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**Tehran**  
**urban narration as method**  
**for urban intervention**

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Name of the institute  
Institute of Structural Design



## **AFFIDAVIT**

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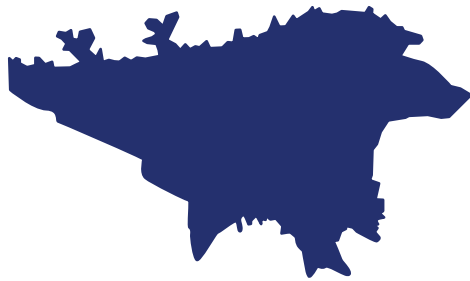
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# Tehran

urban narration as method  
for urban intervention

این پایان نامه به دوستانم در ایران اختصاص دارد:  
متشکرم برای لحظات و صمیمیتی که با هم داشتیم،  
برای غذایی با هم قسمت کردیم، برای پشتیبانیتان و برای  
ماجراجویی هایی که با هم تجربه اش کردیم.





*This thesis is dedicated to my friends in Iran.  
Thank you for the moments and joy we had together,  
the food we shared, the support,  
friendship and adventures we experienced.*





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## Abstract

This master's thesis explores everyday life in a limited area of the metropolis of Tehran, Iran. Tehran is a Middle-Eastern city where religious laws determine what is allowed to happen on the streets and what is not. This raises questions about how people live together in the city. How do they behave towards governmental regulations? What do they think about their political situation? How is space created and who creates space? What strategies and tactics exist in Tehran? How does change happen?

The first chapters give an insight into the relation of politics, history and the current situation for the socio-cultural and urban context through literature review. It gives an understanding of the power relations that exist due to the political foundation of the country. After the introduction, which explores theoretical aspects and methodological approaches, there follows the in-situ exploration of the Middle-Eastern city. The city was explored from June 2015 to December 2015 as well as during three more shorter journeys.

The exploration is shaped by a mix of methodologies related to exploring the soft and hard factors of the city. Drifting the city by oneself, with others and being guided through the city are aspects besides the conversations with locals, travellers and experts which form the content of the main part of the thesis. The Situationist International notion of urban strolls are walks related to personal emotion. The impressions and collections of stories, spatial descriptions and images are transformed into an urban narration. The narration itself is the central method of the thesis.



The result of the explorations is the narration which is the foundation of the future urban intervention. The urban intervention itself uses the existing structure of poems in envelopes sold in the street and re-uses the medium to distribute ideas for urban strolls, adaptation and sensual awareness of the surrounding. It creates abstract guidance through the city.

Both the narration and the intervention mirror the current situation and ideas for reaching out to the city as a place to explore, and to identify personal and collective needs for the urban environment. The methodology literature review, urban strolls, and narration are important sources for the artistic urban intervention idea. In conclusion, tactics and strategies that already exist are mentioned throughout the narration and lead to the future urban intervention. The result of the thesis is the narration with its explorations and the urban intervention as an idea for locals to experience their city in a fresh way, to recreate space and form space within the possibilities of their legal system. awareness of the surrounding. It creates abstract guidance through the city.

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## Foreword

The initial idea was to find the hidden or spaces in Tehran. Hidden spaces in this manner are formed in places where people meet for illegal concerts, theatre plays, etc. The idea was to wander the city and locate hidden places through this wandering, as well as through local actors. To describe them by creating atmospheric descriptions but also by searching for common aspects, for instance a red dot on the door bell. The question was what these hidden spaces have in common. To come to Tehran and to seek these places was more difficult than previously expected. One factor was the religious events that limit what happens within the city. Another reason was that some of the institutions that allow and have allowed illegal events to take place on their premises were mistrustful. One could be a journalist who would get them into trouble. → *subversive 20*

### *Initial Proposal:*

*What will I find while seeking the hidden? What will be hidden for me because of my search for the hidden? What will I be able to find and explore? Conversations and exploration will lead me through the city of Tehran. Not knowing what to see or to expect.*

*What are the hidden spaces of Tehran, what do these spaces tell me? Through spatial experience and a written diary of field research and reflection, in my understanding as a foreign individual inside the city, I would like to provide an understanding of the hidden spaces in Tehran.*

*My main idea is to experience the urban space of Tehran, with the idea in mind of exploring the hidden spaces and writing down my experiences. Having conversations that allow a reflection of people who have been living in Tehran their whole lives.*



## Spatial exploration Tehran - first ideas and concept -

excerpt proposal status April 2015

### Hidden spaces Tehran

Starting with the idea of the city as a tissue of social, spatial, architectural togetherness I will explore the city of Tehran finding 'hidden spaces'. What are hidden spaces? What do the hidden spaces teach architects? What can one learn from and for the urban sphere?

Being drawn by the moment, letting myself being attracted to the people and places, I want to draw an image of Tehran that might not be visible at first sight. An approach without disposing of spaces in maps, but through telling stories that allow being drawn into the scenery.

The master's thesis will be a city guide of the invisible - hidden - spaces. It will be a collection of explorations, conversation

excerpts, drawings in-situ that hopefully will allow the connection to historical and cultural aspects. In the best case, the book can help understand social and spatial terms.

Two strongly different approaches will be the starting point. The on-site approach is a field research, where different existent methods will be used, interpreted and changed in order to work best for the city of Tehran. This leads to a theoretical look into the subject. I might reflect this in my book as a glossary.

The encounter with the city of Tehran, being confronted with the local situation might cause major changes within the concept.

*Being drawn by the moment, letting myself be attracted to the people and places, I want to write an image of Tehran that might not be visible at first sight on entering the city. Through storytelling, one is drawn into the scenery.*

*This master thesis will be a city guide to behaviour and spatial aspects. It will be a collection of explorations, conversation excerpts, drawings that hopefully will allow a connection to historical and cultural aspects. Its objective is to offer an insight into social and spatial terms.*

The result of the in-situ research turned out to leave the hidden spaces mostly behind. The decision was made to find out about spatial strategies and tactics. The results from the research methods, which are based on the great wanderers and field diary, are transformed into narration. The narration itself is the method for the urban intervention that follows. The stories reflect the situations experienced on a personal scale and describe spaces and spatial situations. This reflects an approach oriented on Situationist International methodology.

→ situationist  
international  
11

The names of people within the stories are altered for their personal safety. Further to this, some quotes within the thesis given by people I met at random or don't know in person are only mentioned by first name. The people mentioned in the narration are between twenty and forty years old, the professor is 67 years old. The oldest lady I met was in her 80s. Persian language or Farsi is the official language of Iran. Since Arabic is used for writing, words translated into English can differ in the way they are written. There are no general translation rules. Therefore names found within the text might be written differently in different sources. The Farsi Kh for instance can also be written Ch. It is important to note that dates and years are calculated from the Persian calendar to the Gregorian calendar. The Iranian calendar is based on the Solar Hijri calendar. New Year's Day falls on the March equinox. If a source mentions a year but not a date it reflects the Persian year from March to March. This can mean that the years mentioned without specific month can be plus or minus one.



## Personal background and motivation

I grew up in Germany in places of different sizes, from a small village to larger cities. I had never before lived in a city of millions nor in a cultural surrounding very different from that of my upbringing. Highly curious about the unknown, I accessed patterns, approaches and practices I learned throughout life. Trying them out in this different fabric of social surrounding and space I encountered borders and possibilities previously unknown to me. I am fully aware that 'what I can give to people as an architect' is related to my upbringing, mingled with my studies, my cultural foundation and the new fabric, people and places with which I connect.

Germany and Austria are the main places of my personal growth, while other places have also influenced me. My wider family is made up of middle-class, artists, intellectuals and working class challenged me to use senses, to listen to people, to use my mind and hand in order to relate to the world. I do not know about any family roots being related to Iran, nor did I know any Persian language before I arrived in Iran. My only way to connect to space and people was by learning the language, exposing myself to the city and using any chance I had to connect to locals, to hear their stories and to join their paths.

My motivation to live in Iran was related to the idea that I needed to face everyday life in order to relate to the city and to create a corresponding idea. Living in Tehran for 174 days from June 19, 2015 until October 10, 2015 without longer breaks was a difficult decision to make. It felt like I was taking risk and while landing at the airport in Tehran I wondered: 'Why am I doing this? Is this really necessary?' Now I say: 'Yes'. At times, I struggled with being in a place with different social rules and unpredictable issues, depressing situations and for me seemingly everlasting processes. I am glad and thankful for the great friendships I made, and for the support I received in translating cultures from Iranians who live or have lived in Europe and around the world.

I returned to Tehran for twelve days in February 2016. I am aware that my attention, my way of interacting and my language barriers have altered. I was able to communicate and to translate aspects to the architecture student group from the academy in Nuremberg who invited me on their trip. Moreover, I felt familiar with the city of Tehran and free to move around. Aware of structures and maybe already blinded by assumptions. During the first two trips to Iran, two weeks in January and two weeks in February 2015, I was mainly taken care of by others and moved around by car. I am now able to move through the city by myself, from taking a motorcycle taxi to driving a car myself. Many times on the street and from people I heard the sentence “You can’t trust anyone”, knowing that I can’t survive without trusting people.

I hope that the narration as a method for relating to Tehran will raise awareness of the options that are open for relating to built environments. To ask what people need, to encounter the existing practices of daily life, to play with the city, learn from it and engage with it. I am aware that I am still beginning to understand people, the culture and city. A city that is a paradox to me in many ways. Perhaps this is not just difficult, but also a chance. I would like to be able to relate to places, people and design sensitively and to question the status quo in urban public life.

I would be pleased if I can motivate and encourage young Iranians to look at the city as a resource with all its options. Since my idea comes from an engagement with the place and what I can bring to people, I would love to see what young designers in Iran come up with when being guided to design through a process of making small interventions. I hope I will get the chance to do so.

I am in a privileged situation being born in Germany. I was able to leave Iran at any time, which is not the case for Iranians. While with a German passport one can visit almost any country you like, with an Iranian passport one can travel to almost no countries without visa. (“Visa requirements for Iranian citizens” 2016)



## Methodology

The thesis consists of a variety of methods, from academic research to artistic methodology. The idea for the urban intervention is the result of transferring the in-situ experience of urban walks, conversations and spatial experiences represented in the narrative writing. The following lines will shortly introduce the methods that are mainly used. The explanations are compound and need to be understood as an introduction. Depending on the importance of terms for the thesis, terms are either simply introduced or else explored more deeply. The following terms mentioned in the methodology: space and place, strategy and tactic, are explored in the chapter on theory, terms and definitions. This gives a meta level for a better understanding of the narration and urban intervention.

### ***(1) City walk - Street view – Daily life***

For Situationist International, the walk as an urban experience was one important aspect in order to experience space. Being a participant observant is part of qualitative research methods in cultural anthropology, ethnology and other related disciplines. It allows one to retrace the experience of the researching field or group. (Omahna “Methoden der qualitativen Raumanalyse” 5) Experiencing the city by walking, using public transport, taxis, and rides with strangers. The starting-point of the research is dominated by the street view and one-to-one experience of the city. It was an important choice to go to Iran in order to be part of everyday life. Being in situ enables an understanding of the dynamics of human beings in relation to a city’s structure and their way of interacting with the built environment.

***(1.1) The Situationist International (SI)*** followed the idea of changing art into an art of free life. This free life was supposed to be created by wandering the streets, making psycho-geographic mappings, and misusing overcome structures for finally creating a permanent revolution in daily life. The SI looks at daily life as a result of

*“Drifting throughout the city allows us to be spontaneously free to explore without any determining factors. When we allow our thoughts and actions to be influenced by emotions, we can release our desires and aspirations upon the city. Within this sense of freedom, we can discover hidden relations within the city.” (Carlisle 2012)*

singular situations. Therefore, in order to change people's lives, the SI proposes to disturb, radicalize, divert something from the intended use in order to revolutionize everyday life.

Influencing the city structure and the architectural approaches. For architects the SI practice became an instrument for wandering the city. It is a way of connecting with social and political aspects of the urban environment. This wandering is called *dérive*, in English drift/drift/drift/wandering. Drifting alters the perception of space. (Kuhnert et al. 18)

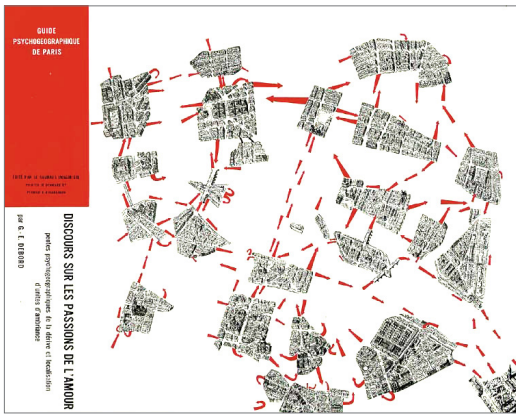


fig. 1  
guy  
debord  
1957

**Psycho-geographic mappings:** Guy Debord's mappings blast the city. It creates islands of quarters or further of places that the movement relates to. What is part of the movement is visible on the visualization, while the elements that are not within the attention disappear by being wiped out. The arrows create an idea of speed and relation, while the areas are emphasized in relation to the overall environment. Psycho-geographic mappings are used to study how

the geographical environment affects the emotions and behaviour of individuals. The maps raise awareness on the built and cultural environment, relate place and emotion and are often critical and political. (Careri 32) Instead of using the mappings proposed by the SI, the thesis uses the method of narration to explore space, emotions and connections.

SI was mainly situated in Paris. *Dérive* was a form of everyday art of life employed in order to explore the already familiar environment. In this thesis *Dérive* is used to explore an unfamiliar surrounding. This is not only used in order to become more aware of the already familiar surrounding, but also a familiarization with the unknown. Additionally, it allows one to reflect on what places within a city attract one personally. Interestingly, parallel to SI, Cedric Price and Alison and Peter Smithson developed an architecture to enable. (Kuhnert et al. 18) The use of *dérive*, a method

developed in Paris, within the urban context of Tehran - a very dissimilar environment - needs to be looked at critically. Especially as ideas of the urban stroll are implemented for the urban intervention.

### ***(2) Trace movements***

The mobile phone application Moves traces movements and is an activity diary. It detects if one walks, uses a bicycle or any other form of transportation. One can create places and name the places, while transport can also be defined. This application traced my steps from 14 July 2015 on.

The application Move-O-Scope allows a visualization of the data on a map. It creates places which vary in size depending on how much time one spends there. The more time, the bigger the point becomes. The idea of tracing with Moves is to have no need to look at maps and to follow the streets, free movement. Using the application enables a focus on the street view, on stories and connections with locals, without one being busy looking at a map or a phone. While focusing on the streets the phone automatically traces one's path, in the case of Tehran not very accurately. The results are maps that enable an understanding of movements through the city. What places were of major importance and how the narration is located within the city structures. It demonstrates that the narration is limited to parts of the city.

### ***(3) Connecting with locals***

Important for the research is connection with locals. If people didn't know English, they sometimes knew German or others helped to translate. The conversations can last a couple of minutes or stretch into hours. The language barrier limits the potential for communication. The conversations took place with people from middle-class to rich and from liberal to conservative and or religious family backgrounds, aged from about twenty to forty years old, but also some younger and older people. One professor was 67 years old. The connections range from strangers on the street to close friends. Communication occurred with Iranians known from Austria, people known through friends in Austria, people met through dating services, in taxis, buses and cafés.

### ***(3.1) Narrative interviews***

The method used for interviews is the “narrative interview”, a qualitative method used in empirical social sciences. The method works by giving the interviewee a fairly broad thematic frame in which he/she can freely associate thoughts, choosing what he/she deems most relevant. The progression of the interview is entirely open, in contrast to more narrow modes of interviewing used in sociology. The method uses serendipity as its potential.

One way to enter into conversation can be a question concerning the biography of the interviewee. The interviewer starts to leave the conversation and allows the interviewee to lead the content. After a phase of listening, which can be interspersed with thoughtful silence, the interviewee gets back to asking questions for a better understanding. The content of the conversation can be discussed together at the end. The goal of this method is not the acquisition of objective data (this remains the domain of various quantitative methods), but rather the gathering and subsequent interpretation of each interviewee’s subjective, personal stories that are composed of their own conglomerate of memories and experiences. (Hopf 349-360)

The narrative interview was used for conversations with professors and other officials but also for talking with people in cafés and on the streets.

### ***(4) Spaces and urban research***

Places have an inner logic, the German word “Stadtforschung”, which usually is inadequately translated as urbanism, researches the city. “Stadtforschung” is a form of urban research or sociological urban research. Omahna writes in “Die qualitative Standortanalyse” that within the discourse of “Stadtforschung” the theory exists that cities have their inner logic and that not only traditional habits influence space but also the specific character of a place influences behaviour. The defined place in terms of geography, politics and culture are influenced by relational coherency. (Omahna 3-4)

In the drift, locals are asked to guide. It enables access to places that wouldn’t have been reachable and interestingly enough different people

lead to the same locations. Returning to some places many times makes it possible to see the use of the spaces at different times of the day, the month and the year. It allows an understanding of the spatial use and habits. The strategies and tactics adopted by people become visible and clear. Certain places bring out different behaviours. People cluster at places that are similar to their subculture.

→ subculture 19

### ***(5) Field diary – Photography – Drawings - Collection***

In order to remember the places and situations better, and to hold on to my feelings and thinking at the time, the use of the field diary was important. The field diary should not be understood as a fact sheet but as a diary with thoughts, memories, connections of different events. It includes some hand drawings. There are several smaller notebooks that reflect the situations, some are based more on daily life, calculations, prices, learning the language, phrases, etc., while others are like an address book, with all the relevant people and places inside, some drawings, conversations. The combination of notes, which are mainly handwritten in German, some in English and some at the computer accompanied with photographs taken by phone and camera, the narration is formed. It includes a loose collection of things from daily life, like bills, notes, and so forth, of which some are implemented in the thesis.

### ***(6) Literature review***

The thesis touches several academic disciplines, with a focal point on urban design, artistic interventions and sociology. Space perception, space making, artistic interventions, urban interventions, the use of space, daily life, tactics and strategies are represented and explored within this thesis. The literature review of the sociologist perspective enables a better understanding of the dynamics, strategies and tactics used. It is a meta level to the explored situationist movement and narration. Further reading offers literature that didn't find its way into the writing but influenced the thesis or relate to it. Before my arrival in Tehran, theory was an important research source, while in Tehran, history, sociology and urban development followed. After the in-situ time in Tehran, reading on Islam, the revolution, the political structure, urban design and urban interventions became important.



### ***(7) Narration***

A narration is a literary technique for writing a story. It is a strategy to relay information to the reader. The perspective is mainly first-person narration, at times it switches to a collective “we” for expressing longer-lasting connections and exchanges of communication. The narration is created to draw the reader into the setting, allow to move through the space. The narration compacts time, while densifying place and space. Through the narrations and the images patterns of place, space and habitués can be explored. It not only reconstructs the observed space but also reflects the personal experience and perception. An architect needs to be aware of his or her way of looking at places and environment in order to plan accordingly. Instead of creating a map of the city through the exploration, the thesis creates a spatial story. It shows how the city becomes familiar, how spaces start to relate to one another. The thesis creates an architectural methodology of writing about getting familiar with space. The dense string of stories related to space, people, movements through the city create a sequence of city. It maps the city through words.

