Moving Images - Static Spaces: Architectures, Art, Media, Film, Digital Art and Design

• Paper / Proposal Title:
The City in Film: Tehran Has No Soul!

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• Presentation Method. I would like to:
  i. present in person (with/without a written paper)
  ii. present via skype (with/without a written paper)
  iii. submit a written paper only (and not attend/present)

• Abstract (300 words):
The city is an expanded, clear, and yet very complex entity. Cinematic interpretation of the city itself has been a controversial field of inquiry. Cities are perfect representations of cultures, people, urban lives, different classes, and a number of social issues. Tehran, Iran’s capital, is no exception. It has played a major role as the location of many films in Iranian cinema. In this paper, I shall focus on the representation of Tehran in two Iranian films: Asghar Farhadi’s Fireworks Wednesday (2006) and Naser Taghvai’s Tranquility in the Presence of Others (1973).

The events of Fireworks Wednesday take place on the last Wednesday before the start of spring. On this day, people set off fireworks, following an ancient Zoroastrian tradition. Roohi, a working class servant, spends her day cleaning the house of a middle class couple. There, she witnesses the ongoing dispute between the couple about the man’s secret affair. Through images of the modern buildings, cracked walls,
and broken windows of Tehran. *Fireworks Wednesday* shows the explosiveness of domestic strife and chaotic situations, and the film eventually becomes the battleground of undeclared war between sexes and classes. The film spends a great deal of time in the city, showcasing fireworks, buildings, and parks. Traces of turmoil and the clamor of fireworks occur alongside the characters’ conflicts.

*Tranquility in the Presence of Others* follows a former army colonel who immigrates to Tehran with his wife and finds it very difficult to adapt to city life. The hustle and bustle of the city, with its tall buildings of monochromatic colors, its over-populated streets filled with chaos and clamor, and its soullessness, bring the colonel to a state of madness. It is a city of alienation. In the end, his daughters take him to a madhouse. From the window of the ambulance, the colonel once again observes Tehran, seeing a modern city that has taken away his sanity. The city that has forgotten him.

In both films, Tehran is depicted as a “panic city” where modernity and its effects on people’s lives evince the mental instability of those, mostly immigrants, who resist it and the quarrels between social classes. The poverty, vulnerability, and psychological problems that underlie modern life create a panic city for its inhabitants. The city is able to neither harbor its citizens nor keep them from a state of mania. This paper seeks to underline the ways in which the city reflects the social reality of class and the mentality of its inhabitants through a detailed scene analysis of the two aforementioned films.

**• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

My name is Tania Ahmadi, and I was born in Iran, Tehran. After finishing high school, I immigrated to the United States. I have a B.A in Film Studies from the University of California, Berkeley. The Film and Media Studies program at UC Berkeley was the place where my passion for writing about films blossomed. The world of film criticism, with its combined focus on visual analysis and theoretical argumentation, has been a magical and inspiring place for me.

Then, I embarked on another journey, pursuing my dream of getting my master’s degree in Film Studies at Columbia University in the city of New York. At Columbia, I decided to concentrate my studies on the portrayal of women in Middle Eastern cinema. I had the privilege to study under the supervision of Professor Jane Gaines, whose works are the hallmarks of feminist studies and focus on women in the film industry from all over the world. I then became involved in Professor Gaines’s unique and superb project entitled “Women Pioneer Film Project”, assisting with the Middle East segment. Under her study, I wrote my M.A thesis on the representation of single/independent motherhood in Iranian melodramas. More specifically, I focused on Rakhshan Bani-Etemad’s films. Currently, I am interning at two film companies: Film
Movement and Film Forum in New York. I also applied to PhD programs and am waiting to hear the results.