MY TEHRAN FOR SALE

A REFLECTION ON THE AESTHETICS OF IRANIAN POETIC CINEMA

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THESIS IN THE FULFILMENT OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF CREATIVE ARTS

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this paper to the memories of my late mother and father: Parvin Chegini Farahani and Hashem Moussavi, as well as my beloved grandmother Nayer Fakhimi who taught me the first poems to recite.
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My sister and brother - Ronak and Sepehr - and my dear friend Dr. Diba Pourmand are mentioned last to
emphasize the special nature of their support and encouragement all through my candidature.
STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICATION

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

________________________________________________________

Granaz Moussavi
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ABSTRACT

The thesis title: My Tehran For Sale: A Reflection on the Aesthetics of Iranian Poetic Cinema

About My Tehran For Sale:

A poetic interpretation of the contemporary tale of a generation searching for freedom...

Shot entirely on location in Tehran, My Tehran For Sale is a poetic story of modern day Iranian youth struggling for cultural freedom. It brings to the screen never before seen images of modern urban Iran, and reveals how young Iranian people live behind closed doors.

Figure 1: My Tehran For Sale
About the Written Exegesis:

The thesis is an exploration of the relationship between Persian poetry and the internationally celebrated and inspiring Iranian art-house cinema; and an experimentation of applying such poetic aesthetics in My Tehran For Sale as a reflection on a native poetics.

The thesis is concerned with examination of the roots of the Iranian poetic cinema in poetry, in which My Tehran For Sale finds its origins, and its poetic tradition against the country’s social and political background. In doing so, I also explore the compatibility, similarities, and differences of a native poetic discourse in Iranian cinema with the key theories of poetic film in Western literature. My Tehran For Sale is a practical research project that examines the possibilities for application of such native aesthetics into a global poetic language.

Taking various theoretic accounts from Iranian and international scholars and practitioners on the poetic cinema in general, the aesthetics of Iranian poetic cinema and its particular characteristics are closely analyzed through examples from selected films from Forough Farrokhzad, Ebrahim Golestan, Sohrab Shahid Sales, Amir Naderi, and especially Abbas Kiarostami.

However, The main focus of the thesis is on textual and stylistic analysis of the feature film, My Tehran For Sale, as a practical research project. In this paper, I also explore and discuss my journey as a scholar/filmmaker on how I have
applied my studies and understanding of the aesthetics and traditions of poetic style in cinema, and especially Iranian art-house cinema, into my poetic film.

In doing so, I have drawn on my background and knowledge as a published poet and examined how my experiences as a poet and filmmaker, combined in a semi-autobiographical film, reflect on both mediums of poetry and cinema.

Since the film has been exhibited in numerous international film festivals such as Toronto, Pusan, and Rotterdam, the feedbacks from the film experts, journalists, and audiences in relation to the poetic aspects of the film will be also attached to this thesis.
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis comprises a 96 minute film titled *My Tehran for Sale* and a written dissertation structured as an essay on Iranian poetic cinema.

*My Tehran For Sale*, an award winning feature film (IF 2009, best independent spirit film) and the first major Iranian-Australian co-production to be screened and celebrated at various international film festivals. The film is a research-based project that explores and advances poetic cinema. The film is aimed at translating aesthetics of poetry that underscore a specific tradition of Iranian cinema into a more universal poetic language.

The initial script, which was entitled “Auction”, was structured in terms of a film-within-a-film; it verges between documentary and fiction, and embeds cinematic devices and intertextual references designed to be familiar to audiences of both Iranian and European poetic cinema traditions. The original idea was to create a film that brought to life research on poetic cinema movements in global and local contexts, placing in dialogue the Iranian and European traditions by highlighting the use of techniques that render the films open to multiple levels of interpretation, including non-linear narrative, subversive forms of expression, and recursive framing techniques that produce heightened forms of interactivity.

The final production embroiders stories of Tehran youth, who live “underground” in the search for cultural freedom. The film narrative and structure are set against a social and historical background in which innovative methods of expression saturate everyday communication and forms of resistance, this reflected through the aesthetics of poetry in Iranian literature and cinema.

Four years of research has equipped me to negotiate the separate traditions and conditions for innovation that define poetic cinema at local and global scales, and I sought to imbue the film with a poetic language that crosses cultural boundaries and the locality of the film. My aim in this practice-led research, combining the film and this thesis, has been to put in conversation distinct traditions of poetic cinema while highlighting their origins and meaning across cultural contexts. While I have explored the major poetic approaches of a
number of Western and international filmmakers, and consciously imported them into My Tehran For Sale, this research focuses on how the local poetry invested in Iranian art-house cinema may be translated into a poetic language accessible to international audiences.

**Background Notes on Theoretical and Methodological Framework**

Since the 1980s, Iranian films have garnered both popular and critical acclaim, and are commonly featured at major international film festivals. Worldwide interest in Iranian cinema was heightened in 1987 with the release of Abbas Kiarostami’s Where is the Friend’s House? Kiarostami is now regarded as a pioneer in Iranian cinema and many film scholars cite particular characteristics of his films – the use of non-actors, out-door locations, marginal and underprivileged characters, minimalist narrative and natural lighting, to name a few – as support for a reading of Iranian cinema within the categories of Neorealism.

Over the last two decades, with just a few notable exceptions, these assumptions have hampered deeper analysis of the Iranian art-house cinema tradition. Iranian cinema has been read as an ‘exotic’ entrant into fields of modern creative innovation or as an expression of nativism that reflects Iran’s historical experiences of occupation and modernity.

Although Iran never was fully colonised, the forces and experiences of the colonial era shaped to a great degree Iran’s project of modernity. Iran’s modernisation was to great extents initiated and engineered in response to colonialism, a social and cultural project reinforced by the Pahlavi dynasty. As Iran moved with fast pace towards an imported modernity, the seeds of Iran’s contemporary cultural identity – from Persian novels and short stories to the New Poetry and, perhaps most importantly, cinema – began to flourish.

It is a central tenet of this thesis that the modern social and cultural innovation in Iran cannot be treated in isolation from long-standing traditions of art and language that have sustained the Persian (Iranian) imaginary over centuries.
While it is widely recognised that Iran’s turbulent political and social history has crucially interrupted the development of Iranian cinema, the disproportionate emphasis in the literature placed on films made during the past 25 years has prevented deeper scrutiny of the underlying continuity in themes and styles of Iranian cinema before and after the 1979 revolution. To date, there have been few attempts made to situate Iranian cinema within a framework of creative and cultural innovations that extend before the modern age.

Structure of the Dissertation

Among the numerous accounts of Iranian cinema, a few well-known writers and critics such as Godfrey Cheshire, David Sterritt, and Hamid Dabashi have discerned unique poetic aesthetics and philosophical visions invested within Iranian art-house films. In the first part of this thesis, I explore concepts of poetic cinema developed by European filmmakers. While I place the main focus on the creative strategies and innovations by Pier Paolo Pasolini, I will also reference the contributions by Derek Jarman, Andrei Tarkovsky and others, and draw upon key ideas by Maya Deren and Raul Ruiz.

This discussion enables me to develop a comprehensive definition and understanding of the techniques by which poetic aesthetics have been developed through cinema. It also allows me to map how poetic cinema has enabled filmmakers to resolve artistic techniques commonly associated with avant-garde literature and cinema, on the one hand, with the impulse to preserve cultural materials and recuperate literary traditions, on the other. Widening the discussion to include critical insights by Gilles Deleuze and Raul Ruiz, I position the poetic cinema movement in relation to the impacts of globalisation, the rise of mass-media and Western cultural hegemony.

I then examine how poetic cinema in Iran has culminated from a trajectory of social and artistic innovation through the efforts of a network of filmmakers, writers and their audiences. New generations of poets in the 1950s and filmmakers in the 1960s advanced social and political change by reformulating traditional modes of expression and meaning-making. But this tradition of innovation extends further into Iran’s cultural past: the linguistic and cultural archetypes for Iranian art-house cinema have evolved over centuries
in dynamic response to the shifting cultural taboos, political censorship and social restrictions imposed on, and regulated from within Iranian society.

In part 2, this theoretical discussion is elaborated through close textual and stylistic analysis of works by Iranian filmmakers. In evaluating the poetic techniques deployed in selected films, I trace their aesthetic and philosophical roots in Iran’s mystic poetry traditions, on the one hand, and in the subversion of these forms by modern poets led by Nima Youshij.

Many of the filmmakers I have selected are recognised poets belonging to Nima’s New Poetry movement, or are associated with the Nimaic poets. Here it is my aim to show how this network of creative figures has integrated modern creative strategies with traditional poetic forms, aesthetics and philosophies. In constantly negotiating censorship and other measures of social control, these filmmakers have drawn on poetic techniques to open the cinematic space to multiple interpretations, thereby facilitating an often mystified, even spiritual communion involving the auteur and their audiences.

Firstly, with reference to the works of Forough Farrokhzad and Ebrahim Golestan, I explore how poetic voice and silence have been employed to frame social and political dialogue through film.

Secondly, analysing the works of Sohrab Shahid Sales and Amir Naderi, I demonstrate how Iranian filmmakers have worked to refocus the cinematic frame on the temporal flow of everyday life.

Thirdly, I emphasise Abbas Kiarostami’s achievements in renewing the terms of dialogue between his viewers and the screen. This section includes more detailed stylistic and textual analysis of Kiarostami’s films as a prominent example of internationally celebrated Iranian poetic cinema. The analysis draws on my ongoing scholarly study of Kiarostami’s cinema (Honours research as well as independent studies in published and unpublished papers over the past 8 years).
Through stylistic and textual analysis of Kiarostami’s films I will discuss how his poetic techniques cast the final stages of meaning-making into his audience’s hands, activating an awareness of reality as both global and perspectival in its frame, subjective and intertextual in its form.

The stylistic and textual analysis of Iranian films provides means by which to establish new insights into the cultural politics of cinema in Iran. I hope to show that in continuing a tradition of poetic innovation, Iranian filmmakers have revived and extended an important social dialogue concerning the tensions between traditional culture and global transitions.

The filmmakers I have selected each manage to elevate the cinematic experience, including the role of the auteur, as intermediary between different social and ontological realities. They incite audiences to re-envisage the breaks in Iran’s past and present, and offer new forums for imagining Iran within its global context. In the process, they have ensured the survival and continued relevance of art-house cinema in Iran. And, producing some of the finest films of our time, they have opened channels for dialogue between Iranian society and world audiences.

As a poet and filmmaker, I have sought to adapt techniques and theories that span the Iranian and European traditions of poetic cinema. In doing so, I have sought to interpret linguistic archetypes native to Iran for an international audience and elaborate Iranian poetic innovations in contact with greater movements in world cinema.

In part 3, I present a close, scene-by-scene analysis of my feature film, My Tehran for Sale. My interest here is to position my own poetic style as bridging world poetic cinema (which has been well-theorised) and the Iranian tradition of poetic innovation (which to date remains largely unexplored). Further, I seek to unravel how my cinematic vision and creative strategies have shifted in response to the suffocating censorship and cultural taboos in Iran, as well as the expectations of industry and audiences in the Australian and international film circuit.

In its entirety, consisting of both film and thesis, this practice-led research investigates how the innovation of poetic aesthetics through cinema could serve as a vital bridge for
social dialogue between Iran and the international community, but how on each side this bridge is systematically being taken apart as it is built.
PART ONE
POETIC INNOVATION AND CULTURAL RESIDUES

Introduction

Since at least the 1960s, when film theorist and semiotician Christian Metz questioned the possibility of poetic cinema, the subject has been posited as a key academic question. Even with proper analysis of the various themes and styles, aesthetic characteristics, and audio, visual and textual aspects of films commonly deemed ‘poetic’, a comprehensive definition for the term ‘poetic cinema’ remains splendidly allusive, for at the heart of the discussion endures problems concerning the very nature of poetry itself.

Nonetheless, the ongoing production of what poetic films around the globe, building on an established history of poetic cinema, suggests that the concept remains valuable as a basis for artistic response, not only to the development of cinema within specific communities and regions but to the continued innovation of poetics as cultural practice.

There are to date a range of substantial accounts that position poetic cinema within a framework of Western modernity and globalisation. Raul Ruiz identifies poetic cinema in opposition to Western mass-media, proposing that poetic cinema constitutes a radical subversion of the ‘conflict theory’ and ‘three-act’ narrative fundamental to mainstream, Hollywood-based storytelling modes. Most theorists and filmmakers who attempt to ascertain a universal language of poetic cinema tend to examine poetics employing measures derived from or rooted in Western languages and poetry. While some accounts acknowledge the poetic qualities to certain non-Western cinema traditions, these remain for the most part in a theoretical blind spot.

In his discussion of poetic cinema, Metz referred directly to the vision of Italian filmmaker, Pier Paolo Pasolini. In this thesis I seek to restore poetic cinema as a concept useful for analysing world cinema traditions and, as elaborated at the outset to this part, Pasolini remains a figure central to this project. The reason is for his interest in cinematic
innovation as a means to preserve, or renew modern and pre-modern literary-social traditions in an age of Modernism.

Within film studies, the use of tradition as a concept for organising the history of cinema is typically treated as problematic. However, the notion of tradition and its reinvention retains pragmatic value when discussing histories of poetic innovation as they relate to cinematic movements.

Poetic film is not a genre in the same sense as Film Noir. Rather, for the purposes of this thesis, it refers to a set of social, aesthetic and creative affiliations between filmmakers, defined at a range of different scales: it may refer to relationships between the cinema of Pier Paolo Pasolini, Maya Deren, Andrei Tarkovsky, Jean Cocteau, Jean Genet and their contemporaries; it may speak of their influence in cinematic production and reading across a range of global and local contexts, as demonstrated in the response to Iranian art-house films in international festivals and markets; finally, it may refer to a localised community of filmmakers who extend cultural traditions of poetic innovation through the development of cinematic forms.

In the case of Iranian cinema, there has to date been little exploration in the West into the substantial traditions of poetic innovation that came to be expressed through Iranian art-house films. For instance, although film scholars and critics such as Godfrey Cheshire and Jonathan Rosenbaum – who have played important roles in introducing Iranian cinema to the world – have mentioned and referred to poetic qualities of Iranian art-house cinema, the capacity for such a focus in their accounts has been limited by a lack of knowledge, perceptions of exoticism in the Iranian tradition, or by a surface attention that portrays poetic aesthetics as decorative aspects to Iranian films.

In tandem with this thesis, a significant development towards properly theorising Iranian poetic cinema has been made in Khatereh Sheibani’s study, The Poetics of Iranian Cinema: Aesthetics, Modernity and Film after the Revolution, released in 2011 in the US. I encountered this study after my initial submission of this dissertation, and have found the research to offer valuable insights grounded in comparative literature. This study rightly elucidates the literary dimensions to cinematic works by Iranian filmmakers such as
Kiarostami and Bahram Bayzai, however the focus on literary elements eschews closer analysis of the formal cinematic and stylistic language of the cinema in focus.

This speaks of a more general gap in the literature: no studies to date have comprehensively examined Iranian films within the wider framework of world poetic cinemas, while at the same time foregrounding how poetic language has formed and been adapted across mediums through a turbulent history of socio-political change. As a film practitioner, writer and researcher working to reflect contemporary experiences of diaspora, I am well positioned to address this knowledge gap.

In this first section of the thesis, I present a historical analysis of poetic innovation in Iran, looking at how certain aesthetics in language have emerged, and been carried forward by revolutionary movements in art and literature, culminating in the New Wave cinema movement. I am especially concerned to explore the modern conditions under which poetic cinema developed as a hybrid form.
Chapter One: A Tradition of Innovation

On Poetic Cinemas of the World

From a theoretical angle, the tradition of poetic cinema is commonly positioned in reference to the artistic movements of Modernism and the Avant-Garde. As Maureen Turim points out, art historians sometimes refer to poetic and subjective qualities of cinema as an avenue for theorising avant-garde film, while “purposely avoiding the discipline of philosophy, its historical references, and its terminology” (527).

Perhaps to the same end, poetic cinema is commonly associated with the ‘art cinema’ of figures such as Jean Cocteau, Jean Genet, Jean-Luc Godard and Ingmar Bergman. In his study the Poetics of Cinema, David Bordwell analyses certain technical and artistic aspects of poetic film – including its mode of practice, its distinct set of formal conventions, and its niche market – relating these to ‘art cinema’. (151-169) Drawing a similar connection, John David Rhodes introduces a stronger history of ideas framework. He notes that the works Pasolini refers to as “cinema of poetry” may also be referred to as “art cinema” – works constituting “filmmaking of the postwar years, originating primarily in Italy and France, that extends... out of the experiments of neorealism” (149).

What distinguishes a poetic film within the framework of ‘art film', or within the wider categories of Modernist and Avant-Garde cinema? I propose that the answer lies in its position with respect to established traditions of poetry and poetic aesthetics. Uncovering this position relies on an analytical or historical approach to viewing the film in context. The analytic approach requires exploring the poetic principals (e.g. in practice and mode of production and/or employment of the poetry material) “according to which films are constructed and through which they achieve particular effects.” The historical approach elevates as a primary concern how poetic aspects and principles of the film take root from inspirations in poetry and poetic acts situated within a historical background; chiefly, from this approach, the theoretician must also question how and why these principles have “arisen and changed in particular empirical circumstances” (Poetics of Cinema 23).
It is my aim in this part to develop a nuanced framework for understanding poetic cinema in its global historical context. Specifically, I ask, how has poetic cinema been developed by artists across cultural stages as a means to resolve dual impulses: creative and social innovation, on the one hand, and the preservation of cultural and literary traditions, on the other. My initial discussion focuses on concepts of poetic cinema derived from the works and teachings of Pier Paolo Pasolini, references to the work of other filmmakers such as Maya Deren, Derek Jarman and Stan Brakhage, and theories of Avant-Garde, Modernist and art cinema.

Not only has Pasolini’s legacy of landmark films influenced many art-house filmmakers, his writings and speeches have generated broad-ranging discussions and disputes among critical theorists such as Christian Metz and Gilles Deleuze. These discussions help to place Pasolini’s approach within the context of globalisation, and lead to a greater understanding of how the innovation of poetic cinema – though deeply associated with the cultural experiences and disruptions of modernity – has in its various forms been used as a vehicle for bringing forward the literary modes and cultural politics that underpin collective subjectivity within local and global communities.

Pasolini never explicitly formulated a definition for poetic aesthetics in cinema. However, in a major debate at the Pesaro Film Meeting in 1965, he pointed to four key measures: in order for films to possess ‘poeticness’, he argued, they must be irrational and express an individual point of view, and they must be purely formal and concrete. While these measures would appear at first glance to be at odds with each other, Pasolini gave them resolution through an emphasis on the expressive, as opposed to informative value of poetry.

Influenced by the post-Romantic philosophy of the German idealist Benedetto Croce, Pasolini (173) implies in *Heretical Empiricism* that any language designed to serve ‘communication with others’ fails to be poetic because of its highly objective quality. Pasolini also adopts Croce’s insistence on poetry as “purely formal”. Croce had stated that “[t]he poet, the painter whose work lacks form, lacks everything, because he is lacking what makes him such”. “Poetic material” Croce had continued, “runs in all our souls: only expression, that is, form, makes a poet” (3).
This critique has been picked up by theorists and elaborated in their discussions about the semiotics of contemporary mass media and its relationship to globalisation and cultural homogenisation. Deleuze comments on the “inclination” of the mainstream media towards sensationalism. In everyday experience, he writes, “the most ordinary event casts us as visionaries”, but the media’s tendency to portray events as spectacles isolated from the periods before and after – “when nothing happens” – turns audiences into “mere passive onlookers, or worse still, voyeurs”. Deleuze concludes that it is “art, rather than the media, that can grasp events” (Negotiatiions 159-160).

Applying this critique to twentieth century cinema, Pasolini argued that cinematic narrative “belongs without question” to the “language of prose communication”. However, his critique went further. The conventional language of cinema, he argued, preserves only “the external manifestation – the logical and illustrative process – while it lacks one fundamental element of the ‘language of prose’: rationality” (172). Poetic film challenges this state by adopting ‘irrationality’ as a formal principle. John David Rhodes thus explores the ambivalent realm in cinema between the rational semblances of prose narrative and the irrational energies behind poetic communication. These “artistic” energies, he writes, are “captured and domesticated by the needs of communication”. Rhodes remains positive that “despite its deployment in the service of ‘prose narrative,’ cinema retains, always, because of its prediction on imaging, some vestige of its original poetic nature” (146).

In Pasolini’s critique, most narrative films are too engaged with logical illustration and portrayal to have space for pure form. The informative nature of conventional narrative disables expression of an individual or subjective point of view and violates the pure formality of poetic aesthetics.

In Poetics of Cinema, Raul Ruiz (9-23) links this violation to the cultural politics of a globalised world, arguing that mainstream narrative cinema, as popularised by Hollywood films, relies on the concept of conflict as a drive behind behaviours, and that this “central conflict theory” is derived from mainstream American culture rather than being drawn from various trends of storytelling in many other cultures. The main point of poetic cinema, continues Ruiz, is to find alternatives to predetermined three-act narrative, such as patterns of multiple stories overlapping “like designs in a Persian carpet”, which allow a
poetic communication to take place, rather than an informative plot that is already processed and canned to be consumed (88-89).

Pasolini’s vision positions poetry in cinema in relation to conventional narrative techniques and values. In his films, he elevates values such as irregularity and ambiguity, irrationality and fragmentation, barbarism and aggression, and he actively subverts the conventional three-act, linear plot structure. Emphasising this subversion from classical narrative, its cause-effect logic and parallelism, poetic cinema can be positioned in relation to art cinema. David Bordwell points to the vague or non-existent choices, goals, desires and motivations of characters within art cinema, contrasted with the “psychologically defined, goal oriented characters” through whom classical narrative projects its action (Poetics of Cinema 152). In art cinema, characters’ choices, goals, desires, and motivations are vague or non-existent, hence there is “a certain drifting episodic quality to the art film’s narrative. Characters may wander out and never reappear; events may lead to nothing” (153).

This diversion can also be viewed as the predominant characteristic of contemporary art and literature. Amos Vogel refers to the same subversive tendency in contemporary literature: “from Kafka to Beckett, from Joyce to Burroughs, from Proust to Robbe-Grillet, there is an unbroken evolution towards vertical rather than horizontal exploration – investigations of atmosphere and states of being rather than the unfolding of fabricated plots” (83). On this note, in an interview with L’Express (28 Jan. 1960), the playwright Eugene Ionesco prioritised state of consciousness over story, describing the play as “a progression by a kind of progressive condensation of states of mind, of a feeling, a situation, an anxiety” (qtd. in Vogel, 83). Referring to this interview Amos Vogel concludes that “this may be another way of saying that through modern science and philosophy art once again returns to poetry and the significance of poetic truth” (83).

However, such radical approach to poetry in cinema is questioned by Christian Metz who sees poetic cinema as deviating from the lyrical affect achieved within early modern French and German cinema, such as Abel Gance’s Napoleon (1927) and La Roue (1923), Jean Vigo’s Zero de Conduite (1933), and F.W. Murnau’s Nosferatu (1922). Metz asks, “instead of imagining a history in which contemporary films break down or disrupt an inherited
tradition of narrative, is it not the case that film today seems even closer to fiction and that previous eras were in fact much more open to poetry than we are now?” He goes on to assert not only that “Pasolini and his contemporaries have it all the wrong way around” but that a film “cannot be a poem” (206).

At a 1953 symposium named “Poetry and the Film”, Dylan Thomas and Arthur Miller – both celebrated writers of modern literature – expressed a similar conviction about the essential relationship between poetry and narrative. When Maya Deren (183) described the lyrical aspect of a work as its “vertical” plain, distinguished from narration as its “horizontal” plain, Thomas and Miller not only rejected Deren’s views, they refused to register her language in defining poetry altogether.

In Bordwell’s understanding of art cinema, as in the theories of Pasolini, Ruiz and also Maya Deren, diversion from conventional narrative and straightforward realism is understood as a poetic act. In art cinema, as is more broadly theorised with respect to Modernist and avant-garde cinema, such acts are used to transform the perception of cinema in respect to recognised poetic aesthetics. Maureen Turim thus finds that film artists ranging from John Cocteau, Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage all seek “a pure beauty or transcendent poetics that has as its goal transforming the mind, the very process of thought” (527).

From this view, there are clear connections between poetic and art cinema. Contrary to Metz’ view on the relationship between poetry and narrative, many theories of Avant-Garde, Modernist and art cinema have been concerned with how the ontology for cinema is transformed and expanded through the adaptation of poetic aesthetics. What is most at stake is subjectivity. Turim defines subjectivity as “an emotionally nuanced seeing”, and the transformation of this way of seeing potentially encompasses the auteur, the character and the viewer. When cinema enters the poetic realm, the ‘unseen’ is made visible as spectacle thus expanding the ontology for cinema.

Pasolini considers the subjective space of the character and the director as core to poetic cinema. He praises the “poeticness” of Michelangelo Antonioni’s Red Desert (1964), referring to the director’s stylistic use of a violet flower motif:
Those two or three out-of-focus violet flowers in the foreground in the shot in which the two protagonists enter the house of the neurotic worker and those same two or three violet flowers which reappear in the background, no longer out of focus, but aggressively in focus, in the shot of the exit.” (qtd. in Rhodes, 150)

Citing this example, John David Rhodes refers to Pasolini’s specific attention to style as the basis for a poetic act that is “paid for in the currency of subjectivity: that of the author and that of the character, whose performance and vision is but the vessel of the former” (151).

Though Pasolini’s creative impulses were focused on expression and pure formality, he observed that the “intended audience of the cinematographic product is also accustomed to ‘read’ reality visually, that is to have an instrumental conversation with the surrounding reality inasmuch as it is the environment of collectivity”. Poetry in film, he continued, thus finds itself in a “polemic and complicated place in its relation to ‘reality’ and its interpretations” (168). This complicated position can be explained in terms of its relations to innovation and tradition: poetic cinema embraces a new media deeply connected with global processes of cultural homogenization while at the same time striving to preserve residues of past literary traditions and modes of reading.

This complicated position, between innovative and traditional ways of seeing, positions both poetic cinema and art cinema apart from the work of the Avant-Garde. The artists of the Avant-Garde movements targeted notions of ‘reality’, setting out to manipulate – even destroy – realism through innovative formal devices. Art cinema, by way of contrast, relies in a sophisticated way on keeping realism intact. In The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice, Bordwell notes that art cinema “motivates its narrative by two principles: realism and authorial expressivity”. Ambiguity, used as a device, enables the film artist to manage “commitment to both objective and subjective verisimilitude”, and it is this that has distinguished art cinema from the classical narrative model” (The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice 57-59).

In Poetics of Cinema he continues: art cinema “foregrounds deviations from the classical norm – there are certain gaps and problems. But these very deviations are placed, resituated
as realism (in life things happen this way) or authorial commentary (the ambiguity is symbolic)” (Poetics of Cinema 156). He then describes the Modernist cinema as a “set of formal properties and viewing protocols that presents, above all, the radical split of a narrative structure from cinematic style, so that the film constantly strains between the coherence of the fiction and the perceptual disjunctions of cinematic representation.” Modernist cinema is not as ambiguous as is the art cinema, considering perceptual play and “non thematic ambivalence” as the main viewing strategy (Poetic of Cinema 157).

According to Pasolini, the poetic alternative to prosaic narrative cinema is achieved through techniques such as the pastiche of pre-existing image-signifiers (what he calls ‘im-signs’), which function as the bridge between layers of cultural meaning, literary texts and collective subjectivity. “We see that the linguistic archetypes of the im-signs are the images of our memories and our dreams; that is, images of “communication with ourselves” he writes. Poetic cinema, he continues, takes im-signs from “the meaningless jumble of possible expressions (chaos), make its individual existence possible, and conceive of it as placed in a dictionary of meaningful im-signs (gestures, environment, dream, memory)” (169-170). This enables film to move towards an expressly subjective and lyrical form that belongs “in the highest degree to the world of poetry” (173).

Bridging the practices of cinematography and poetry, poetic filmmakers tap the linguistic archetypes of images, thus creating cinema that is at once purely subjective and formal. On this note, Patrick Keating highlights Pasolini’s use of ‘free indirect point of view’, noting that this type of shot “allows a director to smuggle a purely formal expression of his/her individual point-of-view into a narrative film by disguising it as the purely formal expression of a character's point-of-view” (11).

He also observes that formal point-of-view shots are purely subjective – they represent a character’s poetic world-view – but information about that world-view remains subordinate to the needs of the narrative. Free-indirect point-of-view, by contrast, presents the expression of an individual-point of view as, or identical to the point-of-view of the author, without the requirement of communicating story information.
This opens the possibility for filmmakers to embed signs of self-referentiality into the cinematic frame. Significant traces of autobiographical self-portraiture can be found in the pioneer films of the Western poetic tradition – Deren appears in Meshes of the Afternoon (1943), while Pasolini plays small roles in The Decameron (1971) and The Canterbury Tales (1972). Pasolini even cast his mother, Susanna Colussi Pasolini, as the older Virgin Mary in The Gospel according to st. Matthew (1964). In such instances, the auteur’s subjectivity is physically embodied within the filmic text, while mapping and taking control of the points of view behind and before the camera lens.

The ultimate effect of these poetic techniques is a textualisation of reality, facilitating communion among artists and their audiences not through a direct ‘communication with others’ but through an open ‘communication with self’. On this note, the Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky – whose highly spiritual films were among the few allowed to be shown in Iranian cinemas and national television following the Islamic revolution – stated: “When I speak of poetry I am not thinking of it as a genre. Poetry is an awareness of the world, a particular way of relating to reality” (21).

Ambiguity, decentralised, puzzled, and episodic narrative, as well as open ending and loosened resolution are among the characteristics that Bordwell assigns to the ‘art cinema’. Similarly, Avant-Garde cinema also shares subversive values of cinematic form with Modernist, and art cinema. Minimal plot, unconventional continuity, dreamlike images, and non-logical dialogue are common aspects in most Avant-Garde films.

Amos Vogel, speaking specifically in regard to the Avant-Garde mode, describes the film Earth (Alexander Dovzhenko, USSR, 1930) as a visual poetry that manages through poetic freedom and lyricism to destroy any realistic sense of time and space. Stylistically, he adds, “the film is spectacular in the originality with which conventional structure is replaced by poetic continuity.” (37-38)

Poeticness in film thus broadly means that it is open to be read and interpreted. In Pasolini’s case this is a quality that relies on the auteur’s formal pastiche of both traditional (literary) and innovative (cinematic) image languages. Deleuze thus writes, “Pasolini’s cinema is a poetic consciousness, which is not strictly aestheticist or technicist, but rather mystical or ‘sacred’” (Cinema I: the Movement-Image 75).
Through his poetic cinema Pasolini found a unique synthesis between the modernist imperative to innovate and a post-Romantic desire to preserve cultural and literary traditions. In his creative vision and strategies, the translation of poetic aesthetics through cinematic form offered a powerful vehicle for artists to express the intertextual layers of collective being, and to facilitate a communion with new audiences based on ‘mystic’ processes of interpretation.

For the purposes of this thesis, Pasolini’s vision of poetic cinema is especially important because it allows for an understanding of creative and social innovation in the age of Modernism as a multi-dimensional process, shaped within the histories and traditions of communities as they shifted in form under the pressures of globalisation. As Dillon rightfully states:

“By itself, ‘poetry’ has little meaning. Even as a contrast to ‘narrative’, it is still rather empty, too abstract. But when used by a community of artists, the word begins to take hold, and we can come to grasp it in its relation to other expressive practices and discourses” (3).

This analysis sets the framework for an original analysis of creative innovation in Iran, detailing the emergence of poetic cinema and its archetypal origins in the mystic language and poetry of Persian culture. It is my central argument that while poetic cinema in Iran evolved in dialogue with the European and Western movements, the tradition’s emergence, shape and trajectory must be understood primarily as the culmination of a centuries-long process of innovation intimately connected with Iran’s complex social, cultural and political history.

Bordwell writes that Iranian cinema is a remarkable instance of a local filmmaking tradition that emerged to “replay at an accelerated pace the trajectory of European art cinema”. This points to the key conceptual site for my argument, but is by itself an unsatisfactory description of the Iranian tradition. I agree with Bordwell that it is vital to examine how local traditions have grown in response to global transitions, and that Iranian film is one case of how “an indigenous realist movement, somewhat comparable to Italian
neorealism, becomes more conscious of the conventions involved in realism” (Poetics of Cinema 161). To add to this, I argue that the trajectory of innovation between Persian language and mystical poetry, New Poetry and art-house film has developed in dynamic response to the enforcement of cultural taboos and censorship within a society defined in large parts by its history of invasion, colonisation and resistance. Further, these creative and cultural innovations have opened pathways for people in Iran to re-imagine indigenous expressional identities and contest the boundaries of their national community within a globalising and homogenising world.

Language and Taboo in Iran

The concept of censorship is commonly associated today with the restricted circulation of cultural and artistic works, and is problematic when considering the contestation of cultures within a history of occupation. Nonetheless, there has been considerable research done on the formation and survival of Persian language in a society that has at various stages over the past centuries been shaped through dynamics between political censorship, the enforcement of cultural taboos and the innovation of language. Before focusing this argument by looking as a case study at the evolution of the mystical Sufi poetic tradition, it is worth sketching out some of the history as context.

In ‘The Arab Conquest of Iran and its Aftermath’, Abd Al-Husain Zarrinkub’s chapter in The Cambridge History of Iran, the historian examines early stages of the relationship between the Arab community and Iran. He writes, “from as early as before the advent of Alexander the Great Arabs had been known to Iran. In the Sasanian period, from A.D. 226 to 651, their jurisdiction reached as far as the western outskirts of Ctesiphon. According to Tabarî, Shâpūr I (A.D. 241–72) had settled some of the tribe of Bakr b. Wa’il in Kirmān.” (on-line overview). During the Arab invasion of Iran between 661 and 750 AD, the invading Arab forces held a sword in one hand and a Koran in the other, figuratively speaking, and sought to reconstitute the Persian community into an expanding political community. Acceptance of Islamic religion by a large number of Iranian communities played an important role in cementing new political relations. The teaching of
Koranic verses that evoked human equality – regardless of colour, race, wealth and social class – appealed to many under-privileged segments of Iranian society. Zarrunkub thus states in ‘History of Iran from the Beginning until the Fall of the Pahlavi’ that Iranians, who had persevered under the tyranny of the Zoroastrian clergy during the Sassanid era, welcomed the demise of the “decaying system and opened their arms to Islam”. He continues, wherever “was a trace of a fire temple” this was “transformed into a mosque or a Muslim temple. There was rarely any space or atmosphere left for preservation of the ancient mythology and traditions.” (313)

With the shift of Islamic Arab power from Medina to Damascus, the Umayyad Caliphate emerging as rulers of the Islamic world, social and political attitudes to Iranian citizenry shifted. Persian traditions and language were ridiculed and banned by powerful preachers of the new faith (80). Their destruction of material forms of culture – from written texts and libraries to handicrafts, costumes, carpets and artworks – was part of a broader project “to eradicate the independent and unique sense of Persian identity in the same way that they "Arabized" and assimilated the Egyptians and the Assyrians, but with minimal success”. As Reza Ladjevardian notes in Ancient Persia to Contemporary Iran, this experience led to the fading of the Middle Persian or Pahlavi alphabet in favour of the new Arabic/Persian alphabet, which continues in use to this day.

Persian language survived and evolved largely ‘underground’ – an unofficial, transgressive and at times forbidden expression of identity and difference. Today, early poets such as Rudaki and Fredowsi are celebrated in Iran for having crystallized and documented the Persian language under the pressures of invasion. In resentment at the Arab influence, Ferdowsi wrote an epic story containing myths associated with pre-Islamic Persia, with minimal usage of words derived from Arabic. Shahnameh ("The Book of Kings") took him 30 years to complete and consisted of over 50,000 couplets – a creative act for which he is considered a national hero and guardian of Persian (Iranian) identity.

Because of its relationship to oral traditions and spoken language, poetry became an integral instrument for transmitting through generations the philosophical, spiritual and social content that sustained imagination of the Persian community. Verbal poetry gave form to a multicultural and politically patchwork nation searching for unity and common grounds. Reflecting shifting cultural politics, Persian poetry and language more generally
became complex in its encodings, with rich aesthetic conventions governing sonority and imagery, and complicated techniques developed for mystifying messages, wrapping and unwrapping meanings, and opening space for interpretation.

For more than a millennium, central modes of representing reality and expressing ideas in Iran have been impacted by a polemic notion of God as invisible, ‘the Invisible’ being the absolute, total and eternal ‘real’. In the absence of a visible deity, the imagination – or ‘feeling’ – of this ontological presence is said to depend on the spiritual capacity of individuals. Therein lies the basis for authority within the religious-social hierarchy, for while the borders between the real and imaginary are vague and open to interpretation, the modes of expression are regulated according to the Book. Later, with the rise of Shi’ism, expression of ‘the Invisible’ was governed according to the interpretation of the ruling clerical class.

Within Iranian society, practices of simulating the face of divinity, or visualising ‘the Invisible’, have been prohibited. Religious conviction is “predicated on the constitutional impossibility of seeing, or showing, the Face of the Unseen” (Dabashi, ‘In the Absence of the Face’ 23). Qur’an and all Islamic prayers start with ‘In The Name of Allah (God)’, just as it is compulsory for all film productions to begin with “In the Name of …”. As Dabashi notes, filmmakers are free to fill the blanks with any name attributed to God according to the Book, the capacity for opening spiritual dialogue through cinema is limited by this practice:

We cannot show because it, the Unseen, cannot be seen. We are not allowed to see because the Unseen cannot be shown. From the sur-Face site of the Absent Face we are then hermeneutically diverted towards the meaning of the Name. (‘In the Absence of the Face’ 23)
The Mystical Sufi Poetic Tradition

The Sufi poetic tradition can be traced back to the 10th century, and has evolved within the Persian tradition to exert a profound impact on Iranian society, culture, art and language.

The roots of the tradition are found in eastern philosophies, such as the philosophy of Hikma (Hekmat) propounded by the Persian physician, philosopher and scientist Avicenna. Central to the thought traditions that underpin Sufi poetics is an illuminationist philosophy known as ‘Ishraq’. As Khatereh Sheibani notes, Ishraq places emphasis on the absolute, unchanging and universal validity of what is real and true, elevating the importance of “essence” over “existence” and “intuitive knowledge” over “representational knowledge” (178). This was defined and elaborated as a philosophy counter to Aristotelian thought by Shahab-i-din Yahya Suhrivardi, who consolidated “the language games, mythology, and theoretical ontology into a philosophical statement”. Sheibani continues, “Ishraq has had a profound impact on Iranian culture and was one of the main philosophical discourses that legitimised Shi’ism in Iran. It also fostered Sufism.” (179)

It was not until the 12th century that Sufi poetry consolidated to reflect the fluid ideological and cultural opposition of Moslem Persians to the Islamic radicalism of the state. Dabashi (Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema 207) notes that Sufism became a kind of “religious populism against the juridical nomo-centrism (or the primacy of nomos, or law) that invariably sided with the medieval feudalism of the Islamic state”. Key to this populism was an “experiential concept of divinity” that offered Persian Muslims an alternative to both the juridical discourses of the state and the reason-centred ethics of philosophers and the cultural elite.

Iran’s tradition of mystic poetry was over time innovated through an intersection with Sufi texts. The outcome was an encoded language with amplified potentials for creating complex, wrapped and layered meanings. The language was further enriched with specific games of interpretation.
Through the production and reception of Sufi texts, poets and their audiences were able to sidestep juridical obstacles and cultural taboos, generating alternative expressions for the ‘meaning of the Name’. Building on the Sufi tradition, poets orchestrated motifs, symbols and nature metaphors that oscillate in meaning between earthly ‘jouissance’ – or romantic experience – and ecstasy of union with the deity. Each jouissance motif becomes a proximate and analogous expression for a spiritual experience: ‘the Beloved’ can mean ‘God’; ‘the Lover’ points to the ‘poet’ or ‘Sufi’; ‘the Road’ signals ‘love experience’; ‘the Wine’ means ‘life itself’; and the intoxication of wine stands for the ecstasy of achieving unity with the invisible deity.