The selection of places and spaces, movements through the city create a spatial understanding. The reader cannot expect a truth through the narration but a personal view that is created through contact with locals. Descriptions of spaces are on the one hand from notes and on the other hand reconstructed through images and drawings. Writing a narration does not claim objectivity but rather subjectivity. The narration is built in such a way that it draws the reader into the field. The narration is accompanied by drawings and photographs.

### ***(8) Urban intervention – Direct urbanism***

Urban intervention is a design or artistic practice. It responds to social aspects, local identity, built environment and public space and is related to SI ideas of art of life. Urban interventions provoke change in interactions and spatial use in cities and create new experiences. (“Urban interventionism” 2016)

***(8.1) Direct urbanism:*** The architects of transparadiso - Barbara Holub and Paul Rajakovics - write in their book “Direkter Urbanismus / Direct Urbanism” that “direct urbanism often refers to different registers of time

and distinguishes between strategy and tactics. In doing so it often draws on lost poetic moment, transforming them into new qualities.” (Holub, Rajakovic 10) “Unitary Urbanism” used by Guy Debord from the SI asserts that through action at any time one can shift something to another level. A practice that includes artistic methods and therefore goes beyond plain goals. (Ibid 10)



fig. 2/3  
drift  
deck

**(8.2) Derivè:** Urban intervention with the creation of instructions for the city, stimulations for different interaction and thinking on the use of space are reflected in *dérive*. One example for the creation of instruction cards is ‘drift deck’ by near future laboratory for the conflux festival in 2008. (“Near Future Laboratory Drift Deck” 2008) Another source is the magazine “*dérive – Zeitschrift für Stadtforschung*”, which reflects this practice by offering instructions for spatial explorations.

**(8.3) Artistic:** Yoko Ono works with instructions, some of them are created for the city. They are short instructions or drawings.

The city or urban structures are complex and have different layers to explore. The decision to use different methods from literature research to in-situ experience allows a greater understanding of the current situation in Tehran. The listed methodology is almost like a time line, which shows the use of the methods in its order. The urban walk was the initial idea of approaching Tehran, being related to the great wanderers, documented by the diary, photography, collecting material and tracing. To connect with space and people through different approaches. Drifting through the city alone or accompanied, guiding and being guided. The methodology of the narration in combination with the collection of images and notes enables a grasp of part of the city and its complexity.

## Theory - Terms – Definitions

### *Space and place*

The French philosopher and sociologist Michel de Certeau writes about everyday life as a presence of people. In his book “The Practice of Everyday life”, space is created by a place as a physical location in the relation with time. “Space is a practiced place” (117), space therefore depends on the presence of people. Place is a certain location with position and implies stability.

For a place, it is not possible that two things are at the same location. Places in the narration are the cafés, such as café Lamiz, the hidden theatre or Ali’s apartment that can be located on the map.

The sociologist Martina Löw concurs with Michel de Certeau when she writes that spaces does not exist independent of bodies; space is incorporated in a constantly changing process. Space is related to activity or action and it is not an object in itself but rather a form of possible objects (Löw 18,30). De Certeau, for instance, says that a street is a place formed through urban planning, and through the action of walking it is transformed into a space. Also interesting in terms of the narration is that reading “is the space produced by the practice of a particular place” (De

Certeau 117), while writing creates a place through “a system of signs”(Ibid 117).

Space as a relation of people and objects at a specific place is dependent on time: it only exists in that very moment, and can become part of a personal or collective memory. Space is closely related to what one describes as atmosphere.

### ***Subculture***

Subculture is a term used to describe the sociological relation between several or more deviating culture groups in one society. In the Merriam Webster online dictionary, a subculture is defined as “a group that has beliefs and behaviors that are different from the main group within a culture or society.”(“Subculture” 2016)

The definition of subculture in this context is that subcultures are not minorities or subgroups but that the culture of the country is shaped by all of the subcultures that exist within the boundaries. One reason to look at the altered definition is the regulation and laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran: by birth one is Muslim, whether one believes or not. Changing one’s religion has legal consequences. What is visible as culture does not coincide with what the majority of subcultures actively do.

### ***Strategy and tactics***

A strategy is something that is related to a place or a person. A strategy is the “manipulation of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power” (De Certeau 35-36) for example a business, a city or an institution can be detected. A strategic approach seeks to create its own place, which serves as a base of power and offers resistance to dissolution.

A tactical approach utilizes time, in other words through repletion of action of behaviour, something becomes culture or spatial appropriate without having its specific place. De Certeau defines tactic as weak. It cannot plan a strategy and uses opportunities in order to operate through isolated actions. “It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers.”(Ibis 37)

### ***Subversive***

The definition of subversion is a form of rebellion. It is seen as a revolutionary act, as something that causes harm to the existing structure. Subversion therefore is a violent act to “overthrow or undermine a governments or political system by persons working secretly from within”. (“subversive” 2016) It can also be understood as a force that asks for alternations and change. Subversion stands therefore for opposition but also for repressed needs which create structures, strategies, spaces and tactics in order to be expressed. Subversive behaviour reflects the interests of people and can be seen as an adaptation, as a structure through which the different strategies and tactics of fulfilling needs are negotiated. In Iran bargaining is part of the culture, it is everyday life in shops and businesses. Bargaining also applies to law and the enactment of law. In the movie “No one knows about Persian cats” by Bahman Ghobaldi, released in 2009, a young Iranian appears in court for selling illegal films. The authority figure and he start bargaining and it results in a less harsh punishment.

### ***Subversive space***

What are subversive spaces? Can a space be subversive? The term subversive space reflects a space that does not belong to categories like mosque, theatre and café but is a space that can be everywhere. It is a space that is linked to humans and human behaviour. It occupies architecture and urban environment. Humans and architecture create space and atmosphere. Subversive spaces could occur for example in galleries or music halls, where human interests find space independent of governmental regulation. Subversive spaces are often multi-use spaces or include hybrid functions. Martina Löw states that people constitute space, which does not need to refer to a specific place. Different social subgroups can create different spaces in the same place. (Löw 53)

### ***Nonmovements***

Asef Bayat, Professor of Global and Transnational Studies and Professor of Sociology and Middle Eastern studies at the University of Illinois, focuses on social forces and how ordinary people cause change in the Middle East. He is interested in human-driven political change. What he points out and explores is that socio-political change not only finds its way through

mass protests but also through so called ‘nonmovements’. Nonmovements are made up of four main dispositions:

- *Collective and non-collective action-oriented actors who are not very ideologically driven.*
- *Practices that are part or become part of everyday life and can be seen as ordinary practices.*
- *A large number of people doing a similar thing simultaneously – effect of normalizing / legitimization.*
- *Direct practice regardless of governmental sanctions.*

In consequence, Bayat looks at the social structure of formations of nonmovements, (Bayat 19-21) which results in the observation that nonmovements cannot be categories like working class, intellectuals, etc. but are “marked by sameness and shared identities, multitude is made up of “singularities” or dissimilar or nonidentical social subjects, a mix of different social groups, gender clusters, or sexual ontologically that are ontologically different” (Ibid. 21). By this he means that nonmovements bring together people from a group, even if this group is dissimilar like globalizing youth, Muslim women, etc., acting in common but being individually different. Collective similar interests are the driving force behind collective action. No leader is needed but solidarities build in public space, housing areas, in mosques, at work, in universities, in the underground, parks and colleges. Physical space allows mutual recognition. (Ibid. 21)

Before entering the narration the following chapters on facts and figures, political Iran and the history of Tehran give an insight into and understanding of foundational aspects that appear in the narration.

## Statistical facts and figures

Iran is home to about 79.7 million people, roughly 12 million of whom are concentrated in the country's capital, Tehran. This is equal to the number of people living in London including the suburbs. While London has an average age of 40, Iranians are on average 30. ("Iran Länderinfo" 2016)

Looking at the numbers more closely and including historical aspects, it is interesting to investigate the fact that, in 2011, 70% of the population was under 25 years of age. ("Iran" 2016) With the baby boom that started in the 1980s just after the beginning of the Iran – Iraq war, the majority of inhabitants today were born around 1986 and after, meaning that today's society in Iran is young. ● Tehran

Most of the inhabitants did not experience the Shah era, since they were born after the second main Revolution in 1979 and significantly, after the death of the first supreme leader Khomeini. They did not fight in the war. Iran can be considered a young country, with a growing education sector, where new media and the Internet connect people within the country and worldwide. ("Iran population data" 2016)

While the former revolutionaries are now aging, the young generation is confronted with a system implemented in 1979. This includes a range of power relations that are self-sustaining and which can easily be exploited to block attempts at reform due to their internal dynamics. The following sections give an overview of political and socio-cultural changes during the most recent political terms. It provides an explanation of the exhaustion expressed by young Iranians, together with their strategies for implementing change from within the country.

In short, the thesis exemplifies the power relations within the government and their effect on the daily life of citizens. This will allow a better understanding of the temporary situation and relations between behaviour space and regulations. The election and aftermath of Rouhani, Ahmadinedschad and Khatami will be the focal point of political Iran and Tehran.

100 km

## Political Iran and Tehran

*Mohammad Khatami* sought freedom of opinion, rule of law and an Islamic democracy. He was mainly voted in by women and young people. During his first term, many of the policies he developed were blocked by the conservative-dominated parliament. Following the election in August 2000, reformers were in the majority in the parliament but faced policy rejection from the Guardian Council, which saw the policies as being illegitimate under Islam. Due to the constellation of the supremacy of the Supreme Leader as well as the Guardian Council, Khatami found himself powerless and incapable of action. Through an enactment he tried to withdraw power from the Guardian Council as well as from the Supreme Leader in the hope of strengthening the parliament and president as a result. Both moves were rejected. (Amirpur 2004)

While 2001 Ayatolla Mesban-Yazdi called for the silencing of those seeking a new reading of Islam and for the safeguarding of Islam and the revolution. In 2003, the year before Hussein Khomeini was elected, the grandson of Ayatollah Khomeini announced that Iran's religious state was the "worst dictatorship in the world". (Bayat "Post-Islamism" 61)

"Under Khatami, I did everything I wanted to, except not wearing Hijab." Fatemeh

*From the street view, during the years following the election of Khatami in May 1997, young Iranians started to give more presence to public space by spending time on the streets, in parks and in newly opened coffee shops. Hijab were moved further to the back of the head, and called bad Hijab. Shopping malls as well as cultural centres, concert halls and stadiums flourished. The number of new political parties and organizations being registered went up, sanctions on critical news agencies decreased, leading to a rise in the publication of both books and newspapers. By the end of his second term, the situation had changed. Protests on the streets were followed by a violent reaction from the police, newspapers were closed by hard-line judiciary with journalists being*



*imprisoned, forced out of work and prevented from pursuing their studies. The protests included people calling for the end of Khatami's term because he had failed, as well as the end of government by a Supreme Leader. In an interview with Iranian musicians, one said that perhaps Khatami just wanted to calm the young people's anger.* (Proisinger 2014)

Protest on the streets was followed by violent police reaction, newspapers being closed through heard-line judiciary with a journalist being put to prison, out of work and not allowed to follow their studies. The protests included people calling for the end of the term of Khatami, because he has failed, as well as the end of a government with Supreme Leader.

***Mahmoud Ahmadinedschad*** came to power in 2005, after a second ballot. Due to a term as mayor of Tehran, he was known for being politically independent from the clerics. He got into power twice, in 2005 and again in 2009; both times, the outcome of the election was questioned throughout the media and on the streets. After his first election in 2005 the former president Mohammad Khatami said "people [sic] showed that they want reform and they don't like the ruling system. People are not happy with their way of life." (Slackman 2005)

While Khatami won votes as a result of his intellectual and democratic ideas, Ahmadinedschad followed the poor and urban poor, gaining attention in the news headlines for his statements. His message to the voters was that he would raise salaries and offer help with other financial issues such as insurance and pensions. His modesty gave him a more authentic image than the reformist government who had had eight years in power and had neither achieved their goals nor reached out to the poor. While the first election was questioned, the second was described by the media as voter fraud.

Ahmadinedschad's foreign policy is infamous not due to his Anti-Semitism and Anti-Americanism. The question arose as to whether Iran was building an atomic bomb: international reaction was to raise existing sanctions, making Iran one of the most sanctioned states. The sanctions put further pressure on the country, causing high inflation rates and export losses. People lost their jobs and the socio-economic situation was generally

difficult. (Borzik 2014)

*For the people on the streets it also meant that the media was again further sanctioned, that Ahmadinedschad pursued a decision to change the Internet into an intranet and followed the idea to change Iran back to the state after the Revolution in 1979. (Kubn 2012) The morality police stepped up their patrols.*

**Hassan Rouhani** is the current president. The election in 2013 can be looked at from the perspective of further shifts in generation and age. The estimated proportion of eligible voters between 18 and 35 years old was about 50 %; a generation that was born and raised mainly in an urban environment. (Khajehpour 2013) Again focusing on the political power structure, the nuclear deal enacted in the summer of 2015 is the clearest reflection of relations. Although Khatami signalled during negotiations that Iran agreed to the nuclear deal, it would nonetheless have proven inconclusive if the Supreme Leader—who is in charge of the military, foreign policy and appointing major positions in the government—had not given his approval.

The voice of young Iranians before the parliamentary election early in 2016 showed hope as well as indifference. *Before the elections some attempted to motivate their peers to vote, posting images of their ballot on Instagram on election day. Others, when asked if they would vote, replied that there was nothing to vote for. They felt that all politicians in Iran were the same, since they wouldn't even have been allowed to stand as a candidate if their beliefs had differed in any way from those of the regime. One mentioned that he would not vote and did not care because he would leave the country soon to move to Canada. Some young Iranians believe it is better not to vote as this could ultimately lead to an extreme situation that no one could tolerate any longer.*

Regardless of how powerful or how powerless the politicians are, the parliamentary elections do reflect what people are looking for. Although many reform party candidates were neglected by the Guardian Council, the reformists still won 83 of the 290 seats awarded, while 69 will be awarded in April or May 2016. In Tehran, reformists won all 30 seats available. The people's choice was made in favour of candidates who are

more likely to respect the needs of the younger generation within the Islamic state's constitution.



fig. 4

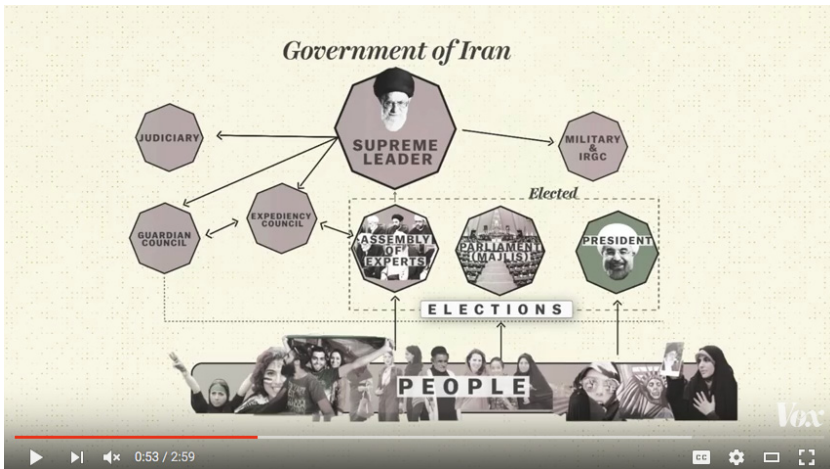


fig. 5

Before the elections, a video spread via Facebook explaining what effect these elections could have on changing the overall political order in Iran. (Vox 2016) Leaving out some very relevant facts of the unelected members of the assembly, the video focused on the view that these elections could

change the composition of the Assembly of Experts for the next eight years. It showed the possible impact on a more reform-oriented supreme leader being elected if Khamenei (76) dies within the term. (Dehghan 2016)

The political situation and its ramifications in the lives of people on the streets are unpredictable even for Iranians. Planned for March 2016, a visit by Rouhani to Vienna cancelled shortly beforehand, with security issues cited as the reason. In light of the current internal discussions about how much the country will open up to trade and exchange, there might also be other reasons for it. (Ladinsler 2016)

One student living outside the country mentioned that nothing is certain and that they cannot make long-term plans, as everything can shift in no time.

The following chapter will introduce the history of Tehran. It gives information about the influences on the city from a political perspective and explains the previous spatial structure of the city, and its development to date.

## **The History of Tehran**

Tehran means 'warm place' and is first mentioned as a village subordinate to the city of Rey. The book *Mo'jam-ol Boldan* describes the villagers as rebellious inhabitants with a lack of respect towards their governors. At that time the inhabitants lived in underground dwellings, and people from outside the village were not allowed to enter the village ground. The village was well protected by its built and social structures. Tehran started to grow rapidly after a Mongol invasion in 1218 A.D. levelled the city of Rey.

Pietro della Valle's (an Italian who stayed in Iran between 1617 and 1624 A.D.) descriptions mention Teheran, highlighting its plane trees, large gardens and orchards. He writes about water channels running through

the city lined with trees. After being occupied by Afghanistan and regained by Nader Shah, Karim Khan Zand selected Tehran as his military headquarters. His interest led to the city's further growth. He built a harem and intended to make Tehran the capital.

In 1785 Tehran became the capital under Agha Mohammad Kahn Qajar, who claimed the throne and killed all Zand claimants. (Zaka, Semsar 5-25) At that time the city was described as not deserving of the title of a capital due to its lack of most urban necessities. Its alleys were too narrow and the summer heat made the city into a dusty, dark place.

Qajar's successor, Khan Baba Khan fortified the city. During his reign, important buildings including pavilions and gardens such as Laleh Zar and Negarestan Garden, Golestan Place, Masjed e Shah (Kings Mosque) and Madreseh ye Khan e Marvi (a religious school) were built.

Followed by Nasser ed-Din Shah, the son of Mohammad Shah in 1848 A.D, his chancellor Mirza Taqi Khan Amir Kabir established public services influenced by western civilisation. Schools and factories were built, cultural institutions founded and cultural activities enhanced. He created a bureaucratic system, establishing governmental departments, civic law, courts and embassies. His assassination, however, led to a regression of reforms.

In the later years of his reign, Nasser ed-Din Shah established Ehtesabieh (the Municipal Revenues Office) which managed lighting and food supplies. A royal post office, the railways and the police were created. Dar ol-Fonun (Technical College), Tekyeh ye Dowlad (Governmental Mourning Arena), the Mosque, Medreseh (Seminary) of Sepahsalar remain from this era. (Talab, Norouzi 58-80)

In 1867 the historical city wall was taken away and the French architect Buhler was invited to restructure the city. He and his team of Iranian architects made orthogonal structures similar to Paris. Tehran grew from 4000 sq/km to 19000 sq/km, bringing not only building development but also the creation of new parks, squares and public places. It was not only

city planning that was affected by European ideas, but also architectural styles can be traced back to European origins.

Mirza Reza Kermani assassinated Nasser ed-Din Shah in 1895 A.D., making his son Mozaffar ed-Dhin Shah. During his period, revolts and other political drawbacks caused a decline in construction; the middle classes, clergymen and merchants were the force behind construction at that time. With the arrival of Ahman Shah, Mohammad Ali Shah's son, new institutions were founded; parliaments, departments and trading were his focus, including a constitutional revolution.

