

PORTA: THE LANGUAGE OF DOORS

by

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.

This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## ABSTRACT

In my master design studio, I was asked to imagine what I would say, what would be my story, if I was a door. This is the poem I wrote as an answer to this query:

### IF I WAS A DOOR

Come closer;  
Let me tell you how painful my loneliness is.  
Behind this coarse body, stories are hidden.  
Come closer;  
Tear the threshold curtains  
Let me tell you of the woman with henna colored  
hair  
Who sat beside me days and years, cried and waited  
for her son  
Who went to war years ago. I wonder if she is still  
there.

Dusty alleys of our parish,  
Children of the street whose voice's tingles  
Swept me to far places; to flying Pelican of Golshan  
garden in Tabas,  
Alborz Mountains, smell of rain, smell of earth

Come closer; let me tell you how beautiful the other  
side of the world is with these little windows on my  
skin.

Could I be green, like the pines of our garden,  
Could I have had a platform for every tired traveler to  
rest and tell me of his journey.

Could I have had a doorkeeper to tell these secrets to:  
Scent of satin, hanging sweetbrier from my brow,  
secret melody of swallows...

Would they not replace me with another: There, that  
house, that parish is all my memory.

This thesis is about the doorway; it is also about  
threshold, transition, and the in-between. It aims to  
encourage a more engaged interaction between people  
and the spaces around them.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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For my parents,  
and for Arash.

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0.1

# MEMOIR



0.2



## POET'S OBLIGATION

*Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take  
Towards the door we never opened  
Into the rose-garden  
My words echo  
Thus, in your mind  
But to what purpose disturbing the dust on a bowl of  
rose-leaves  
I do not know.<sup>1</sup>*

\*\*\*

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time  
Through the known, remembered gate  
When the last of earth left to discover is that which  
was the beginning.<sup>2</sup>*

\*\*\*

T. S. Eliot

<sup>1</sup> Eliot, Thomas Stearns. Four Quartets 3.

<sup>2</sup> Eliot, Thomas Stearns. Four Quartets 39.



0.3

Tuesday, September 16, 2008, the door of belonging opened.

After four years of knocking, a door opened. I went to the Citizenship and Immigration Court of Canada in Kitchener. There were forty eight people from twenty five different countries from all around the world. I was the only Iranian. The judge started her speech. She told us that she wished she could listen to each of our story's; why we left our own countries, what we went through, and why we decided to move to Canada. She asked us to stand up and raise our right hand and repeat after her:

*I swear (or affirm) that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Queen of Canada, Her Heirs and Successors, and that I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada and fulfill my duties as a Canadian citizen.*

After we took the oath, the judge said: “now you are part of our Canadian family. Welcome.”



0.4

A journey begins with a woman, with strong roots in her middle-eastern culture, who leaves her homeland, Iran, and moves to the Western world. This journey brings her many challenges - in expressing her identity and communicating within this foreign society. She follows a new path that changes her life forever and by which she finds herself a new identity.

The challenges she confronted within the new-culture finding a place of belonging have been expressed symbolically in this interpretive video/pictures that I made in the first term of master design studio. It consists of two synchronized black and white video sequences shown next to each other.

The first image on the left shows women in black veils sitting in a courtyard. No one is allowed to go outside. Among these women, there is one in white who leaves the courtyard.

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**PART 1.1**  
(DOORS OF BELONGING)



0.5



0.6



0.7

The second image appears showing a veil flowing in the wind with a view of a western city at the background, demonstrating her immigration to another country.

From the third image to the fifteenth, the screen on the left shows a gramophone, which plays very slow and mellow Persian traditional music symbolizing the woman's routine life and the long hardship that she endured. While the sad music is playing, the fast pace of images flickering on the other screen display a series of significant images from memories of her homeland.

Since she cannot adapt directly into the new society, she goes through a process of difficult transformation. Through this process she decides to remove her veil to create for herself a new identity and to start a new life. As she removes the veil, the images on both screens merge to a new screen in the middle. In fact by taking off her veil her body and mind become one. It is as she is releasing a heavy burden of emotions and memories. However, the freedom from her past is not



0.8



0.9



0.10



0.11



0.12



0.13

complete as a part of her always carries some nostalgia. In the following pictures, she is shown with her veil hanging from the bottom of her feet and being dragged with her as she walks.

The new screen in the center shows the woman walking through the darkness, passing down an alley towards the light. This symbolizes her journey adapting to the new culture. She knocks on the modern city's doors; someone opens and closes the door. She tries on her childhood city's doors, but no one answers. She keeps knocking on both sides and asks herself: Where am I coming from? Where must I go? When will my home be shown to me? Where do I belong?

She is frustrated. Not fitting into either her new or former societies. She keeps walking toward the light at the end of the alley, which connects her original city to the new modern one, hoping to find a place of belonging.

\*\*\*



0.14



0.15



0.16



0.17



0.18



0.19



0.20





# THE OPENING

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**PART 1.1**  
(MODERN DOORS)

This thesis was inspired by my experience after moving to Canada four years ago. Due to the cultural differences, I felt excluded from the new society, struggled to express myself and communicate with other people. The questions I couldn't stop asking were: Where do I belong now? How can I communicate with the new culture?

The feeling of segregation was not only limited to the issue of cultural difference, but also felt from the environment and architectural spaces surrounding me. Edward Hall, a cross-cultural researcher and anthropologist of the twentieth century states "People from different cultures not only speak different languages but, what is possibly more important, inhabit different sensory worlds."<sup>1</sup> That is, people from different cultures are different in the way they select and interpret information from their environment.

The first thing I observed arriving to the new society, was garage doors and small entrance ways. An individual new to this culture, can not help but notice how the scale of front doors compare to that of garage doors; judging by scale one would think the cars are valued more than individuals. The ideas of entry and exit, private and public or the idea of inside and outside, are different in the new culture.

How and what is revealed by this phenomenon is about the culture of this country? What is the significance of entries and exits that seem almost nonexistent? And what does this suggest, more generally, about living in a modern society?

To answer the above questions, the following section looks at some examples of contemporary doors through a series of stories and short movies written and created in final term of my master's thesis. It metaphorically examines how the fast pace of modernization and industrialization, has progressively affected the interaction of the individual with specific architectural elements, in this case doors.



1.0



1.1

<sup>1</sup> Hall, Edward Twitchell. Hidden Dimension 2.



1.2

In modern industrial societies where there is a heavy reliance on cars, garage doors have gradually taken the role of front doors. In many suburban developments the number of garage doors exceeds front doors. The following movie is an illustration of this phenomenon.

The story begins with a woman searching for an address in a narrow street with garage doors on both sides. The doors are similar that she is having trouble finding the address of her destination. The only thing she can rely on is the number of the house situated above the lintel. Once she reaches her destination, she has to enter a code at the garage door in order to enter. As the door gradually lifts up, she directly enters the living room of the house.

---

**PART 1.1.1**  
(GARAGE DOORS)



1.3



1.4



1.5



1.6



1.7



1.8



1.9



1.10



1.11



1.12



1.13



1.14



1.15



1.16



1.17



1.18



1.19



1.20



1.21

---

**PART 1.1.2**  
(GLASS DOORS)

The element of mystery is absent in glass doors; there are no dramas, no secrets related to them. Glass doors are transparent so one can easily see the destination through their screen. They do not trigger one's sense of discovery and curiosity to find out what is behind them. This aspect of glass doors is illustrated through the following short story:

The first image shows a woman walking towards a wooden door, totally unaware of what this conceals. As she walks toward the door, a small opening appears on one side, revealing a part of the story behind the door. As she gets closer and closer, the opening continues to grow in size, multiplying and taking over the facade. By the time she reaches the door, it has become glass and everything has been revealed. She sees her reflection in the glass, which has become an invisible threshold. There is no longer a separation from interior to exterior, glass reveals everything within and reflects the exterior surroundings. She no longer feels the need to approach the door and cross the threshold, because the mystery of the story behind the door is gone.



1.22



1.23



1.24



1.25



1.26



1.27

Glass doors are neutral and monotonous; their function do not change in accordance to the building in which they were installed. As demonstrated in the following pictures, a similar layout is used for various kinds of buildings; regardless of it being a hospital or a coffee shop. In fact, the signs have displaced front doors and now communicate the content of the shop and make visible the inside stories. A glass door isolated from a building would not reflect anything about the stories or the events that happen inside. The following images illustrate this aspect:

**PART 1.1.3**  
(MONOTONOUS GLASS DOORS)



1.28



1.29



1.30



1.31



1.32



1.33



1.34



1.35



1.36

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**PART 1.1.4**  
(AUTOMATIC DOORS)

Automatic doors eliminate the physical contact between the door and the individual. There are no knobs or handles attached to them and the threshold is indiscriminant and uncertain. The following story illustrates this particular characteristic:

A blind man walks towards a building. He has a cane with which he feels the environment around him. It is only with this tool that he can recognize his passage from one atmosphere to another. In image number 6, he is confronted to an automatic door and the door opens up before he even get to feel it with his cane. So, the door no longer enables him to realize that he stepped into another space.



1.37



1.38



1.39



1.40



1.41



1.42

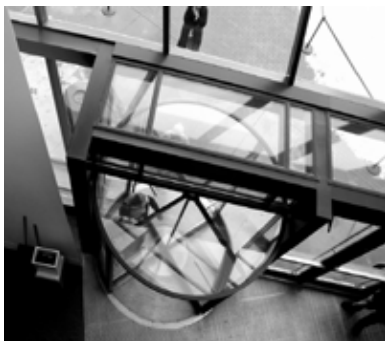


There is no act of opening or closing associated with revolving doors, thus they are merely a threshold. They don't give individual's the power to decide whether or not they can open or close the door; who they can let in or not. The first individual who enters the revolving door has the power to control its movement, with the others following behind. As only one person can enter at a time this works in collaboration with a line-up of individuals in front of the building- controlling their entry, making it an individual experience. Overall, the necessity of passing through the revolving door prolongs the act of crossing the threshold, allowing the individual to become more familiar with the space they are entering.

---

**PART 1.1.5**  
(REVOLVING DOORS)

The following images illustrates these aspects:



1.43



1.44



1.45



1.46



1.47



1.48

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**PART 1.1.6**  
(BUZZER DOOR)

In many apartment buildings one has to pass through a series of doors in order to reach their destination. Usually each one of these doors establishes a secure boundary, such a buzzer number, a security guard or cameras, that send an unwelcoming message to visitor and makes them feel like an intruder. The following movie demonstrates these different steps:



1.49



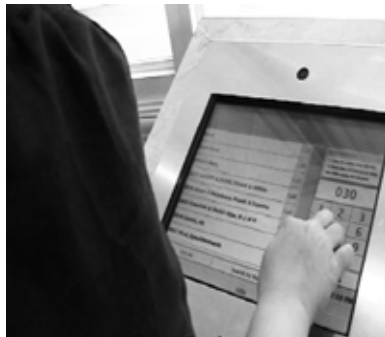
1.50



1.51



1.52



1.53



1.54



1.55



1.56



1.57



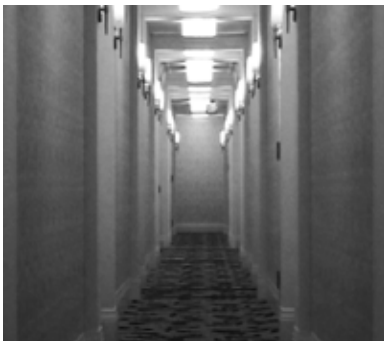
1.58



1.59



1.60



1.61



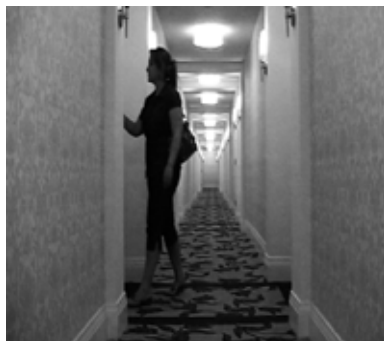
1.62



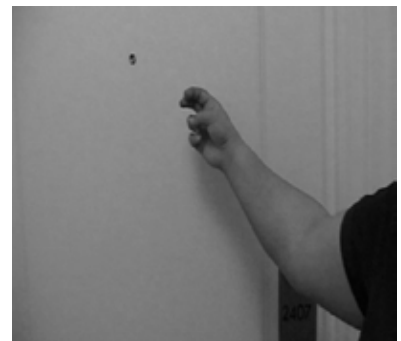
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1.64



1.65



1.66

In all the above examples, one of the common characteristics that can be detected in contemporary doors was the loss of both physical and psychological dimensions and thus the reduction of feeling and sensation between the human being and their environment.

Architecture is the art of shapes - with line, form and space being the symbols through which architects express their thoughts and emotions. Without symbolic meaning, or its abstract interpretation, the physical and psychological dimensions of architecture are lost. This leads to the reduction of feelings and senses in the experience of architectural elements, which is an continuing problem for modern architecture. Today architecture, apart from its most figurative examples, is mostly created for utilitarian uses, thus the story of each architectural element is dependant upon the structural necessity and practicality.

Juan Eduardo Cirlot, a mythologist and art critic of the twentieth century, states:

*Architectural symbolism is founded upon correspondences between various patterns of spatial organization, consequent upon the relationships, on the abstract plane, between architectural structures and the organized pattern of space. While the basic pattern of architectural relationships provides the primary symbolism, secondary symbolic meanings are derived from the appropriate selection of individual forms, colors and materials, and by the relative importance given to the various elements forming the architectural whole (function, height, etc.)*<sup>1</sup>

Since all individual architectural elements, such as windows, walls and doors, are signified in a deeper sense with their symbolic power, architecture can more profoundly express the intent of a building. For instance, a window is not merely an opening that separates the inside from the outside environment; it also has the potential to express great spiritual and intellectual intentions.

<sup>1</sup>Cirlot, Juan Eduardo. Dictionary of Symbols 16.

In another example, the shape and place of a window differs, depending on the intent of the experience. It could be so small that one could only see a person when he or she stands right behind it, confining our views, or it could be a large panoramic one that leads our minds and imaginations to far away places. Metaphorically speaking, the story of windows won't be complete without that of walls. It is the walls that hide everything behind them, keeping the secrets inside. A wall separates two distinct environments- here different from there, this different from that.

Architecture tells the stories of the life within, by the composition of walls, windows and doors. Amongst these various architectural elements, doors have a significant role in revealing the story, as they are always present at the beginning and end of a journey. They shield the inside story, having the potential to be open and welcoming or closed and mysterious.



1.67



1.68

But more importantly, doors offer the possibility of physical passage through them, which is something, that walls and windows cannot provide; doors are thresholds, they can invite or deny us the ability to pass through them.

This thesis looks at the importance of the door, as a primary architectural element. It is where the tactile experience of a building begins. This is explored through the history and mythology of doors, examining both their cultural anthropology and the rituals/traditions people have as they pass through these elemental thresholds. Finally, it will highlight how modernity has neglected the symbolism of this essential architectural element, through a comparative study of different types of modern doors and the symbolism they now project.

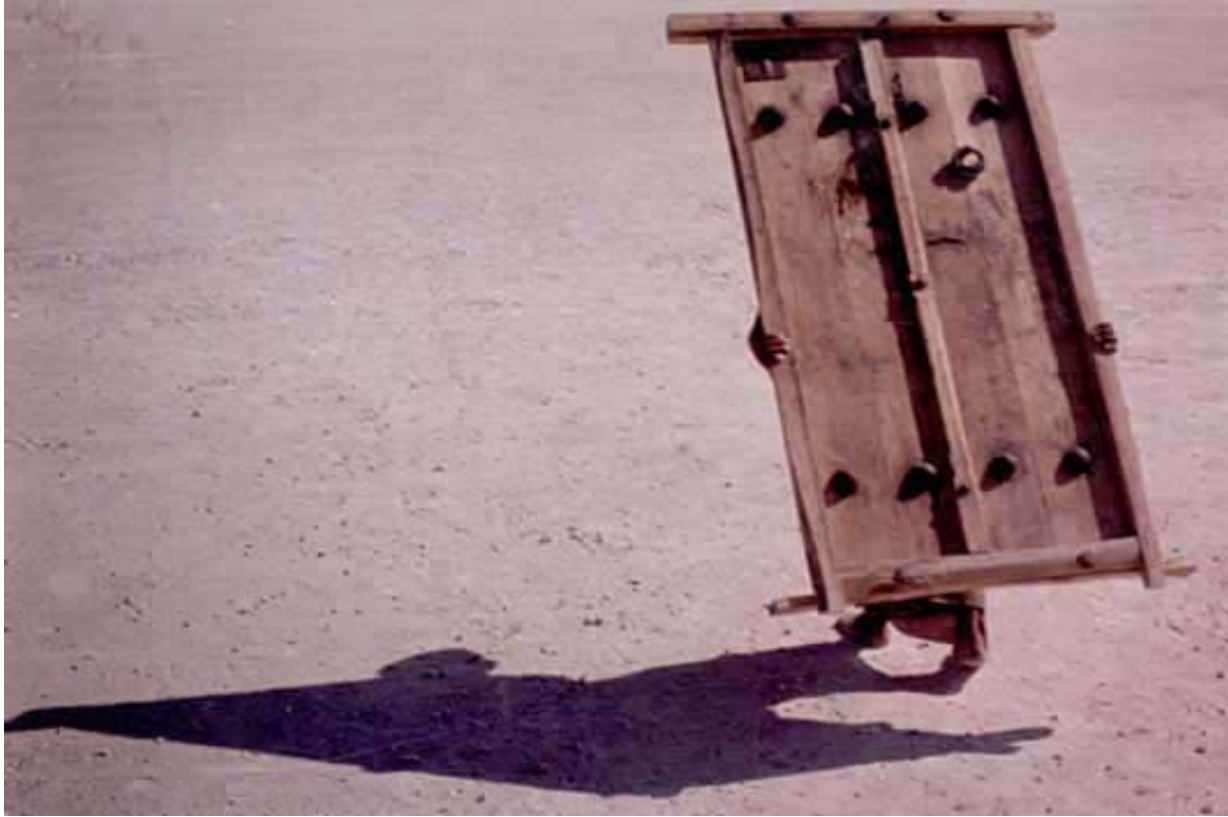
Part 1 is called “Opening”. In this chapter, we find the importance of doors amongst symbolic architectural elements and the personal reasons that attracted me to this subject is introduced.