Ghazal, a lyrical form of mystical poetry literally meaning ‘love conversation’ or ‘love serenade’ enabled the Sufi to voice alternative world-views, political ideologies and religious doubts, and question the sacredness of taboo subjects, through mystic expression with romantic overtones. At the core of Ghazal poetry is the concept of a ‘Beloved’ who is out of reach. This central figuration is open to interpretation as either earthly or Godly, and this opens the poetic mode to being shaped and reshaped with a range of conceptual possibilities. For example, Hafiz – a widely influential fourteenth century poet – fills his poetry with provocative expressions of worldly pleasures, erotic desires, and mockery of rigid religious beliefs and taboos. Reza Baraheni notes that Hafiz was responding to the Mongolian invasion of his country and city. Finding his sense of identity distorted and irrelevant in the midst of chaos, his Ghazal reflects the world “as in fractions (fragmented) and spontaneous”, at the same time serving as a medium for “transition towards a mystical essence”. (550)

The potential for poets and audiences to engage in taboo social dialogue through Ghazal and other Sufi forms is strengthened through values placed on ‘the secret not to be disclosed’ (Ser e Magoo). At the same time, the open interpretability of the texts relates to a religious philosophy concerning the complexity of reality and the inadequacy of language as a means to grasp its essential nature.

In the teachings of Mulla Sadra, a Shi’ite theologian who led the Iranian cultural resistance in the 17th century, the world is constituted in the human mind; but while each person’s reality is unique these ontologies are linked through the presence of God. The ‘Invisible’
deity is figured as the ‘true’ reality and the sole reference for individuals to contact this essential truth, which can only be intuited rather than conceived. This is demonstrated in poetic sayings that place the experiences of time and space at odds with the divine realm:

You are in space but your essence is in the Spaceless Realm [...] This world (of space) has come into existence out of the Spaceless, and out of placelessness it has secured a place [...] The thought is about the past and future; when it gets rid of these two, the difficulty will be solved [...] In the spaceless realm of the Light of God, the past, present and the future do not exist. Past and future are two things only in relation to you; in reality they are one (Abdul Hakim 18).

The language games of Persian Sufi poetry have developed as both a self-oriented practice for ‘feeling’ the ultimate reality and truth, and as a ritualised channel for social communion. Through the open interpretability of the poetic mode, the Persian community could share in an experiential concept of divinity, while evading and challenging taboos set around unsanctioned simulations of ‘the Unseen’. Poetic innovation offered a potent and clandestine means for Persian people to preserve their imagined community and regulate its boundaries under conditions of occupation and social change.
Chapter Two: The Iranian ‘New Wave’: Leading a Poetic Art-House Cinema

The New Poetry

The first two decades of the twentieth century was a unique phase in Iranian history, argues Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak. A renewed quest for change took hold in Iran, reinforced by modern social and political discourse. The Iranian constitutional movement drew legitimacy from a re-casting of national history, “imagined increasingly as a single continuous line”. In popular thought, the modern age was envisioned as a distinct age, this “informed by the perception that a millennium-old political system of despotic rule had ended” (Recasting Persian Poetry 101).

The movement for social and political reform occurred in concert with a massive cultural upheaval. At the helm were new generations of artists, intellectuals and writers, many of whom recognised parallels between the Iranian Revolution and the French Revolution, and fostered “an intense curiosity about nineteenth-century French literature, envisioned as the literary consequence of the French Revolution” (Karimi-Hakkak, Recasting Persian Poetry 101).

Poets such as Iraj Mirza (who died in 1926), and the female poet Parvin E'tesami, absorbed into their work modern concerns such as the emancipation of women and the defeat of fundamentalism. Leading a revival of Persian letters, they opened the form and content of Iranian poetry to new modes of expression compatible with contemporary discourses and concerns.

However, it was Ali Esfandiari (1896-1960) – better known as Nima Youshij – who formulated and articulated New Poetry (Sher e Nowe) as an influential literary and social movement. Nima was inspired by the stylings of modern European poets who insisted on the outright dismissal of traditional poetic genres, medieval imagery and emblematic sentiments. He shook Persian poetry from its conventional forms of expression, at once extending and upending a tradition of innovation stretching back more than a millennium.
Nima manipulated the visual and sound patterns of traditional poetry. He and his followers shifted forms of expression away from the rigid rules governing metre, rhyme and the number of lines required, and freed poetry from symmetry-based verse patterns. They introduced alternative metaphors, metonyms, allegories and imagery. In doing so, they not only changed the standards for expression, they actively disrupted the entire system of production, communication and signification habitually associated with poeticity in Persia.

Nima saw the transformation of poetic systems as a social process in itself. He considered older poetic styles and the specific aesthetic qualities of classical genres such as Ghazal and Qasideh as no longer compatible with an Iranian society rapidly mutating towards modernity and radically detouring from the old ways of life. As Karimi-Hakkak writes, Nima’s texts take part in “a kind of cultural upheaval, in that they work against the existing system of encoding and decoding poetic signs”. Through his New Poetry Nima subjects “the existing significatory systems to a crisis”, creating space for the reimagining of new realities” (Recasting Persian Poetry 282). As Nima wrote:

“With my poetry I have driven the people into a great conflict; Good and bad, they have fallen in confusion; I myself am sitting in a corner, watching them: I have flooded the nest of ants” (Youshij, no page number).

Nima’s spirit of struggle against the ruling regime and his connection with the “suffering” masses is clearly visible in his poetry. Anvar Khameie notes that Nima “criticizes oppression, crime and exploitation of the masses”, and in none of his poems can one detect “praise of royal systems, nobility, khans, employers and wealthy aristocrats” (qtd. in Lajevardian).

Nima reinforced this social alliance by introducing into poetry a localism and casual spoken language that was nonexistent in the Classical canons. Nima used a rural dialect of Mazandaran, his birthplace, while other Nimaic poets introduced everyday language and slang to amplify a sense of urbanism.
As Karimi-Hakkak (Recasting Persian Poetry 237) notes, the New Poetry was conceptualised “as itself an aspect of the social structure mediated through language”. The invention and interpretation of the New Poetry took place within a network of cultural producers and audiences, which became the locus for new forms of community to be imagined. The transformative potential of the movement, writes Karimi-Hakkak, resided in the “essential identicality of the social and literary structures.” He also states:

“Nima and his followers thus formed the core of a community of poets, critics, and readers who actively took part in interpreting the principals of the new poetic system for the reading public. In a real sense, that discourse constituted the last chapter in a literary-cultural process which had originated in the subversive discourse of a group of nineteenth-century social reformers” (Recasting Persian Poetry 233).

Nima and his followers, amongst them pre-eminent modern poets Ahmad Shamlou, Mehdi Akhavan Sales, Sohrab Sepehri and Forough Farrokhzad, “took the risk of creating what their culture might – and in many cases did – view as nonpoetry, nonsense, or both” (Recasting Persian Poetry 283). Through innovation in creative expression and the games of poetic interpretation they helped delineate the boundaries to a modern Iranian community framed within a global context; by creating open texts, free of restrictive rules and out-dated allegories, they espoused an open view to the world.

**Modern Innovation and Cultural Residues**

Karimi-Hakkak writes that in animating modernism in Persian poetry, Nima had to confront “many old and established concepts, widely popular literary figures, and the many theoretical and technical concepts and conventions of Persian poetics”. Many criticised the Nimaic poets, religiously insisting on preserving the traditional habits and coherence of Persian poetry (Karimi-Hakkak and Talattof, “Millenium-old Tradition of Persian Poetry” 1).

Nonetheless, while seeking to free Iran’s poetic modes from cultural rigidities, the Nimaic poets actively reinvented many of the fundamental stylistic elements, language games and
philosophies of local and foreign literary traditions. As an example, Sohrab Sepehri interweaved European modernism, Persian Sufism and Zen-Buddhism in his poetry and paintings. Even as he sought to disrupt the conventions of expression and meaning-making traditionally associated with Persian poetics, he advanced values and ideas at the core of the Sufi tradition. Drawing on a concept central to many Persian poetic traditions, Sepehri emphasised the value of ‘the moment’ in mystic experience, writing: “At the sunset, amid the tired presence of things, An expectant gaze could see the very depth of time” (Dabashi, Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema 214).

In the poetic world of Jalal ad-Din Rumi, the revered 13th century mystic, Sufi is represented as the creature of the moment. Similarly, in the poetry of Omar Khayyam, an influential 11th century poet, the present moment is celebrated as the only available truth.

Sepehri was trained as a painter in Paris and was influenced by encounters with both Japanese and Indian art and culture. The mystic ambience of his work, which relates directly back to his Sufistic approach, is enhanced by the stillness of abstract shapes of nature in his paintings, and a delicate minimalist use of everyday and ‘illustrative’ language in his poetry. The use of intertextuality, abstraction and syncretic deviations from traditional poetic language imbues Sepehri’s work with a modernist spirit.

Even today playfulness with language remains a popular trend in ultra modern and postmodern Persian free-verse poetry; deployed to create complex meanings, open interpretability and heighten the intertextual layers of poetry. However, many of the techniques for playfulness that are still used today – for example creating rhythms and layered meanings through the repetition of words, or deploying similar sounding words with minor alterations – trace back to the work of traditional poets such as Rumi and Hafiz. Thus, while the New Poetry movement was an active force in Iran’s cultural modernisation, the movement can also be ascribed as the culmination of a centuries-long tradition of creative innovation.

As elaborated throughout this part, the evolution of Persian poetic traditions have since their beginnings been defined in large parts by the innovation of techniques and philosophies that open texts and spoken word to heightened practices of encoding and
decoding. This constant innovation has facilitated the preservation of the Persian (Iranian) community under pressures of invasion, occupation and colonisation, and enabled the regulation of its boundaries.

The writers of the New Poetry movement intensified the tradition of poetic innovation in dialogue with broader transitions in society and culture, and global movements in art and politics. With the radical departure from classic modes of poetic communication, elements of traditional culture were opened up to modern practices, with emphasis lying on individual interpretation and invention. Through this process, residues of traditional culture were brought forward into the age of Modernism.

New Wave Cinema

Much of the critique of Iranian cinema has emphasised the country’s modern and contemporary history, and the history of filmmaking in Iran cannot be read in isolation from modern social and political developments. Avanes Oganians is credited for directing the first Iranian feature film, Abi and Rabi, produced in 1929. Since these beginnings, cinema in Iran has undergone a series of significant changes. The birth of the industry occurred only a decade after World War I when Russian and British forces occupied the country, this following the discovery of oil by the British in 1908 and the country’s entrance into global capitalism.

From 1936-48, the change in political atmosphere leading to the outbreak of World War II and the imposition of censorship had a negative affect on the industry. After the American occupation in 1942 and subsequent coup there arose within Iranian society a new socio-political awareness and unrest, framed by debates over freedom and democracy. The government imposed and strengthened measures of control over political and cultural expression.

The situation changed again in the 1950s, when several film companies were established. Alternative, or non-mainstream cinema was initiated in 1949, when Farrokh Ghaffari
established the first National Iranian Film Society at the Iran Bastan Museum. Ghaffari’s *Down Town* (1959) possessed a strong sense of realism and social awareness, making it the first major deviation from ‘Film Farsi’ (Iran’s mainstream cinema). *Down Town* was followed by a wave of experimental filmmaking led by such figures as Samuel Khachikian, Hooshang Kavoosi, Ebrahim Golestan, Masoud Kimiai, Dariush Mehrjooie, Fereidoon Rahnana, Sohrab Shahid Sales and Ali Hatami.

To date there has been limited number of accounts that are concerned with critical investigation of the poetic nature of Iranian cinema. The central aim of this thesis is to show that the Iranian art-house cinema belongs to the poetic cinema tradition at various scales of affiliation. At a global scale, it is loosely affiliated with the international movement of poetic cinema, and in part 2, I closely analyse the works of selected Iranian filmmakers in light of the ideas, techniques and influences of Pasolini and his contemporaries. At a local level, Iranian poetic cinema emerges in continuity with Persian literature, culture, poetic traditions and aesthetics.

The filmmakers of the Iranian New Wave were strongly affiliated through their Iranian cultural identity and connections to the creative communities of modern Iran. As Khatereh Sheibani stresses, “it is evident that Iranian cinema has been profoundly enriched by the original cultural archetypes. Yet, this does not limit it within the ‘in-between-spaces’, as Homa Bhabha calls it, of transnational zones.” Although European cinema has influenced the evolution of poetic cinema in Iran, Sheibani asserts, filmmakers have “drawn inspiration primarily from Persian literature and conventions of Iranian performing arts.” (175-176)

In this sense, the Iranian New Wave can be understood as a process of creative innovation loosely affiliated with the European movement that shares its name, and a process that has come to have a lasting effect on Iranian cinema to this day. The Iranian critic Ahmad Talebinejad has said in interview that the present New Wave is logically an “extension of the pre-Revolutionary New Wave” and that the “special value of the New Wave cinema in Iran was its artistic tendencies”. The films that define this continuum were unique in both subject and form; structure was drawn from novel film subjects, as were stylistic choices across cinematography, music, editing and acting. Ordinary, or cliché
drama were also used as the basis for innovative cinema. For example, in the film *Sarah*, Dariush Mehrjuyee narrates a conflict between a young husband and wife, but special values are given to this repetitive subject through “decoupage in directing (using dissolve and color darkening and lighting)” and a “conscious refusal to use music and editing” (Hamshahri, p. 10).

At a local level, the artistic tendencies in Iranian New Wave cinema are affiliated through creative reference to Persian literature, poetic traditions and aesthetics, and the filmmakers are related through their connections to the creative communities of modern Iran. Many of the New Wave films are highly intertextual, containing references to other poetic texts, whether they are literary or cinematic, classic or contemporary. Sufi poetry, the mystical Ghazal of Hafiz, and Ancient Persian manuscripts such as ‘Avista’, ‘Shahnameh’, ‘Hezar Afsan’, ‘Kelileh va Demneh’ remain main sites for inspiration, as does the mystical and everyday modes of communication that echo across Persian literature, oral storytelling, slang and conversational language, performing and visual arts. These refer back to belief systems such as Zoroastrianism, Sufism and Ishraq that are core to Iranian cultural identity.

As Khatereh Sheibani stresses, “it is evident that Iranian cinema has been profoundly enriched by the original cultural archetypes. Yet, this does not limit it within the ‘in-between-spaces’, as Homa Bhabha calls it, of transnational zones.” Although European cinema has influenced the evolution of poetic cinema in Iran, Sheibani asserts, filmmakers have “drawn inspiration primarily from Persian literature and conventions of Iranian performing arts” (175-176). In contact with the European movement, Iranian filmmakers created a recognisable, yet unique body of poetic cinema, subverting the norms of narrative pervading international mainstream cinema, favouring ambiguity over precision, and vagueness over straight-forwardness, bringing forward non-three-act, non-linear and uneventful modes of story telling, and creating an alternative cinematic language that is understated in its technical sophistication, minimalist in its approach to narrative information, and rich in its expressive qualities. The outcome is a cinema that is highly interpretable, open to be decoded and recoded in various ways, and versatile enough to communicate with film audiences around the world.
### Summary

While poetic cinema may share certain formal traits and philosophical characteristics with Modernist, Avant-Garde, and ‘art film’, it is impossible to reduce poetic cinema to a bounded, coherent movement, with clear-cut objectives, formal properties or viewing protocols that might be otherwise useful in defining genres. A poetic film can share formal properties of Modernist cinema, characteristics by which it diverts into ‘art film’, and yet still expand beyond the horizons of each of these recognised modes.

While innovating poetic games of expression and interpretation through a new medium, Iranian filmmakers have effectively advanced a tradition of poetic innovation that in many ways has defined the Persian imaginary throughout its history. Much of the metaphorical and allegorical qualities of Persian language and literature have developed under the pressures of invasion and occupation over centuries; as such they express the continual search for, and reshaping of a Persian (Iranian) identity in the face of shifting political censorship and social taboos. Art-house filmmakers, whose creative affiliations were made explicit through the New Wave movement, have advanced traditional modes of communication and preserved important aspects of Persian (Iranian) culture through cinematic innovation.

At the same time, the art-house filmmakers have benefited from, and helped to create fundamental new social relations, these in part constructed through new modes of signification and communication developed by the Nimaic poets. As Karimi-Hakkak writes, with respect to both creative movements, “out of the flux of nearly a century of determined effort at esthetic modernity, a new interpretive community was finally born in Iran around the middle of the twentieth century” (Recasting Persian Poetry 250).

Although Iranian poetic cinema takes Classic traditions and Sufi thought as its basis for inspiration, it has been the New Poetry movement that ultimately prepared the grounds for filmmakers to translate these traditions into a poetic contemporary cinematic language. The Nimaic poets opened up the systems of signification and communication governing Iranian
poetry, and in doing so they offered new avenues for creative and social agency. Influenced by the New Poetry – which had its heights a decade before the New Wave began – Iranian filmmakers sought to construct multiple layers of meaning under a surface of technical simplicity.

Against the absence of any real institutional progress towards the ideals of liberty and democracy, the new waves of alternative literature and cinema offered a substantive form of creative agency that sustains normative behaviour, informs social consciousness and projects political agency within the contested boundaries of a modern Persian community. Iranian poetic cinema has emerged as the culmination of a long process of social-artistic reform, and invites its audience to confront the challenges of a highly restrictive society, as well as the impacts of modern transitions, doing so through a pronounced experience of interactivity.

On a broader scale, Iranian cinema has made Persian poetics accessible for diverse international and local audiences – in fact, the extent to which it has done so finds few precedents within Iran’s history of creative innovation. Today, this project becomes increasingly important as international political conflicts and internal turmoil lead to the severe limitation of avenues for communication – both within Iranian society, and between Iranian people and the international community. Despite frequent interruptions, art-house cinema continues the advances of the New Wave in a matured form, helping both local and international cinema makers and audiences to build an alter realm of communication for a modern Iran that can cohabitate to greater or lesser degrees of success alongside fluctuating regimes of social and political censorship.
PART TWO
IRANIAN TEXTS

Introduction

Most references to poetic cinema examine poeticness employing measures derived from or rooted in Western languages and poetry. Although some of those accounts also acknowledge the poetic qualities of some non-Western cinemas as well, their exclusive perspective impedes development of a theoretical framework useful for explaining poetic cinema at a global scale.

In the case of Iranian art-house cinema, there is little understanding of the related history, culture and poetic movements associated with the unique cinematic language that has developed. In most criticism of Iranian films, poetic aspects have been widely mentioned but denied proper examination in terms of their substance and integration. Poetic Iranian cinema is usually framed as part of the culture’s exoticness, viewed through a prism of ‘otherness’, and treated as marginal and decorative – the mood, visuals and rural scenery of Iranian films are labelled ‘poetic’ in a scattered way. The critical failure to engage in comprehensive stylistic and textual analysis of this poetic cinema tradition means there remains a substantial gap in the literature.

This remains the case even while both the cinematic and poetic traditions of Iran are receiving wide international recognition, becoming a source of inspiration for many poetic filmmakers around the world, including Aki Kaurismaki and Nuri Bilge Ceylan. Considering these influences, the study of poeticness in Iranian films becomes increasingly crucial in developing a universal discourse concerning poetry in film.

The urgency of this project is further bolstered by numerous critical accounts on global cinema – such as that by Raul Ruiz – that emphasise and theorise non-mainstream cinematic traditions, including alternatives to the ‘conflict theory’ and ‘three-act narrative’ popularised in Hollywood films. Even in these accounts, the failure to properly penetrate
specific cultural and poetic traditions expressed through cinematic languages betrays a
certain Eurocentric persuasion, leaving poetic cinemas of the world in a peculiar blind spot.

Building on the first part’s discussion about poetic cinema and traditions of innovation,
this part maps some of the recurrent elements and techniques of poetic films,
foregrounding some of the major filmmakers of the Iranian art-house, many of whom
emerged from or were influenced by the New Wave, through close textual reading and
stylistic analysis of their films. My aim is twofold: first, to link the Iranian tradition to some
of the major accounts on poetic cinema, developing a cinematic language useful for
examining poeticity in cinema at near a global scale; second, to place Iranian poetic cinema,
including internationally celebrated post-revolutionary films, in perspective as belonging to
a substantial localised history of poetic innovation and dialogue.

The films I have selected to study are not only regarded as landmarks in Iranian cinema,
they are also key sources of inspiration for my own practice, including the production of
My Tehran for Sale. Building on my earlier discussion of poetic cinema in terms of
different scales of affiliation, this part deepens knowledge on poetic cinema as a versatile
movement shaped through various world histories. Most importantly, it lays solid
foundations for understanding how My Tehran for Sale is situated as a poetic work
abridging Iranian and ‘Western’ cultures, and contemporary and classic influences.
Chapter Three: The Politics of Voice and Silence

Forough Farrokhzad

Iranian New Wave cinema began as an art-house trend in parallel with ‘Film Farsi’ in 1962, when female poet Forough Farrokhzad produced a poetic short film entitled The House Is Black. The following year, the film received the only significant award at the International Short Film Festival in Oberhausen, bringing the new Iranian cinema to international attention. Forough Farrokhzad’s film style is particularly distinguished by her creative strategies in interweaving poetry and naked realism. While the international reading of Iranian poetic cinema has emphasised elements of realism, Iranian audiences could recognise that the invention of a new cinematic style was occurring at the hands of a poet in the Nimaic tradition, and to various extents art-house cinema in Iran has continued in this tradition of poetic innovation.

Jonathan Rosenbaum in his article, ‘Radical Humanism and the Coexistence of Film and Poetry in The House Is Black’ claims that the special status of poetry in Iran, arguably competing with Islam, is embodied in Forough’s life and art:

“*The House is Black* is to my mind one of the very few successful fusions of literary poetry with film poetry – a blend that commonly invites the worst forms of self-consciousness and pretentiousness – and arguably this linkage of cinema with literature is a fundamental trait underlying much of the Iranian new wave” (no page number).

*The House is Black*, Forough’s only directorial film, is a 22-minute poetic piece examining daily life in a leper colony. Forough breaks away from the mainstream cinema through the suspension of narrative conventions: the rhythm of the film is designed through a montage of long takes depicting the daily routines and silent moments experienced by physically distorted lepers who constantly look towards the camera lens; a spoken narration is overlaid, and consists almost entirely of biblical references and poetic prose written by Forough and Ebrahim Golestan, and vocalised by Forough in a melancholic voice.
In one scene, Forough’s free verse is juxtaposed over a long-take of a man with crutches. He limps towards the camera gradually filling the frame, and, in this way, the scene finishes with a black screen. In the absence of music, the audio-visual rhythm of the scene is punctuated with the sound of the man’s crutches on steps, this becoming increasingly dominant as the man approaches the camera (see figs. 2 and 3).

The poetry is read as follows:

“Alas, for the day is fading,
The evening shadows are stretching.
Our being, like a cage full of birds,
Is filled with moans of captivity.
And none among us knows how long,
He will last.”

The poetic narration over the images continues:

“The harvest season passed,
The summer season came to an end,
And we did not find deliverance.
Like doves we cry for justice…
And there is none.
We wait for light/and darkness reigns.” (The House Is Black)

Forough’s visual style involves the use of mise-en-scene, with details depicting everyday life in the ‘leper house’ frequently becoming abstract forms within shots, helping to build towards an overall mood created through the rhythms of montage editing. With poetic narration overlain, Forough enunciates a larger philosophical position concerning the ontological oneness of poetry and film: her poetic cinema gives visual embodiment to specific image-making techniques derived from Persian poetry.

In one scene, where a leper is walking alongside a wall in the dried out yard of the colony, pacing back and forth, intermittently finger-tapping the wall, we hear Forough very faintly off-screen reciting the days of the week over a long take. Her melancholic narration creates a rhythm that Rosenbaum calls “a kind of duet with the man’s repeated gesture” (‘Radical Humanism and the Coexistence of Film and Poetry in The House is Black, no page number).
Through this repetition, the long take effects a mise-en-scene; juxtaposition of filmic and poetic language helps create an allusion to eternal pain. With the rhythm of the leper’s gesture in time with Forough’s voice reciting the weekdays over and over, the on-screen events imply the stretch and collapse of time experienced by the lepers in their lifelong daily routines (in this case, wandering along a wall that is also the barrier to life outside) (see fig. 4).

In Forough’s adaptation of biblical text, the leper’s eternal pain becomes reminiscent of Sisyphus’ suffering and his relationships to Gods, as elaborated in Iranian mythology. Forough’s many references to the notions of God, religion, and destiny opens up the narrative to broader intertextual readings, and through her own filmic and poetic language she adapts these traditional texts for the purposes of advancing contemporary social and political commentary.

The film was produced under dynamic socio-political circumstances, when Tehran and other major cities were undergoing transformation to what many perceived as an imitated, predetermined version of Western modernity, this social change reshaping the country’s history and identity. Set over cinematic images of a ‘leper house’ in traditional rural Iran, Forough’s filmic and poetic language comes to express the cultural transformation of modernity and the continuance of life’s suffering under the stewardship of the Shah. The
use of poetic language enables the audiences to receive the film as euphemism while evading new and old cultural and political taboos.

Like many other Iranian New Wave films, the film runs a fine line between documentary and fiction while denying the conventions of both. The House Is Black oscillates between scenes where a male narrator's voice gives more descriptive information about leprosy, this juxtaposed over documentary-style images of the patients being treated in clinics, and the more poetic scenes in which long-take rhythmic mise-en-scenes and abstract cinematography are narrated in time with Forough’s poetic recitations.

Although the film possesses a strong sense of ‘naked realism’, the latter scenes have more gravity and at times contain shots that are irrelevant to the representation of reality in the film. In such cases, the film actively veers from the realism of documentary towards a poetic cinema style. On this note, Rosenbaum points to the second scene, set in the colony’s school classroom. In this scene, there is an unexpected cutaway to outdoors, where a crowd of lepers appears and approaches the camera but are blocked from sight when a gate abruptly closes on them, bearing the words “Leper House”. With no narrative relation to the scenes before and after, this cutaway constitutes a form of poetic intrusion, and “functions almost exactly like a line in a poem – parenthetically yet dramatically introducing the brutality of our social definition of lepers and how it shuts them away from us – before returning us to the classroom” (‘Radical Humanism and the Coexistence of Film and Poetry in The House is Black’ no page number).

The irrellevancy of this shot to the scenes before and after breaks from the conventions of narrative and works as an ‘image-sign’, in Pasolini’s terms. The shot creates a sense of randomness and chaos, disrupting the conventions of storytelling while conveying meaning on a deeper, dreamlike level. For Pasolini, stylistic liberty and breaking of established cinematic codes were considered as pathways towards ‘poetic cinema’, and by overshadowing basic narrative with expressive images, poetic filmmakers facilitate a multi-layered process of meaning-making. In his accounts on the cinema of poetry, Pasolini refers to the cinematic ‘image’ as the key to cinema as ‘language’. Unlike the reason and logic-based signs that make up conventional cinematic discourse, the image-signs of poetic cinema resist codification; they not only form the basis for open interpretability in
cinematic experience, they place that experience in a complicated and polemical place in relation to the ways communities relate to their collective realities.

With respect to The House is Black, realism is employed to make visible that the reality being presented is an illusion, while the film’s pronounced spatial aesthetics and non-narrative continuity reference the Hafiz’ fragmented forms of Ghazal poetry. In Khatereh Sheibani’s description of Ghazal, “words, in their poetic and imaginative form, treat time as a timeless commodity. They may have immediate social and historical meanings, but beyond that, the verses of a *ghazal* have a universal meaning that could apply to the past, present or future.” (42) Forough adapts this form into cinema, creating a spatial sense of reality freed from march of time and narrative, thereby tapping into an experience that, is in Sheibani’s words, “deeply rooted in the Iranian psyche” (38).

In another scene in the classroom, one of the students reads out aloud from a schoolbook, voicing a prayer to praise god for giving humans limbs to enjoy life and eyes to see beauty. An irony here lies in the didactic nature of the prayer. Over a montage of images it represents a decisive detour from the documentary style towards a more direct and open process of meaning making. Through a poetic audiovisual style, especially evident through the use of ‘free indirect point of view’, which gives the montage of images a narrative dimension, the scene manages to be at once concrete and subjective, formal and irrational. Indirectly, a contrast is drawn between the human experiences of pain and injustice and the rigid teachings of religious texts.

For Pasolini, style is the core of the cinematic praxis through which a filmmaker can convey a ‘free indirect subjectivity’. The sublime style works as an alternative to many established conventions of film syntax. In The House Is Black, as in many other examples of poetic cinema, stylistic elements are used to create formal cinematic qualities that communicate above and beyond the level of story information. They are used towards an indirect expression of individuals’ points of view. In Pasolini’s terms, the filmmaker’s style is the ‘fundamental characteristic’ of ‘free indirect subjectivity’. Style offers a source for the audience to infer the filmmaker’s intentions. In an interview with Oswald Stack, Pasolini describes cinema in terms of technique, and the technique in cinema as potentially equivalent to poetic form:
“If you open a book of poetry, you can see the style immediately, the rhymes and all that: you see the language [lingua] as an instrument, or you count the syllables of a verse. The equivalent of what you see in a text of poetry you can also find in a cinema text, through the styles, i.e. through the camera movements and the montage. So to make films is to be a poet” (Pasolini in Stack, 153).

Just as poetry, by its formal nature, can at once position and obscure the subjective presence of an author, poetic cinema can take force from and obscure the biography of the auteur. Despite Forough’s many differences (above all, in gender and sexual orientation) from figures like Pasolini and Cocteau, all of these poet-filmmakers were similar in the extent to which their challenge to taboos encompassed both their personal and artistic lives. Forough was the first woman in Persian literature to openly and boldly write about her sexual desire. Rosenbaum argues that her “volatile and crisis-ridden” lifestyle was “as central to her legend as her poetry”, and that this “helps to explain her potency as a political figure who was reviled in the press as a whore and placed outside most official literary canons while still being worshipped as both a goddess and a martyr” (“Radical Humanism and the Coexistence of Film and Poetry in The House is Black, no page number). Rosenbaum portrays Forough, Pasolini and Cocteau as comparable figures within their respective societies. Each staged “heroic and dangerous shotgun marriages between eros and religion, poetry and politics, poverty and privilege”, and became figures “whose violent death has been the focus of comparable mythic speculations” (“Radical Humanism and the Coexistence of Film and Poetry in The House is Black, no page number).

In 1962, the poetic approach to narrative and visual style that Forough deployed in The House Is Black forged a pathway for Iranian New Wave cinema to develop. Her major contribution, which reflected the approaches and ideas of Pasolini, was to demonstrate that poetic voice, when blended with a personalised cinematic style and documentary narrative, could work to disrupt conventional cinematic experience; but more than this, she showed that a poetic approach could be used to transform traditional cultural texts and images in a way that advances commentary on the circumstances and transitions of modern life. Combining what could be called an “illuminationist” ontology with allegorical forms of
expression, Forough advanced an approach that can be traced in the cinema of those who worked alongside her, such as Ebrahim Golestan and Farrokh Ghaffari. Together, these poet-filmmakers established important creative foundations for successive generations of practitioners (Sheibani, 179).

**Ebrahim Golestan**

Ebrahim Golestan offers one of the earliest representations of urban life in Iran, focusing on the middle and lower-middle classes of Tehran. This is rare within Iranian New Wave cinema, which usually portrays rural landscapes and people living at the margins of modernity.

The title of Ebrahim Golestan’s remarkable *Brick and Mirror* (1965) comes from the classical Persian poet Sa’di, who wrote, “What the old can see in a mud brick, the youth can see in a mirror.” (274) Golestan explores the philosophical dimensions to this statement. He presents the saga of a young man, Hashemi, who finds a baby girl in his cab and spends a night with his girlfriend debating what to do with the little child (see fig. 5). 1960s Tehran is full of hypocritical intellectuals preaching altruism. A nightclub scene features a group of wannabe intellectuals making pseudo-philosophical commentary. Portrayal of a woman dancing against a bohemian set design, a minor gay character in the audience, only adds to the sense of tension between traditional values and a changing modern society, as the couple negotiate their relationship.

![Figure 5: Brick and Mirror](image from <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:98YDwY_AhMsJ:theseventhart.info/2009/07/04/flashback-62/>)


The film is reminiscent of Italian Neorealism. It is a ‘Scope’ film featuring black-and-white images of Tehran’s streets and nightlife in the 60s. As Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa points out, there is a poetic quality developed through the film’s sonic rhythms and lingering silences. As examples, she points to the characters’ “long, silent walk on the street after a heated conversation” when the woman “loses hope in her lover”, the “orchestration of the pseudo intellectuals’ dialogues in the café”, the “dramatic beats” of the performances, and the way the camera lingers on still moments in some scenes (‘Ebrahim Golestan: Treasure of Pre-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema’, no page number). The tragic narrative, which takes place over 24 hours, steers away from conventional structure, shifting from a fast pace in the first half to a slow rhythm in the second. The stories of minor characters are brought forward with documentary-style cinematography and editing.

Such poetic constructs, in Maya Deren’s terms, function as a ‘vertical’ dimension to the film. They open a meditative space that enables the filmmaker and his audience to probe the “ramifications of the moment”, meaning both its qualities and depth. The poetic dimension is concerned “not with what is occurring but with what it feels like or means”. Deren continues, “A poem, to my mind, creates visible or auditory forms for something that is invisible, which is the feeling, or the emotion, or the metaphysical content of the movement” (qtd. in Jackson 64).

The film’s poetic climax occurs in the finale, when Taji (Hashemi’s girlfriend) is situated alone in the orphanage. Taji playfully interacts with the many children, who look to the camera as if they were in a documentary. But with fast-paced jump cuts, the scene moves into montage. The final shot tracks away from Taji. In an empty corridor she leans to a wall, next to the doorway leading to where the orphans are kept. Golestan uses high contrast, with heavy shadows cast in the foreground (see fig. 6). Silence echoes through the scene. “Formally”, Saeed-Vafa writes, “it’s a precise complement to the earlier jump cuts, as slow and meditative as those were rapid and breathless, each locating a protagonist in a wider world that’s metaphysical as well as physical, standing on the brink of inescapable grief.” (‘Ebrahim Golestan: Treasure of Pre-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema’, no page number.)
In their poetic qualities, Golestan’s short documentaries and commercials have been compared to those by Alain Resnais. Throughout his career, Resnais was commissioned to create documentaries on a wide range of subjects – African sculpture and colonialism, the Nazi death camps, the French national library, and factories for plastic production. Golestan dealt in his documentaries with topics of similar historical and cultural import: oil fire in the South of Iran (1961’s A Fire), archaeological surveys (1963’s The Hills of Marlik), and The Iranian Crown Jewels (1965) – a film commissioned and later banned by the Shah’s cultural ministry.

As poetic artifice in these documentaries, Golestan incorporates creative camera movements, poetic narrations and meditative non-action moments. Saeed-Vafa writes:

“The fantastic rhythm of machinery laying the foundation of the oil terminal in the water in Wave, Coral and Rock, like the musical structures of both The Crown Jewels and The Hills of Marlik, or the court scene where the cab driver goes in and out of doors to find the right person in Brick and Mirror, are good examples of how documentary/industrial films can be turned into poetic films (as in Alain Resnais’ Le Chant du styrène [1958]).’” (’Ebrahim Golestan: Treasure of Pre-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema’, no page number).

Figure 6: Brick and Mirror


Thus, through his filmmaking and documentaries, Golestan employs poetic techniques to explore the impacts of modernisation on Iranian society, and in particular the difficulties in preserving traditional values while processes of industrialisation and urbanisation continue unabated. Golestan’s work shows that just as filmmakers can disrupt conventional narrative and introduce intertextual references to create poetic qualities, the very rhythms of a film may be manipulated to open the cinematic space to poetic forms of communication and open interpretability.
Chapter Four: The Translucency of the Real

Sohrab Shahid Sales

Sohrab Shahid Sales is a pioneer of the Iranian New Wave cinema. Through his work he manifests an uncompromising poetic style, and the impacts of his work extend beyond that of most others. He greatly inspired the generation of filmmakers who practiced after the 1978 revolution.

Sales’ approach epitomises a high point in the development of lyrical realism, initiated by Ghaﬀari in the late-1950s. In the extent to which he managed to disrupt the conventions of Iranian cinema and redefine the realities of Iranian life, Sales’ work is comparable to Nima’s poetry. His style borders between documentary and fiction. His signature lies in the use of slow-pace rhythm and long takes, painterly visuals, non-actors and location-based sound.

Sales first major poetic film was A Simple Event (1973). This film has no discernable plot; instead it reports on the everyday existence of ordinary people who live in the margins of Iranian society. Working with a cast of non-professional local actors, Sales constructed a fiction that corresponds with the temporal flow of rural life. The film looks so simple and raw that it creates the illusion that uneventful moments are being recorded randomly, with no overall design. However, slow rhythms of the long takes, motionless detail, and lingering use of mise-en-scene, Sales mesmerises his audience, creating a mood in which to contemplate the ordinary and find meaning in stillness. He invites his audience to listen attentively in moments of silence. And through this cinematic style he draws insight into the subjective drag of time for people living at the edges of modernity.

As elaborated in part one, Pasolini understood filmmaking as a “technique that renews”, and while his interest was on preserving residues of traditional and modern culture within an age of Modernism, he understood the power of technology for achieving this aim (Gordon 206). As Maurizio Viano explains, Pasolini believed that “audiovisual technology (what Benjamin called “mechanical reproduction”) made us realise the extent to which
everyday reality is a spectacle” (ix). He continues “cinema changed our idea of reality in the same way that writing changed our perception of oral language” (vii).

Through his poetic realism, Sales exploits the power of film as a medium to reframe our collective relations to reality. But, by recuperating more traditional poetic modes of experience, he also sought to push cinema beyond the logic of spectacle. That is, he invited his audiences to explore the immediate and timeless ramifications of the moment, at the same time positioning culturally rooted mystic experiences within a specific historical continuum.

A Simple Event, for all its lyrical aspects, can be considered as a prelude for Shahid Sales’s Still Life (1974), which was awarded the Silver Bear for best direction and the critics’ prize at the Berlin Film Festival in 1974. Still Life tells the story of a train rail switchman living in a remote, desolate area. Everyday the switchman repeats a simple job: whenever a train is about to pass he lowers the fence on the road intersecting the railway line. As the old man receives his retirement papers, everything ends for him and his wife, herself a small time carpet weaver. A young switchman arrives and the old couple has to move.

Dabashi (Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema 194) refers to the film as “visual poetry”. The static cinematography, using natural lighting, sparse sound design and non-actors who play themselves, exemplifies the filmmaker’s minimalist approach in creating mood and ambience. There is a scene where the old woman notices a button falling off the jacket of her visiting son. She tries to mend it, failing over to pass thread through a needle eye due to bad eyesight. In long takes, which feel like an eternity, the static camera captures a slice of this lingering, eventless life.

Against this tragic portrayal of life, Sales manages to achieve dramatic rhythm and comic shifts in mood, bringing the film medium itself into focus as a subject for his films. He plays with the audience’s accustomed modes for viewing cinema. As the old woman’s monotonous action drags on, a crescendo in rhythm occurs. As Dabashi describes it, breathtaking suspense makes the audience “burst into spontaneous applause” the moment the old woman finally succeeds in passing her thread through the needle eye (Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema 200).
The effect, including the mise-en-scene, relies on what Dabashi calls Sales’ indulgence in “the translucency of the real”. By allowing through staging, filming and editing the redundant act to take cinematic meaning, Sales deepens our understanding of the old woman’s world – how she passes her day and finds comfort, wholeness and peace (see fig. 7). Through this we also are led to recognise on a deeper level the experience of disruption, and disruption of experience, initiated by the arrival of the letter ordering compulsory retirement. And, by equal steps, Sales comments on the position of marginalised people within a society undergoing rapid change. Later in the film the simple lifestyle becomes more meaningful in contrast with the chaotic, rapidly changing and bureaucratic society that penetrates the old couple’s life.

Dabashi observes that this approach is distinctive of Sales’ cinema, and is also a basis by which he may be affiliated with certain filmmakers of the Italian Neorealism and New Wave movements.

Ozu, particularly in his masterpiece, Tokyo Story (1952), was a practitioner of this translucent style, as was Robert Bresson (I am reminded of Diary of a Country Priest, 1954), and I might even add Vittorio De Sica and Umberto D to the list. (Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema 200)

Figure 7: Still Life
(image from: <http://mubi.com/lists/19418>)

When considered in light of the major European and Western theories and practices on poetic cinema, especially those of Pasolini, Jarman and Deren, most Iranian New Wave
films share similar characteristics and can thus be affiliated with the global poetic cinema movement. For instance, Iranian art-house films tend to create “the possibilities of alternative worlds and representation”, thus pushing the boundaries of narrative communication (Stack 170). They feature stories that are rendered through a visual language of images that is more non-linear and irregular than conventional plot-oriented movies. And, in comparison to films with direct cause and effect narrative structures, they allow their audiences to engage in a more open process of interpretation and imaginative meaning making.

Sales’ translucent style emerges naturally out of the subject matter for the film, and because the film contains a thematic fragility, it would be easy to dismiss Sales’ artistic innovation. Shallow readings might see his films as depicting an exotic essence to traditional Iranian culture, while more sophisticated film analyses might emphasise his cinematic approach as an effective adaptation of European Neorealism. In my view, both these interpretations would obscure a deeper understanding of Sales’ poetic cinema.