With the rise of the Pahlavi, between 1938 and 1958, social, economic and political affairs in Iran developed. Tehran underwent major changes, mostly novel and modern. Installations reflecting the new civilization rapidly developed in Tehran. A growing population called for the removal of the city walls, since the city had overflowed its limits already. A dramatic structural decision was taken for Tehran to build palaces in the north. Embassies, hospitals and other large educational facilities started to accumulate in the north of the city. The upper class moved out of the city centre to the north. New streets with rectangular intersections, new educational centres and economic and social buildings altered the architecture of the city and divided it into an old and a new section. Traditional people were affected by the changes as Tehran gradually shifted from traditional mode towards becoming a modern city, compromising or not compromising middle-class and lower-classes.

The beginning of World War II and the occupation of Iran by foreign powers stopped the development trend of the city. The coup d'état of Mordad 1332 AS (1953 A.D.), resulting in Iran's subservience to Western capitalism, caused urban development projects to focus on Tehran and the flow of immigrants to converge here more than in any other city in Iran. New economic policies encouraged the daily increase of immigration to Tehran. (Talab, Norouzi 10-20)

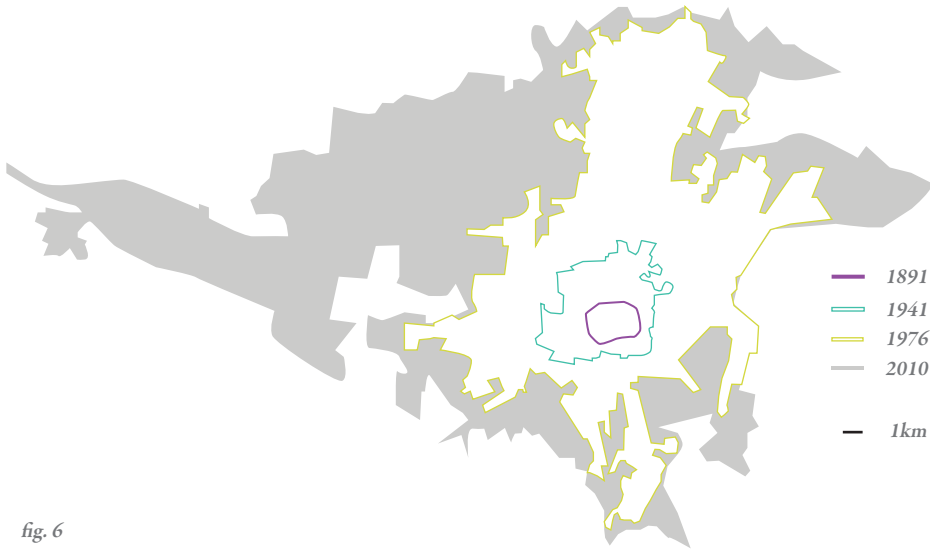


fig. 6

Rapid growth of the city followed. Between 1941 and 1986 the population grew 8.6 times while its area expanded 12 times. (Madanipour 40) The expansion of the city occurred freely into the land. Satellite towns and suburban villages were integrated into Tehran as the city spread. Gardens in the suburbs and inside the city became building land. Anyone had the right to build whichever way he or she wanted. In addition to the creation of satellite cities and urban developments around the city, the townships of Rey and Shemiran were incorporated into Tehran. Immigration after the Islamic Revolution in 1979 A.D. and new development resulted in the creation of a metropolis, with a population of more than 12 million today. (Talab, Norouzi 10-20) The construction of satellite suburban townships around Tehran continues unabated.

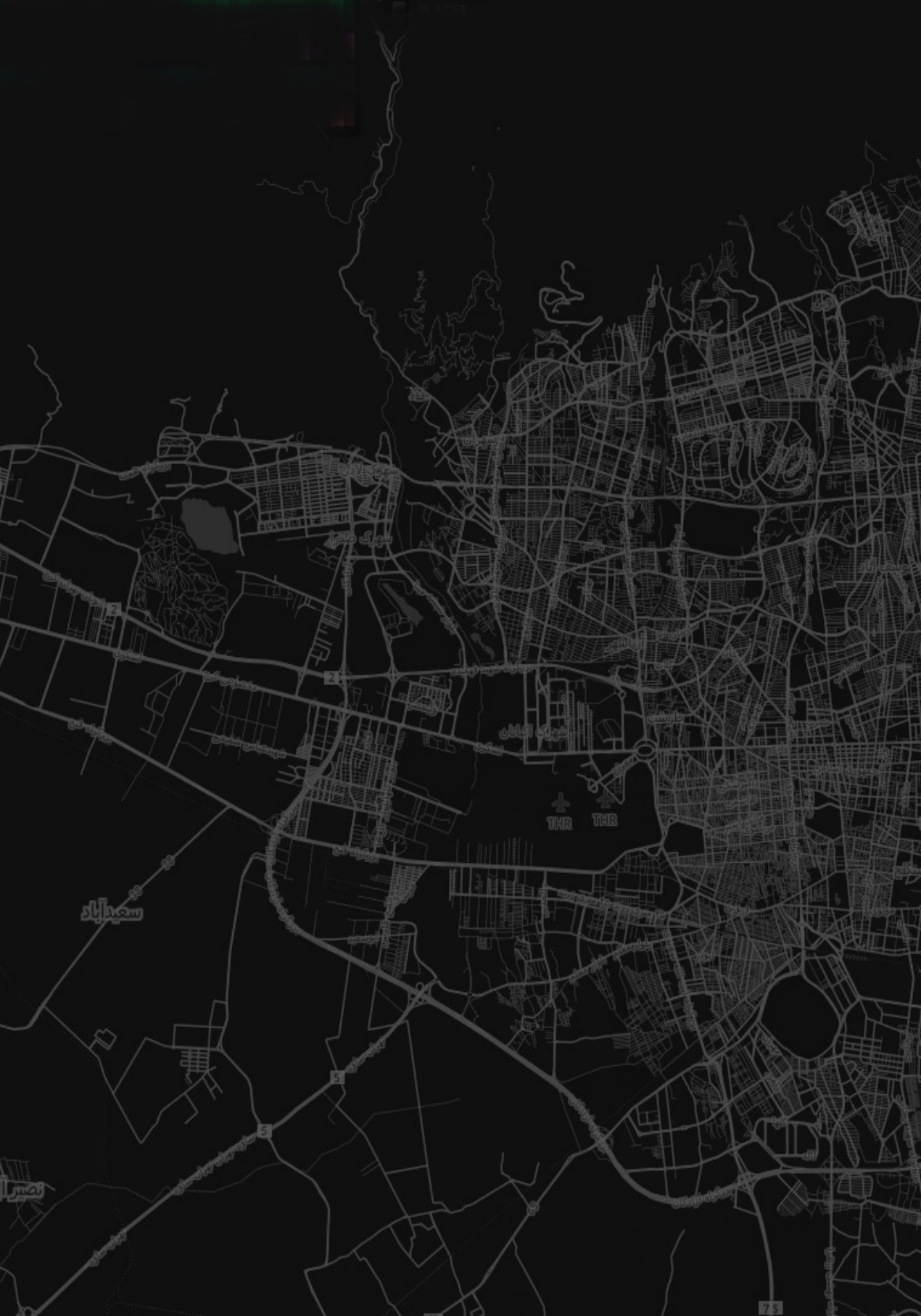
The Iran-Iraq war lasted from from 1980 until 1988. Tehran was affected by airstrikes..(“Iran-Iraq War” 2016) The year after the war ended, the religious leader or supreme leader and founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran Ruhollah Khomeini died. His successor Ali Khamenei is current supreme

leader of the country. The aftermath of the revolution changed the rules applied on the streets enormously. Before the revolution, religion was a matter for the individual; after the revolution, religious ideas had to be followed by everyone, e.g. in terms of clothing.

It is not only the history of the country and its radical changes, the enormous growth of the capital Tehran and cultural aspects that are important. Those in power influence day-to-day life and the streets. This affects not only life, but also space and people's relation to space. Awareness of the country's history makes it easier to understand today's behaviour and tactics in the urban sphere. The following chapter will give an insight into the political social structure. It starts with the current situation and unfolds over the last three presidential elections, charting the influence of politics on day-to-day life.

The political and historical situation as well as facts and figures about the city give a first insight into the structural situation. The following pages move into the main part of the thesis the in-situ methodological approaches. The first page shows the Tehran map, so to speak, empty and before the experience. At the end of the narration the maps of Tehran display the traced places and movements.





سعدآباد

شهری اقلان

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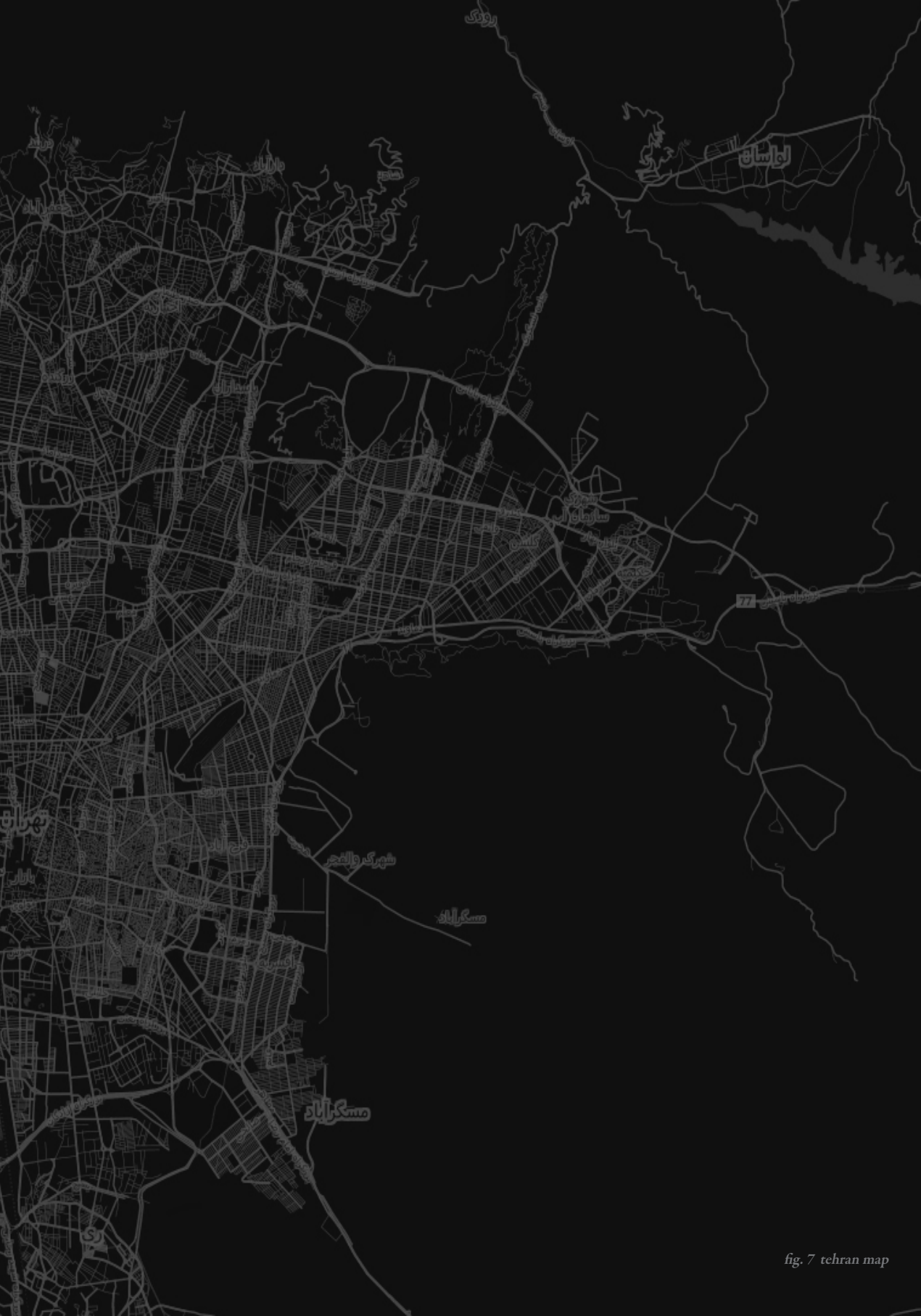


fig. 7 tehran map





**Narration**



I will always  
remember the  
great friendships I  
encountered.

*I am not the same I was before.*



I will always  
remember all  
the 'welcome  
to Iran' given  
to me  
by people on  
the streets from  
day one to day  
174.



*I will always  
remember  
asound of cars  
that block  
the streets at  
almost any  
time.*





*I will always  
remember the  
gratitude and  
hospitality given  
to me.*



I will always  
remember the cloud  
hanging above  
causing my lungs to  
be troubled.



*I will always  
remember the  
smell of the air  
changing  
from  
Ramadan,  
“regular  
summer” to  
Ashura.*

TAG 1

۱۳۹۴/۰۳/۲۰

20.06.2015

Als würde ein innerer Schalter umgelegt, beim erblicken der die Nacht und die Wüste durchschneidenden Lichterreihe. Der Tragweite meiner Reise bin ich mir noch nicht bewusst, mein Körperempfinden war jedoch zwischen Freude und Angst. Teheran etwa eine Autostunde bei Nacht entfernt. Passkontrolle, Gepäckabholung, Zoll, diesmal schneller als bei den zwei Reisen im Januar und Februar. Mein Fahrer nicht da, dafür ganze Familienschwärme die tränenerfüllte Ankömmlinge umarmten, links, rechts links abwechselnd die Wangen küssten und sich lachend Geschichten, Erlebnisse erzählten. Am 17. Juni hat für die Muslime der Ramadan begonnen und mein, eine Stunde zu spät eintreffender Fahrer hielt sich dank seinem Glauben streng daran, wie es mir bei der Fahrt auf gebrochenem Englisch erklärt. Ich rücke mein Kopfputz im kühlen Fahrtwind zurecht. Viel haben wir uns nicht zu sagen,

*“Stories [...] carry out a labor that constantly transforms place into spaces or spaces into places. They also organize the play of changing relationships between place and space.”*

*(De Certeau 118)*

## Reaching Tehran

I am about to land, the aircraft is getting closer and closer to the ground, rows of lights cross the desert, pointing towards Tehran. A city of twelve million people and the place where I will be living for the next six months. An inner voice reminds that this isn't all just fun and pleasure, it means facing anxieties related to what the media tells us about Iran. It means facing the cultural difference in everyday life. What am I doing here? Is this really necessary? What will it mean to stay such a long time in Iran? My feelings shift between joy and anxiety. Tehran is about one hour's car ride away at night. Passport control, baggage claim, customs, along the way four eyes follow me. Photographs of Khomeini and Khamenei on the walls. This time everything goes faster than in January and February.

The driver isn't there yet and I have the time to watch families tearfully welcoming their relatives. This is the international airport, so some of the people around me haven't seen each other for years; others are just returning for the summer break from studies outside the country. I am waiting for my driver since I have no other choice, *there is no public transport from the airport*. Three days ago the religious fast for Ramadan started, so that now is the time of day when people are eating. My driver arrives one hour late, he explains that he was eating with his relatives. I ensure that the Hijab (in my case a loose head scarf) is sitting well and fix it every once in a while as the open window breeze swirls the cloth from my head.

The ride seems to take forever. The airport is located south of the city, close to the religious city of Qom. I am going to my friend's place in *Darabad, a former village, in the north-east of the city. Khomeini's memorial is located on our way, at night bathed in green light*. I am practising Farsi letters on license plates, on the bilingual signs pointing to Tehran and the



advertisements along the way. Even at this time of night the summer heat is noticeable, as are the ubiquitous exhaust fumes that cover the city. *On the highway to the north we cross bridges hung with Iranian flag, submerged in colour-shifting lights and subways decorated with art.* The driver calls my friend once we get close to Niaveran, he needs to call several times in order to reach the apartment. Navigation systems don't exist. Arrival. Warm welcome. We enter the apartment of my friend, who gives me shelter and guidance for the first days in Tehran. *The apartment is on the ground floor. The door is hidden behind parked cars, it is not uncommon to enter houses through parking garages but through a separate entrance. The anteroom connects bedroom, bathroom and the living room including the kitchen.* She recently moved here and her father doesn't know that she lives on her own. In a couple of hours' time we will wake up. My friend will go to the architecture office where she works.

No pleasant dreams during my first nights in Tehran, my mind seems to be upset that I decided to come here. Obviously we are not participating in the fasting, my friend hasn't done so in twelve years. Before we leave the house I download some practical applications for my smart phone. *Open VPN and VPN Spider will get me around governmental filters that apply for certain webpages and applications.* Foursquare allows me to know what restaurants, cafés and other places are close by.

### ***Familiarization with the new urban environment***

It's my first day in Tehran, a day that tells me a lot about the upcoming months, the daily frustrations and the limitations and strategies for creating some kind of normality. It feels like it takes forever to get things done. I don't mind it much now.

Seconds after arriving on the main street, a car stops and we get in. Tajrish is the destination. Niloofar knows where the closest banks are. We want to open a bank account, one for Rial and another for euros. No success. After the lady in the bank made a copy of my passport, which disappears somewhere, we find out that as a foreigner I can't have a bank account. My friend offers to open a bank account in her name for me. We enter two more banks, same information. I join Niloofar at the print shop, the first

one doesn't have the material. She called in last week, no one answered and noticed that the number is available on Telegram (a messenger service). She sent a text and got a response, but now the right paper is not available. A car ride later the second place has all the necessary materials, I am bored, I take a nap for some time, three hours later the five copies are printed and bound. Niloofar takes a cab to the office.

The carpet museum attracts my attention. Back at Tajrish I enter the bus, two hours later reaching Laleh Park (tulip park). ***During the ride some women in the women's area start up a conversation.*** The common questions besides where I come from are how old I am, which cities I have visited in Iran and how long I am staying. *The bus moves down Valiasr Street, the main north-south connection.*

People squeeze into the full bus and no one wants to move further in. Everyone knows how hard it is to get out again. The facades all seem grey and the road is jam-packed with cars and motorcycles. Some traffic police officers try to stop motorcycles from entering the bus lines, which are separated with a fence. ***The cyclists hide behind or next to the buses so that they cannot be seen, move over to the walkways or simply pass the police when their attention is directed somewhere else.*** *Along Valiasr Street are open water channels with large old plane trees. Bus stops are built above the water line, some little flower shops and newspaper stands block the view to the water and replace trees. Along the way are some empty plots, the view is blocked by panel sheets hand-painted with strips in orange-red and black. Some colourful drawings on walls, in subways, some more images, occasional references to the war and martyrs.*

I enjoy the Persian carpets and the conversations I am invited to join at the museum. Shortly after I sit down in the park, a group of young Iranians moves closer to sit with me. My Farsi isn't as good as their English. Some of the guys show me images on their phones. Pictures from the pool, a group image. I am observing the couple sitting on the other side. The guy shows his affection to her by stroking her cheek. We are next to a major street and I am confused. It's the first time that I have seen people so obviously subverting the rules in public space with an audience. I expected people to



be more cautious when breaking laws.

I am already tired of the city. The noise, the traffic, the air, the heat, the lack of food and drinks in the streets. No smells in the streets beside the fumes.

I sleep in the kitchen and the fridge holds my attention for some time before I fall asleep.

Google maps doesn't show the house of my friend, nor the streets, it is just a grey spot. We take our first walk in the area. My friend doesn't want to let me walk around her area alone, it is safe but I am a foreigner, she says. It's the weekend, Friday. The time when Niloofar usually cleans her apartment and makes food. Her week has six days of work and study at the University and a seventh for housework.