Part 2, entitled “Symbolic Language Of Doors”, is a general overview of doors and its implication on our lives through studying different types of doors and their components symbolically. This then leads to Part 3 called “Rituals”, where the individual opens a door to converse with more people and convey his or her experiences of them. The discussion of this chapter is a series of examples of mythology and cultural rituals involving crossing thresholds. The thesis will be organized to tell a story about the human “cycle of life” from birth, to death, to resurrection. And finally the thesis will end with Part 4 entitled “The End Is The New Beginning”, which highlights the importance of doors as a communication tool with different cultures through a video/picture explaining the process of citizenship in the Canadian Immigration system where doors are the main character of the story.





# **SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE OF DOORS**



2.1

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**PART 2.1**  
(THE DOOR)

This is an excerpt from a movie called “The Door” by Mohsen Makhmalbaf, an Iranian film director.

There is a worn out wooden door walking in the desert. Who is carrying it? It is as if it walks on its own two feet. A postman in white robes is following the door. He knocks on the door. The door stops and opens. There is an old man behind it.

*The old man: Yes?*

*The postman: you have a letter.*

*The old man: is it from my son?*

*The postman: I do not know.*

*The old man: read it, I do not know how to read.*

*The postman: it is from a man in bazaar who is in love with your daughter and wants to marry her.*



2.2

When the old man notices that it is not a letter from his son, he tears the letter, closes the door, puts it back to his shoulders and goes on with his daughter following behind. They follow their path till they hear a sound from distance.



2.3

There are some men, playing Tambours and other instruments, coming from the heart of the desert. When they see the door, one of them shouts, “Open the door dad”.

*The old man: who is it?*

*The man: Good morning, we are looking for a wedding ceremony. We have looked everywhere but we cannot find anything.*

*The old man: I know nothing about nothing.*

*The man: we are so tired of looking for it.*

*The old man: Please come in. Come in and get some rest, some tea perhaps.*

*The man: No thanks; I thought you might know where it takes place.*

With the old man still wandering in the desert a week later, the postman comes back and knocks on the door.

*The old man: Who is it?*

*The postman: I have a letter from your son.*

*The old man: I do not want his letter anymore, I have not heard from him for two years. Send it back to*

*him.*

*The postman: if you do not want your letters anymore, you have to take off the plate number on your door.*

*The old man: I cannot take it off.*

*And he walks away.<sup>1</sup>*

The old man keeps the door for himself and refuses to remove the plate number because of all memories he has from his house; the time he got married and crossed this door, first bringing his newborn children home and even them moving out. All of these fond memories are housed in this door, the final piece of his worldly possessions.

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2.4

<sup>1</sup> Mohsen Makhmalbaf. "Movies: The Door script." Ed. Translated by Minou Moshiri <<http://www.makhmalbaf.com/articles.php?a=251>>.



2.5

“When the Door talks” is the name of a video, (made in the first term of master design studio, referred to as M1). It expresses a blind girl’s imagination, telling a story about her life and loneliness by her interpretations of the nails and cracks on the floors and walls of her room. It consists of three screens running at the same time; the one to the left is showing her imagination, while the ones in the middle and right are views of her hand from the top and side.

The story begins as she sits by herself in her room, wondering if there is any story behind the space that she is surrounded by. She starts touching the floor, using her hands as if she is reading a book. When she gets to the nails on the floor, she feels them as a Braille code, which brings the following poetry by the Iranian poet, Hafez, to her mind:

*Friends, let us join in waves of beloved’s hair;  
let its blackness expand this night’s joyous air.*

---

**PART 2.2**  
(WHEN THE FLOOR TALKS)

*Wisdom and unity reign, all friends attend;  
close the circle and say a gathering prayer.  
Strings of rebec and harp sing out in clear voice;  
open your ears to those who speak knowledge rare.*

*I swear to each friend, you'll be free of grief's veil;  
competent mystery's kind if trust it you dare.  
No space separates beloved and lover;  
if she hesitates, love her all the more fair.*

*First counsel of Elder has always been clear:  
travel not with those ones whose clay you don't  
share.*

*If any in circle's not drunk from love's wine,  
let's pray for his death while he has life to spare.<sup>2</sup>*

After reading this poetry in the nails, she considers there is more behind this surface, like the hidden stories of a woman behind a veil. When she gets to some cracks on the floor, she pictures them as characters of this story. They are people who are trying to come out of the floor and talk to her. While she is reading the cracks by her left hand, she grabs a pen and draws on them with her right hand, to help them become visible. In her imagination, a veil comes out of the ground, like a butterfly coming out of its cocoon, and stands in front of her with no division between them. She finds more companions, until the characters of the story want to take another direction, which she cannot follow. She goes back to where she found the first crack on the floor but she gets to the wall. This makes her feel lost and lonely again as the texture of the wall is smooth, without any cracks. Then a crack on the wall appears and her hands come alive as another story begins.

The intent of this video is to emphasize the role and importance of a symbolic understanding of architectural elements. Just, as the words of any language represent a concept or idea deeper than their literal meaning, architectural elements, such as floors, walls and doors, can symbolically express the metaphysical intent of a design. For example a wall may physically separate

<sup>2</sup>Pourafzal, Haleh, and Roger Montgomery. [Hafez: teaching of the philosopher of love](#) 150.

two spaces, but a physical wall is not necessarily needed to separate human beings from one another. We often find that the wall of prejudice and irrational opinion can easily separate people. Their separation may even be more powerful than the one created by a stone wall. I believe the symbolic interpretation and understanding of architectural elements will help designers to communicate these otherwise undisclosed levels of experience. My goal is to bring people of different backgrounds closer together by raising their awareness of these symbolic levels of experience.

In this video art, a blind girl reads the knots and cracks in an old wooden floor and this leads her to grasp a different understanding of the architectural elements. While our culture is dominated by visual experience, the main way in which the blind can experience architecture is through their hands. Thus this tactile world sparks her imagination and she begins to tell her story. This is the tactile experience that allows her to express her imagination and interpret the space she is in. Based on her experience, which is different from someone relying on the sense of sight, her imagination unfolds.

This video highlights how the sense of touch plays a major role in the experience of architectural elements. There is a deep relationship between our physical experience of space and imagination; as all the senses, not only vision, have major role in our experience and understanding of the world.

This can be related to the door because our interaction with it is not merely visual, we also experience it with the other senses such as touch, hearing and perhaps smell. This leads us into the following section explaining the symbolic meanings of doors. This is done by analyzing different types of doors and their components based on their form, scale, material, location in the building and as well as the symbolic importance of their interaction with the individual.



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What is a door? While a door is literally defined as an opening that provides access to a building, it can more broadly be defined as:

a **mask** that individuals wear, which is a **veil** that hides the mystery within,  
a **journey** between this world and the next, which is a **threshold** between life and death,  
and a **passage** between two-separated worlds, which is a **bridge** connecting two different spaces.  
In each case, in both literal and metaphorical meaning, what is crucial is that this vertical plane expresses a sense of transition.

Metaphorically speaking, the transition through a door can be interpreted as moving from one world to another; unknown to known, darkness to light, or concealment to enlightenment. Therefore, anything providing this means of transition can be recognized as a door. But what makes the door so significant amongst the other architectural elements is that the door actually exists in the world. It has a physical dimension which offers us to cross it; it has weight, scale and dimension.

The mystery of the door is that it exists on the boundary between two different worlds; the worlds between private and public, interior and exterior, life and death or light and darkness. Christopher Alexander, in his book *A pattern language*, states “if the Point where the path crosses the boundary is invisible, and then to all intents and purposes the boundary is not there. It will be there, it will be felt, only if the crossing is marked. And essentially, the crossing of a boundary by a path can only be marked by a doorway or gateway.”<sup>3</sup>  
More important, doors can also be felt by other senses than only visual. They can be marked by a sound, a voice, a lull or a smell and a taste. For instance in some houses in south of Iran, there is not a solid front door and anyone who wants to enter has to ring the little bell hung above the lintel. Also we know when we are at home by the smell of inside.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander, Christopher. *Pattern Language : Towns, Buildings, Construction* 277.

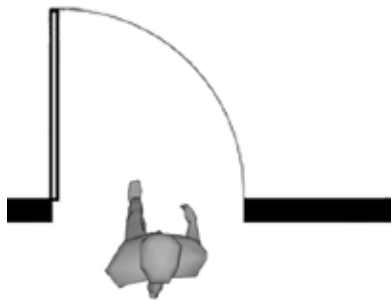


2.30

*Contemporary doorways*, states that “In Latin, the word for door (fores) came to be associated with the distinction between public and private domains. The word “door” and its role and importance as a boundary between two separated worlds is also noticed in different languages. Catherine Slessor in the book, term foris or forum referred to a public space outside the door. Phrases such as “behind closed doors” or “to show someone the door” bear witness to this view of the doors as a junction between public and private space, and as an embodiment of the powers of inclusion and exclusion.”<sup>4</sup>

There are many different types of doors; there are doors that are integral part of the wall, entrance door, back door, garage door and glass door. Etc. These depends on the their form, use, and place in the layout, their symbolic significance is equally varied. For instance, the front door, its shape and place in the building, plays a major role in how welcoming the building is. It can be a double door and invite more people or a single one and only let individuals in one by one. It can be made out of glass and let us see through the building or can be wooden and keep the inside concealed. Thus it is not by accident that some homes appear welcoming, whereas others don't.

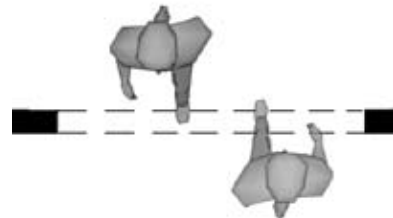
Through a comparison between different types of doors, their shapes, their position within the building and the materials used in them, one can more easily evaluate how welcoming each of these doors is. The following images are aimed at reflecting these points:



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2.33

<sup>4</sup> Slessor, Catherine. *Contemporary Doorways : Architectural Entrances, Transitions and Thresholds* 10-11.



2.34



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As the doors are at the beginning of a passage, our first physical interaction with a building is through them. As such, all of our senses are involved in the act of crossing a threshold or opening a door. We experience them with our hands, eyes, ears, nose; every little muscle, and hair on our body responds to the door. We feel the changes of temperature and humidity at the threshold with our skin. We even sense the new smell of the place we enter in anticipation. Therefore, it is necessary to also look at the significance of each component; as if they are the pages, words and letters of a book without

which the story can not be complete. The subsequent images represent the components of a door followed by my personal analysis of their symbolic meanings. They are organized in order of interaction with the individual, demonstrating their narrative sequence.

**1- Appearance and Identity:** The first interaction that one has with a door is visual. By looking at a door, the philosophy and stories behind its design can reveal themselves to the trained eye. This is why the physical appearance and form of the door play a major role in discovering the stories and mysteries behind it. For example, a wooden door with a horizontal window installed on it, can convey a totally different story from one that has vertical window on it; depending on the form of these openings, one could observe a different part of the story behind the door.

A door can be open and inviting, enticing the individual to cross the threshold, or closed and locked tight. These are ways the door presents a vision that either welcomes an individual or makes them feel unwanted. Simon Unwin in his book, *Doorway*, states that “we read doorways like we read faces; they tell us whether we are welcome or might be in jeopardy. Sometimes they lie to us and lure us into situations we would rather avoid.”<sup>5</sup>



2.43



2.44



2.45

<sup>5</sup> Unwin, Simon. *Doorway*. 206



2.46

**2-The Threshold:** Before stepping into a new territory or crossing a boundary, one often has to ask for permission. The area where one receives this permission is called a “threshold”. It is an introductory and preparatory place where we present our physical identity to the others; we introduce ourselves and ask who they are.

The first physical contact of an individual with the threshold is through his or her feet. The scale and shape of the threshold is dependent upon the particular function of the place or building one aims to enter. Often we cross a threshold in the blink of an eye, but sometimes we hang on there for a while. For example, in many public places, one can observe long staircases gradually allowing the visitors to get closer to the main area, one step at a time.

**3-The Door Handle:** Then comes the time to open the door; just as when two people meet each other and shake hands to introduce themselves, the visitor grabs the handle of the door and twists it.



2.47



It is in a way, his or her personal introduction. Juhani Pallasmaa, in his book, *The Eyes of the Skin*, states “It is pleasurable to press a door handle shining from the thousands of hands that have entered the door before us; the clean shimmer of the ageless wear has turned into an image of welcome and hospitality. The door handle is the handshake of the building. The tactile sense connects us with time and tradition: through impressions of touch we shake the hands of countless generations.”<sup>6</sup>

**4-The Door:** As one proceeds to open the door, the weight it is felt on the body. It is then that the presence of the door is felt most directly, expressing its physical characters, such as the fabric, the weight, the texture etc. This is where, for example, the difference between a heavy door made of iron and a veil or a curtain is clearly felt.



2.48

<sup>6</sup> Pallasmaa, Juhani. *Eyes of the Skin : Architecture and the Senses* 56.

There are indications in some part of the world, such as Middle East and South America and some part of Asia, such as Japan, where the curtain was used as a door so that one could see the shadows of the story within. As the story of the image on the next page demonstrates a prostitute stands behind a curtain in the house where she works. If discovered, these women would be killed by relatives in order to guard the honor of their family name.

**5-The Frame and Hinge:** Now, all the above elements that tell us the story and philosophy behind a particular door, are merged into the entire structure of the edifice through the frame and hinge. This is also when the size of the door is experienced; showing the difference between tall doors, through which one can walk, upright, and a shorter ones that forces the visitor to bow his or her head down as a gesture of humbleness.



2.49



2.50



2.51 A woman within a door; personal interpretation of protection and security by doors. The door is a boundary, protecting the woman from the outside world.

The need for doorways is born the moment boundaries created. Primitive tribes, in order to provide themselves and secure their sources of food, shelter and warmth from wild animals, built shelters with only a small opening.

Later on, along with the population growth and the development of cities, gateways became a distinct architectural element, by means of city's fortification and boundary marks. Amongst the examples of doorways examined, drawbridges, in the middle ages, have the same primary function as gateways, fortification of the interior. The bridge, as a threshold, is controlled by an individual inside the building, allowing only some to pass over the moat or ditch to gain deny entry into the castle.

Gates, when compared to doors, have a greater public dimension. They must be wider and higher to provide access for transportation by means of horse cart or later by car. Since only people with a higher social class rode in vehicles or on horses, the gateways are mostly

representing political or military power of a society, whereas doors mostly reflect the concerns, beliefs and rituals of cultures over time.<sup>7</sup>

Today, inside the home, the doorway separates the private from public. Likewise, the door of sacred places such as mosques, churches and temples are boundaries between pure, a sacred space inside and an unclean, ordinary space outside. In every case, crossing and passing through these thresholds are associated with different rituals or traditions that we are going to explore in the next chapter.

<sup>7</sup>Gate of the Present : 25 Contemporary Lego Gates, with a Historic Introduction  
5.



# RITUALS



3.1



*How could a legend be kept alive and perpetuated if each generation had not “intimate reasons” for believing in it?<sup>1</sup>*

*The symbolic meaning of a phenomenon helps to explain these “intimate reasons”, since it links the instrumental with the spiritual, the human with the cosmic, the casual with casual, disorder with order, and since it justifies a word like universe which, without these wider implications, would be meaningless, a dismembered and chaotic pluralism; and finally, because it always points to the transcendental.<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Bachelard, Gaston. Psychoanalysis of Fire. Translated by Alan C.M. Ross 36.

<sup>2</sup>Cirlot, Juan Eduardo. Dictionary of Symbols xiii.