Sales manages to relay deep human feelings and compassionate moments in an unsentimental fashion, giving integrity to human values and the slow rhythms of life in under-privileged rural areas. He not only captures the un-plotted moments of everyday life, he reveals – and imagines – a sacred dimension to this reality that is not to be disturbed by excessive cinematic manipulation. Precisely because his subject matter is not extraordinary, and by indulging in translucency of the real, Sales invites his audience into the process of meaning-making. But his approach goes further, mobilising a system of narrative that Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa attributes to Kiarostami, but which I argue can be traced back to Sale’s cinema. Both filmmakers evoke “a sense of metaphysical absences and presences” involving “a relative freedom from the structure of cause and effect” (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 59). The audience is invited into a quest to search beyond the visible in order to reach the ‘unseen’. While this translucent realism bridges experiences familiar to local and international audiences, it is founded in the systematic mystical philosophy of Ishraq, and pre-Islamic concepts of ‘the unseen’, developed through the Sufi poetic tradition. Like for other Iranian New Wave films, Sales’ presents the cinematic text as reference to an “unknown” realm beyond the film world. The cinematic experience offers a path to
discover this mystic experience beyond time and space, and in this sense is invested with cultural residues native to Persian poetry.

**Amir Naderi**

Amir Naderi is amongst the many filmmakers whom Sales inspired. After making four relatively conventional films, his filmmaking shifted radically towards a more poetic style, following his first-encounter with Sales’ minimalist approach (Naderi’s fifth film *Harmonica* (1973) was edited by Sales). As Maghsoudlou writes:

“The anti-story, anti-drama and unsentimental cinema of Sales caused Naderi to move beyond his early Hollywood-influenced cinema. This new independence, coupled with his great instinct and talent, refocused his directorial direction on color, form, framing and visual elements […]” (‘Amir Naderi: Images Bitter and Sweet’, no page number).

*Waiting* (1973), one of the most poetic and visually striking Iranian films, received the Grand Prix at the 11th International Meeting of Film and Youth at the 1975 Cannes Film Festival and the Golden Plaque at the Virgin Islands Festival the same year. With almost no dialogue the film conveys Naderi’s romantic experiences from his childhood in a rural southern province in Iran.

This non-three-act narrative centres upon the story of a young, restless lover longing for the moment when his elderly guardians send him to ask for ice from their soft-voiced neighbour. She wears bangles on her wrists but her face remains hidden behind an obstacle, whether it is a door, a wall, or a veil. Each time this object of love is encountered her beautiful hands appear through the crack of a door to receive the crystal bowl. The hands re-emerge, holding the shiny bowl filled with ice – rocks cracking in the heat and glowing under the sunshine.

With *Waiting*, Naderi was inspired by indigenous narrative forms, attached to specific mythologies, as well as the cultural and ceremonial practices through which these narratives
are enacted. At the centre of Shi’ite tradition, believers participate in an eternal ‘awaiting’ for the twelfth Imam, who disappeared from the sensory world as a young child (about 837AD), to reappear at the world’s end. In Displaced Allegories, Negar Mottahedeh explains the centrality to this myth of ‘not knowing’:

the no-where, the Na-koja-Abad, in which the twelfth Imam resides, perhaps along with the other Imams, is self-sufficient, immune, and closed to the outside world...Only those who are summoned are able to find their way to this unknown region – to an imaginal world that is described as both oasis in the desert and an island in green waters. (6)

The only access to the transcendental energies and purifying effects of the ‘imaginal world’ is through attending and opening heart to ontological experiences anchored in rituals such as ‘Rawzeh’ (a mourning performance) and ‘Tazieh’ (a passion play that involves re-enacting the history of Shi’ism). These ceremonies are marked by the recital of certain forms of poetry, as well as the solo and choral singing of religious lyrics.

In the case of Tazieh, performance occurs on a round stage open to viewers. Active participation in the ritual, which enacts stories around the martyrdom of Shi’ite saints, is considered a form of spiritual act. Those who carry roles and spectators “become imaginal bodies, resurrection bodies, that enact simultaneously the history of Islam and its redeemed messianic future on an open stage, which in the course of the play comes to belong to no time and no place Na-koja-Abad)” (Mottahedeh, 7).

Waiting is set during the time of Ashura, a ceremony that celebrates the martyrdom of Imam Hussain and which features Tazieh performances. According to Persian Shi’ite literature, in Karbala, the site of battle between good and evil, during an uprising against the ruling Umayyad Caliph, the caravan of Imam Hussain, the prophet Mohammad’s grandson, was refused access to the river of Euphrates, remaining without water for days. This led to a deadly battle that resulted in the Imam’s martyrdom (Tabari, 2916-3086). In his search for his own mysterious love, the boy in Waiting passes by people ceremoniously mourning the loss of ‘the beloved’ saint through Tazieh performances. The spiritual payoff
of their participation in these poetic rituals are mirrored in the boy’s ‘jouissance’ in drinking ice water received from his beloved’s hands.

In the absence of dialogue the cinematography takes emphasis. For light Naderi utilises the natural sunshine of the dry and hot southern province in Iran, and the sunshine’s reflection upon objects. The sunshine bleeds through the cracks of walls and small coloured windows of provincial architecture; it creates shadows and reflects in objects such as the crystal bowl, the bronze icons used in regional religious rituals, and the boy’s sweating skin. With sunlight, Naderi visualises heat, and the reflection of sunlight on the woman’s bangles and ice rocks holds metaphoric associations not just with love, but with erotic experience, which is at once sacred and taboo in the young boy’s world. This reflects the function of sunlight in Persian mystic traditions, from Mithraism to Shi’ite spiritual rituals, and Sufism, above all.
Chapter Five: Beyond The Imaginary and Metaphoric

Abbas Kiarostami

As argued in the previous part, Persian poetry has long formed a basis for the imagined community of Persia to survive and regulate its boundaries, carving the people’s psyche and shaping and reshaping their collective worldview. Moreover, Persian poetry is a mode of expression and storytelling that has formed the basis for innovation in Iranian New Wave cinema.

Abbas Kiarostami, who like many other Iranian art-house filmmakers started out as a New Wave filmmaker, is noted for his success in combining poetry and film, bringing each to a new level through their creative integration. His experiments in the form and content of filmmaking have in large part evolved in response to his experiences making films through difficult years in the Iranian film industry. His remarkable body of poetic films owe greatly to his talent of making obstacles into opportunities.

Although Kiarostami’s early career in film was mainly affiliated with Neorealism, up until his Koker trilogy and Close-Up (1990), it has been his unique style in subverting the conventions of realism that has led his cinema to be recognised as both innovative and poetic on national and international stages. “That revolutionary aesthetic”, writes Dabashi, referring to Kiarostami’s style, “subverts absolutist terms of certitude”. He continues, this aesthetic “originated in Kiarostami’s visual transformation of a reality he has sought relentlessly to bracket, to alter radically, to crack, and to redefine through systemic unveiling of his cinematic vision” (Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema 284).

Dabashi draws attention to Kiarostami’s strategies for shaping and reshaping reality, drawing on Lacan’s complementary categories of ‘the imaginary’ and ‘the symbolic’. He argues that Kiarostami’s films constantly bridge between these binary oppositions – “one rich and confusing (the imaginary) and the other legislated and meaningful (the symbolic)” (Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema 284).
In so doing, Kiarostami subverts the audience’s conception of ‘the real’. Specifically, he dismantles the regimes of representation operating in conventional filmmaking, employing minimalist, non-three-act, and non-linear narratives to create a hybrid form between documentary and fiction. To this end, he uses non-actors, and improvised dialogue and actions.

In Close-Up, for instance, there seems to be no boundary between fiction and documentary, only a gradient or spectrum, with the film constantly shifting between dramatic and non-dramatic styles. When the film credits appear, we see that all of the actors have portrayed themselves, and the film seems to be the factual rendition of events that actually happened, as they happened.

However, the truth of the matter, divulged in an interview with Tasvir (film) magazine, is far from this (6). Kiarostami revealed that the film was only based on actual events and is, in fact, a dramatization, albeit one that uses the main characters involved. Contrary to expectation, we learn that Kiarostami was not present from the beginning, and only discovered the story after the events, deciding then to reconstruct them. We also learn that Mohsen Makhmalbaf, who appears in the film and actively intervenes in the portrayed events, was never part of those events in real life (see fig. 8).

Figure 8: Close-Up
(image from: <http://www.filmref.com/directors/dirpages/kiarostami.html>)
With these framing strategies Kiarostami integrates raw forms of representation, including technical glitches, hand-held and minimal camera movements, low lighting, blind spots (dark screen and off-screen space) and open-endings. His films have a primitive edge usually associated with certain documentary styles. This primitivism, associated with Direct Cinema and Cinema Verite, serves to blur the lines between documentary and fiction; the implication is that reality passes before the camera lens, and that the film is an immediate documentation, as opposed to having some predetermined direction.

In a scene in Close-Up, for example, Makhmalbaf meets Sabzian – the man who has acted as his impostor – and a dialogue between them unfolds. This is a crucial part of the ‘documentary’, and the audience would usually expect to see and hear all that transpires. However, Kiarostami prevents this by deliberating introducing glitches in sound and interference by busy and noisy traffic passing between the camera and characters.

Using alternative devices which make the narrative difficult to decipher, Kiarostami challenges the idea of the film as a transparent depiction of reality. This contrivance, on one hand, challenges or limits the credibility of the film as an accurate reproduction of a real event, and brings to the audience’s attention the cinematic medium and controlling hand of the auteur. On the other hand, as this interference is made to look so naturally coincidental, it enhances the film’s documentary appearance, conveying a sense of randomness and an absence of manipulative power over the fictive frame. As Khatereh Sheibani analyses Kiarostami’s poetics, “in the absence of narrative aesthetics, the viewer becomes sensitive to images and their symbolic meanings, in the same way that Persians read Hafiz’s poetry” (41).

Kiarostami conceives these strategies of manipulation not as primitivism or a lack of formal accomplishment but as a specific minimalist form which, in its own right, challenges the notion of reality. In his essay, “The White Balloon and Iranian Cinema”, critic Adrian Martin writes:

“Kiarostami himself, when you take a proper look, is no primitive. In films like Close-Up and Through the Olive Trees he gives us stories that float strangely between documentary and fiction, spontaneity and contrivance, naturalness and artifice,
shifting between levels of movie fantasy and chaotic reality.” (‘The White Balloon and Iranian Cinema’, no page number)

In Kiarostami’s work, the filmmaker’s ability to float between the symbolic and the imaginary, the real and its representations, emerges through the innovation of a poetics that could emerge through broad transitions in culture and technology. Dabashi notes that just as Nima’s poetry helped to free cultural representations of reality and contemporary social structures from the rigid rules fundamental to traditional poetry, Kiarostami’s cinema navigates between the real and unreal more fluently than otherwise allowed “in the normative orders of his culture, history, society, religion, and metaphysics” (Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema 283).

Kiarostami’s cinema emancipates reality from rigid boundaries and the rules of logic attached to ‘realistic’ representation in normative narrative film. Instead, he steps into the realm of poetry, creating an open cinematic space through the anarchic arrangement of cultural signs and signifiers.

Most importantly, Kiarostami’s creative innovation, bridging over poetics and cinema, advanced specific techniques that would open Iranian texts to international audiences. The key to this was in his play with the unseen and untold as an element impacting upon both narrative and poetic sense. In his declaration that documentary “is not what is seen, but rather, is what remains unseen” (in Moussavi 96), Kiarostami mirrors Octavio Paz’s emphasis on the “the empty spaces of writing” in poetry:

“Poetic writing is

Learning to read
The empty spaces of writing
In writing
Not traces of what we were
Paths
Toward what we are” (8).
In his study ‘Hermeneutics of Poetic Sense’, Mario J. Valdes explains the above poem, stating that “the blank of writing is found in writing itself as the absence that makes the presence possible” (8). The poetic sense in literature and art thus plays a crucial role in creating and implementing previously unexamined realities.

Kiarostami’s innovation in cinema relied on the recuperation of poetic aesthetics as means to open the cinematic text and reframe its relationships to reality and its many cultural constructions. Jonathan Rosenbaum thus states in his article, ‘Fill in the Blanks’, that in the world of cinema innovation has usually been received as boring or representing some loss, mainly because it redefines the accustomed shape and function of narrative.

In Kiarostami’s case, however, the filmmaker’s playful style went further than merely breaking away from cinematic conventions. Instead of offering a narrative climax, as in three-act-drama, and giving fictional a payoff to on-screen actions, he uses an elliptical form of story telling that leaves parts of the story unseen or untold and therefore, ‘half made’. His poetic style works to restrict essential information in narratives. The untold or unexplained parts of his films are intentionally left open, to be recreated by his audiences through processes of imagination based at once in their individual and collective psyches. The audiences are thus brought into the final stages of production, and made co-creators of cinematic meaning, resolution and value. Kiarostami thus describes the poetic film as:

“[…] like a puzzle where you put the pieces together and they don’t necessarily match. You can make whatever arrangement you yourself would like. Contrary to what the general public is used to, it doesn’t give you a clear result at the end. And it doesn’t give you advice!” (in Sterritt 5).

In this innovation of poetic aesthetics technology and its social role is paramount. Rolando Caputo (4) observes that Kiarostami uses digital technology, including small hand-held cameras, “as means to return cinema to a degree zero, to wipe the slate clean, and thus renew the terms of dialogue between spectator and screen”.

In classic film theory, these terms of dialogue have been described through dual metaphors: the screen as window to the world, thereby “reality captured”; or the screen as
frame on the world, or “reality constructed”. Caputo concludes that Kiarostami “is the finest dialectician of these two metaphors”. That is, he uses new technologies to immerse audiences in the filmic representation of the world. At the same time he brings to the audiences’ attention the filmic medium. And, finally, he makes the audience aware of their own role in interpreting the fictive world and in relating that world to their shared realities – realities that are already constructed through cultural processes of encoding, decoding and recoding image-signifiers.

In his films Kiarostami pays deliberate attention to the recuperation of poetic aesthetics through the film medium, and his cinema has placed the poetic aspects of Iranian art-house cinema in a meaningful perspective both at home and within an international arena. His cinema is hybrid in its poetic structure: it brews together Persian Sufist traditions with more subversive and contemporary forms of expression borrowed from Nimaic poetry and advanced through new technological modes of expression.

Kiarostami elevates to his audience’s attention the relation between the auteur and the audience, and the role of this relationship in framing and reframing lived social and ontological realities. To do so, he deploys a specific range of techniques that affiliate the Iranian body of poetic films with the broader cinematic movement. The next part to this thesis involves a deeper discussion of how this achieved, organised in terms of the key techniques that Kiarostami employs. I will introduce further examples from his filmic texts, in order to bridge relevant ideas about the poetic language of Iranian cinema and European literature concerned with defining poetic cinema on a global scale.

**Open Ending**

Compared with his earlier work, Kiarostami’s later films are stylistically more sophisticated and complicated in their open endings, demanding higher levels of interactivity and interpretability. In *Through the Olive Trees* (1994), the final long take shot of the film depicts Hussein, unwilling to accept Tahereh’s silence as an answer to his proposal, following her down the hill, through the olive trees and into an open field. The camera lingers as the couple are reduced to floating white dots that seem to converge and
disappear into a vanishing point in the far landscape. The film ends, but we never hear Tahereh’s answer. The interpretation of the final scene splits between reality and fiction. The audience is left to decide – do they see the scene as a documentation of this real relationship, or part of an articulated and controlled film narrative?

With this ambiguous ending Kiarostami entices the spectator’s interactive engagement in the final stage of meaning-making. On one hand, this sequence of shots depicting the rural landscape and local people offers an almost hypnotic reflection on the passage of time. The suggestion is that we have born witness to a slice of the real lives of these people and that those lives cannot be bound within the cinematic frame. On the other hand, the film is about a director and his crew trying to make a documentary of these people’s stories after an earthquake.

This use of open-ending, key to Kiarostami’s ‘Unfinished Cinema’, can be found again in Taste of Cherry (1997), a film divided into two parts. The first part is the major body of the film (in terms of its length) and is filmed on 35 mm film, whereas the second part is only three minutes in duration and shot on video. In the final scene of the main narrative – a story of the suicidal Badii trying to find someone to bury him – we see him lying in his grave. In a low-lit shot, we hear the sound of thunder; his face is revealed only in the flash of lightning. The dark-screen lasts for about one minute. Then, there is a cut to the second part of the film where we see the video from behind the scenes. The crew, including the soldiers (extras), Ershadi (who plays Badii) and Kiarostami himself are making the film. What happens to Badii, whether he dies or changes his mind and goes on with life, remains a mystery. In this case, there is not so much an answer or choice between alternatives to be addressed by an audience, but a complete implosion of the fiction, the cinematic piece bringing its own fiction into relief, including its open ending.

Dark-Screen

The ending of Taste of Cherry is not an afterthought, but an essential progression of the film experience, encouraging a new form of interaction of the audience with the screen. As Michael Price writes, “a theme of Kiarostami’s work is that we don’t need to see in order to
know: by purposely shutting his eyes while in his box, in the dark, Badii could be dreaming the entire ending of the film to follow, or else creating it along with us” (2).

Dark-screen enables the director to restrict information and make details of the scene “unseeable”. It is not just the restriction of images, but the positive inclusion of “blank” moments, that confers on each viewer the power to interpret relationships between the realities represented. As Kiarostami says, if the restricted images confer on the viewer the responsibility to make sense of them in a way the filmmaker has not determined, then “it is better not to show much and let the viewer imagine it all” (in Nancy 84).

Off-Screen Space

Kiarostami’s ‘Unfinished Cinema’ strategies include placing significant passages of action in off-screen space. The tendency in mainstream cinemas is to directly show or reveal over time action and information that is relevant to the narrative. Kiarostami doesn’t just veer away from this standard, he actively minimises the amount that is shown on screen, requiring audiences to complete significant un-shown and untold parts of the narrative. Kiarostami asserts, “you do not always have to show something to let your spectator know about it” (in Golamkani 46). Further he says, “the design of each film has to give us the chance to transform the unseen into a spectacle” (in Moussavi 94).

In Through the Olive Trees, the third instalment to Kiarostami’s Koker trilogy, Kiarostami experiments with off-screen space on many occasions. The blocked-road scene, an expository scene in the film, begins with a medium shot of Ms Shiva, the assistant director, and Hussein, the actor, in a car driving towards the filming location. While the car stops in traffic, we realise through the ambient sound of people’s voices off-screen and the facial expressions of the pair in the car that the road is closed. In an interview with Metro magazine, Kiarostami recalls his dialogue with Quentin Tarantino about this scene and says:

“He [Tarantino] said that without showing the traffic jam in the film, we completely
felt it. One person was talking to a worker on the upper level of a building from the right, the sound of bricks being unloaded told of a construction site, and later when the car reverses, we discover that the bricks had in fact been unloaded in front of the car. We discover all these without us seeing any of them” (qtd. in Moussavi 94).

**Self-Referentiality**

Between poetic cinemas and the Modernist, Avant-Garde and art-cinema movements a key area for affiliation is in the use of techniques that bring self-portraiture of the ‘auteur’ into the film, or which serve to heighten among audiences awareness of the film medium. Kiarostami constantly reminds the audience of the ‘film-ness’ of the films they are watching. For instance, the audience is shown behind-the-scenes footage as part of the actual film, thereby directing the audience’s attention to the fact that they are engaged in watching a film being made. Over the course of Kiarostami’s career, he made a number of films that referenced the process of filmmaking – *Homework* (1989), *Close-Up*, *And Life Goes On* (1992), *Through the Olive Trees*, *Taste of Cherry*, *ABC Africa* (2001), and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999). This distinctive approach was key to how the director thought through poetry in film and new possibilities for cinema.

In *Close-Up*, Kiarostami’s self-referential approach is sophisticated. The film is set as an imposture of life, which somehow arrives at truth, but indirectly. It is a true-life story featuring people playing themselves. Sabzian plays himself as an impostor, pretending to be Makhmalbaf (a real-life filmmaker), so as to secure support from Ahankhah’s family for a film he would like to make. In fact, the crucial structure of *Close Up* becomes this complex interplay between the actual filmmaking process, with Sabzian playing himself and mirroring Kiarostami as the filmmaker, while pretending to be the filmmaker Makhmalbaf in order to realise the film.

In the court scene where Sabzian confesses that his dream is to make a film about himself, Kiarostami addresses him from off-screen: “you ‘are’ making a film about yourself right now”, he says (*Close-Up*). As Rapfogel points out:
“[…]the stories which seem to have been plucked from reality have been replaced by stories which truly have been; the actors have become not only non-professionals, ‘real’ people, but the ‘real’ people, the actual protagonists of the actual stories; and the illusion of the absence of the filmmakers has been taken one step further – how can they be present behind the camera when they’re right there in front of it?” (3).

In Through the Olive Trees, the director continues this ‘film within the film’ style. The film is set in the same location as the prior instalments, and opens with Keshavarz – a famous Iranian actor – directly addressing the camera, role-playing Kiarostami and implicating himself in the role as director (see fig. 9).

Figure 9: Through the Olive Trees
(image is courtesy of Abbas Kiarostami)
Another example of self-referentiality is found in the final scene of Taste of Cherry. As previously discussed, this follows an open-ended scene where Badii is left lying in his grave, his face blending into the dark. The dark screen fades into an epilogue filmed in a different format (video), and set in both a different season and time of day (see fig. 10). The handy-cam pans to the right and captures a cameraman holding a 35 mm film camera; it pans to the left and captures Badii taking a cigarette out of his pocket, lighting it and passing it to Kiarostami. The video widens its frame to an extreme long shot of the landscape. With his back to the camera, Kiarostami announces to his crew:

- The shoot is over.

Some critics have proposed that Kiarostami’s films function as a metaphor for cinema. Piero Scaruffi describes And Life Goes On as “another metaphor for the art of making films”. As true as this might be, it can be argued that in these poetic films the self-referential approach impacts beyond mere stylistic metaphor. Reflecting Kiarostami’s ‘Unfinished Cinema’ philosophy, these films encourage the audience to review its own role in cinema production. The act of watching films shifts into a more pronounced form of interaction. Jean-Luc Nancy thus discusses the function of such films as mobilizing the viewer’s gaze towards the film “and inside of it”. Kiarostami turns “the looking into a
filming gaze”, and ceaselessly fits the spectator to the film – “not in order to teach a technique, but to open his or her eyes onto the motion that looking is” (30).

**Intertextuality**

As illustrated with respect to key techniques, Kiarostami’s films demonstrate the latent potential in cinema to frame and unseat fictive and real-world ontologies, and relate them in recursive ways. This potential resides within the medium itself and has been opened by advances in technology and the shifts in ways of ‘seeing’ engendered by new media. Kiarostami’s cinema also demonstrates, however, that how an audience reads a cinematic text relies on their status as agents operating within specific cultural traditions, and that the narrative structures for ontological framing will often rely on strong intertextual meaning.

In her analysis of Kiarostami’s Koker trilogy, Khatereh Sheibani explores the theme of earthquake ruins:

[R]uins signify a mystical notion mostly associated with Hafiz’s poetry. The image does not mostly signify devastation or despair, but an elitist isolation of the Sufi in his quest for absolute truth as reflected in these verses of Hafiz:

In the ruins of the magis I see God
What is this? How can I see it?” (45)

Similarly, as discussed, the ending of Taste of Cherry leaves open to interpretation whether the home-video epilogue offers a diversion from Badii’s tragic story, or if the fade out from the grave scene signals the character’s fatal end. The latter interpretation is supported by Kiarostami’s noted interest in the poetry of Khayam, and the following quatrain in specific relation to this film:

“The cloud came and wept on the greenness
Oh rose-hued wine, there is no living without you;
This green is our pleasure-ground will be the
Elena suggests that this poem “displays that existential pessimism” that Kiarostami recognised as residing beneath the sensualist appeals of the poet (Elena 138-139). In an interview with Youssef Ishaghpour the director asked, “Have you read Omar Khayam? The quatrains of this Persian poet and great scientist… are a constant eulogy of life in the ever-present face of death.” He continued, “In my film, in the same way, we could just have talked about death and left the idea of suicide.” (60)

In recent years, Kiarostami has revealed how deeply influenced he is by Persian classical poets – he has published poetry collections and written on selected poems by Hafiz and Sa’di. His films and film titles also attest to the influence of modern Persian poets such as Forough Farrokhzad, and Ahmad Shamlou and Sohrab Sepehri.

Kiarostami’s film, Where is the Friend’s House? is titled after a line in Sepehri’s famous poem, ‘The Address’, and while the film is not an exact visual translation of the poem, the two creative works have an analogous image-based narrative structure. ‘The Address’ unfolds as follows:

“The Address”
“Where is the friend's house?”
Asked the rider in the twilight,
Heaven paused,
The passerby gave a branch of light
That he had on his lips,
Away to darkness of sands,
And pointed to an aspen and said:
"Just before you reach the tree,
There is a garden-line greener than God's dream,
Where love is bluer than the feathers of honesty.
Walk to the end of the lane
Which emerges from behind puberty,
Then turn towards the flower of solitude,
Two steps to the flower,
Stay by the eternal fountain of all myths of earth
Then a transparent fear will find you,
In the fluid intimacy of the space,
You will hear a rustling sound,
You will see a child ascended a tall plane tree,
To pick up chicks from the nest of light,
Ask him:
“Where is the friend’s house?” (Sepehri 48)

These poetic images run through the film. A child takes a journey to find a friend and return his notebook. He asks many questions of the villagers – the “passers-by” – and walks along the tree-lined paths (or “garden-lane”). An old man’s answer guides him to “the end of the lane which emerges from behind puberty”, and the love and friendship that “is bluer than the feathers of honesty”. The “flower of solitude” is carefully placed in the book as it is returned in the “light” of the next morning.

Dabashi argues that Kiarostami’s visual narratives exist in continuity with the imagist qualities to Sepehri’s poetry. The two poets, both of whom have engaged deeply in the visual medium and language of their times, regress deliberately in their narratives to an “irreducible simplicity” as a strategy to “subvert the configuration of a reality they dislike” (Dabashi, Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema 318). The creative medium is manipulated in such a way that reality “becomes translucent”. Cleared of historically accumulated burdens of meaning, reality “reveals itself as the object of mere observation”, but “this time around, the very act of observation is the result of a set of fresh eyes, eyes cleansed of all the dust of metaphysics, culture, ideology, politics.” (Close Up 68)

Nonetheless, in liberating new ways of seeing, these two visual poets rely equally on a skill for importing traditional poetic vision, ideas and aesthetics – perhaps to the same level to which they rely on an astute use of new visual technologies and forms of expression. It could be argued that the a-historic integrity of poetic visual language is what enables
Kiarostami, especially, to recuperate certain cultural histories and mythologies for contemporary film audiences.

Geoffrey Cheshire points to the scene in Kiarostami’s film, The Wind Will Carry Us, where Behzad, flirting with the milking girl in the cellar, recites parts of a poem by Forough (this being the poem on which the film title is based). The full poem, ‘The Wind Will Take Us’, unfolds as below:

In my small night, ah
The wind has a date with the leaves of the trees
in my small night there is agony of destruction
listen
do you hear the darkness blowing?
I look upon this bliss as a stranger
I am addicted to my despair.
listen do you hear the darkness blowing?
something is passing in the night
the moon is restless and red
and over this rooftop
where crumbling is a constant fear
clouds, like a procession of mourners
seem to be waiting for the moment of rain.
a moment
and then nothing
night shudders beyond this window
and the earth winds to a halt
beyond this window
something unknown is watching you and me.
O green from head to foot
place your hands like a burning memory
in my loving hands
give your lips to the caresses
of my loving lips
like the warm perception of being
the wind will take us
the wind will take us” (Farrokhzad 1337).

Cheshire points out that the context in which this poem is recited within Kiarostami’s narrative works to layer intertextual meanings. He refers to Prophet Mohammad’s ‘hadith’ (sacred quotation) that relates the meaning of milk in a dream to “knowledge”. In Kiarostami’s usage, Cheshire concludes, “there’s no contradiction between ‘sex’ and ‘knowledge’; rather, comprehended by poetry, the sensual and the sacred connotations reflect, reinforce, and explicate each other.” (“How to Read Kiarostami” 13)

Figure 11: The Wind Will Carry Us
(image from: <http://www.firouzanfilms.com/TheFirouzanFifty/Movies/TheWindWillCarryUs/index.html>)

Aesthetics of Tazieh in Kiarostami’s poetic cinema

Cheshire notes that many of Kiarostami’s films – The Traveller (1974), The Report (1977), Homework, And Life Goes On, Taste of Cherry, Wind Will Carry Us, and Certified Copy (2010) – have strong autobiographical references, and present us with “a self-
conscious analogy for what Kiarostami sees himself as doing” (‘Poetry and Sufism’). But principally for Kiarostami the “beauty of art lies in the reaction it causes”. Through his documentary, Looking at Tarzieh, the filmmaker shows his interest in Tarzieh not only as an indigenous narrative form but also as a set of ritual performances in which spectators act as narrative agents.

In the traditional form of Tazieh, role players move circularly as the drama takes place both on and off the circular stage. As Negar Mottahedeh points out, Tazieh performers “mingle with audience members, staging battle in narrow corridors stretched between the spectator-participants.” “In fact,” she adds, “any change of scene is effected by the movement of the role-carrier himself. To go from one place to another, the actor merely announces his intention to travel and often walks or rides on horseback once around the circular stage to arrive at ‘the new location’.” (Displaced Allegories 18)

Kiarostami references and adapts this form through a scene in his film Ten (2002). A camera is mounted on a car, capturing a rotating point of view as the character Badii drives in circles around a telephone booth. Inside the booth, a man is engaged in conversation, which the audience hears even over Badii’s close-up, the source of the sound occurring off-screen. In this, the mise-en-scene, rotating cinematography and spectatorship, and the off-screen effects directly reference and evoke the performer-spectator relationships within Tazieh ceremonies.

Shirin (2008) was a later project through which Kiarostami extended his interest in the Tazieh, achieving a more direct condensation of its dramatic dynamics with the self-referentiality of his films. The project is compilation of close-ups of notable Iranian female actors, as well as the French performer Juliette Binoche, responding in emotional terms to the poetic mythology of ‘Khosrow va Shirin’ and the Tazieh narrative form. Kiarostami has worked consistently to create his poetic films as open texts. To achieve this, he imports traditional cultural materials and story-telling forms, transposing poetic aesthetics into cinematic experience in a way that disarms conventional modes of seeing, and draws his spectators inside of the filmic text.
Summary

Through this part, I have mapped the creative visions, stylistic techniques, intertextual references, artistic identities and influences of key art-house filmmakers affiliated within the networks of the New Wave movement, and more broadly the tradition of poetic innovation that is often said to have culminated with the New Poetry movement.

As much as my analysis has been designed to unearth the commonalities that elevate these films and filmmakers as belonging to a unique body and tradition of poetic cinema – that is, to ascertain the elements that render Iranian art-house films as possessing a unique cinematic language – it has equally been my intention to emphasise that Iranian poetic cinema has emerged as the outcome of efforts by a network of innovators, each responding in unique, varied and inventive ways to Iran’s changing politico-cultural landscape.

Following this line of argument, the filmmakers featured in this stylistic and textual analysis can be said to belong to a localised tradition of poetic innovation, even while their innovations affiliate more broadly with the international poetic cinema movement. That is to say, the primary level of affiliation between these filmmakers lies in their collective responses through cinema to certain localised developments and pressures. Iranian art-house filmmakers have helped articulate the challenges for Iranian society at large, in coming to terms with modern transitions while seeking to preserve a unique identity rooted in historical traditions.

As demonstrated through this part of my thesis, the filmmakers of the Iranian art-house brought into frame for their local and global audiences a spectrum of visions concerning the potentials of new media technologies to at once reflect social transformations associated with the ongoing processes of modernity (especially urbanisation and industrialism) and actively intervene in related cultural transformations.

Forough Farrokhzad, who initially forged her career as a poet in the Nimaic tradition, demonstrated that poetic voice could be successfully integrated with a personalised cinematic style, enabling the filmmaker-poet to revive and transform traditional poetic texts
and images as a vehicle to deliver cutting contemporary social and political commentary. Like many New Wave filmmakers, Forough trained the camera lens on the margins of modern Iranian society. However, her cinema is unique in the way she frames these images as euphemism for her own account of life in Iran, playing to her controversial personal legend and poetic signature. By way of contrast, her contemporary Ebrahim Golestan was one of the few filmmakers to directly represent urban life in modern Iran – rather than developing poetic voice he sought to juxtapose dramatic beats and silence in film to express modern Iran’s crisis of values.

More than any other New Wave filmmaker, Sohrab Shahid Sales elaborated new cinematic techniques for portraying the temporal flow of traditional rural life and its complicated position in relation to the cinematic frame, which is revealed as attached to modern modes of experience that are in conflict with traditional ways of life. Sales plays with the audience’s expectations of ‘spectacle’, action and resolution in film, indulging in what Dabashi terms the “translucency of the real” (Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema 200). Recuperating traditional Iranian modes of experience, based in mystic and Sufist poetry, he invites audiences to explore the immediate and timeless ramifications of ‘the moment’.

These poetic aesthetics – residues of traditional culture – are at once preserved and subtly transformed through cinematic innovation, thus drawing the audience’s attention to the conditions of modernity and impacts of new technologies. A similar effect is rendered through the work of Amir Naderi, who uses innovative cinematic techniques to represent traditional poetic signifiers that abridge the romantic and spiritual experiences of longing for an unseen beloved figure. Through the recuperation of traditional Iranian poetic aesthetics, Naderi opens the cinematic space to games of interpretation rich in intertextual meanings.

In this part I have placed particular emphasis on the films of Abbas Kiarostami for his success in translating Iranian poetic aesthetics into a cinematic mode that is acclaimed as innovative and meaningful within an international context. As Roland Caputo observes, Kiarostami employs digital technologies “as means to return cinema to a degree zero, to wipe the slate clean, and thus renew the terms of dialogue between spectator and screen”.
He dismantles the regimes of representation operating worldwide within the mainstream film industry, but his playful style goes beyond mere subversion of conventional forms. As Adrian Martin comments, Kiarostami elaborates upon the cinematic language of his early New Wave films, advances his specific stylistic mastery, and “gives us stories that float strangely between documentary and fiction, spontaneity and contrivance, naturalness and artifice, shifting between levels of movie fantasy and chaotic reality” (no page number). Employing the terms of Lacan, Dabashi describes his films as constantly oscillating between the symbolic and imaginary.

Through his innovative use of techniques that leave his films ‘unfinished’, Kiarostami invites his audiences into the final stages of production, making them conscious co-creators of cinematic meaning, resolution and value. This, combined with layered intertextual references to traditional and modern Persian poetry, leads to a heightened sense of participation among Iranian audiences. But, beyond this, the constant integration into his films of signs that elevate the audience’s awareness of the cinematic frame and hand of the auteur, leads to a kind of recursive framing that is able to bring international audiences into these localised games of interpretation. As such, Kiarostami successfully opens Iranian texts for a global audience and places the New Wave cinema in contact with global movements of cinematic innovation.

Kiarostami’s cinema, especially, lays foundations for understanding how my own practice, including the production My Tehran for Sale, situates as a poetic work abridging Iranian and ‘Western’ aesthetics, and contemporary and classic influences. More broadly, the stylistic and textual analysis in this part demonstrates the key vision, techniques and creative affiliations that render the Iranian New Wave as a unique body of poetic cinema. In the next part, I build on this analysis to show how my own take on poetic cinema has evolved as the outcome of constant innovation as I have sought to manage the various taboos, pressures and expectations exerted upon the film production process within Iranian, Australian and international contexts.
PART THREE
MY TEHRAN FOR SALE

Introduction

My Tehran For Sale is a feature film conceived and developed on the basis of my research into poetic cinema. As a practice-led research project, I was from the outset concerned to demonstrate my understanding of poetic aesthetics and how they may be recuperated through film. But I have seen my role as being more than an artist traversing disciplinary bounds. My research interests and creative contributions represent my position as a practitioner who has lived and worked across cultural contexts, negotiating the conditions for innovation within dissimilar social realities and creative conditions.

First and foremost, my personal life and artistic output has been deeply shaped by the turbulent experiences of revolution, war and immigration. I have found poetry to be a necessary survival mechanism: it has provided me the means to forge and express a contemporary Iranian identity that stands against the concrete definitions circulating both within and outside of a highly regulated and politicised society. As demonstrated through this thesis, Persian poetics, and Persian language more broadly, has evolved through a tradition of constant innovation in response to shifting social and political pressures, sustaining the Persian (Iranian) imaginary even through the trauma of invasion, a colonialism that was never fully realised and an imported modernity.

Though Persian poetry has been elevated to a position of critical influence and acclaim within global creative discourse, it remains largely unknown to international audiences. The barriers of language are compounded by the complexities of expression and intertextuality advanced through Persian poetic discourse. Even within Iran, many cultural nuances and manners of storytelling become difficult to relay through ordinary modes of expression – this is true even in relation to the modernised forms of poetry developed by Nimaic poets and their successors.
In my creative experience and research, drawing especially on the works and ideas of Pasolini and Kiarostami, it has become clear that cinema holds unique potential for local communities to build an alter realm of communication within the global sphere and that by inventively playing with the conventions associated with dominant modes of storytelling in cinema artists may succeed in preserving residues of traditional cultures, including ethnic poetic traditions, innovating new cinematic languages that are open to be read and interpreted by diverse audiences.

My main aim in this practice-led research, combining the film and this exegesis, has been to place in dialogue distinct traditions of poetic cinema defined at various scales of affiliation. As much as I was inspired by the films of Sohrab Shahid-Sales, Forough Farrokhzad, Abbas Kiarostami and others, I was interested to import the conscious poetic approaches of Pasolini and Maya Deren – among other Western and international poetic filmmakers – as means to translate the local poetry invested in Iranian art-house cinema into a form accessible to international audiences.

As shown in this next part, the experience of producing a poetic film across cultural borders, under the terms of ‘co-production’, illustrates the central theoretical proposition of this thesis: that is, distinct bodies of poetic cinema are the outcomes of an innovation process staged at once at a local and cross-cultural scale.

In chapter 6, I will show how the process of poetic innovation is improvised by the creative involved (particularly the writer-director) as a response to the immediate challenges and expectations arising from within the social reality in which they are affiliated. Poetic innovation through cinema is reiterative: the creative figure may draw on poetic traditions that are embedded in the history and culture of that society, just as they may draw on an array of cinematic techniques and cultural materials. Also, I will show in connection to the development of My Tehran for Sale that poetic ideas, aesthetics and techniques offer an armoury of tools that are useful for testing the limits to expression and experimentation within specific social and professional contexts.

The challenge and central research problem in producing My Tehran for Sale was as follows: how can a filmmaker who operates within a cross-cultural domain of creative and
professional affiliations resolve processes of poetic innovation that are defined and limited within quite distinct social contexts – in this case, Iranian, Australian and global? To go further, the major contribution of this practice-led research is to highlight and explore a related question, which is the subject of the chapters 7 and 8: how may poetic cinema be formulated on each side of an experienced cultural divide in such a way as to facilitate an open interface between people anchored in quite dissimilar social, political and cultural realities?
Chapter Six: Innovation in Context

Research Basis

My Tehran for Sale was conceived from the outset as a project that would encapsulate my research into poetic cinema. The initial script, which was entitled Sale (Appendix G), but was re-titled Auction prior to being submitted to Australian producers, incorporated cinematic devices and intertextual references familiar to Iranian and European poetic cinema traditions. Specifically, the script featured a non-linear narrative and recursive framing techniques that would bring the film medium and controlling hand of the filmmaker to the audience’s attention, heighten interactivity and render the film open to multiple levels of interpretation. The script was structured as a film-within-a-film, verging between documentary and fiction, as detailed in this one-page synopsis:

In Tehran, 30 years old Marzieh has decided to leave Iran for Australia at whatever cost. She is in a contract with 28 years old Saman—an Australian citizen—to get a marriage visa for her. In return, she has to pay Saman. Marzieh has to prostitute herself with the help of Saman to provide the money.

In parallel with the main story, Marzieh also sees Dr Sanati who is known to be a psychiatrist for a number of Tehran based writers, artists, and intellectuals. Marzieh goes to Dr Sanati’s group counselling sessions where there are also other people who are desperate to leave the country. Through the conversations between the patients and Dr Sanati in the group counselling therapy sessions, we learn about some aspects of the difficult lives of women living in Iran and also some of the reasons why they are prepared to do anything to leave the country.

During the process of Marzieh’s medical tests to get the visa from the Australian embassy in Tehran, Saman learns
that Marzieh is infected with HIV. He is devastated and is concerned for his own health. They fight and during their fight we realize that the whole film, up to the medical test result, has been a re-enactment of Marzieh and Saman who have agreed to a group of filmmakers from Australia who are making a film about immigration and exile, to act in their film. From this point on in the film, the drama/enactment is over.

