Odes to incongruity: Iranian Contemporary Art in Diaspora

A thesis presented to
the faculty of
the College of Fine Arts of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

Golnar Yarmohammad Touski

December 2014

© 2014 Golnar Yarmohammad Touski. All Rights Reserved
This thesis titled
Odes to Incongruity: Iranian Contemporary Art in Diaspora

by
GOLNAR YARMOHAMMAD TOUSKI

has been approved for
the School of Art
and the College of Fine Arts by

Jennie Klein
Associate Professor of Art History

Margaret Kennedy-Dygas
Dean, College of Fine Arts
Abstract

YARMOHAMMAD TOUSKI, GOLNAR, M.A., December 2014, Art History

Odes to Incongruity: Iranian Contemporary Art in Diaspora

Director of Thesis: Jennie Klein

The art pieces of Iranian-American artist Pooneh Maghazehe and Iranian Los Angeles-based artist Gelare Khoshgozaran articulate specificities of Iranian contemporary art in diaspora. Using Marc Auge’s neologism of Non-places and Doreen Massey’s theory of space and place in relation to gender, this study analyzes implications of movement, displacement and locality in the art of minorities; specifically Iranian art outside of mainstream art market. The study reviews various ways in which these artists address difference by intervening in systems of administration at urban public spaces.
Acknowledgments

I cannot express enough thanks to my advisor, Jennie Klein, for patiently working with me to develop this study, and for supporting me all through the way, from the day I entered Ohio University as an MA Art History candidate. My completion of this project could not have been possible without encouragement and support of my committee; Dr. Marilyn Bradshaw, Dr. Brian Collins and Professor Andre Gribou. I am especially thankful to the artist and dear friend, Negin Moss, for introducing me to community of Iranian artists in United States, and to artists Pooneh Maghazehe and Gelareh Khoshgozaran for kindly providing me with archives of their artworks.
# Contents

Acknowledgments .................................................................................................................. 4  
List of Figures ....................................................................................................................... 6  
Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 7  
Implications of Movement in Iranian Contemporary Art in Diaspora ............................... 12  
Chapter 1: Spectator, Traveler, Immigrant ........................................................................ 28  
Non-places, Place and Space ............................................................................................ 30  
Space and Place in Relation to Postmodernity .................................................................. 33  
Politics of Geographical Access and Minorities ............................................................... 36  
Time-space Compression and Temporality of Minorities ................................................ 43  
Chapter 2: Pooneh Maghazehe and Poetics of Displacement ........................................... 49  
Four Positions ................................................................................................................... 49  
KEYNOTES [sic] .............................................................................................................. 52  
Negetivists’ Stand In at Sleep Inn ..................................................................................... 53  
Salt Prints .......................................................................................................................... 56  
Chapter 3: Gelare Khoshgozaran: Unraveling Places ....................................................... 59  
The Flirtatious Pirouette of the Artist Around His Subject .............................................. 60  
Vis-à-vis ............................................................................................................................ 63  
Woahoho ............................................................................................................................ 67  
Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 76  
Bibliography ....................................................................................................................... 81  
Figures ............................................................................................................................... 83
# List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Farhad Moshiri, Only Love Faghat Eshgh, Swarovski and oil on canvas mounted on board, 2007</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Farhad Moshiri, Flying Carpet, 32 stacked machine made carpets, 2007</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Shirin Neshat, Unveiling, Gelatin silver print and ink, 1993</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Young Woman from Kabul adorned with her jewelry, Postcard, 1873-189</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Shadi Ghadirian, Like Every day, C-print, 2000</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mahmoud Bakhshi, KHATE POOLSAZE Parsi [Profitable Persian Script], Acrylic on gunny, 2009</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jean-Baptiste André Godin, Familistère de Guise [Social Palace], 1856-1859, Photograph, 2005</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Pooneh Maghazehe, Four Positions, Photograph, 2012</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Pooneh Maghazehe and Nick Paparone, KEYNOTES, Performance still, 2012</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Pooneh Maghazehe, Negetivists’ Stand In at Sleep Inn, Digital C-Print mounted on aluminum, 2010</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Pooneh Maghazehe, Eleni’s Armrest, Heliography, 2012</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Pooneh Maghazehe, Eleni’s chair, Heliography, 2012</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Gelare Khoshgozaran, The Flirtatious Pirouette of the Artist Around His Subject, video still, 2012</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

‘Car nous sommes ou nous ne sommes pas.’
(For we are where we are not.)
Pierre-Jean Jouve 1

The present thesis explores diasporic Iranian contemporary art in relation to transience of postmodernity and status of the artist as spectator. The focus of the research is on those artists whose first concern is questions raised by politics of mapping and movement in geographical terms; also those who address specificities of being Iranian artists beyond market demands and fixated clichés that are associated with Middle Eastern art in mainstream art world. The overall objective is to introduce trends of Iranian diasporic art that include diversities of gender and ethnicity.

As Iranian women, both artists reviewed in this study address their status from a feminist standpoint; but one that addresses their specificities by direct engagement with urban spaces and through a flexible expression that transcends usual portrayal of Iranian women as veiled or Muslim. A glance at some of the works by most demanded artists in the market such as Farhad Moshiri, Shirin Neshat, Shadi Ghadirian and others (figs. 1-6) reveals the ubiquity of stereotypical perception of Iranian art. Strategies many of such artists employ represent an identical trajectory of imagery which reveals demands of the market rather than social, cultural and political concerns. References to Iran’s political and social situation in such art are often combined with Iranian pop culture imagery or scenes of urban life in Iran to comment on the paradoxes and restrictions of Iranian life;

however the result is a trajectory of reiterated clichés which neither offer an in depth critique of Iranian (pop or otherwise) culture nor make any meaningful commentary; rather contribute to a sensational image of a Middle Eastern country by showcasing a vitrine of tourist attractions: Persian rugs, glittering paintings with Persian calligraphy, Iranian handicrafts, Hijab and as seen in the most demanded artworks, a combination of all.

Among artists mentioned above, Neshat probably is the most celebrated; she is as popular in United States as in Iran and has been the symbol with which Iranian feminist art is known internationally. While it is beyond the scope of this study to examine in detail the implications of her art, it is beneficial for purposes of the discussion to briefly look at some of her most known pieces. In the photo titled ‘unveiling’ (from her 1993 series titled ‘Women of Allah’) she is portrayed naked with Persian words written on her chest and covered with Chador, a type of Hijab that has long been adopted by Muslim women in Iran (fig. 3). Her face is covered in calligraphic verses of poetry by Iranian contemporary poetess, Forough Farrokhzad (1935-1967) who is known for her explicitly feminine prose and unconventional lifestyle. But the truth is non-Iranian majority of audience cannot read the poetry; therefore the poems are usually reduced to decorative elements on a beautiful woman’s face who also is naked under an exotic costume. Interestingly enough, this particular artwork is now among the collection of Whitney Museum of American Art; it goes without saying that any artwork which finds its way into such an accredited organization establishes a norm-a history- that directly links the piece to the cultural context with which it is associated. At the same time, presence of this
particular body of work among permanent collection of Whitney shows the dominant perception of Iranian art in United States which is reminiscent of colonial approach to women from the East. One cannot help but to compare this photo with some of the iconic Orientalist postcards (fig. 4); it is stunning that how much of such objectifying gaze is still present and that to such a great degree artists from Middle East view themselves via that gaze. Title of the series, *Women of Allah*, along with other visual elements of the piece suffices to capture the same codes of the market: Muslim woman, veil, Persian calligraphy, and Persian poetry.

However, my intention is not to dismiss Neshat’s art altogether; her specific views come more from her American background as expatriate than her Iranian roots. She deals with her personal feelings regarding the Iran she used to know and the Iran she encountered years later, and surely, as Iran of the two periods are radically different (and as she has frequently remarked in interviews), that experience has been of a shocking nature. As a result, the strongest impression she was left with is of religious fanaticism. In the same way, I do not suggest these artists’ concerns are not valid. Restrictions Iranian women deal with in all social, political and cultural levels, problems of regional conflicts and wars and governmental censorship - all of which resurface in various ways in works of every Iranian artist- are very much real. However, the issue lies in the way such concerns are simplified as a set of visual codes by the mainstream art world and its affiliates; images that are constantly reproduced and advertised as the only plausible expression of being Iranian/Middle Eastern.
At the same time, Middle East has been the talk of the art world well over a decade, but there still is an ambiguity as to what is regarded as Iranian art and what exactly Middle Eastern art encompasses besides reiterated images of Hijab. The mainstream art market tends to overgeneralize various trends of art in the region sometimes as “Art from Middle East” and other times as “Islamic Art” neither of which really articulate diversity of practice in Iranian contemporary art. These terms are extremely problematic and call for yet another study; it suffices to outline here that firstly, Middle East is an extremely multiethnic region with incredibly diverse groups of all religions, hence the term Middle Eastern cannot possibly articulate which ethnicity, religion or social stratum is concerned, unless of course the term is used to evoke certain set of symbols and images. Secondly, Islamic Art leaves out every group whose concerns are not necessarily of a religious or Islamic nature. Comparing the term with Christian art will put things in perspective; the term Islamic can only be used insofar a certain era of history or a contemporary trajectory of art with solely religious purposes is concerned.

It is increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to locate a single context based on which all trends of art in Iran and that of neighboring countries are defined under one title-especially one that is very loosely applied. Such reductive approach is very much reminiscent of colonialist way of portraying Orient as a whole where people wear peculiar outfits and live under incomprehensible conditions. Under the shadow of such established categories, efforts of lesser known Iranian artists to address the subtlety and complexity of their unique status go mostly unnoticed. Ever-increasing population of immigrants from Iran who are now dispersed all across Europe, Canada, Americas and
Asia makes Iranian art a multifaceted phenomenon, especially when artists who work outside of the dominant market are concerned.

The two artists discussed in this study, Pooneh Maghazehe and Gelare Khoshgozaran, both live and work in the United States and have studied Fine Arts at accredited American schools. They adopt interventionist artistic strategies to elaborate on specificities of being a member of minorities; and in relation to systems of administration in the ways in which they control social interactions. However, these artists’ take on issues mentioned is radically different due to their backgrounds. Pooneh Maghazehe is an Iranian-American born in Brooklyn and is from the second generation of immigrants who entered United States upon Islamic revolution of 1979; while Gelare Khoshgozaran was born and raised in Tehran and entered United States five years ago as an MFA student of University of Southern California.

I have specifically chosen artists from two sides of diasporic community to illustrate various ways in which Iranian contemporary artists address notion of belonging; and that despite differences of contexts they work in, they share the same concerns. Also, I aspire to underscore each artist’s unique approach to art practice as spectators who actively engage with urban public spaces. Uniqueness of their approach lies in the ways in which they engage with their cultural and personal backgrounds, but more importantly in their standing between two extremities of stereotypes previously mentioned and radical nationalism. Pressures expatriate artists deal with often lead to adopting a reactionary stance; one that either involves completely embracing hegemonic portrayal of their culture or romanticizing all aspects of the home country. The purpose of this study
therefore, is to introduce examples of Iranian contemporary art practices that exist outside of extreme cynicism or pointless productivity and actively engage with history of their country and their status as expatriates.

Implications of Movement in Iranian Contemporary Art in Diaspora

With pervasiveness of global economy, a seemingly coherent world has come to be where movement—running errands, road tripping or traveling— is almost a similar experience for people in different parts of the world. However, our experience of the spaces of ‘supermodernity’—to borrow Marc Augé’s term—is very much shaped via delegation.² While the airports, train stations, chain stores and highways as products of globalization are made to look and feel identical, the level of accession to each is deeply affected by one’s social status. In other words, the span of freedom available to users of these spaces varies based on their particularities (e.g. a woman, a queer person, a person from ethnicities other than of the majority) and that to what extent such differences are tolerated. Movement in geographical terms is necessarily contingent on one’s sociopolitical situation. In that sense, a female Middle Eastern traveler’s level of access to means of transportation and borders whose country is infested with regional and international conflicts can never be compared with that of a white male. With each political decision made on local and consequently global level, the political status of a country and hence their citizens’ accession to geographical territories dramatically changes; leading in turn to the most quintessential phenomenon of our times which is

immigration; movement in our times means accessing artificial geographical boundaries. The prominent reason why many immigrate is to acquire a new nationality/citizenship that allows them to move more freely in geographical territories. Many immigrants are granted with the rights of citizenship or permanent residency by the host country after living in that country for years or by filing as political or social asylum. A majority of Iranian citizens can be described in two groups: some spend years daydreaming of leaving; others – mainly middle class educated citizens- act upon it and eventually, leave. According to Office of Homeland Security’s 2011 yearbook of immigration statistics, 76,899 Iranians have received legal permanent residence status from 1990 to 1999 while a total number of 66,331 are registered as granted with permanent residency only in 2011. The figures mentioned do not reflect population of Iranian students arriving in U.S each year; however, suffice to articulate ubiquity of migration among Iranians. Once immigrants receive new documents, e.g. an American passport or Green Card, their status is moved to upper rankings in hierarchy of power as citizens or residents of a first world country. Possessing an American passport instead of Iranian for instance means to go around bureaucratic procedures of waiting in long lines, being interviewed at the embassies and doing the endless paperwork with always running the risk of not being permitted to cross certain borders; thus being expatriate sets forward the question of what movement entails, especially to members of minorities. At the same time, emergence of 

---

Iranian diaspora during the last thirty-and-so years has caused notions of place and locality to change dramatically. The more Iranians immigrate, the more artists address in their works various implications of movement, dwelling and geography.