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**PART 3.1**  
(CYCLE OF LIFE)

The following story and the series of symbolic images that accompany it, is about one's spiritual investigation of Birth, Life, Death and Resurrection. It has been made by myself in the first term of master design studio. And inspired by a poem from the Persian poet Rumi, from his book, Divane Shams.

*All day I think about it, then at night I say it.  
Where did I come from, and what am I supposed to  
be doing?*

*I have no idea.*

*My soul is from elsewhere, I'm sure of that,  
And I am intend to end up there.*

*This drunkenness began in some other tavern.  
When I get back around to that place,  
I'll be completely sober. Meanwhile,  
I'm like a bird from another continent, sitting in this  
aviary.*



3.2



3.3

*The day is coming when I fly off,  
But who is it now in my ear who hears my voice?  
Who says words with my mouth?*

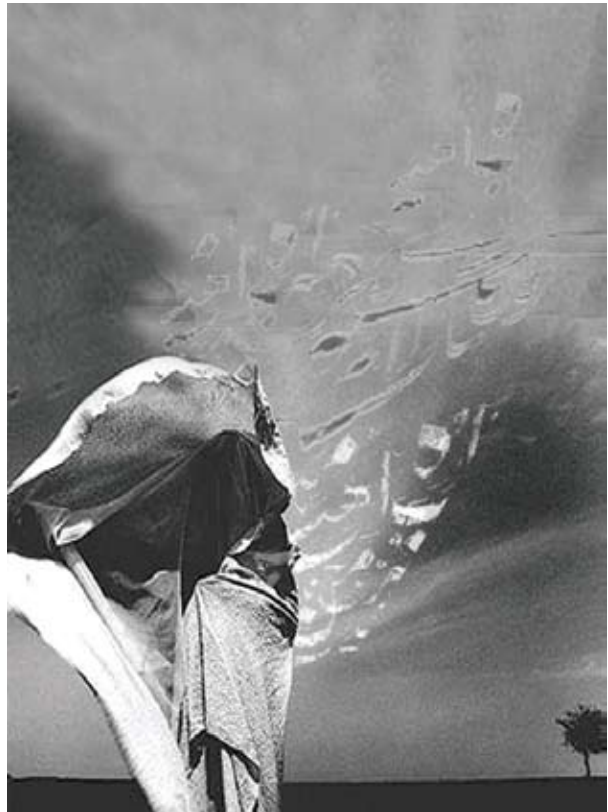
*Who looks out with my eyes? What is the soul?  
I can not stop asking.  
If I could taste one sip of an answer,  
I could break out of this prison for drunks.  
I didn't come here of my own accord, and I can't leave  
that way.  
Whoever brought me here will have to take me home.*

*This poetry. I never know what I'm going to say.  
I don't plan it.  
When I'm outside the saying of it,  
I get very quite and rarely speak at all.<sup>3</sup>*

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3.4



3.5

<sup>3</sup>Jalal al-Din Rumi, Maulana, and Coleman Barks. Essential Rumi 2.



3.6



3.7

The journey begins when a delicate veil, which symbolizes the basic essence of a woman, lifts up from the ground. As she becomes conscious of her own existence, many questions arise:

*Where did I come from, and what am I supposed to be doing?*

As she dwells upon these questions in awe, a Simorgh<sup>4</sup> suddenly lifts her up and takes her on a journey in quest of knowledge. The Simorgh takes her towards an immense tree constantly scattering the seeds of knowledge and wisdom, in form of the Farsi alphabet, into the wind. The flow of Knowledge pouring from the tree is gradually attached into the veil.

What she learns from her surroundings; she will share with the others. She opens her veil to reveal the Farsi letters, which then spread back to the wind. This is a moment of sharing wisdom.

<sup>4</sup>cf. Simorgh, in Persian mythology, is the name of an old bird that has seen the destruction of the world three times over. She learned so much by living so long she is thought to possess the knowledge of all ages.

As her consciousness is filled with philosophical knowledge and becomes saturated with words of wisdom, she realizes that all of her fundamental questions remain unanswered and she only feels heavier with the load of unusable knowledge. She then feels the urge to open a new door inside her. From this sudden realization begins a new kind of quest, that of the soul.

In death she finally reaches the end of her journey and returns to the earth, from which she came. The delicate veil descends back to the ground, carrying the scriptures of wisdom with it until it lifts up again...

روزها فکر من اینست و همه شبم	که چرا عاقل از احوال دل منو شستم
از کجا آمده ام آمد نم بهر چه بود	بکجا میروم آهسته تنهای و طعم
مانده ام سخت عجب که چه سبب ساخت	یا چه بودست مرادوی ازین ساختنم
آنچه از عالم علویست من آن میگویم	رخت بر بسته بر آنم که بدانجا فکرم
یا مرا بردر تخم آن شاه برید	که خار من از انجاست همانجا شکتم
خنک آرزو که پرواز کنم تا بروست	بهوای سر کوشش پرو بالی بر نم
کیست آن گوش که او می شنود آوازم	یا که است سخن میکند اندر دهنم
کیست در دیده که از دیده برون میخورد	یا چه شخصت نگونی که نش پیرهنم
تا تحقیق مرا منزل وره تنهای	یکدم آرام نگیرم نفسی دم نرم
می وصلم بچشان تا در زندان ابد	از سر عریده ستانم بهم در شکتم
نه بخود آدم اینجاست که بخود بازوم	آنکه آورد مرا باز برد تا و طعم
تو سپندار که من شعر بخودی گویم	تا که هشیارم و بیدار کی دم نرم

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**PART 3.2**  
(SPIRITUAL JOURNEY)

*Rituals are physical enactments of spiritual journeys in which the body is taken as the symbol of the spirit. They can symbolize progression toward enlightenment or the gods (the ritual dances of the ancient Mesopotamians, for example, symbolically imitated the journey of the goddess Ishtar to the underworld), or the journey of death and subsequent rebirth, in which we sacrifice our identity and pass renewed into the next stage of life.<sup>5</sup>*

**O**ur interest in humanity's spiritual journey, our existence and creation, is universal. This is related to the fundamental question associated with the knowledge of our own mortality: what will happen to me when I die? This question then leads to another: what am I looking for in this life?

The mysteries of our transformation and transition from this world to another, the fear of death and the life hereafter, have always been connected with the religious rituals of different cultures. These rituals, among some tribal societies and most religions are often done through trials of pain and suffering, such as fasting, trials of strength and endurance. This adds a physical dimension to the symbolic representation of death and rebirth. In this, individuals prove that their souls transcend their physical body.

These particular rituals are connected with cleansing or preparing our souls for death. They often involve purification of the polluted body by bathing in a fast-flowing stream or blood, associated with both life and death and therefore standing for renewal.<sup>6</sup>

Juhani Pallasma, in his book *The Eyes of the Skin*, writes that :

*Architecture, as with all art, is fundamentally confronted with questions of human existence in space and time, it expresses and relates man's being in the world. Architecture is deeply engaged in the metaphysical questions of the self and the world, interiority and exteriority, time and duration, life and*

<sup>5</sup>Fontana, David. *Secret Language of Symbols : A Visual Key to Symbols and their Meanings* 30.

<sup>6</sup>IBID., p.30

*death.*<sup>7</sup>

Among all architectural elements, doors and gates, have always been particularly considered for their symbolic meaning as a threshold between life and death, in the architecture of different cultures. Hence their forms all acquired a divine, royal or celestial association to go with their symbolic significance.<sup>8</sup>

Gates in prehistoric times were mostly considered fortified defensible entrances that were richly ornamented. Later on, they became free from these purposes and stood alone as an important symbolic architectural elements, becoming bound to their ritual significance. There are marvelous examples of myths, rituals and traditions, from both Western and Eastern cultures, associated with doorways and thresholds. The following sections have been organized around the eternal cycles of death and birth, or death and rebirth, as a series of events are eternally recurring, to highlight the role and importance of these rituals in forming the structure of doors and gateways.

3.8 Sema dance is a ritual practiced by followers of Rumi who are also called whirling dervishes or sufis. In Sema, whirling is to reflect our universal truth, that everything in our existence revolves: the circulation of the blood in our bodies, the cycle of the seasons. By the stages of our lives; we come from the earth and we return to it.



<sup>7</sup>Pallasmaa, Juhani. *Eyes of the Skin : Architecture and the Senses* 16.

<sup>8</sup>Smith, E. Baldwin (Earl Baldwin). *Architectural Symbolism of Imperial Rome and the Middle Ages* 10.

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DOORS AS A THRESHOLD  
BETWEEN LIFE AND  
DEATH

*In mythological terms, the door represents hope, opportunity, opening and the entrance to a new life, initiation and shelter. Perhaps, most profoundly, it epitomizes passage from one state or world to another. Doors and gates mark the threshold between profane and sacred, natural and super natural, the living and the dead, and often such portals are guarded by fabulous beasts and monsters.*<sup>9</sup>

Metaphorically speaking, our first journey into this physical world was through a door from the earth, thus death would be the only doorway from this world into a new life. Simon Unwin states, “At birth, in our own personal prehistories, we emerged from darkness into light. People who return from near-death experiences describe a tunnel leading to a bright light.”<sup>10</sup>

As such, in various regions of the world, particular attention has been devoted to doorways and thresholds, as a way to heavenly glory. One of the best examples of such a gateway is the “false door”. It is the “false door” which is actually a secret door that conceals a mystery. False doors are a common feature of Egyptian tombs dedicated to their ancient gods. Ancient Egyptian believed that the false door is a gate between life and death through which a deity or the spirit of deceased could enter and exit.

William Lethaby, in his book *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, notifies us that:

*In most early tombs, those of Persia and Lycia, and the southern coast of modern Turkey, there is a false door, a mere representation of a doorway, with two guardian watchers; as we have seen that the grave was the underworld in double.*<sup>11</sup>

Most of the false doors are found on the west wall of a funerary chapel because the people of ancient

<sup>9</sup> Slessor, Catherine. *Contemporary Doorways : Architectural Entrances, Transitions and Thresholds* 8.

<sup>10</sup> Unwin, Simon. *Doorway* 127.

<sup>11</sup> Lethaby, W. R. (William Richard). *Architecture, Mysticism, and Myth* 190.





3.9 False door of funeral chamber of Theta. Giza, fourth Dynasty



3.10 False door (for spirits) on the south tower of the beautiful Banteay Srei.

Egypt, believed that the souls of the dead passed through a gate facing the West. This was because Osiris, the deity of the underworld, entered this realm at the time of sunset. With regard to the notion of False Door, Henry Trumbull in his book, *Threshold Covenant*, states:

*In Phenicia, Carthage, Cyprus, Sardinia, Sicily, and in Abyssinia, a like prominence was given to the door as a door, in temple and in tomb, and as a niche for the figure of a deity or for the representation of one who had crossed the threshold of the new life. And the door-form is a sacred memorial of the dead in primitive lands in various parts of the world, from the rudest trilithon to the more finished structures of a high civilization.*<sup>12</sup>

Another example of a “false” door used architecturally, would be the use of a Porta Di Morti in Italy. This small door was on the west side of the house and was

<sup>12</sup> Trumbull, H. Clay (Henry Clay). *Threshold Covenant : Or, the Beginning of Religious Rites* 107.

used solely for the removal of a dead body in funeral rituals.<sup>13</sup>

Also in some Inuit tribes in Alaska, there is a hole in the rear wall to remove a corpse, as it is considered an evil omen for the dead to be carried over the houses's threshold. Nowadays, "false doors" can still be found on tombstones or burial monuments. As such, placing flowers upon a grave, marking the tombstone, or praying at the burial site is actually the worship of Osiris, the deity of the underworld.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> IBID., p.24

<sup>14</sup> op.cit, note 11. 190.

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## DOORS AS THRESHOLD BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL

In addition to understand the relationship of threshold to the concept of life and death, doors also touch upon the boundaries between Good and Evil. In this regard, the threshold plays an essential role as a protection; it is where the ceremonies and rituals occur to repel the bad spirits from the house. For example, in Lithuanian baptism ceremonies, the father holds the baby over the threshold, which places them under the protection of the gods of threshold. Also, when children get sick, assuming that the eyes of evil have afflicted them, the child is cleansed on the threshold, with the belief that with the help of the gods of the threshold, the malady may be driven out.<sup>15</sup>

The door also plays a significant role as a boundary between good and evil in the notion of the evil eye, which is deeply rooted in many cultures across the world. As such, people hang or bury objects such as handcrafts or horseshoes, across the threshold, as a means of good luck and to guard the house from evil. These objects vary in different cultures. For instance, in Romania, a bat and a gold coin, are buried under the threshold. In ancient Assyria, various images are placed in different sizes and colors like bronze or yellow stone underneath the stones of the threshold of private houses, temples and city gateways.<sup>16</sup>

In Egypt, in the Far East and the Middle East, it is a custom to inscribe the owner's name and some verses of the Koran or other Holy Books over the entrance of the house to invoke good fortune. Dr William Thomson states:

*Mohammedans never set up a gate, cover a fountain, build a bridge, or erect a house, without writing on it choice sentences from the Koran, or from their best poets. Christians also do the same. These writings are deemed a protection against harm from evil spirits.*<sup>17</sup>



3.11 Mecca

Some doorways are thought to be protected by a Guardian spirit or other mythical entities. This guardian was there to perform two tasks: to protect

<sup>15</sup> op.cit, note 12. p. 25

<sup>16</sup> IBID., p.14

<sup>17</sup> Thomson, William. Land and the Book : Or, Biblical Illustrations Drawn from the Manners and Customs, the Scenes and Scenery, of the Holy Land 140.



3.12 Door of Kabba in Mecca is covered by Kiswah; a black cloth silk brocade embroidered with Qur'anic inscriptions in gold. It is draped annually during the month of Dhu al-Hijjah.

the entrance from evil and to highlight the entry to the sacred enclosure.<sup>18</sup>

For example, in Roman mythology Janus, the god of the door was depicted with two faces looking in opposite directions. This symbolized the changes between past and present and the transition from one world to another. It was due to his ability to see both forward and backward, he became known as two-faced god of the boundaries, doors, gates, beginnings and all movements of transition.<sup>19</sup>

However, doorways are not always used to repel evil. In some cases, they themselves represent Death. Thus touching the threshold was sometimes an omen of evil, and crossing threshold had to be avoided. We see this when brides need to be lifted over the threshold. Similarly, there is a story of a small gate called “Gate of the Dead in Korea”, through which a dead body can be carried out, alone and nobody else can enter that pathway, for fear of Evil eyes.<sup>20</sup>

When reflecting on the mythological stories mentioned above, we can conclude that the existential dilemmas of human beings, the fear of death and the hope for an eternal afterlife, the notion good and evil, the protection from evil forces by good spiritual entities, etc. are reflected in the structure and architecture of doorways. Our cross-cultural study, is an introduction to an understanding of next section on people’s belief and ritual on worship deities at doorways and gateways.

<sup>18</sup> Chevalier, Jean, and Alain Gheerbrant. *Dictionary of Symbols* 23.

<sup>19</sup> Rykwert, Joseph. *Idea of a Town : The Anthropology of Urban Form in Rome, Italy and the Ancient World* 139.

<sup>20</sup> op.cit, note 12. p. 24

In different areas of the world, in both ancient and modern times, there are indications that the threshold or entrance ways of homes are considered the altar of the family; as a place of worship or where people felt the presence of a deity or god. This is because transitions were considered sacred; everything in this world transforms into something else- wood to fire, water to ice, winter to summer. In his book *The Threshold Covenant*, Henry Trumbell states:

*Wherever the door is prominent as a door, the threshold is recognized as the floor of the door or as the primitive altar above which the door is erected thus to pass through the door is to cross over the threshold of the door.*<sup>21</sup>

This suggests that when the threshold is recognized as an altar, nearing the threshold represents closeness the sacred. It is in this place, where prayers and appeals for justice to god would takes place. For instance, an ancient tradition in India occurred on the threshold regarding with the plea for forgiveness. In cases of one's mistreatment of others, the perpetrator would sit on the threshold of the victim's house until he or she starved to death.<sup>22</sup> In most Islamic cultures, people to this day say "Bismillah" or "Ya Allah", (meaning "In the Name of God"), to acknowledge the presence of God at the threshold before passing through.

