pools still exist.



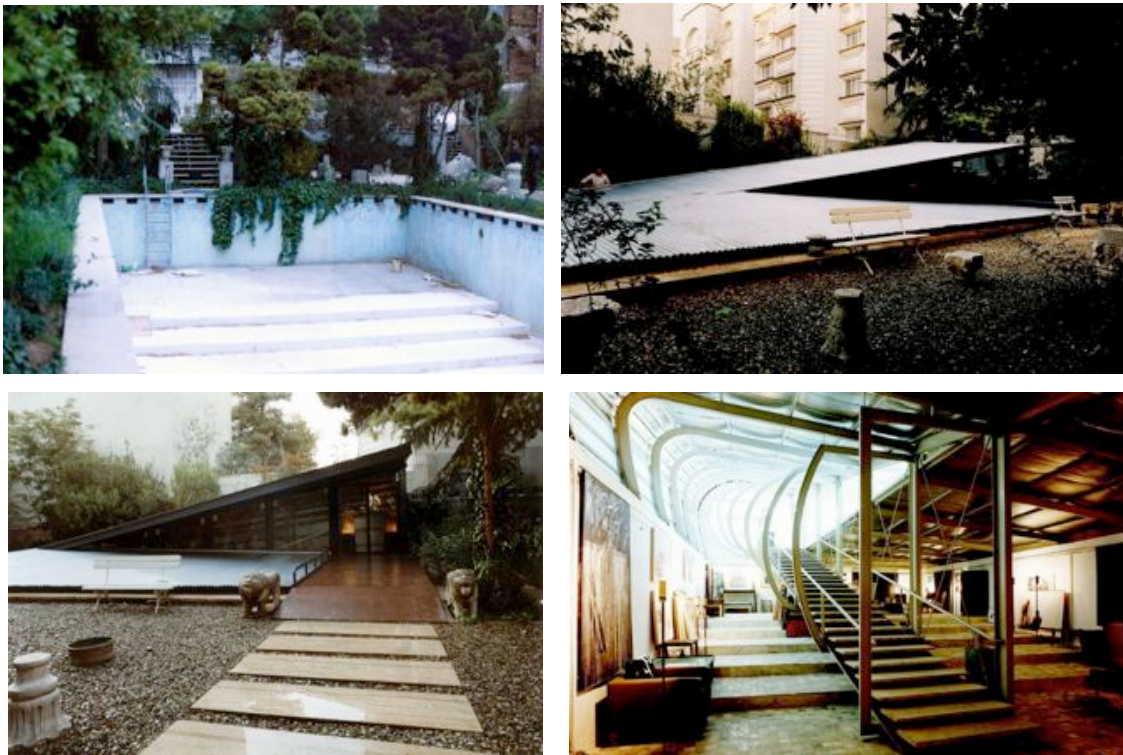
**Figure 3.5**

The blue rectangles in the aerial view are abandoned swimming pools in a block within the Shahrak-e-Gharb neighborhood.

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<sup>67</sup> Fountain: *howz* (Persian)

Often the abandoned pool is merely filled with soil then sodden for greenspace or paved for parking. The Ava Art Gallery by the architect Reza Daneshmir is one creative exception. The client, an artist, hired the architect to turn his private villa-house pool into an art gallery. The project has repurposed this 2,000sf perforation as a unique art venue. The design took advantage of the pool's existing physical attributes: its sloped bottom, rising depth, and open surrounding. A simple and effective supporting structure is designed where a slanted truss holds a lightweight roof and the same truss supports the art gallery's hovering interior staircase.



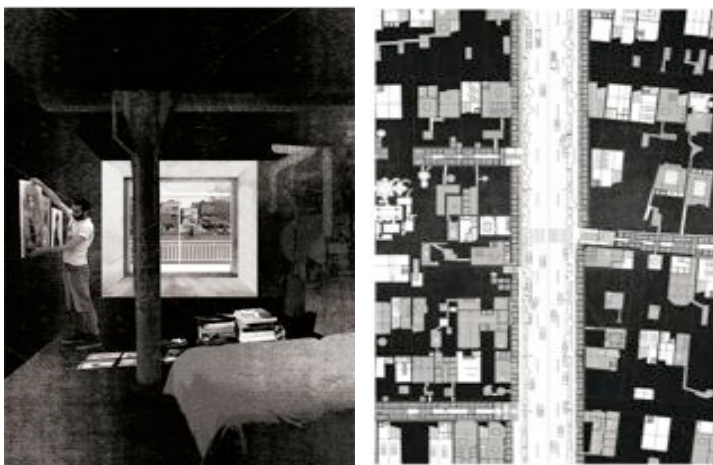
**Figure 3.6**

Ava Art Gallery, Reza Daneshmir, architect. The adjacent multi-story residential building made the private pool visible and unusable (Courtesy of the architect; source: Aga Khan Trust for Culture).

With so many abandoned pools the possibilities of adaptive re-use are many. Each may become a plaza in a house that, together with the rest, can make an urban network of active, retreat spaces for young, avant-garde, and female entrepreneurs. Design professionals may also look into design solutions to raise the pools' inner platforms for ground access and insert simple shed structures inside to make inhabitable containers in pools. Professionals should also invent processes that can engage the users in the making and fabrication of the raised platforms and the inhabitable sheds.

### Ubiquitous Camouflage

Tehran basements<sup>68</sup> are protean spaces with unique opportunities for design interventions. They are uncanny sites of resistance that people are appropriating as art and culture venues, and hangout spots. Such publicly-restricted or discouraged activities are finding their way into Tehran's basements.



**Figure 3.7**

“Autonomous Underground” by Golnar Abbasi: a futurist artistic vision of connected undergrounds separated from spaces on top (Courtesy of the artist).<sup>69</sup>

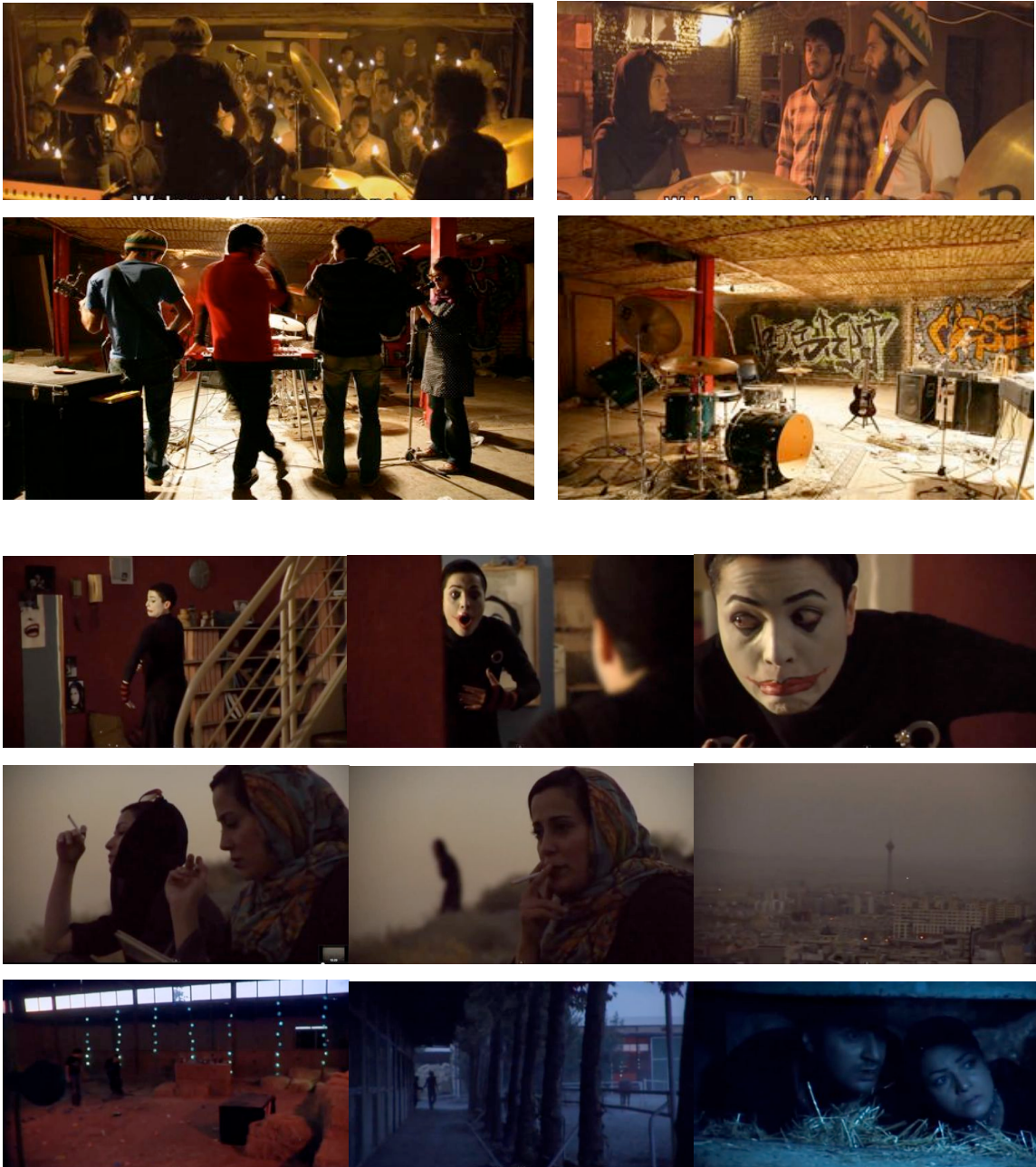
<sup>68</sup> Basement: *zirzamin* (Persian)