To understand references to movement and belonging in Iranian contemporary art it is important to notice the political transformations of the last three decades in relation to global politics. The Islamic revolution of 1979 marks the beginning of an important era for Iranians who facing aftermath of revolution, had to make life-changing decisions. On economic level, petroleum remained a major source of income for Iranian state in 1970s, however, the global economic instability of 1950s escalated causing a crisis; while the economy boosted thanks to high oil prices it simultaneously caused high rates of inflation and financially crippled the middle class and the poor. With Pahlavi regime’s vast oppressions, dissatisfactions mounted. There were few officially active political parties (National Front, an alliance of nationalists with non-communist views, and pro-soviet party of Tüdeh or ‘Party of Masses’) and together with regime’s illegal arresting, censorship and torture of opponents, a dramatic social upheaval began to form. A considerable number of ordinary people who felt their religious affinities were opposed and many secular and communist groups saw Pahlavi monarchy as embodiment of imperialist ‘Westernization’ agendas conducted in the region by the first world states. Insulting remarks in one of the most read newspapers of the time on ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of religious parties, initiated intense anger and uprising In January of 1978. After many killed in street demonstrations the Shah fled the country and a national referendum was held, the result of which was declaring of Islamic Republic of Iran by
ayatollah Khomeini. Facing threats of religious radicalism, many who did not share political or religious views of the new state migrated to other countries.⁴

Meanwhile, political status of Iran in relation to world politics shifted dramatically due to events such as Iran Hostage Crisis (1979-81). In the fall of 1978, the American embassy became a scene of frequent anti-U.S. and anti-imperialist demonstrations by the revolutionary forces. In October of 1979, news of former monarch’s disease and his consequent trip to United States to seek medical aid caused great hostility among revolutionary forces which led to occupation of the American embassy. Out of 66 Americans taken hostage, 56 were held in the embassy for over a year. While American and Iranian diplomats were negotiating terms to release hostages, internal conflicts of power among secular and religious parties caused a number of Iranian diplomats to be deposed of power. Diplomatic efforts therefore remained unsuccessful and United States refused to buy Iranian oil; froze billions of dollars of Iranian assets in the United States, and launched a vigorous campaign of international diplomacy against Iranians. American military forces launched an attack via southern deserts of Tehran to release hostages; an attack which failed due to technical issues during the mission; leading in turn to a great humiliation to Carter administration.⁵ The event later was marked by Islamic state as occupying the den of espionage; a term which characterized the Islamic state’s foreign diplomacy and anti-imperialist propaganda. The

---

hostage crisis resulted in international isolation of Iran and affected lives of many Iranians who did not identify with radical actions of the Islamic state. Many who had already immigrated, found themselves blemished; and many of ordinary citizens who were planning to immigrate were refused entry at the borders.

As the political situation of Iran due to post-revolution events reached to a critical point, a regional conflict devastated Iran’s already vulnerable society. The prolonged Iran-Iraq war (1980 to 1988) which broke out shortly after the revolution resulted in a huge death toll of Iranian youth at fronts. As stated in Encyclopedia Iranica, the war is remarked as the longest conventional war of the century:

The war between Iran and Iraq, lasting nearly eight years, commenced with the Iraqi invasion of Iran on 22 September 1980, and ended with the bilateral acceptance of the UN Security Council Resolution 598 on 20 July 1988. Considered by Iranians as “imposed war” (jang-e taḥmili), the Iran-Iraq War has been called “the longest conventional war of the 20th century,” and cost 1 million casualties and $1.19 trillion. “Iraq claimed it was engaged in a defensive war and was ‘obliged to exercise its legitimate right to self-defense of sovereignty and territorial integrity and to recover its territories by force, considering that the Iranian Government had barred the way to all legally recognized ways to resolve the issues emanating from its obligations’.”

Lives and views of children who grew up during years of revolution and war, such as Gelare Khoshgozaran (chapter 3), were affected by devastation of a war-torn country and the Islamic state’s vast propagandist TV productions which centered on anti-Iraqi and ant-west sentiments in terms of series for kids, puppet shows and chants. At public schools children were given lectures on conspiracy of Western states and sacredness of a defensive war. In such a grim atmosphere Gelare’s generation were

---

simultaneously introduced at homes to American pop culture—a country portrayed by the Islamic state as the ‘Great Satan’. Considerable rupture that existed between what children were taught at schools and what they experienced at home (which Gelare refers to as the only version of ‘having fun’ they knew) created a multi-layered society that was as much the object of anti-West sentiments as the American pop culture. To youth like Gelare who later left home, these events continued to influence their lives outside of Iran.

Post-election events of 2009 mark the second major phase of immigration. With Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s disputed reelection as president in 2009, protesters, mainly students of academia and middle class citizens, came to streets on a ‘walk of silence’ as a peaceful act of civil disobedience, where demonstrators held signs with phrases like ‘Where is my vote’. Demonstrators’ demands were to reclaim their votes to the moderate and popular candidate, Mirhossein Mousavi and to demand removal of Ahmadinejad from the office. The uprising which was later known as the Green Movement (after the color which symbolized Mousavi’s campaign) was received with severely violent oppressions leading to many injured, some killed, many imprisoned and the two prominent figures of opposition, Mirhossein Mousavi and ayatollah Mehdi Karroubi put under house arrest ever since. Many demonstrators and proponents of Mousavi, who were frustrated with failure of civil disobedience and government reform, left the country in the course of next coming years.

Considerable changes in political structure from monarchy to Islamic republic, the hostage crisis, Iran-Iraq war and the baby boom of 1980s (as per order of Ayatollah Khomeini to increase the population) all played crucial roles in shaping the experiences
of movement, home and belonging to the generation both artists discussed in this research are from. The transitions caused by the process of globalization on one hand and these events on the other altered the status of being Iranian. In the works of Pooneh Maghazehe whose parents were among these immigrants, personal choices shape the world of expatriate and effects of such choices linger on all aspects of her life. When belonging to certain geographies and social groups is a matter of choice rather than right of birth, one’s decisions find meaning in a much more personal and at the same time, social level.

Whether they grew up in Iran or were born and raised in another country, implications of movement, leaving home and melancholic feelings to Iranian artists of 80s generation are dramatically influenced by media. As Appadurai correctly notices it is only within the last few decades that migration has become a global phenomenon in line with prevalent presence of media. The country which once was recognized for having oil resources became a country known for political turmoil and religiosity; and voices of various social groups were buried under the propagandist flush of media on one hand and the regime’s authority on the other. Such shifts dictated lifestyles of Iranians for three generations to come, turning to an inseparable part of Iranian collective memory.

The art discussed in present thesis are partly made in response to the artist/expatriate’s unique situation within a mediated hierarchical system of mapping/commuting places which implicitly operates on class, ethnicity and gender differences; and partly in relation to their home country.

---

Pooneh Maghazehe is an Iranian-American artist; she was born in Brooklyn in 1979 and grew up outside of Philadelphia. She is a second generation immigrant, from a family who migrated to United States upon the revolution and was among members of the first Iranian diasporic communities. She earned her MFA from Columbia University in 2011 and had her first major show as one of the artists in Chelsea Art Museum show, “Iran Inside Out” (2009). Pooneh Maghazehe attended a number of artist residencies since 2007 in NY and Germany; has had several solo exhibitions and artist talks at Museum of Modern Art, Columbia University, Pratt Institute and Chelsea Museum of Art, and is a recipient of the Schreyer’s Honor Medal. Her art was reviewed by ArtCrush, Contemporary Practices, Guernica Magazine and ArtMap. In her early works she mainly deals with her Iranian heritage and Iranian community in diaspora; however, she gradually departs from an art that specifically addresses her ethnicity to one that encompasses contemporary human’s concerns beyond her particular background.\(^8\)

Although she is mostly gravitated towards social aspects of art and interventionist strategies of art practice, most of her works have a very distinct poetic tone and a unique expression. Pooneh Maghazehe experiments with different media, oscillating among object making/installation, photography, print and performance art. In her art objects of everyday life reminisce personal choices; choices that are formed by history and form small histories of every immigrant’s life. She ponders on implications of personal decisions as they proliferate to create new dreams and nuanced narratives of home.

Liminal spaces—spaces that are always in state of alteration—become her media to articulate the ways in which they reveal diversity of human visions and the inherent transience of their lives. In the artworks discussed in this study, *Negetivists’ Stand-In at Sleep Inn (2010)*, *Four Positions (2012)*, *KEYNOTES (2012)* and her salt prints (2011-2012) there are often personal belongings present; objects such as empty water bottles, chairs, mattresses and in short, objects which reveal terraces of time and specificities of character.

Her installation pieces portray immigrant’s cosmos by reflecting her particular temporality that is embodied in her stance towards the past, home and nationality. In artist’s photos of her performance piece discussed in this study, her body is captured in acrobatic moves which picture a transitionality that is being conquered; a commentary on instability of life of an immigrant who balances her body among objects, memories and failed desires. Same objects appear in this performance; she dissects them to contextualize time in relation to places as they are to people to whom concept of home does not possess centrality or integration. Home in Pooneh’s art is about fluidity, flexibility and acceptance.

Gelare Khoshgozaran was born in Tehran and moved to United States as an MFA student in 2009; a time that marked a turning point in Iranian contemporary history. Based in Los Angles, Gelare Khoshgozaran is a translator, freelance scholar and artist. She received a BA of photography from university of Tehran in 2009 and MFA from University of Southern California in 2011. Before moving to United States, she contributed in many research projects including the Zan-Negaar, a feminist journal of
women studies in Persian; and translated a number of important theoretical texts on photography and visual arts such as *Critical Theory: A Very Short Introduction* by Stephen Eric Bronner. She writes on a vast array of subjects including gender studies and queer theory, sexual violence, world politics and arts and photography. Her film project *rial and tERROR*, a collage of pre-revolutionary Iranian TV commercials of U.S. products, Iranian 60’s Psychedelic rock music, pirated tapes of the 80’s American music videos illegally distributed in post-revolutionary Iran and home video footage was shown at Access Gallery in Vancouver as part of Encyclopedia Iranica and at *A Bomb, with Ribbon Around It* at Queens Museum, New York. An active artist, she exhibited at many art events around the world; from Lebanon and Morocco to Indonesia, Sweden and Mexico.

Her work is often politically charged; an inevitability to any Iranian artist who would want to address social and cultural aspects of life in Iran of recent decades. She comments on peculiarities of living in Iran of before and after revolution; but is specially interested in the cultural history of 80s in terms of impacts American lifestyle –and globalization in a broader sense- had on young Iranians who at the same time dealt with censorship and anti-West propaganda; and that how such unusual setting perplexed and at the same time motivated her generation. Her medium is mainly video art and performance.

---

Gelare Khoshgozaran and Pooneh Maghazehe share the same interest in interventionist art; however their approach is entirely different. To Gelareh notion of place is intrinsically political; in that regard her views are closer to that of theoreticians like Massey. Gelare’s unique situation enables her to speak from a standpoint that transcends her specificities and yet, she deals with her particular background in terms of political history of her country; hence her approach remains unique among Iranian artists who address diaspora and politics. In her works she reveals the otherwise invisible links that connect histories of America and Iran through examining places of political importance; embassies, convention centers and public spaces. The artworks discussed in the third chapter under the show *The Flirtatious Pirouette of the Artist Around His Subject* (2012), such as *Double Blindfold* (an artist book), *Vis-à-vis* (video art) and her recent performance at Washington convention center, *Woahoho* (2012) conceptualize her relationship with places as a spectator; one that exists and witnesses but is also actively engaged in the space by inserting her body. She makes several references in her works to the sociopolitical atmosphere she grew up in, her encounter with American pop culture and her queer identity which are all rich with historical and cultural anecdotes that relate to her practice in a liberal way; in other words, in her art she belongs to the host culture as much as she does to her own. Without one, the other is impossible; hence her identity is not defined in opposition to or denial of neither culture.

