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Non-visibility and the politics of everyday presence: A spatial analysis of contemporary urban Iran

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Publication date

2016

Document Version

Final published version

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Dibazar, P. (2016). *Non-visibility and the politics of everyday presence: A spatial analysis of contemporary urban Iran*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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3. ROOFTOPS

The Invisibility and Ambiguity of Leftover Space

This chapter is about the implications of non-visibility that urban rooftops carry in everyday life in Iran¹. Considering its elevated location, the rooftop's relation to visibility is twofold: on the one hand the rooftop remains ordinarily invisible to the unequipped eye on the street; on the other hand, it equips the eye with a privileged position to look down, observe the street, and make visible its everyday flow. This double relation is predicated on the rooftop's spatial placement as vertically distant from the ground level where everyday practices unfold on the street and shape its rhythm. As a consequence of such a geographical and visual mismatch, the rooftop is typically positioned outside of the realm of everyday life, implying occasions of escape from it, rather than engagement with it.

This chapter, however, lays claim to an understanding of the rooftop that engages with the practices of everyday life on the same grounds, if not on the exact same level, as the street. It aims at surpassing the discursive distinction between the rich cosmos of everyday life and the blank surface of the rooftop. To do so, this chapter explores the ways in which the rooftop's isolation from the everyday city – as being out of reach and out of sight – is encroached upon through sight, sound, and everyday practices. The chapter therefore adopts the premises of the habitual, familiar, unnoticed, and ordinary as the theoretical foundation for endorsing the rooftop critically. It builds upon the diverse, unmarked, and uncategorized practices, expressions, and performativities that routinely encompass the everyday. To analyse these premises, this chapter focuses on the rooftops in Iran.

In the following, first, I will further explore the implications of incompatibility with, even complete opposition to, the everyday street that rooftops possess in critical urban studies. Subsequently, I will recount a similarly disengaging account of the rooftop as presented in a great number of published memoirs of the Iranian émigré, living in Western countries, which renders a stereotypically nostalgic imagery of the Iranian rooftop as a safe haven, detached and secured from the brutalities and

¹ Parts of this chapter are published in: Dibazar, P., 2016. Leftover Space, Invisibility, and Everyday Life: Rooftops in Iran. In: C. Lindner & M. Meissner, eds. *Global Garbage: Urban Imaginaries of Waste, Excess, and Abandonment*. London & New York: Routledge.

discomforts of everyday life. Despite the spatial and temporal escapism attributed to the rooftop in such accounts, I will explain that its quaint spatiality gets intruded, often violently, by the myriad stimuli of the everyday city. This sensory connectedness between the rooftop and the city, often with disquieting effects, I employ as a starting point for situating the rooftop within – rather than outside of – the everyday city.

The resulting everyday rooftop, I argue, is premised upon multiple ambiguities and uncertainties regarding its spatial configuration. In the subsequent section of this chapter, I outline the concept of leftover space to critically analyse such an indeterminate condition of being left out of the systems of spatial configuration and signification, which further instigates exclusion from the orders of the visible and sensible. Next, I briefly explain the development of the common residential rooftops in contemporary Iran as leftover space. My observation is that, as a consequence of the processes of neoliberal urban transformation in recent decades, common residential rooftops in Iran are cast off as ‘wasted spaces’ in terms of planning and the values associated with it. I will explain how the visual and spatial configurations of the rooftops in Iran as leftover space are further conflated by the proliferation of satellite dishes on them.

Finally, I provide an in-depth analysis of the everyday practices of shouting from rooftops as a form of civil protest. I explain how in such protests the rooftop serves as an extension of the street, from where defiant voices could be heard but not seen. As I demonstrate, the Iranian residential rooftops’ contours are rendered ambiguous in everyday practice, specifically in terms of visibility and systems of control. I contend that such practices disrupt the orders of the visible by having recourse to tactics of anonymity and inconspicuousness, in ways that enhance – rather than repudiate – the conditions of indeterminacy, insignificance, and non-visibility that the rooftop fosters, precisely on the account of its leftover spatiality.

Rooftops and the Everyday City

In his widely cited study on the practices of everyday life, Michel de Certeau (1988) begins the chapter on “walking in the city” by evoking a spectator standing on top of the Twin Towers in New York. In his account, this high altitude responds to the spectator’s “desire to see the city”, fills him with the voyeuristic joy of “seeing the whole” and the “ecstasy of reading” the cosmos of the city from afar (1988, pp. 91-

92). However, this entry point is to be negated promptly, as de Certeau is unequivocal in distinguishing that condition of total visibility from the fractured experiences of the “ordinary practitioners of the city”, indicating that “to be lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be lifted out of the city’s grasp” (1988, pp. 92-93). For de Certeau, the elevated surface of the rooftop epitomizes a condition of detachment from lived experience, a disembodied state of intangibility provided by being “no longer clasped by the streets” (1988, p. 92). What follows is that in order to grasp the city, and to be grasped by it, one needs to descend, to go “down below”, “below the thresholds at which visibility begins” (1988, p. 93). The story of the quotidian, de Certeau steadfastly maintains, “begins on ground level, with footsteps” (1988, p. 97).

Even though the shortcomings of restricting the quotidian to one mode of mobility in the city – walking with ‘footsteps’ – has more recently been examined and criticized, particularly, within the discourse of mobilities (Adey, 2010; Cresswell, 2006; Thrift, 2004; Urry, 2007) – to which I have also responded in the previous chapter by expanding de Certeau’s notion to encompass the practice of driving – de Certeau’s emphasis on the ‘ground level’ as the somewhat commonsensical loci of the ordinary practices of everyday life is a viewpoint that is widely shared amongst urban commentators, and rarely disputed in critical analyses of the everyday city. By being relegated to a location outside and beyond the openly accessible street, the surface of the rooftop in such accounts is deprived of spatial merits concerning form, usage, and meaning, functioning merely as an elevated standpoint for spectators who, in order to observe the city down below, stand on its fringes and turn their backs to it. Accordingly, a contrast is maintained between the realness and corporeality of life on the streets and the abstractness of the visual knowledge that is obtained of the city from rooftops. Such a polar opposition is made pivotal in a great number of studies of the everyday city:

The idea that geographic order is imposed ‘from above’ through the panoptic gaze and segregationist strategies pursued by the police, magistrates, engineers and planners accordingly needs to be tempered with the observation that at ‘street level’ we find that individuals and groups create their own urban geographies, using cities in ways very different than bureaucrats and administrators intend(ed). (Hubbard, 2006, p. 106)

As a matter of fact, such an emphasis on the street is not exclusive to viewpoints focused on the everyday. The street is indeed a key factor in a considerable portion of critical urban studies, simultaneously foregrounded in analyses that focus on the top-down processes of design, management, and policy making, and the studies that seek to render bottom-up possibilities for participatory practices. The street is also a focal point of enquiry in studies addressing processes of – and struggles against – commodification, neo-liberalization, globalization, and militarization of cities. The street is pivotal to the broader conceptualizations of the public space, whether defined as a communal space of openness and inclusiveness (Jacobs, 1961; Sennett, 2006); or as a stage for social and political struggles, exemplified in recent years in such events as the Gezi movement, the Umbrella movement and Occupy movements (Harvey, 2012; Kallianos, 2013). Streets encompass a diverse and conflicting range of activities and visions of the city; streets are “the terrain of social encounters and political protest, sites of domination and resistance, places of pleasure and anxiety” (Fyfe, 1998, p. 1).

In this chapter, I do not intend to disparage the spatial, temporal, and phenomenological constituents of the street in the formation of everyday life – indeed, a critical account of the city oblivious to the street is somewhat unimaginable. However, the point I want to make is that, to a great extent, a disguised logic underlies such studies that approach the street as the common, quintessential, and exclusive site for authentic publicness, overlooking other possible spatialities, temporalities, and materialities of the quotidian that transcend the physical boundaries of the street, and challenge its purported accessibility and visibility. Furthermore, what compels the exclusion of the rooftop from the ordinary city is the idea of extreme verticality and high-rise structures that the rooftop most often conjures up in critical studies.