<sup>69</sup> source: <http://www.hamedkhosravi.com/Six-Projects-for-Tehran>

Throughout Tehran's history, basements have held symbolic meanings filled with pleasant and unpleasant associations. The name "Tehran," in some beliefs, meant a place of *under-grounders*: the city core, its ancient and primitive village built homes in subterranean levels to protect against enemies and bandits. Cool, dry basements traditionally offered important storage areas spaces for rice, dried fruit, and water. During the revolution, the basement became a podium for the protesters who planned revolutionary actions. Many used to gather in basements to listen to the Ayatollah Khomeini's speeches. Later, during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, the basement became the safest zone of the house during Iraqi air attacks. In the 1990s, under President Khatami, Iran's politics became less restrictive and the basement became an alternative arena for unauthorized youthful musical events (notably rock bands) and an experimental platform for avant-garde artistic productions.

A mostly soundproof zone, and hidden from the state oversight, the basement today serves many purposes: venues for concerts, theater, fashion shows, even wedding receptions and parties. And some house informal businesses. Of course the original, authorized—indeed code mandated—function is parking. Typical apartment houses must offer a minimum of one parking space per tenant. But this clearly functional space exists also in the realm of the imagination. It is where the private and public boundaries blur, a "liminal space," as Nooshin (2005) notes, where young and novice artists and musicians often start their careers. In 2009, two independent films, *No One Knows about Persian Cats* by

Bahman Ghobadi and *My Tehran for Sale* by Granaz Moussavi, document  
Tehran's grass-roots, subterranean youth culture.



**Figure 3.8**

Top: In the stills from *No One Knows about Persian Cats*, the basement is an active location, coupled with others such as the rooftop and the barn, where the unauthorized indie-rock bands practice and perform secretive concerts. New music genres develop that merge local and global tastes (Courtesy of the filmmaker).

Bottom: Background on the sad storyline of *My Tehran for Sale* is a series of locations where young and defiant Tehranis' subversive behaviors take place. This is ranging from rave parties in a private villa stable to self-expressions on residual patches on Alborz Mountains, to underground theatre performances in generic houses and basements (Courtesy of the filmmaker).

Basements, camouflaged and soundproof, are domestic sites with many design possibilities. Design professionals can look into urban-scale design solutions, for example, the making of an independent creative city under Tehran's existing basements, to make more spaces for the art and culture. The invented city adds in an interconnected level of second house basements, each with a separate ground access point.

#### Balconies: Indoor/Outdoor Possibilities

Apartment balconies, though small scale, also have potential for adaptive reuse. Public facing balconies in Tehran began to appear in the 1930s with the introduction of frontage apartments. Historically courtyard houses had a semi-open feature similar to a balcony, called the "mahtabi" (also known as "baharkhab"), which faced the courtyard. Mahtabis were often used as summer sleeping porches. Pioneer modernist Vartan Havanesian was among the first architects whose residential designs featured modern balconies. These were spacious, semi-circular street-facing terraces grandly adorned with columns and Art Nouveau ornamentation.



**Figure 3.9**

From Left: A 19<sup>th</sup>-century courtyard-facing mahtabi (Courtesy of the Archives of the Organization for Cultural Heritage), the semi-circular balcony in Vartan Havanesian's architecture (Source: Bani Masud, 2012, p. 243), and a contemporary balcony (photo by author).

Average balconies today are much smaller but their limited space still offers residents an outdoor space. Balconies may be accessed via bedrooms, living rooms, kitchens, or guestrooms. Some project from the façade while others are recessed. Some balconies are concealed on three sides. The more boarded up a balcony gets, the more likely it becomes a storage space. Future housing should create balconies with more potential for integrating interior space and providing varied outdoor activities.

As recounted in the Avina's hair salon example, Tehran balconies, if repurposed through creative new uses, become other possible places for the informal economy to flourish. A future Tehran balcony may be designed further flexibly as a retractable, folding, and/or mobile social space fragment. The

balcony as a portable social hub may roll in and out of the house and simultaneously be masked and exposed to the outside.

### Inserted Box

Reclusive yards, known as “pasio” or “hayat khalvat,” are dark spaces in Tehran apartments. Pirnia (1974) relates the origins of reclusive yards to the Persian architectural feature of “padiav” or “padiab.” This was a small, cloistered quad with rectangular or circular water elements at the center and bordered by arcades. Today, a reclusive yard is a minimum six to ten square feet light-shaft. Dictated by the architectural code, it is meant to allow light into rooms otherwise blocked by neighboring buildings. The shaft, which can be accessed from the ground floor, is typically an inefficiently used space. In some, it houses air coolers, furnaces, or storage. At best, these overlooked spaces may have vegetation, planters, and small water features.



**Figure 3.10**

The dark space of a reclusive yard in a typical housing unit (photo by author)

Reclusive yards could become protean spaces if they were better integrated into the surrounding apartment buildings, made more accessible and more visible to residents. The space, originally designed to bring daylight into housing units, could be used as well in the evening as a social space. With innovative design, for example, the addition of a floating portable alcove inside, a reclusive yard has the possibility of becoming the heart of the ordinary Tehran house.

### Imperceptible Surface

Semi-private rooftops are collective sites with many design opportunities. Empty land is rare in Tehran, and the city has doubled its size and tripled its density since the 1979 revolution. The rooftop, we recall, is the site of culture wars in *Tambourine* and the illicit garden that imperils the real (and metaphoric) structure in *Tenants*. As revealed in those films, the rooftop and its shed-like *kharposhteh* are often contested spaces as well as places of reconciliation. The rooftop is a place, as well, for unauthorized events and self-expression. During and after the 1979 revolution, Tehranis appropriated their rooftops to renounce the Shah's regime. Again, after the controversial June 2009 election, the rooftops were a stage for public discontent. Many protesters, who had been evicted from the streets, climbed to their rooftops and chanted anti-regime slogans. In many residential buildings, the shared rooftop space may also challenge what can be public versus what should be private, causing between-neighbor interactions. Since the 1990s, rooftops became the optimal location for satellite dishes.

Today, Tehran rooftops, more than anything, are serving as experimental fields for counterculture and avant-garde productions. In addition to basements and the city's outskirts, as revealed in *No One Knows about Persian Cats* and *My Tehran for Sale*, young artists and musicians have used rooftops for practicing, recording, and performing. The state rules prevent women from performing in public and for mixed audiences. Women are only allowed to sing in choirs or in singing groups where no single voice is discernible. So female vocalists have been reclaiming rooftops as unauthorized music venues. Vocalists Mahsa and Marjan Vahdat have upended the underground music trope by videotaping their song "Twinklings of Hope" on a Tehran rooftop.



**Figure 3.11**

Underground music is the sky: Vahdat sisters sing "Twinklings of hope" on a rooftop (Courtesy of the vocalists).

With a rooftop on every house, Tehran rooftops' possibilities of adaptive reuse are many. With the city's increasing densities, rooftops may become the future city's rare designable spaces left. Innovative design concepts should make better use of Tehran's rooftops. As a way to respond to the city's housing crisis, future design professionals could develop rooftop micro-habitations where

young Tehranis dwell, work, and socialize. Living places atop rooftops would generate an autonomous city-in-the-sky. Continuous horizontal surfaces may run from one roof to the other to make the lofty city traversable. Additionally, interchangeable, modular and prefabricated micro-habitations could be efficient to build and easy to maintain.