While I was researching to develop initial sketches of this study, my emphasis was on those artists who dealt with place as a concept I saw very much absent in reviews written on Iranian contemporary art. I personally dealt with and wondered about
implications of traveling as an international student, hence sought theories which in comparison to existing rhetoric of globalization, space, place and geography were more inclusive and precise. To write on art of minorities (or Iranian diasporic art) I leaned more on theories which deal with social implications; and my search guided me to Marc Augé, who as an anthropologist analyzes space and place in context of human interaction; a context I saw fit for my research. Doreen Massey’s extensive research on shifting identities of places inspired me to a great degree as I believe art in terms of social practice has an immense potential to address in a positive way the subtleties of life in contemporary context of displaced identities and geographies. I have been stunned and pleased to know that there is such a growing trajectory of artworks and scholarly writings on place; part of which I benefited from, including but not confined to Doreen Massey’s important ideas on geography, Jacques Ranciere’s illuminating notes on spectatorship, Jean-Francois Lyotard’s illustrative book on postmodernity and most importantly, the French anthropologist Marc Augé’s theory of non-places which was the initial inspiration to think and write about embodiments of place in Iranian art.

Written in 1990s, Augé’s accounts of a major shift in notions of space and place in times of Supermodernity reveal an alteration in understanding places at the turn of the century. He explains alterations of human interaction under a global economy which tends to produce identical commodities, identical spaces and homogenized rituals which signify no social interaction. Non-places lean on delegation; mechanisms which minimalize socialization and substitute it with procedures (e.g. stand behind the red line, press the green button), signs and words. In a Supermodern world, Modern cosmology is
vanished by presence of identical “non-places” where signs have substituted places. In Baudrillard’s words, simulacra have substituted any tangible presence of the real. However, the complexity of post-modern spatiality seems to be neglected in Augé’s accounts. In fact, the nature of socialization has changed, but it has not vanished. The integrity he assumes to concepts of space and place leaves differences of social class and gender out of the discourse of non-places.

Massey’s accounts go further to portray changes in theories of space and place; which have to do with departing from a literal spatiality to a complex social and political concept of place. Space to Augé holds a specifically anthropological meaning; one that is bare of any political significance where there are traces of human interaction and most importantly, where there is a cosmos of human relations. Massey redefines space not as a neutral entity devoid of time and unable to change- as theorists like Laclu suggest- but more as an all-encompassing social network of human interaction. Spatiality then means sociability, a connected network of small interactions which relate territories to each other beyond borders or locations. Elsewhere she includes identity of places in her discussion to which I frequently return in this study. Again, she defines identity of places as social and political. In her views global politics affect the nature of places and formation of communities; but inversely, socializing also shapes places, and consequently, local and global politics. Therefore, places do not exist as autonomous with predetermined attributes, but they are in flux by social groups inhabiting them. This, I believe, is a very fluid, dialectical approach to places which redefines concepts of locality, belonging and nationality; all of which concern artists I will discuss in other chapters.
But what Auge suggests to be the problematic is less the absence of the real than it is the illusion of freedom of access implied by administrative processes of non-places. The French term for non-places, non-lieu, connotes the pressure traveler feels to prove her/his innocence; that is to say she/he must provide systems of administration with evidence of her/his eligibility to enter non-places. Etymologically, implications of proving innocent lying in the term were primary reason for me to use it in my discussion to describe pressures immigrants feel when at embassies, border patrols or any space that is built to authorize movement. By further elaborating on spaces created by a capitalist economy, I argue that the postmodern world is not as democratic in offering opportunities as is implied; and that in reality the inequality of geographical and locational access dramatically changes the experience of movement to those social groups who do not control “the power geometry.” 11 This is the departures point from which artists discussed deal with their status and transcend traditional understanding of “home” and “locality.

To better portray the ways in which diasporic art creates new stories and potentials, I frequently refer to Arjun Appadurai’s Modernity at Large, a book I found extremely illustrative in its offering of a thorough and yet optimistic account of globalization. In this book Appadurai explains that due to globalized economy, citizens in every part of the world have technology at hand at their homes; and with technology comes the hegemonic culture. Nevertheless, consumers of American pop culture have always tailored it to suit their needs, and from their nuanced little narratives new visions and dreams proliferated in a unique and unprecedented way. Such is true about Iranians

who devastated by aftermath of revolution, war and internal conflicts, dreamed of
different ways of life, new forms of democracy and freedom. In the same way,
immigrants who deal with non-places insert their numerous visions by making small
modifications which sometimes lead to visible changes in administrative procedures.
Appadurai emphasizes that not only there is plurality of visions, but also consequences of
such visions are more than ever visible.\footnote{Arjun Appadurai, \textit{Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization} (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis press, 1996), 7.}

Ironically enough, the "unreal" world of Internet for instance, created some of the
most real social upheavals of the century. For the purposes of this study, I refer to 2009
post-election events earlier discussed; series of demonstrations that followed the election
and few years after that were in fact organized through social networking, and by young
people who were not led by a charismatic leader (radically different when compared to
events of revolution of 1979).

In this study I use the terms space and place in an anthropological sense; however
my intention is not to postulate the two as binaries. Instead, I use the two with necessarily
fluid, indeterminist and dialectical implications.

When discussing space and place, particularly with regard to minorities and
differences, time remains an essential element. To discuss queer identities and ethnic
differences, it is important to notice that they live in a different time frame; one that
exists despite of seemingly organic temporality which is linked to heterosexual dominant
culture. Benefiting from Halberstam’s ideas, I elaborate on works of Gelare
Khoshgozaran in relation to a temporality of the invisible, or those inhabiting fringes of society; one that does not involve sequential order of childhood, adulthood, marriage and childrearing. Rather, I refer to a temporality that exists to the immigrant, and to the queer, that could be explained as extended adulthood, and in relation to unsettlement and transience. The artists in this research do not view time as central and stagnant to their lives, neither do they see place merely as home and locale.

Since the speed and limit of accessing places (hence passing of time) is directly affected by social and class differences, the immigrant’s temporality is directly related to her position in social strata. The experience of time to expatriates is above anything else a matter of past in relation to transience of present.

The study however does not aim to -and obviously cannot- include all trends of contemporary Iranian art in diaspora, but to review and analyze examples of artistic attempts to address displacement, solitude and incongruity from a lesser seen standpoint. In a world where the borders are rapidly shrinking and yet the social gaps are widening as much, such experiences- as it is implied in following chapters- are not limited to travelers; rather encompass citizens in every part of the world, and in this case Tehran as departure point where tides of globalization constantly disturb attempts to define locality.
Chapter 1: Spectator, Traveler, Immigrant

…Movement adds the particular experience of a form of solitude and, in the literal sense, of “taking up a position”; the experience of someone who, confronted with a landscape he ought to contemplate, cannot avoid contemplating, “strikes the pose”, and drives from his awareness of this attitude a rare and sometimes melancholy pleasure.13

American roads are fascinating in the way they offer a very neat inclusive view of what the United States as a country has to offer: multi-nationality, diversity, and exquisite scenery. Once on the road, signs tell us where we are and what we should expect to experience. It takes a while to realize those gorgeous ponds are in fact big holes filled with water after coal mines were abandoned; and with inter-state loops going around towns, there is no way to find out if there are stones in Lithopolis.14 Roads, airports, chain supermarkets and subways as postmodern spaces we use on a daily basis are very much shaped via delegation; and that sets forward the question of what being a spectator means in relation to places.

The unprecedented proliferation of theories of place in fields of anthropology and geography as well as arts provides myriads of new possibilities to articulate subtleties of movement in social terms, however, it goes without saying that the discussion of space and place in the face of global changes of recent decades is of an ambiguous and complex nature. Rather than focusing on etymological and philosophical ramifications of space and place, I focus here on multi-faceted role of spectator as our experiences of movement and interaction with places are to a great extent contingent on our individualities.

14 Lithopolis is a village in Fairfield and Franklin counties in the U.S. state of Ohio.
It seems crucial to include non-place as an important neologism to explore movement in a postmodern setting and to describe spaces that are direct products of globalization. In that regard Auge’s neologism is beneficial to my discussion in conveying implications of proving innocent and anxieties resulted by controlling gaze of administration; however I do not concur with Auge in his polarization of places and non-places; neither do I dichotomize space and place. Postulating space and place as binaries prevents fluidity of meaning and possible interaction between the two concepts because one should necessarily be what the other is not, as it is the nature of binaries. Hence a binary of space-place defines place as locale and necessarily positive- one that is reminiscent of home and is bound by locationality- versus space as spatial, lacking temporality and dynamism, hence necessarily negative or neutral. Therefore I follow Massey’s argument to “release the spatial from the realm of the dead”;¹⁵ that is to say, spatial does not evoke neutrality, but it implies social interactions on a broader level, interactions that go beyond locations and encompasses places. In that sense places do not refer to locations, but they are signified by socializing. Home as a place is characterized by people who inhabit it rather than where it is located, and space is a network of places, hence implies connectivity. The problematic of binaries in this particular case is bilateral; on one hand viewing places as limited to locations means they are stagnant and unchanging, albeit evoke barren nostalgia - and as Pooneh Maghazehe (chapter 3) shows in her art, Negetivist nostalgia - which in turn leads to dogmatic nationalism; and on the other, seeing space as lacking any social significance excludes potential of space as flux

and contingent on human intervention. In case of Iranian contemporary art, it is useful—even liberating—to discuss space and place as dialectical. Such approach provides both artist and the audience with new possibilities to rethink the concept of belonging without the need to confine it to locations, geographies and countries.

The artworks discussed in next chapters elaborate on the active role of spectator in addressing differences that are omitted by a homogenizing culture of established norms. I aim to picture immigration/migration in relation to non-places as important in shaping social interactions and consequently; contemporary trends of art. What follows is a brief account of crucial theories that help clarify aspects of social art practice that are identified with activating liminal spaces of postmodern non-places to include difference—be it ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. Artists discussed in following chapters address such issues sometimes by disrupting the rhythm of normative administrating processes and other times through manipulation of conventional structure of public spaces. Therefore notions of space and place are discussed in relation to a different rhythm of time to portray the ways in which incongruity challenges systems of administration as representatives of dominant norms.

Non-places, Place and Space

The term “non-place” (French: Non-Lieux) was first coined by the French anthropologist Marc Augé to describe places with certain neutrality; public places that are entirely super-modern products of an increasingly market-oriented world which shrink human relations to mechanisms of sign and code. Marc Augé deals with supermodern situation as a state of solitude; He defines supermodernity as beyond modernity, where
certain definitions of place, space and movement have so dramatically changed that they are hardly associable with any anthropological structure. Modern rhetoric in return, Augé suggests, provides the visitor of places with “cosmology”, a word he uses referring to Proust’s À la recherche du temps perdu (In Search of Lost Time). He borrows Proust’s “philosophy of Combray” to articulate how words build a universe in which one locates himself/herself in the world through images produced by language; a linguistic feature that makes it possible for humans to relate to one another’s experiences.16

Place to Augé therefore is anthropological; it is where people interact to combine space (as locational) and place (as social) to form a cosmos. In that sense, history is included in the concept of space, and places find mythological meaning parallel to their everyday functionality. While non-places are systematic, implicit, and absolutely consumable, places call for physical act of “passing”, for remembering what their significance religiously, ritually, socially and historically is and what living in them implies in a contemporary frame. This is a dialectical relationship that exists through a constant fraction of “being there” and “never being there”, as the act of passing by itself is both objective and subjective. The act of seeing locates us as parts of the experience of landscapes due to our limited human vision, and therefore we can only experience glances of the scenes while we translate them to words by our subjective gaze.