In a documentary style, devastated Saman refuses to continue the filming and asks for all of his acting fees and Marzieh’s to compensate for his loss in the marriage contract.

In a talking-head interview style, Marzieh tells the story from her point of view. We learn that failing living and working as an actor in the Iranian film industry, she meets Saman in a party which later on leads to their marriage contract. She also explains that it was her who came up with the idea of the film (based on the real stories she hears in Dr Sanati’s sessions) which she proposed to her old friend Granaz who lives and practices filmmaking in Australia and now is back to Iran to make a film on immigration and exile.

Failing the medical test, Marzieh who has lost her chances to apply for a visa legally, decided to get into a contract with a smuggler to take her to Australia via Indonesia by boat. She finds contact with a smuggler through one of the women in Dr Sanati’s group counselling.

She meets the smuggler outside the Australian embassy.

Now she needs money to pay the smuggler.
My original idea was to tell the Auction story in non-linear sequences, juxtaposing scenes in a collage form, using minimal dialogue that would be mainly improvised by the actors and incorporating a range of poetic elements. The Adelaide Film Festival (AFF), who came on board as one of the primary investors in the project, approved the experimental style, and were enthused to support a production that would build on research into Iranian arthouse and poetic cinema. Overall, the AFF contributed AUS$150,000, which would cover a third of the film’s costs as estimated by the film’s production team.

Cross-cultural Affiliations and the Terms of ‘Co-production’

Through acquiring additional support from the South Australian Film Corporation (SAFC), the creative strategies behind the film’s development were broadened so the film would meet criteria as a “co-production” between Australia and Iran. In fact, Sale would be the first noted Iranian-Australian co-production in history.

The early emphasis on this project as a co-production had a range of outcomes in terms of shaping the creative and professional strategies invested in the work. One of these outcomes was a strengthening of my artistic and professional affiliations within Iran’s alternative film industry. The SAFC stipulated that at least a third of all money invested in the project had to be provided by an Iranian party, and as I was a first-time feature filmmaker with no directorial credits to my name I was advised to acquire the backing of a well known Iranian producer. I engaged Bahman Ghobadi – an award-winning Iranian film and documentary maker of Kurdish descent who had established Mij Film, a film production company, in 2000.

Chapter 7 focuses on the impacts on my creative strategy that flowed from the forging of local professional affiliations within the Iranian context. For the purposes of this part, it is sufficient to note that while the need for partnership with Ghobadi was driven from Australia, the effect was a strengthening of affiliations that brought into relief the complexities of censorship and cultural politics that would shape the production process in Iran.
It is worth noting from the outset that the qualification of this film as a co-production both worked to frame and reinforce my position as a creative practitioner who has worked across cultural borders as well as creative disciplines. To illustrate this, the engagement of Ghobadi in this project built on a personal experience collaborating with him on a series of projects that have extended across Australian and Iranian borders. I worked as an assistant and on-set digital editor during production of his third feature film, *Turtles Can Fly*; I have co-written with him a yet-to-be-made film entitled *Love Without L.O.V.*; and I acted as his minder and interpreter during his visit to the Adelaide Film Festival in 2006, during which we established with my local producers his involvement in *My Tehran for Sale*.

Importantly, the qualification of this film as a co-production reinforced my prevailing artistic ethic and anticipated research outcome. Through the research stage, reflecting also my past experiences as a migrant and creative practitioner, I developed a conviction that by translating ethnic poetic traditions for international audiences I might facilitate an important two-way dialogue between Iranian people and the international community.

This dialogue would, I hoped, cut across the internally regulated cultural and political borders of Iran and also challenge knowledge and stereotypes of Iranian people and culture operating across public stages within the international sphere. As I have previously argued, there is a substantial gap in the literature on Iranian poetic cinema and the potential for proper investigation of the subject is hampered by tendencies to see Iranian culture and its cinematic expression as representing an “exotic other”, or as a nativist response to creative innovation originating within modern Western or European experiences.

The central criteria set out by the SAFC aligned with my prevailing artistic ethic: the script, they argued, would need to be developed in certain ways that made the ethnic poetic approach and Iranian content more meaningful for mass audiences (and Australian audiences specifically). This meant, first, making the film more explanatory and insightful about the details of restricted life in Iran today, and second, relating the film’s themes and content to Australian experiences and concerns.

To give just one example of how this helped shape my creative strategies, through the script editing process I decided to highlight in the film narrative a conflict that remains
central to Australia’s culture wars and contested national identity – the issue of asylum seekers, their treatment in detention centres and the psychological pressures, impacts and responses these conditions elicit. I was especially interested to explore the imperative on illegal arrivals to formulate personal biographies, narratives that often oscillate between truth and untruth, just as poetic films may highlight the false economy of truth and fiction circulating within the cinematic space.

**The Process of Script Writing**

The poetic foundations of My Tehran For Sale are found in a poem that I wrote on my lived experience of exile, itself entitled ‘Sale’ (Moussavi, Barefoot till Morning 8-10). The script writing process benefited from both my prior creative development as a poet and from almost a decade of conversations with Marzieh Vafamehr, through which I have shaped true-to-life stories about people I have encountered in Australia and Iran.

After my synopsis won the national pitching competition supported by Australian law firm Holding Redlich, the project attracted Cyan Films as potential producers and the script writing process gained its initial momentum. In March 2007 I completed the first draft – a 49-page script comprised of a non-linear narrative, and a weave of side-stories featuring minor characters. This version was designed with a film-within-a-film style, with Marzieh role-playing a prostitute pimped by Saman for the sake of a ‘film’ being made by an Australian crew. Marzieh’s gaze direct-to-camera and dialogue heard off-screen when the camera was supposedly switched off would hint at Marzieh’s real-life persona as a participant in the film crew (Appendix G), even as the lines between these embedded realities would be brought into question.

The revelation that Marzieh has been infected with HIV would act as a catalyst for destabilizing the perceived separation between fiction and reality, opening space for further poetic readings of the film. The final scene of the script was a crane shot of Marzieh stuck in heavy traffic on a Tehran street (Appendix G).
The Iranian script editor Peyman Yaganeh was introduced to the project to help with the second draft. Peyman’s field of practice is script editing from a semiology perspective. We worked on the third version of the script in Tehran, during May and June 2007.

The second draft opened with a newly conceived scene set in Australia’s Woomera detention centre. This scene would serve as a flashback-style point for departure into the narrative. The strong visual concept of Marzieh and Saman descending a mountain in the outskirts of Tehran was introduced by Peyman as a means to enrich the poetic semiology of the text with intertextual references to the grand-narrative of ‘Adam and Eve’. The notion of Marzieh and Saman participating in the underground rave scene in Tehran, surrounded by drug-use, music and dancing, was also introduced in this round of development, with the intention to highlight the double standards that plague life for segments of youth in Tehran.

The script was revised into a third draft in September 2007. There were some rearrangements in the collage of the scenes. For instance, the mountain scene was arranged to take place later in the film, and the idea for a scene featuring an underground rave occurring in a horse stable, set after the opening, took shape, reflecting my own experience taking horse-back riding classes in country villages and learning about raves in the villas, cellars and horse mangers (Appendix F).

The forth draft was a more polished version of this third draft, with minor changes in dialogue and some scene rearrangements. The flashback and film-within-a-film devices were still very much in place. The process of retouching the script into this next form took only a week in October 2007.

After reading feedback from my assessors, and attending several script and feasibility meetings with the producers and SAFC representatives, my aim for the final draft was to prepare this script to a state where it would be ready-to-shoot. As captured in my director’s notes, “I gave myself a few days to detach from the script as it is now, and to digest the readers’ notes and look at their points with fresh eyes. I could see some of the problems and agreed with a few of the points.” I also sought to engage Annette Blonski, an
experienced and open-minded Australian script editor who is familiar with Iranian cinema, in order to enrich the script for an Australian (and international audience). In my director’s notes I set out the rationale:

Although the script was very much benefited from the previous Iranian script editor, Peyman Yeganeh, and I appreciate his participation, at this stage I feel that working with a professional script editor from non-Iranian background (like Annette) will benefit the story. The reason is that the film is going to be made for theatrical releases outside Iran and for a broader international audience. This requires inputs and participation from an experienced script editor with ‘international’ eyes rather than local, being at final stages of developing the script! (Appendix H)

**Strengthening Narrative: The Australian Context**

In their critiques of the film through its various stages of production, the major Australian investors supporting *My Tehran For Sale* urged for changes that reflected mainstream industry-based beliefs about the craft and consumption of cinematic products. Specifically, the SAFC and producers consistently pushed for stronger and more conventional and expository approaches to narrative development. My biggest challenge through the process of script editing was to write the drafts in a way that satisfied the investors while advancing the poetic qualities of the film.

The investors urged me to conform to the ‘central conflict theory’, this meaning centralising conflict as the driver to narrative progress and audience engagement. Raul Ruiz critiques this theory as originating out of United States culture, and indicating cinema’s role in the cultural politics of globalisation. The investors pressed for a more involving drama that would address Marzieh’s motivations and actions in resolving key problems with which she’s confronted through the narrative:

Exposition, or the information the audience needs to have in order to understand the world of the story and its characters, is best delivered through conflict – in
drama. The audience’s engagement is always highest with the characters when the story is being told through drama and conflict. Only when the character acts, or makes a choice that puts her under greater pressure. (Script assessor Belinda Chyko, personal communication with Granaz Moussavi)

The emphasis on the clarity of events, ‘expositions’, and more linear storytelling was clearly in opposition to my initial vision, formulated on the basis of my research into the stylistic and textual qualities of poetic cinema.

Figure 12: (Granaz Moussavi, behind the scene)

My Tehran for Sale, in its final form, reflects my attempt to resolve investors’ demands for narrative resonance and strength with specific elements and devices that create poetic quality and subvert conventional narrative forms. The film employs a non-linear storyline, with events interrupted and expanded over the course of the film, leading to an open ending. Around the central story line – Marzieh’s relationship with Saman and her journey for personal and cultural freedom by leaving Iran for Australia – the narrative thread develops through a collage of minor events. These side stories – peripheral events brought into cinematic focus – provide documentary-style glimpses of the underground lifestyle and social pressures experienced by youths and artists in Tehran.

Through the script editing process the producers’ demand that I strengthen the narrative for Australian audiences led me to incorporate material related to the treatment of asylum
seekers in Australian detention centres – a core issue of contestation in Australia’s culture wars. The film opens crosscutting between a rave in Tehran, raided by police, and a scene of Marzieh in an Australian detention centre (Appendix F). Under questioning Marzieh constructs her story, conveying how she survived the raid and punishment by lashing which followed. Then the film title is introduced, superimposed over an extreme long shot of Tehran in the early morning, with Qur’an verses echoing out, punctuating the stillness of the dawn.

The incorporation of the detention centre scene helped me to build narrative strength, but also strengthened the framework for poetic innovation: I broke down the scene and distributed it throughout the script, creating a time shift that would engage the imagination of the audience, who would receive information gradually and be required to put the pieces together. The narrative development also set grounds for me to introduce oneiric and ambiguous qualities, as I became interested to explore the imperative on illegal arrivals to formulate personal biographies – narratives that oscillate between truth and fiction just as poetic films may highlight the false economy of truth and fiction circulating within the cinematic space. This is a topic that explore more fully Chapter 7, with respect to poetic assemblage and cultural interface.

The film continues as a documentation of lifestyles set across various internal and external locations in Tehran – in front of the Australian embassy; street life and traffic; the house next door to Marzieh where she baby-sits the young girl Niloufar; a medical clinic in Tehran that Marzieh attends for health checks to meet visa requirements (Appendix F). In all these scenes, Marzieh is present amongst others but there is no specific focus on her story. As minor or peripheral characters present themselves and their stories, Marzieh’s character is built up slowly.

For the first 75 minutes of the film, there is no central conflict driving a three act structure. Instead, in the second section, a sudden climax arrives with a letter delivered to the couple’s door informing them that Marzieh’s medical tests returned an HIV positive result (Appendix F). The final section of the film contains scattered scenes of Marzieh saying goodbye to the city and underground life that she both loves and hates, putting her belongings on sale and raging at the Australian detention officers for their unjust treatment.
of her case while she considers voluntarily going back to the hell she has risked her life to escape from (Appendix F).

In their feedback, readers for the funding bodies specifically targeted the use of multiple points of view and peripheral stories observed and acted out by supporting characters. I insisted on keeping this specific device, not simply because it subverts the principles of linear, character-based narrative, but because it helps build the dichotomy of the film as both fiction and documentary thus opening the potential for a heightened interactive experience. The poetic collage structure raises awareness of the ways we are accustomed to seeing life represented through films and other media, and illuminates the potential for other, more radical forms of seeing. As Rumi says, the work of poetry is “[an] ear that interprets mystery, a vein of silver in the ground, and another sky!” (64)

For the same reason, I purposefully left the ending open, a possibility again emerging out of the strengthening of narrative for Australian audiences. In the final scene Marzieh wanders through Tehran streets to the music and lyrics of Mohsen Namjou, an artist popular in the Iranian underground. The position of this scene in the narrative thread is left undetermined and the film thus remains unresolved, or ‘unfinished’ in the terms of Kiarostami. The scene may be interpreted as taking place in the past, before Marzieh left the country, or in the present, indicating that Marzieh has been deported back to Iran.

**Poetic Cinema as Creative Process**

Throughout the various stages of production, the need to compromise and remove or lessen the poetic qualities of the film often felt in immediate response like a negation of my original artistic vision. At the same time, my research into Iranian poetic cinema and its archetypal origins in Iranian cultural tradition offered a fruitful framework for thinking about and dealing with these pressures and challenges.

As theorised in this thesis, poetic cinema refers not to a specific genre or unified movement, but rather to varied traditions of innovation enacted at different scales of affiliation. In contrast to other film movements, which are often advanced through the
reproduction and evolution of genres and styles, poetic cinema is the outcome of an iterative process of creative innovation, which advances residues of traditional culture through new assemblages that resonate with indeterminate meanings.

In an artistic sense, the challenge for poetic filmmakers is thus to experiment within parameters set according to their network of professional affiliations and intended audiences, with the aim to advance a process of poetic innovation. While I am interested to derive through practice, as well as stylistic and textual analysis, a coherent cross-cultural language for poetic cinema, I am aware that the “established” ideas and techniques for recuperating poetic aesthetics into film constitute tools for improvisation and poetic assemblage in response to the social realities and creative conditions in which the filmmaker operates.

With this informed perspective, I tried to use negative or compelling feedback in a positive way: it drove me to be more innovative in my creative strategies, playing with the limits to subversion for opening up the cinematic text to poetic modes of communication. Through the script editing process I was convinced to omit the film-within-a-film device on the basis of this feedback:

“The writer seems to have been after a big surprise, but that surprise needs to have been carefully seeded and cultivated and subtly threaded through the entire story, so that even if we had missed the clues, the moment of revelation would have given us that feeling of “surprising but inevitable” that it needs in order for it to all add up. The revelation of the film crew, and what has really been happening, doesn’t give us what David Mamet describes as that reaction of “What?!” followed seconds later by, “Of course.” (Anonymous script assessor for Cyan Films, personal communication with Granaz Moussavi)

As implied through this quote, the basis for omitting this device lay in the fact that it would fail to inventively play with, or subvert the expectations of mainstream, international cinema audiences. I was concerned that the device might create confusion and shift attention away from other narrative complexities, and that the degree of exposition required to effect it would make the film appear overly didactic, detracting from the film’s
open interpretability. But most significantly, it occurred to me that this device has entered into the discourse of mainstream cinema to an extent that it would encourage conventional viewing habits – even come across as cliché – and thus fail to enhance the film’s poetic quality.

**Negotiating Taboos: The Iranian Context**

In contemporary Iran, the innovation of poetics through cinema continues in response to censorship driven by political authorities and cultural taboos generated at a more social, even grass-roots levels. The incorporation into cinema of poetic language, aesthetics and techniques comes forward in tackling the obstacles of censorship because they open up the film structure and narrative to multiple interpretations, this enabling creative practitioners to highlight the social margins and voice otherwise taboo social and political commentary.

When the social and political implications of a narrative are materialised in the final form of a film, it becomes more difficult to ascertain whether it is ‘crossing the red lines’ – a phrase employed within the Iranian department responsible for censorship. As Hamid Dabashi states in his study *Close-Up: Iranian Cinema Past, Present, and Future* with respect to Kiarostami’s elliptical style:

“To put art, the visual and performing arts in particular, consciously at the service of social and political causes ultimately and paradoxically ossifies and thus intensifies precisely those forces that have conditioned those causes. A far more radical and effective negation of those forces is to abandon the site of their authority [...]” (280).

Kiarostami’s “unfinished” style was constructed through the use of dark screen, off-screen space and unresolved endings, these techniques designed to increase the level of interactivity, opening up the overall structure of the filmic text so viewers will ‘read between the lines’. In Iranian poetic cinema more generally, filmmakers push the limits of
public discourse by creating alternate modes of expression offering multiple layers of interpretation governed by complex rules.

As discussed in previous parts, these games find their origins in Persian poetic traditions, and more specifically the modern innovations of the Nimaic poets. Their poetic forms departed from the rigidities of classical aesthetics, advancing cultural residues while offering new kinds of voices for expressing radical contemporary ideas and affiliations. Nima’s poetry especially manifested a new sense of subjectivity in which modernity and cultural identity could be reimagined.

In this thesis I have formulated a theoretical framework that sees poetic films as affiliated into distinct bodies, their creative and professional relations emerging from the unique social realities in which they are produced. My own experience illustrates the element of process integral to this linkaging. In order to realise this co-production in the Iranian context, the team needed to improvise around the severe control that is exerted over all aspects of filmmaking, from scriptwriting to the shoot. This influence may even be cast over the reception of a film, as festival attendees may measure the film’s credibility against the moral systems and ideologies advanced by the clerical rules of the country).

Upon beginning production in Iran, the social restrictions immediately impacted on a practical level. An offer to use an apartment in Ekbatan as the setting for Marzieh’s apartment appeared perfect. In the 1970s, the Ekbatan village was built by a vast team of architects and engineers – many Western-educated, or professionals lured from overseas. The development was funded by the Shah to express the modernisation and economic prosperity under his government. The location overlooked Tehran’s Mehrabad airport, as well as the Azadi tower (a monumental signature of Tehran) – it would have conveyed well the sense of a Tehranian girl leading a modern life behind tall walls and closed doors, yearning to fly out of the country. But I was informed that filming in Ekbatan was not easily allowed, meaning I would have to shoot on a tight schedule without permission from the building’s managers.

Another issue concerned cultural conventions about female modesty, in particular the coverage of hair. I designed all the female characters’ costumes to show minimal skin. In
the rave scene and in the gathering party scene, I used fake hair wigs for the girls as well as bandanas and headbands (in a fashionable way) instead of a conventional hijab or head-veil (which is routinely used in mainstream Iranian films). In the case of Marzieh, I decided to shave her hair to bypass issues around her hair coverage because it was not always appropriate to portray her wearing a fashionable hair covering – for instance in bed early in the morning (Appendix F).

As anticipated, these kinds of practical and social considerations lead the film towards alternate modes of expression – the very poetic, irregular, non-linear, subjective, chaotic and oneiric qualities that Pasolini observes are essential to the aesthetics of poetic cinema. Thematically, *My Tehran for Sale* captures the realities of urban living for young people in Iran. To do so, it relies on ambiguities that subvert the narrative representation of that reality, positing the film as a text to be actively read and interpreted like a poetic text.

For example, the identity of the authorities that arrest people in the rave scene is always unknown. All we see in the scene is a number of bearded men in plain clothes shouting and attacking people, verbally assaulting them and accusing them of immorality. There is no sign whatsoever indicating any association to any specific armed force in Iran – they wear plain clothes. I even avoided showing batons or other weapons that are legally carried by such authorities to be on the safe side! (Appendix F) Simply, I relied on the pervasive reportage of such incidents to inform interpretation for both Iranian and non-Iranian audiences.

Perhaps the strongest example of how these practical improvisations resulted in the innovation of a poetic cinema style concerns the film’s representations of sexual intimacy. Showing a couple in bed or a male and a female sharing physical intimacy is an absolute taboo and forbidden in Iran. Any direct indication of physical intimacy would endanger the safety of the actors as well as the rest of the crew including myself. Consequently, I struggled with finding ways to represent the development of Marzieh’s relationship with Saman.
Addressing the morality and censorship codes that impacted on classical Hollywood, Susan Hayward notes that the enforcement of such codes led to the development of unique cinematic style. She clarifies that “in order to convey what cannot be said, primarily on the level of sexual and repressed desire, décor and mise-en-scene had to stand in for meaning” (107). My solution was a poetic approach that utilised visual metaphors, distorted shot compositions, low-key lighting, and cinematographic methods that would limit the relay of information while hinting at an underlying eroticism to interaction between characters.

In the opening sequence of the film, set outside the rave, Marzieh and Saman are positioned in the background of a long shot. They are seen to share a cigarette while in the foreground horses move in the quiet of the night. Saman drags Marzieh to the closest stable and closes the door but the camera doesn’t move. It captures the horses’ movements under moonlight, dust flying in the air, while Marzieh and Saman’s intimate moments are inside the stable, behind its closed door, off-screen and unseen. The film cuts away to the rave scene. When the audience finally glimpses within the stables, the representation of intimacy is at once magnified through body language and a sparse sound design, and distorted through the use of dark-screen, low-key lighting and silent audio (see fig. 13). The audience never sees physical touch or sexual intimacy – this information is left off-screen, implied in part through creation of a cinematic “void” (Appendix F).

Figure 13: My Tehran For Sale
The use of metaphor in dialogue contributes to building a more open mode of expression. Marzieh and Saman speak of flying together, suggesting togetherness (intimacy), freedom (sexual liberation) and climax. The use of poetic language prepares the viewer for a more poetic communication through film, encouraging them to fill in the blanks by reading between the lines, engaging beyond the logic of conventional narrative (Appendix F).
Chapter Seven: Assemblage and Cultural Interface

Assemblage as Theory and Strategy

As stated, my aim for My Tehran for Sale was to improvise a new cinematic language that abridges cultural perspectives and influences, and thus to assemble an international audience affiliated on the basis of a cross-cultural poetic cinema. In this project I drew theoretical grounding from the cultural theory of Deleuze and Guattari, and in particular their concept of “assemblage”.

In their use of the term, Deleuze and Guattari draw attention to the dynamics of collective and individual meaning making. Assemblage is a process and activity involving the interweaving of concepts and categories, the mixing and combining of genres and the interconnection of forms. Through this process, individuals and collectives effectively blur the lines of culturally concrete definitions. Assemblage dismantles binary categories such as ‘us’ and ‘others’, ‘real’ and ‘representation’, ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’.

In Deleuze and Guattari’s theory, as set out in their study A Thousand Plateaus, the language system to which all speakers of a language belong – or the “collective agencement of enunciation” – precedes the process of assemblage. The individual subject is oriented in relation to objects through a “social agencement of desire”; they intermingle these orientations in further actions of enunciation, this constituting an assemblage (98).

In the development of My Tehran for Sale the concept of assemblage provided the theoretical basis for a cinematic strategy to examine life across cultural borders, elevate awareness of the technologies of representation used, and at the same time engender audiences to engage beyond binaries such as ‘us’ and ‘others’, ‘real’ and ‘representation’. In developing poetic cinema, assemblage came to mean interweaving unrelated poetic devices and expressions into a new body of meaning; and beyond simply enunciating existing language systems developed through singular poetic cinema traditions, it meant improvising towards new syncretic systems of meaning achieved through the collage of established forms and ideas.
Challenged from the outset to improvise poetic outcomes using conventional cinematic forms, I was empowered by the theory of assemblage to reimagine My Tehran for Sale as a dynamic patchwork of technical elements and cultural materials drawn from Iranian and Western traditions. These language-objects would be enacted (or enunciated) together as a form of poetic cinema through a dynamic process of meaning making. This process would extend from the film’s production to its eventual reception (these being stages when the imaginative resolution of technical elements takes place). As Deleuze and Guattari note, “a technical element remains abstract, entirely undetermined, as long as one does not relate it to an assemblage it presupposes” (A Thousand Plateaus 397-8).

Throughout the script editing process, I re-evaluated the stylistic aspects that I valued highly and the methods that I could use in order to tell Marzieh’s poetic journey. I thought that the use of abstract images and time shift in the representation of film events, adding to a gradual revelation of the story through various side stories (thus avoiding a three-act structure), would add poetic values to the film and playfully subvert the conventions of cinema expected by the mainstream film industry and audiences in Australia. As Henri Bergson suggests in his article ‘The Cinematographical Mechanistic Illusion – a Glance at the History of Systems – Real Becoming and False Evolutionism’, the structures of intellect and perception in Western cultures are attuned not to process but to “the logic of solids”, this mode of perception operating, in his view, as a kind of “cinematographical apparatus”:

“There is, between our body and other bodies, an arrangement like that of the pieces of glass that compose a kaleidoscopic picture. Our activity goes from an arrangement to a rearrangement, each time no doubt giving the kaleidoscope a new shake, but not interesting itself in the shake, and seeing only the new picture” (306).

While indulging in creative improvisation of filmic elements through production it was not my intention to entirely omit this logic of solids, which finds expression in the linearity of conventional narrative genres and styles. Rather, I hoped to draw this logic into collage with poetic aesthetics, thus advancing and intermingling residues from varied cultural traditions. The effect would be not to negate the strength and resonance of the narrative but to raise awareness of its functioning, just as poetry broadly may be said to examine the
essence of logic, reality and time. As Odilon Redon once wrote, poetry is bound to put “the logic of the visible at the service of the invisible” (qtd. in Hauptman 59).

To this end, I sought throughout the film development process to preserve a raw style, utilising digital ‘home video’ technology, wobbly hand-held images, unpolished diegetic sound design, long takes and multiple points-of-view – effectively placing the film on a verge between documentary and fiction without the need for an explicit film-within-a-film structure. Even as I sought to strengthen the narrative, I avoided stepping into a purely formalist approach to narrative organisation. The illusion of events randomly occurring and being captured by my camera, interwoven through a range of technical elements, would in its own right create a more flexible cinematic language, open interpretability of the narrative and elevate awareness of the fictive frame.

Poetic Assemblage and Cultural Interface

Roland Caputo observes that Kiarostami developed a distinctive cinematic style through the interweaving of technical elements that relate to the different social uses of film and video technology (4). In doing so, Kiarostami acts as a dialectician between two metaphors – cinema as ‘window’ and cinema as ‘frame’ onto reality. In the production of My Tehran for Sale I have sought to render these same dynamics and tensions as the means to create an interface between distinctive social realities, reflecting the terms and aims of this project as a co-production.

In the script editing process I became increasingly interested in how the assemblage of poetic aesthetics and conventional narrative structures could be used to portray details about underground life in Tehran, and how these framing techniques could be used to establish contact points between Australian and Iranian social imaginings and realities.

Much of this assemblage was finalised in the editing process. Working with my editor, Bryan Mason, I sought to portray public life in Iran’s urban centre through a slow rhythm without sudden cuts, as if the characters were stuck in constant traffic. This juxtaposed with the chaotic fast rhythm of scenes representing the youthful abandon of Tehran’s
underground culture, featuring fast jump cuts between images. This juxtaposition was designed to map the underground life as a world-within-a-world, a double life framed by frustrations at the excessive moral and religious control exerted within the society and the inventive search by youth for new cultural freedoms and modes of expression.

Part of this poetic innovation, however, occurred during pre-production, and reflected the forging of creative affiliations while in Iran. Morteza Abkener – a famous novelist whose work has been banned within Iran – became engaged with the project as a script editor. Amongst other contributions, he suggested that I emphasise the youth underground as an embedded reality within Tehran life by incorporating contemporary slang in a scene where young men are racing cars on a Tehran freeway (Appendix F). 

In the scripting stage, it was integral that the innovation of an integrated poetic style based on the cinematic rhythm of the piece would also satisfy the expectations of my Australian investors and international audiences. Feedback from my producers was particularly helpful in this regard: it stressed that the rhythm towards the end of the film had become too flat and melancholic. In order to bring it back to life I reordered the narrative events. The second party scene, which is discussed more fully below, was swapped with a scene where Marzieh takes Saman on a tour of Tehran. This helped first, to introduce Tehran as the setting, and second, to establish the developing relationship between the central characters before the audience sees them in the bedroom scene. (Appendix F). The script change illustrates well how my poetic cinema style has been adapted to better facilitate cultural interface.

A further example of how I used poetic innovation to at once disrupt and advance a more conventional narrative is found in the development of the opium scene. I wrote the opium scene paying specific attention to the visual rhythm connecting abstract images of objects and expressions. In this scene I freed the narrative from any direct communication through dialogue, avoiding any compulsion to be expository in the relay of “important” narrative information, focusing instead on correlating images and sounds so as to build a poetic conveyance. To affect a surrealistic and hallucinatory style, I adjusted the camera to a fast motion mode when capturing the scene, and slowed the footage down in editing. The series of slow motion images were compiled and edited in a random fashion, with extreme
jump cuts between close-ups of Marzieh, images of paraphernalia used for smoking opium and floating, hand-held close-ups of other people present in the scene. I complemented this irrational, chaotic and surrealistic style by reversing background dialogue in the sound editing stage. The actors’ incomprehensible, out-of-sync speech patterns compromises realism while empowering artifice (Appendix F).

The overall effect was to express the shifting subjective and formal relation of Marzieh to the embedded world of which she was a part – that is, her frustration, pain and disconnection from what is rapidly revealed as a dysfunctional environment plagued by contradictions and double standards. The point of the scene in narrative terms was advanced through a largely improvised assemblage of poetic techniques and aesthetics, which introduced oneiric and ambiguous qualities into the formal fictive frame. Finally, the scene was overlaid with a melancholic song by Namjou, which completed the creation of a heartfelt, deeply subjective and yet formalised poetic scene (Appendix F).

The opium scene epitomises how the innovation of poetic aesthetics with conventional narrative forms can work to open readings of ethnic texts through their assemblage and intertextual transformation. In the case of this scene, non-Iranian audiences are given insight into the integrated Iranian poetic (musical) work because the primary fictive frame (being the level of narrative structure) offers contextual information that guides interpretation, even while the immediate cinematic space in which the included text is presented and transformed is an embedded reality circulating with indeterminate signs and meanings.

In the same manner, I used poetic aesthetics and language attached to the film’s representation of the Tehrani underground to embed within the text a frame onto Australian social reality. In the second party scene, Saman delivers to Marzieh and the film’s audiences long monologues under the influence of drugs. These monologues, portraying his first memories of entering Australia as a teenager, are formulated in a free-flowing poetic form that give a perspective on the Australian experience in a fashion that is poetic, not expository (Appendix F).
By incorporating surrealistic and oneiric signs and techniques, I managed to destabilise the status of this embedded poetic frame. For instance, in Marzieh’s flashback, a travelling shot shows Sadaf, Marzieh and Saman sitting next to one another amongst other rave attendees waiting in turn to be lashed. However, when the shot returns along the same track, they have been replaced with strangers. In actuality, it is forbidden for men and women to be seated next to one another in a punishment hall or lashed in a mixed-gender group (Appendix F).

Thus, it is left in the hands of the audience to determine the status of the flashback – as a representation of the ‘real’, of memory or of imagination. On one hand, such interpretation impacts on the overall narrative-meanings derived by the audience (the problems confronted by Marzieh in Tehran, and the likelihood she will be deported). On the other hand, the viewer’s interpretation of the poetic frame is coloured by their interpretation of the narrative, which brings into relief their own cultural and political positioning. The viewer must decide if the flashback is an impaired version of reality due to Marzieh’s memory-loss in detention, or the possibility of her lying to seek refuge in a country with complex cultural politics surrounding issues of migration and asylum seekers (Appendix F).

Together, the scenes analysed above succinctly illustrate the strategies for creative-innovation invested in My Tehran for Sale. Essentially, by assembling filmic techniques, including narrative structures and poetic devices, I have acted as a dialectician of two metaphors – that is, cinema as ‘window’ and cinema as ‘frame’ onto reality. Further, reflecting the aims and problems specific to this project, I have sought to put this dialectic in the service of cultural interface, experimenting with the potential to assemble narrative and poetic structures as a means to put diverse social realities into dialogue. At the heart of this enterprise is the potential through assemblage to heighten interactivity within the cinematic space, as the assemblage process works to transform cultural texts and imaginings and open them to original readings and enunciations.
Metonymy and Metaphor

It is my contention that in My Tehran for Sale the assemblage of poetic and narrative elements works to build and actively subvert conventional narrative structure, at the same time facilitating a form of cultural interface. In understanding how this internal logic works it is worth exploring the concepts of metonymy and metaphor as they relate to the organisation of representation in this film.

Referring to the Russian linguist and literary theorist Roman Jackobson, Susan Hayward explains how the concepts of metonymy and metaphor may be applied in film studies. By broad definition, metonyms represent an absent whole through the presence of a part. Hayward argues that this concept can be applied to an object “that is visibly present but which represents another object or subject to which it is related but which is absent”. For instance, “an opening or credit sequence can function metonymically for the whole of a film (the shots refer to the unravelling narrative to come)” (229-30).

The very first scene in My Tehran for Sale features a traditional Afghan family decked in traditional costume, clapping and signing a folk song by the light of a lamp. This creates a cinematic mood reminiscent of many Iranian films that are set in traditional, rural areas of the country and which document the slow rhythm of traditional life. The film then cuts suddenly to the rave scene. Such contrast between scenes documenting dissimilar lifestyles are viewed in relation to one another, and function together as a metonym for the tensions explored through the narrative, and more generally for the contradictions of modern Iran. It is by absorbing this complex of relations that diverse audiences are given unique access to “exotic” socio-cultural realities (Appendix F).

In a further example, the treatment by plain-clothed authorities of Afghan illegal migrants in the opening scene is juxtaposed with images of Marzieh’s treatment as an asylum seeker in Australia’s Woomera detention centre, the film thus shedding light at once on the localisation and globality of certain politico-cultural issues. (Appendix F).

My Tehran for Sale connects dissimilar social realities by placing them in relation to one another. These representations help build narrative sense, but ultimately (by the terms of
the metonymy concept) their meanings are developed through the narrative. Hayward writes that metonyms are understood to function as such only when the story to which they refer is being told, and they help to organise meaning in a precise way (229-30).

However, in My Tehran for Sale I complexify this internal organisation of meaning: the ontological status attributed to social realities represented in the film is destabilised as scenes oscillate between a range of layered interpretations. With respect to each poetic sequence, the film may be viewed as a frame onto a fictive world, a documentary-style window onto a specific socio-cultural reality, an embedded construct of a character, or many characters’ imaginations and memories, and even a conduit for dialogue between the auteur and the viewer which is situated between their primary ontological worlds (the realities in which they are making and viewing the film).

In this respect, My Tehran for Sale’s poetic style may also be said to operate on the level of metaphor. Each poetic sequence has to be “decoded” in order to unlock invisible meanings and this relies on the viewer developing their own framework for interpretation in connection with their own cultural backgrounds. As Hayward observes, with metaphors “we come to understand the unknown through reference to the known, through associative relations”. The unknown “gets explained by being inserted into a paradigm – a framework or pattern, or, in the case of cinema, an image that is new to it, but unknown to us” (229-30).

For example, Saman’s tour of Tehran after arriving back from Australia is represented through a collage of images, including a series of reverse shots showing, first, Saman looking at an old man across the street who leans on his stick and gazes smiling at Saman, second, the old man’s perspective back on Saman, and, third, an image of autumn leaves floating in running water. The metaphorical meaning of this image-collage is anchored in a verse taken from Persian poetry: “Though be seated alongside the creek and see your life as it passes before your eyes.” The metaphor provides paradigmatic meaning for penetrating the greater assemblage of the film, and by solving “the puzzle” the viewer also gains access to meanings adapted from a specific culture-bound poetic tradition. (Appendix F).
Poetic Voice and Intertextuality

Throughout My Tehran for Sale I have incorporated poetic language as a primary means to render the metaphorical relations essential to penetrating the film’s narrative and participating in its unique form of cultural interface. This builds on the approaches of poetic filmmakers in both European and Iranian traditions. As Dillon notes in his analysis of what he terms lyrical film history, “directors such as Jarman, Andrei Tarkovsky, and Pier Paolo Pasolini, as we shall see, do not just talk about poetry constantly – they include recognizable poems and poet-figures in their films. These directors repeatedly encourage us to read and interpret their films not as we would read a novel, but as we would read a poem” (3).

Throughout My Tehran for Sale I have embedded a set of signs that suggest Marzieh’s character has a poetic “shadow”: the symbolic presence of Forough Farrokhzad in the background to many of Marzieh’s shots – for instance, in the middle wall of Marzieh’s apartment there is a portrait of her role model – becomes an enduring metaphor for Marzieh’s position as a free-spirited female artist struggling for sexual, social and artistic liberation (see fig. 14). Forough is considered by many Iranians to be the embodiment of women’s sexual emancipation and expressive freedom. Early in the film, there is a direct reference to this influence, when Marzieh takes Saman to Zahirodoleh, the graveyard where Forough is buried:

Marzieh and Saman approach the closed Iranian style decorated gate of the cemetery.

SAMAN
Wow, this place has a cool door.

MARZIEH
This is Zahirodoleh cemetery. During uni I used to come here and knock for ages and no one would open the door.
Forough is here, "Remember flight, 
the bird is mortal." Also Ghamar 
and Iraj Mirza.

Marzieh starts singing a song of Ghamar's about Iraj Mirza, the poet of about a century ago. (Appendix F)

Figure 14: My Tehran For Sale

In Persian literature in general and in Forough's work in particular ‘flying’ is used as a metaphor for freedom. Towards the end of the film, in a scene where Marzieh is selling off all her belongings to raise money for her immigration to Australia, Marzieh is bid farewell by a woman who takes Forough’s picture off the wall and passes through the door where she is standing. The vision of Marzieh watching Forough’s picture going out the door comes to symbolise how her pursuit of freedom is anchored within her culture but will ultimately negate her position in that world (Appendix F).

In the second party scene Saman’s monologue about his experiences of life in diaspora intersects with a scene of a poetry reading. The poetic piece being voiced opens an alternative reading of the narrative: by its relation to the story being forward by Saman it destabilises the ontological stats of Saman’s drug-induced “memories” (Appendix F). The
piece, entitled ‘Sale’, maps the restrictions that youth and women face in Iran, the social
surveillance and systematic control that leads many Iranian people to choose a life in exile:

Search my bag, what's the point?
My sigh that has forever heard
'halt' lies in hiding, in the
bottom of my pocket.
Let go of me!
You know that I will sleep
with the raspberry bush
And not regret.
Why always set your sights
on the woman
Who sponges up her broken
pieces
And pins her heart to her
sleeve?
There is nothing in my
baggage
Except innocent locks of hair.
Let me go!

Here, flight is always
delayed.
For the slingshots in the
alleys of war
Or for the floral skirt on
the clothes line
But moths live fast regardless.
At least let me have my
childhood picture back

The poem ends with the suggestion that many will not find their promised land in
diaspora, thus anticipating future events in the film:
Stranger than a kite left
behind in a closet,
I am stamped and pass and
miss home.
The antennas aim at the sky
but on the clothes line at
home
My shirt is still holding
God tight. (Moussavi, *Barefoot Till Morning*)

Thus, in *My Tehran For Sale* poetic language plays a crucial role in driving particular
narrative paths, at the same time as it works to set and disrupt the internal organisation of
social and personal realities represented through the film. To this end, the film works on an
intertextual level, with the life and work of both Iranian and international poets
incorporated as a means to bridge the poetic representation of different lifestyles and
integrate them into an open narrative form. In the mountain scene, for instance, Marzieh
and Sadaf sing a modified version of “The Wild Gazelle” – one of Hafiz’s most popular
Ghazals (see fig. 15):

Hey wild gazelle
Where are you?
I know you from a long time ago,
Us, two wanderers, two lonely soles,
Traps and enemies waiting before
and behind us
Remembering the ones who have gone
and the ones who have loved,
agree with the spring rain.
Only a miracle might help
To join one lonely to another.
What awaits us, friends?
Friends of lonely souls and strangers.
I see no green fields of hope,
In this wasteland (*My Tehran For Sale*).
It is widely believed by Iranian people that Hafiz’s poetry is still very much valid to contemporary life and conditions in Iran. Through its incorporation into the film the poetry is transformed to stand-in for the current situation in Iran as experienced by these characters, and frames their relationship to each other as well as to the different social realities of which they are, or will become a part: Marzieh and Sadaf are two close friends always together, united in their everyday struggle for cultural and creative freedom, and now saying goodbye; one is taking the path to an unknown and imagined world, leaving the other behind in a homeland where the vision for personal and cultural freedom is generated in response to constant obstacles (Appendix F).