We are out on the streets, some water is in my backpack since stores are all closed due to the ongoing fasting. *The houses around here are mainly steel skeletons, with concrete flooring, walls are mainly brick and the fronts are flagstone. The path to the main street is built with facades that don't allow you to look inside, and next to it narrow pedestrian walkways.* On ground level parked cars restrict the already narrow walking paths. Some open black garbage containers block parts of the way. We pass two small grocery shops, a small electric store, a bakery and a pizza delivery place.

We reach the main street with the roundabout and a little fountain with water. The street leads in one direction towards Niavaran where one of the Shah's palaces is. Some more grocery stores are here and a butcher with fresh meat. Closed now. We move in the other direction towards the small riverside. One of the recreational places for people, the temperature is hot. A police unit is just before the river, which leads into the mountains. Some metres further on, people hold hands, flirt and have picnics.

Saturday, time to go to the language school. I have to take a taxi, so I walk up to the main street. It doesn't take long and a car stops next to me, I ask for the address and sadly he doesn't know what I am saying. I show my phone to him with the Farsi directions. *Iranian addresses usually come with directions. Area of the city, for example Niaveran, main sites like the palace and from there one street and directions one after another until the*

*destination.* I have internet on my phone. Almost instantly I get responses from friends in Europe who translate German into Farsi for me. That is my only way during the first few weeks of getting around in difficult moments. Traffic as usual. I haven't signed up for the Farsi classes. Lela is the one who is in charge of the students, I didn't get the obligatory information before arrival. Today we will open a bank account and again sit around waiting, Lela wants accompany me to open the bank account. I am the first one who will get one, the school recently made the deal with the bank. The signature from the head of the department is missing. I am sitting in the office and follow the issues of other students arriving at the school. One Chinese guy comes in with his father. He wants to take a class and Lela is shocked when she sees that the visa is not valid plus the papers state he is a woman. The lady next door joins in and laughter rises. ***Watched by Khomeini and Khamenei. Their images hang or sit in all official places, restaurants, cafés, etc..***

Two hours later we are at the bank, which luckily is next door. First I am told that I can only open a euro account, then that I can only open a Rial account, for some time I am told that I will have interest, later I am told I won't have interest, then I am told that I will have interest on all accounts. It turns out that I can get both a euro and a Rial account. My account manager is in a very good mood, his English is excellent and we are joking. *Saman Bank is a private and very modern bank, with lots of glass and white clean surfaces. There are no security windows between the customers and the people who give out the money. Glass elements separate the people working in the office area. Saman bank is different from the other banks I entered, it is very clean in terms of the surfaces, white and the blue fluent design of the logo sticks in my mind.* The money is stored in regular drawers, not comparable with the standards in Germany or Austria. A guy with a machine gun guards the entrance, or maybe not, he is busy with something else.

Since we are having a lot of fun the people around start looking over. Lela says that they aren't in the best mood as they are fasting. She herself can't fast. Why? She would commit suicide if she did. I respond that this isn't an alternative, suicide is forbidden in Iran, right? Laughter starts. Lela isn't the only one who tells me that she doesn't fast. I have hardly met any people

who fast these days. *In public they won't eat but they will eat inside the houses and offices.* Some more organizational things follow, *I take a ride with someone random*, hop off at Tajrish close to the bus terminal. Green and red, small and bigger buses reach the two stations close to the bazaar and the mosque and mausoleum of Imam Zadeh Saleh and spread back to the other parts of the city. Some of them go in the direction of Enghelab Street and Parkway. The guy who works for the ticket control, and who helped me find the bus last time, stands at the very same spot. He asks for my number.

A taxi driver offers me to take me for 6000 Toman – which are 60 000 Rial to Niaveran, I decline as I don't want to take a private taxi. I walk over to the municipality building to get a ride for 2000 Toman.

Days later I am meeting a friend downtown. He is a tour guide and very worried about me coming with the underground and 3000 euros in my pocket. The exchange services we walk into are opposite the German embassy. We do some trading on the final exchange rate, push the number up a bit. After the exchange my backpack is filled with banknotes numbering millions. Packages of money. We walk fast to the closest bank, my friend is watching everyone to see if anyone follows us. I feel odd since I have been carrying this money all along from Austria: in the train, from airport to airport, to my friend's place, and now suddenly it becomes a spectacle. I am thirsty and the shops along the way are closed, I didn't take enough water with me. Some travel agencies and offices are open and some banks have empty water fountains standing in the entrance area. My friend pushes me into the store and asks for water. I don't want to draw attention to myself as a foreigner who doesn't fast during Ramadan. No one seems to care about my worry, everyone is very kind and offers what I need. I get to buy and eat a banana at a small shop. The temperatures are enormously hot under my Hijab and Manto. The Hijab I wear to cover my hair and head. The Manto conceals my chest and upper



body down to the knees. I have to borrow cotton clothes from my friend in order to stand the heat.

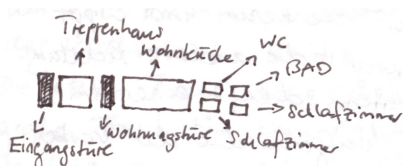
*Don't stare for too long at something, it will be offered to you.*

No answer from the Professor in Tehran. I am a bit frustrated since he said he will support the project but isn't easily reachable since day one in March 2015. Three friends help me follow him up and it seems impossible for me to reach him now.

I am obligated to live at the dormitory from today but I will not sleep there as I am invited to break the fasting tonight. The dinner is close to my friend's apartment in Darabad, so I violate the dorm rules on day one. The guy at the front desk doesn't say anything when I show him my phone with the written translation that I will return the next day. I was told in the beginning that I can at the earliest leave the dorm at 7 a.m. and at the latest come back at 10 p.m., that I have to let the dorm staff know in the morning if I want to stay somewhere else. I am unsure about the situation but it seems less strict than I was told in the beginning.

Two hours later I am at the requested place, I took two taxi rides and a bus. The bus driver pushed me to drink some water since he noticed that I am thirsty. I am waiting between major streets on one of the traffic islands where the bus stops. No idea when my friend will reach here. Some taxis wait alongside the traffic island and the drivers ask me where I want to go. In front of me is an electric power transformation substation.

Breaking the fast happens to be right after a prayer, I am at the apartment of my friend's family relatives. Uncles, aunts and other family members meet to celebrate this Thursday night dinner together. They repeat this every Thursday evening until the end of Ramadan. The family is more traditional.



*The entrance leads into the living room with its enormous, floor-filling handwoven carpet. The kitchen is part of the living room, separated from it*

by a counter. Through a door one can reach the restroom and bathroom and two more rooms for separating men and women. When we arrived, no woman was wearing Chador. Chador is the word for tent and also for the black long cloth women wear. It is usually tight around the head and loose below. A second scarf worn underneath the Chador makes sure that no hair sticks out. The cloth usually reaches to the ground. On escalators, signs warn women to watch out for their Chador so that it doesn't get caught.



The plastic sheets which one can buy almost anywhere are placed on the carpet to save it from stains. Plates and food are distributed on it and the family gathers around the food. When the prayer ends the food is distributed and people start piling food onto my plate. I am not very hungry but I have no other choice but to eat. I enjoy the traditional cuisine with lots of rice and fresh herbs. Usually served with dough, a yogurt drink similar to Turkish Ayran. The children speak English with me, I am astonished at how good their English is. The night ends around midnight.





## Everyday life - places, people and rituals

The following lines are scenarios connected with the specific places. These conversations are a selection of situations that occurred at these certain locations. They give an insight into daily life at these places through conversations and observations. How connection occurs and how communication started. The conversation pieces that I selected are shortened in form and mainly in a narrative voice. The second main part of the narrative is the spaces that described. Some of these spaces are publicly visible and accessible while others are hidden from a public view.

### *The dormitory*

The place where I will be living for six months is in *Velenjak, a district in the north of Tehran which used to be a village but is now one of the most expensive locations in Tehran*. The building is next to a major street called Daneshjoo Boulevard which basically means 'student boulevard'. The street starts at the roundabout Daneshjoo where the main entrance to the public Shahid Beheshti University complex is and goes all the way up to the gates to the recreation area of Tochal mountain.

On *Daneshjoo Boulevard one finds the University area*, several car lanes leading towards the mountain, a mosque, housing, some restaurants and a big shopping centre next to a park, followed by the student hostel for women, one for men and the dorm where I sleep. Next to the dorm is the construction site of a second dorm building.

Opposite the dorm is a restaurant and next to that a small shopping area with a greengrocer's, a travel agency, a bakery and some grocery shops. *The structures of the buildings opposite our twelve-floor student hostel are more like a village but in a metropolitan area, one-storey buildings. Further north the boulevard is landfill, sometimes a donkey walks the street and there are a lot of*





*dogs around.* Further north one finds five- and higher storey buildings in neo-classical style. There are building sites that are unfinished and under construction, and a local bazaar.

I live at the university dorm for married couples. It is probably the only place where unmarried students of both sexes live in one building complex together. Three floors are reserved for foreigners from around the world who have come to study at the Dehkhoda Lexicon Institute. The room is meant to be for two, costing around 250 euros each. We share two rooms and the bathroom. One bed in a single room with a small balcony facing the city and Evin. *Evin prison is design with American standards before the revolution and one of the most famous prisons. Political prisoners are housed here.*

The second bed is in the living room and kitchen area with the noisy fridge. There is hardly any privacy. I first live with a woman from Britain who studies Farsi at Cambridge. Later a woman from Denmark moves in, who studied law and wants to learn Farsi. Last is a woman from Great Britain, a Farsi student at Oxford.

We wash laundry in the bathroom, since there is only one machine for the entire building. After several weeks I get used to the hole in the bathroom, known as an Iranian toilet, which is similar to the toilets I know from my childhood holidays in Italy.

Whenever the cleaning lady comes to mop up she takes the hose, which is used to clean oneself after using the lavatory, and fills the bathroom until it is under water. She wipes the ground and the water flows down the hole. The shower water takes the same way, and very occasionally cockroaches find their way up to room twelve on the ninth floor. Under no circumstances can toilet paper be thrown into the hole, as it would cause a blockage. We received no information about this or other important aspects upon arrival. Anyway, we find our way somehow.

## Selection of dormitory rules

“

- *The earliest time to leave the dorm is 06:00 a.m. and the latest time to return back is 10:00 p.m.*
- *In case the resident wants to stay out, he/she must inform the complex's management in advance.*
- *Ladies are obliged to wear a head-dress that conceals their hair and neck in the corridors.*
- *There shall be no consumption or storage of alcoholic beverages or illegal drugs in the housing area. There will be absolutely NO SMOKING allowed in any of the housing units in the complex. Failure to abide by these rules will result in disciplinary action.*
- *Room doors should be locked to prevent any problems. The complex assumes no financial responsibility for lost or stolen property.*
- *Avoid practical and dangerous jokes with your friends in the housing and corridor areas.*
- *No over-night guests without prior permission from the dorms management allowed.*
- *Residents should register their guests with the dormitory principal.*
- *Visiting hours for off campus visitors are from 8:00 a.m. to 23:00 p.m.*
- *Visitors are only allowed in the apartments while their host is also there.*
- *A roommate must not be deprived of the right to privacy, study time, or sleep because of a guest.*
- *Students may not have guests of the opposite sex stay with them in their rooms.*
- *There shall be no fighting or conflict in the housing area. Arguments should be discussed with the manager of the complex. If the argument is not solved, the manager can change rooms of the conflicting residents.*
- *Those students found in violation of this regulation are subject to dismissal from the housing area within 24 hours.*
- *The resident's passport is kept in trust at the dorm during his/her stay.*

”

(“Accommodation” 2016)

The dormitory rules as well as street signs are significant and interesting in terms of law and life. The rules state that alcohol isn't allowed at the dorm, while alcohol is prohibited in general. Some street signs indicate that dogs aren't allowed in this park, under the circumstance that dogs aren't allowed at all.



My main contacts in Tehran are Niloofar, Andishe and Hassan. They are all related to architecture and I have known them since my first visit to Tehran. I notice that it is easy to establish contact with people but contacts are not necessarily lasting. *Many people ask to meet in order to speak English, want to meet for dinner at their house or invite me for holidays.*

I want to know more about life in Iran and I am curious about what happens behind closed doors and how people are involved in everyday life on the streets. A lot of people offer me their phone number or ask me for my number. I text with them for some time. *Others invite me in to their home so I spend a lot of time inside.* For some time I take invitations home and for some time I answer messages. Later it gets too much, too many people, too many interests. I need to focus on the thesis.

I get more selective, meet my tour guide friend and his family, join them for religious events. I meet the family of a friend from Vienna or visit the friends I know from Graz. I walk up Mount Tochal to meet friends of friends at their café. I try out new strategies in order to get more involved with people I am not related to through friends or places.

I choose to get in touch with people through OkCupid, a dating application that is filtered in Iran but popular. Out of the people I talk to, I meet two. One is Ali and the other is Mohammad.

### ***The religious family***

I am invited round to the family of an Iranian girl I met in Vienna. I accept the invitation. *The brother comes to the dorm to pick me up.* We go downtown to a place close to Laleh Park. *Their apartment is in the second row from the street, on the first floor. The door opens into the living, eating and sleeping room with kitchen. The TV is running and I am warmly welcomed as if I were their daughter.* I feel very uncomfortable when I hear the words, 'you are my daughter'. I respond that I am happy to meet them. *A plastic*

*sheet is spread on the carpet and I am offered food.* The father, mother, sister and brothers are at home, it is Friday. Everyone is happy to meet me, I am the only one who eats which makes me feel a bit uncomfortable. They are fasting and will eat at night. The TV is still running, I enjoy my meal. I am offered the opportunity to wash my clothes here, to come here whenever I want, I just need to call and they will come to pick me up. I don't need to worry about anything, I am part of their family now and I can live at their apartment. I know that these gestures are meant to be very friendly yet they still cause a troublesome situation for me. I feel as if they want to integrate me into their family without me actually wanting to be a part of it. We talk freely about politics and religious topics. I am curious to know more about their way of thinking. The father explains to me that he was in the Iran-Iraq war, that the country is peaceful and that they want peace. I want to know what their opinion is on the rules concerning headscarves in public. One of his daughters lives in Austria and wears the scarf when she leaves the apartment and goes outside. The other daughter lived outside the country and changed her personal style of clothing a bit afterwards. Also for her it was normal to talk to men while being in other countries. Here she needs to watch out because the men misunderstand her talking to them as showing an interest in them. They are all really friendly and interested in the conversation. The father explains his point of view to me. There is a huge difference between the cultures and cultural backgrounds in Iran and Germany or Austria. The law in Germany and Austria, in his understanding, is influenced by the Bible. The law in Iran is influenced by the Koran. The Koran can be read in such a way that the headscarf is mandatory for women. I ask why people do not have a free choice to wear whatever they like. I tell him that I meet many people in the city who complain about the current situation. I show that I am shocked by the comparison that follows. When you own a house in Austria you are not free to change it in whichever way you like. If it's an old house, you can't tear down the facade just because you don't like it. It is regulated and you need to follow the rules. Here in Iran there is freedom regarding what you can do with your property. So the person in Austria is not free to use his ownership as he or she likes. It is public space in Iran that follows religious rules, therefore people here are not free to wear whatever they like. It is just that the morals are different. I can't follow his idea in terms

of the equality of the examples; I notice that breaking it down into moral and aesthetic aspects is one way to look at it. *While wearing a headscarf in public affects all women in terms of their body, their personal will.* Altering a facade influences all people in terms of the change in the city atmosphere. The new atheistic code. Both examples play with personal freedom and collective reasoning.

The discussion takes several hours and I want to go home. Spending all afternoon inside makes me feel terribly tired and frustrated. I felt tight and am happy to be back in my dorm room and to take a walk to Tochal.



It goes through my mind that having to wear the clothing here has not really affected me apart from the temperature. Since we talked about appropriation, the ideas behind it and the reasoning caused a very different emotional situation. It's good to walk up and look at the city from above.

I meet the family for another holiday. This time we take a walk to Enghelab Street. *At street corners I notice small images of martyrs.* These are memorials to those who died during the Iran-Iraq war.



*It seems to me to some extent that the holidays are random and people just come up with them whenever they feel like it.* Of course it is not the case but I am not informed when which holiday comes up. This time it is





the celebration of the revolution and the streets are full of people. *Most women are wearing Chador, although the summer heat is oppressive.* Some fire engines spray water along the street onto the pedestrians. I am with the two sons and one of the daughters in the middle of the crowd. There are many here who through their presence demonstrate that they believe in the values of the revolution, or in the current state of politics. Some posters showing the political leaders of Saudi Arabia, Israel and the United States burst into flames. To me it is an act of violence. I ask what they want to communicate. One person says it means that they are against the politics of these countries. Of the political leaders of these countries. I ask why they use such strong visual language and am told that it is just supposed to show that they don't want this. On other images flags burn. I ask and ask. Why do you burn the flags of these countries? They are against us is the answer and we want to show them that we do not accept them being a stronghold against us. So have you ever seen images like this in the USA, have you ever seen your flag burning in the USA? The answer is no. I remember well how the US media showed war images and danger around the world and now I find myself again *surrounded by dominating images of war*, of danger. Iran is a neighbour of Iraq and Afghanistan, it has been a stable country within the conflict-ridden Middle East in recent years. The fights between the religious groups of the Sunni and Shiites dominates the Middle East.

Visiting the nature bridge with the family, I am told that I cannot use any of the photos they are in. I don't get an answer when asking why and come to the conclusion that it is because of the family's situation in politics. The daughter in Vienna is studying politics and friends tell me that the family name is related to an influential family within the current political scene of Iran.

### ***Tabiat bridge***

Is commonly translated as nature bridge and is a pedestrian bridge with three layers to walk along and cross the highway in the east of the city. There are two options to reach the bridge, which is close to Mirdamad Boulevard: one way is to take the red line underground, the other is to get there by car. *The area is even more busy at night. Each time I come here with*



بهدار

کتابخانه دیجیتال  
کتابخانه دیجیتال  
کتابخانه دیجیتال

*friends or on my own we are stuck in traffic for a long time, not just because of the people commuting back to their houses but also because many are trying to reach the bridge and find a parking spot. My friend Mohammad takes me to the bridge for a walk. We park the car on the side where the forest is. Someone comes up to ask for money for the parked car. Down the road is a stadium as I remember from my first walk here, some young people sit close to the car parking with their shisha and smoke. We walk into the forest, following the path towards the bridge. I can't say no to melon juice. My favourite drink since I first tried it. **Some policemen control the park, checking that no one leaves any traces behind. I was told that people even have sex in public here, but it is extremely dangerous.** After some time we reach the crossing-point of the different paths leading to the bridge. A young Iranian female architect built the bridge, as anyone who brings me here tells me proudly. The age of the woman is different each time it is mentioned, an urban rumour.*

Dehghan interviews Leila Araghian, the architect of Tabiat bridge, who was actually 26 when she created the design. Araghian says: "I wanted it to be a place for people to stay and ponder, not simply pass." (2015)

*Once we step onto the bridge the view opens up onto the mountainside and the upper city. People stand next to the undercutting in order to take images of themselves with the scene. Some security guards make sure that no one steps too close to the balustrade. I watch the interaction for some time; not only are the security guards there to stop the plants being damaged, but they also seem to be checking that no one tries to commit suicide, as they prevent people from stepping too close to the handrail even where there are no plants. We walk to the other side of the bridge. *There are two food courts and some benches which rise softly from the floor structure, forming a place to sit. Some stairs and slopes allow us to move up and down the three floors of the construction.* We reach the round plateau on top, in the centre of the bridge. Even more people stand here to take a photo. Mohammad and I talk about how this place attracts such different people: some women wear Chador, others Manto.*

***Nature bridge is not like the city, where in the north the Manto is more***



*common - the opposite being true for the south of the city. Here it seems to us that the two worlds mingle.* The bridge is an attractive place for people from all different backgrounds. I come here often with intellectuals, religious people, more conservative people and more liberal types.