Rooftops bring into mind the distanced top level of skyscrapers of such modern and postmodern cities as New York and Hong Kong, whose high density and maze-like urban structures further necessitate psychological detachment from the city in everyday life – a heightened sense of “blasé attitude” (Simmel, 2010). However, the skyscraper is neither the most pervading architectural form around the globe, nor the typology that treasures the rooftop in terms of space, form, appearance, function, performance, or materiality. As Alejandro Zaera Polo (2008) suggests, while the flat-

horizontal buildings of such public facilities as airports, factories, and shopping malls make considerable use of the rooftop in providing access and accommodating functions, the skyscraper remains largely oblivious to its spatially distanced rooftop. Typically accommodating the corporate sector, the skyscraper is an architectural form that best serves the interests of the real estate market by increasing the surface of profitable space, stacking levels on levels of square meters. In effect, tall buildings have become “paradigmatic of the representation of power in the city, be it that of a corporation, a city or the might of a political regime” (Zaera Polo, 2008, p. 96). It is therefore not totally coincidental that the managerial look of the spectator from the rooftop – or a top floor – of a skyscraper corresponds with such buildings’ ideological lineage. The point that I want to make is that a study of rooftops should question the discursive coupling of the rooftop with high verticality, which inevitably associates with it specific types of buildings, geographies, and ideologies.

In their study of Hong Kong’s postmodern cinema, Chow and de Kloet indicate that rooftops are frequently presented in films as “a potential way out of the detachment, nihilism and destruction of the postmetropolitan city” (2013, p. 143). Rooftops in such films, they write, breed moments of “radical reconnection” that are steadily waning – if not completely missing – in the global city, moments in which “the protagonists of the films recuperate the possibility to know, feel and remember who they are” in the face of the “claustrophobic” city around them (Chow & de Kloet, 2013, p. 143). They write:

we posit to understand the deployment of rooftops in Hong Kong cinema as a way out, literally and figuratively. The rooftop is thus read as one urban liminal space where one can force the city to suspend, to become on hold: it is the space, we argue, where the acrophilic *flâneurs* of the twenty-first century gather, a space beyond surveillance and outside of the logics of global capitalism, where one negotiates and perhaps overcomes a blasé postmetropolitan individuality with moments of radical reconnection. (Chow & de Kloet, 2013, p. 140; emphasis in original)

Chow & de Kloet's account of the rooftop purports a spatiality that is inhabited and lived, from where the characters do not only observe the city down below, but make connection to the city and to one another. However, their account sustains a different kind of separation of the rooftop from the everyday city by attributing to the rooftop conditions that are at times the direct opposite of the ones attainable on the street. The rooftop radically reconnects because it postulates a refuge from the meaninglessness of the daily life on the streets of the postmetropolis and its everydayness. In this way, the rooftop suggests an "escape" from everyday life and creates an "alternative reality" to it (Cohen & Taylor, 1992, p. 6). The rooftop in this account offers relief from the everyday city. Such an escapist vision of the rooftop is a recurrent motif in Iranian popular culture, to which I briefly turn in the following section.

Rooftops of Iran: Memoirs and Popular Culture

Rooftops are frequently alluded to in the stories, autobiographies, and memoirs of Iranian émigrés in western countries. Published in English and other European languages, and intended largely for an international readership, a great number of these works claim to provide a first-hand account of life in Iran by a generation that has been forced to leave the country as a consequence of socio-political turmoil following the revolution of 1979. Although not always playing a central role in the story, the rooftop's homogenous recurrence in a vast array of such narratives, often with hints of romanticism and orientalism, is compelling.

A nostalgic vision of the Iranian rooftop is presented in *The Last Living Slut: Born in Iran, Bred Backstage* (2010), the autobiographical story of the British/Iranian Roxana Shirazi. The first part of the book, *Home*, recounts Roxana's childhood memories of Iran before she was relocated in the UK at the age of 10 in the early 1980s. A point of reference in this section is the house in which her childhood was spent, particularly its rooftop: "The house had a vast roof. On blazing hot summer nights, like everyone else in the neighborhood, my grandmother, my mother, and I would put our bedding outside and sleep under the stars that crammed the raw Persian sky" (Shirazi, 2010, p. 18). The allusion made to peaceful sleeps under the starry sky conjures up the cliché imagery of mystic oriental nights, further marked by the reference made to the word 'Persian' rather than 'Iranian' or 'Tehranian'. In real life, however, this portrayal is far from precise, considering Tehran's high levels of air

pollution, which makes sleeping on the roof less enjoyable and the stars less vivid in the grey sky.

The following sections of the book recount Roxana's coming of age and her explorations into sexuality in her new abode, Manchester. In the UK, she indulges herself in a rock 'n' roll lifestyle, enjoys the freedoms it offers and comes to terms with its frustrations. No further reference is made to that nostalgic vision of the rooftop until the last section in the book, where Roxana decides, quite abruptly, to return to Iran. In the book's short epilogue, set on a plane to Tehran, Roxana shares her final thoughts on the past and feelings towards the prospects of a new life in Iran. At this final stage, she expresses her disillusionment with the life she has built for herself in the UK, feeling "uprooted from the loving nestle" of her culture and "thrust into a deserted zone" (Shirazi, 2010, p. 312). Unrealistically enthusiastic about her uncertain future in Iran, she writes:

I am going where the sun is shining...I will walk the sleeping sunshine alleys of my childhood in plastic slippers. I will walk past the fruit trees and the gardens. I will walk into my grandmother's derelict house and try to be me. I will sleep on the rooftop of my cousin's home under the sharp blaze of the stars so I can shed this skin and hatch the real yolk of me. I will go to the ancient cities of Esfahan and Shiraz to see the splendor of my country's epic history. I can't wait to go to family parties, eat a banquet of Persian foods, and dance like the Iranian girl that I am. (Shirazi, 2010, p. 312)

Once again the romantic image of sleeping on the rooftop facing the stars is conjured up to stand in for all that supposed authenticity and sense of rootedness that has been denied to Roxana as an immigrant to Britain. Whereas Roxana's first account of the rooftop takes the form of a nostalgic recollection of childhood days in Iran, and therefore is held in the past, this second – and last – evocation of the rooftop is projected onto the future. Either way, the romantic, almost idyllic, rooftop is distanced from the present. Roxana's vision of the rooftop therefore nourishes an imaginary retreat from the undesired present, an escape from the everyday into an unreal future built upon distant memories. More than the exact nature of the envisioned rooftop, such an escapism has a bearing on the insufferable present. Everyday life is indeed

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most often so terrifyingly dull, dreary, meaningless, burdensome, and unfulfilling, that it “creates an overwhelming need not to attend to the here and now but to escape from it, at least temporarily” (Foley, 2012, p. 5). To escape from the everyday, writes Foley (2012), people have recourse to such seemingly free areas as entertainment, travel, partying, alcohol, drugs, or sex – where the everyday could be held back.

The image of the Iranian rooftop serves as such a free area of escape from the everyday for Roxana. Although memories are not per se antithetical to everyday life – indeed, everyday lived experience is suffused with dreams and memories that are lived with routinely and evoked momentarily – Shirazi remains oblivious to the everyday associations of the rooftop by denying her memory to act upon the present. Moreover, Shirazi keeps her vision of the rooftop distanced from the present by insistently making connections to the ‘epic history’ of the ‘ancient’ Persia and glorifying its cultural heritage. Although the vision of the rooftop is most likely to change once Roxana steps on the ground and spends some time in Tehran, the book ends in the plane “somewhere over Iran”, “past ancient Persian mountains, chalky and restless secret nomads” (Shirazi, 2010, p. 313), keeping the everyday Iran inaccessible to Roxana and readers of the book.