The sacredness of the threshold in some cultures reached such significance, in Babylonia for example, that a new temple was supposed to be built on the threshold of an earlier temple; the one threshold being the first and the latest.<sup>23</sup> Hawaiian city of refuge is another example as sanctuaries for the guilty. Thieves, or murderers, might be pursued to the gateway but as long as they pass its threshold, they are safe as the safety was only within the altar or the threshold of the gateways.<sup>24</sup>

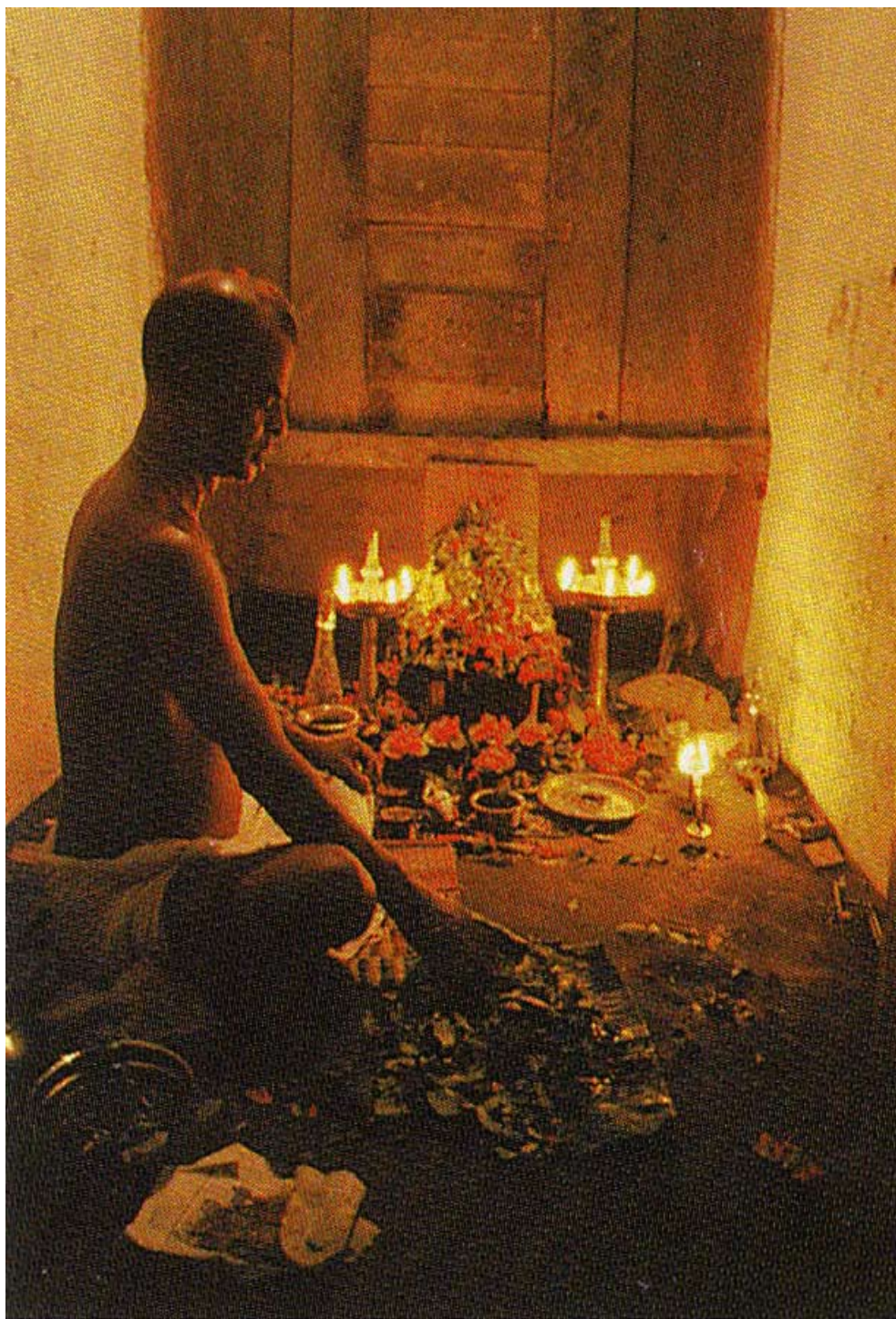
The door and the threshold together form a sacred

<sup>21</sup> IBID., p.108

<sup>22</sup> IBID., p.57

<sup>23</sup> IBID., p.153

<sup>24</sup> IBID., p.151



3.13 A Hindu man is making an offering in front of a rice-store to ensure that the rice gods remain benign.



area where the spirit of God resides. This covenant is shown through inscriptions and tokens on the side-posts and lintels. One such token was the stamp of a red hand, either on the lintel or above the arch of the door.<sup>25</sup> This symbol is common in Jerusalem, representing the hand of Yahweh the God of Israel. In Isaiah, Yahweh himself stated “I” will lift up my hand to the nations” to show his covenant with people of his homeland.<sup>26</sup> This practice survives nowadays in courtrooms where one is to raise their right hand and place their left on a Bible (or other Holy Books) to take an oath. It is also dictated in certain ancient customs that formal documents must be signed with the print of a hand or finger stamped in blood or ink. Later on, instead of the stamp of the Red Hand, red ink alone would simply be used to duplicate the color of blood.

Sacrifices seemed to originate from the same idea showing the covenant with God. For instance, in Syria and Egypt, when a guest comes to the house, the host would slaughter an animal at the threshold of the home, demonstrating that as they crossed the threshold they became part of the family.<sup>27</sup>

There is a commonalty among religious beliefs that the threshold is an altar where the human and divine meet and interact. A threshold is a sacred place where people worship deities and plead allegiance to them.

<sup>25</sup> IBID., p.74

<sup>26</sup>Sabbath Workshop. The Threshold Covenant & Yahweh’s Passover: Part 1 4.

<sup>27</sup> IBID., p.1



3.14 Floating Torii of Miyajima, Japan

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## GATES OF SUN AND SOLAR DEITY

At one time, cultures and civilizations around the world, express a universal need to understand the relationship between human beings and celestial objects, mainly the sun. This can be seen in the notion of eternal battle between good and evil represented by the concept of light and darkness. There is often an influence of celestial objects on human destiny, where humans are looking up for answers to their fundamental questions and existential crisis. Hence, Sun or the Lord of the Day, became the first symbol, by which humans tried to understand their universe.<sup>28</sup>

The general early view was that there were two separate gates in the Eastern and Western parts of the world. Sun enters in the morning through the East gate and exits from the West in the evening, making its way back through the dark path of the underworld.<sup>29</sup>The battle between Horus, the sun god of Egypt, and Set, the god of darkness, is one of constant victories and defeats. Every morning with the sunrise, Horus would

<sup>28</sup>Humphrey, Caroline, and Piers Vitebsky. *Sacred Architecture* 14.

<sup>29</sup>op.cit, note 11. p.174.

dominate the battle, yet in the evening as darkness descended upon the world, Set would get the upper hand.

Related to this there is a sacred story in Egyptian mythology, claiming that God, in order to give advantage to Horus in this battle of light versus darkness, ordered the image of the sun to be shown on every portal at the gate of the East.

This idea of “catching the sun” can be seen in many cultures, mostly Eastern. For instance in Hindu temples, they would sometimes hang a chain across the top of portal to localize the sun at the eastern door.<sup>30</sup> There is a similar example in Kyoto, Japan, where on the front door of a god king palace, there are two rocks connected by a band of straw from which hang Shinto symbols and people worship the rising sun as seen between them. Another example in Japan is the Torii<sup>31</sup>, which has been made in a shape of a roost for the sun, the king of Nature, to rest like a bird would on its nest. This is because in Shinto, birds are considered messengers of the gods.<sup>32</sup>

Although the symbolic battle of light versus darkness has gradually diminished in importance in various religions, one can still observe traces in the appearance, structure and orientation of some architectural elements; mainly doors. These examples are evidence of human kind’s belief in a solar deity. The word minaret, a distinctive architectural feature of Islamic mosques, is the same as manaret, the Arabian word for lamp or lighthouse, and it is allied to manorah, the Hebrew for a candlestick.<sup>33</sup> As demonstrated in fig (3.15), one could assume that the space between two minarets in front of the mosques, have similar functions as the spaces between pillars used in other cultures to catch the sun.

There are similar examples on the front doors of some churches, in middle ages, where the materiality of some doors is chosen to reflect as much light as possible, such as those of Rome, which are made of bronze.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> op.cit, note 11. p.187

<sup>31</sup> cf. A torii is a pillared archway usually made of wood, bronze or stone as the entry into Shinto Shrine.

<sup>32</sup> op.cit, note 11. p.186.

<sup>33</sup> Bayley, Harold. Lost Language of Symbolism : an Inquiry into the Origin of Certain Letters, Words, Names, Fairy-Tales, Folklore, and Mythologies 148.

<sup>34</sup> op.cit, note 11. p.197



3.15 Minaret of Imam mosque in Isfahan, Iran

Legends, myths, and fables are still alive today, which fuel the belief in the afterlife and hereafter. “These legends vary in different religions as the morally determined concepts of heaven and hell, the happy hunting grounds or Nirvana, areas or grounds one hoped or feared to set foot on through entrances or gates.”<sup>35</sup>

Through comparative studies of the architectural mythology of cultures associated with gates of heaven, there are indications that the arc and circular forms have always symbolized the supreme sky god. Elemer Hankiss in his book *Fears and Symbols*, observes that:

*In magic, circle, could encompass, invoke and keep captive the devil and evil spirits; or it could protect the magician, and human in general, against the devil and evil spirits. In mythic thinking, it symbolizes the sky, the dome of heaven, the sacred, virtue, totality, perfection, eternity.*<sup>36</sup>

Gateways became recognized as a symbol of worship due to the symbolic meaning of the arch. Passing through them was then celebrated as leading to heavenly glories. This idea was strengthened under the Roman Empire in the first century BC, where the entrance ways of temples and churches were dedicated to sky worship as a symbol of a heavenly stronghold. Similarly, some Christian churches were named as Porta Coeli, which means gate of heaven.<sup>37</sup>

The Egyptians had similar ideologies; such as ceremonies at the thresholds of a temple where people believed the horizon of heaven was in the line created by the towers next to the Pylon.

In his book, *the Literature of the Egyptians*, renowned Egyptologist Adolf Erman states that “the towered pylons or Horizon, not only represented heaven, the celestial dwelling of the sun or the king’s palace and

<sup>35</sup> Gate of the Present : 25 Contemporary Lego Gates, with a Historic Introduction 5.

<sup>36</sup> Hankiss, Elemer. Fears and Symbols: An Introduction to the Study of Western Civilization 121.

<sup>37</sup> op.cit, note 8. p.22



3.16 Former Cistercian nunnery, Porta Coeli in the Svatka Valley outside of Brno, Czech Republic

a temple, but it also symbolized the throne of the world.”<sup>38</sup>

In Babylon, which derives its name from “Gate of Godhead”, the form of the arch became sacred in itself. Inside the city of Babylon, the sacred gate of Ishtar was decorated with a golden rosette of stars on a blue background as for the inhabitants of Babylon, the arch or towered portal symbolized the arch of heaven.<sup>39</sup>

Today, the rituals of worshipping deities associated with doorways has been noticed through the design strategy for the entrance ways of sacred places such as mosques, synagogues and churches.

The power of these doorways is to establish a linkage between the worshipper and a sacred place such as an altar, the image of a god or a sacred space in the distance.



3.17 Ishtar gate and the processional way, Babylon

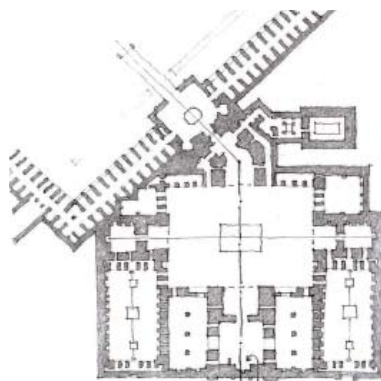
<sup>38</sup>

<sup>39</sup> op.cit, note 35. p.6



3.18 Entrance way to Imam mosque, Isfahan, Iran

The plan on this page is of the Imam mosque in Isfahan, Iran. As shown, it is attached to the great Isfahan square which is not aligned with Mecca. The doorway between the square and the mosque has to accommodate a change in direction so the entrance ways of the mosque, will be placed along the correct orientation with Mecca.



3.19 Plan of Imam mosque

Looking at mythological stories and symbolism of the gates of heaven, we begin to understand the humans constant endeavor to express being. The symbolism of the arch indicates man's belief in spiritual life following the physical one. Believing in rebirth or resurrection, man seeks to prepare the conditions for the reemergence of a better life in a higher realm. People have always come to realize they are looking for meaning in their life. Joseph Campbell in his book, the Power of Myth explains this struggle in understanding the concept of life, observing this from a new perspective adding value to it. Campbell believes that:



*What we are seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive. That's what it's all finally about, and that's what these clues help us to find within ourselves.*<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Campbell, Joseph, and Bill D. Moyers. Power of Myth 1.



**THE END IS THE NEW BEGINNING**



4.1 Children's gateway in orphanage designed by Aldo Van Eyck, Amstelveenseweg, Amsterdam

*This is not historic indulgence in a limited sense; not a question of traveling back, but merely of being aware of what exists in the present- what has traveled into it: the projection of the past into the future via the created present.<sup>1</sup>*

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*Entry is provided for where old and new meet.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup>Eyck, Aldo van, and Vincent Ligtelijn. Aldo Van Eyck, Works 33.

<sup>2</sup>IBID., p.184

When reflecting on the architectural mythology associated with doorways in the previous chapter, we begin to understand that the passage of time does not radically change the essential meaning of symbols; it is rather the context in which they appear and are perceived, that varies.

Among many examples in our cross-cultural studies; we saw the symbolism of the “Red hand” on the surface of doors or above the lintel representing a covenant between God and residents of the house, Today, it is commonly seen in court rooms and official ceremonies that oaths are taken by raising the right hand and bearing witness in front of God.

Considering the significance of symbols, the final thesis proposal also deals with the meanings and concepts behind doors, as seen in previous chapters, and analyzes them within new contexts. The idea is to demonstrate the possibility of reflecting the social, cultural and political facets of a society through doorways.

In order to better illustrate this concept, I have made a short film entitled “Crossing doors”. The reason I chose film instead of conventional architectural representations is the fact that film as a presentation tool combines the power of sound and image to express emotion. Sound and image combined convey a more direct and sense based experience of symbols as well. By using poetic images, the filmmaker can easily direct the viewer’s attention towards a particular symbol or emphasize a particular concept. More importantly, I have chosen the medium of film because of its inherent ability to “tease” the senses. Film not only engages us visually, but it envelops the viewers unconscious mind in a world of the filmmaker’s creation. Film automatically creates an immersive world in which the viewer may rapidly experience multiple layers of sound and image. Thus people interact with a variety of symbolic interpretations in a rich and complex way. The choice of selecting different perspectives is a possibility which can be induced both more easily and with greater precision by carefully crafting a combination of the most important senses - sight and sound. These factors led me to communicate my architectural ideas through film.

Juhani Pallasmaa in his book, *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema*, states that:

*Architecture of today tends to confine emotional response to the realm of utilitarian rationality whereas cinema projects the full range of human emotions: fear and despair, alienation and nostalgia, affection and intimacy, longing and bliss through using symbolic or poetic images.*<sup>3</sup>

“Crossing door” is the name of this final video/pictures that I have made in the fifth terms of my master design studio. It explains a life journey of a woman as she migrates from her Islamic country, Iran; to the day she receives her Canadian citizenship. The narrative of the movie will be shown through series of images on the right of the screen, while various types of doors will express it symbolically on the left. In this film the door and the women’s veil have a tangled relationship; every transformation that one goes through is instantaneously reflected on the other.

The story begins with a woman covered in a black veil on the right side of the screen, and gradually unfolds through the small openings of her veil. Meanwhile, the screen on the left displays a door with small openings through which one can barely see the outside. Both, the door and the woman in black veil are the main characters of this movie.

The second image shows a crowd of women in black veils and men in white shirts. A black veil separates them; demonstrating the separation of women and men in her society of origin. Meanwhile the image on the left shows a traditional door with two different door knobs for men and women. The function of knockers is to indicate to the inhabitants of the house, whether it is a man or a woman who is knocking on the door. The aim is to prevent women from opening the door for a male stranger. Then the third image appears; it shows a woman standing up among the same crowd of women in black veils. She is preparing to leave this place and go somewhere else. The left screen shows the same door with two knockers, and this time, the

<sup>3</sup>Pallasmaa, Juhani. *Architecture of Image : Existential Space in Cinema* 186.

side of the door which belongs to women is open. This symbol reflects her decision to follow a new path in her life.

Images 4 to 6 demonstrate her immigration to Canada. The first image of series shows a small part of a traditional door next to a large garage door, a symbol of a place where two cultures meet. These doorways are connected to each other by a tall and heavy door at the end of the dark alley, symbolizing immigration. This door connects the story of those doors together. She feels that she does not belong to this society and the image on the right shows her standing out of the screen, expressing her feeling of separation. As she opens the heavy door of immigration, a part of the door sticks to the wall that belongs to her home country. The feeling of being attached to her home country has been demonstrated on the right, where she has partially removed her veil after moving to the new society and still cannot remove the veil, entirely.