### **Theorization: The Opportunistic House**

Generic apartment houses present residual spaces that are assets for future housing design innovation. Abandoned swimming pools, camouflaged basements, cantilevered balconies, reclusive yards, and rooftops can become inexpensive living spaces, informal workspaces, and place of social gathering. The new and integrative spaces will reinvent the house as a sociable unit where the social self can make more choices, applying various inhabitation tactics. Future designers could learn from the previous examples in order to repurpose residual spaces or design entirely new solutions for ordinary Tehran housing based on residents' needs and aspirations. Below are theoretical explorations into possible design paths.

#### Autonomous Platforms

Ordinary Tehran houses own the basements and rooftops as their relatively larger surface areas, compared to the balconies, for example, that people are creatively using and turning into ad hoc places for social interaction. For

people's better use, design professionals can look into maximizing such surfaces and also partially liberating them from the rest of the house spaces. As a solution, future houses may include new levels for a second rooftop and second basement with separate entry admissions. The new independent levels, one underground and the other aboveground, make the future house opportunistic that, if combined and merged at the city scale, can make continuous longitudinal platforms encapsulating the existing city.

### Retractable Nooks

A Tehran ordinary house needs a heart: a retreat alcove and a portable social hub that at times can be physically separable from the rest of house spaces. Design professionals can reuse current house possibilities areas, for example, the existing reclusive yards and balconies, to make a heart for the house. Future houses may include portable hubs sliding in and out the house areas. A sliding portable hub floating in a reclusive yard allows its evening use as a social space. Future houses may include a more mobile retreat zone fragment that can also roll in and out into other domestic locations such as the shared staircase zone, balcony territory, and ceremonious guestroom.



**Figure 3.12**

Top The “Safe Room” by Salimi (2003) is designed in two types: inside the house or attached to the exterior (Drawing courtesy of Salimi).

Bottom: Tehran has three active fault lines, making the city susceptible to earthquakes (Image Source: International Institute of Earthquake Engineering and Seismology).

The fragment can also be flexible, being temporarily masked or exposed via the retractable sides. With the exception of doors and windows, most house exteriors are fixed climate barriers. But such exteriors could be more mutable. Folding balconies appended on the building facade can make another retractable retreat zone for the house. The fragment may also function as earthquake “safe room.”<sup>70</sup> In this case the alcove fragment includes a quake-resistant lightweight, cubic, steel beam structure such as that invented by Farzad Salimi (2003).

### Simple Sheds

The house areas, inside obsolete swimming pools and over rooftops, for instance, have space possibilities for minimal structures. Design professionals may look into ideas that people can manage themselves, for example, simple sheds or raised platforms that people can easily built on their own. Abandoned swimming pools can become house plazas. These pool plazas can perform as a network of active retreat spaces for young and avant-garde populations and the female entrepreneurs. Design professionals may come up with solutions to raise the pools’ inner platforms for ground access, insert a simple inhabitable shed structure, and invent processes to engage the users in the fabrication of the platforms and sheds.

### Micro-Habitations

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<sup>70</sup> Tehran, vulnerable to earthquakes, has two active fault lines and seismologists have projected a damaging earthquake. The city needs safer homes.

Innovative design concepts should make better use of Tehran's rooftops. As a way to respond to the city's housing crisis, future professionals could develop rooftop micro-habitations where young Tehranis can dwell, work, and socialize. Living places atop rooftops would generate an autonomous city-in-the-sky. Continuous horizontal surfaces may run from one roof to the other to make the lofty city traversable. Additionally, interchangeable, modular and prefabricated micro-habitations could be efficient to build and easy to maintain.

Future design professionals should be proactive. They should not just solicit creative solutions to recycle residual spaces but invent the processes by which new house designs can be implemented. This means fashioning new building codes and revising or removing outdated and ineffective ones. New codes can have lasting morphological and aesthetic effects on future house types and cultures. Municipality-sponsored pilot programs could foster novel ideas to respond to Tehran's housing problems. Finally, professional interventions should link the house and its protean spaces with multiple formal and informal urban spaces. In this way opportunistic housing could create a vast and richly layered network of social, economic, and cultural interaction.

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## **Conclusions**

## **Public Space Renewal in Tehran**

As a recent citizen I noticed Tehran's urge for new kinds of public spaces. So, I initiated a dissertation that outlined a call for protean spaces as the future Tehran's public spaces.<sup>71</sup> The end goal is citizen empowerment by means of protean spaces: safe, accessible, and intriguing social spaces that empower people where to make thriving places for self-growth as well as human contact. The concept at start was inspired by the ad hoc nature of Tehran "patoghs." Patoghs are native social spaces not existing without the people, making them into living places. I have used Tehran as an intrinsic case study to examine alternative planning and design processes that are capable of tracking down and enhancing protean spaces.

Protean spaces in Tehran, I have argued, can better accept, adapt to, and act in response to the city's clandestine changes over time. There, Tehranis can make further adaptable places, offering healthier social interactions and all kinds of support for personal and interpersonal relationships. The alternative process publicized in my dissertation could offer design knowledge that helps tracing possibilities and improving protean spaces by ways of learning from and building on the native people's smart placemaking tactics. The process can enhance survival chances and increase protean spaces by drawing inspirations from how

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<sup>71</sup> Protean space capacities exist within and outside conventional public spaces. These are not just on the streets, parks, and squares. They are also within small courtyards tucked away in secondary and tertiary streets, narrow allies, street corners, parking lots, brownfields, basements, balconies, upper stories, rooftops, and even in and between the tiniest residual spaces in a building.

Tehranis have made places, for example, in patoghs. The process can accommodate Tehranis with better protean spaces for future adaptations.

Tehranis have never submitted to the limited choices the city's existing public spaces are offering. Where competent and accessible public space is rare and the ones existing are hostile, people take over possible spaces, of all kinds, and turn them into places of human contact. They make up new social spaces by ways of deconstructing, then, reconstructing the existing via adaptation, appropriation, and contestation. Urban authorities typically consider Tehranis' impulsive uses unauthorized and places they make to be zones of conflict.<sup>72</sup>

My studies have particularly looked at such Tehran zones of conflict and for alternative processes that could enhance and increase protean spaces there by locating, exposing, and reinventing conflicting zones as protean spaces. I have tracked down the possibilities in unconventional urban territories in the natural residues, ordinary streets, and domestic zones. I have then based my interventions solutions on the three themes of Performative Landscapes, Generative Sidewalks, and Opportunistic Housing.

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<sup>72</sup> Worldwide, authorities, at best in attempts to secure cities, obliterate people's ideal and free access to public spaces. As Davis (1999) argues, contemporary architecture does not create democratic realms, but a "neo-military syntax" that implies violence and invokes imaginary dangers. In many places, highly-policed spaces with security systems and invisible signs are warning off to exclude alleged underclass others. It is not often the crime rates, but the social perceptions of threat that is justifying and mobilizing the needs for security in urban spaces (pp. 224-226).

## Performative Landscapes

New protean spaces in performative landscapes make connections between Tehran's natural, man-made, and human ecologies. Intra-city residual natural landscapes are the "terrain vagues"<sup>73</sup> of Tehran: the leftover green patches on the Alborz Mountain ridges, half-erased river-valley corridors, and underground matrix of abandoned qanats. They, due to less definite ownership claims and relative inaccessibility by policing authorities, make better protean spaces for future place-making adaptations. They are currently disconnected from the city's structure and its people. Ever-growing infrastructure constructions in Tehran have generated irreversible divides between the city fabric, its remainders of nature, and its people.



**Figure 5.4**

The increasing clover-shaped and double-storey highways cut through Tehran and unravel these transit zones from pedestrian (Photo by Author).

To unite Tehran's man-made, residual, and human ecologies, suitable physical access and presence of human figure are needed. Highway landscapes are unimpressed, depleted of human presence and indifferent to the urbane

<sup>73</sup> Solà-Morales (1996) introduced five constructed and interconnected realms with which the design practice should engage that is beyond architectural objects: mutations, flows, habitations, containers and terrain vagues.

bodies' needs. The landscapes are ignorant, detached from and destructive to the city's leftovers of nature, cutting off precious river-valley corridors and blinding qanat entries. Such citywide growing constructions are tearing apart any remainder of river-valleys, scarping them off from future activation possibilities. They are as well permanently screening ground entries of age-old qanats. In addition to being destructive to what nature has left behind, the highway landscapes are reluctant to and bared from tactile body experiences. The foot access and human figure presence other than in a driving car are denied within and around the highways public realm.