By the end of the film, the inclusion of poetic verses, overlaid over images of Tehran’s streets, is designed to empower the viewer to interpret the organising logic of the film and the relations drawn between cultural realities (see fig. 16):

“Neo-Kantian ideology is for me
Normandy poppies for you
Indulgence and impatience for me
The 15-centimeter love for you
Macaroni and tamarind paste
Is our share
The streets of Martyrs
Is our share
Making fun of the shrine
Is our share
Cleverness and cunning
Is our share"

Figure 16: My Tehran For Sale

"Neo-Kantian Ideology is for me
Normandy poppies for you
Left-over food
Is our share
Bootlegged copies of The Godfather
Is our share
An unwanted generation
Is our share
Bootlegged copies of The Godfather
Is our share
Embarrassment of the Government
Is our share
The thick blacklist
Is our share
The loser national team
Is our share
Embarrassment of the Government
Is our share
'Constructive Criticism'
Is our share” (courtesy of Mohsen Namjou in Appendix F)

These lyrics by Namjou are overlain on a montage sequence featuring Marzieh walking through the streets, and the scene is open to being interpreted as a flashback while Marzieh remains in Australian detention or a depiction of the present following her return. Almost inviting the audience to finally reflect on the film’s role as a conduit for cultural interface, Namjou’s lyrics fade as he repeats one line:

“Tomorrow maybe is our share
Tomorrow maybe is our share.”

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Chapter Eight: Autobiography, Social Commentary and Interactivity

Between Documentary and Fiction

In this final section to the thesis I will discuss how the film oscillates between documentary and fiction, leaving it open to be interpreted as either a fabricated narrative or as a documentation of actual events in real peoples’ lives. The documentary mode of the film is enriched by a range of stylistic and textual devices, such as improvised acting and dialogue; the presence of non-actors as extras and in supporting roles; natural lighting and hand-held camera; realistic make-up, set and costume design; and a highly ambient sound design. The outcome of such techniques, arranged through an assemblage process, is to raise awareness of the cinematic frame and controlling hand of the auteur, breaking down solid categories such as ‘truth’ and ‘fiction’.

Ultimately, it is my central argument in this section that poetic innovation invested in My Tehran for Sale enables me to extend the film’s organising logic – that is, the relational positioning of represented socio-cultural realities – beyond the cinematic frame to incorporate the ontological worlds of the auteur and the viewer. The outcome, in terms drawn from theory associated with Pasolini’s poetic cinema, is a textualisation of reality, this process negotiated as an active dialogue between the filmmaker, the community of creative practitioners involved and the audience network aggregated through the film experience.

On a textual level, the ontological status of the cinematic frame is affected by the inclusion of autobiographical material introduced by both the filmmaker and the main actors. Throughout the shoot, I continued brainstorming with the main actors to develop the script and dialogue. Most of the crew were under 30 years old and had experienced similar lifestyles and pressures as the central characters in the film. On this basis the theatre scene was totally improvised by a real-life underground acting troupe that I had found through Asha Mehrabi (Sadaf). I gave them key themes – torture, confession, death, addiction and searching for freedom – and they came up with short pieces including modern dance to which I made some alterations before the shoot. The improvised scene was an absolute success, and again illustrates my argument that poetics in cinema is the
outcome of an improvisation process generated at a local scale of creative and professional affiliations.

The autobiographical dimension to the film was further escalated when it came to the central characters. Marzieh (the actor) brought onto set an image of herself in *Unsweetened Tea* (2005) – a feature film directed by Naser Taghvai. Two-thirds of the way through the shoot this film had been seized by the authorities. We placed this image next to the same mirror that is smashed to pieces by Saman at the end of the apartment fight scene. The picture inspired me to write extra dialogue for the interview scene: as she talks about her dreams in the detention centre Marzieh refers to her role in the film. Visual references to Marzieh’s real life as an actor, as well as my own presence before the camera playing my real life persona as a poet and friend to Marzieh, contribute in building the film’s referential layers (Appendix F).

The inclusion of autobiographical signs and material destabilises rigid categories of ‘truth’ and ‘fiction’, and works in concert with specific filming and editing techniques that reinforce the improvisational nature of the scenes. In the second sequence, a hand-held camera documents Marzieh’s desperation to leave Iran and how this impacts on her embryonic relationship with Saman. The camera struggles to follow the characters’ movements and a great deal of the action takes place off-screen. The visuals and sound are both affected by technical glitches and ‘errors’ that maximise the rawness of the footage and amplify the sense of the performance as an ‘everyday’, improvised social interaction.

**Free Indirect Discourse: Poetic Voice and Social Commentary**

In “The Written Language of Reality”, Pasolini reflects on the stylisation and technical elements of poetic cinema. He observes, “by moving the camera towards a subject who is not moving, a director can make the audience aware of the camera’s activity”. Alternatively, he continues “a director could employ unusual rhythms in editing a scene, thereby making the audience aware of the editorial style” (209-12). Pasolini contrasts these techniques to the ‘seamless’ and ‘invisible’ style cultivated within mainstream, Hollywood films.
In the technical production of My Tehran for Sale, I have sought to introduce various social uses of film and video technology in order to highlight the artifice of filmmaking practice. Throughout the film characters are constantly filming narrative events using mobile cameras. Niloufar films Marzieh when she is minding her, capturing Marzieh’s private life in her apartment and her conversation with a corrupt university professor. She also captures marginal side stories, including the pregnant girl struggling for an abortion prior to a suicide.

In another instance, Sadaf films the raid of a rave party with her mobile phone. Marzieh later replays these images to her case officer as supporting evidence for her claim to asylum. In these uses, different filmmaking techniques offer more than simple visual motifs or narrative drivers; they build towards a self-conscious stylisation that elevates the filmmaking process as a central subject of the film.

As the film drops into more poetic moments, the cinematic stylisation transitions the film into a free indirect discourse: the scenes flicker between being formalised representations of the fictive world, the internal points-of-view belonging to (potentially multiple) characters present, and the director’s perspective and commentary. In line with my argument that the assemblage of narrative and poetic elements works to destabilise the status of scenes, the key lies in the transition points.

For instance, in the opium-smoking scene, the alienating and anti-naturalistic effect is produced through a sudden and radical shift in the visual rhythm (both speed and motion). Together with Marzieh’s gestural performance, the cinematic style creates a distanciation effect: it heightens awareness of artifice in filmmaking and formalises ambiguity over whether the mood expressed reflects the director’s subjective point-of-view, through and beyond the worldview of the protagonist. Patrick Keating thus notes that when Pasolini advocates for filmmakers to foreground style it is not for “style’s sake”. Rather, “a director should foreground stylistic elements to add a level of connotation to the basic denotative level. These connotations work to express the director’s subjective response to the polemic event” (12).
In this way, the assemblage of poetic elements in My Tehran for Sale effectively conveys my own position as artist, in autobiographical, socio-political and creative terms. A prologue to the underground concert scene features a medium-long shot of Marzieh staring from within her apartment at Tehran’s traffic and skyline. Her figure blurs out of focus and the city comes into focus. Marzieh’s visage is left out of focus. She becomes faceless – isolated from the city in which she lives, disempowered as a free spirited woman in a patriarchal society. The shot frames the film’s narrative pathways, indicating the social reality that shapes her options and choices. Moreover, it functions as a visual directorial comment about that social world (see fig. 17).

Figure 17: My Tehran For Sale

Through such instances of free indirect point-of-view I have sought to move My Tehran for Sale away from a sensationalist portrayal of social realities, towards what Dabashi terms the “translucency of the real” (Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema 200). The final scene with Marzieh pacing through the different suburbs of Tehran captures an entire day from dusk to dawn.
Figure 18: My Tehran For Sale

Though Marzieh’s face expresses her anger, loss and confusion, this sequence does not magnify the protagonist’s emotions. Instead, her feelings of meaninglessness and lack of purpose refract in the demeanours and activities of those she passes. And, in a documentary style that utilises hand-held cameras and collage editing, the scene expresses my own commentary on the situation of Tehran (see fig. 18).

A Female Perspective

My Tehran For Sale centres a female character in its narrative and shows the film world from her perspective. This sets the film apart from the majority of Iranian New Wave films, in which women were mostly absent or possessed only minor roles. In recent years, an increasing number of female art-cinema filmmakers in Iran – Rakhshan Bani'temad, Marzieh Meshkini, and Samira Makhmalbaf being notable examples, have developed filmic texts that respond to feminist concerns. My Tehran for Sale has been impacted by gender politics in Iran from the initial stages of production; in both text and style the film addresses the social construction of gender through cinema, and the challenges to creating alternative representations of femininity within a strictly patriarchal society.

In Iran, feminist film practitioners have learnt to function within the boundaries of cultural and political norms and within a film industry that is not geared to support radically alternative world-views. Negar Mottahehedeh discusses the problem of ‘veiling’ in
Iranian post-Revolutionary cinema. The veiled female in Iranian films, she argues, works to foreground the ‘looked-at-ness’ of the female form in culture more broadly. The look of the camera is gendered. Relating this to Western feminist film theory, Mottahedeh observes that this inherent gendering assists in recreating a sacred imaginal world which, in its cinematic form, exists in opposition to the voyeuristic codes fundamental to the classical narrative form of Hollywood cinema (Mottahedeh 10).

My Tehran for Sale challenges these “scopophilic conventions” within global classical cinema; at the same time the film is consciously set apart from the gendered frameworks for imagining familiar to Iranian post-Revolutionary cinema. In the film, the enforcement of veiling strongly informed the interaction aesthetics of the film, especially the dress, expression and engagement between actors. However, I have used alternative or compromised forms of veiling – Marzieh’s shaved head, wigs, hats and other non-veil head coverings.

This approach is continued with respect to other stylistic and textual choices. The gender politics around ‘veiling’ are directly and indirectly expressed through location, film style and cinematography. Vision is constantly masked or obstructed by objects and architectural features, such as bars, stair rails, walls, doors, even the graffiti-covered glass screens of a bus station. Hamid Nafici states that in Iranian cinema veiling can be taken as “metaphors for modesty (hejab) which sets women apart from the men and purportedly protects them from the male gaze”. He continues, “The reciprocity of veiling and unveiling necessitates that the obstructions which seem to conceal certain things from the view also serve to reveal something, namely, the intention of the director” (52). My intention has been not only to break taboos about the female body, but to create through poetic assemblage new in-between spaces for female subjectivity.

Laura Mulvey argues that although a “different understanding of the gaze underlies the Islamic discourse of veiling and Western feminist concepts of voyeurism,” a feminist reading of My Tehran for Sale puts “the ‘problem’ of cinema as a mode of representation” in dialogue with “the ‘problem’ of woman’s representation on the screen” (Mulvey, 259). The advancement of a female perspective through poetic style places the film within the terms of what Claire Johnston has theorised as “counter cinema” (133-143).
presentation of alternative cinema forms encourages audiences “to critique the seemingly transparent images on the screen and to question the manipulative techniques and editing” (Erens xix). Poetic cinema brings into relief not only the dominant modes of production within mainstream cinema, but also the structures of power and ideology circulating within that cultural-economic sphere.

As a joint production of Iran and Australia, My Tehran for Sale draws references to other transcultural poetic film practices that have addressed female representation in cinema and what Hamish Ford describes as “the ubiquitous challenge of living between two or more (often problematic) cultures”. Dian Li describes the work of Clara Law, for instance, as “poetry of the Chinese Diaspora”, observing that “through meaning-laden images and provocative framing, Law leads us to the inner world of those who travel and migrate and in whom we vicariously experience the trauma of cultural clashes and the bliss of self-emancipation”.

Ford suggests that My Tehran for Sale “tells us as much about Australia as Iran” because it throws into light ‘the other’ through the perspective of characters and an author who must navigate that cultural gulf. In fact, My Tehran for Sale represents a distinctively Australian example of films coming out of countries from around the world – films that present female perspectives, and raise awareness of the treatment of femininity in film, by negotiating the bridges and gulfs in expectation between audiences from very different cultural backgrounds.
Summary

Immersion and Interactivity

Hayward observes that in the dominant mode of cinema “the story ‘naturally’ unfolds”. Because the text “makes sense of itself”, she continues, the viewer “has no role to play”. This leads to an “illusion of unity” – the ‘spectator-as-subject’:

“the spectator-as-subject is both constituting and constituted through the process of ‘reading’ the film text. In terms of cinematic address (that is, the interaction or interrelation of film as a text and the spectator), the spectator is, therefore, both the enunciator (the spectator-subject making sense of the text) and the enunciated (the spectator-subject being situated by the text)” (100).

While mainstream cinema is no sense monolithic in terms of film styles, intertextuality and desired impacts, classical cinema is characterised by certain values and techniques to counter resistance in audiences against this “illusion of unity” and encourage a wilful suspension of disbelief.

As discussed in the beginning of this part, according to the pioneer rhetoricians of poetic cinema such as Pasolini, Tarkovsky and Deren, films that adopt an avant-garde and unconventional approach can be classified as ‘poetic’ because they develop on the basis of aesthetics and language-forms that challenge established cinematic codes.

As argued throughout this thesis, a more interactive or aware experience of cinema can be encouraged through specific stylistic and textual elements. This includes the use of off-screen space and open endings, as well as non-linear storytelling. The secure relationship between the spectator and the image is brought into threat as the spectator becomes aware of the absence of conventional cinematic codes. The image “starts to show itself for what it is, an artefact, an illusion, and in so doing threatens to reveal film as a system of signs and codes” (Hayward 113).
As shown, My Tehran for Sale assembles such techniques through a process of poetic innovation: it celebrates the economy of film language while encouraging new enunciations of existing cinematic language and cultural texts; it foregrounds the filmic apparatus, thus acknowledging and empowering spectators in their individual and collective roles as interpreters and meaning-makers. The film functions on a hyper-interactive level. Audiences are motivated to read the film as a poetic filmic text and make sense of the textual, stylistic, poetic and narrative elements in their assemblage. The film’s reading, far from than being a process of information-relay, takes place within a ritualised practice of communion.

The open interpretability of the film is elicited further through a play with metaphoric and metonymic structures that are used, first, by the auteur to destabilise the ontological status of the cinematic frame, and second, by the viewer to penetrate distinct social realities and cultural texts. With the viewer engaged as a co-creator of meaning, and the filmmaker’s position made present through a free indirect discourse, the film becomes a kind of active conversation or dialogue situated between the unique dimensions of these co-creators, but, moreover, re-textualising the social realities to which they are subject.

A Coloured Reception

My Tehran for Sale had its world-premier at the Toronto International Film Festival, and has been selected and screened by numerous other prestigious international film festivals in Pusan, Rotterdam, Vancouver, Mannheim, Heidelberg, Foukuaka, Gran Canaria and Las Palmas. It has been screened at major museums of modern art in New York, Boston, Washington, and Houston (2009-2011). In Australia, the film was selected by The Adelaide Film Festival (2009) and has toured to a range of Australian cities and towns through events of the Sydney Traveling Film Festival (2010) and the Human Rights Arts and Film Festival (2010).

The film screenings have been mostly met with high levels of attendance and acclaim from local and international film critics. More than three hundred literary accounts of the
film have appeared across mediums, from Iranian and Western newspapers to magazines, websites and weblogs. Notable positive accounts include the following:

Driven by a complex narrative structure, which cuts across time and between locations, My Tehran For Sale, is an accomplished effort, particularly considering this is Moussavi’s debut film. (Clara Nash, Film Ink)

...an artful and poetic film, which is also timely considering the current illegal immigration headlines. (Annette Basile)

...although local distributors have remained indifferent, My Tehran for Sale is one of the most complex, engrossing works made in Australia for some time. (Dan Edwards, 24)

Many accounts in Persian have appeared, reflecting on both the social commentary and poetic qualities of the film. Parviz Jahed, a renowned Iranian film critic and scholar, wrote:

My Tehran For Sale, in many moments, reminds me of “Four Months, Three Weeks, Two Days” made by Cristian Mungiu of Romania. Both films portray historical eras of nations whose dreams, overshadowed by policing and surveillance controlling systems, went with the winds.

Jahed emphasised in his writing the film’s stylistic innovations, as did another Iranian film critic and writer, Naser Zera’ati, another Iranian film critic and writer, also refers to poetic qualities stylistic innovations of the film. The resonance of the film in social terms is testified not in terms of its commercial success so much as its wide circulation on the black market in Tehran as well as other Iranian cities – a fact reported in government-backed newspapers within the country (Jahan News, 18 Apr. 2011).

In the global context, the film’s viral promotion and circulation online has reached a level at which it can no longer be easily controlled or tracked by its producers, with more than 2 million hits in total to this day. One of the film’s YouTube pages alone had received 234,565 hits by 22/2/2012. (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47sEhwrq73E). On the
IMDB website, the film has received an average rating of 7/10, as of 20/2/2012. (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1368864/).

The success of My Tehran for Sale in facilitating the form of cultural interface that I set out to achieve was ultimately coloured by political dynamics contemporary to the film’s distribution and circulation in international festivals. The film’s release coincided with the 2009 Iranian presidential elections and its aftermath, including the rise and suppression of the Green Movement.

On the one hand, the festival organisers and attendees were interested in the fact that the film was shot underground in a semi-guerrilla style, and depicted the life of middle class youth of Tehran ‘behind the walls’. The film gave a voice to the young urbane community, which under the gaze of worldwide media was viewed fighting for basic democratic rights and social change. For audiences, the socio-political circumstances worked to highlight the conditions of repression to which the film was a response.

At the same time, I believe that the socio-political context limited the capacity for the film’s poetic aesthetics to open interpretability and convey the more nuanced levels of meaning and commentary invested in the film. The Q&A sessions following the screenings were focused mainly around contemporary political issues. At the Toronto International Film Festival in 2009, for instance, one audience member excitedly raised similarities between Marzieh and Neda Aghasoltan, a real life figure who was shot during the protests. In their catalogues, the festival organisers framed the film along similar lines.

One year on and it appears that critics and audiences are revising these politically charged readings and, building on the discourse opened by Kiarostami’s achievements, considering the stylistic and aesthetic qualities of the film. It is perhaps instructive that it is during periods of relative silence about Iran on the global stage that Iranian poetic cinema best performs its role. At the end of this practice-led research, I continue to believe (borrowing the words of Dabashi) that poetic cinema can play an important role in building global dialogue, chiefly by “the aesthetic sublimation of these repeated cycles of violence into a visual poetic of hope” (“Mohsen Makhmalbaf’s A Moment of Innocence” 120).
CONCLUSION

The aesthetics, form and content of Persian poetry have evolved through a long history of cultural development, invention in language and creative innovation, shaped in response to local, regional and global shifts in power. Within Iranian society, poetic games serve an integral role in how certain communities – religious, political and artistic – imagine and enact their shared histories and world perspectives. In Iranian society, the poetic dimension to everyday and ceremonial language perpetuates this role. Poetry’s mark is carved on the psyche of the Persian people.

Presenting a broad history of the socio-political conditions in Iran, I have argued that the Persian community has regulated its boundaries over time through cultural and artistic endeavours, adapting and innovating traditional poetic modalities across mediums – from writing to painting, performance to cinema. Ambiguous, or fluid modes of expression have facilitated the continued quest for freedom against oppression by successive governments, as the country has bounced between phases of foreign political intervention, struggles to assert sovereignty and multigenerational revolutions, including the Constitutional Revolution, the 1978 Revolution, and more recently, the 2009 Green Movement. Through this history, the sophisticated techniques of narrative-creation and complex manners of meaning-making enacted in poetic rituals by both performers and audiences, have not only been integral to the development of resistant political cultures; they have served as a renewed source of identity for the Iranian people over generation.

My central proposition in this exegesis is that specific ideas and modes of expression anchored in classical Persian and Nimaic poetry are evident in the films of successive generations of Iranian filmmakers who are affiliated as belonging to the Iranian New Wave and post-Revolutionary art-house cinema.

In my analysis, this entrance of poetic aesthetics into art-cinema can be traced back to Forough Farrokhzad’s The House is Black. Through stylistic and textual analysis of films by Farrokhzad, Ebrahim Golestan, Sohrab Shahid Sales, Amir Naderi and Abbas Kiarostami, I have presented a broad range of examples that show how certain poetic forms, narratives, concepts, philosophies, aesthetics and rituals are adapted as the
foundations for films that challenge both social taboos within Iran and expectations of how reality and fiction should be represented through popular cinema. Experiencing these films involves unraveling multiple layers of meaning weighted through metaphorical, metonymic and intertextual readings. Many Iranian poetic filmmakers draw for example on Sufi concepts and narratives, structured around the search for the ‘Unknown’ and the ritualized journey towards a veiled reality. These readings are most available to audiences familiar with such systems of thought. But equally they are made available to wider audiences through the use of sophisticated cinematic techniques and narratives. Iranian poetic cinema breaks away from the linearity and logic of conventional three-act storytelling, offering what may been termed a “translucent” style of representing reality. These films refuse to cohere to solidified categories such as documentary or fiction, real or fabricated, improvised or predetermined.

Drawing on the work of Pasolini, and other key theorists in cinema, historical and gender studies, I have argued that the innovative creative techniques employed to adapt traditional poetic aesthetics through cinema places the creative output of these local filmmakers in dialogue with international Modernist, Avant-garde and art-cinema movements. I am consequently led to an argument that poetic cinema generally should be viewed not as a movement or tradition, but as a kind of creative response. As Tarkovsky says, qualifying the work of poetry in film, “when I speak of poetry I am not thinking of it as a genre. Poetry is an awareness of the world, a particular way of relating to reality” (21). This kind of response to the world, to tradition and to its loss in the face of the globalising process, affiliates certain filmmakers – as well as figures working across other fields. It organises them into communities and networks that spread across contexts at a range of scales, from the local to the global.

This view offers an alternative to common perspectives on Iranian New Wave cinema as rooted in Italian or French New Wave movements, whilst still maintaining the possibility a connection. It also opens space for a nuanced form of post-colonial cultural politics to enter into the analysis of innovation in Iranian poetry and cinema. As Dabashi writes, it is not accidental that in Iranian creative culture, “the turn has been towards an active re-negotiation of how reality is to be perceived.” He reasons:
“In the absence of any tangible possibility of changing the material condition of that reality, of creating the historical possibilities of a civil society, of parliamentary democracy, of the most rudimentary parameters of liberty, human rights, freedom of the press, of voluntary associations, and the whole apparatus of democratic modernity, what is left is a rhetorical negotiation with reality, so that in art one can begin to dream the forbidden thought, perceive the impossible solution, and thus not only resist the colonially constituted subjectivity but, equally important, subvert the rhetoric of authenticity that animates the traditions that that very modernity has instigated, fabricated, and legitimized.” (“Mohsen Makhmalbaf’s A Moment of Innocence” 120).

Iranian New Wave and art-cinema may be seen by some audiences to present an exoticized vision of contemporary Iranian culture, especially as filmmakers of this tradition tend to portray the everyday lives of Iranians living on the margins of modernity, depicting actual locations and landscapes, while penetrating the poetic depth of the ‘moment’. However, in my analysis, Iranian poetic cinema has opened new artistic space for subverting ‘the rhetoric of authenticity’ that animates traditions. It has done so primarily by extending and building upon the innovation of the New Wave poets.

The New Wave poets, led by Nima, revolutionised a millennium old tradition of classical poetry in Iran, reframing the relationship between language and its surrounding reality. Poets and their audiences were empowered to “turn reality into a linguistically constructed and articulated phenomenon”, and on this basis creative communities contributed to reconstituting a vision of Iran for the modern age, with an open view to the world. (Karimi-Hakkak, Recasting Persian Poetry 245) Iranian New Wave filmmakers, working in affiliation with the New Poets, have helped to intensify the Persian tradition of poetic innovation in dialogue with broader transitions in society and culture, and global movements in art and politics. With the radical departure from classical modes of poetic communication, elements of traditional culture have been opened up to modern practices, with emphasis lying on individual interpretation and invention. Through this process, residues of traditional culture have been brought forward into the age of Modernism.
As shown in Part 3 of this exegesis, My Tehran for Sale, has been designed as a piece of poetic cinema. I have employed a collage-style narrative that breaks the conventional three-act mould and blurs the lines between autobiography, documentary and fiction. I have woven into the stylistic and textual fabric of the film certain techniques and materials that evoke the approaches to poetry and cinema of some of my own influences from Western and Iranian creative cultures, using the film to raise awareness of Iranian art-cinema’s own poetic lineage and my own place within it.

The film borrows from Nima the possibility that traditional subjectivities and cultural materials can be reconstituted for contemporary times through a formal but breakaway and improvisational poetic style. The film takes on Forough Farrokhzad confessional cinematic language, referencing the self while allowing the self to equally become the screen’s apparition. In Maya Deren’s terms, the film is more concerned with the underlying layers of meaning – it’s poetic dimensions – than the narrative surface. It gives primacy to the ‘invisible’, inviting its audiences to participate in veiling and unveiling layers of meaning, as the film oscillates in status between fiction and documentary. All that is left is to explore the ramifications of the moment and allow these to disrupt from the story’s own logical coherence and flow. As Deren states with respect to poetic experience in film, “the chosen moment should be of such significance that one can deduce all history from it” (in ‘Poetry and the Film: A Symposium’ 183).

My aim in this has been to portray the deep contradictions that continue to plague life in Iranian society. My film shows how the Iranian people – and specifically a segment of the urbane youth within Tehran – are struggling to negotiate the same or similar tensions to those which have offered the bases for innovative creative response since the New Poets. Iran is a fast mutating society undertaking a still incomplete project of modernisation. Within that society, resistance to colonially constituted subjectivities is countered by desires to find both new and traditional bases for understanding reality, and its many layers, and for engaging authentically with each other and with others beyond the country’s borders. My Tehran for Sale intervenes in this in ways that are almost counter to each other. On the one hand, it takes the social taboos and extreme measures of control within Iran as the starting point for enriching the poetic aspects of the film, with a recognition that the power and authenticity of poetic cinema is that it is shaped through unconventional modes of
production (in this case a guerrilla style has enabled this filmmaker to explore external vantage points, looking in on Iranian conditions and adding poetic density, without necessarily compromising the intertextual and self-referential relationships to local cultural and artistic traditions). On the other hand, the film benefits from independent support and its status as a transnational co-production to ease movement around common checkpoints enforced by Iranian authorities, to develop a inside-out look at the intricacies, problems, contradictions and beauties of Iranian culture in a form that evades national cinema or genre categories.

This creative research on the function of poetic cinema leaves open space for further investigation into other poetic cinemas in the world. Whether other poetic cinemas share characteristics because they challenge sites of authority and power, or whether their similarities and differences are rooted in local contexts, deep cultures, traditions of poetry and storytelling and modes of imagining, are questions that require further investigation.

I would like to wrap up this with a statement from Mikhail Bakhtin. It reflects, I believe, the hopes and wishes with which many generations of Iranian artists, poets, and filmmakers have been living and working: “Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future” (166).
WORK CONSULTED


FILMOGRAPHY


APPENDICES

The following section contains selected reviews on *My Tehran For Sale* by international film critics through numerous screenings of the film in the film festivals and museums around the world. Also, the film script is included as the final appendix.

SELECTED FILM FESTIVALS:

- **2011**  
  Iranian film festival, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Washington DC, Houston, USA.

- **2010**  
  Fukuoka International Film Festival, Japan.

- **2010**  
  MOMA, NY, USA.

- **2010**  
  The Rotterdam International Film Festival, Holland.

- **2009**  
  Mannheim and Heidelberg International Film Festival, Germany.

- **2009**  
  Vancouver International Film Festival, Canada.

- **2009**  
  Toronto International Film Festival, Canada.

- **2009**  
  Pusan International Film Festivals, Korea.

- **2009**  
  Adelaide Film Festival, Australia.
Appendix A- Screen Daily review
http://www.screendaily.com/5004965.article

My Tehran For Sale
1 July, 2009 | Updated: 2 September, 2009 5:22 pm | By Frank Hatherley

Dir/ Scr: Granaz Moussavi. Aust/ Iran. 2009. 96 mins

Shot undercover in Iran’s teeming capital, this brave low-budget film speaks volumes about the everyday repressions faced by middle-class, literate Iranians — a focus only intensified by the recent presidential election and its continued aftermath of mass protest and state-sanctioned clampdown.
Shot mainly in Farsi with English sub-titles and with key scenes featuring lengthy examples of mimed underground theatre, Iranian poetry readings and protest songs, this film is evidently a festival ticket – bowing at Adelaide and screening at Toronto. Set for local distribution in Australia in November through Cyan, it will have a tough haul in the commercial marketplace, but as a passionate cry for international understanding and a stirring example of hit-and-run moviemaking, it can’t be overlooked.

**Strikingly attractive, if unrelentingly mournful, Marzieh Vafamehr dominates the screen**

Writer-director Granaz Moussavi is an established Iranian poet with several volumes of published verse. Migrating to Australia in 1997 with her family at the age of 22, she went on to graduate in filmmaking and editing. With this debut feature she returns to her native Tehran, employing former friends as lead actors and imbuing her fact-based tale with an angry personal intensity.

Strikingly attractive, if unrelentingly mournful, Marzieh Vafamehr dominates the screen as a dedicated fringe actress (also named Marzieh) who sees a rare opportunity to escape the state’s persecution of her art when she meets Saman (Chegini) at an illegal after-hours disco. He’s a tall, dark Iranian who, through his family’s emigration, now has Australian citizenship.

The disco is raided by an outraged militia: “Do you think this is Europe?” one cries, lashing out. Marzieh and Saman start a relationship, become engaged and she begins the lengthy and often corrupt process of applying for a visa to enter the Australian ‘paradise’ that Saman talks about.

Costs mount; then crushing news arrives that forces her to take
ever more desperate measures. She sells all her possessions, and bids farewell to her colleagues, her coldly unforgiving family and the sprawling, unlovely city that she knows she will sorely miss.

Keeping a low profile during the six-week location shoot was an absolute requirement: director Moussavi and her female cinematographer (Bonnie Elliott) wore headscarves and whole body coverings in the 40+ heat. The authentic handheld digital footage was spirited out of the country on hard discs to be edited in Adelaide with some skill by Bryan Mason. He fractures the narrative, forcing the audience to reconstruct the original sequence of events.

Although there is perhaps too much here of Marzieh gloomily pounding the streets of inner Tehran, there’s also a magical sequence high on a hill overlooking the vast city where she sits with her worried friend Sadaf (Mehrabi) and delivers some heartfelt wails into the gathering dusk.

While *My Tehran For Sale* takes a welcome focus away from poor, working-class Iranians, there’s a serious-minded preciousness about Marzieh’s middle-class arty endeavors that can be hard-going, particularly the Marcel Marceau mimes and the intensely serious poetry readings. And the film’s concluding song, though powerfully delivered, keeps repeating the deadly phrase that is the song’s title: “Neo-Kantian ideology”.

VERDICT: Cry from the heart is a surefire festival favourite
Appendix B - Variety review

http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117940990?refcatid=31

Posted: Tue., Sep. 8, 2009, 10:43pm PT - Toronto

My Tehran For Sale

(Australia)
By RUSSELL EDWARDS

A South Australian Film Corp., Adelaide Film Festival presentation of a Cyan Films production. (International sales: Media Luna, Cologne.) Produced by Julie Ryan, Kate Croser, Granaz Moussavi. Directed, written by Granaz Moussavi.

With: Marzieh Vafamehr, Amir Chegini, Asha Mehrabi, Mobina Karimi.

An Iranian woman seeking artistic and sexual freedom finds her ambitions stymied in Oz-funded, Iran-shot indie "My Tehran for Sale." Featuring superior bilingual perfs, the pic was lensed guerrilla-style in the titular city without knowledge of the Iranian government. It’s an enterprising effort, but its erratic narrative reflects the drawbacks of filming in such uncertain circumstances. Toronto-bound "Tehran" is enjoying a tour of the fest circuit, but commercial prospects are few.

A dance party displays a funky, sexy Iran that will be novel to many. Oppressive fundamentalists shut the festivities down, but luckily, aspiring actress Marzieh (Marzieh Vafamehr) has just hooked up with returning Oz émigré Saman (Amir Chegini), with whom she hides in nearby stables. Enchanted by Saman’s Australian stories and fearing authorities
seeking to quash her artistic freedom, Marzieh plans to leave Iran with him. Naturally, love neither runs smoothly nor is leaving Tehran so simple. Vafamehr is a natural on camera, but the meandering narrative takes its toll; when a cloying niece plays with a video camera for "experimental" visuals, the yarn loses its focus. Lensing is above average for a clandestine operation, as is sound quality.

Camera (color, HD), Bonnie Elliot; editor, Bryan Mason; music, Mohsen Namjou. Reviewed at Intercolour Post House, Lindfield, Sept. 1, 2009. (In Toronto Film Festival -- Discovery; Adelaide Film Festival.) Farsi, English dialogue. Running time: 97 MIN. Contact the variety newsroom at news@variety.com
An artful and poetic film, which is also timely considering the current illegal immigration headlines.

An Iranian-Australian co-production, the film is about the kinds of people who made it - Iranian artists driven underground by a repressive regime. It centres on Marzieh (Marzieh Vafamehr in a haunting performance), a stage actress whose work has been banned. She's found a niche in Tehran's thriving underground arts movement, but it's not nearly enough. She meets Saman (Amir Chegini), an Iranian-Australian, at an illegal rave party. They are outside when the party is raided, and those caught are brutally lashed. Marzieh and Saman then decide to set up house in Adelaide, and Marzieh tries to take the legal route to Australia. But as we soon see in ever-widening glimpses into her future, Marzieh makes it to South Australia but, ironically, has even less freedom than in Tehran. She's in detention, at
Woomera.

This is a timely release, with illegal immigration making headlines the very day that it was reviewed. It hones in on Marzieh, but illuminates the lives of all who cross her path - each offering an aspect of a larger story about Iran.

In her debut as a writer/director, Iranian-Australian poet Granaz Moussavi uses images to tell a story, and dialogue to paint pictures. She finds beauty in the seemingly ordinary, while also taking cinematic advantage of Tehran's amazing cityscape. She doesn't spoon-feed her audience - the way in which the story is constructed, shifting around in time, forces you to fit things together.

The only criticism is that it's sometimes a little too willfully obscure and self consciously “arty” (like in the experimental theatre scenes). That's a minor quibble, however, because this is a nourishing and exceptional film that you'll find yourself recommending.
A glimpse into the everyday life of educated young Iranians.

17 December 2010- By Lynden Barber

A few years ago the animation Persepolis offered an eye-opening look into lives and values of middle-class secular Iranians, showing the common idea of a nation of Islamic fundamentalists to be mistaken.

The live action My Tehran for Sale – which is billed as the first Australian-Iranian feature collaboration – gives a comparable, albeit less dramatic, glimpse into the everyday life of educated young Iranians living under an oppressive regime. Marzieh Vafamehr plays Marzieh, a young actress whose pleasures and freedoms are eeked out illegally, where there is always the possibility of discovery and punishment.

This is a Tehran where satellite TV aerials are confiscated, socially critical plays are performed in underground venues, and those caught enjoying themselves at raves are carted off by the police and whipped. Letting a boyfriend sleep at her flat leads to a neighbor blackmailing Marzieh into providing day care for her young daughter. Marzieh’s lifestyle so offends her parents that they won’t even answer the phone when she rings.

Meeting and becoming engaged to Saman (Amir Chegini) a young Iranian man with Australian citizenship, the clearly unhappy Marzieh starts to see the possibility of a new life – until news arrives that sends her spinning in an unexpected direction.
Writer-director Granaz Moussavi, a female poet who grew up in Iran but now lives in Australia, uses hand-held camera with a restraint that complements her keen eye for visual composition, and employs a non-linear time frame (including flashes forward to an Australian detention centre) with clarity and confidence. Where the film falters is in its lack of narrative drive, leading to flatness around the mid-way point. The film does recover but not quite enough to banish the impression of a drifting accumulation of incidents that might have been strengthened by a greater sense of cause and effect.
Appendix E - A Rosa Jamali’s review

http://thelaststreetoftehran.blogspot.com/

THURSDAY, 24 MARCH 2011

A Moving Picture of Tehran (A review on Granaz Moussavi’s "My Tehran for Sale")

Unlike many other Iranian award-winning movies favoured by the western festivals, exploring either the rural life, ethnic minorities, illiteracy, tribal conflicts or poverty, Granaz Moussavi’s "My Tehran for Sale" is a unique tale revealing all the secrets and mysteries hidden behind the scene and it can be
taken as a genuine and unswerving picture of this tumultuous, contradictory and hectic lifestyle in Tehran conflicting the traditions of the past and the principles imposed by the authorities.

Alienating the cliches of Iranian films, Granaz Moussavi takes the initiative to disclose the dark cryptic undercovered story, eliminating the wrong image and illusions made by other filmmakers shadowing what really exists here. Honestly speaking I have never seen northern Tehran pictured by western news agencies. Life in the northern Tehran is posh, expensive, trendy and full of contradictions. Girls and boys racing cars, underground nightclubs and flashy, heavy make-up worn by young girls,... compared to European standards people sound really loud here!

The image shown so far and the western camera has been accustomed to, no longer exists in the wealthy areas of Tehran where I live!

This courageous movie is opening a path to the reality behind the scene, in a policed society life has been watched under the surveillance camera, your personal phone call has been eavesdropped by the telecommunication centre, your artistic work has been scrutinised and banned, people stalking and spying on one another for the sake of benefit they might take....

Stealthily and sneakily crawling into underground nightclubs, young boys and girls go on dating, experience sex at a very early age, practice whatsoever's been heated and controversial in the west.

The leading actress, Marzieh Vafamehr does quite an impressive job. Irreconcilable with her family traditions, challenging the guidelines dictated by the art and culture ministry, she has been drifted apart from the prevailing lifestyle. She practices performance art, sounds peculiar but been favorite by a group of avant-garde artists though unlicensed and questioned by drama administration in Iran.

But the tragic life of asylum seekers is nothing new. Not a new story, this has been what Iranians made quite a reputation over during this thirty years of Islamic regime.

The sudden rush of immigration, brain drain, the issues over political refugees has done enough harm to the society's welfare.
The film implies the current and contemporary Farsi spoken in the streets of Tehran mainly by the youth, a combination of slangs and colloquial terms defying from the norms taught at schools or advertised on state TV or mass media. Some phrases and words coined and taken from high-tech equipment manuals or cyber terms used on the internet or a jargon jumbled by a salad of English and Persian as Iranian expatriates sometimes talk...

Apart from the music, the soundtrack is a mixture of all possible sounds you might hear in Tehran including religious grieving sounds, the call for praying pronounced by mosques, continuous honking of the horns of cars, people shouting at one another, calling a taxi in the streets...

The landscape shown for several times in the film is the view from the foothills of the Alborz, the mountainous region covering the north country, what you could see from the northern neighborhoods if you turn back...

Despite all these the city looks vigorous, sparkling electric lamps, highrise buildings, lengthy highways shows the contrasts of modern and traditional life.

The film is full of innovative moments, some frames are really gripping, the view of flowerpots overlooks from the top floor of a highrise building paralleled at a time Marzieh feels quite devastated in love, a leaf dropping into the gutters while trekking in northern alleys of Tehran, the symbolic lantern which starts the film, street market with all its attractions and Marzieh’s trekking on Tehran’s night at the end.

Acting's quite dynamic and dramatic, a good choice of cast while Marzieh's low-pitched voice and pale complexion is interacted with Niloofar's vivacious laughter and sunny face.

The story is told through a patchwork, dialogues follow a certain rhythm, the settings are in harmony with the language used through the film, costumes, acting, accessories are all employed with one accord.
APPENDIX F: My Tehran For Sale script – Final Draft

MY TEHRAN FOR SALE

Screenplay by
Granaz Moussavi

(All dialogue in Persian unless indicated.)

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Developed with the assistance of the
South Australian Film Corporation
SCENE 1 - INT - GUARD HOUSE - RIDING CLUB- NIGHT

The outskirts of Tehran. In a poor shack behind a horse riding club, an Afghan family who guard the riding club are playing traditional musical instruments and singing folk songs, having fun as the camera pans from a lantern to their faces and instruments. Off-screen, loud contemporary dance music can be heard from afar.

SCENE 2 - INT - WAREHOUSE - RIDING CLUB- NIGHT

Inside a huge rectangular building used for horseback riding, huge fans hang off the ceiling and big piles of coats line the walls. The warehouse is lit by colourful fancy lights. An underground rave is at its peak with smoke machines pouring out thick coloured smoke. There is a huge bar at the back of the building where alcoholic drinks are being served. There is a D.J. with a full array of equipment in a corner. Loud music fills the scene. About 150 young, urban-looking people party and scream with joy as each new music track kicks in.