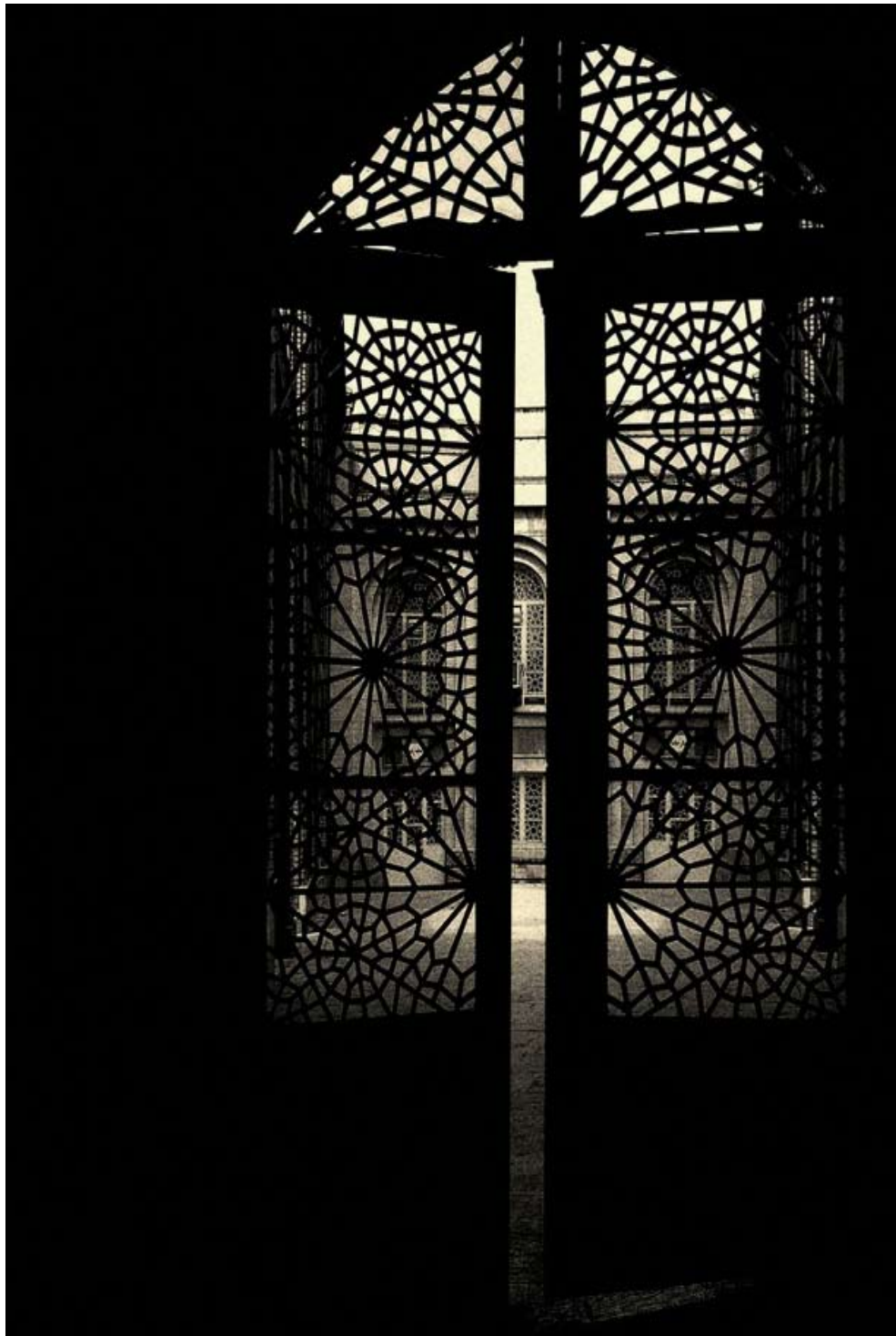
The seventh image on the left symbolizes a room with a hundred different types of doors, the exploration of her new challenges and opportunities as she is confronted with a new culture. She knocks on every door, but there is only one door that opens for her eventually. The image on the right displays a black screen with the sound of some one knocking on different types of doors as the music gets louder and louder reacting to level of hardships and difficulties that she encounters.

After she crosses a pathway with all these different doorways, she finally applies for Canadian citizenship. The process of becoming a Canadian citizen requires one to go through a citizenship test, taking an oath in a ceremony and applying for a passport; these all take time too. This is expressed symbolically as a very dark and narrow pathway with an intense light at the end. The passage is so narrow that only one person at the time can go through, if he or she passes all those steps successfully.

At the end, both images become one and there is no difference between her and other people in the new society. The door becomes thus just a thin and semi-



transparent veil from which only the shadows of the people behind it, are visible. The image represents a thin veil instead of a door as to represent the equality between all citizens.



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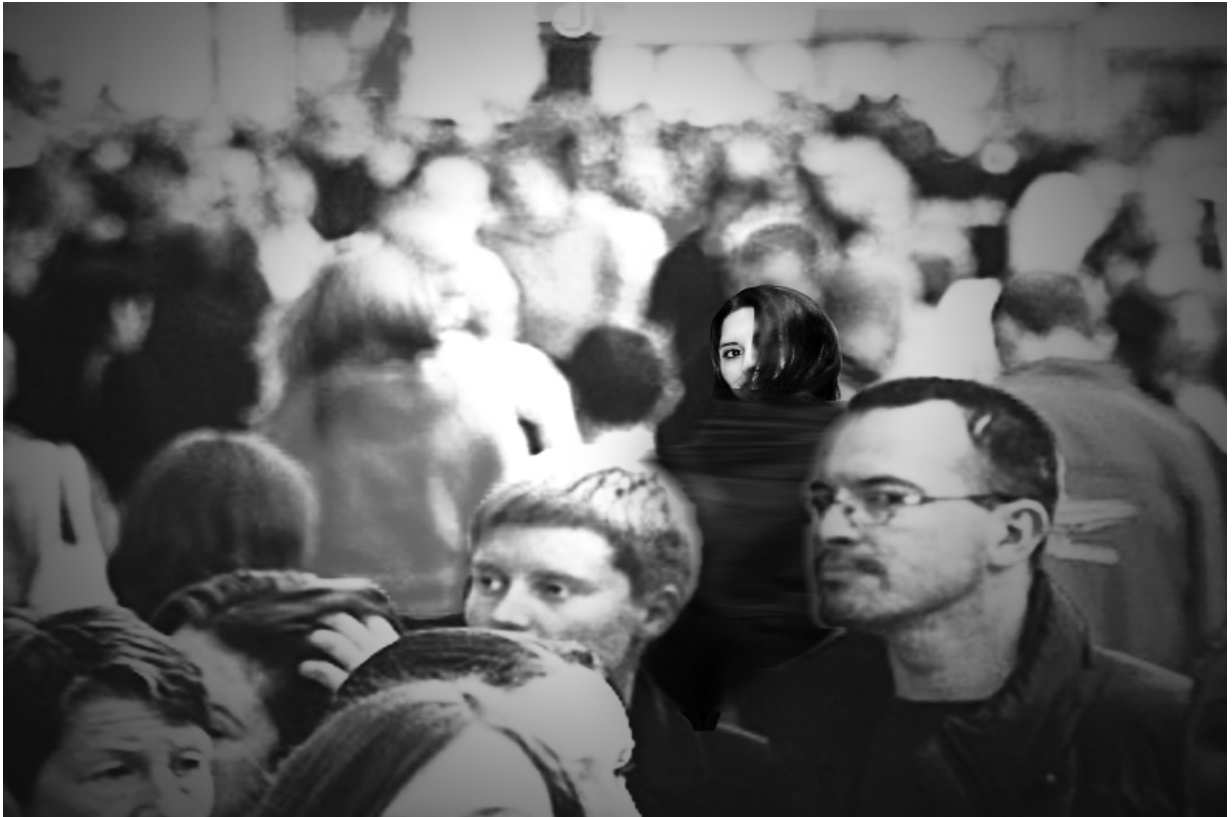
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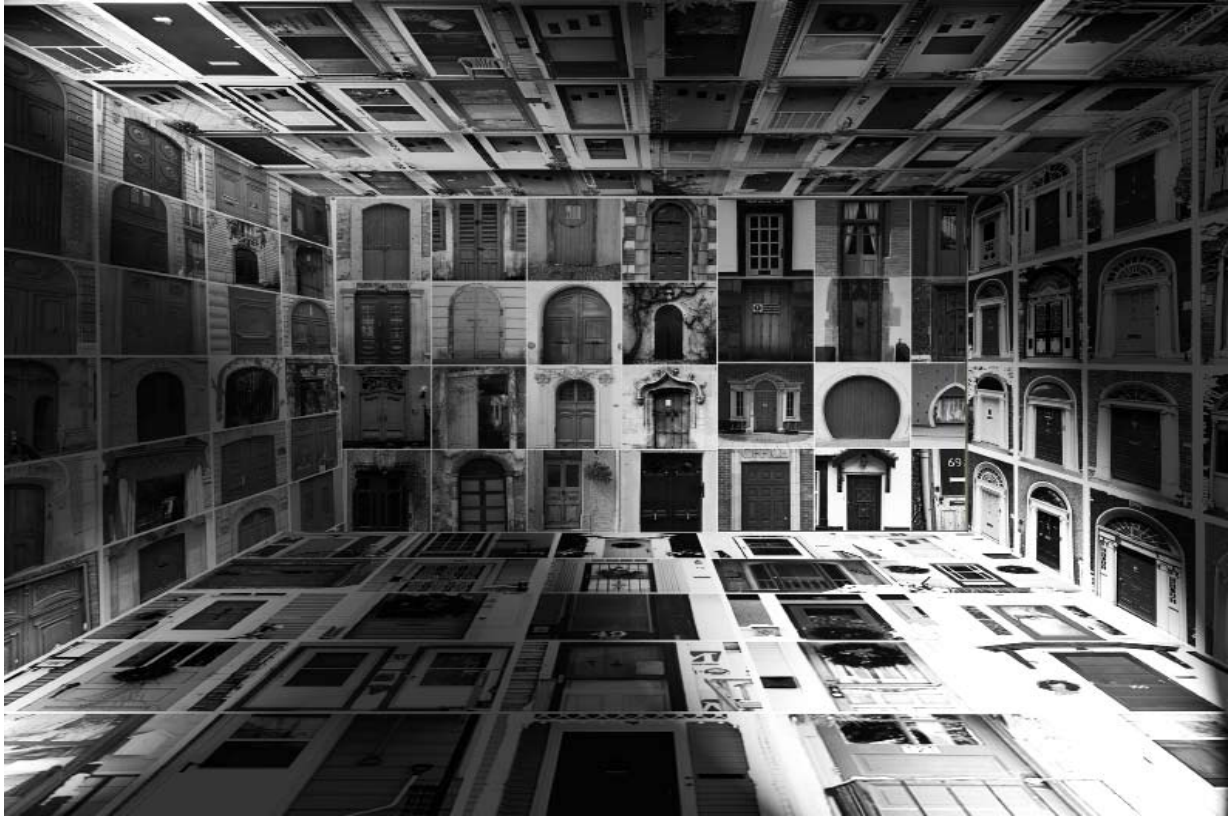
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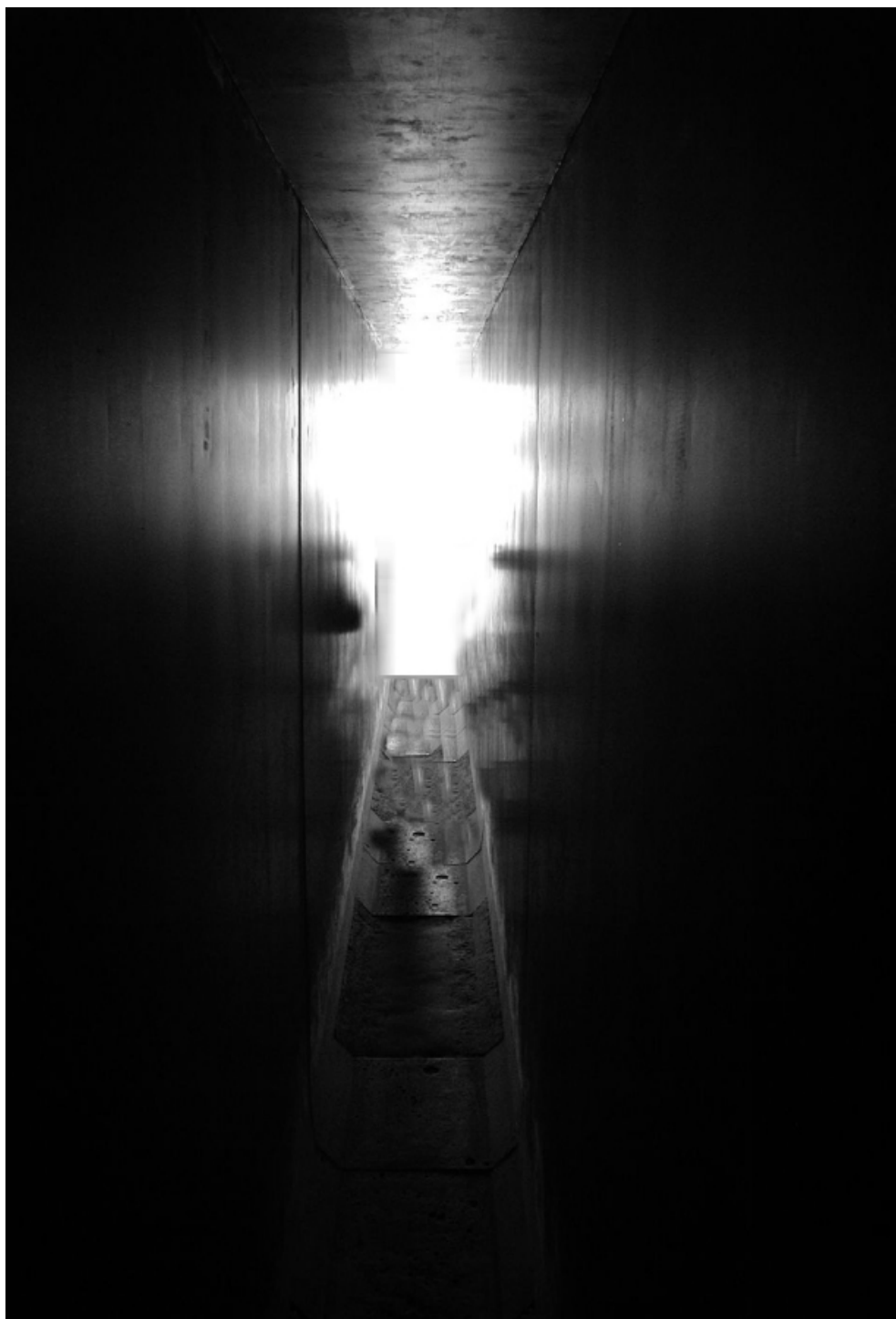


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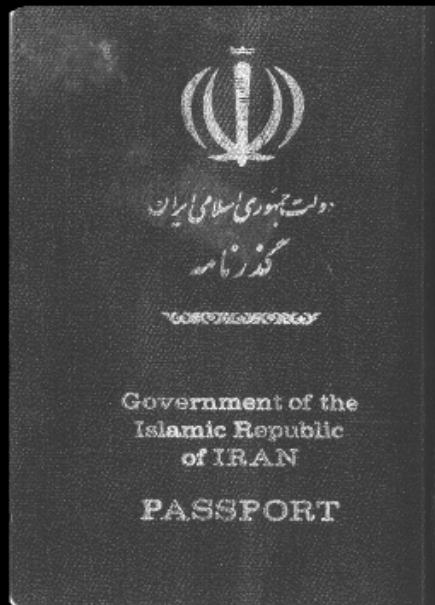
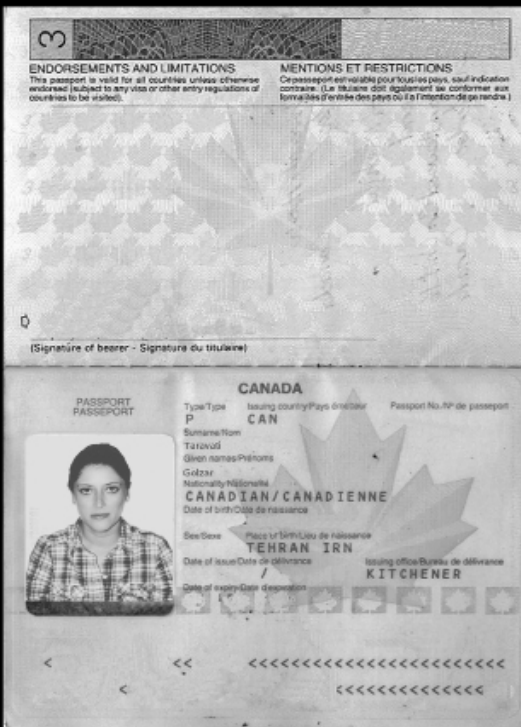
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4.18



# EPILOGUE

Explaining the power and symbolic meanings of doors and thresholds, one realizes how the pace of life in today's technological and consumer societies has disconnected people from their environment. Rarely do people take the time to notice and reflect on details and extract their meanings and senses.