Similar nostalgic views of the rooftop are traceable in a novel that perhaps makes the most direct and expansive reference to rooftops in Iran: *The Rooftops of Tehran* (2009), written by American/Iranian Mahbod Seraji. A common rooftop in Tehran plays a central role in the development of the characters and events of the book. A work of fiction influenced by personal memories, *The Rooftops of Tehran* portrays the dreams, friendships, loves, and lives of a generation of young adults in the politically charged times prior to the revolution of 1979. Even though, in the book, Seraji reproduces a nostalgic vision of the rooftop that is quite similar to Roxana’s, his treatment of the rooftop as key to the development of the narrative is of significance in that it does not hold back the everyday, but relates to it.

The blurb on the back of the book states: “In a middle-class neighborhood in Iran’s sprawling capital city, seventeen-year-old Pasha Shahed spends the summer of 1973 on his rooftop with his best friend, Ahmed, joking around and talking about the future”. Pivotal to the development of the story, Pasha’s rooftop in *The Rooftops of Tehran* is a place to live and inhabit. The rooftop is Pasha’s most cherished space, where he shares secrets and the most thoughts with his best friend, Ahmed; where he meets Zari and shows affection towards her; where he holds the otherwise unlikely

direct talk with his father. Pasha's rooftop is an intimate and emotional space, where secrets are unveiled, relations are upheld, tears are shed, and truths are reached.

Pasha's rooftop is also a secluded and unreachable place, kept safely hidden from the eyes on the street, from where Pasha observes the alley and peers at the comings and goings in the neighbourhood. The narrator, Pasha, raises this point in the opening pages of the story: "Our summer nights on the roof are spent basking in the wide-open safety of our bird's-eye-view" (Seraji, 2009, p. 10). Reminiscent of de Certeau's spectator, Pasha observes and reads the neighbourhood from the rooftop and gains knowledge of the events that unfold in the alleys. This is best exemplified in a crucial scene in which Doctor, the secretive political activist to whom Pasha looks up as his hero, is chased in the middle of the night by three agents of SAVAK (the then Iranian intelligence service). The scene is described from the point of view of Pasha on the rooftop, from where he observes the chase and sees Doctor climb over the wall of the neighbouring house and hide in its front-yard – a move that remains hidden from the eyes of the agents. In addition, Pasha's spectatorship from the rooftop satisfies a strong masculine voyeuristic desire. Pasha secretly falls in love with Zari precisely as a result of his frequent peeking into the privacy of the neighbouring front-yard where Zari lives.

However, in contrast to de Certeau's spectator, Pasha's look from the rooftop is often completed by a look back from the street. Pasha develops feelings towards Zari not merely by casting an objectifying masculine gaze upon her from top of the roof, but by recognizing and appreciating her reciprocal looks: "She knows that I'm watching her because she looks up often" (Seraji, 2009, p. 72). It is the reciprocity of looks that propels the story to a dramatic point in the scene where Pasha watches Doctor being chased by the secret service agents in the alley. While appreciating the possibilities for observing such an exciting chasing scene that the rooftop grants him, he realizes, to his astonishment, that he is the only person in the vicinity that is enthusiastically following the scene from a rooftop. "I can see that more and more neighbors are watching from their darkened rooms. No one wants to be seen, but everyone wants to know how this will end" (Seraji, 2009, p. 82). Absorbed in the scene, Pasha probably takes this as a sign for the cowardice of his neighbours who are scared of being seen. But the events that follow swiftly lead to a tragic moment in

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which one of the agents looks up at Pasha and tracks the direction of his look. Pasha's observation from the rooftop therefore involuntarily gives away Doctor's hideaway:

I can't take my eyes off the scene that has frozen in time in Zari's yard. A sound suddenly diverts my attention to the end of the ally. The man with the radio is looking at me. I quickly sit down behind the short wall, but it's too late. He must have been watching me for a while, and from the direction of my gaze he has pinpointed the house in which Doctor has taken sanctuary. (Seraji, 2009, pp. 82-83)

In this scene, the dramatic effect of the visual interrelation between the city, on the ground level, and the rooftop is horrifying, as the interplay of looks bears resemblance to the systems of surveillance. In this approximation, the spectator on the rooftop is not reduced to disembodied observing eyes, but is corporeally present and subject to undisclosed observations and surveillance from the street. In this scene, the typically sequestered rooftop of the story is violently intruded by the city "down below" (Certeau, 1988, p. 93), with drastic consequences indeed (Doctor is caught, imprisoned, and finally executed). During this event, not only the privacy of Pasha's retreat is encroached upon, but also his autonomy and power in gazing around is undermined. By resorting to his rooftop, Pasha is therefore not necessarily safe from the unsafeties that pervade everyday life. Pasha's rooftop is not completely severed from the everyday street, but the relation it maintains with the street is a hostile and aggressive one.

By contrast with the hostile and aggressive relation that Pasha's rooftop maintains with the everyday street, a fruitful and welcoming connection with the city is recounted in Hamid Dabashi's childhood memory of open-air cinemas in Ahvaz. In the introduction to his book on Iranian cinema, the American/Iranian scholar Dabashi writes:

In addition to the main theaters, all movie houses had an open-air section for summer. In Ahvaz the summer days were long and monotonous, but because of the breeze from the Karun river, the evenings were extraordinarily cool and pleasant. Very few pleasures in the world could compare with watching an Indian musical on a cool summer evening in an open-air theater. People living

in the adjacent apartments, if they were lucky, could actually see the screen and hear the soundtrack in the privacy of their own homes. Television had not yet come to the Ahvaz of my childhood, and these big screen miracles could quadruple the price of a house. Even those who were too far away to see the screen but close enough to hear the soundtrack considered themselves fortunate. The breeze would carry the sound of an Indian musical into the furthest reaches of town. All you had to do was see a film once and then listen to its soundtrack and songs from the top of your roof for night after night. Women in some neighborhoods would have impromptu parties on their roofs, as they were laying out the bedding for their family (we slept on the rooftops during the summer), listening to the soundtrack of *Sangam*, particularly the songs sung by Nargess and Raj Kapour. (Dabashi, 2001, p. 2)

Even though this account also romanticises the rooftop to a certain extent, it does so by precisely suggesting its connection to, rather than detachment from, the city. Dabashi's rooftop does not provide an escape from the everyday, but creates a different way of relating to it. Its special quality is the possibility it grants for sensing the city, for hearing its sounds and connecting to it. The rooftop functions as an extension to the open-air cinema, providing aural access to it, and hosts communities and collectives of cinema-goers.

In popular culture, many references are made to groups of people shouting revolutionary slogans from rooftops during the 1979 revolution, which follow along parallel lines of aural connectivity with the city and the creation of collective sentiments. In other words, the dreamlike image of the rooftop as a personal retreat away from the everyday city (with its romantic undertones) is paralleled in popular accounts with a real (but no less romanticized) image of collective rooftops as spaces that connect with the city through revolutionary sounds and practices. Later in this chapter I will examine more recent incidents of shouting from rooftops during the political unrest following the 2009 presidential elections in Iran. In order to be able to better situate these rooftop protests in space, I will first briefly examine the physical form of contemporary rooftops in Iran and their structural transformation in the past decades. To do so, and to be able to better situate my argument regarding the non-visible modes of presence that the rooftop adheres to, I will study the rooftops as

leftover spaces. In the following section, I will introduce leftover space as a conceptual apparatus that helps in understanding the ambiguous position that Iranian rooftops hold in joining the everyday and yet remaining non-visible to it.

On Leftover Space

Leftover space is a contested term in urban studies, often used interchangeably with a range of definitions that denote the spatial properties of being neglected, lost, derelict, vacant, blank, slack, marginal, and void (Carmona, 2010; Doron, 2007). Broadly speaking, it alludes to seemingly empty, uninhabited, or uninhabitable spaces whose form, function, boundaries, and aesthetics do not comfortably fit into the physical arrangements or conceptual frameworks of urban planning. Urban literature mostly considers the indeterminacy of such spatial conditions as an undesirable side effect of modern urban planning, caused by either negligence in the initial processes of design (space left over after planning, such as the margins of cities), failure in maintenance, programming, and after-care (space left over after use, such as old industrial sites), or inability in achieving sustainability (space left over after the living, such as wastelands). Such grey zones are thought to pose a threat not only to the appearance of a desirable city, but also to the function of a cohesive society. Imprecise, ill-defined, and under-utilized, leftover spaces are commonly considered breeding places for illegal activities and dangerous behaviours.