**Figure 5.5**

Tehran's Highway landscapes are filled with high-maintenance greenery and empty from human presence. Vegetated areas are not accessible to people on foot (Photo by Kamyar Adl).<sup>74</sup>

The theme performative landscapes could merge natural urban ecologies with the ecology of human bodies. They help balancing natural and man-made networks by bringing the human presence into the large-scale, brutalistic and blasé infrastructural landscapes of Tehran roads and highways. "Tehran roofs,"

<sup>74</sup> Retrieved from: [www.flickr.com/photos/kamshots/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/kamshots/)

residual patches atop the Alborz Mountains are other protean space possibilities to be turned into performative landscapes. Everyday, Tehranis take over these zones by creating ad hoc spaces for social gathering. Yet, the spaces they construct are often short in terms of containing bodies in a comfortable way.



**Figure 5.6**

Lofty Alborz patches make alternatives to rare and hostile public spaces elsewhere in the city (Image Source: FARS News Agency).<sup>75</sup>

Performative landscapes at the city scale are designed, therefore, as the intersections of man-made, natural, and human ecologies. They could connect the city, its natural residues, and bodies in ways that the bond could make protean spaces for social interaction. Performative landscapes accommodate

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<sup>75</sup> Retrieved from: <http://dreamofiran.com/the-roof-of-tehran-panorama-of-iranian-modernity/>

bodies in space when they are in performance, permanence, or pause. They reveal the bodies' presence when they are in motion within reluctant landscapes of roads.

### **Generative Sidewalks**

Insufficient and hostile public spaces have made Tehran sidewalks an ad hoc alternative. These embody an interstitial territory. I have called this the grey zone, which is between the streets and edging buildings. The zone, readily available, fully public, and free of charge, is contested, where notions of public and private, planned and spontaneous, and resistance and control compete. Despite some lively sidewalk spaces in Tehran,<sup>76</sup> most are dull and unexciting, offering no more than passage conduits with clichéd urban experiences.



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<sup>76</sup> Only a small number of Tehran sidewalks has made unique ad hoc meeting places. For those, location is an important factor, often positioned adjacent to well-liked streets or famous hangout places such as tiny but popular juice bars and sandwich shops.



**Figure 5.4**

Grey zones of most Tehran sidewalks lack pleasing physical conditions and aesthetic qualities. Nonetheless, people appropriate even the most mundane sidewalks. They make spaces into places to relax by themselves or build up social interactions with other acquaintances or even strangers they meet for the first time (Images courtesy of Kamyar Adl).

The grey zone on mundane sidewalks could be turned into protean spaces if design ideas could restructure those as generative places and fill them with narrative-rich spaces. Cinematic techniques can be used as tropes to describe the kind of design solutions that can generate narrative-rich sidewalks. At intervals, sequences of improvised occurrences cut the predictability of movement in favor of new situations that reflect the spirit of discovery. The sidewalks designed with cinematic experience are phenomenological, tactile, and intimate. They synchronize sequences of improvised occurrences and non-clichéd social spaces. Cinematic sidewalks are filled with contradictions, at once: predictable and random, harmonious and discordant, continuous and fragmented. They are filled with textures, spatial orientations, attitudes, patterns and vivacity, and intimate spots for artistic performance and self-expression.

Generative sidewalk spaces can then embody unplanned opportunities beyond clichéd that encourage walking, drifting discovery, and appropriation.

### **Opportunistic Housing**

Opportunistic houses are products of repurposing residual domestic spaces or designing entirely new solutions for ordinary Tehran housing. They could better connect private lives with social needs. Most ordinary houses are now substandard, nondescript and unexciting. Yet, also, they leave residual or unused spaces within and around them such as rooftops, basements, balconies, reclusive yards, and swimming pools. These leftover domestic zones make capacities for future protean spaces, opening up new space options where people can make places for social interaction.



**Figure 5.5**

Rooftop leftovers, in abundance in Tehran, make great opportunities for future design interventions (Images courtesy of Kamyar Adl).

Designers, via creative domestic leftover reuse, could invent future opportunistic housing to include integrative spaces: inexpensive living options, informal places of social gathering and contact, and informal workspace

alternatives for in-house work/socializing. Such adaptations are especially valuable to foster the needs of younger residents and women. Tehran's rampant inflation has put home ownership beyond the reach of most young Tehranis and women's activities outside the home are severely circumscribed. The new spaces reinvent the house as a sociable unit where the social self can make more choices, applying various inhabitation tactics.

## **Illustrations**

Despite the exploratory nature of my dissertation, this section includes some thematic illustration concepts. Up to here, I have intentionally hesitated to offer any drawing to better engage reader capacities for interpretation. I did so not to solidify the multiple readings possible, from my three themes, into solid imageries. At this section, however, I am bringing in some drawing scenarios to present more insights into the design process of protean space.

## **Performative-Landscape Concepts**

“Eyes of Tehran”

Residual green patches atop the Alborz Mountains are terrain vague, protean spaces that everyday Tehranis take over and turn into popular hangouts. These spaces at Tehran heights are the citizens' eyes. They open up greater vistas towards a city that is notorious for being more lovable to look at from distance

than to be lived in. Rare and hostile public spaces elsewhere have made these a superior alternative. Despite requisite popularity, the space is not flawless. One imperfection is that bodies are not well protected, hence, bodies are not really comfortable in their wide-open surroundings. The few benches inserted do no do the work.



**Figure 5.6**

Retractable and/or portable niche concepts, along with their plinth throws, could become a Tehran roofs accessory. The niches could shelter the bodies that are at pause and make them more comfortable, at a simultaneous intimacy and anonymity.

The “eyes of Tehran” is a conceptual solution to enhance the boundlessness and the unwrapped territories of lofty protean spaces atop Alborz. The concept

is to bring in space accessories<sup>77</sup> that could house further intimate niches. The niches could then accommodate bodies when they are in performance, relative permanence, and pause. Tehranis could make better places out of the accessorized zones, just by feeling more comfortable, anonymous yet also cherished, as social selves in public. I am illustrating the following accessory intervention solutions to better accommodate bodies: umbrellas and junkyard cars.

#### “Eco-Frastructural Densities”

Tehran is too dense, high-trafficked, and most of its land is overtly built. These make the open spaces rare and high-quality public space absent. Increasing infrastructure constructions and land values destroy any hope for better public spaces in future. The urban space that is not walkable triggers Tehranis’ car-dependency. Public transportation, even though largely improved over the past decade, does not satisfy a growing population. Unfortunately, planners have not yet found any better way, but to multiply the road constructions to help the city keep going. The number of double-tier highways added to the city has become a foremost achievement that Tehran Mayors, one after another, are proud to announce after the one’s term in office. Growing infrastructure constructions

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<sup>77</sup> Junkyards are also vast brownfields and wastelands in Tehran. The abundant vehicles of no use could be reclaimed and recycled as accessories atop the Alborz patches. The items reused as social spaces would contain the pausing bodies. They blend in with the landscape because declining economies have caused many citizens to drive older cars in the city. The reused cars could also look authentic, as if no design intention has been present to bring them at the heights. Being camouflaged is a protean space condition that could provoke user appropriations.

make irreversible landscapes that segregate the urban fabric and remains of nature and the people. The segregated highway landscapes offer no feasible access that denies the presence of human figure in their public realm.



**Figure 5.7**

Eco-frastructural densities fill Tehran's highway landscapes with the human presence and activities. Shared-use trails could be designed to equally allow access to walkers, bikers, and to those on wheels.

No doubt, it is not realistic to argue for the highways' destruction and that making of tremendous architectural waste. The "hovering surface" concept is a way to reuse the unneeded and inaccessible greenery or the leftover spaces belonged to the highways as new kinds of public space. Hovering surfaces are suspended or appended fields with human access on the edges, beneath, or above the infrastructural landscapes of roads. These new public spaces make performative landscapes as a way to fill highway landscapes with human presence. They reveal bodies' presence when they are in motion within reluctant

landscapes of roads and make those bodies that are on foot visible to those who are driving by on a higher speed. New public spaces could embody shared-use platforms to connect the built (highway infrastructures), natural (residual landscapes of river-valleys and qanats), and cultural (human body anthroscapes) ecologies. The connections could become future protean space possibilities that promote the making of new places for human contact and self-growth.

### **Generative-Sidewalk Concepts**

#### **“Tehran Pores”**

Many current sidewalk spaces in Tehran not just suffer from substandard physical qualities, but also make no more than tedious passage corridors filled with clichéd experiences. To revive such experiences, I argue, unrivaled and surrealist urban design interventions could work best. New narrative-rich nodes could be crafted at the intersections of a sidewalk and its edging buildings to foster generative social places. Their city-scale assembly would symbolize Tehran as a rather porous city. The new nodes, as the pores, become rich sources for Tehranis’ improvisation, discovery, and pleasure, offering new capacities for unplanned occurrences, ad hoc inventions, and urban drifting.