The final proposal of this thesis, "Crossing Door", is composed with the intent of revealing the definition and importance of doors, while raising awareness to the artificiality and superficiality of our life-styles in technologically advanced societies. The human relation with the profound meanings of life will become fruitful and engaged as once again we become aware of the symbolic meanings around us and propose new design strategies for doorways and thresholds based on a firm understanding of their mythological significance. These ideas have been illustrated through some short films and video arts. Film's power to carry symbolic images enabled me to express more of my experiences and emotions that I could have through the design of an architectural space.

What I have hoped to achieve in this thesis was to demonstrate that doorways are not merely functional openings in walls through which we get from the outside to the inside or from one room to another. They are also potential carriers of complex cultural, philosophical and social meanings, making them much more than functional tools to separate two distinct spaces.

A door is an architectural element that reveals the identity of the building; thus in a larger scale, they reveal the identity of a society.

A door is a symbol of duality and contradiction. It can be open or closed to invite or deny access to the visitors. Doors link two different spaces at the same time as they divide them.

A door is a locus of boundary and protection. It separates and links two different worlds, inside from outside, private from public. It is at the doorway where we are in between; we can be in a state of being neither

here nor there.

The mystery of doorway is that they are located at the beginning and end of a journey. A door is also a bridge and a threshold connecting two different spaces. It is a threshold between life and death, sacred and profane, light and darkness.

A doorway is located at an in-between zone, similar to the status of “life and death” which also stand astride a great duality; as such doorways carry the same ambiguities and mysteries with them. Understandably a great number of religious rituals and mythological symbols in human societies have been attached to doors. The threshold of doorways has long been the place of many spiritual rituals and ceremonies, a place to worship deities and plea allegiance to them, a place where two different worlds meet.

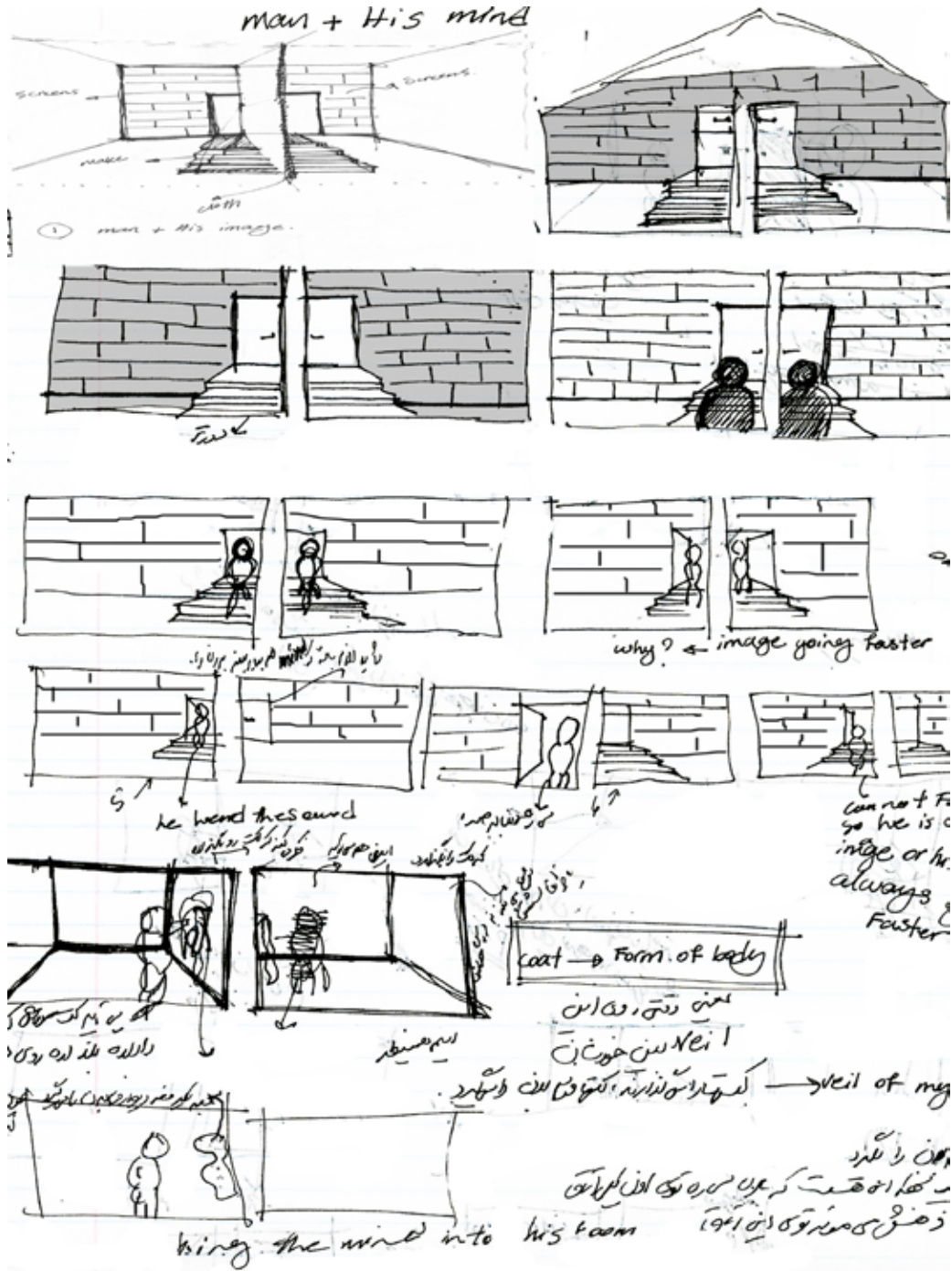
And finally through this thesis we can emphasize and raise awareness about the role and importance of symbols surrounding us, hope to encourage a more engaged interaction between people and the space surrounding them. Also we hope to motivate a new generation of designers to revive these meanings in their future works.



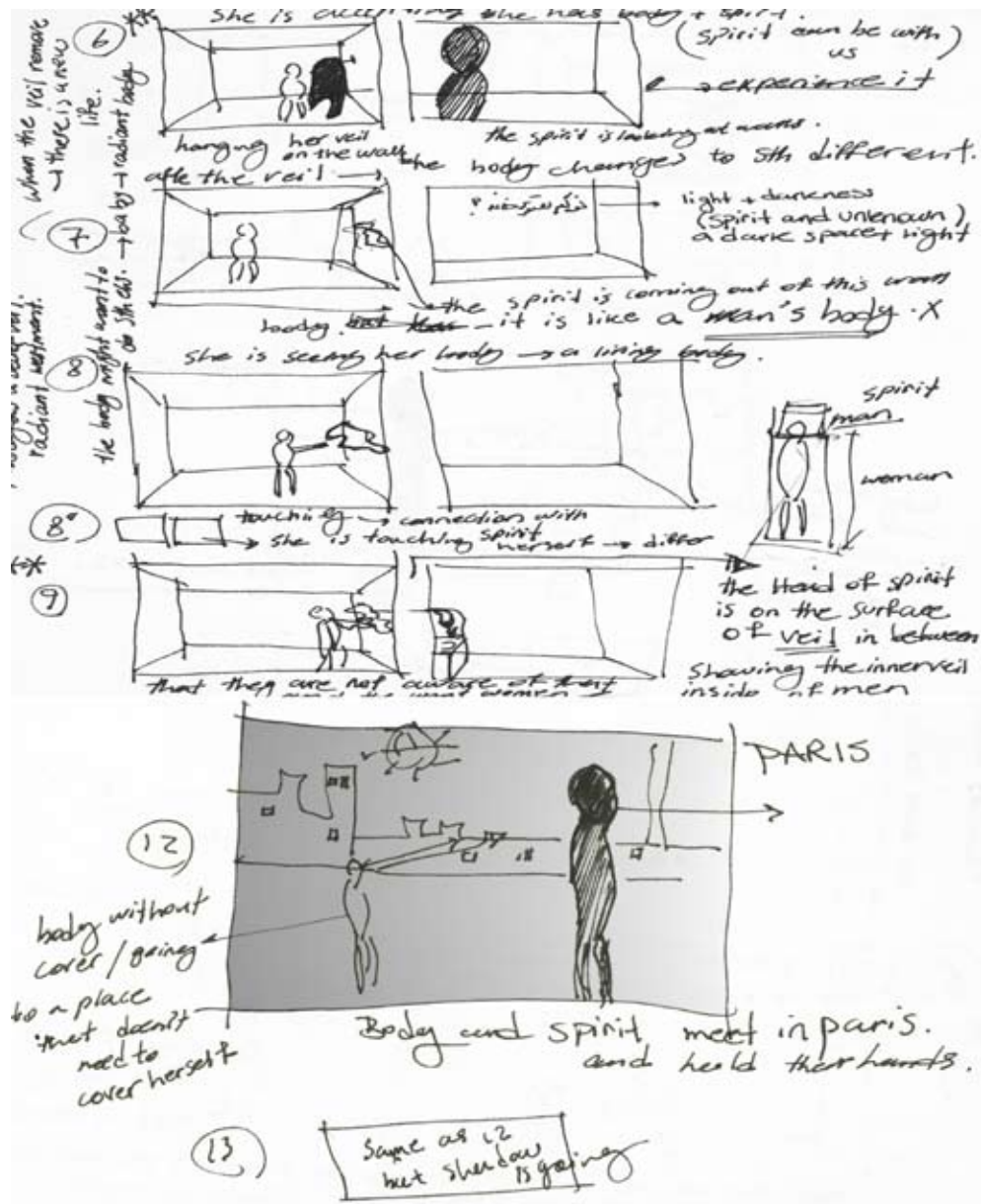


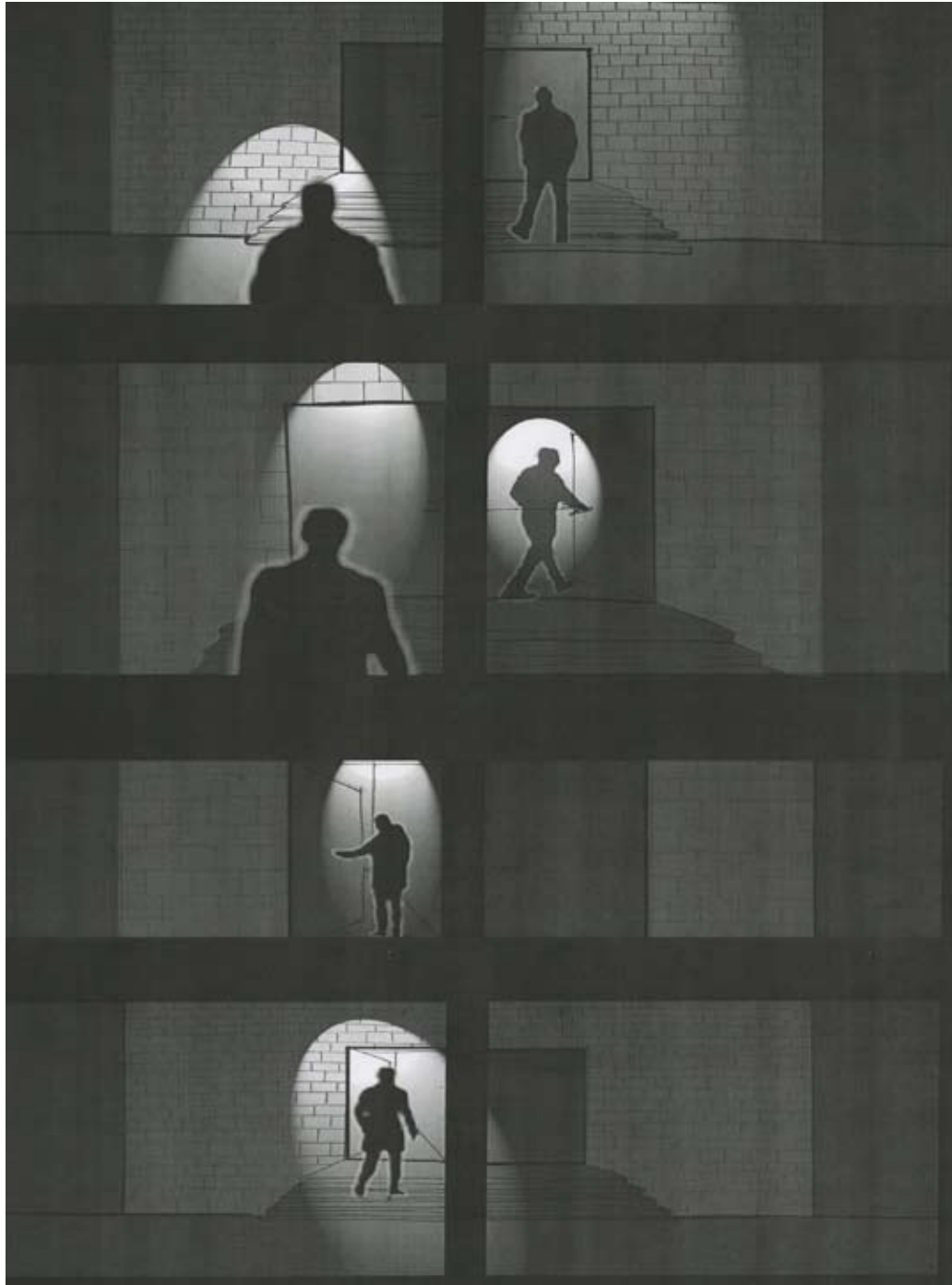
# APPENDIX A

PART 6.1  
 STORY BOARDS OF  
 "DOOR OF BELONGING"