Among the revelers are Saman (early 30s), Marzieh (30) and Sadaf (35), all dressed in fashionable clothes. Sadaf and Marzieh are chatting and checking out the men around them as they dance. They notice Saman looking at them and smiling. They smile back. Sadaf whispers in Marzieh’s ear. They both laugh.

Marzieh approaches Saman. Marzieh and Saman dance together amongst the others in the party. Other young men and women in the crowd around them are drinking, flirting, and dancing.

Marzieh and Saman are now dancing together. Sadaf talks and laughs with another man in the other side of the party scene. Saman and Marzieh get closer then disappear from view as they are enveloped in the thick smoke coming out of the smoke machine.

The crowd continues partying.
Outside the warehouse there is an outdoor manege lined with cedar trees. There are about twenty horses in the field under the moonlight. They seem unsettled by the music. Behind the trees are stables. The faint sound of the Afghan music can be heard coming from the guard house at the other end of the yard.

Marzieh and Saman come out of the warehouse. They smoke next to the manege and horses. He leads her towards one of the stables.

The horses shift uncomfortably in the open air in the middle of the night. The music beats change again inside the warehouse.

The Afghan guards are absorbed in their music, playing and singing.

In the outdoor manege, two horses rub their necks against one another. In the background, the loud sound of party music.
SCENE 6 - INT - STABLE - NIGHT

Saman and Marzieh are having intimate moments inside the stable as they are lying on their backs.

SAMAN

Look at me.

Marzieh rolls towards him.

SCENE 7 - INT - WAREHOUSE - RIDING CLUB - NIGHT

The party goes on. Men and woman, including Sadaf, dance to the beats.

SCENE 8 - INT - GUARD HOUSE - NIGHT

The Afghan family is playing and singing to the music. Suddenly the door is kicked open. Two plain clothes bearded officers barge in pointing guns at the Afghans. Terrified, they stop the music.

OFFICER 1

What's going on here?

The Afghan family are scared. They stop playing the music. The guard puts his instrument down.
AFGHAN GUARD

Oh god, what is going on?

OFFICER 1

Pick up all your gear!

The Officers come towards the family. Officer 2 pulls the Afghan man by his neck and makes him stand up.

AFGHAN GUARD

I haven't done anything wrong, sir.
I'm nobody here. I'm only a guard and I mind the gate.

OFFICER 2

Show me your ID.

AFGHAN GUARD

I've lost my card.

OFFICER 2

They're illegals from Afghanistan.
Put them in the bus.

Officer 2 pushes the Afghan Guard towards the door.

Officer 1 approaches the Afghan boy and the two girls.
OFFICER 1

How old are you?

AFGHAN BOY

18.

Officer 1 pushes the boy and the girls out.

OFFICER 1

You're lying. Fuck off! Out!

SCENE 9 - INT - STABLE - NIGHT

Inside the stable, Saman is picking pieces of hay off Marzieh's hair. Suddenly, in the distance, there is a sound of a gate being opened.

MARZIEH

What was that?

SAMAN

Nothing. Just the horses.

Marzieh stares at the ceiling.
SCENE 10 - EXT - OUTDOOR MANEGE - NIGHT

The Officers push the Afghans towards the bus and get other officers to run with them towards the big party.

OFFICER 1

We'll see about that later.
Run, go on. Get them all in the bus.
The rest of you come with me.

SCENE 11 - INT - WAREHOUSE - THE RIDING CLUB - NIGHT

The Officers enter the warehouse rave and attack the women and the men in the party.

OFFICERS

Turn that off!

The music is stopped, the party is over.

SCENE 12 - INT - STABLE - NIGHT

Marzieh and Saman hear the noises and interruptions from the warehouse party raid. They roll over towards the stable door and try to look outside through the gap in the door.

SAMAN

What's happened?
MARZIEH

Shhh...!

SCENE 13 - INT - WAREHOUSE - THE RIDING CLUB - NIGHT 13

In the chaos of the raid, some people try to hide and run.

OFFICER 1

Shame on you!

SCENE 14 - INT - STABLE - NIGHT 14

Marzieh and Saman are looking out through the gap in the door. Marzieh has realised the danger.

MARZIEH

Let's hide behind the haystacks.

They both roll and jump behind the haystack in the back of the stable.
Officers attack people in the party. They divide them up, with men on one side of the building, and women on the other side.

OFFICER 1

Do you think this is Europe?

People scream in fear.

Women, Sadaf among them, rush towards a rack covered with their scarves and long jackets, and pull out their clothing, trying to get covered and scarved. Some are crying with fear. Sadaf films the scene with her mobile phone.

OFFICER 1

Men and women apart.

(to the women)

Put on your scarf!

(to the men)

Fuck off to the other side!

(to the men jamming in a corner)

Like a bunch of animals!

OFFICER 3

(to the women)

Shut up!

ANOTHER OFFICER (V/O)

Make yourself decent!
An officer spots Sadaf filming on her mobile phone.

OFFICER 1

Turn that off, get the fuck out!

Men and women run towards the gate as they are pushed and attacked by the officers. They scream in fear.

SCENE 16 – INT – STABLE – NIGHT

Marzieh and Saman are looking out through the gap underneath the stable door. They hear the sounds of men and women being pushed towards the bus.

OFFICER (V/O)

Hurry up. Move it!

Get in the bus. Move it!

Marzieh and Saman can see the feet of the party people being pushed towards the bus.

Marzieh and Saman look at each other in fear as they are hidden behind the haystack.

At the far end, behind the gates, the last group of people is forced into the buses. One of the Islamic policemen closes the gate.

The sound of the buses starting up can be heard.
MARZIEH (V/O)

I just happened to be there that night. I didn't know anyone except Sadaf and Saman.

SCENE 17 - INT - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Marzieh is sitting behind a desk and is being interviewed by an Australian Officer. Marzieh speaks in Persian and looks to the Interpreter for the translation of her words to the Interviewer.

SCENE 18 - EXT - TEHRAN HIGHWAY - DAY

A car is chasing another.

Inside the second card, Marzieh and Sadaf are chatting and listening to music.

The boys in the first car are trying to chat with the girls in the other car.

BOY 1

(shouting from the first car)

Excuse us ladies.

Marzieh notices them.
MARZIEH
(to Sadaf)
Check them out!

BOY 1
Are you after some handsome husbands?
with after sales service.

BOY 2
And a one year guarantee.

SADAF
Want to race them?

MARZIEH
Yeah.

The cars take off, racing each other down the freeway.

Sadaf leaves them behind and goes in another direction.

MARZIEH
What's with you? Slow down!

SADAF
I can see that you're freaked out.

(pause)
Wait until two nights from now!

MARZIEH

What's happening in two nights?

SADAF

I'm going to show you someone. He's just your type. Just flirt with him and you'll be on.

MARZIEH

Here we go again! Another jerk You've found for me.

SADAF

Beg your pardon, he's a foreign citizen!

MARZIEH

Citizen of which hellhole?

SADAF

Watch it, he might be your lucky ticket. He's cool.

Marzieh smiles at Sadaf.
The horses are in the manege going around in distress.

In the warehouse, party lights are flashing on and off. The riding club is quiet except for noises of the horses.

Marzieh and Saman roll towards the door gap and look outside to check if the invasion is over.

SAMAN

I think they're gone.

MARZIEH

Are you sure? Wait.

Saman gets up and opens the door.

Marzieh follows him.

MARZIEH (V/O)

We had no idea what had happened.

Marzieh is being questioned by the Australian Interviewer. Behind her is a map of Australia.
MARZIEH
(in broken English)
It was terrible. They took everybody.
They broken everything.
They took everybody and brought with bus.

INTERVIEWER (V/O)
(in English)
I think you said something different last time.
I think you said that only you could hear them.

Marzieh looks stressed. She doesn't understand and looks to the Interpreter for help.

MARZIEH
What's he saying?

INTERPRETER (V/O)
That you're saying something different.
Be careful what you say.

Marzieh gets even more distressed.

MARZIEH
(in broken English)
No! I told..., me and Saman was in...
(towards the Interpreter)

(in Persian)

... stable?

INTERPRETER (V/O)

(in English)

She says it was only her and Saman in the stable.

SCENE 22 - EXT - OUTDOOR MANEGE - DAWN

Marzieh and Saman come out of the stable and walk towards the warehouse.

SCENE 23 - INT - WAREHOUSE - RIDING CLUB - DAWN

Marzieh and Saman walk inside the warehouse. The place is empty except for the remains of the party scattered everywhere. It's a mess. Pieces of clothing, bottles, glass and masks are strewn over the floor.

Marzieh notices Sadaf's mobile phone and picks it up.

MARZIEH

Oh poor Sadaf. Her mobile phone.

Marzieh finds a Chador covered by dust on the floor. She shakes the hay off it and puts it on. They leave the warehouse.
MARZIEH (V/O)

I can't remember exactly if we were in the rave
or the stable when they invaded.

SCENE 24 - INT - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Mobile phone images of the invasion.

MARZIEH (V/O)

I can't remember.

INTERPRETER (V/O)

(in English)

She's confused. She can't remember
if they were in the stable or in the party.

INTERVIEWER (V/O)

(in English)

So in fact you were not hurt then?

Marzieh looks worried and misunderstood. She stares at the Interviewer.
SCENE 25 - INT - LASHING HALL - UNKNOWN TIME

Some of the party guests including Sadaf, Marzieh and Saman are lining up, sitting on chairs in a hall. The sound of lashing and a woman's screams can be heard while the camera pans across the party guests' faces. At the end of the line, in a doorway, a big unshaved man appears. He looks at the people waiting and asks for the next person.

BIG UNSHAVED MAN

Next!

A Longhaired Boy stands up and follows the Man towards the lashing room. A Woman in a Chador is taking notes in the corridor.

The camera pans back along the line and in the places next to Sadaf, there are two different people. The sound of lashing continues.

SCENE 26 - EXT - OUTDOOR MANEGE - DAY

Marzieh and Saman leave the riding club. The horses walk around undisturbed.

SCENE 27 - EXT - OUTSKIRTS OF TEHRAN - DAY

Marzieh, covered in the Chador, walks next to Saman through the fields.
SAMAN
What will they do with the people they caught?

MARZIEH
When did you say you came back to Iran?

SAMAN
Two months ago.

MARZIEH
You're in Australia? Sydney?

SAMAN
No. Adelaide.

MARZIEH
The rich ones will buy their way out and the others get punished.

SAMAN
Which group does Sadaf belong to?

MARZIEH
Sadaf is a psychologist. She has enough money for the fine. But because it's her second time, I'm worried about what they'll do to her.
SAMAN

Funny. I thought things had changed after all this time.

Marzieh struggles to keep up with Saman across the uneven fields.

MARZIEH

My feet! My shoes are killing me.

Saman offers a helping hand.

SAMAN

Come this way.

They walk on a rural side road towards the highway.

MARZIEH

I can't walk any more.

SCENE 28 - EXT - THE HIGHWAY - DAWN

Marzieh and Saman are hitchhiking by the side of the highway. A car stops and they get in. Tehran can be seen in the background.
The sound of the invasion fades in over the image.

SCENE 29 - INT - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Mobile phone images of the invasion.

The Interviewer is looking at the mobile phone in disbelief. He turns the mobile video off.

INTERVIEWER

(in English)

Did you take this footage yourself?

The Interpreter translates.

MARZIEH

(in English)

Yes!

INTERVIEWER

(in English)

How can I even tell what this is? I mean, You Tube is full of this sort of stuff. Are you even in this footage?
The Interpreter tries to interpret but Marzieh interrupts and silences him.

MARZIEH

I understood.

SCENE 30 - EXT - STREETS OF TEHRAN - DAY

Images of Tehran streets. Traffic. Pedestrians come and go and cross the road.

SAMAN (V/O)

Thanks for showing me around Tehran.
I had no idea how big it was.

MARZIEH (V/O)

My pleasure. Where have you been all this time?

Images of corn kebabs being cooked by a roadside vendor.

MARZIEH (V/O)

Back when I went to school you never saw any of these colourful schoolgirls.
We couldn't wear white socks,
let alone hi-top sneakers and colourful backpacks.
The corn boy puts the done corn kebabs into a saltwater jar and serves them.

SAMAN

What a corn kebab!

MARZIEH

Oh, it’s burnt.

SAMAN

(to the corn boy)

Thanks.

They pay for the corn and start eating them as they walk down the steep stairs and chat.

MARZIEH

During the war, there wasn’t a bird to be seen in the sky over this town. During the bomb raids, it was like a ghost town. And the world watched in silence.

Where were you back then? You overseas people, it’s like no matter how many years pass, time doesn't affect you.

SAMAN

You mean you’re older and I'm still young?
MARZIEH

Maybe. Doesn’t it look like it?

They approach Zahirodoleh - A cemetery where the past generation of artists, singers and political activists are buried.

Marzieh and Saman approach the closed Persian style decorated gate of the cemetery.

SAMAN

Wow, this place has a cool door.

MARZIEH

This is Zahirodoleh cemetery.

During uni I used to come here and knock for ages and no one would open the door.

Forough is here: "Remember flight, the bird is mortal." Also Ghamar and Iraj Mirza.

Marzieh starts singing a song of Ghamar's about Iraj Mirza, the poet of 100 years ago.

SAMNA (jokingly)

You're quite an antique.

MARZIEH (jokingly)

Go away, foreigner.
They tap on the door but no one comes to the door.

MARZIEH
Let's see if they open the door.

Nobody opens the door.

MARZIEH
Do you know Forough and Ghamar?

SAMAN
Yeah, my mum's a big fan.

They keep on tapping until they're tired.

MARZIEH
No way they're going to open. Anyway, I just wanted to show it to you.

They look at each other and leave.

SCENE 31 - INT - INSIDE A TRUCK - UNKNOWN TIME

Marzieh, sad and distressed, sits in the dark, amongst boxes and the sounds of a moving truck.
A few kids are painting and playing. The younger one cries and goes to her Mum. Her Mum's voice can be heard off-screen as she's chatting to another detainee woman.

WOMAN 1 (V/O)
What happened to your lawyer?

WOMAN 2 (V/O)
Nothing. I kept going back and never got an answer.

WOMAN 1 (V/O)
They just think of themselves.

The child goes to Woman 2, her Mum.

WOMAN 2
What happened?
(to the other kids who are complaining)
Did you fight with her? Go sit down.

WOMAN 1
Leave her alone. Let her play.

Marzieh in the background is lying on her back on a bed reading a Sylvia Plath poetry book. The door opens and a serious looking Official is at the door calling a number.
The women go quiet. They look at each other and then to Marzieh.

Marzieh smiles at them, takes her folder and scarf, waves a little hand to the women and goes to the door where the Official is waiting for her.

The Official closes the door and walks Marzieh through the corridors of the Detention Centre.

SCENE 33 - EXT - STREET OF NORTH TEHRAN - DAY

A leafy street of North Tehran. Marzieh and Saman are walking along the street.

SAMAN
This is so pretty. I've never been around here.

MARZIEH
I told you. You hang with me and I'll show you some things.

SAMAN
Very cool.

Marzieh notices a public pay phone.
MARZIEH
Can you wait while I make a phone call?

SAMAN
Why not use your mobile?

MARZIEH
I want to call my parents.
If they see my number they won't pick up.

SAMAN
Okay.

Marzieh goes inside the phone booth and dials a number.

MARZIEH
Hello? HI, Mum. Mum?

Her Mum hangs up on her.

MARZIEH
(to the phone receiver)
Why do you hang up?

She dials the number again, disappointed.
Saman leaves her to her privacy and finds a set of apartment stairs to sit on. He's in the background as Marzieh talks to Masumeh, her sister, over the phone.

MARZIEH
Hello? Hi Masumeh. How are you?
Don't you hang up. How are you?
Is Mum well? What about Dad?
I'm missing you guys a lot.
Come and visit me for once.

Saman is smoking a cigarette and exchanging looks with an Old Man sitting across the road. He looks around him, to a little boy playing on the other side, and to the running water in the gutter. The Old Man smiles at him. He puts on his sunglasses.

Marzieh is still talking on the phone.

MARZIEH
I love you. Listen, take care.
Be around this time tomorrow.
Okay, go now, go.

She hangs up and goes towards Saman.

SAMAN
What happened?

MARZIEH
Nothing. My father's afraid
Any hint of me would cast a shadow over my sister's decency.

SAMAN

Look, I don't want to make you uncomfortable,
But we can talk if you want to.

They walk away, side by side.

SCENE 34 - INT - AUST. DETENTION CENTRE - DAY

The Official walks Marzieh through corridors, and towards a door. He opens the door. Inside the Interviewer and the Interpreter are awaiting her.

INTERVIEWER

(in English)
Come in, take a seat.

MARZIEH

(in English)
Hello.
Inside Marzieh's bedroom, it's messy, with their books and clothes everywhere. Marzieh's bras are here and there. Saman's pants and shoes are next to the bed and Marzieh's clothes.

On the bed their feet can be seen. Their voices are heard chatting off-screen.

SAMAN (V/O)
Marzieh, are you awake, baby?

MARZIEH (V/O)
No.

SAMAN (V/O)
Where are you?

MARZIEH (V/O)
Australia.

SAMAN (V/O)
So you dreamt you'd be my wife?

Marzieh kicks Saman's foot on the bed.

MARZIEH (V/O)
Shut up! Who asked you to come to bed with me anyway? Fly off.
SAMAN (V/O)
(playfully - in English)
Don't fucking kick me!

(in Persian)
I might just really fly off, Marzieh.

MARZIEH (V/O)
Then fly.

SAMAN (V/O)
I'll really fly away from your hands.

Marzieh's kicking foot rests for a moment.

MARZIEH (V/O)
No. Wait for me.

SAMAN (V/O)
And then what?

MARZIEH (V/O)
We might fly off together.

SAMAN (V/O)
Perhaps we'll fly off together.
MARZIEH (V/O)

Perhaps?

Marzieh starts a role play, as if she's calling Emergency (911) for help.

MARZIEH (V/O)

Hello? 911? There's a guy here, and he's saying "perhaps".

SAMAN (V/O)

(amused)

Are you calling 911?

The doorbell rings once, then twice.

Marzieh and Saman are silenced. Marzieh pulls the bed sheet off her head and gets up. Saman is seen in the bed behind her.

Marzieh wraps herself in a bedspread and Saman sits up in bed.

Marzieh comes down the stairs.

SCENE 36 - INT - MARZIEH'S APARTMENT - DAY

Marzieh opens the door.

Shadi, her neighbour, and Niloufar, Shadi’s daughter, are at the door.
SHADI
Hello, love. I'm so sorry I woke you up.

NILOUFAR
Hello Auntie.

MARZIEH
Hello Nilou. I was getting up anyway.
Do you need me to mind Nilou?

SHADI
No, don't worry. I'm leaving her with apartment 410.
I've just got this material for upstairs.
Sew them quickly. They have a wedding.
I have to go to court.

MARZIEH
How long will you keep doing this? Just tell
your shit-arse husband he can't raise children.

SHADI
These courts are absolute hell.
By the way, your landlord was here yesterday when
you were out asking who comes and goes here.
Just get married and be done with it.
So you don't give this guy an excuse to raise the
rent.
Marzieh looks upset.

SHADI
And make sure you're entitled in case of divorce.
And include 1000 gold coins as well.

MARZIEH
(smiles)
Oh lord, you want to marry me off too?
Am I a burden to you as well?

SHADI
By the way, how is Sadaf?

MARZIEH
She took it. 35 times.

SHADI
A lashed psychologist? Is she still consulting?
I'm late, I have to go. Take care of yourself.
See you later.

They say goodbye and leave. Marzieh closes the door and goes away with the material.
Marzieh is sewing.

Marzieh is in the darkness, sleeping light, leaning her head on her arm, amongst the boxes.

Marzieh and Saman are walking along the street. Marzieh is rushing. She's late for a rehearsal.

MARZIEH

Oh, I'm late... oh, I'm late...

SAMAN

Wait for me. You sound like a broken record.

MARZIEH

Okay, we're here.

SAMAN

Is this it?
Marzieh presses the intercom button.

INTERCOM VOICE (V/O)

Who is it?

MARZIEH

Marzieh.

(to Saman)

This is the genie's castle.

The door opens.

SAMAN

Yeah, it looks like it… So, I'm going to go home.

Take care.

They blow kisses. Marzieh goes inside. Saman walks away.

SCENE 40 – INT – UNDERGROUND THEATRE – DAY 40

Montage images of an abstract drama piece which contains a mood and motif of betrayal, punishment, torture and death. Marzieh joins the rehearsal half way. The images of actors eventually reach out their hands towards a window frame hung on the wall.
An unruly crowd of men and women are waiting in front of the iron gate of the Australian Embassy in Tehran. The crowd moves towards it, slowly and calmly at first, but soon they start pushing and shoving, jockeying for a better position near the intercom in order to plead their case. Many voices cry out at once, each in an attempt to drown out others.

From within the crowd, a woman is being nosy, asking others questions about their cases.

NOSY WOMAN

Excuse me, sir. what's your case?

OLD MAN

It's medical.

NOSY WOMAN

They process medical cases real easy.

The man doesn't continue the conversation. The woman finds herself other people to ask questions to.

NOSY WOMAN

I'm guessing your case is study-related?

SNOB WOMAN

No, it's spouse-related immigration.
GREEN SCARF GIRL
Lucky you! Marriage is the best ticket out of here.

NOSY WOMAN
My sister lives in Perth. She says that life is easy there.

On the other side of the crowd, next to the intercom, a few men and women are chatting about their cases.

MAN 1
I've had enough! They don't care about wasting our time until something gets done.

MAN 2
I hear you! I'm embarrassed to take more time off work for this.

WOMAN 3
I've spent 2 years in and out of here. My whole life is up for sale. I don't know what's going to happen.

MAN 2
Don't worry. It will get better before it gets worse.
WOMAN 3

God willing.

THE BULKY MAN

How long have you been coming here?

MAN 2

A year.

THE BULKY MAN

A year? It's my first day. What am I in for?

MAN 2

You'll be doing this for a long time.

WOMAN 3

And running a lot.

MAN 1

Just don't do anything without a consultant.

THE BULKY MAN

All they do is take your money.

MAN 2

Don't waste your money.
All you have to do is find someone to create a history for you.
THE BULKY MAN

A history?

MAN 2

A work history.

The intercom calls three names.

The crowd listens carefully. A few people approach the door and go in. Others who were not called start complaining.

INTERCOM

Vehedi, Ehsani, Niknam. The rest of you stay in line and be orderly.

A man wants to go in but the Bulky Man tries to stop him thinking he's jumping the queue.

THE BULKY MAN

Hold on there! You just got here.

MAN IN WHITE

Sorry but they called my name.
I've been through what you've been through.

A few people excuse themselves and find their way through the crowd to the Embassy gate and go in.

Two hand seller boys approach the crowd. One sells fortune cards and the other sells chewing gum. They try to convince people to buy from them.
FORTUNE BOY

Want to buy a fortune card Mister?

On the other side of the crowd, the Nosy Woman is still asking questions from people around her.'

NOSY WOMAN

Which city do you want to go to?

SNOB WOMAN

Sydney.

NOSY WOMAN

Gee! What about all the crowds and the inflation?

SNOB WOMAN

I don't have to do a thing.
The guy taking me is organising everything.

NOSY WOMAN

What about you?

WOMAN IN GREEN SCARF

Sydney too. I'm going there for study. But I don't know the language well.
NOSY WOMAN

Don't worry, just go and all will be fine.

(to the Woman in Pink)

How about you? What's your case?

WOMAN IN PINK

Work and holiday.

NOSY WOMAN

Wow! One of those internet weddings?

WOMAN IN PINK

No, it's a totally different thing.

NOSY WOMAN

Everyone goes there and says that.

Behind the women a Man with Moustache is talking to people and hands out his business card.

MAN WITH MOUSTACHE

But there are conditions involved which are up to us. Otherwise the answer would be no.

Marzieh and Saman approach the crowd and go straight to the gate. People start complaining.

Saman

Excuse me. One moment please.
THE BULKY MAN

Hey, there's a line!

Saman doesn't pay attention. He pushes the button on the intercom and holds his Australian passport up to the intercom camera.

SAMAN

(in English)
Open the gate please, I'm an Australian citizen.

The door opens, Saman turns to Marzieh.

SAMAN

Wait for me here. I'll be back in five minutes.

Saman goes through the gate.

People around Marzieh, including the Nosy Woman, start asking questions and eyeing her up to find out more about her and their case.

THE BULKY MAN

I think he works for the embassy.

MAN 2

He was an Australian citizen.

THE BULKY MAN

Does he work for the embassy?
On the other side, the Man with a Moustache is talking to a young man.

**MAN WITH A MOUSTACHE**
They're wasting their time. They'll end up coming to me anyhow. Here, take my card.

Back where Marzieh is standing, the Nosy Woman starts asking questions.

**NOSY WOMAN**
Is he your husband?

**MARZIEH**
Sort of.

**NOSY WOMAN**
Is he a citizen?

**MARZIEH**
Yes.

**SNOB WOMAN (V/O)**
She's a spouse case too.

**WOMAN IN GREEN**
Where are you going?
MARZIEH

Adelaide.

WOMAN IN GREEN

Oh, that's a tiny city.

Suddenly, the Fortune Boy jumps up and starts insisting on sales. He starts with the Woman in Pink.

FORTUNE BOY

Do you want one? God willing, you'll get a green card.

WOMAN IN PINK

Green card? This is the Australian embassy.

FORTUNE BOY

Please buy one!

WOMAN IN PINK

Fine.

The Woman in Pink takes a card and starts reading it. Then the Fortune Boy goes to Marzieh.

FORTUNE BOY

Don't you want one lady?
MARZIEH

I do.

Marzieh picks a card.

MARZIEH

I want... to get a visa.

The Chewing Gum seller calls out for buyers.

CHEWING GUM BOY

Chewing gum! Banana and strawberry flavors! Please buy one. Banana or strawberry flavor.

The Man with a Moustache hands out his business card to the women.

MAN WITH A MOUSTACHE

Excuse me. Hi. Sorry to bother you. Here's my card. If you have any visa or immigration issues, call me. I'm based around here. I'm at your service.

(approaching the group of men)

Hello. Godspeed. Call me if you need anything.

Marzieh and others take his cards. Meanwhile, Saman comes out smiling.

MARZIEH

What happened?
SAMAN

Let's go. I'll tell you later.

People at the Embassy look at them in envy and wish them luck as they leave.

NOSY WOMAN

All the best. Have a nice trip.

MEN (V/O)

Lucky them! They're all sorted. Very easy. They just came, got their visa and left. I wish I was that lucky.

Marzieh and Saman happily walk away.

On the main road they catch a cab. Tehran is busy and crowded in the background.

SCENE 42 - INT/EXT - TAXI - DAY

Marzieh and Saman are in the back of the taxi and look at each other affectionately and smile.

A Woman waiting on the pavement calls for a taxi.
WOMAN WAITING

Freedom Street?

The Taxi Driver checks with Saman to see if he should pick up other passengers or make it a private fare.

TAXI DRIVER

Is this a private fare for you?

SAMAN

Yes, make it private.

A Bearded Man suddenly approaches the taxi and calls out.

BEARDED MAN

Do you go to Revolution Square?

TAXI DRIVER

No, sorry.

Marzieh and Saman quickly move away from each other and sit in their seats properly. Marzieh pulls her scarf forward. She's obviously scared.

After they've passed the Bearded Man on the street, they get close to each other again. Saman notices that she's scared and tries to comfort her. The Taxi Driver is checking them out in the rearview mirror.
TAXI DRIVER
I know who to take and who not to take. My hair has gone white for a reason.

SAMAN
Yes, it's obvious.

Marzieh takes a pill.

TAXI DRIVER
I've been doing this all my life.

Saman tries to comfort Marzieh.

SAMAN
Are you alright?

MARZIEH
That guy gave me a fright.

SAMAN
Why are you so cold in this heat? Do you want to go to the doctor?

MARZIEH
No, I have to get to rehearsal.
SAMAN
You sure you can rehearse in this shape?

Marzieh smiles.

MARZIEH
It will make me feel better if I do.

Saman smiles back.

SAMAN
That's great.

Marzieh looks outside through the car window. Images of Tehran streets and buildings.

SAMAN
Anywhere here is good, sir.

The Taxi Driver looks at them in the rearview mirror. He pulls over and stops. Marzieh gets out and goes to the rehearsal.

SAMAN
Take care of yourself.

They affectionately look at each other and say goodbye.
Marzieh presses the intercom button.

INTERCOM (V/O)
Who is it?

MARZIEH
Marzieh.

INTERCOM (V/O)
Finally you're here.

Marzieh goes in.

Marzieh walks down the stairs. She looks excited to be in the theatre. She enters the make-up room, sits down, takes her scarf off and starts doing her make-up.

An establishing shot of Marzieh's apartment block, next to the airport. An airplane takes off.
Saman is talking to his Mum in Australia on the phone in a mixture of English and Persian.

Saman

Please stop worrying, Mum.
What crime? I'm not a child.
For God's sake Mum, don't start again. You've just finished work, you're tired and you'll upset me too.

Marzieh opens the door and enters the apartment.

Saman sees her and looking affectionately, welcomes her home. They exchange looks.

Marzieh takes her Manteau off in front of the mirror. Saman continues to talk on the phone.

Saman

Like I said, things are different here. Everyone around me is on the level. I don't have problems with anyone. Rest assured.

Marzieh goes over to Saman and whispers in his ear.

Marzieh

Remember you're invited tonight.
Saman nods and continues talking.

**SAMAN**

Mum, you've got to see my fiancée.

She's so cute. You'll fall in love with her the moment you see her. I told you. She's an actress...

No, she's not famous...

Marzieh notices the comment and is disappointed. She goes into the kitchen. She takes a pill and smokes a cigarette and continues to listen to Saman talking.

**SAMAN (V/O)**

Jesus Christ, Mum, she's different to all the others. She's a beautiful girl. An artist and really intelligent. Yeah. I've moved in with her... don't worry Mum. We've talked about it. We'll come over there, work together and make a life. Whatever you say. We'll get married too... Mum, can you trust me for once?

Okay... Can you do something for me? Can you call my brother? Tell him I'm coming over and will pay him back his money... Mum, you know I'm embarrassed to call him.

Marzieh comes out of the kitchen towards the living room where Saman is. She signals to Saman, asking him if he's using a telephone card. Saman signals no. Disappointed, Marzieh goes upstairs. Saman remains on the phone and looks stressed.
SAMAN
This place is made of money.
It's real easy to make money.
I have plans...Yes, I'm coming to pay off my debts.
Mum, I don't have a phone card. I'm on the
landline. I've got to go. Can we talk later?
I love you too...take care.
Bye.

Saman hangs up.

SAMAN
(to himself, in English)
Fuck.

Saman yells out to Marzieh who is now upstairs.

SAMAN
Where did you say we're going tonight?

MARZIEH (V/O)
One of Sadaf's friends.

SAMAN
(sarcastically)
Yeah, sure. Dinner and lashings will be served.
SCENE 47 - EXT - TEHRAN - NIGHT

Tehran buildings at night.

SCENE 48 - INT - HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

A group of fifteen to twenty men and women in their 20s and 30s are sitting around a modern apartment. The door opens and Marzieh and Saman come in. Sadaf welcomes them at the door and introduces them to her friends.

SADAF

Late as usual, huh?
Hasti, this is the friend I was telling you about.
She's a fashion designer and an actress. And this is her boyfriend Saman.

They exchange greetings and find seats near Sadaf. Marzieh takes off her scarf. People are chatting, smoking and drinking.

Marzieh starts a conversation with Hasti.

SAMAN

I'll go sit over there.

MARZIEH

(to Hasti)

This heat is killing me.
HASTI
Have I seen your work in cinema or television?

MARZIEH
Television? God forbid. You don't see my work here. Lucky you.

SADAF
Just help yourselves, guys. Things you like are here and the things you like best are over there.

SAMAN
(to Sadaf)
How are you? I see you like purple now.

SADAF
I always liked purple. You want something?

SAMAN
Just cigarettes and a drink.

SADAF
Nima, bring a beverage for Saman.

(to Marzieh)
So how's things? You want something?

Marzieh has helped herself and is already drinking.
MARZIEH

Don’t worry about me.

SADAF

Yeah, I can see.

The party goes on with live music, a guitarist and singers. People smoke joints and drink and chat.

Saman joins a group smoking joints.

SAMAN

What are you up to? You're having joints? Awesome.

I'm in. Can I sit here? Thanks.

Let's see it. Pass it here.

Saman starts smoking the little pipe.

People are partying. Marzieh looks for Saman and appears tipsy and stoned.

SCENE 49 - INT - HOUSE PARTY - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Marzieh finds Saman in a bedroom, sitting by himself, smoking a cigarette.

She puts a pillow under Saman's head.
MARZIEH
You must be uncomfortable. Lift your head up. Are you alive?

SAMAN
I'm alive and how.

MARZIEH
So what kind of place is Australia? Can you perform there and does it get recognized?

SAMAN
Australia? Australia is very cool.
Full of beaches and oceans.
Full of trees and forests.
Green grass. Light...colourful clothes. Australia is like paradise. A paradise made of coloured paper.

SCENE 50 - INT - HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

Outside the bedroom people are singing along with the guitarist.

SCENE 51 - INT - HOUSE PARTY - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Back in the bedroom Saman continues his story.
Back then, for a 14-year-old boy like me, at first it was really cool.

You get on the plane. And you fly for 17, 18 hours. You cross seas. Oceans. You arrive in a big city full of light. Just like a fairytale. A city that's very different to yours. When you get off the plane, light and colour hit you in the face, as if your E has just come on. But a couple of weeks later, the effect is gone. And you start to wonder... who are these people, what is this place? You don't know what they're saying, what they want. You don't know their language. You've left your school, your schoolmates. Friends and neighbors. Your family. You've left your father.

When we were going, my father wasn't allowed out of the country. He was going to get his stuff sorted and come over as well. But there was no news of him. We didn't know what happened to him. No trace of what they did to him. Mom went to Iran to search for him a couple of times. But no luck.

When she returned she had to work all the time,
morning and night. My brother and I had to go to school alone and come back home alone. I left school and went to work. You open your eyes and see that... you've forgotten what you wanted to do when you grew up. You forget what you were after in life.

SCENE 52 - INT - HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

Back at the party, a Poet is reading one of her poems to the guests.

POET

Search my bag, what's the point?
My sigh that has forever heard
'Halt' lies in hiding, in the bottom of my pocket.
Let go of me!
You know that I will sleep with the raspberry bush
And not regret.
Why always set your sights on the woman
Who sponges up her broken pieces
And pins her heart to her sleeve?
There is nothing in my baggage
Except innocent locks of hair.
Let me go!
Back in the bedroom, Saman continues his story. Marzieh takes a cigarette and lights it up for him.

**SAMAN**

In the end I don't know what happened. All the money I'd earnt and everything I'd borrowed from my brother was lost in a single night at the casino. I didn't have the nerve to go back. I am only telling you this because I have taken an E. Don't hold it against me tomorrow.

**MARZIEH**

Let's see what happens tomorrow. So what happened then?

Saman takes a puff and continues.

**SAMAN**

The whole world had crashed in on me. I didn't know what to do. Kids who came back from Iran said how easy it was to make money here. You do a deal and make millions.
MARZIEH
(jokingly)
How much have you got in your account now?

SAMAN
What, you too? People around us have more problems than I do. And the ones who are doing well, who knows who they've ripped off?
(jokingly)
Do you have anything I can steal?

MARZIEH
(jokingly)
Not sure how much you'll get ripping off a clown!

They laugh and gaze at each other.

SCENE 54 - INT - HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

Back to the party and the Poet continues reading the poem.

POET
Here, flight is always delayed.
For the slingshots in the alleys of war
Or for the floral skirt on the clothes line
But moths live fast regardless.
At least let me have my childhood picture back.
Stranger than a kite left behind in a closet,
I am stamped and pass and miss home.
The antennas aim at the sky but on the clothes line
At home
My shirt is still holding
God tight.

The people clap and the Poet says "thank you".

SCENE 55 - INT/EXT - TAXI - NIGHT

Marzieh and Saman are in a taxi on their way back home from the party. Saman is asleep. Marzieh, stoned and drunk, is hallucinating and gets mesmerized by the streetlights outside. Music fills the scene. Montage of Marzieh's face and abstract images of Tehran's streets and lights.

SCENE 56 - INT - UNDERGROUND THEATRE - UNKNOWN TIME

Montage of abstract theatre. The theme is heroin and addiction.

The actors continue rehearsing. The director hears Marzieh enter and goes to check on her in the make-up room.

In the make-up room, Marzieh is sitting before the mirror, sad.
DIRECTOR

Is something wrong, Marzieh?
You're very late to rehearsal.

MARZIEH

Nothing's wrong. I'm just a bit down.

DIRECTOR

Your make-up is running too.

MARZIEH

I know. I have to leave you all and go, just when we're about to perform after all these years.

I don't know whether to be happy I'm going or sad about leaving things behind.
It's no joke. I've only got my medical to go. I might not be here next month. You might have to replace me.

DIRECTOR

Well, you are here now.
Are the costume designs ready?

Marzieh nods yes.

MARZIEH

Yeah.
DIRECTOR

Let's see them.

Marzieh takes the designs out of her bag and gives them to the director. He looks at them one by one and finally chooses one he likes.

DIRECTOR

This is good. It just needs to be simplified a bit.

Change this curve here and darken these greens.

He tries to cheer Marzieh up.

DIRECTOR

If we get a venue, we can start performing from next Sunday.

MARZIEH

Is that true?

DIRECTOR

So, put it there!

He goes for a "high five". Marzieh sadly puts up her hand, immersed in her melancholy, staring at her image in the mirror.

The director goes back to rehearsal.
Marzieh is in the dark amongst the boxes as we hear the vehicle moving. She stares in a fixed direction and coughs.

Marzieh is sitting before the mirror, practicing yoga and doing facial exercises. The doorbell rings. She gets up and opens the door. Shadi and Nilou are at the door.

Shadi is in a hurry. She tries to convince Marzieh to look after Niloufar.

SHADI

Hi Marzieh. Did I wake you?

Marzieh says "hi", so does Niloufar.

MARZIEH

No. I just wasn't expecting anyone this early.

SHADI

I have to be in court today to see if I can get custody of her.
MARZIEH
I hope your case gets resolved soon.

SHADI
Thanks. I just want to leave her with you today.

MARZIEH
I have a rehearsal. And I have to go out.

SHADI
What if she promises to be silent?

MARZIEH
Her? She'll die if she doesn't talk.

Nilou smiles cheekily.

SHADI
She'll promise to be good.
Thank you. I'll make it up to you.


SHADI
(indicating Saman)
Say hello for me by the way.
Bye.
Marzieh closes the door.

**MARZIEH**

(to Nilou)

Nilou, don't wake up your Uncle today. I have a lot of rehearsing to do. So you'll have to be quiet. And I'll give you orange juice later.

Nilou sits on the couch trying to play with the TV remote control.

Marzieh sits at the mirror again and tries to concentrate on her acting exercises. Nilou keeps interrupting.

**NILOU (V/O)**

Which channel is satellite TV On, Auntie?

**MARZIEH**

Satellite? They confiscated the dish. Didn't they confiscate yours?

**NILOU**

Yes.

**MARZIEH**

What are you on about, then?
NILOU

It's not turning on. I want to watch the kids show.

MARZIEH

I don't have antennas, TV channels or patience.
Will you let me work now?

NILOU

Have you seen my mobile, Auntie?
Dad got it for me for being good.

Marzieh is still practicing, getting constantly interrupted by Nilou. Nilou starts filming with her mobile phone. She films Marzieh sitting in front of the mirror.

NILOU

It shoots movies too.

Marzieh gets up knowing that Nilou won't let her work. She goes to the kitchen to find Nilou something.

MARZIEH

You're not going to let me work, are you?

Nilou smiles cheekily. She continues filming the household - knick knacks, the sewing machine and the bike.

Marzieh's voice can be heard addressing Nilou from the kitchen.
MARZIEH
We're out of orange juice.
Do you want ice cream?

NILOU
Only if it's strawberry-flavored.

Then she tries to get on the bike and ride.

NILOU
Will you teach me how to ride a bike, Auntie?

Marzieh rushes to help her onto the bike.

MARZIEH
Be careful. To go where?

NILOU
School.

MARZIEH
Girls can't ride bikes to school.

NILOU
I'll just dress like a boy.
I'm not scared.
MARZIEH

You'll be scared when you get older.

Nilou is trying to ride the big bike. She laughs and squeals excitedly. Saman is up and comes down the stairs.

SAMAN

What's with all this noise?

Marzieh smiles at him. He says good morning and smiles back. He continues.

NILOU

Hi.

SAMAN

It's you again.

Nilou smiles cheekily and shows off her new mobile phone to Saman.

NILOU

Uncle, have you seen my mobile?

My dad bought it for me.