Once passed through the subjective gaze, airports, chain stores, subways and highways lack the characterizing features of landscapes, hence the process of visiting

---

16 In his book, Proust uses Philosophy of Combray to refer to Françoise the cook’s particular ideology of the world; in relation to my discussion, it could be read as a personal adaptation of the world.
works in reverse. They do not suggest any identifiable spatial significance, and therefore no past or future, while their interiors tend to manifest certain integrating features bereft of any spatial specificity. They are simply passages by which one leaves his/her characteristics behind and enters as part of a general shared identity of “traveler” or “customer”, but are by no means neutral. Our understanding of non-places begins not by scenes, but by words; they define, shape and indicate human relations to place and space by ads, banners; signs (e.g. take the right-hand lane) and signs are themselves administrated in a hierarchy (e.g. financed by ministry of transportation). Therefore travelling on highways, or any other non-place, we “read landscapes rather than seeing them”.17

On another level, the myth produced by words accompanied by glossy photos creates banal non-places; made up worlds that do not break mythical-functional binary of space-place, but create one. Leaflets advertising an ideal life in United States that applicants, waiting to be interviewed, are provided with at American embassies, promising images of happy good looking people spending their vacation at a secluded resort or words depicting safe, luxurious and enjoyable flight present manufactured worlds to imply certain perception of reality that suits economical purposes. Accordingly, words vary based on consumers of non-places: at airports they take a masculine tone to convey prototype figure of prestigious passenger; in supermarkets they changes to create images of a desirable life to mostly feminine consumers.

As Augé shows, people at non-places are stripped of their distinguishing human characteristics; they exist at such places in presence of certain social agreements that encourage isolation: they use machines, credit cards or passports in procedures through which neither customers/travelers nor people at service exchange words (or do so only when necessary). Here Augé refers to etymological implications of the term. In French *non-lieu* (non-place) is used at courts when there is no ground for prosecution, albeit implies Innocence: one needs to prove innocent (true to non-social agreements of non-places) to enter as passengers, with no signifying social attachments except their general existence as consumers of non-places. Augé sees non-places as growing inside places by which modernity once identified, and therefore totalitarian in their manipulation of human relations. However, as Ranciere points out, the spectator is never fully passive and subject to domination, neither is the traveler/customer as spectators of non-places. The choices spectator/traveler makes on a trip, taking photographs, buying from duty-free shops and picking a spot to seat and wait, are all ways in which people take the chance to act outside of a sequential predetermined order; therefore any personifying mundane act at non-places is a reaction towards being the object of spectating.

*Space and Place in Relation to Postmodernity*

A traveler’s experience is in fact an accumulation of scenes and names which imply absence of places. The spectator is bound by his/her limitations, and therefore the relationship between what he sees and what exists is of a transient nature; in that regard traveler’s space translates as *Places of memory* in contrast to Modernist idea of places as

---

integrated. Elaborating on fleeting nature of places, Auge discusses Chateaubriand’s accounts of travel arguing that unlike his emphasis on the journey to be historic, he does not follow any particular historic objective; rather writes out of the urge to talk about himself as a traveler, and to locate his presence in a moment of transience. The more the traveler tries to capture a permanent sense of places, the more he/she entrenches the gap of here and now with then and there. As Ranciere puts it, *it is precisely the desire to abolish the distance that creates distance*.20

Postmodern places exist as a trajectory of classified spaces and by absence of social interaction, they reinforce individuality and solitude.21 The question here is how is it possible to transcend neutrality of non-places? While Auge mentions De Certeau’s accounts on *invention of the everyday* as opening new ways to engage with places, he polarizes place to space;22 while former never vanishes, latter is never complete. By postulating polarities Auge emphasize the ephemerality of the two that can be actively addressed by practice of everyday life. Hence the experience of traveling above anything else is about contemplating on one’s presence as spectator.

Emergence of proliferating non-places in everyday lives marks the increasing presence of administration in everyday routine. It can be said that the contemporary

---

22 Augé, Non-places: *Introduction to An Anthropology of Supermodernity*, 79.
traveler/spectator is more than ever an object of spectacle himself; his presence within non-places of airports and roads only reinforce his existence as an object inside a system of passage that is designed to direct him through delegated scenes and experiences. These increasingly growing spaces in urban life can be viewed as extensions of Modern passages and glass-and-iron architecture that were admired by Modernists such as Walter Benjamin, now embodied as independent spaces which dominate existence of their users.

It is important to examine the ways in which consumers of non-places nuance limitations, possibilities and novelties offered to them by the very administrative and propagandist systems that characterize spaces of postmodernity. It is precisely the ubiquity of consumer culture that brings so much diversity to the ways of interaction with non-places and the myths of desirable life.

In Modernity at Large, Appadurai explores the flip side of globalization in relation to technologies that in 80s and 90s became available to many. Unlike what most critics of mass culture predicted to be the case, not only human interaction not vanished, but also it turned to have more than ever visible consequences in all religious, spiritual and social terms. If Modernity called for the need of charismatic individuals to move people’s imagination, now every person had visions of a different way of life that connected them as communities; in other words the accessibility of media and images overturned social equations in a much smaller span of time and created new opportunities based on connected differences. It is important to note that migration as the most prominent embodiment of movement was a direct product of ordinary people’s

\[23\] ibid, 87.
imagination. Through the very systems of sign and imagery that Auge sees as creating banal non-places, everybody became aware of possible lifestyles that they would not know of otherwise. In fact the ubiquity of American-or Western- mass culture in homes of many in other less-privileged countries and adversities of life under pressurizing circumstances created the clandestine pleasure of dreaming of a better life that eventually gave way to movement on a much broader scale, that is migration. As more people leave their homes in search of better jobs, better education and wealth, they carry with them, change and alter the initial imagined opportunities they sought, and there emerges *diasporas of hope, diasporas of terror, and diasporas of despair.*

As Appadurai correctly notes, imagination no longer belongs solely to the realm of art, myth and ritual, but it is practiced in ordinary people’s everyday lives. Therefore space and place find meaning by agency of their postmodern spectators and in part by cultural consumption of images and words. This is not to say however, that the possibilities plurality of imagination provides are necessarily liberating, as freedom is a *rather more elusive commodity.*

**Politics of Geographical Access and Minorities**

Cosmos of a contemporary city involves a great amount of localized adoptions of various ethnicities and cultures (Chinese, Thai, Palestinian supermarkets) and everything we consume is produced within a broad vicinity of countries. Place, as an anthropological concept, now more than ever implies mobility and communication, thus ramifications of

---

26 Ibid.
movement encompass the contemporary cities as much as the airports, to which gender/ethnicity based presumptions are constantly applied.27

A brief touch on Foucault’s ideas on power in relation to architecture helps clarify problematic of viewing space and place as isolated; as concepts that exist as autonomous entities to which predetermined notions are applicable. In his interview with Paul Rainbow, Foucault discusses the architectural places designed to have liberating functions, stating that architecture by itself cannot pre-determine liberating or socially determined features; in other words places are woven into spaces by social practice:

I do not think that there is anything that is functionally – by its very nature – absolutely liberating. Liberty is a practice. So there may, in fact, always be a certain number of projects whose aim is to modify some constraints, to loosen, or even to break them, but none of these projects can, simply by its nature, assure that people will have liberty automatically, that it will be established by the project itself.28

To address the reverse functions places can adapt when seen in light of predetermined binaries (liberating vs limiting), Foucault discusses some of Le Corbusier’s and Godin’s public projects as architects whose vision was to design buildings in line with their ideals of liberty. Using Godin’s Familistère as example, Foucault explains its primary objective to be a place for workers to practice their autonomy and freedom, whereas in fact it is designed in an internally concentrated shape which allows no one to enter or leave without being noticed (fig. 7).29

---

29 During, “Michel Foucault: Space, Power and Knowledge,” 136.
Foucault argues that the building by itself does not cause discomfort as long as its habitants do not intend to use it to control one another. As long as places are not used in compliance with what they were initially intended, their functionality reverses to the opposite, as in case of the Familistère, it could easily be used as a prison. This is to say that place is created not just through “frequenting space”, but mainly through establishment of social provisions which decide the fate of places. So is true in case of non-places as locations in which systems of power delegate to shape our level of social interaction and the desire to travel or to buy via the complex system of signs and images we are accustomed to read; therefore the discriminating administrative systems controlling non-places betray their seeming neutrality.

Foucault’s portrayal of functions of architecture in light of social relations leads to understanding places in line with specificities of social groups. With availability of traveling facilities, the idea of taking a trip to various countries is not far-fetched, neither is the picture of walking on streets of Paris or Cape Town. However, crossing borders or walking on streets (at late hours of night or at certain neighborhoods) is never the same for people of different social status. Such limitations rise from strictly heterosexual societies within which unwritten agreements and red lines exist beyond civil legislations. The legislations by themselves are products of enacted social interactions that define clear limits for each civilian’s and every alien resident’s accessibility. Hence the existing social pattern in every society –specifically in relation to global politics- could radically transform experiences of movement to different travelers.
In the chapter *A Place Called Home* Massey deals with implications of locale and home in relation to feelings of displacement. She suggests that spatiality in our times has gone through major shifts that in turn are caused by a radically different pattern of communication. In light of recent changes, previously existing modes of coherency and locality are no longer relevant (although she correctly argues that there never was a coherency or stagnancy to notion of place or space). She points out the ubiquity of the prefix “post” which by itself suggests uncertainty about positive nature of the new circumstances. Discussing economic changes, she argues that despite the dominancy of phrases such as “local businesses”, “decentralization” and “small firms”, major businesses still rule the market.\(^\text{30}\) Instead of importing raw material from third world countries to produce commodities, these countries now have become a new market and a new ground to establish industries due to obvious advantages of cheap labor.

Such conditions have given way to a new scale of social interactions that encompass a much broader space. Not only power relations have changed, but also capitalist patterns of production have been exported to far reaching countries. The result is an omnipresent dominant mode of global trade which in turn produces models of consumption and hierarchy of service, but is also recipient of new modes of consumption that are injected to it by other ends of the market.

With invasion of locale by mentioned modes of trade, the concepts of home and origin also have altered. An unprecedented space-time compression means to feel belonged to any geographical territory, but it also could mean retrograde approaches to

\(^{30}\) Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minnesota: Minnesota Press, 1994), 158.
expatriates’ origins. The reactionary stance intrigued by these changes has given way to overt nationalism, and attempts to reclaim control over a seemingly lost sense of place. Applying the word “community” to every group of minorities, as Halberstam mentions referring to Jean Luc Nancy’s “The inoperative Community”, has to do with a nostalgia for once again gathering under a unifying, life giving notion that once implied national pride and is now lost. In that regard reactionary nostalgic approaches give way to the most conservative political agendas.31 Such conservatism is very obvious among some of Iranian diasporic communities who often identify themselves with a romanticized, idealized image of ancient Persian Empire before Islam was introduced to Persia. Such approach tends to eliminate parts of history in favor of an idealist narration of home; terms such as “pure Persian” that are often used by some Iranian expatriates are symptomatic of nationalist radicalism that give way to racist behavior.

Furthermore, it would be a misconception to think of place and community as the same. Every place has in it a history of overlapping communities, while many communities have not necessarily gathered around the same spatiality. Massey notes that the concept of home has never been unmediated to begin with.32 To immigrants, home finds meaning only when left behind; it is through the trajectory of shared nostalgic imagery that melancholic sentiments suddenly surface. When at home, what everybody feels or thinks does not necessarily revolve around the same identifying processes or shared emotions.

---

31 Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 167.
32 Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 168.
Massey’s argument reveals yet another interesting aspect of much expressed fears of “invasion of globalization” and the melancholy for locale. Referring to the rhetoric that laments the loss of control and dislocation in face of postmodernity, she states that such worries rise from an elite and even colonialist standpoint. Just as a new time-space compression is not available to all even in the first world countries- one can think of those commuting for hours to get to work and wait at stations even more to take a train back home- having control over locale has never been available to all except a minority of elites. Hence those nations who have been colonized have long felt the threat of displacement and delocalization. Massey concludes that the notion of home, quoting bell hooks, is much different for colonized.33

Another minority who are primarily associated with the notion of home are women. As previously mentioned, home is often described by those being away; but as Massey argues, in the past those have prominently been males associating an unchanging image of home with mothers, wives and in general, women who had to stay behind. Citing Wilson, Massey continues that in smaller vicinities, such as small towns, women were controllable, and posed no threat to men. It was moving to major cities that made it incredibly difficult to bound women to the ever-present, never changing image of home, which explains how presence of women on streets was against societal norms from the very beginning, and disrupting such norms- that is urban life- challenged patriarchy. What is here deciphered is that geography moves in line with changing social power relations; and with those, meanings of locality change. In light of Massey’s argument

concepts of home and belonging can be articulated with feminist, anti-colonialist and
democratic approaches, albeit it allows including social groups who otherwise would be
absent in the discourse.