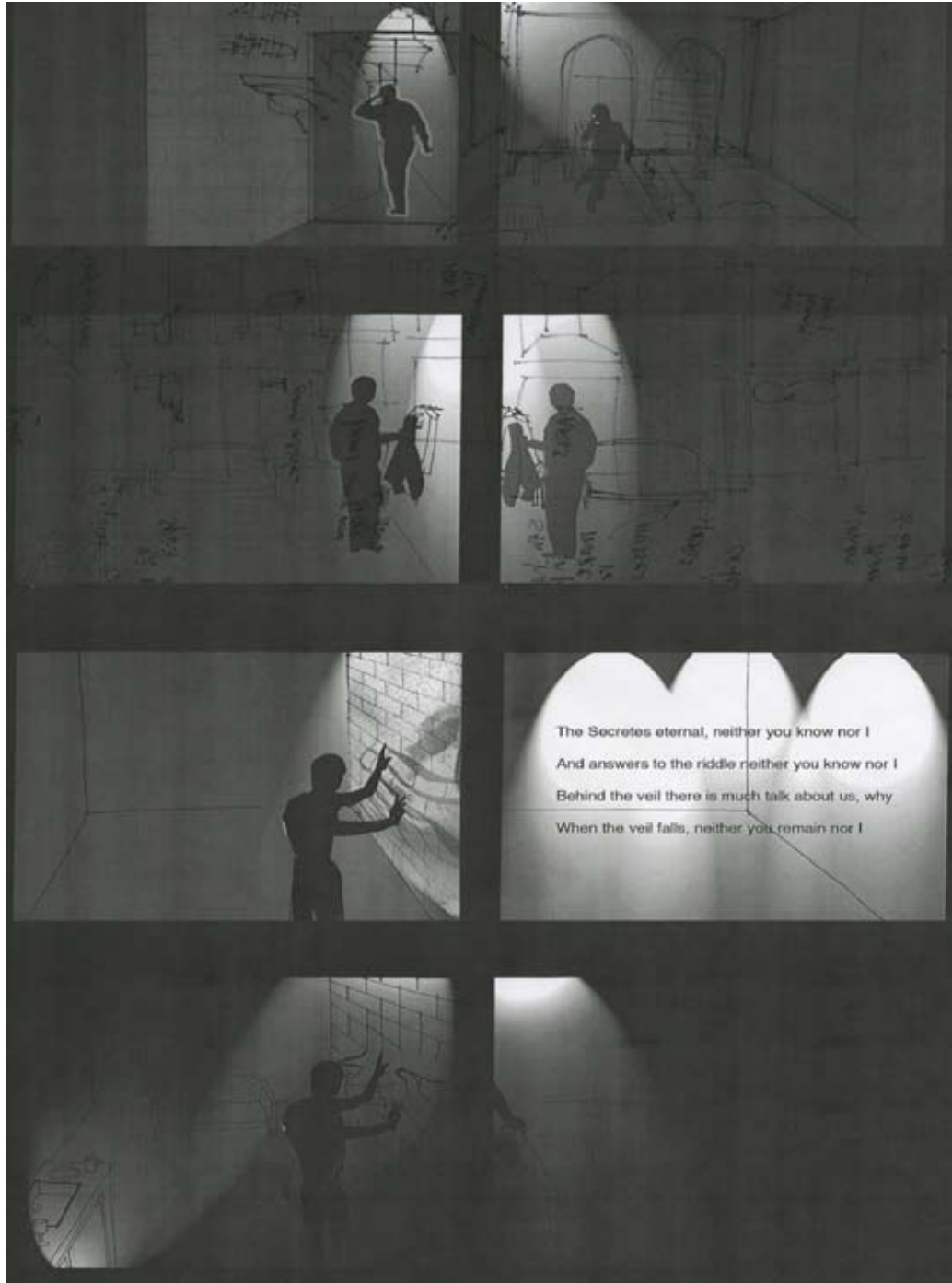


6.1

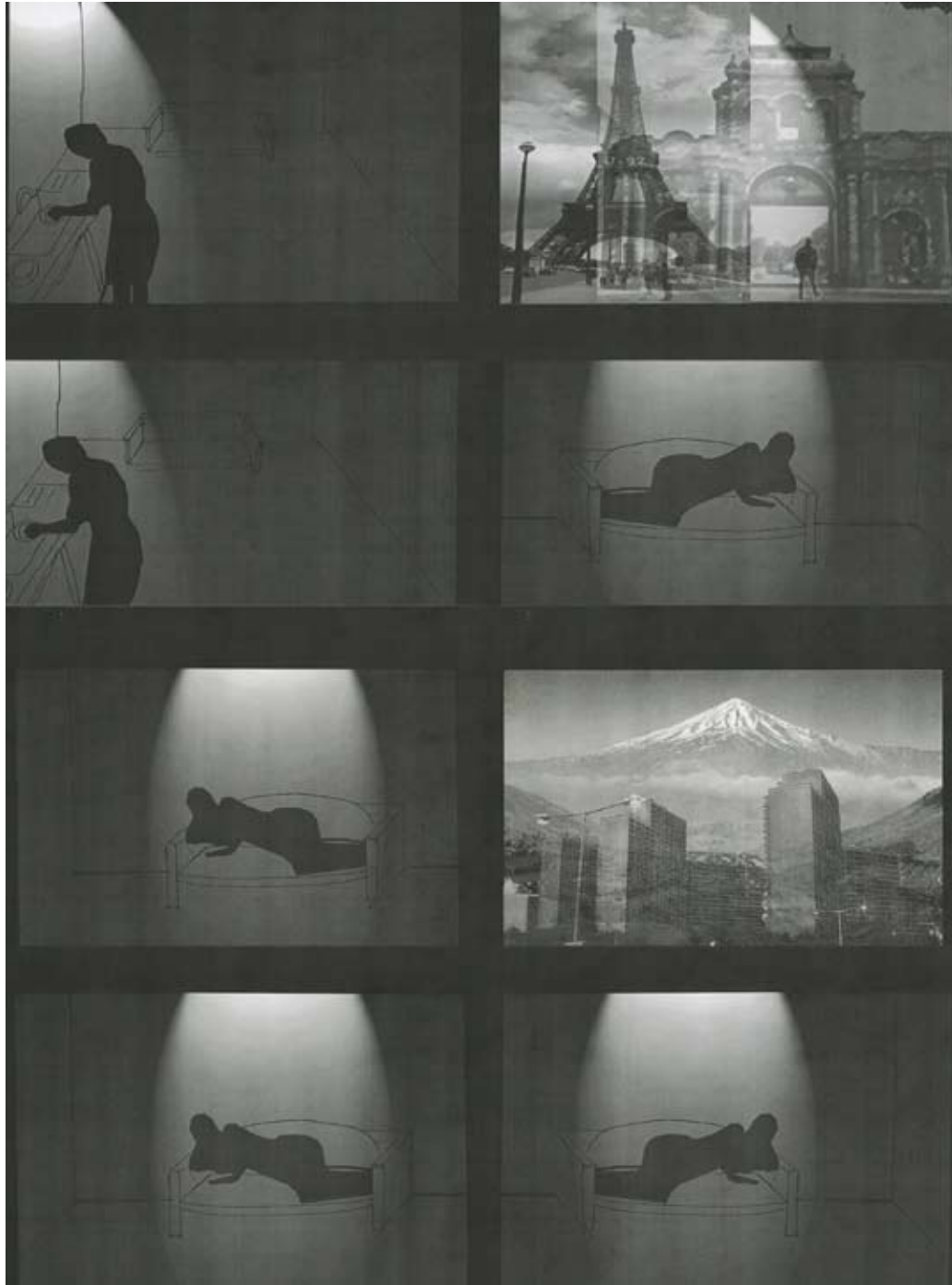




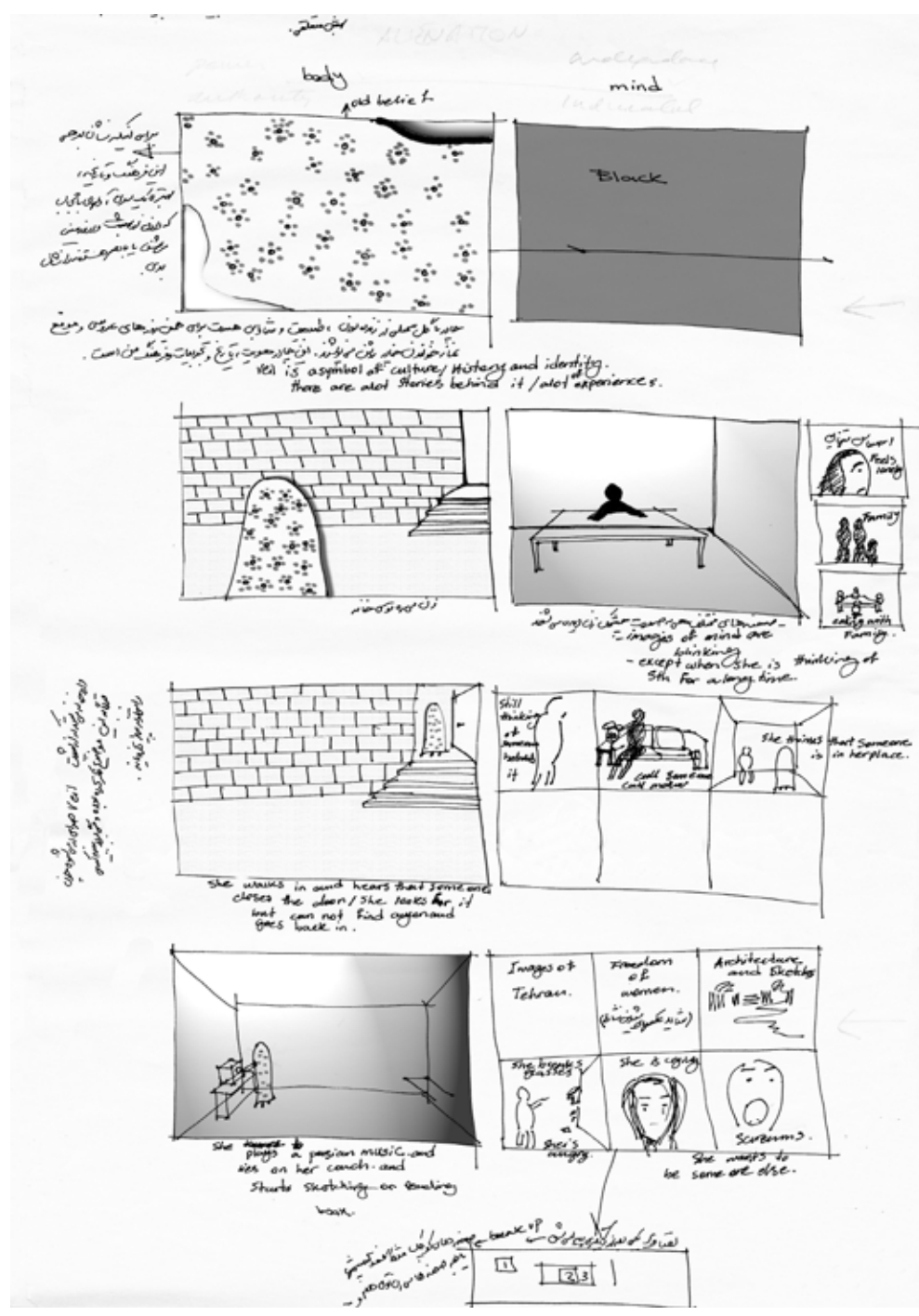
6.3



6.4



6.5



6.6

من دلم بازي مي خورم، چه حجابي ستايم؟  
پاکتک، ریاض

that is why she looks of her veil.  
she is looking for a new life  
and world. → she changes  
to someone else → like local people.

Freedom  
Iran she thinks she is married  
She changes her name  
New born

she goes outside and sees pe  
blue eyes and she  
she is strange.

she can not ~~stop~~ thinking  
of her identity → her veil is following  
she looks at the other city and she looks  
3 minutes.

she feels good in Iran / it be arrival  
people  
same habits.

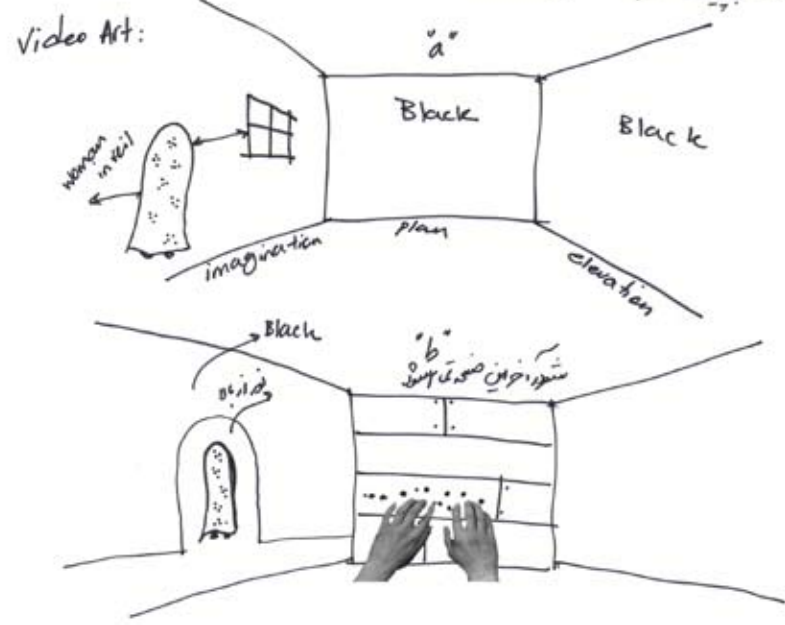
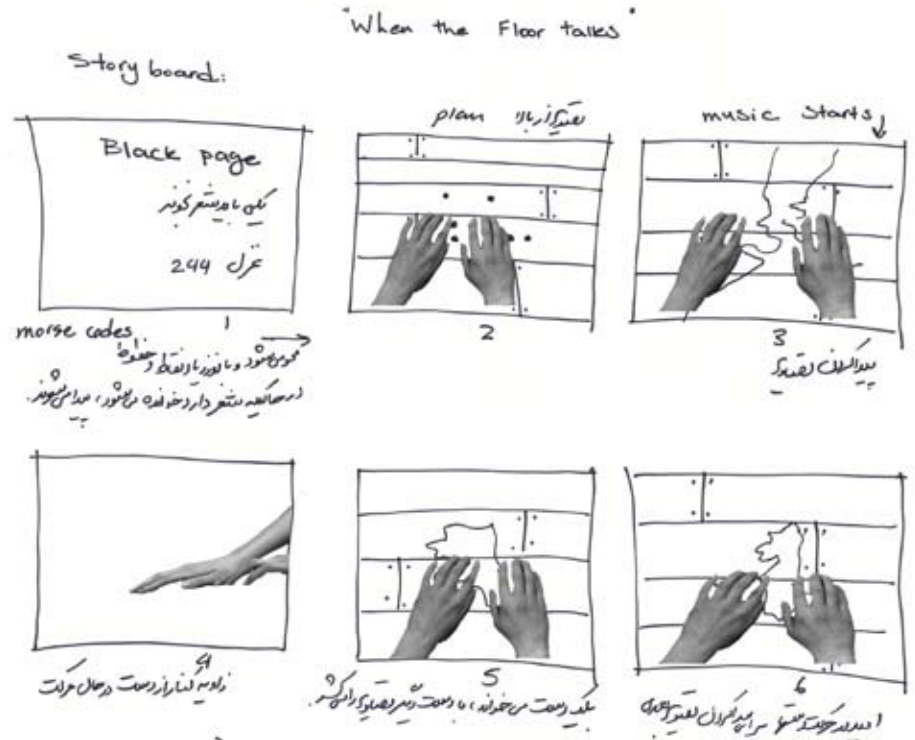
she doesn't belong to  
Iran either / she belongs to  
nowhere / she belongs to  
city of nowhere.

**Story:**  
Pocky - I am looking for sth in this land  
maybe looking for light or smile.  
- veil between body and mind → the story is about finding our own identity.  
- true story.  
- political, social / → Mirzab → against women's freedom  
- veil is a symbol of culture / history  
- Iran is where woman's light is more similar to → environment → friendly  
- she finally can't find her own light → she doesn't belong to anywhere again

