

The House of Uncommon Grounds

by

Lida Arbabi

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I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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ABSTRACT

Demographically open public spaces provide valuable grounds for engaging diverse ideologies. While the rise of society and passive consumption of mass culture excludes “action” and “speech” from the public realm and threatens human plurality, a public space in which to hold public debates and discussions will reengage public roles in the public realm. And it will consequently act as a new site for citizenship and new “space of appearance.”

Such space becomes even more essential in a society that dreads conflict. Focusing on Iranian society, the proposal integrates this overlooked opportunity by offering temporary debate interventions to be used around the Iranian cities on a regular basis, envisioning a culture of dialogue incrementally developing.

This is a way of approaching a sociological issue with the help of Architecture, making a role for public space in promoting a culture, a culture that encourages human plurality and appreciates engaging the wide range of diverse ideologies, convictions and viewpoints. Rather than proposing a closed narrative and one single architectural solution for the space of public debate, the thesis imagines an architectural toolkit for application to the specific cultural and urban context.

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to my family, my people, and to you

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INTRODUCTION

Spring 2009, two months after I first came to Canada, it was my first review session at the School of Architecture, UW, the first time that I listened to other students present their designs there. In most of the presentations there was something that did not sound “normal” to me, or “right”, maybe not even “reasonable.” There was something about how they expressed their ideas, something more than simply the language differences that I was faced with. Then, at one of my reviews some thoughts suddenly dawned on me:

The concept of my design comes from...Here is the first gallery... From there you take these steps to the second gallery...This is the view you will have from this gallery...From there you take a curved ramp to the final gallery...

facts...facts...and facts, why don't you talk about your ideas, your views, your feelings...Here is a courtyard, the galleries are located around a courtyard...You had all those ideas about the courtyard, how do you feel about having it at the middle of the mass and the idea of taking the journey through galleries upwardly around it, tell them!...From this gallery you will have a view of the courtyard...Why don't you say how you feel about all those views! The effect you feel that volume of light would have on visitors, Explain the entire idea you had in mind: all those various views at different points of the journey are seen with the help of different windows; say it!...You have finally been given this opportunity to express how you really feel about your design and your ideas. You do not have to

just talk about facts and functions. Tell them all your ideas about what is important to you about designing a gallery...Tell them!

I can't...it does not sound "right;" I do not feel comfortable telling them... i just can't...

I finished, but all I could feel was a great sense of confusion. What was *wrong* with me! Why could I not simply express my thoughts! I was so passionate about them, yet I hid them! How could I be feeling “credible” and safe to express all those facts and yet not my personal views! It was not just that feeling; expressing my thoughts truly, to me, also meant struggling with a sense of guilt, the sense of guilt followed by displaying an inappropriate behaviour. What was that? “You should not brag about what you think and what you feel when you do not have “reliable” facts to refer to,” I was hearing such a phrase in my inner ear. Where does that voice come from?!

I knew, from the very beginning, that it was not simply an issue specific to the design presentations. By looking deeply into my personal memories and memories I had of other people, it did not take me long to realize that this issue of self-expression had to do with something bigger than just me. I had to have a bigger scale in mind while exploring the reason, perhaps a generation, a society, or a history.

I come from Iran. I had lived there my whole life before the spring of 2009 when I came to Canada to continue my education in the Masters of Architecture Program. As I sit here in Tim Hortons and think back to all the things that have had bearings on this thesis and how its story has taken shape, I hear a discussion at the table next to me over whether there exists an absolute truth, and an absolute morality. There are other people talking around me as well, yet it is just this discussion that grabs my attention. What is it about it that engages me? Through my research I now know that I have a good ear for discussion. I am drawn to the heat and the sense of passion embodied in debate and discussion, yet I had always tried to escape from it. I used to think I hated discussions because, to me, it was always followed by a wrangle and quarrel or, basically, it sounded useless as no one cared about reaching a compromise. However, subconsciously, I had a longing for effective and valuable discussions. That misconception of mine I can now trace back to the history of a society influenced by the repression of self-expression. Through this investigation, I realized that there has rarely been any opportunity or

encouragement for individuals in Iranian society to speak their minds and express their views freely.

In fact, it is not untrue to say that my thesis helped me find my true voice. This is actually the first time I have written in the first person, except of course, in my diary, the only refuge I had. No matter how duty-bound I felt to keep an accurate factual record of what was happening around me, the main character of all the events I chose was always, blatantly and shamelessly, the audacious “I.” In contrast, all the reports and essays and even my bachelor’s thesis had to be in third person since the desired style of writing was the objective and reliable third-person narrator.