We continue to the other side of the bridge. I very much like the fountains at the fire and water park nearby. We reach it within a few minutes' walk from here. We can turn around and the structure of the bridge becomes visible. *The tree-like pylons next to each other open out into branches. It is like an alley of trees with connected crowns forming the pathway* for the people to wander from one recreation area to the next.

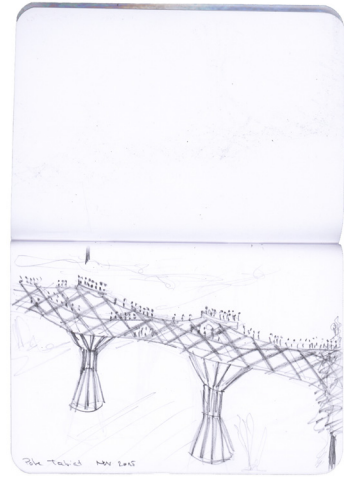


fig. 9.  
nature  
bridge

*At the fire and water park, fountains push water up to the sky. Children run through the park and parents watch them with joy. Some metal towers frame the park; when they are in use, gas-fed flames light up the night. There are several restaurants, some places to sit and chat, an amphitheatre and a skater park nearby.*



fig. 10  
fire and  
water park

### **Vanak**

Vanak is one of the larger squares in Tehran, close to Tabiat bridge. One of the big taxi stations is located here and it is the hub where many people change transport in order to move through the metropolis. Many of the commuters from the satellite cities and Karaj city come here before spreading out into the city. It's no wonder that this square is a popular place for morality police controls. I come to Vanak in order to visit friends who live close by or when I go to the National Library. My friend Niloofer has to observe the square for her university class. One day she shows me her drawings. She proudly presents them to me: she has created a design



that allows people to hide better from the morality police. *The morality police checks that people are dressed properly - this is especially true for women, whose Manto must not be too short or scarves too far back.*

The police stand or drive by in cars and pick people out. One time I see a girl getting out of a morality police car; the car starts up and moves away, she runs after it and the person inside throws her backpack into the water channel next to the street.

### ***The night of the nuclear agreement***

I meet Ali in front of the dorm, a stranger who I got in touch with through OkCupid and until now only texted. He picks me up in his car and I take the chance to ask if he would let me drive. He agrees and I drive for the first time in heavy traffic. It is the perfect day for this intervention because people are in a very good mood due to the result of the nuclear deal. By the evening *people gather around Enghelab Street and Valiasr Street to celebrate the deal and the expected lifting of sanctions.* The streets are busier than usual: cars, motorcycles and pedestrians occupy the streets and honk horns. People give away newspapers, sing and shout. We are in the middle of the crowd and, since we can hardly move, I park the car. The people walking up Valiasr Street shout names out loudly and sing songs. Ali is very moved. He translates for me that people are shouting the names of those who died during the Iranian Green Movement in 2009. He himself worked as a journalist at that time, his writings were critical of Iran's government. While in power Ahmadinejad closed down magazines and newspapers and journalists had to face imprisonment and sanctions on continuing their studies or job opportunities. ***He wasn't able to study for four years.*** We hardly know each other, yet while walking back to the car I see tears in his eyes. I look around; no person close to us, I just worry about the street lights, that someone could see us. I step up to him and give him a long hug. The beginning of more adventures. With Ali I visit many places and talk to about life and politics at every possible occasion. I spend a lot of time at their apartment in Atizas complex, where he lives with his father and brother. I meet his wife who is studying in Germany, and we have an exchange about the cultural differences she has noticed while living in Germany.





### ***Mohammad***

I meet Mohammad through the dating app. He spends his summer in Tehran. We arrange to meet at *Ferdows Garden, which is at the Cinema Museum close to Tajrish*. We sit by the fountain and talk about Iran and Italy, the difference between life here and there. We also talk about the changes that have occurred over the last few years. Mohammad has been living outside the country for several years. He is studying Information Technology in Italy and will return there after the summer break. His mom works for the airline Iran Air. His parents got divorced when he was a child. His sister and he were in the custody of his father as the state regulates it. When they realized that they preferred to be with their mother, their father agreed. Before he moved to Tehran he lived in Shiraz. When he was a young boy the teachings of the Koran were important to him but now it has lost its meaning. He is angry that he had to grow up in Iran. He feels as if he missed out on what young people do during their teenage years. Everything is so complicated, you can't get to know a girl easily in Iran.

One of his sisters lives in Sweden, the other sister in Italy, his father is also in Sweden. He wants his mother to come and live in Italy. He never takes me to his home when his mother is around. *Whenever I come to visit him somewhere near Mirdamad, he watches carefully to see if the neighbours notice and closes the curtains.*

### ***Café Nazdik***

Since the research into spaces that are less accessible failed, the focus moves to public space. Endbrink publishes "Cautiously, Iranians Reclaim the Public Spaces and Liberties Long Suppressed" The article tells of music events with women displaying their hair in public. About the difference between inside houses and outside, where inside the home Western trends are followed while public space is governed by laws made after the Islamic revolution in 1979. One person interviewed is Ehsan Rasoulof, the 32-year-old son of a wealthy banker. He is the owner of the Café Nazdik branches and Mohsen Gallery. When I mention his name to Niloofar and Ali they have both heard his name before. Ali's father knows Ehsan Rasoulof's father and Niloofar's architecture firm is planning a hotel for him.



Ehsan Rasoulof says to the New York Times: “*I am not left, or right, I couldn't care less about politics. My mission in life is to take back our public space.*” (Erdbrink 2015) With public spaces he refers to his cafés and gallery as “bases to hang out.” (Ibid.)

The branch of Café Nazdik close to Haft-e Tir is on the first floor. I am told by Ali that Mr. Rasoulof *must have a lot of influence to be able to open this café. It isn't easy to open a café located on the first floor, added to which Café Nazdik has no open window fronts for surveillance.*

The café becomes a place to go with friends and people I get to know. I arrange to meet Jan, a guy from Germany. Our contact builds up through OkCupid. Jan communicates with me for several weeks, he wants to know how to behave and what to know about Iran before his arrival. Now he is here and brings me my favourite shampoo. I am lucky because friends from Europe supply me with what I can't find here. Jan brings along an Iranian woman. They met online and he is staying at her house while he is in Tehran. They also want to travel together. It seems that they like each other. I am at the café with Ali, who allowed me to drive his car there. Everyone at the table is astonished that I drive in Tehran. Ali and I joke that he is the only man with a German female chauffeur in Tehran.

Nazdik becomes the place to go to with Ali, with Mohammad to meet, eat and sit outside in the garden on summer evenings. *The cafés serve as a hub between the private space and the streets. While on the street women are not supposed to smoke, but it is very common for them to smoke in modern cafés. These cafés are under law public spaces, like offices and other places where women need to wear the veil.* If a woman loosens her headscarf in the café the staff will tell her to adjust it, since the café is held responsible for the implementation of the laws.

### *In front of Café Lamiz*

Café Lamiz at Tajrish is often packed. The room is narrow and long where people stand in line and wait for their order to be taken. They take their number and *wait outside next to the café where there is limited space and no official place to sit (img page 70).* One of the open water lines from the mountainside flows just in front of the café. *The concrete borders*



*along the channelled water also serve as seating, which is not supposed to be this way. They sit next to each other on the edge and have their drink or simply wait for their order to be ready.*

The café is near other cafés, small shops, mainly office supplies and fast food restaurants. Since the room is so small that it doesn't provide customers with a restroom, the mosque and the shopping centre are usually the places to go to.

The one-room café has a glass front with one step to enter. The interior is organized as a path leading to the counter and standing and sitting opportunities to the left and right of it. The first row of high metal stools is positioned next to the front window, followed by the heavy wooden bar high table and a second row of stools. Behind it follows the bench that leans on the brick wall with café tables and similar stools in a suitable size. The opposite wall has the second bar high table. Both tables are fixed to the walls with a copper pipe construction. Between the walls is the line for the sales and cake counter. Not only is the board for orders bilingual, the Farsi words are also similar to the English nomenclature. **Espresso, cappuccino, chocolate and cake written simply in Arabic letters.** The supreme leader's image leans on some bags of coffee and video surveillance faces the entrance. **Every café owner is obliged to install surveillance.**



fig. 11  
in front of  
café lamiz



Some drawings of butterflies decorate the wall above the bench. This kind of stools reminds me of a French design company. Everything else reminds me of the images buzzing around the web that are flagged industrial chic. The café attracts people from different backgrounds, mainly young, less traditionally dressed, internationally oriented and wealthier. In terms of work background, probably not a taxi driver or bus driver, instead people with academic backgrounds like artists, architects, engineers, embassy



staff, English teachers, musicians, journalists, writers, actors, doctors, psychologists, nurses, pupils, car salespeople and students.

*The café is one of the places I go to several times a week, since it is close to the Dehkhoda language school. It is one of my hotspots for meeting and getting to know people. Watching the street and the café from inside and outside. **Only once did I witness a police officer asking people to leave the concrete edge of the water channel.***

### ***At Café Lamiz***

A man of about sixty years old comes to sit with me. I am sipping my hot chocolate and after an introduction we get into conversation. ***His English is fluent and he is one of those people who don't complain about the finance crisis or sanctions.*** He is waiting for a friend of his, both are psychologists. I run into them often over the months here. After talking about my reasons to be in Iran for a while he points to the street and tells me that this café is not old, the street here used to look very different. *When he was young he went to school up the road, and just down the road was a school for women only. After class the pupils from both schools came to meet in this street to talk to each other.* Everything was very different back then. Here he met his first girlfriend and arranged to go dancing with her. He smiles. He is obviously talking about the time before the revolution.

Nima and Kaveh meet me at Café Lamiz. I met Nima some weeks ago for the first time. My phone wasn't working back then and the internet at three places was too slow to reinstall the operating system. Nima offered me the fast and filter-free internet at the embassy he works for. Now his twin joins him from Canada and is here for some time. Both grew up in Iran but have also lived in South Africa and now live mainly in Canada. Their father owns some houses in Tehran and the brothers take care of the land, renting the apartments out. I discover that Kaveh is a sailor and spends most of his time as a skipper with guests from around the world. Nima likes restoring houses and furniture but now works in the trading department of the embassy for financial reasons. As Nima leaves for work, a woman comes to join our conversation. Her name is Rita and she also used to live in Iran. The two start speaking about the Iran of their childhood.



They remember how they left the city for vacations. It was not actually a vacation, they had to leave because of the bombing during the eight years of the Iran-Iraq war. As children it felt like a cheerful time with the family. Nostalgia surfaces as they talk about the *former amusement park right where Atizas, a housing complex, is located now or the zoo down Valiasr Street with the two lions guarding the entrance. The question arises as to whether there are any amusement parks still in existence.* No answer follows.

### ***The Poems***

I meet Kaveh at Tajrish. We eat dinner together and I feel like walking to one of the cake shops where they have Nutella cake and other delicious things. On the way a man stops us. ***He is selling envelopes containing Hafez poems.*** I decide to get one. It is the second poem envelope I buy on the street.



Kaveh reads and translates the poem to me as we sit in front of the cake shop and eat our cakes. ***It's hard to translate the poems, because they have different layers. They can be interpreted in various ways. Hafez is popular in Iran, his poems often refer to love and beloved ones. Elements in the poems have symbolic meanings. The cypress can be a symbol for beloved ones, birds singing refer to human love. Walking through the streets I see some more sellers, some have a little bird with them, which picks the card for the person. The poetic letters are somehow like a wisdom to the people.***

fig.12  
hafez  
poem

*Selling things on the street is quite common. Books are spread out on the ground or household articles are sold on buses and the underground. It is an interesting bazaar scenario, although sadly I don't understand what the sellers say. Too fast and too many words I don't know. I only notice that it must be funny by the facial expressions of others around me.*

## *Café Vadi*

Eskan Shopping Center which is located on Valiasr Street, on the corner of Mirdamad Boulevard. Next to the Central Police Department and another shopping centre that has everything for computers.

*The Eskhan are housing towers with a shopping city inside. On three floors, one can mainly exchange money, other than that there are carpet shops, a photographer, several cafés and a place to buy cakes. Café Vadi stands out. The concrete walls are visible and accentuated. The floor has an industrial look. Unlike the other shops and cafés in the Eskan Shopping complex, this café completely changed its interior. While the gallery at the shops around is used for storage, Café Vadi extended the steel construction and uses the gallery as a floor.*

The café is owned by several friends. A woman tells me that it was her father's shop. She had the opportunity to make whatever she liked out of it, and this is what she created. She presents herself as the person in charge of the interior design, but so do the other two men. ***It is a funny moment for me as, independent of each other, all three mention how they created the design without mentioning the others.*** I find out that one of the men is an architect and studied with a friend of mine at university. One day I meet someone who works in the oil industry, another day a guy who programmes an application for Middle Eastern Paypal, I meet Michel here who is Austrian and teaches English and two guys who design pillows under the name of thedodesign.

## *Talking to Kamran*

We meet Kamran at his apartment in upper Iran to speak about subversive structures and to get a better



ceiling of café vadi and entrance to the café





understanding of culture and the city. By we I mean Niloofar and Maryam, who both study architecture. The philosopher and socio-cultural theorist offers us a place to sit, sweets and tea. Currently he is a professor in Tehran and recently moved back to the city. He lived for some time in Europe and also in Japan.

Kamran begins with the topic of subversive space by looking at culture. *To him there is not just one culture in Iran; culture is formed by subcultures. These subcultures emerge freely and can be invisible. Subcultures interfere with and influence each other. Each subculture has its own dynamic. Whether subcultures interfere with each other depends on the compatibility of the different subculture dynamics. The language and behaviour of different subcultures differ and therefore connectivity varies.*

Rap music was underground in Iran, the people who made the music or listened to it can be seen as a subculture. This has changed as other subcultures started to listen to rap music and it became more common. Nowadays people listen to rap music on the radio. You can hear it at various places where other subcultures meet. Aspects change through subculture, subculture is essential for change and development. *It is a process similar to gentrification and can be compared with it.*

New York City is known for Broadway. Broadway was innovative, walls were painted black, bus seats were used and admission cost just \$1.50. Once a company bought Broadway it became more expensive and the place changed. The “original” Broadway moved and formed Off-Broadway and so on. *An evolution of subculture began.*

If you have a prestigious dinner party then Mr. Architect is invited, and let's say he is integrated into these surroundings. *It's a party of the new rich class that believes in building design of neoclassical architecture. Mr. Architect belongs to the subculture and will create prestigious buildings for his clients.* People at the party like this may be concerned with questions like: ‘Who is his girlfriend? Who is her boyfriend? Who are the parents?’ *Consuming human beings like an object.* The building is about representation and



being able to consume. Who can consume whom better? People from a subculture like this care about consumerism.

*There are subcultures that are seen as resistance, they try to be different from this. Try to be themselves. The pressure on them is high and their will to be themselves is high as well. To be yourself becomes the best resistance and in order to be yourself you need to know who you are. It is about freedom of your own will. People need to know what they want.*

What one wants defines whether one feels free. Instead of saying 'I can't, they don't let me ...' (referring to family and politics), one thinks 'who can prevent us?' *The number of things one can do is very high.* Today we find more and more men taking care of the children, or families where both take care of the children equally. This is new and it changes a society from the inside. People create their own value system, it's something that can be felt but not seen. One doesn't call oneself a subculture of resistance. It is something you live, you do. *The subculture of resistance has no defined space, one cannot locate a person. It can be in university, business, military – it can be anywhere that it is defused. This makes Iranian society one of the most paradoxical in the world.*

*Women today are more socially active and highly educated. Iranian society has never experienced such a low level of violence before. We are confronted with enormous cultural changes. The upbringing of children is being shared now in Iran.*

### *Underground Theatre*

Several weeks ago, my friend Niloofar told me that there is a play that she wants to go with me. Further information follows. *The play is prohibited and therefore not officially announced.* She is in contact with one of the people who organizes the evenings and takes care of bookings. It's the first time I go to a play that needs to be hidden due to its content. It took three months to reach this point. *On the day of the play, I receive the message that it will take place and get the directions.* As usual it is the description of the area, followed by main crossings and streets, the street and the house number. With the help of some friends and the guard at the dorm I figure out how to get there. *I calculate about two hours for the journey.* No bus will take me to the bus station for twenty minutes, so I walk down



Daneshjoo Boulevard and take a car in the direction of Parkway. The usual questions are asked and the **man next to me pays for my ride before I can say anything**. I thank him and exit at Parkway. *The streets are crowded, as usual. Parkway is in the north of Tehran at the intersection of Valiasr Street and the Modares Highway. Parkway is one of the major bus stops. I use my underground card, which serves for bus, underground and for parking.* The bus takes me downtown. **People on the bus help me find the right station to exit, I have several conversations and some guys enter the women's section to sell sweets and stockings, toothbrushes and other handy things**. I get off at the crossing. From the bus stop I take a car towards the east.