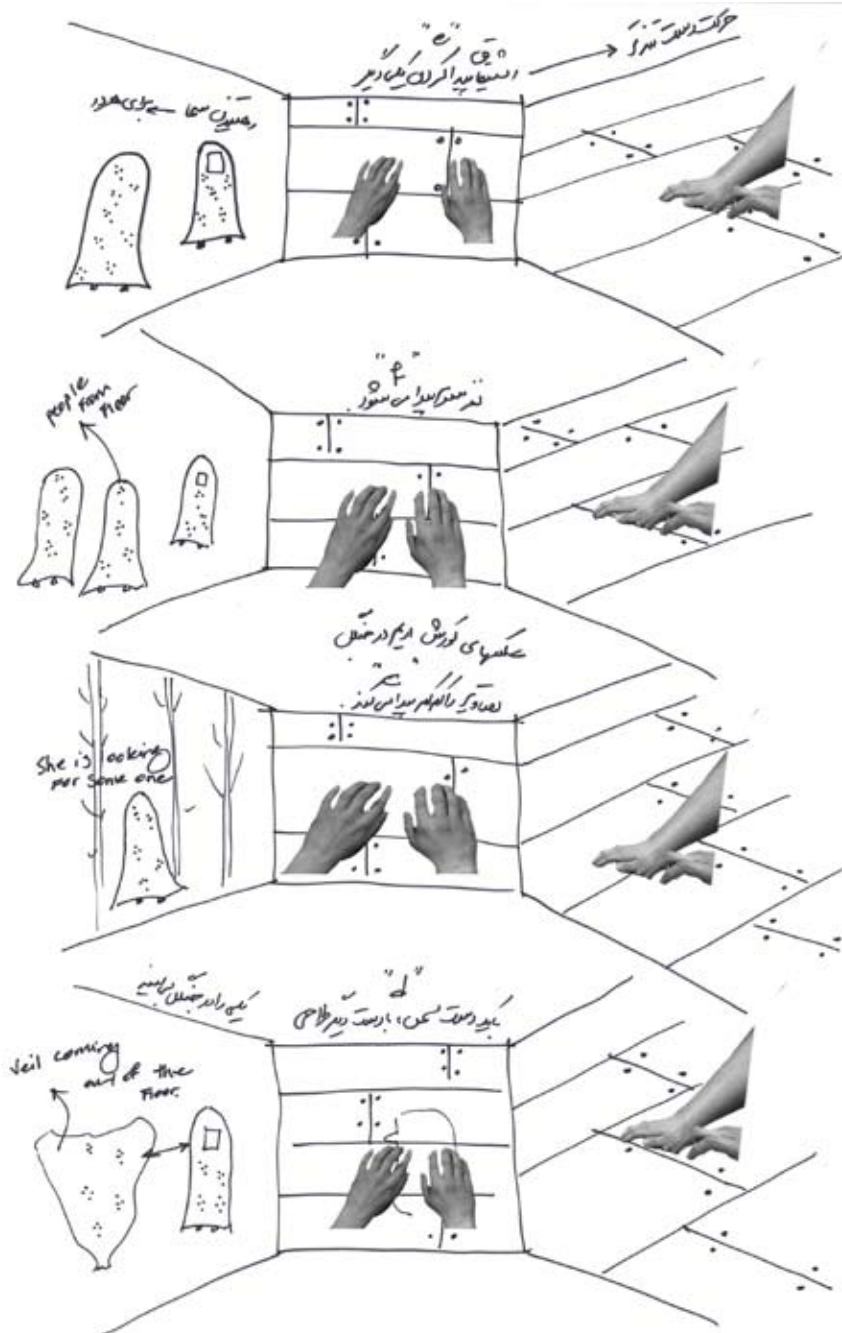
6.7

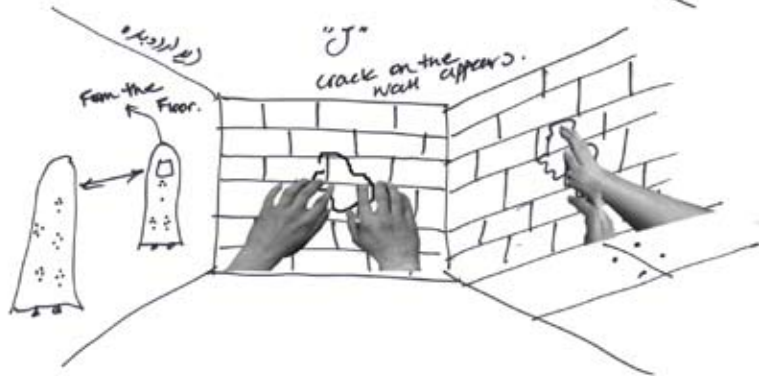
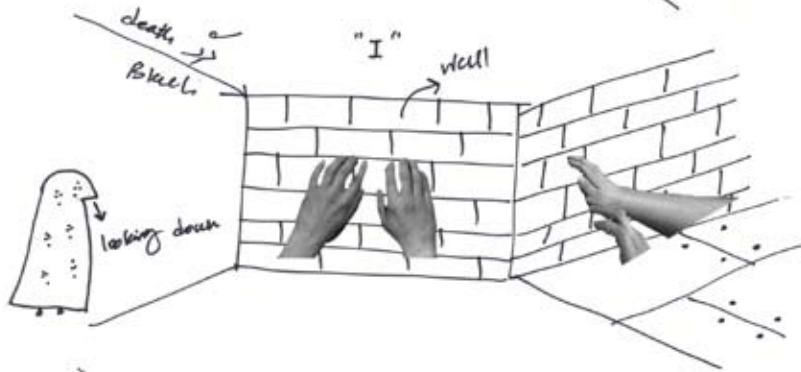
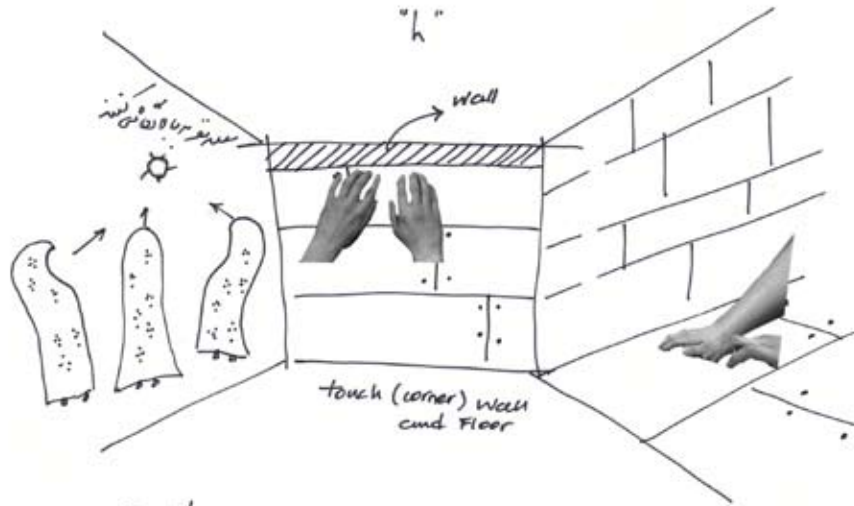


PART 6.1  
 STORY BOARDS OF  
 "WHEN THE FLOOR TALKS"

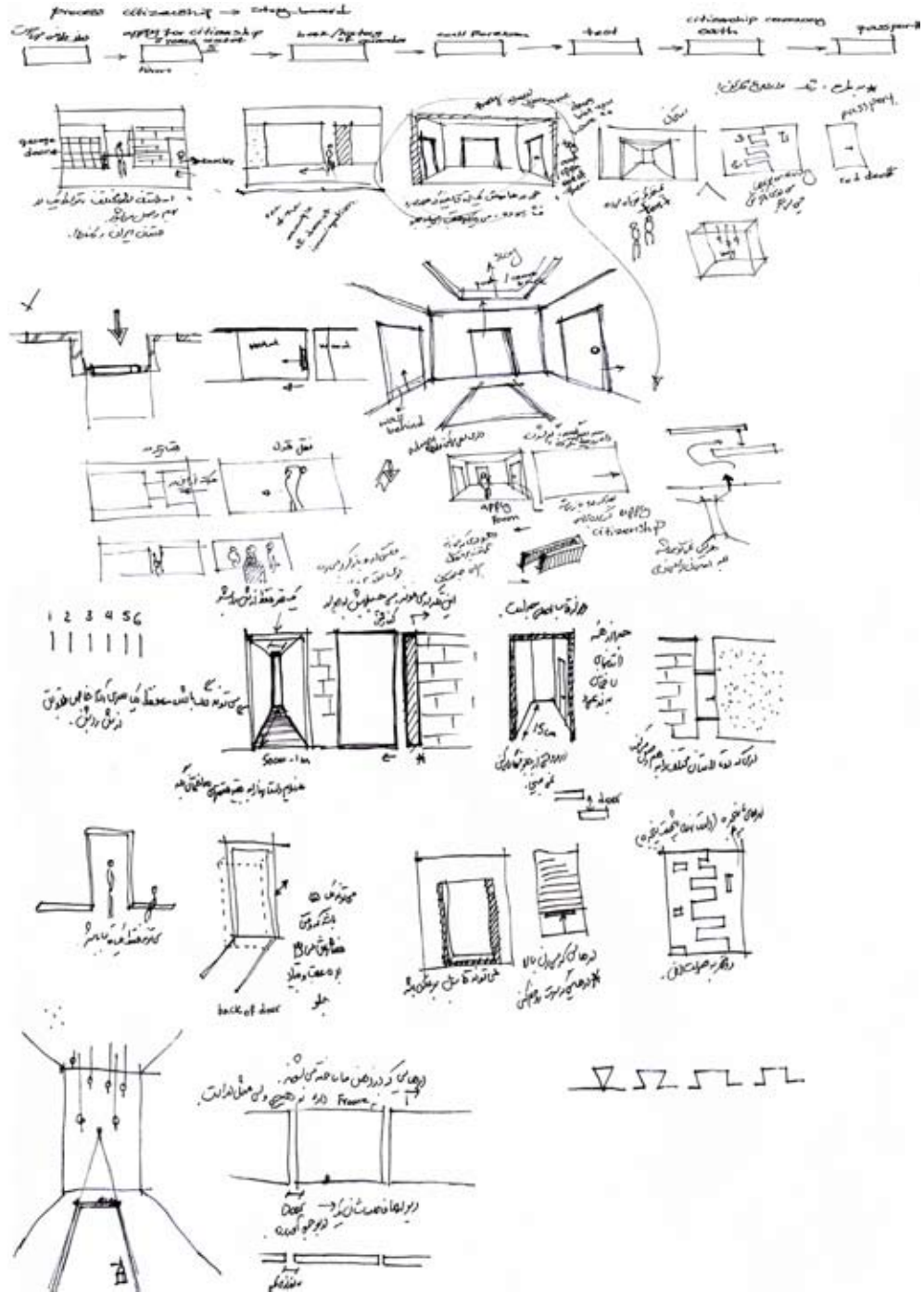


6.8

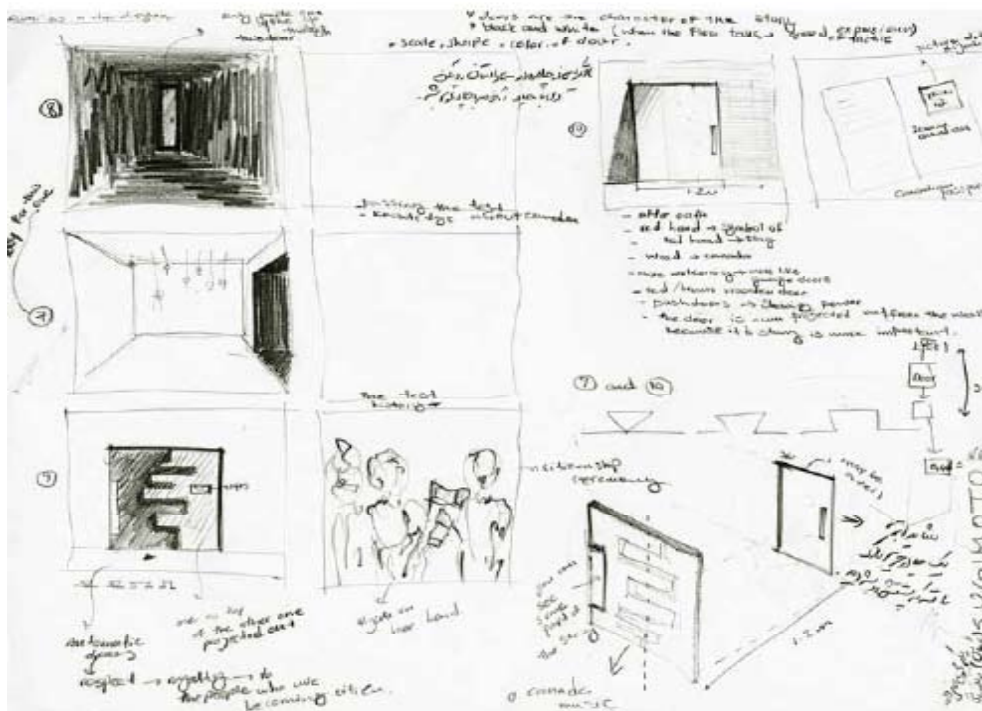
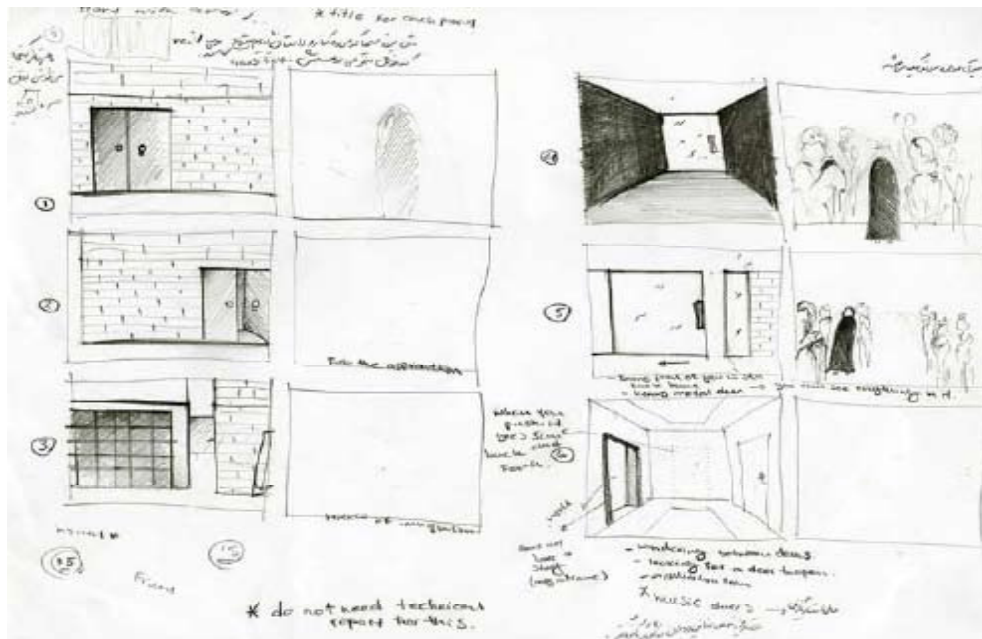




PART 6.2  
CROSSING DOORS



6.11



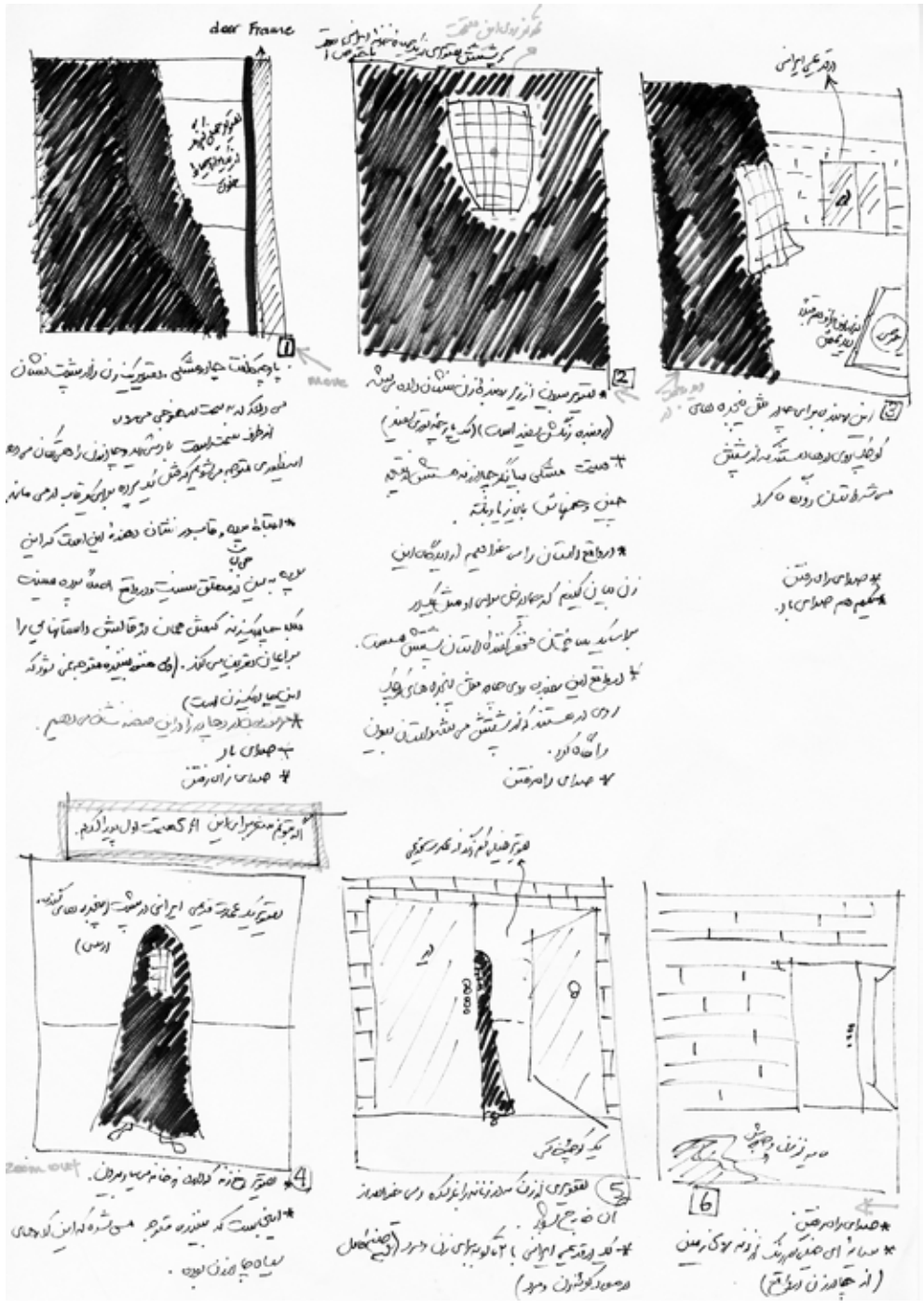
6.12



6.13

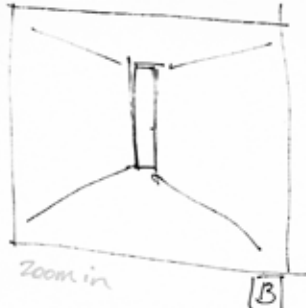


6.14



6.15

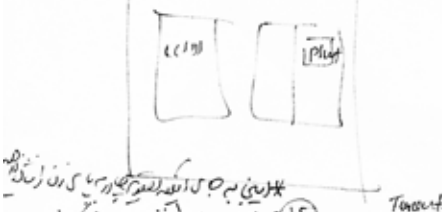




در ضمن ایندی بزرگ است و تو ایندی بزرگتره  
 همونقدش باشه  
 بعدش بزرگتره  
 \* در ضمن ایندی بزرگتره  
 در ضمن ایندی بزرگتره

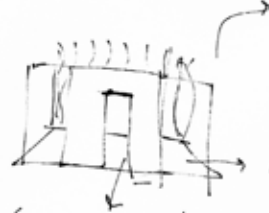


این در وسطه  
 \* در ضمن ایندی بزرگتره  
 در ضمن ایندی بزرگتره



در ضمن ایندی بزرگتره  
 \* در ضمن ایندی بزرگتره  
 در ضمن ایندی بزرگتره

در ضمن ایندی بزرگتره  
 \* در ضمن ایندی بزرگتره  
 در ضمن ایندی بزرگتره



در ضمن ایندی بزرگتره  
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 در ضمن ایندی بزرگتره



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 در ضمن ایندی بزرگتره

در ضمن ایندی بزرگتره  
 \* در ضمن ایندی بزرگتره  
 در ضمن ایندی بزرگتره



## APPENDIX B

This appendix includes video files of different design portions of the thesis.

The file names of these video files are “Doors of Belonging.mov”, “Garage Door.mov”, “Buzzer Door.mov”, “When The Floor Talks.mov” and “Crossing Doors.mov”.

The files of these videos can be found on the DVD in the sleeve on the inside back cover of the thesis book.

If you have accessed this thesis from a source other than the University of Waterloo, you may not have access to this file.

You may access it by searching for this thesis at <http://uwspace.uwaterloo.ca> .



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