Building on transience of geography, Massey discusses identity of places through
the lens of social interactions. With space considered in relation to time and as
encompassing all human interactions in different geographies, she concludes that place is
a *particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location*.34 Such
definition makes it possible to see the role of minorities in a more subjective way. The
identity of places albeit is shaped not based on a territorial indication, but through
positive cultural exchange with others. Such reading of places challenges the
conventional notion of home as secure and stable. Instead of viewing places as the center
points of our identities which only find meaning by negating others’, this approach offers
a liberating way to think implications of belonging, particularly to minorities whose
presence in social arenas is constantly opposed by binary presumptions of “us” and
“them”, “national” and “international”, “citizen” and “resident”. To artists discussed in
this study, the fluidity of identity of places becomes the departure point to initiate a
dialogue with their audience from their transnational status. It is only through an
exchange with the outside that places find identities. In that regard, these artists transcend
determination of locational boundaries and certain geographies. To accept a relational
identity to places in turn means to visualize indetermination of personal identity, and
consequently allowing uncertainty to be a permanent part of our experiences. Needless to

---
34 Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minnesota: Minnesota Press, 1994), 166.
say, such approach requires a considerable flexibility in conceptualizing who we are beyond conventional norms of homeland, nationality and normativity.

_Time-space Compression and Temporality of Minorities_

The knowledge of and ability to use online maps and interconnecting systems differs from person to person based on their level of control over administrative mechanisms; a situation Massey describes as having control over “power geometry”.³⁵ If we imagine maps as modified based on how far each social group’s reach can go in terms of crossing geographical territories, the result renders Massey’s intended use of power geometry. Accordingly, there are policies to control limits of time-space compression upon which certain classifications of human movement are defined.³⁶ For example, the amount of documents visa applicants are required to provide differs from region to region: American travelers can obtain visa at border agencies upon travelling to other countries while for many Asian countries and U.S residing non-Americans traveling entails a daunting process: applying for an appointment at the embassies some of which are located in a country other than applicant’s country of residence, standing in long lines to be interviewed, preparing a stack of documents and waiting for months-sometimes for years- to be granted with permission to enter other countries. The idea of moving across the borders is therefore a type of space-time compression not available to all; quite in contrary to the advertised image of the happy passenger which is mostly created to generate a coherent sense of time and space or an illusion of equal opportunities for all. Massey further explains geometries of space by positing those who are in move

³⁵ Doreen Massey, _Space, Place and Gender_ (Minnesota: Minnesota Press, 1994),149
³⁶ Massey, _Space, Place and Gender_,141.
physically in contrast to those who have access to geometrical movement. Refugees who take extreme risks of traveling in boats packed with hundreds of others only to cross borders have a different perception of time compared to most of the people for whom traveling basically means sitting in planes and getting off at the other end of the ocean.

It is important to note that Massey’s intended argument of unequal time-space compression is not merely to make a moral point; rather she emphasizes the contingency of every person’s level of access on the other. One needs to understand geographies of access as interrelated; with one’s increasing access to certain facilities of movement, others’ actively decreases. For instance with every person owning a car, others lose the possible advantage of public transportation. Same is true about global politics of geography. To quote Massey, “*The 747 that fly computer scientists across the Pacific are part of the reason for the greater isolation today of the island of Pictcairn.*” Massey refers to geography and spatial embodiment of human territories explaining that unlike claims in 70s that space was merely social, Massey points out the nationwide restructurings of 80s as a sociopolitical transformation that proved otherwise. Therefore, geography is not solely an outcome of social change; it is a source of change in the way that any geographical territorial manipulation will dramatically change the population and social life of that territory.

In the same way, Massey sees places as absolutely political. She argues against theorists’ efforts to depoliticize space, quoting Laclau: “*spatiality means coexistence*

---

37 Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minnesota:Minnesota Press, 1994), 150.
within a structure that establishes the positive nature of all its terms". She criticizes Laclau’s definition of spatial notion for detaching space from any dynamism that can cause surprises. For Laclau, any changing structure is “temporal”, and therefore space (as stagnant) stands in opposition to time (as transient). An exploration of the overlapping relations of space and place and their sociopolitical connotations will include the role of various groups of minorities to further articulate their contribution to and relationship with postmodern places (or non-places).

By introducing the concept of time-space compression, Massey shows that an all-inclusive definition of temporality is a product of patriarchal mechanisms which exclude alternate lifestyles that exist mainly on fringes of societies; these minorities as Halberstam argues include not only people of different gender orientation, but also every person that risks to live beyond predetermined contours of the social class or subculture he/she is associated with. The clear yet implicit social lines that keep certain minorities from entering or limit their presence at certain neighborhoods, towns, public places or in case of my discussion, non-places, as Halberstam suggests are in fact produced by the same old social constructs that protect privileged members of society (rich, male, white) from everyone else.

Halberstam notes that we assume time to progress naturally, albeit forget the underlying structure to it. Just as assuming a static nature to space (versus time) camouflages existing hegemonic political and social constructions, assuming a natural

---

38 Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 252.
40 Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 7.
flow to time dismisses the fact that it is gendered and sexualized just as much. On another note she reveals that rendering inherently discriminating systems as organic and natural has been for long a way to justify capitalism.

In the last chapter of In a Queer Time and Place, Halberstam discusses queer subcultures and minorities in relation to space and time, supporting a different perception of temporality among queer people which questions heterosexual norms of time that are postulated as applicable to all. Such nonnormative understanding of time provides new possibilities to understand temporality of minorities.

As Halberstam discusses, in Western cultures the prolonged healthy life is posited against the life cut short by unhealthy habits or lifestyles that involve risk. In that sense, subcultures who take the risk to incarnate their particular visions of a desirable lifestyle inevitably fall victim of the same normative structures that weed out differences in favor of a coherent society. The dominant patterns of time, e.g. childhood, adulthood, marriage, child birth, are advertised as the desirable allocation of human’s life span. Queer time disrupts the binary image of childhood versus adulthood by opposing the conventional divisions of stages of life. While not all queer people live radically different with heterosexual people, the idea of a prolonged adulthood which does not include childrearing, dedication to home and family or a financially stable life breaks the conventional linear pattern of temporality. In such nonlinear pattern, subcultures experience transient, extrafamilial, and oppositional modes of affiliation. A different

---

41 Ibid.
temporality then has to do with challenging eradication of differences by dominant culture in terms of questioning stereotypes. By overgeneralizing diversity, members of numerous subcultures are branded as just different, or as the “other”. Corporation of clichés therefore neutralizes differences, reducing all subcultures to a single prototype or just one agreed upon way for being “gay”, “Middle Eastern”, “Muslim” or “Ethnic”. It can be added to Halberstam’s argument that stereotypes are results of a capitalist market that tends to commodify and generate differences into presentable units. These units are bought by consumers of mass culture and are incorporated in the overall texture of society. In this regard, queer temporality is a conscious and active way of \textit{challenging hegemony through style rather than simply through overt ideological articulations}.\textsuperscript{43}

Concluding above, Halberstam’s and Massey’s ideas regarding temporality provide possibilities to contextualize art of subcultures; particularly social art practice that has to do with occupying-rather claiming- spaces which exclude minorities by intervening or interrupting normative processes of these spaces. At the same time, their accounts provide an opportunity to articulate differences from the standpoint of the different, the queer, and the ethnic.

By coining the term non-places, Augé sums up the postmodern experience in its transiency, instability and ephemeral temporality. His notion of traveling and movement renders contemporary human’s stance as much subjective as being the object of delegating systems which reinforce feelings of solitude. However, his definition of

\textsuperscript{43} Halberstam, \textit{In a Queer Time and Place},159.
supermodernity as a state beyond the cosmology by which Modernism identified remains oblivious to possibilities, diversities and human connections of supermodernity.

Outside of the realm of anthropology however, non-places find much broader implications. As international policies affect people of different ethnicities and sexual orientation, they in turn affect non-places by their unique visions, needs and characteristics, modifying them as part of a new cosmology of postmodern.
Chapter 2: Pooneh Maghazehe and Poetics of Displacement

The Brooklyn based artist Pooneh Maghazehe was born in New York the same year the Iranian revolution took place (1979). With the first groups of immigrants leaving the country, notions of displacement and movement became an inseparable part of Iranian collective memory while the dramatic shifts of economy on a global scale caused the world that Pooneh Maghazehe grew up in to alter rapidly in line with the political shifts in her country of origin. Life in diasporic communities was no longer confined to geographical territories they thrived in, but it was and is more than ever about volatility, connectivity and differences.

Maghazehe received a BS of Biobehavioral Health from Penn State (2001), MS in interior architecture from Pratt institute (2005) and MFA from Columbia University (2011) before beginning her career as an artist. She deals with specificities of personal in reciprocation with social, reflecting the transience of immigrant/traveler’s status.

Four Positions

Maghazehe’s trajectory of installation pieces and performance art demonstrates her engagement with those aspects of everyday life which sum up and reveal the incoherency that lies in life of a traveler and her constant efforts to bridge the gap of incongruity. Her collaboration with This Red Door residency is probably one of exemplary pieces in manifesting her interests and her activation of liminal urban spaces.

Created by three American artists- Jomar Statkun, Jared Friedman, and Christopher Stackhouse- This Red Door residency is an art space based on diversity of social practice which aims to *expand terms and conditions that may define ‘studio*
practice’. Set in dynamic art scene of cosmopolitan Berlin, it provides a space “behind the red door” within which a community of artists, filmmakers, lecturers and writers frequently gather to ponder upon and comment on world politics, economy and “social capital”. As inferred from the founders’ mission statement, the projects at the residency more than anything else deal with active engagement in art as an act of social intervention which encompasses political issues as much as personal reflections beyond the conventional gallery settings.

Photos documenting her performance piece “Four Positions” (Fig. 8) at This Red Door show the artist performing series of acrobatic movements hanging above, over or under pieces of furniture and disposable containers. Her moves are spontaneous and her body seems to be on the verge of collapse; yet her endurance in maintaining balance is reminiscent of the subtle fragility of life amidst the chaos of empty water bottles and leftovers of fast-food around. The fences in the background seemingly separate an urban park from the cement floor on which the piece is happening; yet they imply partial visibility of what otherwise would be a wall- an element conveying a sense of home. Here feeling at home is both present and absent- present through subtly implied walls and absent by the porous look of the fences. Together with the cold-looking cement, they inspire a feeling of caginess and insecurity. As the overall look of the setting upon which she performs conveys instability and risk, the recurring objects- the chair and raggedy mattress- (seen in her other installation pieces) demonstrate parts of a petite history as the most stable and present component in life of the immigrant/traveler. Objects of belonging

---

she engages with carry memories of inhabiting places; hence in life of a wandering traveler objects replace physicality of familiar places. Stains of spilled coffee, the spotted mattress and a brick placed on artist’s back as she is balancing on a piece of furniture, not only mark passing of time but also become where memories linger and substitute the literal sense of home altogether. Her moves are attached to a reinforced yet unfulfilled desire to belong; a desire which resists fading and yet alters inevitably. The use of reoccurring objects integrates artist’s body in a temporary cosmos of lived moments - the only cosmos known to dwellers of contemporary urban space. It is within the big cities where the immigrant composes poetics of concurrent desires and failures.

Just as walking in Berlin or any other major city for that matter involves taking a break at Starbucks or wandering in malls which house hundreds of major businesses, the notion of place is inevitably and increasingly linked to numerous non-places; but it is as much influenced by locale, albeit it has become increasingly multi-layered. Non-places Pooneh Maghazehe addresses in her art resist characterization; but the concept of locality by itself does, too. What we inhabitants of places consider local is constantly changing with global, so much so that any fixated definition of places becomes impossible. In that sense, locale is not a static coherent concept limited to geographical territories or borders; it entails cultural novelties any traveler brings to the place he/she dwells in.

The other side of not belonging can be a shift of literality of borders, maps and the locale to a much more fluid sense of place which in Maghazehe’s art is embodied in the movement itself. The multinational traveler no longer drives her rootedness from a certain geographical territory; rather she builds her own spatial reality through lived
moments and in that sense, she carries her unique universe as she inhabits places of temporary stay.

**KEYNOTES [sic]**

In KEYNOTES (2012 Institute of Contemporary Art Philadelphia), Maghazehe along with German descent artist Nick Paparone (MFA, Columbia University 2011, BFA, Art Academy of Cincinnati 2003) take on human interaction through administrative systems of delegation at work in non-places (fig. 9). Their artistic strategy is simple yet highly eloquent: two pieces of black fabric hung on a gallery wall. The artists appear dragging with them two office-chairs; posit them in front of the fabrics and sit; pause for few moments; then Maghazehe rushes to the window-like black quadrangle shouting parts of a client’s monologue. She addresses the employee on inefficacy of administrative processes while artists take turn with Paparone shouting at the other window as the employee. In response to previous sentences, he gives instructions to prepare application files. In other parts of the performance footage the artists are seen joining together shouting to engage in a chaotic dialogue. The words heard are twisted and earsplitting and much of them are not audible which create a sense of discomfort and nerve wrecking unease. Artists’ body expression as they push against the wall and shout at the top of their lungs inspires miscommunication and unreachability.