To solve the problems posed by leftover spaces, the overall strategy developed in urban literature is the implementation of the concept of ‘appropriation’: conceiving creative ways to reverse the threat by reclaiming the void as a resource for carving out new concepts of public space. In this process, two antithetical processes are envisaged. Urban design and planning professions, on the one hand, aim at recuperating such forgotten spaces into the desired domains of economy and spatial order, in effect extending their managerial and ideological reach to those ill-managed sites. Processes of redevelopment and regeneration in contemporary cities are exemplary of this total planning attitude (Carmona, 2010; Tranick, 1986). On the other hand, the claim is frequently made that such leftover spaces open up avenues for diverse and spontaneous ways for people to make use of space in everyday life, therefore producing multiple spatialities, not necessarily in accordance with the proper orders of the space as defined by law. Advocating creative uses of space that resist given definitions of the public realm and that defy real and metaphorical

boundaries of space, this second approach – illustrative of which are the postulations of “everyday urbanism” (Chase, et al., 1999) and “everyday city” (Hubbard, 2006) – sees in leftover spaces potential for hidden and unacknowledged counter-publics.

In other words, constant contestation over the use, and therefore definition, of space runs between the systematic processes that seek to maintain the status quo by recuperating leftover spaces – leading to more homogeneous urban environments – and the vernacular everyday practices that look for alternatives to the hegemonic order in such indeterminate settings. It is in part following this line of thought that I argue for the uncertain premises of rooftops in Iran as grounds for contestation between competing regimes of control within everyday practices. However, central to the spatial condition analysed in this paper is the perpetuation of conditions of indeterminacy in ways that defy easy appropriation and categorization into one or the other regime. As I will explain in the following, it is in exploring such a sustained condition of indeterminacy that I believe the term ‘leftover’ is helpful, on a conceptual level, in complicating any attempt to categorize such spaces by conventional definitions of meaning, aesthetics, or functionality.

Inherent in the notion of the leftover is, first of all, the temporality of before and after use, which purports a certain sense of waste and garbage. John Scanlan writes: “in an unproblematic sense garbage is leftover matter. It is what remains when the good, fruitful, valuable, nourishing and useful has been taken away” (2005, p. 13). Even if an object remains visibly and materially unchanged before and after use, Myra Hird (2012) believes that its ontology changes in the course of this transition from a desirable matter to garbage. Therefore, she explains what defines things as garbage is their “usability or worthlessness to human purposes”, suggesting that “no entity is in its essence waste, and all entities are potentially waste” (Hird, 2012, p. 455). Following a similar line of thought, Scanlan refers to garbage as inexact and equivocal, that which defies neat definitions, and could be conceptualized as “the remainder of such neatness” (2005, pp. 16-22). In other words, he writes, “the stuff of garbage” can best be defined in a metaphoric sense as “the remainder of the symbolic order proper” (2005, pp. 16-22). Consequently, “the meaning of ‘waste’ carries force because of the way in which it symbolizes an idea of improper use, and therefore operates within a more or less moral economy of the right, the good, the proper, their opposites and all values in between” (Scanlan, 2005, pp. 16-22).

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Leftover spaces should be read in ways that allow for the critical questioning of such moral economies. Over and above regarding the leftover space as a resource for potential uses, it is also possible to regard its uselessness – its defiance of the culturally constructed significations of value – as potential. In order to theorize a sustained critique of space as leftover, it is crucial to pay attention to the equivocality of meanings and values associated not only with the physical shape and materiality of space, but also with the range of activities, temporalities, and aesthetics that get attached to the processes of appropriation of it. In this chapter, I analyse such intertwined spatial, social, political, and aesthetic processes that account for the residual and indefinite status of rooftops in Iran. By regarding Iranian rooftops as leftover spaces, I wish to highlight the power contained in them to question, if not totally transform, the dominant hegemony in everyday practice.

A second point about the ‘leftover’ is that, by conjuring up waste and that which does not conform, it addresses issues of proximity and exposure. That which remains after the useful and valuable is exhausted is usually seen as posing a threat to the orders of the spatial and the visible, precisely because of its assertive presence, detectability, visibility, and contiguity in everyday life. To administer both its inappropriateness and disclosure, the leftover therefore needs to be disposed of, disconnected from sense experience, placed elsewhere and removed from everyday contact. Hird suggests that our societies are overwhelmed by “the desire to disgorge ourselves of waste and remove it from sight” (2012, p. 455). However, taking into account the indeterminacy of the definition of waste on the one hand, and the daily procedures of waste production and management on the other, waste is present and never totally removed from everyday contact. The physical and symbolic endurance of the residue is even more accentuated in the case of spatial leftovers, as a result of their historically embedded and contested geographies. Rather than losing touch with everyday sense experience, spatial leftovers obstinately establish contact with everyday life by providing ideal settings for a multiplicity of quotidian practices of deviation, transgression, and appropriation. The intertwinement of visibility, connectivity, and indeterminacy then poses the possibility of critique, since “visible remainders”, as Scanlan writes, “stand as the evidence that something else is going on besides the conventional use materials and products are put to” (2005, p. 109).

It is due to such ambiguous positions regarding visibility and everyday contact that I find the concept of leftover space pertinent to analysing everyday practices of

the rooftop in Iran. Being located above street level and disconnected from it, I argue that the rooftop's contours of visibility are in effect ambiguous and complicated in everyday practice. In particular, I will show that the subversive capacity of the rooftop in instigating counter-publics and giving voice to political dissent is predicated upon a twofold relation between visibility and invisibility, proximity and distance, and presence and absence.

Finally, the concept of the residual is instrumental to an understanding of the practices of everyday life that I pursue in this paper. To examine everyday life, as Michael Sheringham (2006) explains in his study of a range of theories and practices, is to be sensitive to the activities, aesthetics, and feelings that lag behind the dominant structures of thought and regimes of representation, and that are therefore left out of consideration in the processes of knowledge production. Most notably, Henri Lefebvre writes: "everyday life, in a sense residual, defined by 'what is left over' after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by analysis, must be defined as a totality" (1991, p. 97). Similarly, Maurice Blanchot believes

the everyday is platitude (what lags and falls back, the residual life with which our trash cans and cemeteries are filled: scrap and refuse); but this banality is also what is most important, if it brings us back to existence in its very spontaneity and as it is lived – in the moment when, lived, it escapes every speculative formulation, perhaps all coherence, all regularity. (Blanchot, 1987, p. 13)

It is the liveliness of this inexorable remainder that serves as a rich and infinite source of creativity, criticality, and resistance to the ordered structures of space that seek to monopolize every aspect of modern human life. Sheringham, describing Lefebvre's theory, writes: "the irreducible residue comprises basic human rhythms and biological needs that are not simply remainders but factors which, in surviving (and resisting), struggle against the forces that oppose appropriation" (2006, p. 149).

What follows from this attentiveness to the multiple implications of the residual is, as I will show in the following, an intertwined social, political, and aesthetic condition of indeterminacy, in terms of the orders of the spatial, apparatuses

of control, and the multifaceted ramifications of visibility in everyday life. By focusing on the positioning of satellite dishes on the rooftops and the practices of shouting from them as protest, I will argue that, despite being neglected in the processes of design and positioned out of reach and out of sight of the street, urban rooftops in Iran do not repudiate prospects of engagement with the everyday city. On the contrary, their exteriority to the orders of the spatial and the visible precisely raises possibilities for joining the everyday in ways that are disruptive of the orders of the sensible. They establish connections with residual practices of dissent and discarded voices of protest in unconventionally indeterminate, but affective, ways. The possibilities for critique that this paradox of spatial detachment and affective attachment provides are, I argue, premised upon the leftover status of such spaces. Iranian rooftops play out the power contained in the concept of the leftover space – as residual, wasted, and indeterminate – to sustainably destabilize positions taken for granted within the spatial, temporal, aesthetic, and political patterns.