It has always been a desire of mine to hear others’ views and thoughts, to discover their personal ideology and how that affects their lives. This has actually become my thesis; my obsession, and my desire; the desire to provide a space and opportunity for a group of diverse individuals in order to engage differing voices and viewpoints. “I’ll propose a space for that, for sharing different views and perspectives, for discussing and debating, for generating that fascinating heat and excitement; I’ll make a space for the public to have discussion.” I was determined, though, that I wanted to focus on the tolerance and understanding side of discussing, rather than the commonly known competitive side of debate. This idea of mine has its roots in a desire to encourage the virtue of human plurality, and to acknowledge the presence of the wide range of diverse ideologies, convictions and viewpoints pertaining to today’s globalized world.

Engaging and expressing differences involves experiencing and being challenged by opposing viewpoints. Ideally, the ongoing exposure to challenges develops people’s tolerance of others’ opinions, an attitude that must be cultivated in a diverse society.

Expressing oneself in public in this investigation, specifically, touches on the issues of enhancing public self-expression skill, and thereby disclosing overlooked public “masks” and shaping a “unique identity” in the public realm. The public roles can be reengaged by providing an opportunity for individuals to express their uniqueness and share their viewpoints. For the purpose of expressing and sharing thoughts and initiating the culture of dialogue, this investigation encourages developing the art of debate and discussion. Here, the proposal would elicit questions such as: What is the best way to accomplish the

thesis intention? How is it related to space? In what kind of space will people feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts and sharing their views? Does the proposal require a disciplinary space of eye, voice, and body to meet its intention? How exposed or enclosed does the space need to be?

Once I dove into the notion of space, I started looking at spaces in which public discussion has occurred such as the Greek Pnyx, Roman Forum, and the British Speakers' Corner. I attempted to establish an understanding of how these spaces worked and work for their societies; how the idea of the exposure of the speaker and the audiences to each other could be looked at. Each of these precedents provides a wealth of knowledge about public spaces that host public speaking and encourage the oratory skill. However, none of these places addresses debate, specifically. Along with these precedents, I looked at more private places wherein formal debates have been practiced throughout history, including Roman Curia, Houses of Commons, and debate spaces at universities. This research also involved spaces where debate and discussion happened in Iran. However, in exploring architectural features and design guidelines for a space in which to hold public debates, only those precedents are presented that have specific impact on the final proposal. After that comes the question of context. Where to put this space? In what context would people feel comfortable and encouraged to debate? Why public space?

Public spaces with their demographically open qualities provide valuable grounds for engaging a variety of world views and values. Having a public space to hold these heated discussions will certainly engage and involve the public and influence a wider group than just intellectuals. By dedicating a space to this purpose in the public realm, the thesis envisions that the space will consequently act as a new site for citizenship and a new "space of appearance."

Such space becomes even more essential in Iranian society that dreads conflict. In addition, since debates in Iran were practiced and bound by the limits of an authoritative body of knowledge, encouraging and engaging people with more diverse viewpoints and ideologies will break the boundaries and will address tolerance more effectively than before.

My proposition appears to turn a blind eye to the current situation of Iran in terms of freedom of expression. However, this thesis does not aim for political

debates; rather its focus is on promoting a culture of debate in a society that dreads conflict. There would be, of course, some limitations on the practices engaged in the space, yet the mere existence of it would be a big step in educating people of a need that they might not be consciously aware of, in subtly notifying them of a missing opportunity. I would rather ignite the culture than abandon the idea because of the possible limitations that might be imposed on it.

The thesis does not claim to be a single solution to any issue of self-expression and fostering of the culture of debate, nor does it present a complete design for the space of public debates. Within the narrative of this thesis, one way of exploring a collective shadow of a society is presented, along with a way to own it by an architecture that incorporates the shadow into the public life. In fact, this is a way of approaching a sociological issue with the help of Architecture, making a role for public space in promoting a culture; a culture that encourages human plurality and appreciates engaging diverse viewpoints.

Considering the different aspects of this proposal, the thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter one will discuss the concern of the thesis in two parts. First the issue of self-expression is explored using personal memories—self scale—and memories of a society—large scale. Then the philosophy of the space is introduced based on the virtues of diversity and tolerance, as well as disclosure of unique public selves within the public realm. Chapter two will be dedicated to the concept of debate and the history of its practice in the world and in Iran; this will also include an analysis of a combination of case studies from both Iran and the world, all of which have specific influence on the final proposal, and the applied key concept of each will be summarized in a table of drawings. The last chapter shall focus on framing the citizenry debate and its space. There, the differences between debate, discussion, and dialogue will be addressed, as will the qualities of the type of debate intended for this proposal. The last part of this chapter will discuss the space within the context of an urban park that will be introduced as the intended type of public space. The proposal culminates by presenting an architectural toolkit for application to the specified cultural and urban context.

