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7 Leftover space, invisibility, and everyday life

Rooftops in Iran

Pedram Dibazar

This chapter is about rooftops in Iran as leftover spaces. Its starting point is the observation that, as a consequence of the ongoing processes of neo-liberal urban transformation, common residential rooftops in Iran are cast off as 'wasted spaces' in terms of planning and the values associated with it. The term 'leftover space' is therefore used to describe an indeterminate condition of being left out of the systems of spatial configuration and signification, which subsequently instigates exclusion from the orders of the visible and sensible. By analysing rooftop protests in Iran, this chapter argues that the Iranian residential rooftops' contours are rendered ambiguous in everyday practice, specifically in terms of visibility and systems of control. My argument is that such practices sustainably disrupt the orders of the visible by having recourse to tactics of anonymity and inconspicuousness, in ways that enhance – rather than repudiate – the conditions of indeterminacy, insignificance, and non-visibility that the rooftop fosters, precisely on the account of its leftover spatiality.

In the following, I will first outline the concept of leftover space as pertinent to the study of Iranian rooftops. Next, I will briefly explain the historic, social, and cultural bases for the application of this concept to residential rooftops in contemporary Iran, and I will explain how the proliferation of satellite dishes conflates the orders of the visible associated with leftover spaces. In the final section, I will provide an in-depth analysis of the ambiguous and confrontational trajectories of Iranian rooftops in everyday life, by focusing on the practice of shouting from rooftops at night as a form of civil protest, which is associated in Iran's recent history with the Green movement.

On leftover space

Leftover space is a contested term in urban studies, often used interchangeably with a range of definitions that denote the spatial properties of being neglected, lost, derelict, vacant, blank, slack, marginal, and void (Doron 2007b; Carmona 2010). Broadly speaking, it alludes to seemingly empty, uninhabited, or uninhabitable spaces whose form, function, boundaries, and aesthetics do not comfortably fit into the physical arrangements or conceptual frameworks of urban planning. Urban literature mostly considers the indeterminacy of such spatial

conditions as an undesirable side effect of modern urban planning, caused by either negligence in the initial processes of design (space left over after planning, such as the margins of cities), failure in maintenance, programming, and after-care (space left over after use, such as old industrial sites), or inability in achieving sustainability (space left over after the living, such as wastelands). Such grey zones are thought to pose a threat not only to the appearance of a desirable city but also to the function of a cohesive society. Imprecise, ill-defined, and underutilized, leftover spaces are commonly considered breeding places for illegal activities and dangerous behaviours.

To solve the problems posed by leftover spaces, the overall strategy developed in urban literature is the implementation of the concept of 'appropriation': conceiving creative ways to reverse the threat by reclaiming the void as a resource for carving out new concepts of public space. In this process, two antithetical processes are envisaged. Urban design and planning professions, on the one hand, aim at recuperating such forgotten spaces into the desired domains of economy and spatial order, in effect extending their managerial and ideological reach to those ill-managed sites. Processes of redevelopment and regeneration in contemporary cities are exemplary of this total planning attitude (Carmona 2010; Trancik 1986). On the other hand, the claim is frequently made that such leftover spaces open up avenues for diverse and spontaneous ways for people to make use of space in everyday life, therefore producing multiple spatialities, not necessarily in accordance with the proper orders of the space as defined by law. Advocating creative uses of space that resist given definitions of the public realm and that defy real and metaphoric boundaries of space, this second approach – illustrative of which are the postulations of 'everyday urbanism' (Chase *et al.* 1999) and 'everyday city' (Hubbard 2006) – sees in leftover spaces potential for hidden and unacknowledged counter-publics.