With the use of black cloths artists activate the liminal space of empty gallery walls to windows at an office building; the two openings in the wall thus are symbolic voids barricading human interaction. The reference to administrative systems as dehumanizing is clear in this piece, which brings us back to the idea of hierarchy of
access to places. These assumed windows could be read as office spaces at embassies, or the airports or any other non-place where entrants are required to pass through procedures that are directly related to ethnicity, gender and other similar factors based on which the applicant’s level of access is decided. The two sides of the dialogue in KEYNOTES are incapable of communicating or breaking through the barrier of administration; in absence of a natural flow of human interaction, the black openings that are meant to allow access through the thick walls in fact keep the voices from being heard and the faces from being seen. Systems of delegation at work at non-places not only not facilitate connectivity, but also become a problem on their own. In line with expansion of airports, train stations, consulate offices and chain supermarkets where the freedom of access is vastly advertised, what is increasingly absent is freedom. The signs, long corridors, isles and glass walls substitute landscapes to limit the extent of users’ reach.

**Negetivists’ Stand In at Sleep Inn**

In series of digital prints of installations titled Negetivists’ Stand-in at Sleep Inn (2010); Maghazehe represents a bricolage of generic objects furnishing places of interim residence (fig. 10). The setting these hybrid objects are represented at -the inns- picture a turning point of American history when movement was synonymous to freedom and immateriality. With the rise of civil movement and legislations followed by it in late 1960s and adoption of a different life style by countercultures such as hippies, roads became symbolic of the idea of travelling as a core concept to the American ideals of freedom; in other words, living outside of the norms implied and observed by society was first and foremost embodied in movement. The state of being an expatriate where one’s
ethnicity and gender locate her among minorities on the other hand stands in sharp
contrast to the concept of movement as liberating; it is in fact more about limits than
freedom. The disconcerting gestalt of Pooneh’s objects reveal the inherently paradoxical
nature of migration parallel to the general sense of traveling as emancipating. As Doreen
Massey rightly suggests, accessing means or routs of commute and hence movement is
more a matter of ethnicity and gender than capital. While more people have access to
streets, roads, airports and means of public transportation thanks to a global economy,
such accession dramatically varies based on the social (and inevitably political) status
members of minorities hold within their respective societies and in relation to the world.
What Massey refers to as “time-space compression” or the spectrum and speed of access
to places is a variable notion contingent first and foremost on social power relations, and
in case of immigrants it is considerably affected by the political and social status of their
country of origin within global scene.

To Pooneh or any other woman of Middle Eastern descent traveling can never be
the same experience as it is for any other American citizen inasmuch as the sense of
belonging to a social structure is concerned. In Pooneh Maghazehe’s work the two sides
of a second generation immigrant become one to create an inhomogeneous sense of
presence at places of passage. As the immigrant and the citizen merge, the constant
struggle to reconcile the immigrant’s origins with a landscape of different hierarchy
culminates. The room and its occupant object render the impossibility of a final union of
the two particularly in non-places designed to subdue or rather camouflage differences.

---

45 Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press,
In these photos Pooneh Maghazehe documents the same objects—armchair, raggedy shreds of foam mattresses and empty plastic bottles—but this time they accompany assembled statues to represent a character she introduces as Negetivist. The giant assemblage of wooden boards and upholstery sits in settings of a generic hotel room with a flat screen TV where a framed photo of birds flying, china cups and cartons emerge amidst the mass. In one of the photos the figure appears sitting on the bed with what looks like a reproduction of Modern paintings hanging on the wall above, while in the other it is buried under objects of reminiscence and rags. The figure disappears altogether in some of the photos leaving the bits and pieces of household accessories dominating the bedroom. The low ceiling with fire alarms and subdued colored walls and curtains give an overall grim look which any passenger having spent a night at inns relates to; yet the Negetivist implies feelings of lonesome contemplation and nostalgia; or as the title suggests, hopeless attachment to a past that is fiercely invaded by indifference of the present. While the objects merge together and scatter to address an ever-present irony of unsettlement, they portray a character that is caught in the gap between home and a totally defamiliarized environment.

But these installations are not just about the intrinsic nostalgia of being away from home; they evoke the darker side of expatriation in the face of delegation where any representation of reality is strongly affected by a predefined system of representation; facing such a system the traveler is unable to embrace fragility and instability of the notion of belonging in forced or voluntary exile. In other words, Negetivists’ Stand In at Sleep Inn is the other side of the coin to Four Positions discussed above: While the
immigrant/traveler shifts the physicality of familiar places (homeland, country, hometown) to immateriality of lived moments (objects of everyday life), she/he may end up clinging to a past that grows more and more inaccessible. If Four Positions is a comment on living life on the edge, the Negetivist buried under a pile of personal belongings could be read as an elegy of failure in coming to terms with a new order of existence and retrograding to barren memories.

The Art Deco-style painting on the wall along with the TV, the bedside lamp and other objects of accommodation on the other hand, suggest homogenized standards of design or to borrow Appadurai’s ideas, the capitalist economy’s production of nostalgia in terms of generic objects that mimic certain points of history (in this case, history of art and design). These objects are exemplary of non-places as products of globalized economy; they are simulated productions of familiarity meant to represent identically packaged units of ideal but in fact they lead to no actual point of historical or personal reference.

The series of Negetivists' Stand In at Sleep Inn represent Melancholic musings of transitionality and concomitant isolation of being on the road; and the urge every immigrant feels to locate and redefine their dissonant presence within non-places. The chaotic looks of the objects in the way they occupy the room depict desperate efforts to translate delegated reality to spaces of intimate interaction.
Salt Prints

The fluidity of place in its social and interactive terms versus spatial or literal remains the core concept in Pooneh Maghazehe’s work. In series of salt prints (heliography) made in course of two years (2012-13) she experiments with terraces-rather silouetts of objects of belonging. Chairs, bed springs, pearl neckleces and Advil pills in these works leave geometric marks which could be read as portraits of the unknown owners (figs. 11-12). However, instead of rendering three dimensional reproductions, they record the actual presence of time plus belongings, hence a more anthropological sense of place than topographic with which space is destinguished as place. She writes:

These salt prints register the weight and shape of belongings recovered from pre-owned furniture, and most recently, parts of the actual sculpture. They render the literal passage of time, in effect, collapsing the critical distance between the dimensionality of object and photo.  

These objects are later seen in her sculptural works where belongigns reflect personal choices in confrontation with unfamiliarity and change; in that regard they reflect choices already made and places already lived. Prominent in each is their inevitable reference to place as lived moments where spatiality is translated to temporality.

Some of the prints have with them titles which further emphasize the link to the temporal presence that has affected objects of everyday life, and with which the subject creates a cosmos otherwise absent in built-up environements. Proper names (Eleni's Seat, Eleni's Armrest) reveal an individual cosmology of place with points of temporal

---

reference (e.g. Last Christmas) all of which build metaphorical images of place. Together these images portray objects as places of daily occurrence where life has happened. In them lie femininity, frustration, mundanity and personal beliefs and in short, specificity that is associated with the notion of home.

Pooneh Maghazehe’s contemplations in relation to her own unique status, and in a bigger picture, in relation to the status of contemporary traveler highlights post-modern human’s everlasting and almost ever-failing desire to return to a coherent notion of homeland which mainly exists as a sensational image of the real; and to which any actual return is almost always impossible. On the other hand, her narration of spectatorship renders movement as an entirely different and not necessarily a liberating experience. While she criticizes such limitations, she manages to avoid both extremes: sentimental patriot or ethnically exotic American. Her take on places transcends that of a reactionary stance which could otherwise lead to overt nationalism or reproduction of clichés. Any reactionary attempt to return to a supposedly whole image of “homeland” could easily lead to nostalgic cynicism; but for Maghazehe ramifications of diaspora only underscore the need for understanding places in more flexible terms. She grasps that quickly vanishing sense of familiarity known to any contemporary human being.
Chapter 3: Gelare Khoshgozaran: Unraveling Places

A BA graduate of Tehran University in photography, Gelaré Khoshgozaran Khoshgozaran travelled to the States upon her admittance to University of Southern California as an MFA student. Gelaré Khoshgozaran’s position as a diasporic artist is unique in many ways. As a non-Muslim woman and a queer person she was a member of minority in societal texture of her home country; in the United States, she belongs to ethnic minorities while she does not comply with the conventional image of Middle Eastern woman. Such a position allows for a dialogue with both extremities of power. She addresses the heterosexual exclusionary culture which robs women and queer people of Iran of their right to have a social presence; and at the same time engages with boundaries the hegemonic heterosexual culture of the host country defines for a woman that does not look or act ‘ethnic’ or ‘Muslim’. Architectural spaces, pages of her Iranian passport, Internet chatrooms and office buildings become her media of expression to question the ways in which difference is classified.

A freelance scholar and translator, she navigates cultural events of 80s in mainstream pop culture in relation to political events and life of her generation in late 70s and 80s Iran. By evoking structures of geographical access control, namely, the embassies, Gelaré Khoshgozaran as an immigrant who filed for asylum in America sheds light on double pressures of “proving innocent”47 within non-places of bureaucratic authentication; and explores implications of being a member of social and

---

cultural minority as a Middle Eastern immigrant and cast out from home due to her political views and sexual orientation.

Since 2011 she has lectured at several panel talks and presentations on governmental censorship, queer, feminist and transgender art, Iranian diaspora, self-exile and self-censorship and political transformations in Middle East in relation to art practice. In the project developed after she was awarded the Neely Macomber travel grant of Roski Gallery (USC, LA, September 2012), Gelaré Khoshgozaran represents a multimedia project consisting of two videos and six artist books. The award is part of grants offered by Roski School of Art at University of Southern California and is endowed by the school of art to the best proposal received from MFA students based on a prospective project. The gallery space is dedicated to a solo show by the selected artist.

*The Flirtatious Pirouette of the Artist Around His Subject*

In a video footage of the show, Gelaré Khoshgozaran represents six books as part of the installation. She made the books by reassembling archives from the former Iranian embassy in Washington and American embassy in Tehran under a show titled *The Flirtatious Pirouette of the Artist Around His Subject* (fig. 13). These books are compilations of documents revealing transformations of political relationship between the two countries through narrating a sequence of events. On another side of the gallery, two videos are at display; through one Gelaré Khoshgozaran projects interchangeably lyrics of Iranian and American national anthems (both in English) while the other shows footage of her documentation of the former Iranian embassy in Washington D.C. The show refers to Iran Hostage Crisis, a turning point of Iran/U.S. history that played a
crucial role in current conflicts between the two states. The crisis to which Gelaré Khoshgozaran refers in this show began in November of 1979. The American embassy in Tehran was taken over by revolutionary students and militants who saw the American state as representing imperialist agendas and having close ties with former Iranian monarch. Amidst quarrels of power among Iranian secular and religious parties, the crisis worsened leading to 52 American citizens held hostage for over a year. With an aborted attack to release hostages in April 1980 by U.S. military forces, political turmoil between Tehran and Washington culminated and the ties between the two countries were severed. The event was later known by the newly emerged Islamic state as occupying “the Den of Espionage” marking one of the most pivotal political events of the post-revolutionary Iran. The government later introduced the event as a turning point in history of revolution with which it identified. As a spontaneous act of people’s free will, it symbolized anti-imperialist radicalism which later became part of political agenda of current state. The books Gelaré Khoshgozaran has thus made are documentations of the event under two main titles. The title Double Blindfold among others is a combination of photojournalist images of the event and images which were then reproduced by Iranian revolutionary regime as propagandist representations in terms of posters, murals and postage stamps. Other title, INTIMUS, is an acronym artist composed by combining letterheads of American top secret documents (IN, T, I, M, US) which were shredded in an attempt of eradicating confidential documents upon occupation of American embassy,

and were later reassembled by revolutionary state as proof of foreign conspiracy against people’s elected state. With the political ties of the two countries broken, the spatial dialogue between the two was replaced by monologues of opposition. The artist creates these collages by assembling propagandist adaptations to tactfully manipulate historical moments which disclose bare bones of legitimation and delegitimation and are first and foremost embodied in words. Gelaré Khoshgozaran writes:

The mission this shredder failed to carry out served propagandist purposes of an emerging power in Iran which drew its legitimacy from populist strategies of “people’s will” and momentum. By a so called act of “divulging” plans of American government to overthrow Iranian people’s revolutionary state, the American embassy in Iran became a decoded symbol of foreign surveillance though exposure of the very elements by which it once was known as authentic. As the mechanism issuing authenticity failed to keep its secrets, the American embassy altered to a purposeless object ready to be used in banal parades of triumphant will.49

Projected words of Iranian and American national anthem in English framing one of the walls of the gallery portray the process through which historical events are rearranged to comply with official educational agendas. To an Iranian audience (the show has been visited by other Iranian students and scholars based in L.A.), the translated Iranian anthem in English defamiliarizes a context otherwise known to be a part of every Iranian’s morning routine (the national anthem is played to school kids every morning) and makes palpable the radicalism lying in the words while lyrics of American anthem which flash in between the Iranian one reveal similarities of the nationalist prose. To English speaking audience it creates a reverse process; accompanied by American national anthem, political events in a foreign country seem familiar, even alike. Events

which otherwise would seem redundant and far-removed to both audiences, reveal a familiar pattern in terms of lyrics: diversity of social forces and events collapsed into a banal metanarrative. A line of Iranian anthem lyrics reads: ‘The month of Bahman’ [January] is the brilliance of our faith’ referring to January of 1979 as marking the official victory of revolutionary forces. The lyrics take a moment which in fact was a result of many secular, communist and religious social groups’ contribution, introducing it as purely religious. Hence through omitting of diversities, little narratives are substituted with a metanarrative of the dominant social group.