Chapter One The Concern

SELF- EXPRESSION

Wall has mouse, and mouse has ears

~ Persian proverb

THE LARGE-SCALE

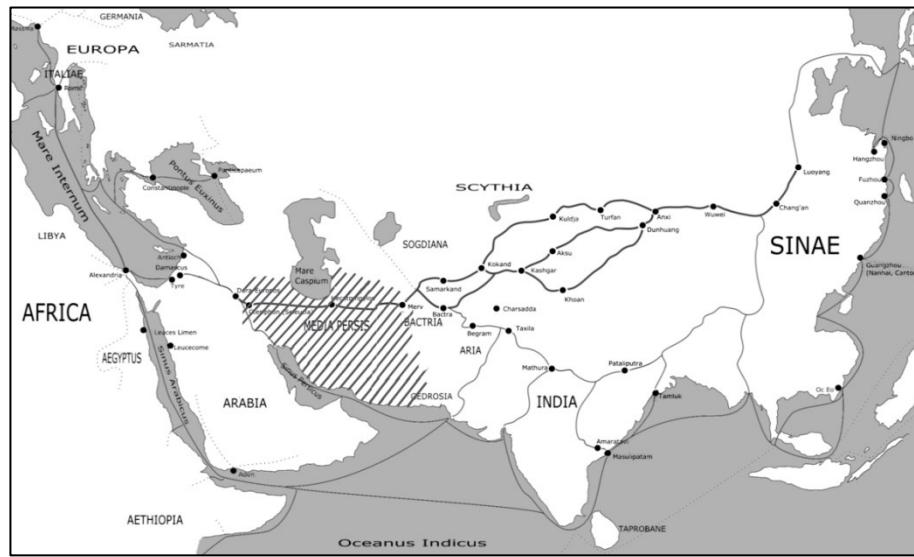
Through the study of Iranian history, I realized that rarely has there been any opportunity or encouragement for individuals in Iranian society to speak their minds and express their views freely. Thus, authentic self-expression has become a dilemma for Iranians. This phenomenon has its roots in the fundamental conflict between state and society throughout Iranian history. The state tended towards absolute and arbitrary rule; society tended towards rebellion and chaos.

This antagonism took its origin from that quality of the society for which the expression an "arid-isolatic society" has been used. Basically, the general scarcity of water and the aridity of the land created a landscape of isolated and self-sufficient villages with long distances in between. In fact, the villages were too small with insufficient surplus of production to support a feudal base. Thus, the aridity of the land and its resulting isolated social units precluded the rise of a feudal society or any other independent social classes in the country; instead, it led the state into exercising arbitrary power. In a feudal society, landlords act

as the ruling classes, which were initially represented by the state. The state was subsequently dependent on and representative of the ruling classes. In Iran, all landlords depended on the state, and the state stood above the social pyramid and had the power of life and property over all the social classes. Although the state's independence from society clarified its peculiar power, it was also the primary reason for its weakness and vulnerability. To illustrate, the state could seldom depend on the support of any privileged classes in critical times, and this situation happened twice in the twentieth century, in the Constitutional Revolution, and the Revolution of 1979 seventy years after.¹

The persistence of this conflict, ultimately, generated an unusual degree of insecurity in the country as a whole. Hardly anyone could be sure that his position and/or possessions would be secure over a year. This insecure feeling was not merely a product of internal conflicts, but also because of the peculiar geographical location of the country. Iran has been the crossroads between Asia and Europe, East and West, and it has been overrun frequently throughout the centuries. Moreover, all this unusual degree of unpredictability generated a feeling of indifference in Iranian society as well because people came to believe the stability of their situation was unreliable and that someone—an insider or outsider—could come, at any moment, and change the whole existing situation. The Persian proverb 'six months from now, who will be dead, who alive?' summed up the general attitude towards time, prediction and planning.

¹ Homa Katouzian, *The Persians, Ancient, Medieval and Modern Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 4-8.