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

Inherent in the notion of the leftover is, first of all, the temporality of before and after use, which purports a certain sense of waste and garbage. John Scanlan writes: 'in an unproblematic sense garbage is leftover matter. It is what remains when the good, fruitful, valuable, nourishing and useful has been taken away' (2005: 13). Even if an object remains visibly and materially unchanged before and after use, Hird (2012) believes that its ontology changes in the course of this transition from a desirable matter to garbage. Therefore, she explains what defines things as garbage is their 'usability or worthlessness to human purposes', suggesting that 'no entity is in its essence waste, and all entities are potentially waste' (Hird 2012: 455). Following a similar line of thought, Scanlan refers to garbage as inexact and equivocal, that which defies neat definitions, and could be conceptualized as 'the remainder of such neatness'. In other words, he writes, 'the stuff of garbage' can best be defined in a metaphoric sense as 'the remainder of the symbolic order proper' (Scanlan 2005: 16–22). Consequently he writes:

> the meaning of 'waste' carries force because of the way in which it symbolizes an idea of improper use, and therefore operates within a more or less moral economy of the right, the good, the proper, their opposites and all values in between.
>
> (2005: 22)

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

A second point considering the 'leftover' is that, by conjuring up waste and that which does not conform, it addresses issues of proximity and exposure. That which remains after the useful and valuable is exhausted is usually seen as posing a threat to the orders of the spatial and the visible precisely because of its assertive presence, detectability, visibility, and contiguity in everyday life. To administer both its inappropriateness and disclosure, the leftover therefore needs to be disposed of, disconnected from sense experience, placed elsewhere, and removed from everyday contact. Hird (2012: 455) suggests that our societies are overwhelmed by 'the desire to disgorge ourselves of waste and remove it from sight'. However, taking into account the indeterminacy of the definition of waste on the one hand, and the daily procedures of waste production and management on the other, waste is present and never totally removed from everyday contact. The physical and symbolic endurance of the residue is even more accentuated in the case of spatial leftovers, as a result of their historically embedded and contested geographies. Rather than losing touch with everyday sense experience,

spatial leftovers obstinately establish contact with everyday life by providing ideal settings for a multiplicity of quotidian practices of deviation, transgression, and appropriation. The intertwinement of visibility, connectivity, and indeterminacy then poses the possibility of critique, since 'visible remainders', as Scanlan writes, 'stand as the evidence that something else is going on besides the conventional use materials and products are put to' (2005: 109).

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

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

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

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

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

Urban rooftops in Iran

The history of contemporary urban development in Iran shows precisely how the residential rooftops have been systematically cast off as leftover in design and planning. Since late 1980s, Iranian cities have been radically remodelled under the influence of the forces of speculative markets, that see in the renewal of urban centres the possibility for profit-making by vertically adding to the profitable square metres of cherished real estate (Madanipour 1998; Bayat 2010). Rather than being controlled, this process has been aided by municipalities that, disregardful of their own zoning regulations, have devised policies for selling 'building rights' as a means of maximizing their revenues. In the dense vertical cities that have emerged as a consequence of submission to the demands of the market, space is a scarcity that, in tune with the drive for maximization of profit, calls for prudence in the spatial configuration of new apartment buildings. Accordingly, spaces that do not fully contribute to square metres of saleable space – that are not readily categorized as indoors or functional – are for the most part considered as 'wasted', a squandering of the developer's investment and a dissipation of space. In this process, while in-between spaces of the old single house units such as courtyards, balconies, basements, and attics are either completely removed or reduced to the minimum in exchange for saleable square metres of indoor space, the rooftop is an unavoidable element that is held onto as necessary but treated as worthless in the processes of design and construction. Market yearnings for higher profit and architectural sensibilities for scrupulous design therefore combine to set forth new definitions of 'unnecessary' spaces.

As a result of such neo-liberal urban development schemes, common rooftops in Iranian cities are designed with little to no thought for their appearance and maintained absentmindedly over time. Resonating with this negligence is the invisibility of common rooftops for the unequipped eye on the street, which has led to the ignoring of rooftops in urban beautification policies. In short, left over as insignificant, urban rooftops have been systematically forgotten and severed from everyday contact. However, with the proliferation of the previously unthought-of satellite dishes on the rooftops, from the early 1990s onwards,

rooftops have taken on a new meaning (see Figure 7.1). As the receiving of foreign TV channels through satellite dishes is regarded as undesirable by the state, on the basis of the state's lack of control over it, the previously unimportant rooftops have been unexpectedly charged with political significance. The government by and large regards the satellite technology as a 'cultural invasion by the West', a morally corruptive network that needs to be fought against. In 1995, the Iranian parliament passed a law against the importation, sale, and use of any kind of satellite equipment, legalizing their confiscation from rooftops.