Urban Rooftops in Iran: The Ambivalence of Leftover Space

The history of contemporary urban development in Iran shows precisely how the residential rooftops have been systematically cast off as leftover in design and planning. Since the late 1980s, Iranian cities have been radically remodelled under the influence of the forces of speculative markets, that see in the renewal of urban centres the possibility for profit making, by vertically adding to the profitable square meters of cherished real estate (Bayat, 2010; Madanipour, 1998). Rather than being controlled, this process has been aided by municipalities that, disregarding of their own zoning regulations, have devised policies for selling ‘building rights’ as a means for maximization of their revenues. Such policies began when the mayor of Tehran, Gholamhossein Karbaschi, introduced a new mandate for financial self-reliance against a backdrop of dependence on central government’s financial support (2010, p. 112). To eliminate all state subsidies, municipalities then had to find new and safe revenues. Kaveh Ehsani writes:

Three quarters of the new revenues came from the sale of residential permits that were in explicit violation of zoning laws. These violations either allowed commercial use of public land or were generated by the ‘sale of density,’ which exempted developers from zoning laws by allowing them to subdivide

plots and build high-rises well above the permitted norm. The latter, highly controversial move was justified on the grounds that it would boost the housing supply through increased ‘vertical density.’ (Ehsani, 2009)

In the dense vertical cities that have emerged as a consequence of the demands of the market, space is a scarcity that, in tune with the drive for maximization of profit, calls for prudence in the spatial configuration of new apartment buildings. Accordingly, spaces that do not fully contribute to square meters of sellable space – that are not readily categorized as indoors or functional – are for the most part considered as ‘wasted’, a squandering of the developer’s investment and a dissipation of space. In this process, while such in-between spaces of the old single house units as courtyards, balconies, basements, and attics are either completely removed or reduced to the minimum in exchange for sellable square meters of indoor space, the rooftop is an unavoidable element that is held onto as necessary, but treated as worthless in the processes of design and construction. Market yearnings for higher profit and architectural sensibilities for scrupulous design therefore combine to set forth new definitions of ‘unnecessary’ spaces.

As a result of such neoliberal urban development schemes, common rooftops in Iranian cities are designed with little to no thought for their appearance and maintained absentmindedly over time. The rooftop in this system is reduced to a basic structural element, responding to such necessities as weight bearing and insulation. Resonating with this negligence is the invisibility of common rooftops for the unequipped eye on the street, which has led to the ignoring of rooftops in urban beautification policies, regarded as being inconsequential to the cityscape. In short, left over as insignificant, urban rooftops have been systematically forgotten and severed from everyday contact. As a consequence of this negligence, the typical Iranian urban rooftop suffers from haphazard design and a lack of maintenance. In this process, rooftops have become the common location for the installation of aesthetically undesired, yet functionally necessary, apparatuses that sustain the performance of a building; among them are several systems of ventilation, such as coolers, and technologies of communication, such as TV antennas. The rooftop is therefore significant in the preliminary design phase and during its functioning only to

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the extent that it inconspicuously accommodates such leftover materialities related to the everyday performance of the building.

However, with the proliferation of the previously unthought-of satellite dishes on the rooftops, from the early 1990s onwards, rooftops have taken on a new meaning (see Figure 3.1). Unlike TV antennas and cooling systems, satellite dishes have not been treated as insignificant in terms of their visibility. As the receiving of foreign TV channels through satellite dishes is regarded as undesirable by the state, on the basis of the state's lack of control over it, the previously unimportant rooftops have been unexpectedly charged with political significance. The government by and large regards the satellite technology as a 'cultural invasion by the West', a morally corruptive network that needs to be fought against. In 1995, the Iranian Parliament passed a law against the importing, sale, and use of any kind of satellite equipment, legalizing their confiscation from rooftops.



Figure 3.1. Common urban residential rooftops in Iran. Photograph by Kamyar Adl (Kamshots@Flickr)

However, satellite dishes have continuously resisted confiscation by the authorities, since their placement on rooftops effectively conflates the dividing lines between the legally binding concepts of the visible and hidden, public and private, and moral and immoral. By recounting disputes over the issue in the Iranian

parliament in 1995, Fariba Adelkhah (2000) explains that the core threatening effect of satellite dishes was believed to arise from their visibility on the rooftops, as evident manifestation of unruliness and nonconformity to the moral values of the State.

Rather than the content of the transmitted programmes, it was the satellite dishes' display on the roof that was considered to be morally incorrect, as it intruded into the orders of publicness – and was therefore subject to punishment. More recently, in May 2011, then deputy commander of the Iranian police, Sardar Ahmadreza Radan, clearly stated that the police's priority in seizing the satellite dishes were the clearly visible ones (Jahannews, 2011).

However, the application of the concept of visibility to satellite dishes on the rooftops is ambiguous. The accusation of intentionality in blatant public display of an unlawful behaviour is untenable, since the surface of the rooftop is ordinarily unseen from the street. How, when, and to whom then are the satellite dishes visible? Although it is possible to bring the rooftop dishes into view from neighbouring rooftops, the premises upon which that visibility is assured is questionable. Particularly since the in-between state of the rooftop as a privately owned yet publicly disclosed space is posited ambiguously within the realm of the state's control: how can visibility from a private setting be used as an allegation of a public violation of the orders of the visible?

In answer to such questions, I argue that the rooftop's implications of visibility stem from its spatial condition of ambiguity as a leftover space. Through the intertwining of ambiguous premises of the visibility and privacy of the rooftop, a state of uncertainty ensues that poses a threat to the orders of the visible. The rooftop's implications of visibility stem from its spatial condition of ambiguity as a leftover space. Whereas the leftover status of the rooftop does not suggest any particular aesthetic regime of the visible, positioning satellite dishes adds specific meaning to its otherwise blank composition. Even though the issue of visibility is often invoked to tackle the problem of satellite dishes, what instigates rigorous reactions is the way in which, by the installation of satellite dishes, the previously insignificant rooftop gains significance as a site for illegal and immoral conduct. In other words, by adding satellite dishes, the uncertain spatial status of the rooftop is changed into one with a particular political message.

What is most compelling is that, by growing into a subject of debate and legislation in public discourse, the insignificant rooftops have gained a critical edge in questioning the cultural constructedness of such abstract, but legally binding, concepts as visibility and privacy. Furthermore, with the police's sporadically violent conduct and adventurous manoeuvres in seizing satellite dishes, the out-of-sight and insignificant rooftops have gained visibility in the media, exposed to the world as bearers of anti-establishment sentiments. The results of a Google search for satellite dishes in Iran show the extent to which the rooftops are rendered visible in the media as sites of seemingly unstoppable confrontation between the hegemony of the state – as manifest in the spectacle of the confiscated and destroyed dishes – and the waywardness of its citizens – detectable in the enduring presence of dishes on the rooftops. In the following, I will explore the confrontational aspects of Iranian rooftops by analysing the rooftop protests associated with the Green movement.

Rooftop Protests: The Everyday Practice of Shouting from Rooftops

During the political uprisings in the aftermath of the disputed 2009 presidential elections in Iran, a number of rallies were organized on the streets by the Green movement; the first and most famous of which was a 'silent' rally, in which hundreds of thousands of people came to the streets in Tehran in silence. People's silence, although a precautionary strategy, in practice intensified the affect of their overwhelming presence, as the message of the demonstrations was to let the government see and feel the existence of people whose votes, the protestors argued, were not counted. The only signs of expression during the protests were small signs, here and there, exclaiming 'where is my vote'. Although peaceful throughout the day, in the evening, when demonstrators were spreading out on their way back home, gunshots were fired, during which a number of civilians were killed. That initially peaceful demonstration was followed by a few less silent rallies on the streets, during which more people were killed.