In terms of cultural behaviour, the prevalence of *taqiye*, or dissimulation, was a product of such an arbitrary state and its associated sense of insecurity. ‘Taqiye’ is the practice of concealing one’s true beliefs and religion, or even—in threatening circumstances—pretending to views that are not truly held. People should always be cautious, not expressing troublesome thoughts and feelings. Another frequently-used Persian proverb, ‘wall has mouse, and mouse has ears’, which is the closest saying to the English “walls have ears,” kept warning about the possible consequences of expressing thoughts. Moreover, practicing dissimulation has been further provoked by the strict mixture of religion and politics from the Revolution of 1979. The persistent state of insecurity in the country, consequently, has made authentic self-expression a dilemma for Iranian society.

Fig. 1-1 The geographical location of Iran as the crossroads between East and West, 1st century CE Greco-Roman trans-Asia map.

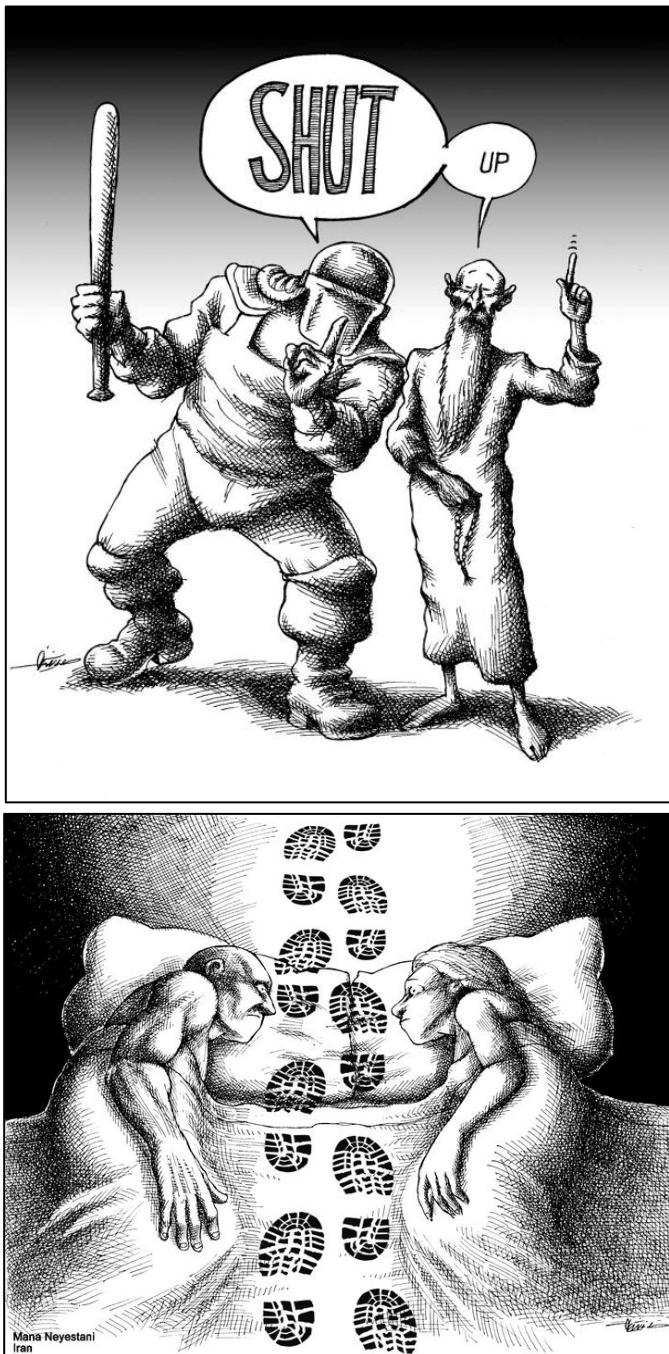


Fig. 1-2 Theocracy, by Mana Neyestani,

Mana Neyestani is an Iranian cartoonist and illustrator for economic, intellectual, political, cultural, and professional magazines. He is particularly known for his work for the newspaper *Zan* and Iranian exile media Radio Zamaneh.

Fig. 1-3 The Boots, by Mana Neyestani

In my discovery of the origins of those confused senses I felt in my first review in Canada, there was a sense of guilt, the sense of guilt followed by displaying an inappropriate behaviour. "You should not brag about what you think and what you feel," was a phrase that I traced back to a core cultural virtue known as *shekasteh-nafsi*, which may be literally glossed as 'breaking the self'. The closest concept in English to this concept would be 'modesty' or 'humility'. There are many stories, epics, poems, and anecdotes in Persian literature admiring the virtue of modesty. For Sa'di—one of the major Persian poets of the medieval period—humility tops the maxims of good behaviour. In his works, humility, modesty and humble behaviour are part of a general maxim of a good relationship with one's fellow human beings. Here is the preamble to Sa'di's approach from his *Kolliyat*:

A drop of water dropped down with the rain
It felt small seeing the breadth of the ocean
Thinking 'Who am I where is the sea
Where there is sea I might as well not be
Since it showed modesty, the mother of pearl
Held it in its bosom and raised it as pearl
It was elevated to such an extent
That it turned into a glittering jewel
It rose high because it showed humility
It began to exist by pretending to nullity
In the very intelligent humility is found
A branch heavy with fruit lies on the ground²

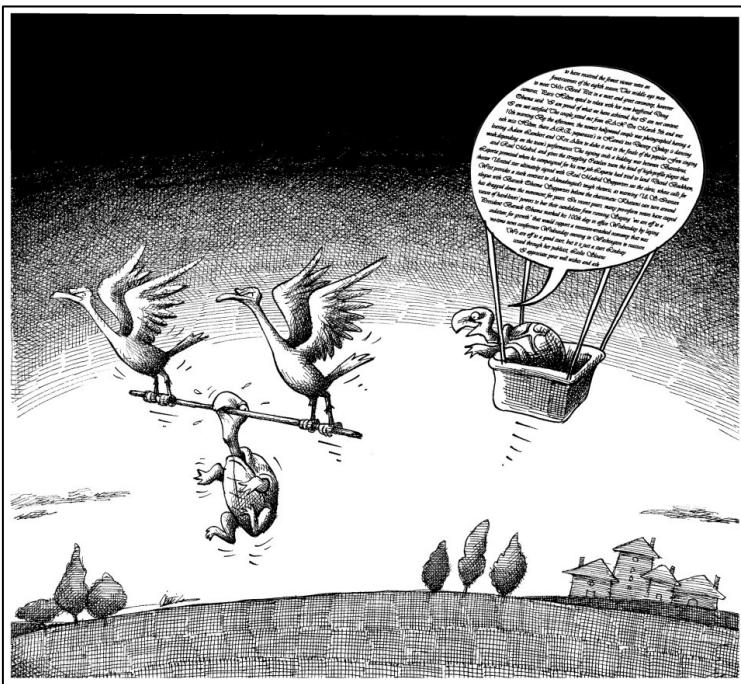
However, the word *shekasteh-nafsi* in Persian is somewhat different from 'modesty' in English, and as it is used in Western cultures. Within this culture of *shekasteh-nafsi*, in circumstances of receiving praise for an achievement, the receivers of the praise are prone to downplay their own role in the achievement and attribute it to other factors such as other people like their

² Homa Katouzian, *Sa'di: The Poet of Life, Love and Compassion* (Oxford: One World Publications, 2006), 103.

parents, or God, fate, or luck. In fact, this culture discourages any form of 'self endearing' that would imply the exclusion of others.³

Under this line of thought, you are encouraged to remain ever silent rather than boasting about yourself. From all of those literature courses that I took during my school time, I have retained the ‘wisdom of silence’ as a frequent notion in my mind. Silence is dignity: that is a repeated *fact* in our literature.

The man of many words is deaf; no counsel does he heed like silence.
He that speaks little thou dost never see ashamed; a grain of musk is
better than a heap of mud.
A wise man sews up his mouth: the candle is burned by means of its
wick.⁴



³ Farzad Sharifian, *Cultural Conceptualisations and Language* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), 115.

⁴ Saadi Shirazi, *The Bostan Of Saadi*, A. Hart Edwards trans. (London: John Murray, 1911), 110-111.

Fig. 1-4 Turtles, by
Mana Neyestani

To further identify this cultural behaviour of our society, I shall address a concept in psychology known as “shadow.” This term, first used by Carl Jung, refers to the unconscious and disowned part of the self that is not under control of the ego. The shadow-making process, generally speaking, starts somewhere early in our life. Within the context of culture, we categorize our innate characteristics into those that are acceptable to our society and those traits that have to be discarded. Although this partitioning is to some extent essential in a civilized society, those rejected and abandoned traits do not disappear; they only accumulate in the dark corners of one’s personality. We inevitably make shadows in order to have culture; what we need to do, later in life, is restore the wholeness of our personality that was lost in the cultural ideals. Otherwise, shadow, being hidden too long, collects an energy potential more than that of the ego and consequently becomes an autonomous monster that erupts as an overpowering rage.⁵

For the purpose of this investigation, I started looking for our collective shadow in terms of self-expression. The shadow of society, broadly speaking, is a massive force, an accumulation of unconscious aspects of its individuals. In a society in which expressing one’s true beliefs receives no attention, and practicing dissimulation that is imposed by a sense of insecurity has been rooted in individuals over the years, self-expression becomes a huge “collective shadow” that erupts brutally if not owned and integrated consciously. The reoccurrence of revolutions throughout Iranian history stemming from experiencing arbitrary rule by the state is a manifestation of Iranian collective shadow outbursts.