However, satellite dishes have continuously resisted confiscation by the authorities, since their placement on rooftops effectively conflates the dividing lines between the legally binding concepts of the visible and hidden, public and private, and moral and immoral. By recounting disputes over the issue in the Iranian parliament in 1995, Fariba Adelkhah (1999) explains that the core threatening effect of satellite dishes was believed to arise from their visibility on the rooftops, as evident manifestation of unruliness and nonconformity to the moral values of the state. Rather than the content of the transmitted programmes, it was the display of satellite dishes on the roof that was considered to be morally incorrect as it intruded into the orders of publicness – and therefore subject to punishment. More recently, in May 2011, then deputy commander of the Iranian police, Sardaar Ahmadreza Radan, clearly stated that the police's priority in seizing the satellite dishes were the 'clearly visible' ones (*Entekhab.ir* 2011).

However, the application of the concept of visibility to satellite dishes on the rooftops is ambiguous. The accusation of intentionality in blatant public display of an unlawful behaviour is untenable since the surface of the rooftop is ordinarily unseen from the street. How, when, and to whom then are the satellite dishes visible? Although it is possible to bring the rooftop dishes into view from neighbouring rooftops, the premise upon which that visibility is assured is questionable. In particular, since the in-between state of the rooftop as a privately owned

Figure 7.1 Common urban residential rooftops in Iran (photograph by kamshots [Kamyar Adl]).

yet publicly disclosed space is posited ambiguously within the realm of the state's control, how can a vision from a private setting be used as an allegation of a public violation of the orders of the visible?

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

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

Rooftop protests

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

were killed. The uneven balance of power was already known to the demonstrators, who had opted for a silent and less provocative demonstration. However, the reaction of the regime – the extent to which it was eager to use its uneven power – was not exactly known beforehand.

After those deadly demonstrations of power by the government, the Green movement's street politics, which were effective to that point and unprecedented in post-revolutionary Iran, gradually died away. Subsequently, the main concern of the movement was to find ways to hold on, to resist complete annihilation, and to assure endurance. One of the forms in which the movement stayed relatively alive for a longer period of time, and undermined the monopoly of the authority over the public sphere, was by shouting from rooftops, which came to be known as rooftop protests (Ehsani *et al.* 2009). After nightfall, around 9 or 10 PM depending on the season, people would go up to the roof of their respective dwellings – mostly shared rooftops of apartment buildings – and shout 'Allah-o Akbar' (God is Great) and 'Marg bar Dictator' (Death to the dictator).

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

The move from the street to the rooftop has a locational significance in the first place: it is a strategy of distantiation from the street. While the street is constantly policed as a result of the mobility that it offers, the rooftop maintains an autonomous geography, at least temporarily, as a result of being posited outside that system of flow. In that respect, by way of not being within the immediate reach of the police force, the move to the rooftop is a strategy to delay, if not completely deter, the direct counterattacks and brutalities of the police. In this context, the rooftop is a retreat to a 'less dangerous' position than the street, an escape to a less readily accessible space. Besides, the rooftop provides additional possibilities for escape by being in close proximity to each person's house, as it is always possible to run down and take shelter inside – given that the police is not yet prepared to fully relocate its field of action from the public to the private sphere. Therefore, the move to the communally owned rooftops of shared apartment buildings challenges the state's unconditional reaction to such demonstrations, entangles the police in legal limitations to its field of command, and charges its reactions with ambivalence and indecisiveness.

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

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

All in all, one might find a tactical gesture in the move to the rooftop, that constitutes a less dangerous way of exerting a certain level of voice and agency that is wound up intricately with everyday forms of expressivity. To start with, there are certain aspects of the rooftop protests that readily correspond to the practices of everyday life. While organizational efforts are required to sustain a single street rally on a specific day in a particular location, the shouting from the rooftop recurs with a daily rhythm at a predicted time in diverse places all around the city, and is ordinarily run as one among several daily errands with no special need for prearrangement. Besides, compared to street protests, it is inclusive of a larger range of social groups and generations. To give an example, while parents in a normative family seldom participate in street demonstrations and, dreading the prospect of the dangers involved in such rallies, would discourage the youngsters from getting involved, it is common that in the rooftop protests all members of a household participate collectively. This invitation for participation is directly connected to the conditions of anonymity that the invisibility of the rooftop provides, rendering the experience of shouting from the rooftop visually inconspicuous.