The “folded edge” and “nested space” pattern-examples could embed narrative-rich place nodes on sidewalk edges. The nodes represent urban pores to be used for ad hoc social contacts. The two concepts help creating exceptional linkages at the nodes on the edges. At intervals, new nodes interrupt tedious

sidewalk experiences and increase sidewalks corridor legibility. Derelict central and south Tehran streets make relevant templates for such superlative interventions. Cases include sidewalk corridors of Lalehzar, Pol-e-Chubi, Marvi, Mehran, Berlan, Jomhuri, and Nasser Khosro. Historic Lalehzar sidewalks are picked as a prototype to make new, folded and nested, nodes so that the entire street could be envisioned as an autonomous art community.



**Figure 5.8**

Lalehzar could be turned into future Tehran's autonomous art and cinema community and filled with generative place nodes. This unique street, with its emptied theatres and dilapidated buildings, provides a good template for applying the concepts of folded edges and nested spaces.

Similarly, unrivaled sidewalk renewal projects could actually happen if pragmatic strategies would merge with the out-of-the-box wisdom, aspirations, and motivation of avant-garde populations. The involvements of avant-garde populations in the process could trigger off the needs for new policies and incentives. These could grant place-making resources to women, artists, young,

and cultural entrepreneurs. Their active positions in the society as income-earners and economic productive individuals shape theirs and their families' futures. For instance, monetary, design and planning supports could be offered to purchase desolate properties or long-term lease benefits, and to convert dismal properties into creative live-work and socializing places. New places become sustainable assets that help boosting local economies. At large, these would contribute to the city's economic viability, which creates a unique identity.

### **Opportunistic-Housing Concepts**

#### **"Hybrid Retreats"**

Rare and hostile exterior spaces redirect social spaces and their needs into surplus zones of private houses such as the basements, rooftops, and balconies. These creative intrusions emerge a call for the integration of further opportunistic zones into the design of standard apartment houses. Future houses could be planned in ways that embed spaces with increased social-space intrusion capacities. Integration of hybrid retreats is a smart way to reprogram current housing as opportunistic dwelling. The addition could reinvent the house as a sociable unit where Tehranis could apply various inhabitation tactics to make themselves more choices. A portable sociable nook is a hybrid retreat concept. Such space is empowering; the social self would use the space for ad hoc socializing. There inside the house, the self could make a convivial place to nurture its sociability at relative ease.



**Figure 5.9**

Average Tehran apartments could integrate hybrid retreat concepts, inserted in the balconies and/or reclusive yards, at once private and public. The new spaces distort the boundaries to allow the public crawl into private zones.

If used as spaces of entrepreneurship, the nooks could help improving the local economic conditions in Tehran. Such spaces are especially valuable to foster the needs of avant-garde populations of women, artists, and entrepreneurs. Women's activities outside the home are severely circumscribed. Artists and entrepreneurs have found it very expensive to rent spaces for work in,

and the available space qualities are not inspirational. Sociable nook spaces in-house could become places where stay-at-home women, self-employed artists, and cultural entrepreneurs initiate informal businesses.

### “Micro-Habitations”

Tehran is overtly built that leaves the future housing developments with scarce undeveloped land. Land scarcity coupled with rampant inflation and growing land prices have put home ownership beyond the reach of most young Tehranis. In a futurist scenario, one could imagine the rooftops as the sole remaining plinths where to build new houses on. Micro-habitations on the rooftops, as an innovative design path, could create inexpensive housing to respond to the city's housing crisis.

The concept makes better use of residential rooftops by reusing them as surfaces to maximize the buildable space for opportunistic housing. Rooftop living would demand rather unconventional life styles, so presumably more satisfying for the younger and more creative populations. Rooftop micro-habitations could also become new spaces that young artists and avant-garde souls can appropriate and make integrative places to dwell, work, and socialize. These places could foster better connections between private lives and social needs.

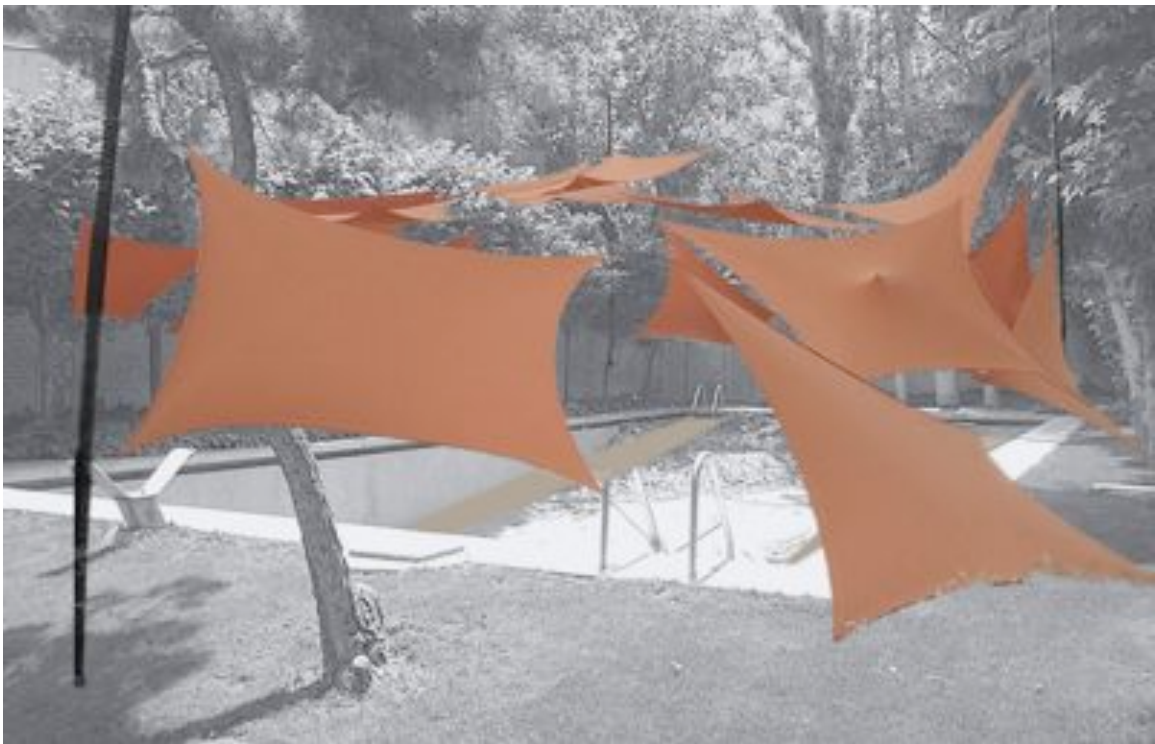


**Figure 5.10**

Creative and inexpensive home concepts on the roofs could respond to the city's housing crisis. Ambitiously, continuous traversing surfaces could make connected rooftops, a self-sufficient lofty city in the air.

### “Pool Simplicities”

Since the revolution, many private house outdoor swimming pools in Tehran have become out of use and obsolete. Most pools have lost their actual purpose due to issues of privacy and control. The buildings nearby that have become taller have made the pools and their users more visible. The physically existing, emptied-of-use blue holes in the landscape offer adaptive re-use possibilities. Simple additions as design solution could turn them into house plazas. The converted pools could also work as social retreat for the youths, women, artists and entrepreneurs.



**Figure 5.11**

Concepts as simple as a sloped and/or raised platform or a shed could turn Tehran's obsolete swimming pool spaces around. If intended with metaphoric meanings, those could also become object artifacts that are capable of drawing further attention to many of the city's current conflicts.

To turn an obsolete pool into an inhabitable container, raising the pool's inner platform for a gradually-descending ground access and inserting simple shed structures inside the pool are possible paths. The platform or the shed ideas could work better if they are designed as simple architectural objects. For an actual implementation of such concepts in Tehran, practical processes are needed that can engage the house residents as well as the social media to help spreading out the knowledge. The ideas, if known, could also invite local installation artists and others interested in the projects to join in the course of design and fabrication.

## Implications

My dissertation is not a manifesto on urbanism, but a proposal for the future of public spaces in Tehran.<sup>78</sup> While my studies concern Tehran, they make broader contributions in terms of process and methodology by creating a new knowledge on the design of protean spaces, which all cities can benefit from.