Illustrating another aspect of Iranian shadow eruption, in the shape of expressing communal happiness, is Iran’s defeat of Australia in November 1997, leading to its qualification for the 1998 World Cup. Huge crowds of people poured onto the streets across the country to celebrate the victory; this unexpectedly continued until after 3:00 am. Being among that crowd, I noticed that the intensity of the joy arose from not only the victory, but also from an unprecedented sense of attachment through public celebration. Similarly, the presence of a large number of people in the streets celebrating religious rituals—the only permitted festival-like events in Iran—despite the fact that

⁵ Robert A. Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow: Understanding the Dark Side of the Psyche* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 5.

most of the celebrants are not true believers, somehow indicates the public expression of usually-repressed joy. Properly speaking, it often seems as though an autonomous force causes all these stories to surface no matter how deeply those shadows have been buried in the society. First, we need to acknowledge this collective shadow and then, as designers, try to own it consciously through integrating it in the designs of our cities and urban spaces.



Fig. 1-5 Unprecedented
Crowds of People
celebrating in the streets
the 1997 Iranian soccer
team's victory and its
qualification for the 1998
World Cup.

THE SELF-SCALE

I can vividly remember how in school we had to say prayers and even had a prayer break at noon to pray together in congregation. Were we all believers? That did not matter. Even if you were not a believer you had to pretend to pray and needed to have a strong excuse to skip taking this imposed road to heaven. This concealing of genuine beliefs was not limited only to our “actions;” you could not express them through “speech” either. You can imagine how deeply it would influence your psyche if you were not a believer, whether you struggled with not telling lies or yielded to an untruthful self disclosure.⁶

In fact, concealing or veiling seems to have been rooted in all aspects of our life and have turned society into a veiled society:

In a veiled society, walls surround houses. Religious *Taqiyeh* [deliberate dissimulation] protects faith. *Ta'arof* [ritualistic mode of discourse] disguises some thoughts and emotions and plunges both parties, the addressee and the addresser, into a kind of factual suspense. Houses become compartmentalized with their *Daruni* [inner] and *Biruni* [outer] areas. Feelings become disjointed in *Zaheri* [external] and *Bateni* [internal] spheres. Abstractions supplant concreteness. Autobiographies become a rare commodity in the literary arena. Generalities replace the specific. Indirection becomes a common practice. Concealing, keeping what is considered private _veiling_ is not just a woman's problem. It is a relative constant, everyone's preoccupation.⁷

⁶ A good illustration of the situation at the time in Iran is *Persepolis*. Persepolis is an autobiographical comic book written in 2000 by Marjane Satrapi depicting her childhood up to her early adult years in Iran during and after the Islamic revolution. Figures 1-5 have been included due to their similarities with my personal experiences in self-scale part, both in content and context.

⁷ Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 5.



Fig. 1-6 This drawing illustrates how children had to learn to lie about their faiths. From Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000)

As a child you were always struggling with what was ok to express and what was not. Even if you chose not to tell lies, you had to be careful to hide and not talk about whatever you had at home that was “ḥarām,” and therefore illegal. Unfortunately, most of the things that you were excited to talk about—music, music videos, parties, and satellite programs—were either illegal or taboo. This situation got even worse when you reached your teenage years, a time when you had to learn to conceal a new type of feelings as well, your natural and strong feelings for another person. “What is the relationship between you two? Hand over your IDs.” The guardians of the revolution would ask if they saw you out with a member of the opposite sex alone.⁸ It was not just the government; opposite sex relationships before marriage were taboo among most families as well. Whether you chose to follow your natural demands and accept all its circumstances, or tried to stay out of trouble by not getting involved, you could not truly be a teenager. Thus, this period in which you should be implicitly allowed to make mistakes lost its true meaning in such a society.



Fig. 1-7 Drawings on this page and the next two pages display a way to deal with The Guardians of The Revolution in order to refrain from being taken to the Committee, the HQ of Iran's Revolutionary Guards. From Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000)

⁸ Originally intended to protect the country's Islamic system, the Guardians of the Revolution was formed following the Islamic Revolution of 1979 as a branch of Iran's military. They gradually have taken an ever-more assertive role in virtually every aspect of Iranian society.