It shoots movies.

Nilou films Marzieh as she mimes to the mobile camera.
SAMAN

Check out her mobile. Records video too.

NILOU

Can I record your wedding?

SAMAN

If you're filming our wedding,
who will dance for us, then?

NILOU

I'll dance and record at the same time.

Nilou does a little dance to show them. Saman jokes with Nilou.

SAMAN

Will you be our daughter, pretty miss?

Nilou responds on the spot.

NILOU

No way.

Marzieh smiles watching Nilou filming and chatting to Saman.
Marzieh and Nilou leave the apartment block hand-in-hand.

Wide shot of Marzieh's apartment on an early autumn day.

Niloufar walks on the dried autumn leaves. She passes by a gutter, and puts her foot into the running water.

She films her feet stepping on the leaves with her mobile phone.

Off screen, Marzieh has hailed a taxi and calls Nilou.

MARZIEH

Niloufar, hurry up and come.

They get in the taxi and it drives off.

Marzieh is visiting a doctor.

MARZIEH

What will the cost be like, doctor?
DOCTOR
Because you have important tests
and x-rays, the cost will be quite high.
But don't worry.
My fee is 25,000 tomans which you can pay at
reception. Hopefully your tests will come
back okay and you'll get your visa from the
embassy.

The Doctor stamps the list and gives it to Marzieh. He continues.

DOCTOR
And I wish you a very nice trip.
Think of me when you're having fun there.

MARZIEH
Thank you, doctor.

DOCTOR
You're welcome.

They say goodbye and Marzieh leaves.

In the waiting room, Nilou is impatiently waiting for Marzieh. She's
obviously angry at her for keeping her waiting for too long. She
refuses to talk to Marzieh.
Marzieh pays the fee to the receptionist and sits next to Nilou. The receptionist calls the next patient.

RECEPTIONIST
You're next, Madam.

NILOUFAR
(to Marzieh)
Where have you been? I've been sitting here for like 3 hours.

MARZIEH
What am I supposed to do? I needed to see the doctor. Can't you wait a bit for your Auntie?

Niloufar won't speak to Marzieh.

MARZIEH
Are you upset with me? Well then, I suppose you don't want any chewing gum.

She takes a chewing gum out of her bag and starts chewing. At the same time, she licks her arm and puts the chewing gum "tattoo" on her wrist. Niloufar watches in silence and envy.

Marzieh blows a bubble and Nilou pops it with her finger, signaling that they are friends again.
MARZIEH

Friends again?

Niloufar smiles and reaches her hand for a chewing gum. Marzieh gives her one.

SCENE 62 - EXT - TEHRAN STREET - DAY

Images of people and traffic in downtown Tehran. Marzieh and Niloufar enter a building.

SCENE 63 - INT - PATHOLOGIST - DAY

Niloufar is impatiently waiting in the waiting room sitting next to the adults. Next to her, there are two women gossiping about other people in the waiting room. Niloufar can hear them and starts filming the people they are talking about, including a little child who makes faces at her. She makes faces in return.

WOMEN (V/O)

(referring to the little child)
- What a cute kid!
- You think it's their second child?
- No, I think it's their first child.

The women look at an older man sitting with a very young woman.
WOMEN (V/O)

- Are those two father and daughter?
- No, I think they're in a temporary marriage.
- It's not a bad fashion, hooking up with a rich old man.
- Women will do anything nowadays for money.
- It's laughable. Look at them.

The women turn their attention now to Niloufar sitting next to them.

WOMEN (V/O)

- Check out that kid.
- Her parents have left her here.
- How terrible!
- She's been here over 2 hours.

As they continue talking, Niloufar gets upset, puts her hands over her ears and stalks out of the room.

WOMEN (V/O)

- What happened?
- She heard you.
- That's funny.

Outside the pathologist, there is a gynecologist practice. At the door, the receptionist is talking to a young woman in a Chador. The young woman is crying and begging to enter the clinic. The receptionist is standing in her way trying to convince her to go to a hospital.
They are having a heated conversation.

Niloufar overhears them and starts filming them.

RECEPTIONIST
Don't cry, dear!

YOUNG WOMAN
Just let me in one more time.

RECEPTIONIST
I can't. I have responsibilities. I've done all I can. If it wasn't for Mrs. Mohebi, I wouldn't have Gone this far. Try to understand, this isn't a hospital.

YOUNG WOMAN
Just one more time. Please let me in!

RECEPTIONIST
It can't be done here. The doctor will look bad, and so will I. Do you know what the punishment is?

YOUNG WOMAN
Please, they'll kill me.
RECEPTIONIST

You're already 3 months pregnant. Plus we can't do it here. You have to go to the hospital. Go on, love. Go and stop causing a scene here.

The Young Woman is crying desperately.

The Receptionist closes the door on her.

The Young Woman sits on the stairs. Niloufar is still filming.

The Receptionist comes out of the door again with a pink folder in her hands. She leaves the folder next to the Young Woman and continues...

YOUNG WOMAN

Take your files and go to a hospital. They may be able to help you.

As the Receptionist is about to go back into her clinic, she notices Niloufar filming and tells her off.

YOUNG WOMAN

Hey you! Stop snooping. Go back to your mother.

Niloufar is scared. She puts the mobile phone away and runs back to the pathologist where Marzieh is at the counter paying her bill. Niloufar holds Marzieh's hand.
The Women in the waiting room are still gossiping about the people in the room. They talk about Marzieh now.

WOMEN (V/O)
- Look, she's got a child.
- You couldn't tell by looking at her.
- She looks like a kid herself.
- She probably married when she was 9 and got pregnant.
- Poor girl!

Marzieh and Nilou leave.

In the stairways, Niloufar notices that the crying woman is gone. As they walk down the stairs, a sound of a car accident can be heard.

MARZIEH
Are you tired, little missy?

SCENE 64 - EXT - OUTSIDE THE PATHOLOGY CLINIC - DAY 64

The noises of a crowd. People are running towards the scene. As Marzieh and Niloufar come out of the pathology clinic, they notice a car accident. People are gathered in a crowd and all are commenting on the scene.

Marzieh and Niloufar approach the scene to see what's going on.
Niloufar starts filming. They notice a woman in a Chador with a pink folder next to her on the ground.

CROWD
- She might still be alive.
- Call an ambulance.
- Someone notify her family.
- Just lift her up!

Marzieh and Niloufar leave the scene. Niloufar is still filming.

Images of Tehran traffic.

Marzieh and Niloufar keep walking along Tehran streets. They wait on the side of the road for a taxi.

A car pulls over and stands by them.

Marzieh realises that she knows the driver. She says hi and signals Niloufar to get into the car. The driver is her ex-University Professor.

MARZIEH

Hi Professor. Are you well?

They drive away.
Niloufar is filming the streets through the car window. She's curiously listening to the conversation Marzieh and the Professor are having in the front seats.

PROFESSOR

I had no idea you had a child.

MARZIEH

The neighbors have the kids. I just raise them.

Niloufar doesn't like the implication of what Marzieh's saying. She looks annoyed and puts her fingers in her ears.

PROFESSOR

So, she'll grow up to be an artist, then.

(pause)

What happened to your thesis?

MARZIEH

My thesis is more like a saga. Right now I don't have the money for the set design and props. It depends on the sales from my clothing show.

PROFESSOR

Why not pay me a visit so I can organise it?
MARZIEH

I can take care of everything myself.

The Professor makes her an indecent offer.

PROFESSOR

Shall we go to the office?

Marzieh doesn't appreciate his boldness. Niloufar looks uncomfortable as well.

MARZIEH

I'm in love with someone else, professor.

Marzieh looks back to check on Nilou.

MARZIEH

Are you okay, Nilou?

Niloufar stares at the adults.

MARZIEH

I can just get out just here. Thanks.

The Professor pretends that he doesn't hear Marzieh, while Nilou starts filming again.

PROFESSOR

Why don't you work? Why don't you perform?
MARZIEH

I work a lot, underground. It's not to your taste so you don't allow us on stage.

Images of Tehran as Niloufar is filming through the car window. Marzieh continues.

MARZIEH

I'll get out here.

The Professor replies in a compelling way.

PROFESSOR

No, I'll take you all the way there.

Marzieh's mobile rings and she answers.

MARZIEH

Hello, Sadaf? Hi, how are you? Tonight? You're so cheeky. Haven't you had enough? I have to look after Niloufar and I've got lots to do... And I've just seen a dead body. I don't feel much like partying... we'll do it another night...don't insist...Hold on...

(to the Professor)

We're here professor.
(to Niloufar)

Let's go, Nilou.

The car pulls over and Marzieh and Nilou get out. Marzieh says goodbye to the Professor.

PROFESSOR

See you later, then.

Marzieh closes the car door.

MARZIEH

Goodbye professor.

Marzieh continues her conversation with Sadaf over the phone.

MARZIEH

(to Sadaf on the phone)

No one, just a pest.

Listen, Sadaf. I'll come only if you promise to help me advertise my sale.

And I'll kill you if you get drunk and forget about this... Okay...

Marzieh and Nilou walk towards Marzieh's apartment block.
The Australian official is still asking questions.

\textbf{INTERVIEWER}

(in English)

So, any specific problems?

The Interpreter interprets the question for Marzieh.

\textbf{MARZIEH}

I miss my work. In my head I hear all the characters that were never allowed on stage. The Arab girl in \textit{Unsweetened Tea}. The half-finished film which was seized. I have nightmares every night. The city is burning and I'm tied up. The fire gets close and a baby's scream wakes me.

The Interpreter interrupts.

\textbf{INTERPRETER}

He means your health. Any illnesses?

(continues to the Interviewer, in English)

She just misunderstood. I explained to her.
INTERVIEWER
(in English)
So I mean, your case is under control and you are seeing the doctor regularly and when required?

Marzieh seems to be a bit confused and is sinking into her own thoughts.

MARZIEH
I'm seeing the doctor and I feel better. But it's important that you know this.
I really loved Saman, and wanted to live with him.
I loved him until everything fell apart.

INTERPRETER
(in English)
The main things she wants you to know is that she was in love with Saman and she was going to have a beautiful life with him but all of a sudden everything collapsed.

The Interviewer can't believe the irrelevant information he is being provided in the interview.

SCENE 67 - INT - MARZIEH'S APARTMENT - DAY

Marzieh is in her mime make-up, practicing before the mirror. She is miming a clown.
The doorbell rings. She calls Saman, in the kitchen, to open the door.

MARZIEH
Sami... Samoa.

SAMAN (V/O)
Yes baby.

MARZIEH
Get the door. I can't looking like this.

SAMAN (V/O)
Coming.

He takes his mug and gets the door. Niloufar is there with a letter in her hands.

NILOU
Hi, Uncle.

SAMAN
Hi little one.

NILOU
My Mum said for me to come over. And I found this letter under the door.
Saman takes the letter, opens it and starts to read.

Niloufar sees Marzieh in her make-up and is excited. She starts playing and miming with Marzieh.

NILOU

Auntie, you look so nice! Please paint my face too!

Saman collapses on the floor. Marzieh notices and mimes "what?" to him in the mirror.

Suddenly, he gets up and throws something. The mirror in front of Marzieh breaks into a hundred pieces. Niloufar screams. Marzieh turns around towards Saman in fear.

MARZIEH

Are you crazy, what's wrong?

SAMAN

With me? It's what's wrong with you.

MARZIEH

What's wrong?

SAMAN

You're positive. You've tested positive.
MARZIEH
I'm positive, so what?
I'll have an abortion. Who wants a child with you anyway?

SAMAN
What abortion? This is from the embassy. You're HIV positive.

Marzieh grabs the letter off Saman in disbelief. Saman is devastated. Their conversation gradually turns into a fight. Niloufar, scared, is crying and begs them to stop.

SAMAN
What if you've given it to me as well?

MARZIEH
There's been a mistake. These tests are incorrect. These labs get people's piss and blood mixed up. How is it possible?

SAMAN
What if you've given it to me as well?

MARZIEH
If you want to leave, why are you coming up with excuses? Pack your stuff and go.
SAMAN
You're always acting! Look, I hate lies. I'm the idiot you ticked to get you over there.

MARZIEH
And what if you gave it to me?

SAMAN
You fucking slut! You've had your fun and I'm stuck with your HIV? What were all your stories about?

MARZIEH
And what about yours?

NILOUFAR
Please don't fight.

SAMAN
Mine were different. This is no joke. Do you know what HIV positive means?
They won't let you into any country. Fuck.

Marzieh goes out of control and attacks Saman. She can't take his accusations anymore. Saman, in defense, pushes her back.

MARZIEH
Who are you to say? Do you work for the embassy?
SAMAN

Don't touch me! Don't fucking touch me!

Saman pushes Marzieh onto the floor, near the broken mirror. Niloufar screams and rushes to hold and calm her.

NILOU

Don't hit her!

SAMAN

Fuck!

Saman is upset and embarrassed with what he's done.

He sits down on a seat by the wall, next to Marzieh's image in the poster "Unsweetened Tea".

NILOU

(to Marzieh)

Don't worry. It's Okay.

There is a moment of silence.

SAMAN

Look, Marzieh. I have enough problems in my life. I can't deal with this shit on top of all that.

(pause)

I'm so fucking sorry... I can't handle this.
He gets up and moves towards the door. Then he throws his keys on the floor and leaves.

Marzieh looks at him leaving. Niloufar is still crying. She kisses Marzieh and tries to calm her down.

NILOU

Why did this happen?
It's Okay Auntie. Don't cry.
Don't worry.

Outside the window, life goes on. A few moments pass. Marzieh's voice can be heard talking on the phone to Sadaf.

MARZIEH (V/O)

Hello? Sadaf?

Back inside the apartment, Marzieh is talking on the phone and Nilou is still holding her tight.

MARZIEH

Can you book me in with Dr Sanai? I can't go any more... Right now.

She hangs up. Marzieh and Nilou hold each other tight, in sadness and desperation.
In Sadaf's psychology practice, the waiting room is packed with patients of all kinds, men and women.

Marzieh, looking sad and exhausted, waits at the receptionist desk.

Sadaf comes out of her office and puts on a calm face for Marzieh. She tries to be helpful, not knowing what Marzieh has been through.

SADAF

Of course he won't book you in.

You should have called earlier.

Did you have an argument?

Marzieh stares at her in silence. Sadaf continues.

SADAF

Do you want to have a consultation with me?

MARZIEH

No. You're my friend, not my doctor. If I'd wanted to do that, I'd have done it a while ago. Bye now.

Sadaf interrupts and doesn't let her leave.

SADAF

Did you get your visa approved?
Marzieh says nothing, opens her bag and takes the Embassy letter out. She gives the letter to Sadaf. Sadaf now looks worried.

Marzieh says goodbye before Sadaf opens the letter.

MARZIEH
Bye.

SADAF
Wait, don't go. I'll drop you off. I'll drop you off.

MARZIEH
No. I'll go myself.

SADAF
Let me give you something to calm you.

MARZIEH
I can get something from the guys.

SADAF
Marzi...

Marzieh leaves.

Sadaf doesn't know what to do. She gets the receptionist to call the next patient in and goes back to her room.
SADAF

Please send in the next patient.

RECEPTIONIST

Mrs. Lotfi.

SCENE 69 - EXT - TEHRAN STREETS - NIGHT

POVs of Tehran streets at night from a moving car. Music fills the scene.

SCENE 70 - INT - AN APARTMENT - NIGHT

A few men and women, including Marzieh dressed in black, are smoking opium. Everyone except Marzieh is having a good time. People chat, drink sweet tea and smoke. They burn aromatic herbs and a hazy smoke fills the room.

The music continues over abstract images of opium smoking, hands exchanging cigarettes, a cup of tea being stirred, a pipe being passed, Marzieh being stoned and sinking into her inner world.

SCENE 71 - EXT - FIRE STAIRS - DAY

Marzieh is coming down the fire stairs at her apartment building.
Marzieh enters a strange waste collection depot where various people are working, recycling cardboard and moving tins.

A few chickens are in cages and a few move around the yard freely.

Marzieh looks around and finds her way into a dark room where we recognise the Man with the Moustache from the Australian Embassy scenes earlier. We now learn that he is a people smuggler.

**SMUGGLER**

The cost is a bit high. Can you afford it?

**MARZIEH**

How much will it be?

**SMUGGLER**

It's 50% now, 50% at the border.

**MARZIEH**

Is it guaranteed?

**SMUGGLER**

Guaranteed? Rest assured. But we must agree on a few conditions right from the start. Otherwise the answer will be negative.
Images of people working in the depot.

SCENE 73 - EXT - MARZIEH'S APARTMENT - DAY 73

Marzieh and Niloufar are pinning up SALE signs for Marzieh's household items. Marzieh seems sad and depressed.

Niloufar pins up a sign on the pole on the fire stairs. Marzieh notices.

MARZIEH
Here? On the emergency exit stairs? Who's going to pass this way?

NILOUFAR
But it looks nicer here.

Marzieh goes in another direction. Nilou runs after her.

SCENE 74 - INT/EXT - SADAF'S CAR - DAY 74

Sadaf is driving Marzieh through Tehran streets. Marzieh is not happy and Sadaf looks concerned. Marzieh is quiet and looks ill.
SADAF
How much have you got?

MARZIEH
A little. No joke, I need a lot of money.

SADAF
What are you going to do?

MARZIEH
I'll think of something.

SADAF
If only I could at least help you.

Sadaf tries to keep the conversation alive and fruitful but Marzieh seems to be in no mood for a conversation. Marzieh is sinking into her own inner thoughts. Sadaf tries to bring her back to earth.

SADAF
Why did you refuse your father's help?

MARZIEH
Don't even go there.

SADAF
But I can do something at least.

Marzieh is staring emotionlessly. Sadaf tries to cheer her up.
SADAF

I won't take no for an answer, no excuse accepted. We'll go to an underground concert this Thursday. It will do your spirits good.

Marzieh stays quiet. Sadaf tries to be more compelling to get a response from her.

SADAF

What's wrong with you? It's not the end of the world, you know. If you can't get treatment here, you can get it over there. Try and take good memories with you.

MARZIEH

I'll see what happens.

SADAF

Rubbish. You're coming. Marzieh...

Marzieh does her best to smile at Sadaf.

SCENE 75 – INT – SHOPPING CENTRE/JEWELERY SHOP – DAY 75

In a crowded shopping centre, Sadaf and Marzieh go into a jewelery shop.
JEWELERY MAN 1

What can I do for you?

MARZIEH

I just wanted to sell this ring.

She takes out the ring and gives it to the jeweler. He checks it out.

JEWELERY MAN 1

It's low carat and the stones are fake.

He weighs the ring and calculates the price.

JEWELERY MAN 1

I can take it for 25,000.

MARZIEH

What if I throw in this watch too?

She takes out her watch and gives it to the jeweler. He checks the watch out too. Disappointed... he looks at his colleague and responds.

JEWELERY MAN 1

We're a jewellery store. We don't sell watches. And this is old and second-hand.
SADAF

So how much for both?

JEWELERY MAN 1

Best I can do is 50,000.

Sadaf starts negotiating the price.

SADAF

Your offer is too low for the ring.

Sadaf takes her own necklace off.

JEWELERY MAN 1

No, it's a fake and it's a low carat.

Sadaf gives her own jewelry to the man.

SADAF

Well, these aren't fake.

Marzieh tries to stop Sadaf.

MARZIEH

No. What are you doing?

Sadaf makes it sound like a joke and not an important thing to do.
SADAF

I'll still live if it's not around my neck.

Marzieh looks embarrassed and uncomfortable but accepts the offer.

The Jewelery Man weighs the items and calculates the price.

JEWELERY MAN 1

Maximum I can give you is 400,000. And that's it.

Sadaf looks at Marzieh. The Jeweler continues.

JEWELERY MAN 1

So shall I?

SADAF

Yes please.

JEWELERY MAN 1

You can count it. It's already been counted, though.

The Jeweler gives Sadaf the notes and she starts counting it. She winks at Marzieh as she counts.
Marzieh is sewing.

Marzieh is standing at her windows, looking outside. Music fills the scene.

An underground blues concert. Men and women of various ages are sitting in rows. Marzieh and Sadaf are amongst the audience. Marzieh deeply feels the music. Sadaf looks at her and holds her hand.

**BLUES SINGER**

Tonight

The woman

Who saw a stranger's smile

Will not sleep until morning.

Montage images of Marzieh sitting alone on the stairs, smoking a cigarette, getting up and climbing the stairs, standing in front of the window looking outside, her image in a broken window, smoking another cigarette and walking along the window to the pot plants.

Marzieh is lying on bed, crying. She picks up the phone and dials a number.
MARZIEH

Hello? Saman?

(pause)

Isn't this 0912-315-7787?

(pause)

Do you know anything about him?

She drops the phone in disappointment and lies on her back again.

SCENE 79 - INT - MARZIEH'S APARTMENT - DAY

Marzieh is having her household sale. Customers are everywhere in the apartment, checking out her knick knacks and negotiating prices with Sadaf and Shadi.

Niloufar is filming with her mobile phone.

A woman is negotiating Forough's picture with Shadi.

BLOND WOMAN

Excuse me, can this go for less?

SHADI

No, love, that's the best price.

BLOND WOMAN

I really like it.
SHADI
You won't be sorry if you get it.

The woman takes the picture off the wall and pays Shadi.

Two men check out the television and negotiate with Sadaf.

SADAF
You drive a hard bargain.

Meanwhile the Blond Woman leaves the apartment with the picture under her arms, saying goodbye to Marzieh who's standing by the door. Marzieh looks at her as she leaves.

Sadaf continues negotiations with the men and the television.

MAN 1
What's your lowest price?

SADAF
Best I can do is 100,000.

MAN 1
It's very expensive. It's not going to sell.

SADAF
It's hardly been used.
MAN 1

It has to go in my shop.

SADAF

How much do you want it for?

MAN 1

70,000. 75,000 tops.

SADAF

Okay, take it for 80,000.

MAN 1

Fine.

(to his friend)

Give her the money.

The money is exchanged and they take the television.

A woman is taking other pictures off the wall. She talks to Marzieh, who is leaning on the wall in silence.

WOMAN

I wish you a safe and happy trip. Best of luck.

Bye.

Marzieh looks at the pictures as they are taken away.
On the other side, another woman is dealing with the sewing machine with Sadaf.

WOMAN 2

So you'll do it for the price we agreed on?

SADAF

But this is...

WOMAN 2

Please. It's really old and impractical. I just like the design.

Nilou is trying one of the dresses which is obviously too big for her, but she likes it and shows it off to Sadaf.

Marzieh is quietly watching her stuff leave the apartment.

SADAF

You haggle so much.

WOMAN 2

Thanks, I'll send someone to pick it up.

She gives the money to Sadaf and she starts counting the notes. The woman says goodbye and leaves.

NILOUFAR

Does this look nice on me, Auntie?
SADAF

It looks beautiful.

Sadaf looks at Marzieh.

A man is looking at the books with Marzieh standing next to him.

MARZIEH

Just 100,000 tomans for all the books?

BOOK MAN

I'm a pro, madam. No one will pay more than that.

What do you say?

Marzieh takes a last look at the books.

MARZIEH

Take them.

As the man starts taking the books, Marzieh pulls two books off the shelf.

MARZIEH

But I'll keep these two books.

BOOK MAN

No problem.
Other people are taking bits and pieces. Sadaf and Nilou come over to Marzieh who is holding the two books.

SCENE 80 – EXT – OLD TEHRAN ALLEY – DAY

Marzieh is waiting outside an old door in a poor suburban part of Tehran.

Two women in Chadors come out of the doorway. Marzieh runs over to them.

MARZIEH

Mum! Masume!

The woman turns to her in surprise. Marzieh's Mom looks worried.

MUM

Marzieh. What are you doing here? You know what your dad's like. If he sees you he'll kill you. Go on, love. Go away.

(to Masume)

Let's go. Hurry!

She pushes Masume and quickly leaves in a hurry.

Masume with tears in her eyes looks back to Marzieh.
Marzieh, in tears, waves to them and watches them leave.

SCENE 81 - INT - TRUCK - UNKNOWN TIME

Marzieh in the dark at the back of the moving truck, amongst the boxes, sings a song to herself.

        MARZIEH
        Hey! Remedy jewel!
        Look at the wounded.
        You, remedy in hand but no care for us.
        We need another lifetime after passing over
        Since this life was all wasted
        In hopes and wishes...

SCENE 82 - EXT - OUTSIDE THEATRE - DAY

Marzieh walks to the theatre door. She rings the doorbell. And rings again... and again. Nobody answers.

She takes her phone out of her backpack and dials a number.

        MARZIEH
        Hello, Naser.

        NASER
        Hello.
MARZIEH

It's Marzieh.
I've come to see your rehearsal before you open.

NASER

What rehearsal? It's over. Reza was arrested
a few days ago. The rehearsal was raided.

MARZIEH

What do you mean?

NASER

Marzieh? Hello? Hello?

Marzieh collapses on the ground. She drops the mobile phone and
stares. She is traumatized.

SCENE 83 - EXT - AN UNKNOWN PLACE - DAY 83

Marzieh is standing outside a truck.

A man, the truck driver, approaches her with a bundle of food in his
hands. He passes the bundle to Marzieh.

TRUCK DRIVER

Here, take this bundle so you don't starve back
there.
Marzieh seems worried.

MARZIEH

Will it be alright?

TRUCK DRIVER

Don't worry. I've taken 50 people across the border and no one has died. There's two legs to the trip, 5 hours then 17 hours. Just stay quiet.

Marzieh gets into the back of the truck.

The truck driver closes and locks the back door.

TRUCK DRIVER

Good luck.

Marzieh's coughing can be heard inside the back of the truck.

SCENE 84 - EXT - ON THE HILL - DUSK

Marzieh and Sadaf are sitting on a hill overlooking Tehran, singing their favourite song.

MARZIEH & SADAF

Hey wild gazelle
Where are you?
I know you from a long time ago,
Us, two wanderers, two lonely soles,
Traps and enemies waiting before and behind us
Remembering the ones who have gone
And the ones who have loved, agree with the spring rain.
Only a miracle might help
To join one lonely to another.
What awaits us, friends?
Friends of lonely souls and strangers.
I see no green fields of hope,
In this wasteland.

The girls walk over the hill and sit on the other side, smoking cigarettes watching the sunset over Tehran. The sound of the sunset prayer fills the scene.

Marzieh takes the two books she saved from the sale and passes them to Sadaf.

MARZIEH

I want these to stay with you.

Sadaf takes the book. She is quiet in her sadness. Marzieh gets up and walks away from Sadaf. She stands at the edge of the hill, facing Tehran, and screams and screams.

Sadaf can't look at Marzieh. She struggles to hold her tears back.

The sounds of the prayer intensify over images of the city.
SCENE 85 - EXT/INT - UNKNOWN PLACE/TRUCK - DAY

The truck drives off.

In the back, Marzieh is sitting with fear amongst the boxes. She moves as the truck starts.

MARZIEH (V/O)
Tell him this is my evidence.
What else does he need?

SCENE 86 - INT - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Marzieh is speaking impatiently. She is devastated and has lost control over her nerves.

MARZIEH
To have left one's roots and One's country to come here and wait for so long. What does he really need?

INTERPRETER
Aren't these evidences good enough to you? That she left her own country behind her...

The Interviewer interrupts.
INTERVIEWER
(in English)
Unfortunately this footage has no real value in the
eyes of the law. You have to be able to prove that
you were imprisoned, or that you were hurt, or your
life was endangered. This stuff is just useless.

The Interpreter tries to interpret but Marzieh interrupts with
anger. She mixes up English and Persian in her
response to the Interviewer.

MARZIEH
(in English and Persian)
Value? What's valuable in your country? What's...
I've been in detention for 2 years.
Others have been here for 7. You know that I
haven't got much time left.

INTERPRETER
She says some people are here for seven years...

The Interviewer interrupts impatiently. He looks bored and not
interested in Marzieh's stories anymore.

INTERVIEWER
(in English)
Look! It's up to you. If you want to bear with the
legal process, or if you prefer we can facilitate
to take illegal asylum seekers back to their own country.

The Interpreter translates.

Marzieh is upset, nervous and disappointed. She thinks for a moment.

MARZIEH
Do I have to reply now?

INTERPRETER
(in English)
Does she have to decide right now?

INTERVIEWER
No, you don't have to decide now. But that option's available if you prefer.

The Interpreter tries to interpret but Marzieh signals him that she's understood.

MARZIEH
I understood.

Marzieh thinks for a moment, looking in another direction, avoiding looking at the Interviewer.

The Interviewer writes down some notes.
Marzieh is walking and walking through Tehran streets, from dusk and into the night.

She listens to music on her IPod.

MUSIC

Neo-Kantian ideology is for me
Normandy poppies for you
Indulgence and impatience for me
The 15-centimeter love for you

Macaroni and tamarind paste is our share
The streets of Martyrs is our share
Making fun of the shrine is our share
Cleverness and cunning is our share

Neo-Kantian Ideology is for me
Normandy poppies for you
Left-over food is our share
Bootlegged copies of The Godfather is our share
An unwanted generation is our share
Bootlegged copies of The Godfather is our share
Embarrassment of the Government is our share
The thick blacklist is our share
The loser national team is our share
Embarrassment of the Government is our share
'Constructive Criticism' is our share
Tomorrow maybe is our share.

Montage images of Marzieh walking, Tehran streets, people and traffic.

Marzieh stands at a closed shop at night, looking confused, watching the traffic and Tehran nightlife.

She moves towards the busy street and dissolves into the traffic and Tehran.

Credits roll
THE END
APPENDIX G: My Tehran For Sale script –first draft

SALE

1st Draft

Granaz Moussavi

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Scene one: In front Of the Australian Embassy. Exterior, Day.

An unruly crowd of men and women are waiting in front of the white iron gate of the Australian embassy. There is no line, and no turn taking. Some are quietly standing away from the chaotic crowd, some chatting. Most conversations are centred around life and work conditions, and studying in Australia. Those who have family members or friends in Australia, exaggeratedly recount their information and what they have heard on the subject. Some others are repeating their common, everyday complaints about the conditions in the country. A little way off is a man in a black leather jacket with a big black leather briefcase. Everyone is well groomed and well dressed.

**Woman:**

- My sister says all you have to do is come here, the rest will sort itself out. It is too late for us,

  but at least the kids will have a future.

**The accosted woman inquires:**

- Which city are they in?

**A 40-year-old woman:**

*(wearing a lot of jewellery with a colourful headscarf to a 30-year-old woman in office worker’s clothes who constantly fanning herself, visibly irritated by the heat)*

- Perth. They say it is newly built and beautiful. I don’t know... I haven’t been blessed to see it yet.

I am really getting tired of this - It has been two years that we have been waiting for our application.
A younger woman:
(looking self consciously around her)

- Everyone here is so well dressed. Do you think I Should have dressed up nice instead of coming in my work clothes?

A little further away, a young man is standing by himself, gazing into the distance, playing with his tie.

The sound of the first woman:

- Don’t be silly. After all, they are human too. They Will understand the condition we are in. But next time try to come in your own clothes so they don’t think you are one of those religious, fanatic types. You know how much harder they have made things after 9/11. Even after 1400 years these Arabs still have to somehow be a thorn in our Side.

The second woman:

- It’s a fine thing the way these people at the gate Treat us like dirt. Thank god they are still Iranian and treat us this way! What would they do if they weren’t? Just because they work here they reckon they’ve become Australians and look down their noses at us.

The first woman:

(laughing)

- Bring your voice down! They might hear you on the intercom.

The man with the briefcase approaches the women.

Man in leather jacket:

- Excuse me ladies, I was wondering if you need any of the embassy forms. You see, I have them all
here, and for a minimal fee, they can be at your disposal without your having to wait all day to go inside to get one. I can also give you any information that will help you with your applications.

The two women look at each other, eyes full of distrust for the man.

The first woman:

- No thank you. I have everything I need.

Man in leather jacket:

(to the other woman)

- And what about you madam?

The second woman:

- No thank you. But if you give me your telephone number, I may call you for a consultation later.

A little way away, a 6-7 year-old boy approaches a young man.

Band-aid boy:

- Sir, band-aid? Please buy one.
Young man:

(motioning with his hand for the boy to go)

- I don’t want any. Go away.

Band-aid boy:

- Please, for god’s sake, buy one. It’s my first sale Of the day. And you’ve got a bag. Put it in there.

The young man:

(pushes the boy to one side)

- I said I don’t want any. You are all like flies.

The band-aid boy, unperplexed moves on to the next person.

Two men, well dressed, well groomed are talking. One is holding a thick folder containing papers and documents. The other has on a thick, heavy gold watch.

Band-aid boy:

_ Sir, I hope to god you get your green-card.

Please buy a band-aid from me. Take it as a souvenir.

Both men laugh.

The man with the gold watch:

- Do you even know what a green-card is?

Ignoring the man’s question, the boy continues to implore the men.
Band-aid boy:
- Please sir, buy one. Here, take more. Your wife and kids will need them, I am telling you.

The man holding the folder puts his hand in his pocket and brings out a wad of 1000 Touman notes. He searches through them and puts them back into his pocket. The boy has torn off a few sheets of band-aid and is holding them toward the man.

Band-aid boy:
- Buy some. I’ll give them cheap – I swear to god.

Man with the folder:
- I haven’t got any change. Go and sell them to someone else.

Band-aid boy:
- You have all that money! Give me a grand and take five sheets.

The man with the watch:
- And so expensive too! Don’t buy any! Move on kid.

Man with the folder:
- I told you I haven’t got any change, and I don’t want any band-aids.

Band-aid boy:
- I’ll give you ten sheets.
The voices of the crowd - still conversing about work and life conditions in Australia - mix with one another.

From the iron gates, the metallic sound of the intercom calling the next applicant to enter sends the crowd into a sudden silence. The men push the still begging boy away.

The man with the folder:
- Go away kid, stop bothering us.

The men move toward the gate.

The crowd moves toward the gate, slowly and calmly at first. But soon they start pushing and shoving each other, jockeying for a better position near the intercom, to plead their cases through it while it is still being manned from within. Many voices cry out at once, each in an attempt to drown out others.

From within the crowd, a woman manages to push her way to the gate, beats on it with her diamond ring calling out.

Woman:
- Mr. Etemad? Mr. Etemad, are you there? It’s me, Bagheri. You remember, don’t you?

Another man calls out:
- Mr. Etemad, I only need to have my passport stamped.

Can I come in?

All try to make their reasons for wanting to enter the embassy sound more important that the others’.

The metallic voice from the intercom rings out:
- Ladies and gentlemen, please remain calm, we’ll call you.
Then a click informs everyone that the receiver has been placed in its cradle.

The crowd start to complain.

A male voice cries out:

- This bloke won’t be happy until he has made us all wait here the whole day. Same thing happened to me the day before yesterday. I was here first thing in the morning and waited till evening for nothing. My whole day was wasted.

The woman who was knocking in the door with her ring speaks out loudly, as if wanting to be heard from inside.

Woman:

- No, I disagree. In fact not only is Mr, Etemad not a bad man, he’s very fair.

The man replies:

- I swear, it’s the same thing every time I’ve come here. First of all, they are off for three days a week; Saturday and Sunday is their weekend, so they don’t work, Friday is our weekend, so they are closed, Thursday, Everyone is in shut down mode, and so that only leaves three days a week for them to deal with all these people.

A young girl:

(worriedly)

- If I don’t get my visa in two weeks, it’ll be too late! I’ll lose my place at the university. The new term will have started. I have an acceptance letter...
Another voice cries out:
- So what? We have a previous appointment and we’re still being kept waiting.

The voice of the band-aid boy, roaming from one person to the next trying to sell some band-aids can be heard every now and again from among the crowd. A woman opens her bag and taking out some money, buys some from him.

The intercom once again silences the hubbub

V.O:
- I’ll read out the names of those who have made appointments first: Jafarri, Bonyad, Masoom-Nejad, Karami.

The button is pressed and the embassy’s garage gate is opened. From various places in and around the resentful, uncooperative crowd, some men and women push their way to the gate, and disappear behind it.

The remaining crowd still huddled at the gate once again raise their din.

A woman is stuck behind the crowd but is struggling to get through.

Woman:
- Goodness, gentlemen, let me through. They just called my name, Karami. Let me go in.

Still, everyone tries to get their own plea to the attention of Etemad. Bagheri (the woman knocking on the gate with her ring) slips in through the still open gate, and it closes. Karami, who has finally managed to push her way through the crowd, bangs on the gate.
Karami:

- Mr. Etemad? Please open the gate. It’s me, Karami. You just read my name. Mr. Etemad? Can you hear me?

Once again the button is pressed, the gate opens, Karami passes through, the gate shuts and the excited crowd, now bigger than before, resume their hubbub.

In the crowd are Saman – a 40-year-old man, with salt and pepper hair, tied in a pony tail and Marziye, a woman in her 30’s. Saman turns to a man in the crowd.

Saman:

- Excuse me. Do you know how many people have gone in?

Two voices speak out simultaneously.

V.O:

- They called four people in.

A woman calls out.

V.O:

- Five! That woman who was knocking the door down went in with them.

Another voice cries out.

V.O:

- It’s the same everywhere you go. Nepotism everywhere! She knows the gate keeper.
The small band-aid boy is still doing his rounds, and has been joined by another young boy selling Hafez-Fortunes.

**Fortune boy:**

- Sir, madam, get a Hafez-fortune. It will answer all your questions. Buy one, God willing you’ll have fortune.

Saman leads Marziye to a corner.

**Saman:**

- You wait here. I won’t be long.

Marziye calmly looks around at the crowd. Saman goes to the pillar next to the gate, looks up at the surveillance camera, pulls out his Australian passport and holds it up to the camera, and speaks in English.

**Saman:**

- I am an Australian citizen Please open the door.

The crowd look on silently, the intercom comes to life, the gate opens and a voice says.

**V.O.:**

- Come in.

A woman from the crowd approaches Marziye and strikes up a conversation:

**Woman:**

- Are you waiting for a visa?
Marziye:
- We have a file open.

Woman:
- Have you got an answer?

Marziye:
- Yes, we’ve passed the first hurdle. Now we’re waiting for the second round.

Woman:
- To go for the medical exam? God willing that will happen too. Which town will you be going to?

Marziye:
- I don’t know yet.

Woman:
- I’m sorry for asking, I don’t mean to intrude, but can I ask how long its taken? You see, I have a file open too.

Marziye:
- It’s been about 7-8 months.

Woman:
- What is your case based on? Student visa?

Marziye:
- No, spouse immigration.

Woman:
- I see. Was that man with the passport your husband?

Marziye:
- He’s my fiancé. We’ll have to get married within ten months after we get there.

The Hafez-fortune selling boy approaches Marziye and interrupts the conversation.
**Fortune boy:**

- Buy a fortune miss. Buy a fortune, I’ll pray to imam Ali that the obstacles in your way are lifted; that your fate and fortune change for the better.

**Marziye:**

- Do you even know what fate and fortune is?

**Fortune boy:**

- Of course I do. I am unfortunate, you are fortunate; that is my fate, this is yours.

**Fortune boy:**

(changes his tone, trying to invoke pity)

- Please buy one. I swear to god I didn’t have dinner last night.

**Woman:**

- Go away kid. Don’t listen to them lady, these are all tricks. These kids will say anything to get your money.

**Fortune boy:**

(ignoring the last comment)

- Buy one miss. Would you like me to let the budgie choose one for you?

**Marziye:**

- Who says I am fortunate?

**Fortune boy:**

- You are going to America, aren’t you? C’mon miss, buy a fortune from me, it won’t kill you.

**Woman:**

- This is the Australian embassy, kid. America doesn’t have an embassy here.
Fortune boy:
- Abroad is abroad. What difference does it make? Please buy one.

Woman:
- Anyway, what’s your budgies name?

Fortune boy:
- Budgies don’t have names! You can call it Bagher, or Asghar, or whatever you want. After all, it’s only a budgie.

Fortune boy:
(sensing he is about to make a sale, turns back to Marziye)
- For god’s sake, miss, buy one.

Fortune boy:
(taps the budgies head)
- C’mon Googoosh, choose a fortune for the lady.

Marziye and the woman laugh.

Marziye:
- Are your fortunes true?

Fortune boy:
(keeping one eye on the budgie to make sure it has retrieved one of the small pieces of paper with the fortune printed on it)
- Truly true. Bless you. I hope you get to America. Take your fortune, Googoosh’s beak is getting tired, see?
Marziye:
(taking the piece of paper from the budgie’s beak and giving the boy some money)

- Alright, alright!

Woman:
(obviously tempted, opens her hand-bag)

- Tell your Googoosh to get me one too. Damn it all.

Fortune boy:
- Thank you sister. God willing, you’ll go to America too.

Woman:
(unfolds the fortune and begins to read the poem)

- Listen! See what mine says;

Lost Joseph shall once more return to the land of Canaan,
mourn not.