My studies support further intrinsic, probabilistic and perceptionist approaches to urbanism that could be more successful in fostering protean spaces. The approaches are rooted in the acknowledgement of present and impulsive uses of urban spaces. They better relate to a city's everyday life. They are quasi-deterministic with processes that hold promises for uncertainty and skepticism. They neither follow a fully predictable cause and effect order, nor an entirely random pattern. They are open-ended with abilities to quickly alter according to need changes.<sup>79</sup> Their processes deem many smaller and subtler interventions more valuable than big, utopian, and science-led schemes.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> A list of paradigms exist, each describing an urbanism with a single adjective such as sustainable, combinatory, typological, ecological, handmade, new, landscape, dialectical, everyday, and tactical, smart growth and healthy communities. In my dissertation, however, my goal was not concluding with another such generalizable paradigm. Although cities worldwide may share many of their problems, there is no single approach that could be expected to work effectively for every city. For example, a compact-city solution to sprawl in one city may be the enemy of another overcrowded city. Every city's problems could be unique due to irregularities, historical layers, and distinctive messiness in places where citizens live.

<sup>79</sup> As Kim Dovey (2010) said, open-endedness of place and identity liberates the architectural practice. Similar in concept, Steven Holl (2009) also argues how urbanism should work with doubt and Gui Bonsiepe (2006) invites to a liberation of urbanism from becoming of a tool of domination.

<sup>80</sup> To make protean spaces, many smaller interventions are more valuable than big urban schemes such as master planning. The ad hoc nature of such interventions allows clandestine changes over time possible in the city. As Nabil Hamdi (2004) put, smaller piecemeal interventions, each at a time, are more effective than large-scale or long-term schemes. While I do not reject the importance of design studies and how spaces are shaped physically, I see low-stakes interventions more successful. They further rely on ephemeral attributes such as living experiences and fleeting knowledge that people construct.

My studies also present the notion of conflict as a key concept in the making and interpreting of protean spaces. Conflicts are inevitable lived-experience realities of urban spaces. A genuine essence of protean spaces is their capacities to survive at the edge of and in harmony with conflicts. Protean spaces conceive the city in terms of process. Any process that would anticipate protean space productions ought to start with the conflicts that are in existence.<sup>81</sup> The city-scale assemblage of protean spaces and their urban networks are also supposed to embody capacities to survive, thrive, and self-nurture amid conflicts. Protean spaces, hence, need to build and increase their own capacities for learning and future adaptations. The assemblage could sustain via self-systematization, not by any means of external forces. Such capacities in protean spaces also help a city to prosper, not by avoiding but by admitting, articulating, and transforming zones of conflict into opportunistic place formations. The places that would shape could become micro-political forums for debate and negotiation.

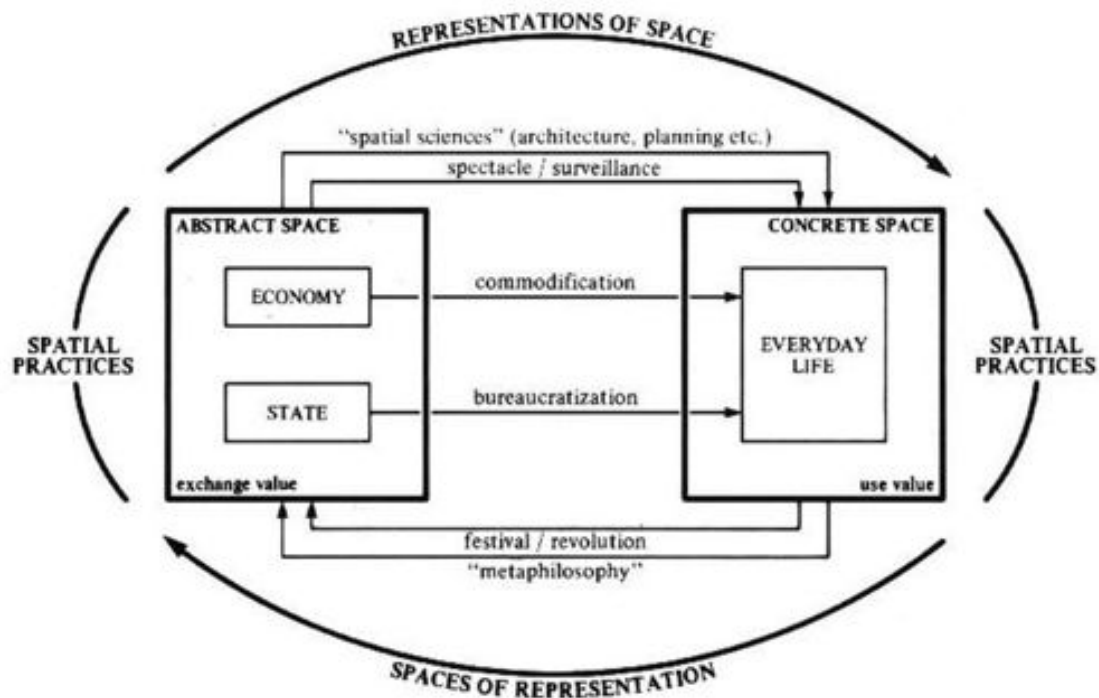
### **Recommendations for Practice and Policy**

Design and its writing have limits in terms of shaping policy and social change. The language designers use to visualize and communicate ideas is different from that of planners and decision makers. Design is often overly focused on abstract

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<sup>81</sup> Urban spaces are not neutral; as Dovey (1999) put, they are programmed according to interests in pursue amenities, profits, status, and political power. They reflect the people's interests in empowerment and freedom, the states' interests in social order, the private corporates' interests in stimulating consumption, and many differences and struggles of identities, genders, classes, races, cultures and ages (p. 1).

form-making and solid tools of drawing and computerized modeling. Writing about design is often too philosophical, filled with nonfigurative statements far from happening. Despite the limits, I conclude that design and writing about design can make larger socio-political impacts by means of better communication. Planning and design professionals as spatial practices can become more influential in a city's operations. They do so by better connections between the abstract and concrete spaces. Gregory (1994) defines the connection in the following scheme (Figure 5-1).



**Figure 5.12**

The spatial practices establish linkages, as intermediaries, between a city's abstract spaces of economic and political productions and its concrete spaces of the everyday life (Gregory, 1994, p. 405).

In anticipation for long-term impacts on Tehran's policies and urban change and as a relevant means for better communication, my dissertation concludes with a course of action. I do not end my studies at this conclusion chapter, but carry on the outcomes with making a website that I name The Protean Space Initiative. The website is a tactical tool to disseminate knowledge of protean spaces and receive future supports. It is a proactive way to connect with influential people for support and help keeping my initial project premises alive.<sup>82</sup>

My Tehran study is the first project to display online. However, the website does not limit its discussions to Tehran, but shape and disperse global knowledge on protean spaces. The first, Tehran project would plant seeds for future urban transformations. It also would instigate similar discussions for new projects in other cities, as a visionary forum to introduce project topics relevant to other cities. The online forum would enhance likelihood that such projects could have broader impacts. The forum would also become a didactic platform to examine alternative planning and design practices. As excitors/instigators, discourses in the forum could inform, inspire, and engage professionals and policymakers, at one level, and artist, young, and women communities, at another. By operating with user collaborations, the forum could invite creative brains and local resources to involve in testing out new urban uses, prototypes, technologies, and processes. Ambitiously, the online initiative would remain an experimental platform to impact the future of cities.

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<sup>82</sup> In addition to my holistic protean space project for Tehran, the forum can put out ideas for smaller and rather short-term projects to enliven Tehran's existing public spaces. For example, a platform can engage Tehranis, asking their ideas on pop-up social place-makings in desolate neighborhood-scale boostans or their help in inventing tactics to enhance workability on Tehran streets.

## **A Colloquial Space in the Website for Artists and Entrepreneurs**

Tehran needs innovative spaces that could house new local economies. Since the 1979 revolution, many Iranian artists and cultural entrepreneurs have been facing numerous limitations in regards to their spaces of production. State regulations have urged many to stretch their practices into eccentric realms and develop the kinds of mentalities that could enable them getting around limitations. These groups are often self-employed and proactive in finding and making their own workplaces. The suggested website initiative could help fostering the needs of local artists and entrepreneurs by including a discussion group section. The open colloquium could invite public engagement in the processes of ideating and making protean spaces and involve unique perspectives of artists and entrepreneurs.

Artists and entrepreneurs make local economies that are the city's assets. The discussion group in the website could become an experimental platform where new ideas could be expressed, for example, on possible integrative live-work-socializing spaces. Embedding these creative people in the city development strategies could lead to smarter choices and thriving local economies. The creative people bring in different perspectives, often more ambitious than those that planners and designers have. In addition to their new ideas, those artists and entrepreneurs with pragmatic abilities could help putting new space project ideas into practice.