Since elusive practices of the everyday usually maintain an inconvenient relation with representational forms (Highmore 2002: 21), professional journalism has mostly failed to capture the rooftop protests visually. An exception is Pietro Masturzo's photograph of women shouting from a rooftop in Tehran, which has been widely circulated after winning the 2009 world press photo prize (see Figure 7.2). By portraying a generally neglected spatiality, this picture makes visible those ordinary people who are usually silenced, or at best misrepresented, in the media, as a result of the overexposure of certain others. Whereas in street protests women are for the most part either absent from the scene or only get highlighted in the media when their tighter and more colourful clothing attests to the image of a modern, secular, Western-styled subject, in this photo it is ordinary-looking women with casual clothes that are depicted. Furthermore, I believe that this photo is particularly affective because it depicts, by fixing in a purely visual medium, such ordinary women performing the otherwise non-visual act of 'shouting'. Moreover, to portray the act of shouting, the picture makes visible those dirty, trivial, and unimpressive scenes of the city that are

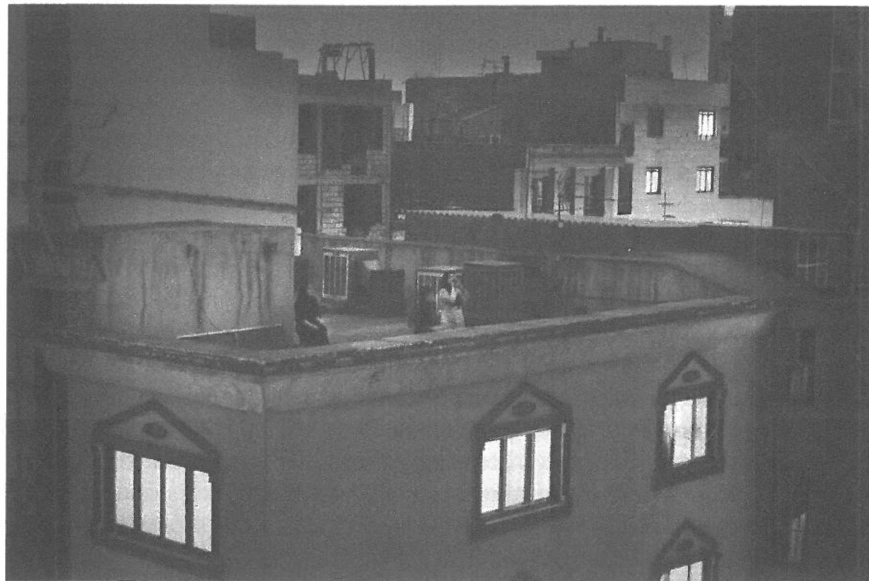

Figure 7.2 Women shouting from the rooftops (photograph by Pietro Masturzo, 2009).

customarily left out from consideration: bare walls and messy cooling systems next to the jumble of a construction site. Seen in this way, the photo is an attempt at depicting the leftovers of the governing orders of the visible; yet, as I will explain in the following, it does so by being attentive to those residual aesthetics and activities to the extent of sustaining the invisibilities inherent in them.

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

The photographer is therefore transformed from a mobile specialist, ready to capture the moment while keeping his distance to the subject on the street, to one who lingers on along with a certain community, bound to the limits of the rooftop. As the protests take place at night, the immobility of the photographer is

emphasized, as he is forced to use high exposure times, appropriate for photographing fixed objects. The time spent on the rooftop within the proximate and consistent community of the rooftop leads to the photographer's active and affective engagement in the scene of his photography. In a number of Masturzo's other photographs in his rooftop protests collection, moments of intimacy within this community of the rooftop are captured (see Figure 7.3).