Vis-à-vis

The other video - titled Vis-à-vis- (fig. 14) shows footage of the artist’s trip to Washington D.C. to visit the abandoned Iranian embassy. In this video Gelaré Khoshgozaran records the interiors of the embassy while narrating her experience at the American embassy in Baku, Azerbaijan, where she had to be interviewed to obtain an American visa. Walking through vacant spaces of the former Iranian embassy in Washington, she zooms in on walls and windows invaded by the passage of time, while picturing by narration the implications of being the object of inspection. Terraces of time -molds covering statues and walls, peels of paint, weedy windows and dusty interiors- reveal a temporality bare of social and political structures, accentuating inevitably the history of what once existed. Only in a state of abandonment and in position of being examined does a place reveal how time and spatiality are formed and modified by social constructs. The camera moves over broken blue tiles that once covered the floors, the crystal chandeliers, and the decorative motifs swirling across the thresholds and walls, all
of which once represented the culture of the country that is known best for blue tiles of mosques and meticulous abstract decorations. Echoing footsteps, even the sound of the narrator’s jeans rubbing against her body as she walks, mark the presence of the spectator transcending images to a subjective account, one that combined with narration reminds us of accounts of travel by Orientalists who visiting colonized lands, contemplated on the otherness of unfamiliar surroundings. A brief comparison of Jean Chardin’s *Journal du voyage du Chevalier Chardin en Perse* (Voyage of Chevalier Chardin in Persia published 1686) may help reveal the similarities. Jean Baptiste Chardin was a French explorer and jeweler who traveled to Persia on several occasions. Upon his visit to Persepolis and city of Shiraz, Chardin writes:

> On the same side of the city, by the corner of a mountain are the ruins of an ancient castle, and at some distance from it, a convent of Dervises [sic], near which are two deep holes in the ground. The mouth of one of them is four feet and a half round, and it is of an unfathomable depth. I was told that on throwing a large stone into it, one might distinctly repeat the Lord’s Prayer before the noise of its falling ceased; and this I found to be true, by trying the experiment three times successively.50

Chardin in this excerpt describes ruins of a castle in a foreign land and contemplates on its rituals which to him seem incomprehensible; in that sense his accounts parallel Gelaré Khoshgozaran’s accounts of an abandoned governmental building in a land other than hers. However, her narration is of a keen observer; one that examines a land she is visiting that is supposedly a representative of her nationality and

---

culture; however she is the ‘other’, the one that was once visited, observed and speculated, and is now speculating:

This one is an embassy for visit and not visa, to see and not to show, to document and not to provide documents. It does not and it is not supposed to make me feel at home at all, on the contrary, it does in all its capacity make me feel the least comfortable about belonging to some place at all.\(^\text{51}\)

Gelaré Khoshgozaran goes on, examining further the ways in which mutual social exchange is both symbolized in and gives identity to places:

There are locks on every door; in fact, it looks like every door has been locked twice: once by those who were given the keys and the second time by those who lost their trust in them, the key keepers.\(^\text{52}\)

With a social spatial connection lost, the artist’s contemplations on presence in non-places of the American embassy in Baku and deserted Iranian embassy reveal the essentially sociopolitical nature of human interaction in such spaces. The cultural artifacts displayed in footage (e.g. tiles, decorations) manifest relativity of identity of places; that the way a country in a broader sense and an embassy in a smaller scale represent a culture is a matter of selecting a specific set of spatial relations, that is, the way cultures are represented has to do with the dominant discourse of power. The way Iran for instance is culturally represented now and was then has always been indicated by a twofold relationship, the colonialist intentions to minimalize diversities to particular set of imagery and words, to which colonized often submitted, and the nature of political relationship of colonized with colonizer. In that sense the Orientalist way of explaining differences functioned the same way consumer culture does today. Popularity of images


\(^{52}\) ibid, 08:06.
of veiled women framed in a background of domes and Persian calligraphy is symptomatic of the same heterosexual gaze that favored exoticism in depictions of people of Orient. With that on mind, Gelaré Khoshgozaran’s particular way of documenting liminality of Iranian embassy initiates a dialogue with power but not from the stance of an object of speculation, but from the subjective position of addressing the act of speculation. The resemblance of her narrative prose with the accounts of eighteen-century travelers in fact deconstructs dialogue of power; instead of being the object of dominant gaze, she reenacts the history in reverse. Few minutes into the video and in another part of narration, she describes feelings of desperation and anxiety in terms of bodily functions - e.g. the urge to urinate at embassy of Baku. Such contrasting reality of her human needs with stark interiors of embassies and their neutral pose underscore the ways in which systems of delegation categorize her presence in measurable terms: she is the “potential occupier” and “a collection of stored data in a folder”. 53 In other words, by contrasting her bodily functions with the office rooms, she depicts contradicting nature of passive “applicant” as opposed to dynamism of spectator. The camera moves over deserted interiors; we hear narrator’s voice talking about brochures and leaflets applicants are provided with at the American embassy as the camera wobbles on futile office accessories and empty halls. The apparent contrast of what the artist describes of a neat, glossy promising United States pictured in brochures dubbed on amateur portrayal of its abandoned counterpart reveals feigned nature of processes that are primarily designed to

devoid, disorient and subordinate. The act of selectively reassembling evidences of a historical shift rewinds administrative sequences of granting entrance to geographical territories. The artist chooses specific moments of history to tell her own little story (or to borrow Lyotard, petits recits) of a historical turning point when subjective validating systems are overthrown to be objects of conformation to a new order. The abandoned embassy now devoid of any functionality gives way to subjective act of documenting which in and of itself is empowering. Recording casually via a home-video camera associates the footage with home videos of everyday life so abundantly present on Internet, hence Gelaré Khoshgozaran’s reaction to a non-place devoid of its functions is of a tourist, of a spectator whose immediate response is to record her presence to capture a moment of intimacy with space. The building as a physical empty database unravels the abstraction of official prose revealing them as purposefully ambiguous, intimidating and essentially monotonous. Linking the abandoned Iranian embassy to its occupied American counterpart in Tehran completes the arch of mediated spatiality: latter is robbed of the same legitimacy the former has lost via application, disapplication or misapplication of signs and words.

Woahoho

There were also some discos in Providence, and I remember hearing the O’Jays and the Three Degrees and other Philadelphia acts that were staples on the dance floor. I became aware that DJs were finding ways to extend the songs longer than what appeared on the records. Somehow, to us, this club music didn’t seem antithetical to the rock we were playing and listening to. Dancing was fun, too.54

54 David Byrne, How Music Works (San Francisco: McSweeney’s 2012), 36-37.
In her performance piece “Woahoho” (2012) at Washington Convention Center, Gelaré Khoshgozaran appears in a drag office suit dancing carefreely to a popular 70s tune-“Wild Life” by the rock band Talking Heads (fig. 14). Her choice of the NewWave band correlates to some of the most iconic moments of 1980s; an era in which Gelaré Khoshgozaran’s generation was experiencing major social restrictions and censorship which inhibited music and women’s freedom in public spaces by while Western mainstream pop culture had already found its way in homes; first by radio, then video and audio cassettes. Even before Gelaré Khoshgozaran’s generation was introduced to punk rock and pop music of 80s, waves of Western music had already reached the shores of Iranian music. As cultural worldwide effects of post-World War II and presence of radio sets, pop genres such as Rumba, Tango and Waltz and later rock and jazz were adapted and reproduced in terms of Persian songs. With the onset of Iranian pop music, video clips of singers who played never-seen-before instruments such as electric guitars and drums, variety shows and rock bands emerged in music scene of 60s and 70s in Iran. The Revolution however disrupted the flourishing Iranian rock among other forms and media of art which thanks to a boosting oil economy received funds and support of the Shah. All genres of music- with rare exception of Iranian traditional folk (as the only music allowed to be heard in public few years after the revolution) - were deemed degenerate as products of westernization of Iran by Pahlavi monarchy. Many Iranian singers and bands migrated shortly after new state took power and settled in other cities, mainly Los Angeles.
Gelaré Khoshgozaran frequently refers in her works to these transformations which combined with strict governmental censorship, turned the act of dancing (or as she notes ‘having fun’) to a pleasure that was to be seen and practiced only in privacy of homes. Pirating illegally copied video cassettes of the latest Los Angeles-based Iranian pop music and listening to Western songs from noisy radio stations on a low volume form a major part of the generation’s collective memory. In her note on another video art project, *rial and tERROR (2011)*, she describes lives of a generation born and raised in the contemporary Iran, post 1979 Islamic Revolution, during the Iran-Iraq War and currently living in diaspora who being raised in times of social and political upheaval, have a totally different idea of fun. The fun that was brought to them by American pop culture, smuggled in from the same country that was subject of anti-imperialist governmental rallies.

The band Talking Heads, was one of the bands very much influenced by 80s glam rock and punk culture. The band members, who were students of Rhode Island School of Design, drew their inspiration from all forms of art including performance. David Byrne (lead vocalist and guitar player) recalls in his autobiographical chapter in “How Music Works” his first attempts to develop a stage persona by shaving his beard as his friend Mark played accordion:

I didn’t have a mirror and couldn’t manage the razor very well, so there was a fair amount of blood.

---


56 David Byrne, *How Music Works* (San Francisco: McSweeney’s 2012), 35
Although Byrne experimented mostly with the intention to create a spectacle which was expected of rock stars, influences of Bowie in particular and eccentricity of glam rock artists led him to adopt stage acts that were radical even with rock and roll standards of the time. Talking Heads, as the opening paragraph suggests, also associated themselves with disco music; in most of the video clips they produced a unique humorous and dramatic take on disco dance and rock performances is apparent. Gelaré Khoshgozaran’s dancing to their tune signifies her association with implications of disco dance both in relation to her particular background and to the more general idea of dancing as a visual and dramatic statement. With her frolicking moves she in fact claims her right to dance, to have fun, and to make her happiness apparent against a patriarchal system which constantly homogenizes plurality of lives to singularity of one certain way of happiness.

Gelaré Khoshgozaran’s choice of music points to yet another important aspect of Talking Heads as influenced by glam rock, and that is adopting stage persona. Creating persona allowed people of subcultures such as queers to step beyond societal norms; it was a chance to practice queer identities in line with their sexual orientation where such differences wouldn’t be noticed. However, glam rock culture was essentially heterosexual and dominated by men; so queer identities could only exist as a clandestine way of practicing personal freedom. In that regard, Gelaré Khoshgozaran makes paralleled references to secretiveness under the gaze of heterosexual and patriarchal

---

58 ibid, 37.
systems of surveillance. Her dyke look, the office suit and the music link her stage persona of an employee to the experience of keeping her sexual identity secret under a government who polices ideological, sexual, and social differences. Her performance manipulates the dominant male tone of subcultures such as punk; and by purposefully choosing a male dominated band she subverts the masculine tone to inject feminist queerness. She not only belongs to queer culture but also comes from a sophisticated set of differences: ethnic, gender related and cultural. In a way, she belongs to an even smaller minority within another minority.