The driver knows the street name and the other people in the car let me know when to get out. *I have no idea where I am, just pass by a police station and some car salesrooms. I walk into a smaller street, away from the main traffic. It is a housing area, on the right is a hospital, there are some small grocery shops and but mainly the closed facades of building complexes. The buildings are between three and four floors high, the hospital is higher. The area is mainly residential; close by are a bus station and some leather producers. The street I need to enter looks just like any other street in Tehran. So far, nothing visible indicates the theatre.* I have twenty minutes until the play begins. **A car with some young people waits at the corner**. Some more people walk the street towards one of the houses (image). They are similarly dressed. *The building they walk into is an apartment building. On the second floor the windows are covered with newspapers from inside. The flagstone facade is interrupted by metal-grilled window openings.* My four friends arrive in a car, we wait a bit before we enter the building. A young lady checks our names on the guest list and asks us to wait in the room on the first floor. I am not allowed to take any photographs, so I try to memorize the spaces and the situation I am in. *We are waiting in a long room that must have been a living room. Openings let in light. As is common at parties, chairs are placed with their backs next to the wall, creating an open space in the middle of the room. There are plastic garden chairs, wooden chairs and benches.* We wait until all the guests have arrived. *The room is next to an atrium with an out-of-use fountain.*

The play is about to begin and we walk up to the *second floor*. *The former*





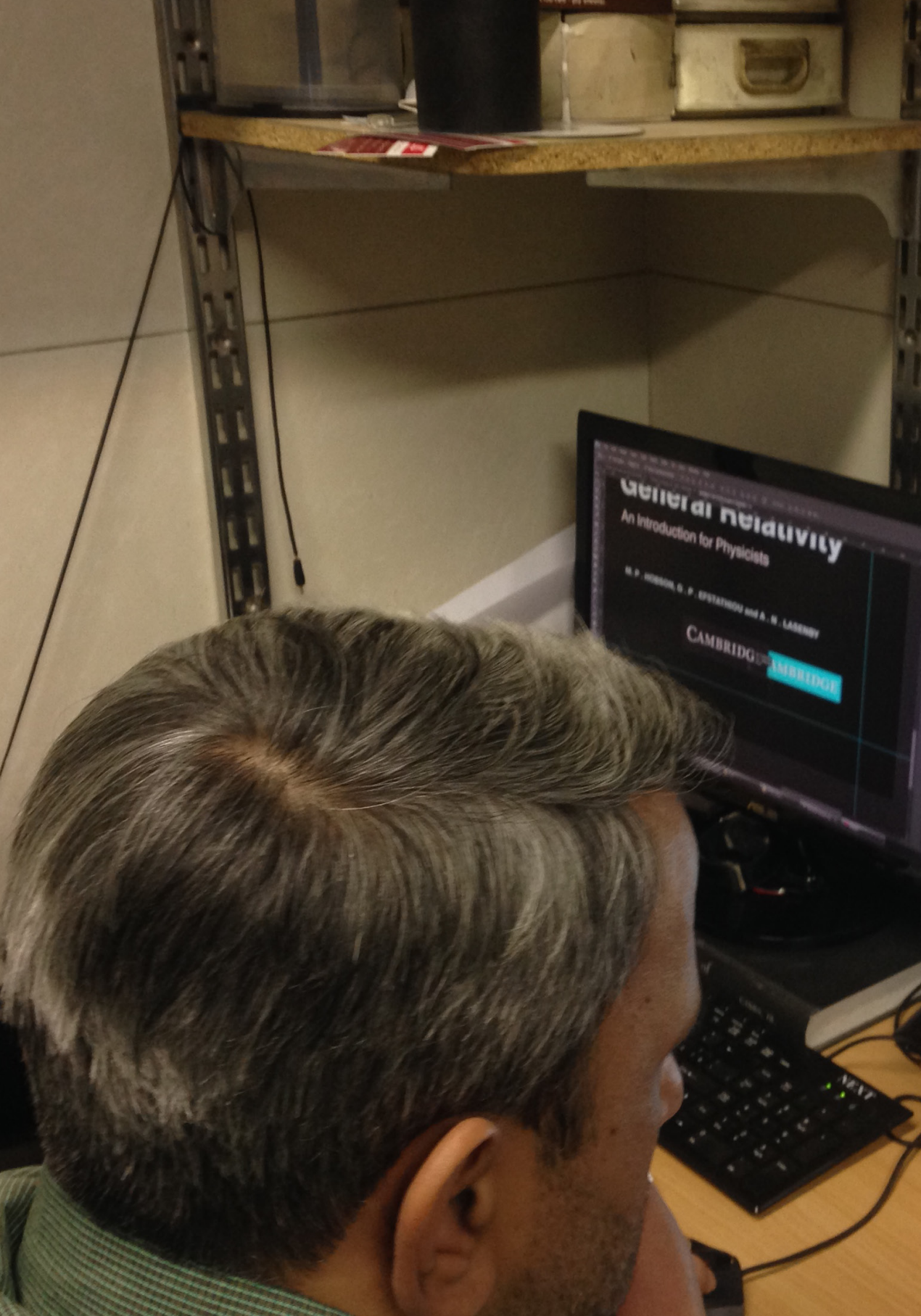
apartment is all covered with black cloth, which makes it difficult to orient oneself within the space and to understand the set-up of the play. A self-constructed tribune of steel tubes provides space for about thirty guests. The tribune is built on wheels. We are asked to take a seat. The play takes place. The scenery is clever and makes do with little stage design. *It is not the stage that changes its design; instead, the audience has to move from one scene to another. The former kitchen, living room, hallway and further rooms become the stage. For each scene, the guests need to get up off their seats and move to another space or wait for the tribune to be relocated in the corridor, facing another room opening out towards the hall. The play leads people from space to space and the floor plan of the building becomes secondary to the arranged movement through the place.* I secretly take images with my phone.

I am fascinated and want to return, take measurements, photographs. The girl in charge speaks little English but good German. We arrange to connect and meet. ***No answer. No chance to return. The play is discovered by the police, the place closed.*** What happened to the actors and to the organizers is unclear. I talk about the play to a friend of mine who used to be an underground musician. His name is Reza. Now sanctioned and not allowed to play in public, today he gives music lessons, plays the guitar fanatically. ***He is trying to arrange for his band to be allowed to play again.***

He knows the area and has been to the play as well. ***Some calls later he tells me that the organizers of the play invited some official theatre person, so maybe that's the reason they were found out.*** I return several times to the area to take walks and become familiar with the surroundings. Street views don't tell me much about what happens behind the walls. If I didn't have the address of the theatre I wouldn't have known nor found the theatre in the first place.

### ***Copy Shops Downtown***

I need to buy or print several books. My friend Ali offers to take care of it for me. One of the books is by Asef Bayat, another by De Certeau. *The printing shop is on Enghelab Street. The shop is located in a ruined or perhaps unfinished building, and has a digital library with more than 40,000 copies*



# General relativity

An Introduction for Physicists

W. R. INDIK, G. P. EPSTEIN and A. S. LASNEY

CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

of digitalized books. *The shelves are full of self-printed copies.* For less than seven euros, I receive printed and bound books. I am not sure if Asef Bayat is allowed in Iran and I like the coincidence that I printed the book on Enghelab Street. Bayat writes in "Life as Politics" that the publishing houses close to the university transformed the place into a centre not only for intellectuals and for academic material but also for "underground revolutionary literature" (169). And now here I am, getting his book from here.

### ***Underground Businesses***

*I know of one place somewhere close to the cinema museum where people can buy underground films. The building is close to another park with miniature sculptures of sights in Tehran. I never enter the shop. I only hear of it. When I wanted to go there, I was told that the place had just been discovered by the police. It is closed now. What I hear from the description is that one needs to call the owner first, if someone wants to bring along another person it is quite hard.*

The easiest way to find and get to places is through a trusted friend. Mohammad's friend is a film maker and owns a DVD shop. Where it is located I do not know, not only was it night but also we went by car. I noted down some aspects. *It is a ground floor shop, not the most common situation. A long glass facade makes it easy to look inside. Some film posters on the window glass limit the view into the place. As we enter, a counter separates the customer and the seller's area. Left of the entrance door is a computer with keyboard to search for movies of interest. The room is rectangular. The entrance is midway opposite, the shelves that face the adjacent side obscure the view towards the wall. Behind them, the illegal discs are stored. The wall of the hypotenuse opens up to visitors, allowing them to look at the downloaded, self-burned and nicely packaged film covers. The film "Taxi" is only available in very bad quality. So I decide to wait, and we take some cheap films.*

***Trust is low and the risk high. Some places can exist for some time, then once they are found out they move, or they are closed for a while and reopen. Only phone numbers are a reliable source to finding the shop owners and where they sell their products.***

Alcohol can be reached via numbers, and less often via places. With the right number, anything is possible. *With alcohol, the location is not important. The exchange can happen in a park, or at a parking spot.* Usually the money is transferred and the meeting place arranged. It is not only difficult to find good alcohol but also to get it. *One time a friend bought wine and it took him three days to arrange everything and the day he went to pick up the containers he spent almost five hours stuck in traffic and then waiting for the person to come.*



While it is illegal in Europe, *infringement of copyright is normal in Iran.* Not only on western products but also for local businesses. Names and corporate designs are at times one to one copies but don't belong to the same owner. Some stores copy American fast food branch designs and alter them for the local market. So while using software without copyright can cause big issues in Austria, to be found with alcohol is a problem in Iran. While it is hard to find places in Austria to get illegal software, it is hard to find places for alcohol in Iran.

### *The Shrine of Khomeini*

I call Ali, today I feel like leaving Tehran, I am down, I just want to go home. It's not that things would be better then but I feel like running away. Ali listens to me for a long time and I ask him if there isn't anything we can do that cheers me up. Like what, he responds? I don't really know, I just know that I haven't been to the shrine of Khomeini yet and that it could be an option. Ali picks me up at the dorm, *I drive the car towards Qom,* but we miss the exit. I am frustrated. We find another way to get there. *The shire is next to the graveyard of Tehran. This is where all the people*



*who died are buried.* I should have known better than to imagine that this is a fun place to visit. The endless graveyard with all the *stones and glass vitrines which show images of the people who died during the Iran – Iraq War.* Young men, family fathers and little children. *Phrases from the Koran embellish the blank stones.* A young woman sits next to one of the graves and reads aloud from a book. The rows seem never-ending as we drive around the cemetery of ***Behesht-e Zabra, which is about 500 hectares.*** I want to leave. ***We need to drive to the memorial building of Khomeini.*** We come via a subway station. As far as I know one can get here on the red line which goes all the way up to Tajrish.

We enter the area of the memorial to Khomeini through the back gate. *Women through the right entrance and men to the left.* ***The building bears the advertisement of a bank, there is a hotel and some stores, restaurants and shops.*** I am confused about the building complex being the pilgrimage place for the former leader of Iran and yet somehow a shopping area with hotel and so on at the same time. We walk a long way to the entrance of the memorial. Some benches and pavilions offer people a chance to sit down and picnic.





Later I tell Reza, the musician, about this day. He laughs when he hears what I did and says something like **'You chose the wrong country for going out and having fun'**. Later he sends me a link to some German comedians he loves. It cheers me up.

### ***Friday prayer at Enghelab Street***

*Usually Enghelab Street is packed with cars. The street connecting east to west is within the old town area, which has a restriction on the cars allowed to enter. Cars starting with odd licence plate numbers can enter on certain days while cars with even numbers can enter on other days. In the evening, all cars are allowed. Even though this regulation exists, the streets are crowded and cars often move more slowly than pedestrians. Friday is the big exception. Parts of Enghelab Streets are blocked during the morning hours in order to give space for the Friday prayer at the Tehran University. This not only means that any traffic needs to be diverted, it also means that it is possible to walk the lanes. The street is usually really loud and I would have never noticed the speakers that are situated along the street. **Now the prayers engulf the footpath.** I take images of the street and the speakers. **Seconds later, a man is standing next to me and asking me what I am doing.** I answer in Farsi: Man danesjoo-e me'mahri am. Which means something like, I am an architecture student. **I am accompanied to the next checkpoint.** The streets are quiet, some people are walking, but there is hardly anyone around. *We walk next to the barriers that split the street into lanes for cars, buses and cars again. The bus lane is in the middle and people can move from the walkways to the bus station by crossing pedestrian bridges. At some stations getting to the station is possible on street level mainly due to traffic lights. At major crossing points, where underground and buses meet, there are also subways. This is the case at the city theatre.**

*The footpaths towards Tehran University are quite wide. The university areal has a fence and only students who study here can enter the area. Along the road there are mainly shops which sell books or software. Anything linked to university studies can be found here. Programmes for language classes and other computer programmes are available, no copyright respected, printed and produced in an official-looking manner. There are several printing shops around.*



We continue our walk to the gate of Tehran University. The man who guided me talks to a police officer who knows English very well. ***I introduce myself in Farsi and am asked if I am a journalist.*** What I am doing here? If I came to see the Friday prayer. I decide to be truthful and tell them that I am an architecture student. I am here because its the only time of the week that the street is empty and that this is very interesting to me. I wanted to take images of the carless street and show them the images without being asked. Luckily, I mainly took images of buildings and streets. Now there are several men looking at me suspiciously. ***I am standing in the middle of the street and I am sure that what I did is not acceptable.*** The man asks me again if I came here to see the Friday prayer. I respond that it wasn't my purpose but if I could enter the prayer room and take images I would be happy to do so. Strangely enough we walk inside, I didn't expect this to happen at all. *We are at the narrow entrance to the university complex. Right of the gate is a small pathway that I wouldn't have noticed if I didn't come for this occasion. We reach a small building, more a checkpoint. The door stands open, inside are three men, a table and left of the entrance there are shelves.* I am asked to leave my ID card and my cell phone here. I am a bit suspicious, even though the situation seems to be fine now. I turn off my phone, leave my passport with the strangers, one of whom speaks very good German. I receive a press pass, but no information paper that I left my passport and phone with them. I am still accompanied by the man who interviewed me earlier. We walk back to the gate, *there are metal fences guiding one to the entrances. One prayer room is reserved for women, the other for men.* As I have come late for the prayer the line is empty, the guy only says goodbye now as I reach the small shelter for women to enter. ***Inside three women wearing Chador are using their smart phones. They smile at me and make a body check, give me the rentable Chador and ask some further questions, very friendly and joyful.*** One lady guides me to the women's prayer space. It is an outdoor prayer room, with what seems like a temporary building that is rebuilt each week on the same spot. Actually it is not but everything seems very temporary and as if next week it could be gone and no more prayers will be held at the University. *The structure looks like the framework one finds throughout the city on construction sites. Round metal tubes that fit together for a fair-like construction covered with cloth against wind, sun and rain. All of the women kneel on the ground on the large carpet facing Mecca.*

*A cloth divides the male section from the female section. The person who is praying is multiplied through the speakers that can be heard directly through the cloth. No glimpse of the men participating in the prayers is possible. I am allowed to take images and some of the women turn around so that their faces aren't visible. The woman who accompanied me here is talking to another women in charge. We walk back as we came, crossing a chain that is supposed to prevent people from entering the garden, we pass by the benches and walk towards the shelter to give back the Chador. I exchange the journalist pass for my belongings.*

I am told not to take any images on the streets here. In turn I ask if it is OK to take photographs in the side alleys and get a 'yes'. The streets are all empty and my focus shifts to what is less noticeable on other days. *The big garbage disposal containers are sitting on their stations along the way. Some of the water paths here can hardly be seen because they are covered by concrete. Besides concrete and stone there are some trees, especially the ones in the park of the University areal. I get curious about a wooden bench with graffiti sprayed on it. Now at Friday prayer time the facade is all closed and I can't even look inside.* I take more images. *The further I walk, the closer I get to the second entrance of the university.* Men are praying on the street and one man who notices me starts to gesture that I need to leave. I decide to give myself some time before I follow his request and take a right to the neighbouring street. ***An official on a motorcycle reaches me. He requests my camera and wants to know what I am doing.*** I tell him what I said before, he checks my ID and leaves. Further down the street I take images of the buildings around, *some of the old buildings here have balconies facing the streets. The entrances to shops are with two or more stairs and the windows can be closed with old wooden window shutters. One building has some organic forms, while others remind me of 1970s Germany. Two motorcycles approach me, I am told that I can't take images here. I respond politely but firmly that I am only taking images of the buildings and streets.* No people are included. The guys inspect the images and agree. But they again tell me that I can't take images at this time, so I respond politely that these buildings are here at any time of the week and they do not look any different now than they do on any other days. Why should I not take pictures now? I am asked to wait for the end of the prayer. Once I reach *Felestin street with the mosque* and the



roundabout, I seem to be out of the prayer area. Cars are parked in three rows, one stopping others from leaving, and two men check my identity for the last time. We get into a funny conversation about the parked cars. I move over to one of the shops and get myself some water for the way and sit next to the water line. *From here I can move up to the subway or down to Enghelab Street. I decide head for Enghelab, Felestin street is a street I am repeatedly attracted to.*

*Felestin street is parallel to Valiasr Street. I am at Medune Felestin, which is a roundabout about two blocks north of Enghelab Street. Walking distance from here is not only Tehran University from where I have come but also Amirkabir University of Technology, a branch of Islamic Azad University at the crossing of Enghelab and Felestin street, the National Theatre and other performance venues. I am close to Laleh Park, and walking down Felestin Street will bring me to Marmar Palace, one of the governmental buildings and Imam Ali University. Other than uptown Tehran, the area is not only packed with traffic but also with places to reach within walking distance. I am taking a right into Felestin street. The street of glasses, sunglasses, window fronts display brands from all around the world. The shops are open and I take a look at some glasses. It's around midday, the streets start to get more crowded and the area is open to traffic again. Felestin street has an open water channel next to the walkway. During the summer heat this water channel is almost empty. I am about to reach Enghelab Street and the door to Azad University is close by. On the right hand side a new gallery is about to open and a modern, stylish restaurant just opened a few weeks ago. The place is below ground level and serves fast food such as burgers. The design is by an artist. The wide open space is mainly white, with black and red chairs, as I remember. The wall has geometrically cut mirrors as can be found in the Shah's palaces and is used as a medium in contemporary sculptures. I wonder if it is a reference to the dynasty or luxury? Enghelab Street interrupts the rhythm of Felestin street. South of Enghelab, Felestin street becomes a place for cloth producers and sellers. A café and some food shops are along the way but mainly there are places to buy rolled-up cloth. A floorcloth stands next to one of the trees, small metal bridges cross the stone-paved water channel. The street is narrower here and it is more like a personal space to me. Hassan, an architect friend, will transform one of the old houses into a hotel. I*



am at the brick building which refers back to the times when the *water supply came through underground water channels called qanat. The building has a basement space where water (in Farsi – Ab) used to be stored. Some buildings in the area had the purpose of storing water for the neighbourhood. One of these buildings is Ab-Anbar, which today has been transformed into a gallery and the multifunctional architecture space Platform 28.*

*The street ends abruptly at the Marmar palace. A small alley turning left brings me back to Valiasr Street. The houses here are two-storey buildings. I didn't make notes about this street and in my mind the street became a mud building site, but most likely it was stone as we are not yet in the bazaar area where some old mud buildings still exist.*

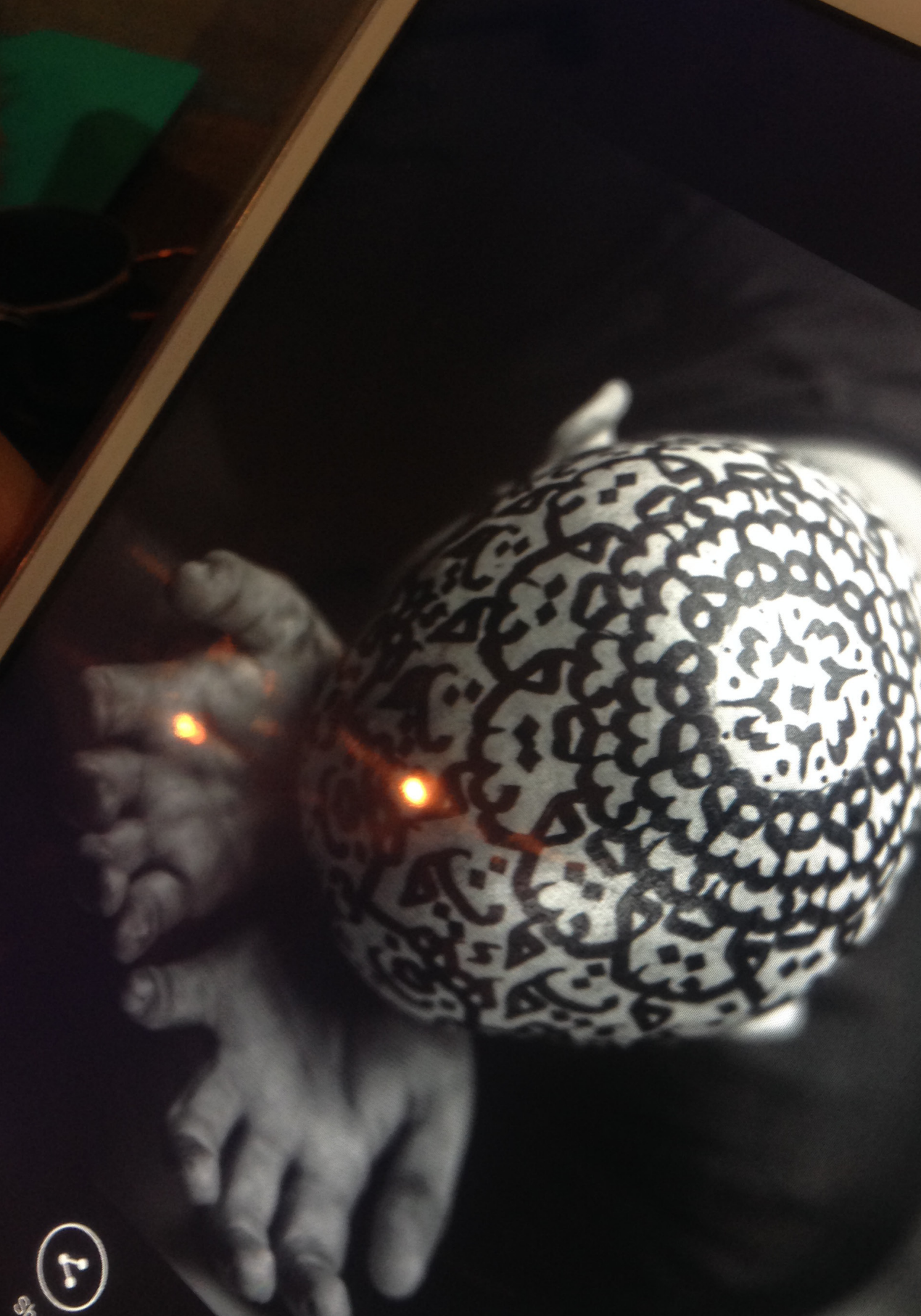
### ***Other Eyes***

After a while, the images of Khomeini and Khamenei lose my visual attention. I don't notice them any more. The same happens with aggressive images, war paintings and the martyr memorials on streets, street corners, on houses and walls. My visual eye becomes used to them.