The uneven balance of power was already known to the demonstrators, who had opted for a silent and less provocative demonstration. However, the reaction of the regime – the extent to which it was eager to use its uneven power – was not exactly known beforehand. After those deadly demonstrations of power by the government, the Green movement's street politics, which were effective to that point and unprecedented in post-revolutionary Iran, gradually died away. Subsequently, the

main concern of the movement was to find ways to hold on, to resist complete annihilation, and to assure endurance:

The problem now for the protest movement is to find a way to keep up the pressure while defusing the impact of state violence.... The movement will probably conclude that protest should move off the streets, where violence is easier to employ and the flame of dissent itself burns hotter and more unsustainably. The state escalation of violence has made the streets a site of confrontation rather than mobilization (Ehsani, et al., 2009).

One of the forms in which the movement stayed relatively alive for a longer period of time, and undermined the monopoly of the authority over the public sphere, was by shouting from rooftops, which came to be known as rooftop protests (Ehsani, et al., 2009). After nightfall, around 9 or 10 PM depending on the season, people would go up to the roof of their dwellings – mostly shared rooftops of apartment buildings – and shout ‘Allah-o Akbar’ (God is Great) and ‘Marg bar Dictator’ (Death to the dictator). Bearing resemblances to chants of Allah-o Akbar that animated the revolutionary crowds in 1978 and 1979, this form of protest alluded to the ideals of the revolution of 1979, and gained significance for revitalizing its forgotten patterns.

As a form of protest, the chanting from rooftops invites comparison with the more conventional form of street protest. It certainly purports to be a different form of expressivity in terms of space (rooftop instead of street), temporality (night instead of day), materiality (voice instead of banners and placards), and sensory faculties being invoked (sound instead of sight). Nevertheless, as I will explain in the following, rather than rejecting street politics, it effectively extends the reach of those politics to different spatial, temporal, material, and bodily functions.

The move from the street to the rooftop has a locational significance, in the first place: it is a strategy of distancing from the street. While the street is constantly policed as a result of the mobility that it offers, the rooftop maintains an autonomous geography, at least temporarily, as a result of being posited outside that system of flow. In that respect, by way of not being within the immediate reach of the police force, the move to the rooftop is a strategy to delay, if not completely deter, the direct counterattacks and brutalities of the police. In this context, the rooftop is a

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retreat to a ‘less dangerous’ position than the street, an escape to a less readily accessible space. Besides, the rooftop provides additional possibilities for escape by being in close proximity to each person’s house, as it is always possible to run down and take shelter inside – given that the police is not yet prepared to fully relocate its field of action from the public to the private sphere. Therefore, the move to the communally owned rooftops of shared apartment buildings challenges the state’s unconditional reaction to such demonstrations, entangles the police in legal limitations to its field of command, and charges its reactions with ambivalence and indecisiveness.

In addition to relocation, the spatiality of the rooftop addresses a different regime of visibility, as it remains mostly out of the sight of the eyes on the street. The temporality of night further positions the rooftop in a non-visible condition of darkness. The act of shouting therefore rejects visual means of demonstrability and display, by simultaneously mobilizing conditions of non-representability (in the face of the state’s monopoly over such public media as TV and the press) and non-recognisability (in the face of apparatuses of surveillance on the street). To put it differently, the invisibility of the rooftop provides certain level of safety through sustaining conditions of anonymity. Massimo Leone describes this point succinctly:

whereas diurnal slogans/chants of protests come from a visible source, nocturnal slogans/chants of protests come from an invisible source, protected by both the darkness of night and the position of the ‘performers’: thus, also those who, for various reasons, are unable to join the protests in a visible way, can do it in an invisible way (the less young, for instance). (Leone, 2012, p. 350)

All in all, one might find a tactical gesture in the move to the rooftop, that constitutes a less dangerous way of exerting a certain level of voice and agency that is wound up intricately with everyday forms of expressivity. To start with, there are certain aspects of the rooftop protests that readily correspond to the practices of everyday life. While organizational efforts are required to sustain a single street rally on a specific day in a particular location, the shouting from the rooftop recurs with a daily rhythm at a predicted time in diverse places all around the city, and is ordinarily run as one among several daily errands with no special need for pre-arrangement. Besides, compared to

street protests, it is inclusive of a larger range of social groups and generations. To give an example, while parents in a normative family seldom participate in street demonstrations and, dreading the prospect of the dangers involved in such rallies, would discourage the youngsters from getting involved, it is common that in the rooftop protests all members of a household participate collectively. This invitation for participation is directly connected to the conditions of anonymity that the invisibility of the rooftop provides, rendering the experience of shouting from the rooftop visually inconspicuous.

Since elusive practices of the everyday usually maintain an inconvenient relation with representational forms (Highmore, 2002, p. 21), professional journalism has mostly failed to capture the rooftop protests visually. An exception is Pietro Masturzo's photograph of women shouting from a rooftop in Tehran, which has been widely circulated after winning the 2009 world press photo prize (see Figure 3.2). By portraying a generally neglected spatiality, this picture makes visible those ordinary people who are usually silenced, or at best misrepresented, in the media, as a result of the over-exposure of certain others.



Figure 3.2. Women Shouting from the Rooftops. Photograph by Pietro Masturzo, from *Tehran Echoes* series, 2009.

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Whereas in street protests women are for the most part either absent from the scene or only get highlighted in the media when their tighter and more colourful clothing attests to the image of a modern, secular, western styled subject, in this photo it is ordinary looking women with casual clothes that are depicted. Furthermore, this photo is particularly affective because it depicts, by fixing in a purely visual medium, such ordinary women performing the otherwise non-visual act of ‘shouting’. Moreover, to portray the act of shouting, the picture makes visible those dirty, trivial and unimpressive scenes of the city that are customarily left out from consideration: bare walls and messy cooling systems next to the jumble of a construction site. Seen in this way, the photo is an attempt at depicting the leftovers of the governing orders of the visible; yet, it does so by being attentive to those residual aesthetics and activities to the extent of sustaining the invisibilities inherent in them.

Peculiar to this photograph is the vantage point of the photographer, and by implication the viewer, as the photograph seems to be taken from an elevated point, most probably from another rooftop. In this case, the photographer’s move from the street to the rooftop is first of all a practical move, as a rooftop is visible only from a point higher in altitude. In addition, given the state-imposed restrictions on photographing in times of political unrest, the move from the street to the rooftop is, to an extent, forced. However, as the rooftops in question are privately owned, this is not just a matter of simple relocation on the part of the photographer. To be on the rooftop, the photographer has to gain admission by winning the trust of the inhabitants of the building, which usually works through such strategies as befriending them – in short, he has to be welcome up on the roof. One consequence of this process of relocation is that, in contrast to a street photographer, the rooftop photographer emerges as a member within the community of the specific rooftop that he enters.

The photographer is therefore transformed from a mobile specialist, ready to capture the moment while keeping his distance to the subject on the street, to one who lingers on along with a certain community, bound to the limits of the rooftop. As the protests take place at night, the immobility of the photographer is emphasized, as he is forced to use high exposure times, appropriate for photographing fixed objects. The time spent on the rooftop within the proximate and consistent community of the rooftop leads to the photographer’s active and affective engagement in the scene of his photography. In a number of Marutzo’s other photographs in his rooftop protests

collection, moments of intimacy within this community of the rooftop are captured (see Figure 3.3).