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

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

The blurry disposition of the image is therefore not necessarily an inevitable consequence of the darkness, but particularly intended to maintain non-visibility and anonymity. In fact, a photographic mediation can violate the privacy of the

Figure 7.3 Photograph by Pietro Masturzo, from his Tehran series, 2009.

rooftop – as a privately owned space – by disclosing it to the public. Particularly opting for invisibility, the need for the visual containment of the rooftop is enhanced by substituting the professional ethics of transparency, impartiality, and objectivity with an amateurish, but no less dexterous, enthusiasm for affective engagement in the event. To be sure, as a hug between a man and a woman in Iran is incompatible with the public orders of the visible that carefully maintain the segregation of genders, the emotions contained in the photograph suggest a rather personal take suitable for private family albums. What I want to emphasize is that, as the photographer captures the practice of the rooftop protest by living it himself, he is positioned at a difficult and indeterminate point between representation and action. Masturzo's rooftop photos therefore inhabit the liminal space between the private and public, invisibility and transparency, amateurishness and professionalism.

It is following this logic that rooftop protests have been disseminated extensively on the internet through homemade videos uploaded on YouTube.[1] In such videos, acts of protest and recording merge as the people recording the event are at the same time participating in the protest by shouting on the rooftop themselves. This is strongly sensed in the videos since, given the amateur video recording equipment's ineptitude in capturing distant sounds, the clearest and loudest voice unequivocally belongs to the filmmaker – one who holds the recording device and shouts closest to the microphone. Indeed, as Leone describes, the condition of being simultaneously a 'performer' and the viewer, 'an actor of protest and a spectator of it (or, to be more precise, a listener to it)', is inherent to the rooftop protests in contrast to diurnal street rallies in which 'the crowd is a collective actor that stages a protest for the rest of the community and for the media' (2012: 351). In this 'nocturnal collective musical performance' there exists no separation between the stage and the audience. By merging the process of mediation through recording with protesting through shouting, the rooftop videos compellingly propel the viewer/listener to an affective engagement with the performance.

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

Setrag Manoukian (2010) observes such rooftop videos in his careful analysis of the new forms of affective and experiential politics in contemporary Iran. Closely analysing a single 'video-poem' of the rooftop, he discerns a new form of politics emerging, which is premised on the interrelation between collective action – as exemplified in the video by the multiplicity of voices that shout – and individual, intimate sensations – as exemplified by the darkness of the image and the hushed voice of a woman commenting on the event. Furthermore, he detects in the particular gesture of shouting from rooftops and the exact chants of the protest a mechanism of direct referencing to – as citations and appropriations of – the same gestures and words used during the revolution of 1979. With this redeployment of the past as conveying new meanings in relation to the political landscape of the present, he believes a 'temporal disjuncture' has taken place in Iranian everyday lives. For him, following Agamben, the darkness of the rooftop video is illustrative of this disjuncture because of the intuitive courage it carries 'to look into the darkness', to grasp something beyond the restraints of chronological time. Manoukian's insightful analysis of the rooftop protests in the context of the Green movement, interestingly, parallels my reading of the rooftop videos in the use of a number of key conceptual and theoretical frameworks. However, I want to stress that – unlike Manoukian's paper, but not necessarily in contradiction to it – in this chapter I use the concept of the leftover as the framework for studying the rooftop protests. It is through the interrelation between the trashy aesthetics of the visual and sonic field of the videos, the casualness of their processes of production through everyday practices of shouting, and the leftover attributes of the space of the rooftop that I wish to analyse the subversive power contained in such practices.