Only once when people from Austria come to Tehran and we walk the city together, they talk about the images and clothing. It is visible again. Memories come back of my first time in Tehran and how I was more sensitive to these aspects.

The visitors, two women, travel around Iran. They come back to Tehran towards the end of their visit. I meet them at the apartment of a friend, who offers them the chance to stay at his place but to live at a hotel. We order food, or rather the friend orders the food for us while he is at work. They tell me about their experiences: for them, the Hijab and Manto are unsettling. They address violation in little children wearing Chador and mention the difference between Tehran and other places. From the stories they heard about Tehran and Iran before they came, they expected fewer people to be wearing Chador. I find it interesting to note these different perceptions.

Locals in anger. *Symbols, religious rituals and the use of space is offensive to*



*some people in Tehran. They mention how their own values and interests are violated and that religious people can do whatever they like. They are OK with the rituals themselves, but under the circumstance of not being allowed to live as they like, discontent develops.* Reza tells me that he thinks religious people are favoured in Iran. They are allowed to do anything and for us everything is difficult and hard. *I hear people complain about the status quo, but usually along the way they turn to humour.*

### *The Jewellery Maker*

It is one of those days when I just walk into Café Lamiz after class to get a hot chocolate. A young man leans over his papers. He lifts his face from the work and looks at me. Warm welcomes as if we have known each other for a long time. I just respond as if I have known him for a long time as well. I stick my face into his drawings. He lifts his backpack from the floor and takes out a tablet computer. We look at one folder after another, different drawings of his, afterwards handmade jewellery, calligraphy appliquéd onto the human body. He doesn't speak much English and my Farsi is not sufficient to communicate all I want to say. He asks my name and starts creating a piece of jewellery on paper. My British roommate comes in with a friend. We introduce each other. My roommate studies Farsi and helps with communication.

A day later we meet again, not by arrangement, but quite by coincidence. He offers me a lift to the shop I want to go to. The motorcycle is parked in front of the café, *neither of us is wearing a helmet. It is getting chillier nowadays.* I hop on, he starts the motorcycle, the people outside wave us off. *The roundabout at Tajrish is busy with cars. We sneak between the cars, left, right, right, right.* There seem to be even fewer rules for motorcycles. *No respect for one-way streets. At least drivers of cars only violate the one-way system sometimes. Motorcycles can be found on walkways, bus lanes, moving in any direction.*

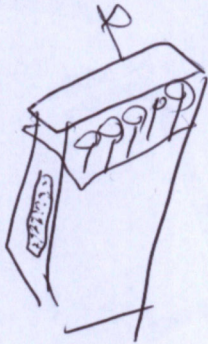
We meet several times after our first meeting. Go to galleries, art shops, artist's houses and cafés. His mother is a hairdresser. *Female hairdressers are hard to find. No street signs or street shops, they are only available through the network of people one knows.* We have a hard time communicating with each



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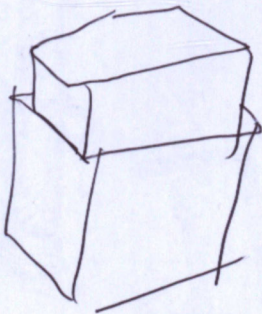
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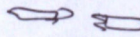
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other, so we draw for each other and wait for the next person to translate for us. One time he shows me articles written about him, photographs and negative words about him. *He looks different from others, wears earrings, has long hair and his clothes stand out.*

*He is very unhappy that people look at him this way.* When we go around he gets very angry about every religious person who says something against him. People sometimes stare at him. All of this leaves traces. *In one of the drawings he makes for me, he describes how painful it is to hear these words and read these newspaper articles.* Each time, he feels like crying inside and with his tears his heart grows and grows and one day it will become a balloon that lifts him off the ground and takes him away. Iran is hard, he writes.

#### *The inner map connecting places*

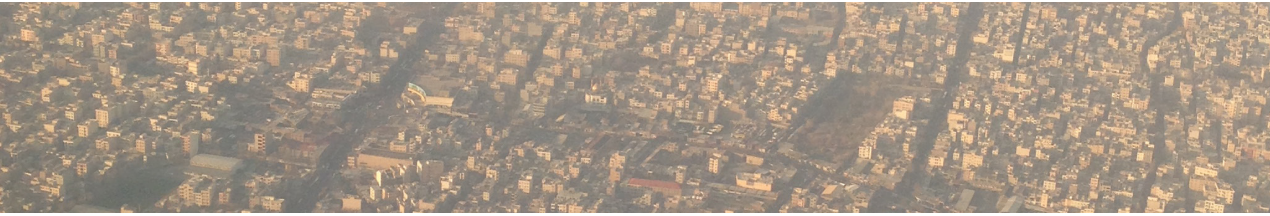
*There are these moments in Iran when places start to synchronize, when connections between people become visible.* One example is Café Nazdik at Tehran University. I didn't know where this café was located until my last month in Iran. The café with the wooden bench outside was closed on Friday prayer. I realize this is the café I went to last spring for a theatre performance and the place where a friend's father, a writer, celebrated his birthday with friends, colleagues and students.

I had been here during the day and evening, not knowing where I was. I came by car and didn't check a map. In this instant the place becomes part of the greater connection of places and spaces around me. It is part of the network of places I have entered and experienced over the past months.

A memory surfaces. I was walking with my first roommate and her boyfriend through the city. We went to the bazaar at Tajrish. My roommate was new to the city and her friend didn't enter the bazaar often. It was easy for me to move through the narrow alleys, to know where to go, what to find where. As we came to one corner I asked if they would like to go to the shrine. *They were both puzzled that I knew so well how to get there. It was clear on my inner map.*

fig. 14

*The National Library is next to the Holy Defense Museum, by the forest with the nature bridge and the fire and water park which is not far from Vanak. Slowly, by moving through the city, the proximities and distances become clear. Some aspects become visible only once I am in Austria evaluating the data on the Moves application.*



### ***Returning to Tehran***

I enjoy being with the student group here, it was a last-minute decision to come along. Visa at the airport and the fourth name variation printed in my Visa. ***The bank manager makes four copies of my passport in order to verify my identity. This time I stay with Ali, mentioning Niloofar as the place I will live at the Visa counter. Female visitors are only allowed to stay with women.***

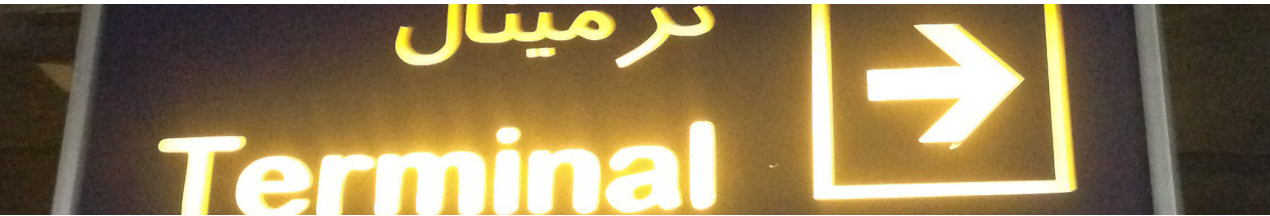
The teacher and student group from Nuremberg, some leaders of a workshop at platform 28 (an architecture multifunctional space) and I wait for an architect who will show us around. It's a rainy day and we are supposed to look at the facades of Enghelab Street and the street that I only know as the *street where you can buy lights and where the cinemas used to be*. The students mention their experience at the Holy Defense Museum. A building close to the National Library, to me only known from when Mohammad and me took a wrong turn at night, stopping the car as we were facing missiles behind a netting wire. The guard didn't show any interest as he was barbecuing with others. So there we were standing out here and the scarf saves me from the rain. My personal holy defence.

Clothing. I notice it. In the case of the headscarf (Hijab), many people ask me how I feel about wearing it. There was some sort of attention towards it almost every day. The Manto, which is usually shorter than the Chador,

ending around the knees and more fitted, felt OK to me. Since I allowed myself colourful Hijab and Mantos that suited my personal feelings, it was like an accessory. The Manto and Hijab saved me several times from the aftermath of cold and warm temperature when entering and exiting buildings or subways. I can neither say that I liked wearing these clothes nor that I hated them. The only time I remember was a moment of anger and frustration where my mind went against all that surrounded me. Which was simply an emotional storm. I make the choice to go to Iran and live under the rules.

We can hardly understand the words of the guide. The traffic whistles in our ears. *I look, look at the buildings, the balconies, the stone elements, the playfulness of some facades.*

*By the end of the trip some students come back from a party at a villa in the north of the city. Since the way there was long, they decide to take one of the plastic water bottles standing in the house entrance along from the hotel. The traffic is quieter and one wants to take a sip noticing that this only looks like water. Inside, well hidden Araq, an alcoholic drink.*



I have been back in Europe several months now, and my friend Mohammad and I decide to talk on the phone. It is funny to hear him speak about us moving through the city. He asks me if I remember the day we walked into the parliament. *I smile, it was that day we wanted to go to one of the really beautiful gardens, Negarestan Garden. We saw from afar a pyramid building, with a high fence. We both didn't know what it was, so we crossed the fast moving street, walking car by car and watching if they slowed down or not until we reached the fence. There was no walkway, or no walkway yet. It was just earth and in some places there was some construction under way*





*to make a stone-paved path.* We walked through the dust, along the fence, no entrance for a long time. Once we reached the entrance, Mohammad asked where we were. I wanted to enter the building. ***On the phone he tells me, I would have never gone there, I think this was really great, we just walked into places, we just went for things never minding what the result would be.*** He asks me if I remember the moment my backpack went through the security and the knife was found. We both start to laugh. The kitchen knife was there for the melon I had with me, it must have looked odd to the guard but I just smiled and said, we will have a picnic later on. The other entrance we had to go to had a poster above the security checkpoint. I went to sit down while the people responsible made phone calls. When I looked up at the poster I was irritated. We were sitting in the parliament entrance for citizens and the poster hanging for everyone to see looked like Austrian mountainside with wooden buildings and a meandering road.

A phone call with my British flatmate who is still in Tehran sends me back to the streets. *She goes with the agency to the dorm and I am listening to her stories. After a while she mentions to me that she is close to Atisaz.* I listen to her words and in front of my eyes the housing towers appear, *the wall, the pedestrian bridge across the highway to the bus, the Iranian flags covering the bridge and the traffic I sat in for hours. It all comes back to me as if it was just now and as if I was sitting next to her. As if we were on our way from the museum or a gallery back to the dorm.*

The selection of stories from Tehran form spatial reference and create spatial descriptions that existed at the moment of presence and in memory. To be present in space forms space and creates it, space is subjective. To be present in an urban environment not only alters the space but also personal perception and relation to the space. It's time to look at the map of the traces of movements and places in Tehran. The following maps show the almost 700 square kilometres of Tehran, it shows where the narration can be located and what movements are involved. The first map shows the places mainly visited, the higher the frequency the bigger the circle becomes. The second map shows movements with public transport, taxis, cars and other means of transport. The third maps are the walking paths. Each of these maps traces from 14. July 2015 and is not accurate

but a proximity. The movements and places were only recorded when the phone was switched on. They give an understanding of what the stories bring to life, what exists within these surroundings and may not be true for other areas. The maps are followed by the chapter on urban intervention. While the narration introduces practices that already exist, the urban interventions seek to stimulate the reader, the local in Tehran and elsewhere to go out onto the streets and investigate, become aware and alter behaviour and spatial relation. It suggests moving, talking, drawing, finding out, investigating and trusting. The following chapter starts with the initial thoughts and proposals for an urban intervention and leads to the idea of an artistic approach linked to local practices.