You had been reminded many times to be careful about blurting out troublesome thoughts during classes. For instance, questioning religion got you into serious trouble. Lectures were generally monologue speeches given by the teacher, and when you were asked to express yourself, you were asked about facts. “How do you feel about this ideology?” or “What do you think about this event?” would have sounded quite unfamiliar questions to my ears in a religious classroom.⁹ This peculiarity of us never being asked about our ideas occurred in other classes as well. I have a crystal clear memory of one always happy and energetic girl at high school who used to jump in and give her comments about any subject. To the rest of us, this behaviour was secretly not acceptable. We did not know why; we just knew that we did not like her! Some actually hated her: “OK, she is miss know-it-all.” Our response was something that now I can label as the projection of our collective shadows.

Fig. 1-8 Drawings on next two pages illustrate how families were worried about their children expressing their troublesome thoughts at school. From Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000).

⁹ Religious courses in Iran are mandatory to all students and they are mostly focused on Islamic thoughts.





In retrospect it seems that I was always trying to be a “good and reasonable” girl. In facing all those situations, I chose to abandon the troublesome approach, and focused instead on my primary goal in life. In fact, with any approach there was a price to pay and I just decided to prepay the price. I do see lost pieces in each phase of my life, which makes it difficult to equate these phases with their implied definitions: the honest expressive childhood and the spontaneous uncontrollable teenage years. And it is not only me; I can see many others of my generation who took the same approach towards life, and who now are feeling the same losses in their life. Some are even desperately trying to make up all of their lost experiences in their adulthood, and thus, feel lost and trapped by contradictory roles.

In a society with a deep-rooted sense of insecurity that had made expressing thoughts a dilemma for individuals, sharing views becomes a rare occasion, and the whole society, even unconsciously, is suffering from the lack of an opportunity for effective discussion. In times of clashing ideas and its following discussions, the common behaviour you observe is either frustration or indifference. Most people prefer to avoid any discussion since, to them, it is the sign of a wrangle and quarrel; or basically, it sounds useless as they think no one cares about their views. In fact, those are the ones who do not know how to engage in an effective discussion. Here, I remember part of an Iranian novel in which the narrator’s father tells her “Neither argue with people, nor criticize them. Whatever they say, just tell them ‘you are right’ and let it go. When people ask about your opinion, they do not want to hear your thoughts; they want you to agree with their opinion. Debating with people is useless.”¹⁰

Having repression of expression as a constant policy, the state has taken no interest in encouraging and educating people to discuss and respect differences. However, enhancing the virtues of diversity and tolerance of different viewpoints needs to be taken more seriously in our increasingly diverse societies.

¹⁰ Zoya Pirzad, *Cheragh-ha ra Man Khamush Mikonam* [I Turn Off the Lights] (Tehran, Markaz Publication, 2001), 153.

EXPRESSING DIFFERENCES

'Difference' today seems to be about identity, we think of race, gender, or class. Aristotle meant something more by difference; he included also the experience of doing different things, of acting in divergent ways which do not neatly fit together. The mixture in a city of action as well as identity is the foundation of its distinctive politics. Aristotle's hope was that when a person becomes accustomed to a diverse, complex milieu, he or she will cease reacting violently when challenged by something strange or contrary. Instead, this environment should create an outlook favorable to discussion of differing views or conflicting interests.

~ Richard Sennett

DIVERSITY — TOLERENCE

'Diversity' in this investigation mainly addresses the presence of the wide range of diverse ideologies, convictions and viewpoints pertaining to today's globalized world. Our beliefs can constantly be challenged with the transnational flow of ideas, cultures, resources, etc., in this networked world. The question is whether we can accept being exposed to the challenges resulting from diversity.

The first step in encountering this phenomenon, apparently, is the acknowledgment of the presence of different and diverse viewpoints. As a matter of fact, by understanding the uniqueness of all individuals and their ability to contribute to improvement, we can broaden our horizons in our journey toward the truth. The virtue of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect of differences, and this acknowledgment of diversity is generally known as pluralism. The notion of pluralism postulates that people can hold several views, all of which may be equally right and fundamental, yet in conflict with each other. As a society, all of our experiences, both individual and collective, are connected and share a common ground, yet are uniquely different in the various forms that they take. This difference forms the basis of diversity. A characteristic of a diverse society is the parallel existence of both essential sameness and unique difference between its individuals. In her book, *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt aptly describes human plurality with the twofold character of equality and distinction:

If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. Signs and sounds to communicate immediate, identical needs and wants would be enough....In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive, become uniqueness, and human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings.¹¹