This desolate hovel shall once more be a rose garden,
mourn not.

Marziye:
- Well, that’s good!
Woman:

(laughing)

- I don’t want Joseph to return! I want to go and be where he is!

Marziye:

- Well, it says mourn not, so it must mean you’ll get Your wish.

Woman:

- I hope so.

The woman, points to the piece of paper Marziye is holding and still has not opened.

Woman:

- Is yours a good one too?

Marziye:

- I hope so. I’ll open mine at home.

Saman comes back and tells Marziye its time to go. Marziye and the woman both look questioningly at Saman. Saman takes Marziye’s arm to pull her away.

Marziye:

(turning to the woman)

- Well, take care.

Woman:

- Goodbye. All the best.
The woman returning to the crowd, pauses, looks back one more time inquisitively at the couple walking away. The intercom once again comes to life and the crowd hoard around it.

V.O:

- Allah-karam, Azizi, Negahdari, ...

Scene two, Inside a taxi, day.

Marziye and Saman are sitting in the back of a white Hillman Hunter.

Mayziye is looking out of the window at the busy, crowded streets. There are many people waiting for taxis by the roadside.

A woman:

(with her child, carrying some shopping bags) leans towards the passing taxi and calls out.)

- Shah Junction.

The driver:

(slowing down, looking in the rear-view mirror at Saman)

- Shall I pick them up, or do you want to make it a Private fare?

Saman:

- Drive on, make it a private fare.

As the driver is pulling away, a rough bearded man, resembling a religious fanatic runs toward the car. Marziye, thinking he could be a plain-clothes ethnic police, pulls her headscarf down over her brow and slides away from Saman.

Man:

- How much do you charge to Toopkhoone?
Driver:
- We’re not going that way.

The driver:
(continuing on his way looking back at Saman and Marziye)
- I wouldn’t pick that one up – that jerk with all that fur and whiskers!

Saman:
- Tehran has really changed! There used to be a time when those types terrorize the people. When I was young, one of them got me and cut my hair – right there on the street!

Driver:
(occasionally glancing in the mirror)
- Yeah! They wear their shirts over their trousers and think they own the country. Well, what do you expect from a country with no caretaker? You live abroad, don’t you?

Saman:
- Why do you say that?

Driver:
- I know people. It’s my job. Do you have any idea how many people I pick up every day?
Saman:
- But my accent hasn’t changed so how did you guess?

Driver:
- It’s not the accent. It’s the look. It’s the attitude. How can I put it? There’s something in your mannerisms.
The people who live on the other side, when they come back, it’s obvious. They look healthier. They have the patience to talk to people.

Saman:
- What are you talking about? People here talk to each other!

Driver:
- Yes, but people here only talk about their miseries.

Marziye:
(who until now was looking out)
- Aren’t you going to tell me what happened?

Saman:  
(smiles at Marziye, puts both hands in his pockets, draws them out closed and holds them in front of her)
- Choose.
Marziye:
(touches his left hand)

- This one.
Saman opens the chosen hand to reveal a coin. Marziye laughs and
screams with happiness, kisses Saman’s cheeks and then darts an
embarrassed look at the mirror.

The driver:
(averting his eyes and smiling)

- Good news?
There are a number of laughing young girls outside the taxi that is
stuck in traffic behind a red light. As the light turns green, and
the taxi begins to move, Marziye throws a piece of paper toward
them. One of the girls, still laughing steps forward and picks the
paper up.

Saman:
(seeing all this from the rear windscreen)

- What was that?

Marziye:

- Nothing, just a Hafez fortune.

Saman:

- What was it?

Marziye:

- I don’t know. I didn’t open it. Whatever it was,
it was good, so what difference does it make which
poem it was?
Saman:

(places the coin in Marziye’s hand)

- I’ll call you. I have made you an appointment for tonight.

Saman:

(to the taxi driver)

- Turn left here, please.

Marziye turns back to the window. Some girls are playing hopscotch on the pavement. The car goes over a series of speed bumps.

Saman’s V.O:

- Stop here please, the lady is getting off.

The sound of opening and closing of the car door can be heard over the image of Saman’s face.

Saman:

(first to Marziye and then to the driver)

- Wait for my call. Don’t turn your mobile off. After the doctor, let me know. Let’s go.

Marziye watches as the car pulls away, then turns and walks across the road. On a doorway, under a shiny brass name-plate which says ‘Dr. Mohammad Sanati – psychoanalyst’ is a doorbell. Marziye pushes it.

A feminine voice comes over the intercom:

- Yes?
Marziye:

- I am Vafayi, Marziye Vafayi. I have an appointment.

Intercom:

- Come in Miss Vafayi.

The secretary presses the button.

Scene three: Dr. Sanati’s consultation rooms. Day, interior.

Inside a modern apartment, with modern western interior design, across the wooden floorboards, sitting behind a large desk, writing in a ledger, wearing make-up and no headscarf, is a well dressed young woman. Next to her right hand is a cup of coffee.

On the image of the young woman, the sound of the door opening, closing and the footsteps of a woman wearing high heels, walking across the floor can be heard. The young woman raises her head.

Marziye’s voice:

- Hello. Am I late?

Secretary:

- No, Miss Vafayi, you’re on time. Please go in, the doctor and the rest are inside.
Scene four: Dr. Sanati’s office. Interior. Day.

A wooden door opens.

Marziye:

(entering)

- Hello.

V.Os:

(one male and several female)

- Hello, hello.

Marziye sits on a chair.

Female voice:

- Marziye, how are you dear?

Marziye:

- So-so. How are you?

Dr. Sanati’s voice:

- Right, let’s start today’s session.

Footnote:

This scene includes Dr. Sanati, Marziye and four women – non-actors, playing themselves. It will last 15 minutes.

Characters

Marjan: 27-8 year-old woman. In the hope of getting to the US, has lived a few years in Turkey. Unable to get a visa, impoverished and
suffering from depression, she is forced to return to Tehran. She has problems with her father, smokes too much and now plans to pay a smuggler to get her to the US via Bolivia. She is prostituting herself to raise the money for the smuggler. She first prostituted herself in Turkey to survive.

Shahla: 40-year-old divorced woman. Her ex-husband has custody over her two children and refuses her visitation rights. She cries constantly and speaks of suicide. She is an artist, and has become the concubine of a married man who pays her living expenses.

Mahin: 37-8-year-old spinster. She is a nurse and is afraid of entering into a relationship with men, thinking that all (Iranian) men are out to take advantage of her. She wants to leave Iran and marry a foreigner. She hates Iranian men and believes them to be violent patriarchs.

Taraneh: 25-6-year-old poet. She thinks that she must be in love to be able to write poetry but she constantly suffers defeat in her love life. She believes in staying in Iran, at any cost, to help correct the wrongs of the country.

Dr. Sanati: 60-year-old, talkative, eloquent man. He is the therapist of many Tehran’s artists, writers and intellectuals. He has attempted suicide three time himself.

Dr. Sanati:  
- How would you like to talk about our worst thoughts again, in the two hours that we have today? I mean in continuation of our previous session, lets first talk about what kind of thoughts come into our minds that make us feel bad and depressed.
The following sequence will last for 15 minutes, during which the characters improvise their responses.

In this session Marjan speaks of the sickening feeling she gets after each time she has sex with her customers.

The topic of this sequence revolves around issues such as suicide, prostitution and sexual relationships, the hard economic situation of Iran, and emigration.

The secretary knocks and enters, interrupting and causing the interaction to stop.

**Dr. Sanati:**

*(agitated at this disturbance)*

- Yes? Is something wrong?

**Secretary:**

- I’m sorry to interrupt. Miss Vafayi has a telephone call.

**Dr. Sanati:**

*(in an unhappy tone of voice)*

- You may go, Miss Vafayi. Ladies, we’ll continue. Please go on.

**Marziye:**

*(obviously surprised)*

- I am really sorry.
Marziye walks towards the door and gives an inquisitive look at the secretary. She goes out and the secretary closes the door. Within the room, the conversations resume.

Scene five: Dr. Sanati’s reception area. Interior. Late evening.

The Secretary:
(speaking into the phone condescendingly and disdainfully)
- One moment. She is coming.

The secretary:
(turns to Marziye)
- Mr. Saman!

Marziye:
(upset, takes the receiver)
- Hello? What is it?
(Pause)
- How can I keep my mobile on when I’m in the middle Of the session?
(Pause)
- Anyway, so what? Have you made plans for tonight?
(Pause, then picking up a piece of paper and a pen from the secretary’s table in spite of the secretary’s disapproving look)
- Where is it?

(Pause while writing down the address)

- Ellahiye? Which street?

(Pause)

- OK. How many are there this time?

(Pause)

- OK. I’ll see you later.

She puts the receiver down and turns to the secretary.

Marziye:

- Thanks. Sorry, bye.

The secretary doesn’t reply, but sits back down at her desk, and sipping from her coffee cup, begins to give the impression she is busy. The sound of Marziye’s footsteps, walking on the floorboards towards the door can be heard on the image of the secretary’s face, who is following Marziye with her eyes. As the secretary looks on the sound of the door opening, Marziye stepping out and the closing of the door can be heard.

Scene six: Taxi(within), Exterior. Night.

In the darkness of the night, the occasional lights of passing cars and street lights and shadows dancing on her heavily made-up face, Marziye is sitting on the back seat of a taxi, looking out. The taxi passes through the green, leafy streets of the affluent neighborhood of Ellahiye.
Outside, from between the latest and best model cars passing by, Marziye looks on at the men and women, dressed in the colourful designs of the latest fashions, sitting in the café’s and restaurants of Ellahiye.

The taxi turns into a narrow cul-de-sac and stops at the end – in front of the gates of a big villa.

**Marziye:**

(taking out a few 1000 Tm. notes, and handing them to the driver)

- Here you are. Count them to make sure they are all there.

**The driver:**

(with a knowing smile, looking in his rear-view mirror)

- Please, be my guest.

(Pause)

- Would you like me to come and pick you up when you are finished?

**Marziye:**

(turns her glance away from the driver, gets out and closes the door)

- I can get back myself, you’re not needed.

The driver turns his car around with a wry smile and drives off.
Marziye walks in the darkness toward the gate where Saman is waiting.

Saman:
- Your'e late!

Marziye:
- Didn’t you tell me to do myself up especially well tonight? Well, that takes time!

Saman pushes the gates open to reveal a huge front garden dotted with trees, at the end of which the lights of a big house can be seen. They walk along the lit foot path towards the house and close the gate behind them.

As the gate closes, the gates of an adjacent house open and an expensive car exits. A well dressed woman is behind the wheel. The car disappears from view and the narrow tree lined cul-de-sac remains in the silence and the dark.

From the distance the whistle of a night watchman can be heard. The intermittent sound of the whistle draws closer and the night watchman – a grey haired, white bearded, middle aged man, shabbily dressed and carrying a staff – comes into view.

He blows into his whistle occasionally, does his rounds in the cul-de-sac and moves, disappearing in the darkness.

Scene seven: Marziye and Saman’s apartment. Interior. Early morning.

At about two in the morning, tired and tense, Marziye and Saman open the door of their apartment and enter. Without a word, nor even turning on the lights, each go in a different direction. Saman goes to the toilet. Marziye, obviously exhausted, takes off her headscarf and throws it onto an armchair. She throws her hand-bag onto a different armchair. She takes off her over-gown and lets it fall to the floor. Tired, she drops onto the sofa. On the coffee table in
front of her, there is a tea cup, still one third full of stale tea from hours ago. She picks it up and drinks.

The sound of the toilet flushing followed by the tap being turned on and then off waft into the room.

_Saman:_

(entering the room, without looking at Marziye)

- I’m going to bed.

Marziye doesn’t answer.

Saman goes to the bedroom and closes the door behind him.

Marziye sits motionless for a while, staring into the darkness. A wall clock’s monotonous ticking is the only sound that can be heard.

A few seconds later, the sound of youthful, male chatting and laughter floats into the apartment. Marziye moves to the window and looks out. In the street below, 3-4 young men are sitting and standing on and around the hood of a car, chatting and laughing.

Except for a few, all the windows of the surrounding apartments are dark. Two apartment blocks away, the shadows of people dancing on the blind and the sound of Iranian dance music floating in the air, tell Marziye that there is a big party going on.

Scanning the apartments opposite, Marziye suddenly becomes aware of the apartment directly opposite. It is dark, but a faint light emits from it as if a night light is on there.

Through the darkness Marziye can make out the silhouette of a man, who, like her, has been standing at the window, watching the street from the darkness.

As Marziye looks on, trying to make out more detail, it seems to her that he too has become aware of her. They hold each other’s gaze for a few seconds.

Marziye draws the curtains and turns around in the darkness, heading for the bedroom.
Scene eight: Bedroom. Interior. Day.

In a messy, badly decorated bedroom, in a shabby, old bed, Marziye and Saman are laying backs to each other, apparently asleep.

The sound of Saman’s light snoring is heard on Marziye’s face, staring straight ahead.

A few seconds later, the doorbell rings harshly. Marziye jumps out of bed, flies out if the room and closes the door behind her in an attempt not to have Saman woken up by the loud bell. She rushes to the door, looks into the peep hole, takes the chain off the door and opens it.

From outside the voices of the lady next door and her daughter can be heard.

Neighbour:
- Oh, I am so sorry, Marzie, dear. Did I wake you?

Girl:
- Hello auntie.

Marziye:
- Hello. No, it doesn’t matter. Do you want something?

Neighbour:
- Yes, I have a court hearing today. I am taking a witness.

Marziye:
- Oh, yes. Well, good luck.
Neighbour:
- Thanks. Listen, I am really sorry for bothering you so much.

(to her daughter)

- Niloo, darling, don’t be any trouble to auntie.

(back to Marziye)

- I have to run, I’m late. Bye Marzie dear.

Marziye:
- Bye.

(to Niloofar)

- Come in, Niloo dear. Just don’t wake uncle up.

Marziye leads the girl inside.

Marziye:
- Come on in. I’ll turn the TV on for you while I make some coffee. But I won’t turn it up, ok?

Marziye turns the TV on and goes to the kitchen. A children’s program is on, and a young cleric is preaching to the children.

Niloofar:

(shouting)

- Auntie! Give me the remote. I can’t hear anything!
Marziye:
(dashing back into the room panic-stricken)

- SHHH! What’s the matter with you, making such a racket so early in the morning? Can’t you do without having to hear this rubbish?

Marziye, sitting down next to Niloofar, takes the remote and turns the volume up slightly. She takes a few sips from her cup.

Marziye:
- Do you want some ice-cream?

Niloofar, mesmerized by the TV screen nods in the affirmative.

Marziye:
- Today we’ll be going to see some of my friends, but...

NilooFar:
(cutting her mid-sentence, finishes her sentence for her)

- If I want ice-cream, I mustn’t tell anyone, even my mum.

Marziye:
(taking the child in her arms, tickles her affectionately)

- That’s my girl.
Niloofar laughs out loud and Marziye is forced to cover her mouth in an attempt to muffle the hysterical laughter of the child.

Scene nine: Streets of Tehran. Exterior. Day

Marziye and Niloofar, hand in hand, walk along Jordan boulevard. Occasionally they stop as if to get a taxi.

A car, flashing its headlights, stops in front of them. Marziye approaches the front window and stooping, begins to negotiate with the driver and his companion. A few seconds later, Marziye straightens herself and the car takes off at high speed, screeching its tires.

FADE OUT & FADE IN

Marziye and Niloofar are walking along Vali-Asr Avenue, near Amaniye. Niloofar steps on the golden-brown leaves to make them crunch under her feet. The sound of a car screeching to a halt is heard on the image of Niloofar’s feet, followed by an unintelligible conversation between Marziye and two men.

Marziye:

- Niloofar, come on. Get in.

Niloofer’s feet leave the frame, to the sound of crackling autumn leaves, the closing of a car door and finally a car driving off. The further the car gets, the more clearly the sound of running water in the ditch by the roadside can be heard.
Scene ten: Inside the car driving along the streets of Tehran. 

The sound of foreign music, exploding through loudspeakers prevents anyone hearing anyone else.

Marziye and Niloofar are both looking out of the window. The driver is sizing Marziye up through the rear-view mirror.

**Driver:**
- If the music is bothering you, I can change it.

**Marziye:**
- What?

**Driver:**
(turning the volume down)

- I said if the music is bothering you, I can change it.

**Marziye:**
- No, its fine.

The volume is once again increased. The driver and his friend begin an unintelligible conversation, laughing occasionally, on the image of Marziye’s face who is once again looking out of the window.

Next to Marziye on the back seat, Niloofar has covered her ears and is looking out of the window.

POV of Niloofar, looking at the streets in silence.

The driver’s eyes are still on Marziye in the mirror.
Marziye:
(taking out a cigarette from her handbag)

- Can I light up?

Driver’s companion:

- You can light it up too.

And once again, the two men begin to laugh. Marziye lights her cigarette and takes a couple of deep drags. On the image of Marziye’s face, only the crackling sound of a cigarette and her inhaling/exhaling can be heard.

On the seat next to Marziye, the music still blaring, Niloofar now has one hand pinching her nose and one hand on one ear, looking straight ahead at the traffic they are stuck in. The car has stopped.

The loud music is heard over the image of Tehran’s heavy traffic from the windscreen of the car that has come to a complete standstill.


Dr. Pourmand, a lady doctor affiliated with the Australian embassy, is writing her instructions on various test and radiology forms to be taken to different laboratories and radiologists. Simultaneously, she is explaining the processes Australian visa applicants need to go through in order to pass the medical examinations. She puts the request forms in an envelope and hands them over to Marziye.
Marziye:
- How much will all this cost me?

Doctor:
- Well, nothing worthwhile comes cheap! The lab expenses you will have to discuss with them. As for my visitation, I charge 20,000 Tmns at each visit, which you will pay up front at the reception.

(handing the envelope to Marziye across the desk)

- Here you are.

Marziye gets up, takes the envelope and leaves.


Marziye exits the doctors office into the waiting room. In a corner of the room, Niloofar is sitting, arms crossed on her chest, frown on her face, sulking.

Marziye - depressed, tired and at the end of her rope, goes to the receptionist, takes out a wad of money from her handbag, counts it and hands it over to the receptionist.

She turns and heads towards Niloofar. Realizing her attitude, Marziye tries to soften her up.
Marziye:
- C’mon Niloo, dear. Let’s go.

Niloofar:
- I won’t! And I’ll tell my mum!

Marziye:
- But why? Is it my fault I have to go to the doctor and get tests done? Is this how you show kindness?

Well thank you very much! Is this how much you love your auntie?

Niloofar has stuck her fingers in her ears and turned her head away.

Marziye opens her handbag and takes out a packet of bubble gum (the brand that has transferable pictures), unwraps one and puts it in her mouth. She licks the wrapper, and presses the picture on the back of her hand. After a few seconds, she peels the wrapper off to reveal a colour, tattoo-like image of a Japanese cartoon character.

Niloofar, who has now taken her hands away from her ears and is watching intently, swallows her saliva.

Marziye proceeds with her enticement with a coup de resistance – a big, pink bubble ever growing from her mouth.

Niloofar, now apparently completely oblivious to her own late indignation at having been subjected to grow-up things, almost involuntarily stretches out a finger toward the bubble, trying to burst it.

Marziye takes a bubblegum and holds it toward Niloofar. She takes it and greedily puts it in her mouth.

It is done. Without the need for another word, all is forgotten and they have made up.
Scene thirteen: In the street. Exterior. Day.

Marziye, holding Niloofar’s hand, crosses a busy street and enters a pathology and medical centre.

Scene fourteen: Pathology Laboratory. Interior. Day.

Niloofar is sitting in the waiting room of a busy pathology lab, trying to blow a bubble with her bubblegum. A small child is looking at her from across the waiting room. An old man, a villager, is striding across the room with the help of a walking stick, taking slow steps. Legs wide apart, in obvious discomfort, he grumbles to himself with every step.

Niloofar looks at the people and listens to their conversations. Two women next to her are talking about the rising price of chicken, meat and fruit and about how with the present conditions many people are unable to buy the basic necessities.

A chair becomes empty on the other side of the room, and Niloofar changes her seat. Opposite her is a man in his fifties. He is well dressed and well groomed. Beside him is a 17 - 18 year-old girl with heavy make-up. They are whispering to each other and laughing. They are behaving like a newly engaged couple.

A woman in her fifties on the other side of Niloofar is whispering to a woman in her forties next to her:

50-year-old woman:

- My goodness! Look at that. He could very well be Her father. Have they no shame?
40-year-old woman:

- This is nothing. The whole city is full of people like this. Men who start dealing with those higher up, get rich over night and when that happens, they start feeling like young chicks.

50-year-old woman:

- What is the world coming to?

Niloo far looks at the women, the man and the girl, trying to understand what is going on. The old man is still pacing up and down the waiting room. The receptionist calls out in a loud, curt manner:

Receptionist:

- Excuse me sir, there are seats available. Please sit down.

The whole room fell into silence with the receptionist’s loud, intimidating tone of voice.

The old man, at the end of his tether, shouts back

Old man:

- I don’t want to sit down! I can’t sit down! I’m paying for this! I have to take the food from my children’s mouths to be able to pay for all these tests and crap! And anyway, am I in anybody’s way?
The receptionist barks back, more rudely than before

**Receptionist:**

- Well excuse me, but this isn’t a park. And besides...

The old man cuts her short.

**Old man:**

- Don’t talk to me lady. You’re not the doctor. Do I have to spell it out for you? In front of all these women and children? Well, I will! I can’t sit down with these swollen testicles! There, satisfied?

As the old man and the receptionist continue to shout at each other, Niloofar covers her ears and walks out the door.

**Scene fifteen:** In the hallway outside the Pathology Laboratory. Interior. Day.

Next to the pathology is a gynecologist’s office. The gynecologist’s secretary is talking to a young girl, who crying, is refusing to leave. The sound of the young girl’s sobs fills then staircase.

**Secretary:**

- Stop crying now. You can always try somewhere else.

Maybe they’ll accept.
Young girl:

- It’s no use! I have passed three months. Where can I go? For god’s sake, is there nothing you can do?

Secretary:

- You heard for yourself how the doctor shouted at me for taking your side. If it wasn’t for Mrs. Mohebbi, I wouldn’t have done that, but I did. But we don’t do that here. Especially for a woman three months gone. You have to go to a hospital.

As the girl’s sobs ring out, the sound of the pathologist’s receptionist and the old man’s shouting match die down. Things have settled down in the pathologist’s.

Young girl:

- For the love of god, Miss Ahmadi, do something. They’ll kill me. They’ll ruin my life.

Secretary:

- I’m sorry; I can’t do anything for you.

The secretary closes the door. The young woman is left outside, stunned. Niloofar stares at the young woman. The young girl sits on the steps outside the doctor’s surgery and holds her head in her hands. A few seconds later the door opens again and the secretary reappears, holding out a red shawl toward the girl. She does not move and the secretary lets go of the shawl which falls on the step in front of the girl.
The secretary, noticing Nilooofar for the first time, speaks to her in a menacing tone of voice.

**Secretary:**

- What are you doing, standing there, eavesdropping, you naughty girl? Run along to your mother. Go on!

Nilooofar, scared, runs back inside the pathologist’s. Marziye emerges from the X-ray room. Nilooofar runs to her and holds her hand. The screeching sound of a car braking suddenly draws the attention of everyone. Marziye goes to the receptionist’s desk and takes out a bundle of money, counts some and hands it over to her.

The old man is still pacing up and down. Marziye and Nilooofar walk down the stairs. Nilooofar looks back at the spot where the young girl had been sitting. A young man and girl are now sitting there.


Marziye and Nilooofar exit the medical centre. There is mayhem on the other side of the road. A van has obviously had an accident, traffic is building up rapidly, and a crowd of people are running about, some shouting, some coming to gather around the van for a better view.

**Marziye:**

(to Nilooofar)

- See? That’s why I tell you to hold my hand and be
careful when you cross the road.

Through the legs of the crowd, Niloofar, passing through, manages to steal a glimpse of a figure sprawled on the ground, wearing a dark overcoat, and the corner of a red shawl.

The sound of a man rings out.

V.O:

- The poor thing! Look how young she was. God give the family patience.

The sound of a siren comes into earshot just as Marziye and Niloofar get into a cab.

Scene seventeen:  In the hallway of Marziye and Saman’s building.
Interior. Night.

The lift door opens, pouring out light. Marziye and Niloofar step out. Marziye steps toward a door and rings the bell. The neighbour (Niloofar’s mother) opens the door.

Niloofar’s mother:

- Oh, it’s you. I was beginning to get worried.

She takes Niloofar’s hand and pulls her in.
Niloofar’s mother:

- Hello darling.

Niloofar doesn’t reply. She turns around.

Niloofar:

- Bye auntie.

Marziye:

- Bye bye Niloo dear. (To her neighbour) I ran late. I had to go to the doctor’s and then get some tests done.

Niloofar’s mother:

- Why? What’s wrong?

Marziye:

- It’s ok. It was for my visa procedures.

Niloofar’s mother:

- Oh, I see. Well, I hope that it all works out for you. Now, let me tell you about what happened to me! Boy, thank god for my lawyer! That jerk wants
to take everything I’ve got! He has his heart set on this apartment! He says if I want custody of my child, I’ll have to give it to him. But my lawyer put him in his place. He told me I mustn’t give him anything, and he’s right. Why should I? This apartment was left me by my father. He has no right to it. Besides, he’s only using the custody thing as leverage. As if he could raise a child!

Marziye cuts her off.

Marzieh:

- Listen, Pavanaeh dear, I have to go. It’s late, and I’m tired. I’ll stop by later and we can talk then. See you later.

Niloofar’s mother:

(disappointed)


Marziye:

- Bye.


Marziye opens the door and enters in darkness. Saman is sitting on the couch, his feet on the coffee table.
Saman:
- You’re late.

Marziye:
- I went for my tests.

Saman:
- What tests?

Marziye:
- For the embassy. You know!

Marziye takes off her overalls and headscarf and tries to step over Saman’s legs on her way to the kitchen. Saman darts out his hand, takes Marziye’s hand and pulls her towards him.

Marziye:
(calmlly)
- I’m tired.

Saman:
- No. No way.

In the darkness, Saman pulls Marziye to him.

*Fade out – Fade in*
Marziye and Saman are lying next to each other on the floor. Marziye’s eyes are closed. Saman jovially asks.

Saman:

- So, what else is new?

Marziye:

(trying to sleep, after a short pause)

- Don’t forget, I have to see Dr. Sanati. Write it down.

Fade out.

Scene nineteen: Dr. Sanati’s surgery. Interior. Evening.

As the camera circles around the faces in Dr. Sanati’s group therapy session, Marziye is speaking about her views on life in Iran and her advocacy for open relationships. The people in the group are as follows.

Marziye: The main character.

Dr. Sanati: Psychologist.

Peymaneh: A wealthy, 45-year-old woman, who has a rich husband. Using her husband’s money, she supports her mother and brothers. Her husband is a 40-year-old man who with his wealth has also become a powerful figure. In Paymaneh’s opinion his only weakness is women. He spends 6 months of the year in Iran and the other 6 months in Europe. He has recently taken a young concubine.
Taraneh: a young female poet.

Marjan: a young female artist.

Marziye:

- A vast part of young people’s youth, time and energy, especially young women in Iran, is being wasted on the struggle with ancient customs and the suppression of instinctive tendencies. This destroys the country’s youths’ motivation and dries out their talent.

(pause)

Personally, I see nothing but dead-ends and just thinking about my past; my childhood and my youth makes me depressed.

The camera comes and rests on Marziye’s face. With the end of Marziye’s talk, Dr. Sanati directs the discussion.

This session is to last 15 minutes. All the characters are real and the dialogs are authentic, spontaneous, albeit under the direction of Dr. Sanati who aims to bring out the group’s negative thoughts and emotional difficulties.

One week later

The apartment is in total silence and almost complete darkness. The only light is that which is filtering through the crack in the door of the kitchen and it is almost impossible to make anything out. The light from the kitchen is just enough to allow the silhouette of Marziye, standing at the window, looking out, to be made out. Outside, some of the windows of the surrounding apartments are lit, but most are in darkness. The cars passing by and the voices of the young boys socializing outside can be heard.

There is a party in one of the apartments, in another, a husband and wife fight can be heard, shouting and screams and all.

In the dark window opposite, just like Marziye, a calm, motionless man is standing, still, looking out at the goings on in the street. In the distance, the dark outline of the Alborz mountains looms in the partial moonlight.

Scene twenty-one:  Marziye and Saman’s bedroom. Interior. Day.

Saman and Marziye are lying, back to back on a messy bed. Saman is wrapped in the sheet and blanket, snoring. Marziye is lying there, eyes wide open, as if she hasn’t slept all night, staring into the distance. The furniture in the room is a mismatch collection of things and in a state of disarray.

The doorbell rings and Marziye jumps up. She takes a quick glance at Saman who is still asleep. As she is about to leave the room, the doorbell rings again, repeatedly. She closes the door and rushes to the door to get it before it wakes Saman up.

Behind the door, Niloofar is holding an envelope.
Niloofar:

- My mum told me to give this to you. It came to our house by mistake yesterday. She also said hi and asked that you look after me today. She has to go to court and...

Marziye:

(cutting her off)


All the while they are talking, Marziye is looking at the envelope. She reads the back and half excited, half worried, she opens it. Inside, Niloofar is busy looking for the remote. She looks on the couch, under the cushions and all around. She can’t find it and is grumbling to herself, imitating adults.

Niloofar:

- Where’s that remote again? You can’t find anything in this house! You could even lose a camel with its load!

Meanwhile, Marziye, confused, is trying to read the letter. Niloofar finds the remote and sits to watch TV just as Saman, yawning, still sleepy, comes out of the bedroom.
Saman:

- What’s all the commotion about?

Marziye:

(holding out the letter, stunned)

- It’s from the embassy. I can’t read it. It’s in English.

Saman, now wide awake, walks quickly to Marziye. He takes the letter and reads. His face goes pale. He looks on the back, turns the letter over and re-reads it disbelievingly.

Marziye:

- What does it say?

Saman, completely transformed, shaking all over, his face contorted, pale, throws the letter on the floor. He is furious, ranting and raving, shouting and swearing. He starts punching and kicking the table, couch, walls, knocking everything in his path over.

Saman:

(screaming)

- You fucking whore! You miserable AIDS ridden slut!
  You’ve ruined everything! You’ve destroyed me!
  You’ve fucking ruined both of us! What the fuck did you get me into? Why me? If it wasn’t for my piece of shit, retard junkie brother, I wouldn’t be in
this mess! Not in a million years!

Marziye is overwhelmed, weeping quietly. Niloofar is terrified, screaming and crying.

Saman:

- And you can take this brat back to her mother.

Marziye picks the hysterical Niloofar up to take her.

Saman:

(to the camera, bellowing)

- That’s enough. I said that’s enough! Cut! The film is over.

(turning to Marziye)

- Tell them that’s it! I’ve had it! I’m out!

(turning to the camera)

- And you have to pay me to the last dollar! The last cent! Otherwise I’ll make you all regret it.

Saman storms towards the door and pushes Marziye violently out of his way. Marziye falls against an upside down armchair. Niloofar screams.
**Marziye:**

*(to the camera)*

- Cut it.

Saman slams the door.

**Cut to black.**

Dark screen

Marziye and Niloofar’s footsteps, Niloofar’s sobbing and a doorbell are heard. The sound of a door opening and Parvaneh’s voice.

**Parvaneh’s voice:**

- What’s the matter?

**Marziye’s voice:**

- The film’s over. The game’s over.

**Parvaneh’s voice:**

- What do you mean? Is she playing up over her part?
Marziye’s voice:

- I’ll tell you later. Bye.

Scene twenty-two: In a car on the streets of Tehran. Interior/exterior. Day.

The camera is filming the streets from within the moving car. The conversation between the passengers is recorded on the scenes of the streets.

Voice of the cameraman:

- What shall we do? Shall we end the film here? We can fix it in the editing.

Voice of the assistant director:

- No way! What editing? It has no beginning and no end!

The sound of the argument between the DP and AD fade out and the music fades in.

After a while the sound of a mobile phone ringing overlaps the music and the music fades out.

Voice of the director:

- Quiet a minute. Hello? Oh, Marziye, is that you?
I’ve been waiting for you to call for ages. I tried but couldn’t reach you… Yes? … All right, when? … All right dear, we’ll settle all the pay all in one go … yeah, I know you want it for Saman … I can’t not bring the sound man, you know that! … The most I can do is come with a small group; just the DP, sound man and me. Just three of us. And it won’t take too long. You know how it works!


(Documentary style).

Marziye talking to the camera.

Marziye:

- It wasn’t supposed to end like this. We were supposed to end this film like two mature adults and then go our separate ways.

I met Saman at a party. He is an Australian resident. He told me he had financial problems. And I was sick and tired of the atmosphere here; of the closed conditions of Iranian cinema and theatre, of everything. It’s been 10 years since I got my acting degree, and I have bent over
backwards but haven’t been able to get a proper role. This sick, dirty industry and the whole society won’t let me grow.

Marziye talks candidly (improvising) about all of her problems, which are representative of the problems of any young Iranian living in Iran. She talks about the problems with living in Tehran, in the present situation.

She talks about the life problems facing a woman, an actor, and a woman actor. She talks of social angst, financial difficulties which often border on impossibilities. But mostly, she speaks out about the problems facing an open-minded, emancipated woman living under an oppressive regime such as hers. She speaks about the problems facing women like herself, who believe in socializing freely, living freely, and about her belief that the core root of all these social problems lies in religious beliefs and sexual oppression. She speaks of political problems, issues caused by censorship and so on which prevent a great number of people from living a life that would otherwise be active and fruitful. And she asserts that it is because of these reasons that many young people, after graduating, will do almost anything to leave the country and migrate elsewhere.

She tells the camera that she too wanted to leave the country at any cost.

She had considered Europe and the USA. But first of all, getting the necessary visas, residence permits, is a big problem, and secondly, surviving in those countries is no joke.

And then she met Saman at a party. They agree that in return for 10 million Toumans (approximately 12 thousand Australian dollars) – to be paid in Tehran, and a further 30 thousand dollars – to be paid in Australia, Saman would marry her and take her as his wife and find her a job so that she can pay him off in three years, regardless of the type of work.

Then she explains that in order to raise the initial 10 million Toumans, she speaks to the director of the film, who is also her friend, and they agree to film her story in return for the money.
But in order to make the film more feasible and interesting, they change the plot to make it seem as though she is prostituting herself to raise the money. This would work to the director’s advantage also, as because this is an image the west wants/expects to see of an Iranian woman, it would all but guarantee the sale of the film.

During the course of the film she enters into a relationship with Saman, and the rest was as depicted.

(Marziye’s story is completely real and this person, a graduate of acting school and resident of Tehran actually exists.)

**Voice of the director:**

- What are you going to do now?

**Marziye:**

- Well, with what has happened, I have to forget about ever getting a visa. I’ll have to go by boat. I have no other choice.

**Scene twenty-four: Outside the Australian embassy. Exterior. Day.**

A large crowd of people, young and old are waiting outside the iron gate of the Australian embassy. Each is trying to impress upon everyone else that their reason for wanting to enter the actual embassy is more important than any one else’s. A few very young
child peddlers are also roaming around trying to sell fortunes, walnuts, band-aids and the like.

A little further away stands a man in a black leather jacket with a black leather briefcase. Occasionally he talks to someone as he moves around.

A car stops, Marziye gets out and goes towards the embassy.

But without even looking at the gate, she looks around, locates and moves toward the man in the black leather jacket.

After a few brief exchanges, the man pulls Marziye to one side, takes out a piece of paper, writes something on it and gives it to Marziye. As he is handing it to her, he bends forward and whispers something in her ear. Marziye looks quickly at the writing on the paper, nods, puts it in her handbag and goes to the car.

Once inside, she turns to the camera.

Marziye:

- Lets go.


Marziye is looking out of the car window. The car stereo is pumping out loud music. Jordan Boulevard is crowded and full of hustle and bustle. The street is filled the well dressed, well off people of the north of Tehran. The car is stuck in a heavy traffic.

Jordan Boulevard is seen from an extreme long-shot. It is full of cars stuck motionless in heavy traffic in both directions. The white car in which Marziye is sitting is just one of the many other cars.
Appendix H - Director's Note on Final Script Editing Process

For the next draft of “Auction” which I hope for it to be the final ready-to-shoot, I wish to retouch the narrative to some noticeable extent. After reading the feedbacks of Annette Blonski and The Script Factory, I gave myself a few days to detach from the script as it is now, and to digest the readers’ notes and look at their points with fresh eyes. I could see some of the problems and agreed with a few of the points. Especially I appreciated Annette’s approach to the material and also her knowledge of the alternative art house films, non traditional story telling methods, and more importantly the culture and environment where the story takes place.

The areas that I wish to focus on for changes are:

• Getting emotionally closer to the main characters Marzieh and Saman through seeing more of their dramatic actions in their day to day life.

• Dramatising the events through focusing more on actions rather than dialogues as according to both sources of feedbacks, the dialogues seem to be lengthy at times which results in dragging the rhythm of the story. This needs to be worked on.

• Setting some clues throughout the script which hint to Marzieh as an actor who is not able to actively practice her profession under the circumstances. However, these clues might not be instantly realizable by the audience but will make sense after unfolding the narrative in the scene where she breaks out after the fight with Saman and reveals the world behind what the audiences seen up to that point. This device of allocation clues will firstly prepare for the unfolding scene without giving out too much information and secondly helps for the twist to have a logic of its own as a role-play of Marzieh being an actor in real life, playing herself as an Iranian young woman under the harsh situation auctioning all she has to get herself of the country in the doco-drama of her story all together.

Spreading clues all over the narrative will the active role of the audiences in making sense of the story and meaning making processes instead of offering them a linear conventional already put together puzzle to watch. Giving the audiences the clues to put together like a puzzle while revealing the whole picture like a pay off in the end of the film will create more excitement for the audiences getting
engaged in the process of watching, making sense of the different scenes, and
putting the segments together and unfold the mysterious hints in the pay off scene.
This requires knowing Marzieh more through her engagement in a daily life and
activities within her private and social environment, and more importantly through
her urge and crave to live a life as an artist/actor, express herself, express her
emotions and beliefs, and live a life style of a free person.

• I also want to work on the public scenes versus the private life scenes, to
clarify the contradictions and incompatibility of the private and public life of
people in Iran to a greater extent than what it is now.

• I have to develop Saman’s character to be a more likable/justifiable character
who acts the way he does under the circumstances. The premise is that both
Marzieh and Saman do what they do, make their own mistakes, take wrong or
right decisions while anyone else would do the same if were in their shoes.
The dilemma is the situation they are stuck in and how to survive it and if there
is a way at all out of it?

• Same subtle clue-setting strategy should be taken to introduce Marzieh’s illness in the finale. I
believe that in the next draft I should leave couple of hints like a set up for her illness.

• In the party scene I believe that more description on the location set should be stated as there
was some confusion addressed by Annette in her notes.

• Signs, clues, and some subtle set ups regarding how Marzieh struggles selling her belongings,
ways she tries to raise money for her contract with Saman, and also her prostitution facilitated
by Saman (which finally will be revealed as fiction) alongside with her risk taking sexual behavior
in the underground parties (which will be testified as real-life in the finale) should be taking place
in the next draft.

• Marzieh is an actress playing herself in a deco-drama about an Iranian woman who takes any risk
and auctions everything she has to free herself from oppression. However, as a creative minded
actress who also knows about the world cinemas and festival success of other films, she reveals in the finale that she inserted the prostitution scenes in her story before the camera to attract more international attention to her story, for guaranteeing the festival/international success of her film since she believes that the international audiences are not interested in seeing the real lives of the Iranian middle class women unless some sort of misery, exotism, or locality (rural scenes) are introduced with the story. This makes her feel that the voices of normal urban women like herself are even less hearable thanks to the international media. Making these points clear needs more effective development in the next version.

• The monologue and the therapy scenes also need more development towards making the events in those scenes more dramatic rather than mainly verbalized the way they are currently. I still very much like Marzieh to talk openly for once in her life before the camera which has been filming her public and private life for the world’s eyes, but I also believe that this monologue can be more polished, engaging, and dramatically engaging as well as taking the audiences even deeper into Marzieh’s inner character.

I am very hopeful that working with Annette will help me to benefit from her fresh eyes for the story as well as her knowledge and experience in script problem solving methods. Although the script was very much benefited from the previous Iranian script editor, Peyman Yeganeh, and I appreciate his participation, at this stage I feel that working with a professional script editor from non-Iranian background (like Annette) will benefit the story. The reason is that the film is going to be made for theatrical releases outside Iran and for a broader international audience. This requires inputs and participation from an experienced script editor with ‘international’ eyes rather than local, being at final stages of developing the script!

Granaz Moussavi