مروارید

بهارک مهران

فرودگاه مهرگان

نصیر آباد

نصیر آباد

THR

THR



fig. 15 tehran map places

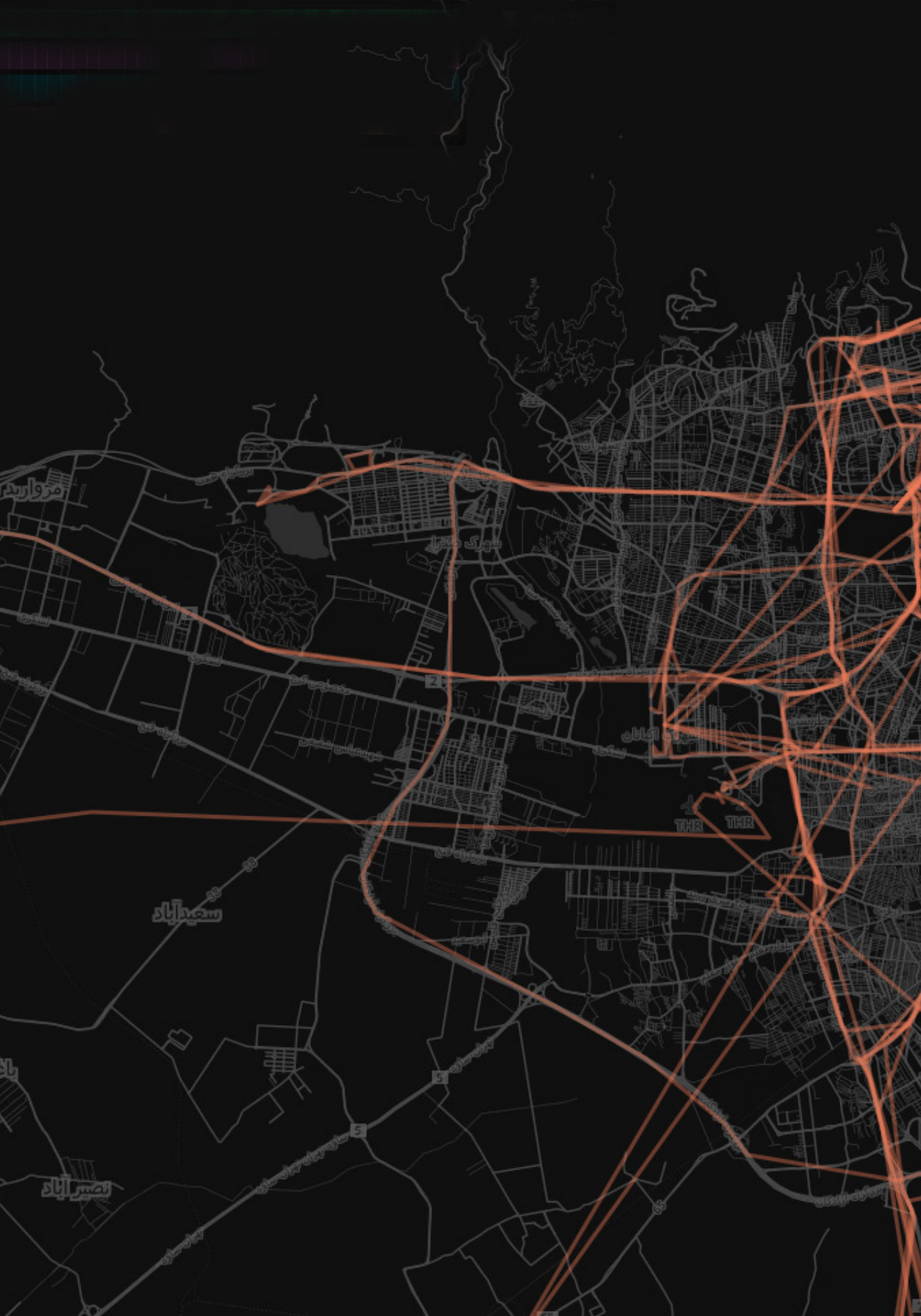




fig. 16 tehran map  
transportation

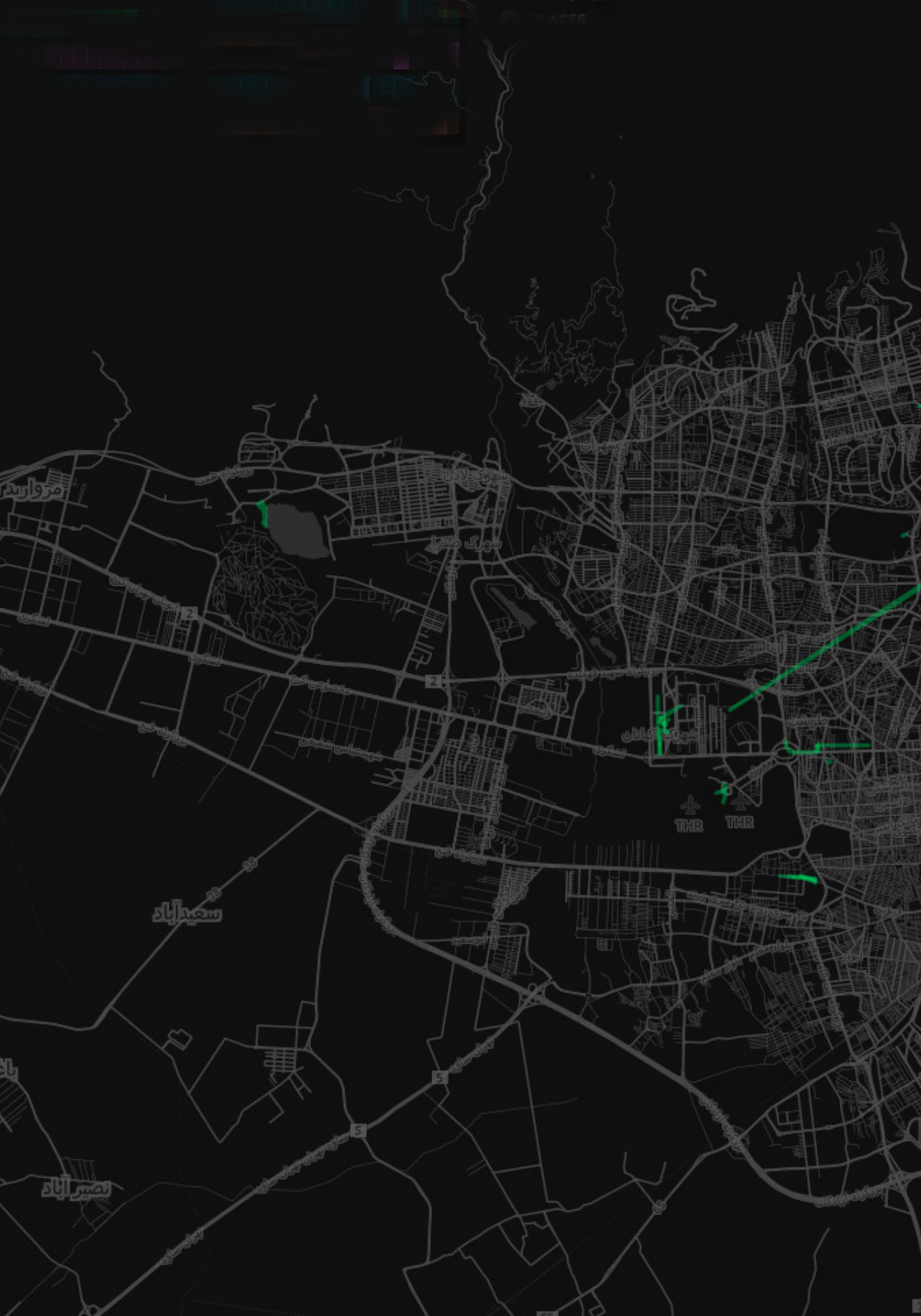




fig. 17 tehran map walks

## Urban Intervention

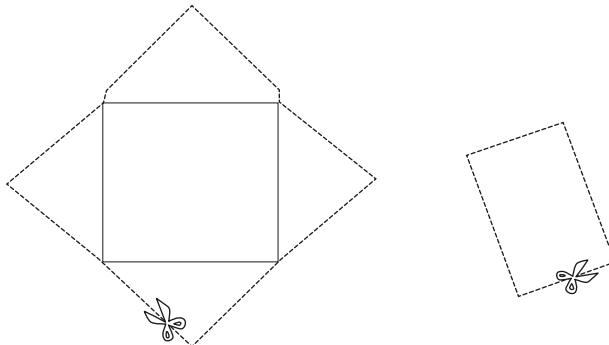
What is it that I can give for the city, to the people. Creating an idea for Tehran encounters all kinds of limitations. I am offered the chance to help a friend who is an architect and assists children who are in difficult family situations. They come to a class and learn something about architecture. The friend asks me to create a class design for them. I propose some ideas, which he likes very much, but it doesn't happen. 'Not happening' is something I am confronted with through the in-situ experiences. Not because it's bad will but because of circumstances or reasons that I am not aware of, maybe cultural differences in communication. Sometimes it seems to be connected to the regulations, to the people in charge, and sometimes it is random to me why something is possible and happens or impossible but not mentioned. It just fades away. One of these examples is the governmental proposal for an urban, spatial intervention. I prepared papers for it, with a financial plan and purpose. Explaining the benefit for the municipality, etc. A friend of a friend sends out the papers to the NGO she works for, it's supposed to go further to the municipality. I stay in touch, it is all going ... no results after weeks, months. The person I am in contact with in order to produce the work needs to travel to Nepal for one month and wants to get back to me when he returns. I put the idea on ice. After all, the thesis is a preparation for an Urban Intervention that relates to creating space, culture, adaptations, participation. To bring something physical into a place becomes a draining experience. I think of the smallest possible intervention. the poems come back to my mind. I don't know how far in terms of the content I can go, writing notes for 'urban strolls'. What are the limits? What can I say or not say? Ask for or not?

The Hafez poems are replaced with ideas, with codes of action and experimentation. While thinking of the poems, thinking of the stories mentioned in the thesis, one more memory returns: The day when a man entered Café Lamiz and sat next to me: We have a conversation about how he is unable to do anything different. Nothing can change, nothing will alter, he is locked in this place. I ask him if he has ever bought flowers from one the florists along Valiasr Street and simply given them to someone on

the street. He says no. When I ask him if he has ever given a compliment to a woman walking by without asking for her number or trying to reach out for her in any different way, another no. He leaves the café with a goodbye. Minutes later he returns and says ‘Thank you’. Why do you thank me? He responds to me that he never thought of this and probably wouldn’t have thought of doing something like that. He tells me that he thinks that it could bring more happiness to people and that he would really like to do it.

The poems are replaced by directions, by text passages that request complimentation. The letters are a form of experimentation that affect the behaviour and the spatial perception. In the way of perceiving known spaces and in the way of reaching out to places that are unfamiliar or even with negative connotations, without one ever having been there. It is about expanding the places and people, people reach out to. Combining *dérive* and artistic methodology and the cultural specifics. For now, I can spread these letters online, give them out to the people I know, but a more effective approach would be to hand them out to people on the streets. For feedback and spreading the word the letters have hashtags, which are used in Instagram to make images related to a topic trackable. People are asked to share their impressions as images and texts with others via Instagram as Instagram is a popular platform in Iran.

People can think of their own ideas for urban exploration and send them in via Telegram @wanderingtehran. They are free to publish them through the hashtag to everyone.







*take an agent  
ask him what  
places he likes  
choose one you have  
not been to  
enjoy*

*share your  
experience  
on instagram  
#wanderingtehran*

*buy a flower at the  
nearest shop. give  
the flower to the  
first person you  
spot after exiting  
- regardless who  
it is!*

*share your  
experience  
on instagram  
#wanderingtehran*

*say something nice  
to someone you do  
not know.  
continue your  
walk.*

*share your  
experience  
on instagram  
#wanderingtehran*

*tehran  
short story to give to a  
stranger*

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

*.....  
share on instagram  
#wanderingtehran*

*look for  
opportunities to  
sit. do not take the  
bench*

*share your  
experience  
on instagram  
#wanderingtehran*

*what happens  
while you take any  
underground line  
all the way to the  
end*

*share your  
experience  
on instagram  
#wanderingtehran*

*bring your mother  
to a place she has  
never been to in  
tehran*

*share your  
experience  
on instagram  
#wanderingtehran*

*drift. drift. drift.  
change your path.  
follow your soul.  
listen within.  
follow your  
intuition*

*share your  
experience  
on instagram  
#wanderingtehran*

*take an agent  
ask him what  
places he likes to  
choose one you have  
not been to  
enjoy*

*share your  
experience  
on instagram  
#wanderingtehran*

*look for what you  
already know.  
cherish the  
familiar.  
take images. draw.  
write.*

*share your  
experience  
on instagram  
#wanderingtehran*

*avoid all paths you  
have already taken  
to get where you  
want to go*

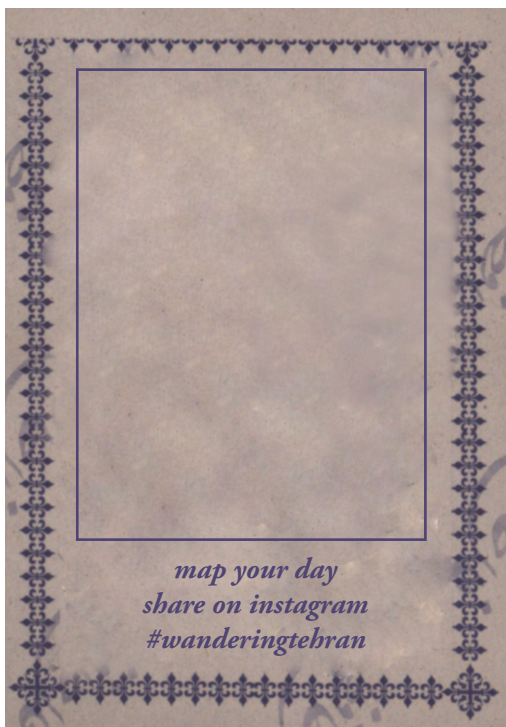
*share your  
experience  
on instagram  
#wanderingtehran*

*map where you  
move.  
how do you move  
the city? where  
have you been?  
have not been?*

*share your  
experience  
on instagram  
#wanderingtehran*

*ask someone to give  
you instructions  
left  
right  
straight  
...  
follow the list  
where do you  
reach?*

*share your  
experience  
on instagram  
#wanderingtehran*



## Conclusion

Experiencing the different power relations on the streets of Tehran, one coming from governmental institutions and lawmakers and the other being related to ordinary people, is one option for creating ideas for spatial developments. There is the need to consider not only two poles of politics, religion and people but also the diversity within the culture through its subcultures.

Michel de Certeau looks at the power relation by looking at place, space, strategy and tactic. Strategies are related to places, while tactics create change through repetition. With the term nonmovements, Asef Bayat introduces the ideas of collective and noncollective actors. What Martina Löw, de Certeau and Bayat have in common is that space is created through participation. In the framework of de Certeau, this creation process is tactical. Presence and everyday practices are a key to change.

People in Tehran create their value systems, leading to different forms of behaviour and spatial expression. People with money and financial possibilities create places as a strategy. Examples of this strategy are, for instance, the neo-classical buildings described in the conversation with the professor or places like the cafés and gallery of Ehsan Rasoulof.

The nonmovement is related to tactical approach. It works with time and normalization through repetition of a high number of people. It relies on the idea that subcultures influence each other and that ideas spread through time and discourse. The action of sitting in front of Café Lamiz on the concrete boundaries of the water channel and occupying the space is one example, as one is not permitted to hang out in public, especially as the place does not belong to the café. The experience from the first weeks in Tehran with the young Iranians showing their affection at the park is another example. Holding hands and how clothes are worn are possible notions.

Several conversations at Café Lamiz show how the city changed before and after the revolution of 1979. For Nima and Rita, who mainly live outside the country, this is visible not only on the built scale with the lack of places they used to go to, but also in terms of what they were able to do and what has become normal in behaviour and spatial appropriation by now. For someone who comes back to a place or comes to a place only sometimes, the view of changes is clearer and more visible than it might be for someone who is constantly living at the place.

The narration gives an insight into behaviours that are the custom or have become custom over time. What the narration does not allow is the creation of the city in all its aspects, as the financial market or sanctions are minor topics. What the thesis does not reflect or only slightly reflects is the financial market situation, the sanctions and environmental issues, such as air pollution. It focuses on the human relation, the socio-cultural aspects and the built urban structures. The narration is limited to the area of research as well as to the greater focus on the subversive and suppressed strategies and tactics by subcultures.

The thesis creates a methodological approach on urban research and the in-situ research transformed into a narration the foundation for planning, design and intervention. The narration not only serves as an introduction for the reader to the socio-cultural and socio-spatial situation. In itself, in combination with the images and drawings, it displays the complexity of the city and is a methodology. The narration gives an insight into what is possible even within a restricted urban environment such as that of Tehran, where the space outside of private houses is occupied by religious and cultural aspects. The narration shows and senses what possibilities exist, what boundaries are thought and have been explored.

Exploring a city creates connections and makes a place familiar. It takes time to create the inner connections of spaces and places. Wandering is an excellent method for sensing not only the relation of the places to one another. With time, a city or areas of a city become familiar while other areas remain a blind spot. Walking specific areas more often gives an insight into the connections, relations and built environment. These



are aspects that the narration explores. It also shows that walking the city creates connections and give an inner experience of how close or far things are apart from one another. To be aware of the existing and intended relation of connectivity in a city is important to planning urban structures.

The idea before thinking of the urban intervention was to create an urban furniture. This furniture was thought of as an element that connects to the existent structure of the concrete elements which are used as boundaries for the water channels to create place for people to come together. The idea was to use common structural elements like steel tubes for the construction and the design was intended to be flexible according to the different situations that occur along the waterside. The idea was proposed at the beginning of 2016 to the municipality of Tehran, but is still unanswered. This shows how time-consuming processes are.

The urban intervention as a minimal act that seeks to inspire, came afterwards. It asks what is relevant to the people, to create spatial awareness. To identify personal and collective needs for urban environment. The suggestions and offered ideas of interaction may create new insights and ideas, prompt people to think of more options and look at their surroundings more closely and thoroughly. To an extent, it asks us to look at what is normal as something special and unique. Through the intervention, the possibilities in Tehran can be further explored.

Using urban intervention with suggestions for space perception, evaluation and exploration in an adapted but familiar medium, the postcards that are given away on the streets and Instagram as a medium to share and interact are related to the local manners. Whether these cards are accepted not only depends on the idea itself. State supervision on the streets and the Internet is one aspect that needs to be considered. Even if they are used and explored without being shared, they influence everyday life on the streets. The practice of walking the city, becoming familiar with the surroundings, aware of emotions related to the places and spaces and by disturbing and changing the use of objects and places to form the intended use, will be visible for others and may be re-created without knowing of the initial catalyst. Through the intervention the possibilities in Tehran can

be further explored and become visible.

The urban intervention can cause effect, and effect is a lowest common denominator between the artistic approach of urban intervention and architecture. A building causes effect by its pure presences, how a person moves through the place is determined by the design of the architect. The city where buildings, architecture, public spaces, streets and other elements come together affects the everyday life of citizens. Architects are determined to create places with atmospheres. Atmospheres are related to spaces which are determined by objects, time and users. The urban intervention implements the idea to cause an effect to each person who participates and witnesses the exploration.

The urban intervention can cause effect and effect is a lowest common denominator between the artistic approach of urban intervention and architecture. A building causes effect by its pure presences, how a person moves through the place is determined through the design of the architect. The city where buildings, architecture, public spaces, streets and other elements come together effects everyday life of citizens. Architects are determined to create places with atmospheres. Atmospheres are related to spaces which are determined by objects, time and users. The urban intervention has implements the idea to cause an effect to each person who participates.

The creation of space is not only done by the architect but also by the human who is present in the urban environment and makes places into spaces and spaces into places. The human as the creator of the changes needs to be in the focus for interventions and relations, as it comes from him/her.

Closing the conclusion, strategies and tactics usually display cultural developments and are a precursor for architectural and urban developments that can follow.





Impressions



۱۱۸  
۴۵۷۷۷

۱۱۷  
۱۷۷۷۷

کافه  
۱۹



Pomegranate Juice

# آب انار ترش و شیرین

زندگی خوب و شیرین  
با آب انار ترش و شیرین

- |        |                            |
|--------|----------------------------|
| 1.2000 | آب انار ترش خام            |
| 1.2000 | آب انار شیرین خام          |
| 1.2000 | آب انار سیاه               |
| 1.2000 | آب انار پسته انار          |
| 1.2000 | پنجگون انار ترش و شیرین    |
| 1.2000 | پستنی دل‌زایی ترش و شیرین  |
| 1.2000 | ژله پستنی انار ترش و شیرین |
| 1.2000 | قالوده انار ترش و شیرین    |
| 1.2000 | انار گلانه ترش و شیرین     |
| 1.2000 | آیس بک انار                |
| 1.2000 | آب انار                    |
| 1.2000 | زرشک انار                  |
| 1.2000 | پسته انار                  |
| 1.2000 | آب زرشک کوهی               |
| 1.2000 | آب زرشک معمولی             |
| 1.2000 | آب انار                    |

نوشته انار حاصلی ترش و شیرین است که با افزودن آب انار شیرین به آن می‌تواند به یک نوشیدنی بسیار لذیذ و خوشمزه تبدیل شود. آب انار ترش و شیرین را می‌توان به عنوان یک نوشیدنی بسیار مفید و سالم در کنار سایر نوشیدنی‌ها استفاده کرد.

Sweet Life With Sweet Bazaar Pomegranate Juice







SAMSUNG

لعنت. اون كفشاي گروني خريده  
اون الان منتظر اين عروسيه







شماره فاکتور: ۲۸۲  
 تعداد وزن فی قیمت  
 تاریخ: ۹۴/۰۷/۲۲  
 ساعت: ۱۲:۴۰  
 ترابزه: ۱  
 شماره: ۳۷۰

بانک سامان  
 ۰۱۳۴  
 ۰۱۳۴  
 ۰۱۳۴  
 ۰۱۳۴

Lavender  
 شماره: ۳۷۰  
 مقدار: ۱  
 قیمت کل: ۱۱۰۰۰۰  
 تاریخ: ۱۱/۰۶/۱۸  
 شماره: ۳۷۰  
 مقدار: ۱  
 قیمت کل: ۱۱۰۰۰۰  
 تاریخ: ۱۱/۰۶/۱۸

Lavender  
 شماره: ۳۷۰  
 مقدار: ۱  
 قیمت کل: ۱۱۰۰۰۰  
 تاریخ: ۱۱/۰۶/۱۸

کار پلیس تهران

شماره کارت: ۸۱۶۳۴	تاریخ: ۱۳۹۴/۰۱/۲۳	ساعت: ۱۶:۳۴
تاریخ: ۱۳۹۴/۰۱/۲۳	ساعت: ۱۶:۳۴	ساعت: ۱۶:۳۴
ساعت: ۱۶:۳۴	ساعت: ۱۶:۳۴	ساعت: ۱۶:۳۴
ساعت: ۱۶:۳۴	ساعت: ۱۶:۳۴	ساعت: ۱۶:۳۴

قابل پرداخت: ۱۰۰,۰۰۰ ریال  
 موجودی جدید: ۴۴۶,۷۲۰ ریال  
 موجودی: TOSAN

در حال پذیرش:  
 خواهشمندیم برای تقاضای منظر بهمانند:  
 ۰۱۳۲  
 ۰۱۳۲  
 ۰۱۳۲  
 ۰۱۳۲

Now serving:  
 Please be patient  
 you will be served shortly

Subway  
 → Emqg khm'ic  
 station  
 Ferdos' eq'  
 Fornt Bank melli  
 central brand  
 cony elabwy

بازار میوه و تره بار ولنجک  
 شماره فاکتور: ۲۸۵  
 تعداد وزن فی قیمت  
 تاریخ: ۹۴/۰۷/۲۲  
 ساعت: ۱۲:۵۷  
 ترابزه: ۱  
 شماره: ۳۷۰  
 مبلغ: ۴۱۰,۰۰۰  
 جمع کل: ۳۳۸۰

قارچ سوخاری  
 مرغ یک تکه نرمال  
 H I G S A

رسید مشتری  
 شماره حساب: ۵۹۵۸۱۴۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰  
 شماره کارت: ۵۹۹۸۶۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰۰  
 شماره پیگیری: ۴۳۲۱۴  
 تاریخ: ۹۴/۰۷/۲۲  
 مبلغ: ۱۰۸۹۴۶۰۹۱۴۷  
 شماره: ۳۷۰

فود کورت پل طبیع  
 تلفن: ۶۶۵۷۵۷۳۰  
 شماره: ۳۷۰  
 مبلغ: ۴۰,۰۰۰  
 جمع کل: ۴۰,۰۰۰









شیراز  
شیراز

آرامش  
ARAMESH IS

















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