As people do not use amplifying devices, the sound that is disseminated in the city during the nights of protest is unmediated, unfiltered, and uncontrolled. The shouting therefore maintains a bodily and performative utterance that suggests the most primitive and rudimentary way of demanding one's rights – shouting out loud. The unrefined character of the homemade videos supplements this condition of rudimentariness, downplaying the medium's intrinsic mediality. The way in which the texture of sound in these videos is shaped by the spatial and temporal attributes of the rooftop and the night is in contrast to what Thompson (2002: 2–3) describes as the disembodied soundscape of modern cities. In modern times, Thompson writes, with the proliferation of sound technology and amplifying devices, such as microphones and loudspeakers, a fundamental compulsion has existed to control the behaviour of sound in space, to purge out what could be regarded as the unwanted noise, and therefore to dissociate sound from its direct spatial bearings. The overall sonic experience of the modern city does not capture the reverberations of space, he continues, but rather accounts for non-reverberant, disembodied, and disjointed sounds, which have little to say about the places in which they are produced or consumed. In the modern soundscape therefore, Thompson believes, reverberations conceived as 'the lingering over time of residual sound in a space' are mostly regarded as 'noise, unnecessary and best eliminated' (2002: 2–3). The rooftop protests, however, are most affective precisely because they make sensible the reverberation of space, to the extent that one cannot definitively dissociate the shouts from them. One might say that, rather than clear shouts of protest in their singularity, the videos convey the whole space as protesting in reverberation. In short, the coarseness of the

sound, unintelligibility of the image, and ingenuousness of the performance in these videos maintain a close relation with the spatial attributes of the rooftops as leftover space.

In the rooftop videos, the resonances of shouts near and far create a depth of the spatial field. By foregrounding and backgrounding sounds, an auditory idea of distance that embraces the city through the soundscape substitutes for the indiscernible flatness of the visual landscape. As a consequence, a cityscape is created that, unconventionally, is more attuned to sound than vision, making it poorly suited for the apparatuses of control as the elusiveness of sound, unlike vision, evades traceability and identification. Accordingly, as sources of the shouts are not seen in the videos, there exists no synchrony between sound and image. Michel Chion (1999) explains in relation to sound in cinema that a sound can be non-synchronous without necessarily inhabiting the imaginary off-screen. He writes,

> Consider as example the 'offscreen' voice of someone who has just left the image but continues to be there, or a man we've never seen but whom we expect to see, because we situate him in a place contiguous with the screen, in the present tense of the action.
>
> (Chion 1999: 4)

Such sounds and voices, he writes, are 'neither entirely inside nor clearly outside', instead they are 'sounds and voices that wander the surface of the screen, awaiting a place to attach to' (Chion 1999: 4). Yet, what complicates the issue in the rooftop videos is that this off-screen sound does not refer to any specific visual space, since the darkness of the image conflates a definite conception of the inside or outside of the screen.

In fact, it might be the reversal of Chion's description that is carried through in the rooftop videos: that it is a vision – an imagined vision of a person shouting – that is wandering, awaiting a sound to attach to. Therefore, the non-synchronous sound and image in the rooftop videos is conducive to the absence of direct referencing. As Chion maintains in relation to the silent cinema,

> it's not so much the *absence of voices* that the talking film came to disrupt, as the spectator's freedom to imagine them in her own way (in the same way that a filmed adaptation objectifies the features of a character in the novel).
>
> (Chion 1999: 9, emphasis in original)

Along the same lines, by recourse to absence of vision, the videos in question provide conditions for the imagination of the spectator to attach the voice of protests to an imagined vision. It is this imagination, intensified by the resonances of sound through the night, which is most affective and disruptive of the regimes of the sensible. It is this dissociation of the embodied voices from the vision that produces an ever-present spectral sense of hovering over the landscape. As a consequence of the absence of the vision, the vigorous presence of embodied voices transpires a presence that is emphatically felt, if not exactly seen.

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

Indeed, 'impression management', as James C. Scott argues, has always been one of the key survival skills of subordinate groups in power-laden situations (1990: 4). Yet, such tactical control over the impression that one leaves – which might lead at times to rigorous limitations that would make the person seem absent on the basis of the deprivation of her individual expressivities – is a delicate undertaking in the course of the practices of everyday life in ways that are not completely devoid of moments of confrontation, defiance, and critique. To understand those personal tactics of affect control, Scott conceptualizes the notion of 'hidden transcripts', in opposition to 'public transcripts'. He writes

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

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

the public one, affecting the contours of both, and sustaining an in-between space of nameless potentiality.

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

> the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time.
>
> (Rancière 2004: 13)

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

Conclusion

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

Note

1 See, for instance, www.mightierthan.com/2009/07/rooftop (accessed 26 August 2015).