The setting she chooses to perform is crucial in her opposing act of enabling dissimilarities; public places such as convention centers represent American structure of power and administration while they symbolize non-places in their identical structure and purpose, and in mediating human interaction. However, the core concept of convention ironically suggests possibilities to socialize; albeit a signifying feature in convention centers is the concept of community. Cambridge Dictionary defines a convention center as a building or group of buildings where large groups of people gather for meetings or events. If we agree on this general definition, then convention centers have in them implications of commune both in terms of communal properties and a union of people with similar interests. Convention could also be associated with conventional; with an act of convenience, and in short with normative. These implications, as apparent as they seem, are important in relation to artist’s purposes of reenacting a place of gathering. Halberstam views subcultures as social groups who by adopting a certain style challenge the seemingly organic nature of ‘community’. Drawing on Jean Luc Nancy’s
analysis, she specifies the word ‘community’ as connoting *Christian ritual of communion*, arguing that phrases like ‘gay and lesbian community’ become a ground on which heterosexual culture attempts to normalize or segregate gays and lesbians in a heteronormative social texture. Thus dancing in a convention center in a dyke outfit is twofold. First, by adopting a performative persona, the artist injects a type of social existence that is implicitly segregated from mainstream culture; second, through the act of dancing artist claims a social space that is associated with normality and performs a type of ritual that opposes conventional rituals that are associated with such spaces, hence turns heterosexual normativity on its head.

On another level, her appearance as a non-white queer woman who dances disco style opposes the Western stereotypical expected image of a Middle Eastern woman who is bound to be essentially Muslim, veiled and inherently heterosexual. In that regard Gelaré Khoshgozaran engages with both ends of heterosexual and patriarchal monitoring systems; one that in her country eliminates narratives of diversity in favor of master narrative of totalitarian control, and the other which assimilates pluralities in terms of stereotypes to eliminate anomalies. One could argue that such spectacle can be disturbing to those who cannot locate performer’s sexuality and ethnicity in terms of existing patterns, while it can be emancipating to those who seek to engage with a socially empowered art that breaks borders of a bureaucratic setting.

As an emerging artist who disturbs dogmas of ethnicity and gender at places of passage in intriguing ways, Gelaré Khoshgozaran’s piece “Woahoho” successfully

---

transcends an omnipresent, rather Orientalist image of the Iranian/Middle Eastern woman while engaging in a dynamic dialogue with her past which is emancipating first and foremost to the artist. Once outside of their home country, Iranian artists-women in particular- are usually seen under certain categories of “Muslim”, “Middle Eastern” or “veiled” all of which fail to encompass existing diversities of religion, gender and lifestyle among Iranians. Such stereotypical approach affects artists like Gelaré Khoshgozaran Khoshgozaran from the moment they begin their journey to when they make their first artistic attempts to represent at art institutions as places that delegate the image of “world art”. Reoccurring memories of home in face of a radically different environment drives the artist to revisit certain historical moments of past to reestablish her brittle sense of belonging and locate her experiences in relation to a fluid identity. These arbitrary moments however resurface unexpectedly to create a desire to return to a coherent sense of existence which is home; an image which fades away as the immigrant syncs with her new life making an actual return impossible. Once back, home is never what one has left behind.

Young Iranian artists who are increasingly inhabiting academic and art scenes question metanarratives of ethnicity and belonging which necessarily form around political agendas of globalization and often times contradict free flow of interaction and communication in a world that makes it almost impossible to ignore diversity.

As Halberstam mentions in her accounts on subcultures, “new queer subcultural theory will have to account for nonheterosexual, nonexclusively male, nonwhite, and
nonadolescent subcultural production in all its specificity.” 61 Since most of theorists of subcultures are also participants of those groups, Gelaré hoshgozaran’s contribution to a more democratic expression to articulate specificities of minorities is of both an artist and theorist.62 While she vastly draws on archives of queer performance, by both activating heterosexually defined social spaces and developing new artistic tactics to address queer lives, she adds to possibilities available to artists who seek for dynamic ways of engaging with and addressing differences.

In her discussion of drag queens in The Ballad of a Ladyman, Halberstam reviews examples of popular TV shows on transgender people arguing that pop culture’s interest in queer styles, drag queens and dykes is of a voyeuristic nature; one that both seeks to define and at the same time derogates nonnormative sexual orientations.63 She notes some rare examples when drag queens have used the opportunity of a pop show to deliberately blur the lines of sexuality. Such approach towards their role distinguishes queer performativity from those of punk subcultures, and in that sense Gelaré Khoshgozaran’s use of performativity to bring out blueprints of lines by which minorities are categorized is one that leaves these lines blurred. Through such an approach she takes on a fluid identity while she attaches that fluidity to time as boundless and contingent to active social interaction with places. Gelaré Khoshgozaran’s art is outstanding in her ability to transcend demands of academia and global art market to a level of sincere contemplation in relation to her host country and her unique status. Ramifications of

---

62 Halberstam, In a Queer Time and Place, 161.
63 ibid, 156.
diaspora in her works connote an everlasting and almost ever-failing desire to return to a homeland which mainly exists not as a geographical location, but as series of spatial relations which intersect with political events, creating moments of transformative collective experiences.
Conclusion

Big cities of Iran-Tehran in particular- embody the spirit of instability in undergoing urban projects, emerging towers, under-construction highways and over-night demolished buildings making way for to-be-erected skyscrapers. While the face of cities is rapidly changing to give way to vista of modernized life, they maintain a lingering unfulfilled gestalt. Major political and consequently social shifts of recent decades in Iran- with the Islamic revolution being the pivotal event- further complicate this image by presence of systems of censorship and ideological assimilation. In a seemingly modern yet an inherently conservative environment with omnipresent governmental monitoring, minds of citizens is occupied-rather obsessed- with utopian dreams of a prosperous life across the borders. Hence transience is a familiar notion to dwellers of Iranian large cities accustomed to live in an environment frozen in state of alteration, with their minds set on visions of another life. The effects of globalization as Appadurai discusses have created myriads of personal visions which go far and beyond borders. In post-revolutionary Iran, just like any other country in the world, the American pop culture has been present at homes via introduction of technological novelties: cassettes, satellite receivers, and more recently, internet and social networks. As a direct result of such changes, little narratives found a chance to be observed; social uprisings were channeled in social networks and then back to the society, this time with very real consequences. The second major political event I have briefly introduced as initiator of the largest wave of Iranian immigration after 1979, the post-presidential election events of 2009 known as the ‘Green Movement’, visualizes the best Appadurai’s points on realization of postmodern
visions. In light of recent global and local transformations, exploring ways in which the burgeoning discourse of space and place has changed perceptions of the role of spectator remains central to much of Iranian artists’ recent practice, especially in works of those who migrated due to limitations they faced in their country of origin - albeit were deeply affected by experiences of movement and displacement on one hand, and reoccurring thoughts of the land left behind and unfulfilled visions of *home* on the other.

With an expanding Iranian diaspora, the question to artists is how to approach the notion of belonging within contexts of other cultures without falling into banal reiterations of nostalgia, heraldic nationalism and cynicism. The answers to this question have been of a mainly reactionary nature- at least in the realm of most known trends of contemporary Iranian art. In their dealing with new cultures and environments, artists many times resort to overt nationalism, isolating prejudice towards the past or reproduction of stereotypical concepts/images that are favored by mainstream art market. A glance on recent events, major auctions and periodicals which focus on the 'art of the Arab world', 'Middle Eastern art', 'Islamic art' and so forth would delineate the existing exclusionary approaches towards plurality of art practice in the Middle East region.

In my review of Iranian diasporic art in previous chapters, I lean on those theories which suggest a diversifying approach towards concepts of locale, global and difference; ideas that offer positive interaction and inclusion of various subcultures, and emphasize the important role of spectator as liberating and subjective. In the face of recent much-expressed worries about 'fragmentation', 'dislocation' and 'incoherency' of the world under a globalized economy, I concur with Massey in her rendering of the situation: “There is
reference to the condition of postmodernity, but in fact there are many such conditions.64 In that sense, my focus has been on illustrating those artistic attempts that initiate positive intervention in places which characterize social stasis; places that exacerbate solitude and isolation by delegating social exchange and excluding diversity. With slight variations, these places, as I have shown previously, share the same mechanisms of mediation which comply with the metanarrative of ideal nationality, ethnicity and lifestyle; embassies, security check points, airports, and other generic urban spaces -or non-places- reverberate words into consumable images, and by systems of surveillance and administration they push to margins other social patterns that don’t match the blueprints of hegemonic culture. The heterosexual structure non-places are identified with not only determines the spatiality of places in terms of normativity, but also assigns a ‘natural’ structure to time by reinforcing a conventional narrative of family, reproduction and childrearing as organic stages of life. I follow Halberstam’s idea of the term subculture as a nuanced concept beyond implications of rebellious youth, and more in reference to marginal groups of minorities who due to their particular views of temporality and their unique position in societal texture are identified as outsiders.

By assuming an essentially social nature to spatiality and places, I intend to introduce examples of Iranian diasporic art which adapt a flux identity; both in relation to their host culture and their origins. Pooneh Maghazehe and Gelare Khoshgozaran, the artists discussed in this study, refuse to submit to ubiquitous image of Middle Eastern woman artist by employing mechanisms of expression which transcend their ethnicity

64 Doreen Massey, Space, Place and Gender (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 164.
and gender and create a much broader perspective; those that address their individualities in an active dialogue with the environment. Pooneh’s language is of enabling the inherited past to contemplate on personal decisions; her use of everyday objects in line with transitionality of liminal spaces reifies the subjective role of the immigrant/expatriate in shaping identities of places. Gelare in the contrary gravitates towards a political understanding of places. Her situation as one that is posited in between two systems of heterosexual authority is curious; back home she dealt with an extremely patriarchal authoritative system that does not tolerate any other version of social existence but one that it dictates; in her host country she deals with other dogmas regarding Iranian women. In reality, she complies with neither. Her solution- apart from dancing- is reinserting invisible forms of social life back into public spaces by making references to historical turning points and mechanisms of censorship.

My encounter with both artists has been through Internet. Visiting artists in person obviously required much more time and more financial resources. Considering the fact that many Iranian artists live literally everywhere in the world, in order to run an inclusive investigation of trajectory of Iranian art one needs to go far and wide. In any case, my interest in the subject has to do with my own background as an Iranian writer who has dealt with the same crippling questions raised by pressures of being a member of minorities, especially when one’s appearance, beliefs and lifestyle do not match preexisting definitions of the minority she supposedly belongs to. Also, as an art gallery manager and columnist in Tehran art periodicals I have long been concerned with stereotypical framing of Iranian art in the mainstream art world. I have been amazed to
discover that such politicization and sexualization of the image of Iranian women exists so disproportionate to the reality of their lives, and that Western interest in their art is almost always of exoticizing nature.

I of course realize that my primary motives are far too ambitious for the limited scope of this study which does not allow for a thorough examination of dynamism of art practice in Iranian diasporic communities; nor can it reflect complexity of life in Iran of recent years in terms of flourishing social movements, especially since much of the art hence produced is either in confinement of underground galleries in Iran or on fringes of media hubbub elsewhere. It may however, introduce new possibilities of diasporic art in light of diversities of practice among Iranian artists. It is also a brief account on those aspects of Iranian life that are less discussed; practices that neither require a certain religion as intrinsic to the argument nor a certain set of emblematic imagery, such as veil. My intention has been to picture other trends of Iranian contemporary art as conceptualizing humanly concerns; questions that are not specific to just Iranians, but may concern any contemporary person who deals with a constantly changing geography.
Bibliography


-----. Negotiating Nonhuman/Human Place. Antipode (2005): 353-357


Figure 1. Farhad Moshiri, Only Love Faghat Eshgh, 2007, Swarovski and oil on canvas mounted on board, 67 inches x 7.6 feet x 2 3/4 in., Glerie Perrotin, Paris. 
Figure 5. Shadi Ghadirian, #11, 12, 14 and 17, from the series Like Every day, 2000, C-print, 19.6x19.6 in., Courtesy of the artist.  
Figure 7. Jean-Baptiste André Godin, Familistère de Guise, inner court of center building, Wikimedia.
Figure 8. Pooneh Maghazehe, Four Positions, 2012, Photographed by Nicolas Scordia, Courtesy of the artist.  
Figure 10. Pooneh Maghazehe, Negetivists’ Stand In at Sleep Inn, 2010, Digital C-Print mounted on aluminum, 16x20 in., Courtesy of the artist.  
Figure 12. Pooneh Maghazehe, Eleni’s chair, 2012, from the series *Salt print*, heliography, 20x30 in., Courtesy of the artist.  