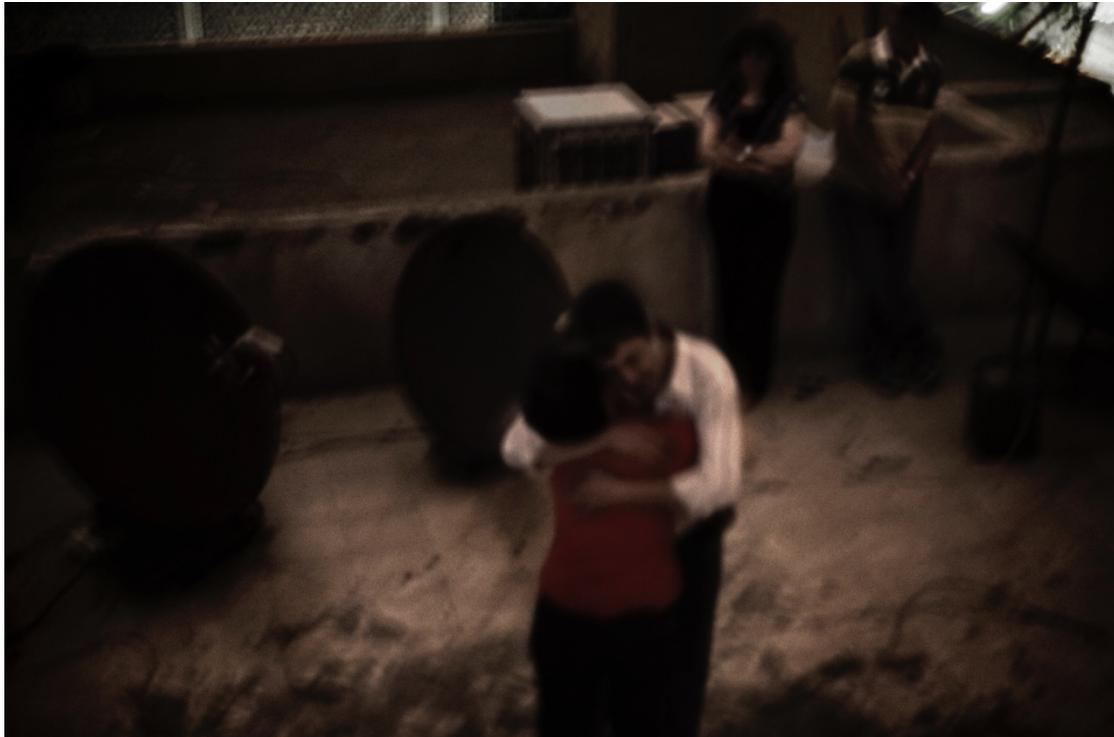


Figure 3.3. Photograph by Pietro Masturzo, from *Tehran Echoes* series, 2009.

Explaining the story behind this photograph in an interview with *The Guardian* (2010), Masturzo recounts how, after having had dinner as a guest at the house of a casual acquaintance, he accompanied his host and the rest of the guests to the roof in order to join the protests. Describing the atmosphere on the rooftop as ‘emotional’, as people hugged and cried, he says:

The image is blurry because I had to use a very long exposure. It was night-time and I couldn't use a tripod or flash – the protesters were very nervous about being seen in the company of someone with a camera. It was also vital that their faces were not recognisable: in fact, it was difficult to convince them to let me take their picture at all, but I explained that no one would see who they were.

I particularly like this picture because I loved that night on the rooftops. There was so much emotion. (*The Guardian*, 2010)

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The blurry disposition of the image is therefore not necessarily an inevitable consequence of the darkness, but particularly intended to maintain non-visibility and anonymity. In fact, a photographic mediation can violate the privacy of the rooftop – as a privately owned space – by disclosing it to the public. Particularly opting for invisibility, the need for the visual containment of the rooftop is enhanced by substituting the professional ethics of transparency, impartiality, and objectivity with an amateurish, but no less dexterous, enthusiasm for affective engagement in the event. To be sure, as a hug between a man and a woman in Iran is incompatible with the public orders of the visible that carefully maintain the segregation of genders, the emotions contained in the photograph suggest a rather personal take suitable for private family albums. What I want to emphasize is that, as the photographer captures the practice of the rooftop protest by living it himself, he is positioned at a difficult and indeterminate point between representation and action. Masturzo's rooftop photos therefore inhabit the liminal space between the private and public, invisibility and transparency, amateurishness, and professionalism.

It is following this logic that rooftop protests have been disseminated extensively on the Internet through homemade videos uploaded on YouTube (see Figure 3.4). In such videos, acts of protest and recording merge as the people recording the event are at the same time participating in the protest by shouting on the rooftop themselves. This is strongly sensed in the videos since, given the amateur video recording equipment's ineptitude in capturing distant sounds, the clearest and loudest voice unequivocally belongs to the filmmaker – one who holds the recording device and shouts closest to the microphone. Indeed, as Leone describes, the condition of being simultaneously a “performer” and the viewer, “an actor of protest and a spectator of it (or, to be more precise, a listener to it)”, is inherent to the rooftop protests, in contrast to diurnal street rallies in which “the crowd is a collective actor that stages a protest for the rest of the community and for the media” (2012, p. 351). In this “nocturnal collective musical performance” there exists no separation between the stage and the audience (Leone, 2012, p. 351). In the same way, by merging the process of mediation through recording with protesting through shouting, the rooftop videos compellingly propel the viewer/listener to an affective engagement with the performance.

Crucial to the anti-representational nature of the videos of the rooftop protests is the invisibility of the rooftop that, paradoxically, negates channelling through visual

media. Startlingly similar in form and content, in almost all of these videos the screen is almost always completely dark, making it difficult to discern anything except for a few sources of light in the distance. While the association of the temporality of the night with the spatiality of the rooftop – a sort of hidden time and space – renders the rooftop protests invisible, it is the voice uttered most powerfully from the top of the buildings which presents itself unreservedly to the city that is free from the noise of daytime, as well as to the viewers of the videos. Subsequently, what the films depict are the shouts, which are particularly affective by being juxtaposed to the darkness (emptiness) of the visual field.



Figure 3.4. Screenshots from a number of videos of rooftop protests on YouTube.

Setrag Manoukian (2010) observes such rooftop videos in his careful analysis of the new forms of affective and experiential politics in contemporary Iran. Closely

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analysing a single ‘video-poem’ of the rooftop, he discerns a new form of politics emerging, which is premised on the interrelation between collective action – as exemplified in the video by the multiplicity of voices that shout – and individual, intimate sensations – as exemplified by the darkness of the image and the hushed voice of a woman commenting on the events. Furthermore, he detects in the particular gesture of shouting from rooftops and the exact chants of the protest a mechanism of direct referencing to – as citations and appropriations of – the same gestures and words used during the revolution of 1979. With this redeployment of the past as conveying new meanings in relation to the political landscape of the present, he believes a temporal disjuncture has taken place in Iranian everyday lives. For him, following Agamben, the darkness of the rooftop video is illustrative of this disjuncture because of the intuitive courage it carries to look into the darkness, to grasp something beyond the restraints of chronological time. Manoukian’s insightful analysis of the rooftop protests in the context of the Green movement, interestingly, parallels my reading of the rooftop videos in the use of a number of key conceptual and theoretical frameworks. However, I want to stress that – unlike Manoukian’s paper, but not necessarily in contradiction to it – I use the concept of the leftover as the framework for studying the rooftop protests. It is through the interrelation between the trashy aesthetics of the visual and sonic field of the videos, the casualness of their processes of production through everyday practices of shouting, and the leftover attributes of the space of the rooftop that I wish to analyse the subversive power contained in such practices.

As people do not use amplifying devices, the sound that is disseminated in the city during the nights of protest is unmediated, unfiltered, and uncontrolled. The shouting therefore maintains a bodily and performative utterance that suggests the most primitive and rudimentary way of demanding one’s rights – shouting out loud. The unrefined character of the homemade videos supplements this condition of rudimentariness, downplaying the medium’s intrinsic mediality. The way in which the texture of sound in these videos is shaped by the spatial and temporal attributes of the rooftop and the night is in contrast to what Emily Thompson (2002) describes as the disembodied soundscape of modern cities. In modern times, Thompson writes, with the proliferation of sound technology and amplifying devices, such as microphones and loudspeakers, a fundamental compulsion has existed to control the behaviour of sound in space, to purge out what could be regarded as the unwanted noise, and

therefore to dissociate sound from its direct spatial bearings. The overall sonic experience of the modern city does not capture the reverberations of space, he continues, but rather accounts for nonreverberant, disembodied and disjointed sounds, which have little to say about the places in which they are produced or consumed. In the modern soundscape therefore, Thompson believes, reverberations conceived as “the lingering over time of residual sound in a space”, are mostly regarded as “noise, unnecessary and best eliminated” (Thompson, 2002, pp. 2-3). The rooftop protests, however, are affective precisely because they make sensible the reverberation of space, to the extent that one cannot definitively dissociate the shouts from them. One might say that, rather than clear shouts of protest in their singularity, the videos convey the whole space as protesting in reverberation. In short, the coarseness of the sound, unintelligibility of the image, and the ingenuousness of the performance in these videos maintain a close relation with the spatial attributes of the rooftops as leftover space.