**Figure 5.13**

Darehbaghi, in collaboration with an artist friend of his, Pooya Aryanpour, repurposed the far-end section of the Saadabad's greenhouse into a twin-studio. Since its museum reconfiguration, Saadabad has been housing a traditional art and craft section for pottery, sculpture, and carpentry. Pointed at in the picture, this section is somewhat hidden. Not many visitors would know about it. Although art spaces have pre-existed in Saadabad, the twin-studio is unique: an adaptive-reused greenhouse with a modern feeling for artistic expression. Darehbaghi who was directly involved in all planning, design, and construction stages made a resulting space that is in accordance with its initial drawings. The artist also wanted to turn the rest of the greenhouse into gallery space for group exhibitions. This idea never came true (Images courtesy of the artist).

In 2011, when conducting my fieldworks in Tehran, I interviewed the creative and pragmatic artist Morteza Darehbaghi.<sup>83</sup> He had inspiring ideas on the kinds of personal and social qualities in places that, he believed, could accelerate prosperous art making. Back then, his ideas resonated much with my concept of protean space. Starting in 2009, the artist solicited the location, and designed and built his art studio, to my surprise, on the Saadabad property.<sup>84</sup> Until then, I had not thought that institutionalized settings like Saadabad with all their bureaucratic restrictions could also offer spaces for placemaking innovations.

The artist had initially intended his studio space in ways that the space could be shared with Tehran's artists' communities. He, who had lived in New York for few years, not finding enough inspiration to make art abroad, came back to Tehran in 2005. He returned with much energy to bring about cultural change in artistic productions domains.<sup>85</sup> When he was building the studio, he had an additional intention to turn it into a communal place where artists could gather to exchange ideas. In his view, collaboration and constructive criticism in the shared space could result in new artistic expressions.

The artist believed in the capacities of his space to contribute to the emergence of prosperous art movements in Tehran. The artist had even thought

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<sup>83</sup> Throughout the dissertation, I have used pseudonym, but the artist had no objection using his real name.

<sup>84</sup> Saadabad, located north of Tehran, was first used by the Qajar kings and rebuilt as the Pahlavis' residence. The site has become a museum complex since the 1979 revolution. The Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization administers the buildings and housed cultural artifacts.

<sup>85</sup> Between his return until 2011, he led some artistic and cultural space projects in Tehran. In addition to his Saadabad studio and another dilapidated house he renovated as his living place north of the city, he was the founding brain behind the creation of Tehran's café-galleries. He meant those to become new integrative artistic platforms where new artistic expressions could take form. At the Niavaran Palace-Museum, Dr. Hesabi Museum, Iranshahr Garden, and Bagh-e-Ferdos Museum sites, he helped the inauguration of four café-galleries. Despite his initial active supports of the idea and their shaping, at the time of our interviews, he did not believe that what these spaces had achieved in reality had been relative to their utmost, originally expected potentials. Instead of the kinds of spaces that could build new artistic expressions, in his view Tehran café-galleries were in reality turned into cliché commercial spaces used for superficial hangouts.

about holding open-studios every Tuesday and invite video-artists, documentarist, and sculptors to exchange viewpoints. Cutting-edge and inspirational interiors made the studio a unique place. The artist' direct influence on the interiors' aesthetics was an advantage. The studio had a progressive setting where one could feel like being in any world-city's renovated loft.



**Figure 5.14**

The making process of the studio was under the artist's direct supervision.

Despite early desires to share the studio as a communal place, the space remained as a private workplace. The twin-studio that is physically there has

recently become emptied of use, not anymore in the artists' custody. Despite upfront renovation costs paid out of pocket, the artists had to give up the space due to management changes and terminate their lease contract sooner. The space expiration funnels a rethinking on the kinds of spaces that could sustain similar creative place-making. This invokes whether institutional spaces could at all be opportunistic or that future opportunistic houses, as discussed in earlier chapters, are better alternatives.

### **Lessons for Education**

Design school could initiate the protean space learning by reestablishing their core curricula in ways that could better engage dynamic design processes and outcomes. The new curricula could demand further creativity on the part of students in realms of theory making. In terms of process, studios often use predefined problems created by instructors. New curricula could ask students to take the lead in problematizing. Students could be encouraged to originate topics based on native people's impulsive uses of urban spaces. This would demand a longer period of theoretical exploration at the beginning of the design process. Students need to locate zones of conflict and transform them into opportunistic design projects. Instructors could also encourage project outcomes beyond clichéd and solid image productions and curatorial efforts in prose writing, critiquing, making websites, blogging, and tweeting can find further values in the process.

## **Further Direction**

Tehran's protean spaces would empower Tehranis and constitute their rights to urban spaces. The protean space inclusion would renew the city's public spaces. Protean spaces are the creatively-unfinished results of probabilistic processes that could hold back and procrastinate the place-ness of spaces. Such incompleteness is opportunistic, leaving more possibilities for the user manipulation. They conceive the kinds of spaces that could longer remain in preconception stages and the states of becoming.

My future research could carry further my studies on the revival of public spaces with protean space. I am particularly interested in expanding the idea of opportunistic housing. I look for new housing typologies that are sociable urban units with protean space capacities for human contact. Codes and regulations, for instance, are major determinants of a city form, so revising and establishing new codes could be a way to create domestic protean spaces capacities.

My dissertation has for the most parts been abstract and perfectionist. It has leaned towards ideal solutions by exploring novel theories that push the limits of what design professionals can be and do for the society. My future research, however, would also look for practical solutions and educative processes that invite the kinds of public engagements needed to put prospective research results into practice.

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## **CV**

### **Bio**

I am a practiced architect and a landscape architect from Tehran and am committed to the integrity of theory and design. My experience ranges from teaching design, to public interest planning and architecture, to integrated project delivery, to historic preservation and urban restoration. I came to the United States in 2007 to pursue a doctoral degree in architecture. I joined the “Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures” program at SARUP, UWM where I accumulated broad theoretical knowledge that informs my teaching and practice. In recognition of my doctoral research, I received the ARCC Kings Medal, the Scott Greer Award, first Dean Bob Greenstreet Honorary Award, and a number of Chancellor’s and Travel Awards. I presented at conference venues such as ARCC, SAH, Toward a Just Metropolis, and International Conference on Arts and Humanities.

While at the doctoral program, I taught three undergraduate design studios and held a two-year senior project manager position at the Community Design Solutions outreach center. At the center, I led student teams and provided under-resourced Wisconsin communities with conceptual design and planning services. I also organized and facilitated public workshops that engaged communities in design and planning processes. The “Wausau North East Riverfront Master Plan” project that I managed at CDS received news recognition and is published in the “World Landscape Architecture” magazine. Prior to my doctoral studies in the United States, I had worked in Tehran for five years. At Amood, a small firm, I became familiar with historic preservation and urban restoration. At Mapna, a large company, I got immersed in technical dimensions of architectural practice in a close collaboration with civil, mechanical, and electrical engineering.

My diverse professional experience and academic knowledge made me a research-based designer and educator. They instilled in me the worth of integrative, knowledge-based design practice informed by relevant theories and user-inclusive processes. In the future, with each class I teach and each design problem I solve, I am learning and growing my knowledge on the better assimilation of design and theory.

### **Research**

Architecture and Urban Design Theory  
 Cinema and Architecture

### **Teaching Experience**

ARCH 420 Architectural Design II  
 ARCH 410 Architectural Design I  
 ARCH 320 Fundamentals of Architectural Design II

## Education

### **Ph.D. Architecture**

August 2007 – August 2014

School of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee

### **Graduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education**

January 2009 - December 2012

School of Education, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee

### **Master of Arts in Landscape Architecture**

September 2003 - July 2006

School of Architecture, College of Fine Arts, University of Tehran

### **Continuous Master in Architecture (including Bachelor)**

September 1997 - August 2003

Department of Architecture, Qazvin Azad University

## Professional Development

### **Proposal Writers Boot Camp**

Foundation Center, Chicago, 2012

### **Master Planning: Moving Toward a Sustainable City Certificate**

Executive Education, Harvard Graduate School of Design, 2012

### **Passive Thermal Design for Energy Efficiency and Indoor Comfort Certificate**

Energy Center of Wisconsin, ComeEd Training, 2012

### **KPT OPD Training: Plant Engineering/Plant Layout Certificate**

Siemens Technical Knowledge Transfer, Mapna Co., Tehran, IRAN, 2005

### **Teacher Training Course Certificate (TTC)**

Aryanpour Language Center, Tehran, Iran, 2007

## Career

### **Design Consultant**

December 2011- May 2014

Community Design Solutions, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee

### **Adjunct Professor**

January 2012 – May 2013

School of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee

Courses:

ARCH 420 Architectural Design II- Spring 2012

ARCH 410 Architectural Design I- Fall 2012  
 ARCH 320 Fundamentals of Architectural Design II- Spring 2013

### **Senior Project Manager**

August 2009 - September 2011

Community Design Solutions, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee

Projects:

UWM Film Department Renovation, July 2009-March 2010  
 The Riverworks Center Design Guidelines, June 2009-March 2010  
 Johnsons Park Mixed-Used Development, September 2009-January 2010  
 Milwaukee River Greenway Master Plan, September 2009-June 2010  
 UWM School of Continuing Education Renovation, January 2010-July 2010  
 Five Points Transportation Hub, April 2010-September 2010  
 Greater Galilee Baptist Church Expansion, August 2010-December 2010  
 Jackpot Gallery Building Renovation, August 2010-January 2011  
 Juneau Park Urban Revitalization, January 2011-February 2011  
 Casa Romero Renewal Center Renovation, January 2011-June 2011  
 West Greenfield Avenue Streetscape Revitalization, January 2011-June 2011  
 Milwaukee Police/Fire Safety Academy Building Renovation, October 2010-August 2011  
 Tannery Office Park Center Master Plan, June 2011-August 2011  
 Wausau North East Riverfront Master Plan, June 2011-January 2012

### **Design Consultant**

December 2008 - August 2009

The City of Milwaukee's Economic Development Division

### **Teacher Assistant**

August 2007 - May 2009

School of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee

Courses:

ARCH 615 Studies in Architectural Tech. & Theory: Animation Studio- Spring 2009  
 ARCH 581 Law & Professional Practice for Architects- Fall 2008  
 ARCH 300 Architecture History & Theory- Spring 2008  
 ARCH 382 Computers in Architecture: Revit Architecture 2008- Fall 2007

### **Architect**

October 2003 - August 2007

MAPNA Group, Engineering Deputy

### **Architect**

November 2001 – April 2003

Amood Consulting Engineers Co.

## **Awards and Services**

### **Awards**

Leadership and Service Award, Community Design Solutions, UWM, Spring 2012

Bob Greenstreet Honorary Scholarship, Fall 2011  
 ARCC Kings Medal for Outstanding Research, Spring 2011  
 Scott Greer Award for Outstanding Research in Urban Studies, UWM, 2010  
 Graduate Student Travel Awards, UWM: Spring 2010 & Spring 2009  
 Graduate School Chancellor's Awards, UWM: Fall 2007, Fall 2009 & Fall 2010

### **Services**

Doctoral Program Committee, SARUP, UWM, 2007-2009  
 DAR Committee, SARUP, UWM, 2007

## **Scholarships**

### **Publications**

Khorshidifard, S. (2011), A Paradigm in Architectural Education: Kolb's Model and Learning Styles in Studio Pedagogy, In Plowright, P., & Gamper, B. (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 2011 ARCC Spring Research Conference* (pp. 621-635), Publisher: Lawrence Technological University.

Khorshidifard, S. (2010), Genuine, Protean, Ad Hoc Public Spaces: Patogh-Space Networks of Tehran, In *e.polis 2014: an online student journal of urban studies* (36-64), Urban Studies Program, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, Vol. IV, Fall/Winter 2011

Khorshidifard, S. (2009), A Film Studies Approach in Architectural Research: The Image of Power in Urban Public Space in three Iranian Films, In Rashed-Ali, H., & Roff, Sh. (Eds.). *Leadership in Architectural Research, Proceedings of the 2009 Research Conference* (pp. 189-199), Publisher: Architectural Research Centers Consortium

Khorshidifard, S. (2009), Contestation of Power in Protean Spaces: Everyday Form of Resistance and Sovereignty in Urban Public Space, In La, G., & Zell, M. (Eds), *calibrations 3: positions* (p. 179), Publisher: School of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

### **Presentations**

Khorshidifard, S. (2011), A paradigm in architectural education: Kolb's Model and learning styles in studio pedagogy, ARCC 2011 Conference: Considering Research: Reflecting upon current themes in Architectural Research, Detroit, MI, April 20-23 2011.

Khorshidifard, S., & Weistrop, S. (2010), Innovative Strategies, Fresh Roles and Renewed Commitment to Collaboration for CDCs, Toward a Just Metropolis: From Crises to Possibilities conference, San Francisco Bay Area, CA, June 16-20 2010.

Khorshidifard, S. (2010), Genuine, Protean, Ad Hoc Public Spaces, 63rd Society of Architectural Historians Conference, Chicago, IL, April 21-25 2010, 15th Annual

Urban Studies Forum: The Changing City, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, April 10 2010, and International Conference on Arts and Humanities, Honolulu, HI, January 13-16 2010.

Khorshidifard, S. (2009), A Film Studies Approach in Architectural Research: The Image of Power in Urban Public Space in three Iranian Films, ARCC 2009 Conference: Leadership on Architectural Research: Between Academia and the Profession, University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, TX, April 15-18 2009,

Khorshidifard, S. (2009), Unique Phenomena in Humble Spaces, Small Places with Big Hearths: Abu's Jerusalem of the Gold, 14th Annual Urban Studies Forum: City Life: Emerging Perspectives, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI, April 4 2009.

### **Invited Panel Discussion**

Khorshidifard, S. (2012), "Discussion Facilitation on The Complete Persepolis by Marjan Satrapi," 2012 First-Year Common Reading Experience (CRE) @ UWM: University-Wide Orientation for Incoming Freshman, Lubar School of Business, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI, August 26-September 1 2012.

Khorshidifard, S. (2011), "Planning your Course," Panel presentation for TEACHING @ UWM: University-Wide Orientation and Teaching Conference for New Teaching Assistants and Teaching Academic Staff, Lubar School of Business, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI, August 23 2011.

Khorshidifard, S. (2010), "Teaching One Session at a Time," Panel presentation for TEACHING @ UWM: University-Wide Orientation and Teaching Conference for New Teaching Assistants and Teaching Academic Staff, Lubar School of Business, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI, August 24 2010.

### **Reports, Readers & Websites**

CDS project published in World Landscape Architect, In SARUP News, February 28 2012, <http://www4.uwm.edu/sarup/news/cdsproject2012.cfm>. Wausau North East Riverfront Master Plan project in the World Landscape Architecture magazine, February 28 2012, <http://worldlandscapearchitect.com/wausau-north-east-riverfront-masterplan-wausau-wisconsin-community-design-solutions/#.T2Hzha5N740>.

North Central Wisconsin Channel 9 News Release: City Leaders Want to Merge Riverfront with Downtown (January 16 2012, 10 pm news), <http://www.waow.com/story/16531695/city-leaders-want-to-merge-riverfront-with-downtown>.

News Release: Community to help shape vision for East Riverfront District (June 28 2011), City of Wausau, Department of Public Works, Planning Division, <http://www.ci.wausau.wi.us/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=hnCTqQeyrc0%3D&tabid=578>.

Mentioned in Article: Travel and Tribute for UWM Architecture Dean, Laura Hunt, In *Fall 2011 UWM Alumni Magazine*, p. 13,  
[http://issuu.com/uwmnews/docs/alumni2011fall\\_2](http://issuu.com/uwmnews/docs/alumni2011fall_2).

Mentioned in Article: 2010 Scott Greer Awards, Tina J. Wagner, In *UWM Report, Faculty/Staff Newsletter*, Volume 31, Number 5, June 2010, p. 7,  
[http://www4.uwm.edu/news/publications/report/upload/UWM\\_R\\_Jun\\_5-18.pdf](http://www4.uwm.edu/news/publications/report/upload/UWM_R_Jun_5-18.pdf)

## **Languages and Qualifications**

### **Languages**

Persian: Native

English: Fluent

French: Post Intermediate

Le Diplôme Du DELF/DALF 1er Degré, A1, A2 & A3 [taken June 2004] & A4 [taken June 2005], Institut de Langues d'Iran, Tehran, IRAN

Studied at Kish Institute of Science and Technology (KFZO Affiliated)

Period: 21 months (882 hours), up to FA1 level

June 1999 – August 2003

Spanish: Beginning

Studied at the Kish Institute of Science and Technology

June 2003 - August 2005

Arabic: Beginning

Studied at Middle and High School Curriculum

September 1991 - May 1997

### **Computer Skills**

Revit, AutoCAD, 3D Studio, Adobe: Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, & Premiere Pro, Arc GIS, & SPSS