In the rooftop videos, the resonances of near and far shouts create a depth of the spatial field. By foregrounding and backgrounding sounds, an auditory idea of distance that embraces the city through the soundscape substitutes for the indiscernible flatness of the visual landscape. As a consequence, a cityscape is created that, unconventionally, is more attuned to sound than vision, making it poorly suited for the apparatuses of control as the elusiveness of sound, unlike vision, evades traceability and identification. Accordingly, as sources of the shouts are not seen in the videos, there exists no synchrony between sound and image. Michel Chion (1999) explains in relation to sound in cinema that a sound can be non-synchronous without necessarily inhabiting the imaginary off-screen. He writes, “consider as example the ‘offscreen’ voice of someone who has just left the image but continues to be there, or a man we’ve never seen but whom we expect to see, because we situate him in a place contiguous with the screen, in the present tense of the action” (Chion, 1999, p. 4). Such sounds and voices, he writes, are “neither entirely inside nor clearly outside”, instead they are “sounds and voices that wander the surface of the screen, awaiting a place to attach to” (Chion, 1999, p. 4). Yet, what complicates the issue in the rooftop videos is that this off-screen sound does not refer to any specific visual space, since the darkness of the image conflates a definite conception of the inside or outside of the screen.

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In fact, it might be the reversal of Chion's description that is carried through in the rooftop videos: that it is a vision – an imagined vision of a person shouting – that is wandering, awaiting a sound to attach to. Therefore, the non-synchronous sound and image in the rooftop videos is conducive to the absence of direct referencing. As Chion maintains in relation to the silent cinema, “it's not so much the *absence of voices* that the talking film came to disrupt, as the spectator's freedom to imagine them in her own way (in the same way that a filmed adaptation objectifies the features of a character in the novel)” (Chion, 1999, p.9; emphasis in original). Along the same lines, by recourse to absence of vision, the videos in question provide conditions for the imagination of the spectator to attach the voice of protests to an imagined vision. It is this imagination, intensified by the resonances of sound through the night, which is most affective and disruptive of the regimes of the sensible. It is this dissociation of the embodied voices from the vision that produces an ever-present spectral sense of hovering over the landscape. As a consequence of the absence of the vision, the vigorous presence of embodied voices transpires a presence that is emphatically felt, if not exactly seen.

Such expressive audial presence, predicated upon visual abstinence, is different from Amir-Ebrahimi's conceptualization of the strategies of “absent presence” in Iranian society, which indicates that, in order to entertain a “more extensive presence in the public and often masculine spaces of the city”, individual particularities and bodily non-conformist features need to be downplayed – in effect absented (2006, p. 459). Individualities obtain overall public presence, she argues, by managing the impressions that they leave in order to be “protected by the disciplinary monotony” imposed on them (2006, p. 459). What follows are ghostly ways of being present in everyday life that are not seen or felt. Although the rooftop protests nurture conditions of spectral invisibility and anonymity, they do not insinuate such an absence, since the interrelation of the spatial, temporal, audial, and performative aspects of the act of shouting from the rooftop is particularly expressive of protest as discontent, resistance, and confrontation, and is impressive since it breaks the monopoly of the state over the public sphere by compellingly challenging the orders of the sensible by audible means.

Indeed, ‘impression management’, as James C. Scott (1990, p. 4) argues, has always been one of the key survival skills of subordinate groups in power-laden situations. Yet, such tactical control over the impression that one leaves – which

might lead at times to rigorous limitations that would make the person seem absent on the basis of the deprivation of her individual expressivities – is a delicate undertaking in the course of the practices of everyday life in ways that are not completely devoid of moments of confrontation, defiance, and critique. To understand those personal tactics of affect control, Scott conceptualizes the notion of ‘hidden transcripts’, in opposition to ‘public transcripts’. He writes:

If subordinate discourse in the presence of the dominant is a public transcript, I shall use the term *hidden transcript* to characterize discourse that takes place ‘offstage,’ beyond direct observation by powerholders. The hidden transcript is thus derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript.” (Scott, 1990, pp. 4-5; emphasis in original)

To the extent that the rooftop protests take place off-stage and off-screen, employing diverse strategies of non-visibility, they pertain to such a hidden transcript as a vehicle through which one could “insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity or behind innocuous understandings of their conduct” (Scott, 1990, p. xiii). However, as the rooftop protests conflate the status of the stage and backstage, both in the real act of shouting and in the distributed videos, they encroach upon the public transcript by influencing the soundscape. In that regard, the rooftop protests do not stay put on the side of the hidden, or the absent, but provide that liminal condition in which the hidden transcript meets the public one, affecting the contours of both, and sustaining an in-between space of nameless potentiality.

Finally, since this liminality is conditioned on visual, audial, and perceptive constituents, I want to turn to Jacques Rancière’s definition of an aesthetic act as “configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity” (2004, p. 9). Rancière describes aesthetic regimes as the following:

the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and

the stakes of politics as a form experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time. (Rancière, 2004, p. 13)

It is by disturbing such orders of the visible, by introducing novel forms of sense experience to the partitions of time and space, that the rooftop protests provide a specific “aesthetic-political field of possibility”. The political significance and potency of the rooftop protests, thus, does not simply emanate from politically-charged words that are vehemently spoken against the power in an act of protest. Rather, it is the interruption of the distributive systems of the sensible that the rooftop protests substantiate – that which Rancière considers to be the essence of politics.

Yet, what sustains this politics is its embeddedness in the everyday. It is the everyday, ordinary, and diffused composition of the rooftop protests that endures in time and scope, amounting to sustained and active modes of presence. I see rooftop protests as incidents of “active citizenry”, of the artful and tactical ways of “asserting collective will in spite of all odds, circumventing constraints, utilizing what is possible, and discovering new spaces within which to make oneself heard, seen, and felt” (Bayat, 2007, p. 202). Embodying tactics of non-visibility, rooftop protests capture a liminal space of unremittingly resilient and oppositional potentiality for radical public presence.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued for situating rooftops within, rather than apart from, everyday modes of presence in the city. In this way, my intention has been to de-romanticize the nostalgic vision that has frequently been posed of the Iranian rooftops in popular culture as a retreat and safe haven. Instead, I have argued for an approach to the everyday city that expands the limits of the street to encompass the rooftop, where the rooftop connects to the city through sight, sound, and practice. I have described how in recent decades the installation of satellite dishes on rooftops has brought the issue of visual connectedness of the rooftop with the street into focus. By highlighting the ambivalences of the visibility of the rooftop, I have argued for considering the Iranian rooftop as a leftover space.

Finally, I have argued for the rooftop as an everyday, leftover and non-visible political space during the rooftop protests. I have explained that, by exhausting the possibilities for non-visibility and anonymity that the leftover rooftops offer, the rooftop protesters subvert public orders of the sensible in an everyday fashion and reclaim the city's soundscape by way of their embodied presence. Consequently, I have argued that, by enacting a liminal condition of expressivity, such protests sustain active public presence, encompassing the artful ways in which, as Asef Bayat (2007) puts into words, citizens aspire to make themselves "heard, seen and felt" within their everyday domains.

I want to conclude by reiterating that what sustains this potentiality for politics is the way the rooftop protests constitute the everyday. Central to this argument is the resonance between the insignificance of the spatiality of the rooftop, as out of reach and out of sight, and the anonymity, inconspicuousness, and unmarkedness of the practices of shouting from rooftops at night. Contributing to a different regime of aesthetics, rooftop protests capture a liminal space of unremittingly resilient and oppositional potentiality for radical public presence, by being appreciative of the residual elements contained in their disposition in terms of space, aesthetics, and everyday practices.