The destruction of this 'plurality of unique beings' happens under conditions of either radical isolation or mass society. Radical isolation is usually the case in a tyranny under which its subjects lose their human capacity to act and speak together because of the isolation of the tyrant from his subjects and the isolation of the subjects from one another through mutual fear and suspicion. A mass society, on the other hand, expects all social groups to absorb into one society and tries to "normalize" its members by imposing innumerable and various rules. Thus, it excludes the full appearance of the actions that

¹¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 175.

reveal the distinct and unique identity of an individual. Under such circumstances, distinction and difference become private matters of the individual.¹²

The desire for communal sameness, stemming from the rise of society, threatens human plurality in today's societies. From the deceptive term of "community" and the "we" feeling, people may erroneously feel they belong to one another, and share together, because they are the same. By adopting this coherent community image, individuals are prone to avoid the necessity of looking deeply into one another. Through this peculiar avoiding process, "belonging" to one another becomes a shared sense of what we think we ought to be like, as one social being, in order not to be hurt. In this myth of solidarity, consequently, fear prevails rather than love of human's "otherness." The fear of actual participation, because of its accompanying challenges and pain, emerges in the process of forming this community image; and it, consequently, leads to the loss of situations of confrontation and exploration between individuals of the society.¹³ In other words, this false perception of sameness and equality pertaining to the idea of community threatens the power of the public realm as a place in which individuals appear through their unique "action" and "speech," and thus overlooks the virtue of human plurality.

In taking the next step, in order to actively acknowledge the virtue of a pluralism of viewpoints, the immediate and primary approach is to engage those differing voices and viewpoints. Achieving this objective encompasses more than merely assembling the differences; differences have to interact. As Richard Sennett points out, "if in the same space different persons or activities are merely concentrated, but each remains isolated and segregated, diversity loses its force."¹⁴ This goal of integrating plurality can be achieved by providing a space and opportunity for a diverse group of individuals to share their viewpoints.

¹² Ibid , 40,41, 58.

¹³ Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life* (New York: Knopf, 1943), 40-42.

¹⁴ Richard Sennett, *The Spaces of Democracy* (Michigan: The University of Michigan, 1998), 20.

While expressing the many differing viewpoints within a diverse assembly will engender a series of confrontations, avoiding those issues, simply because they are unpleasant to address, is not sensible. Ongoing confrontation through engaging and disclosure of the differences introduces the virtue of tolerance. Tolerance of others' opinions is a skill that can be encouraged by appreciating the coexistence of multiple perspectives from which we can develop our argument. By and large, engaging a wide range of viewpoints would promote the full understanding of an issue. Although confronting an opposing idea is, initially, painful and challenging, it may shed light on a hidden aspect of the issue. Becoming aware of opinions different from your own restrains certain kind of dogmatism and overconfidence. Considering the process of getting to the truth as an ongoing and evolving process prevents us from taking dogmatic positions and it also encourages us to experience being challenged by opposing viewpoints and so develops our tolerance. Experiencing these uncomfortable and painful encounters with differences will, consequently, influence the individual's growth both psychologically and ethically.

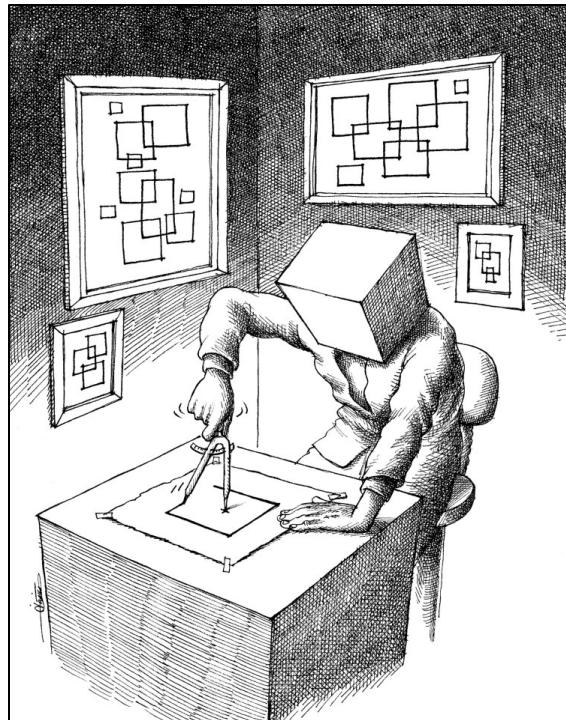


Fig. 1-9 Square Heads 3,
by Mana Neyestani

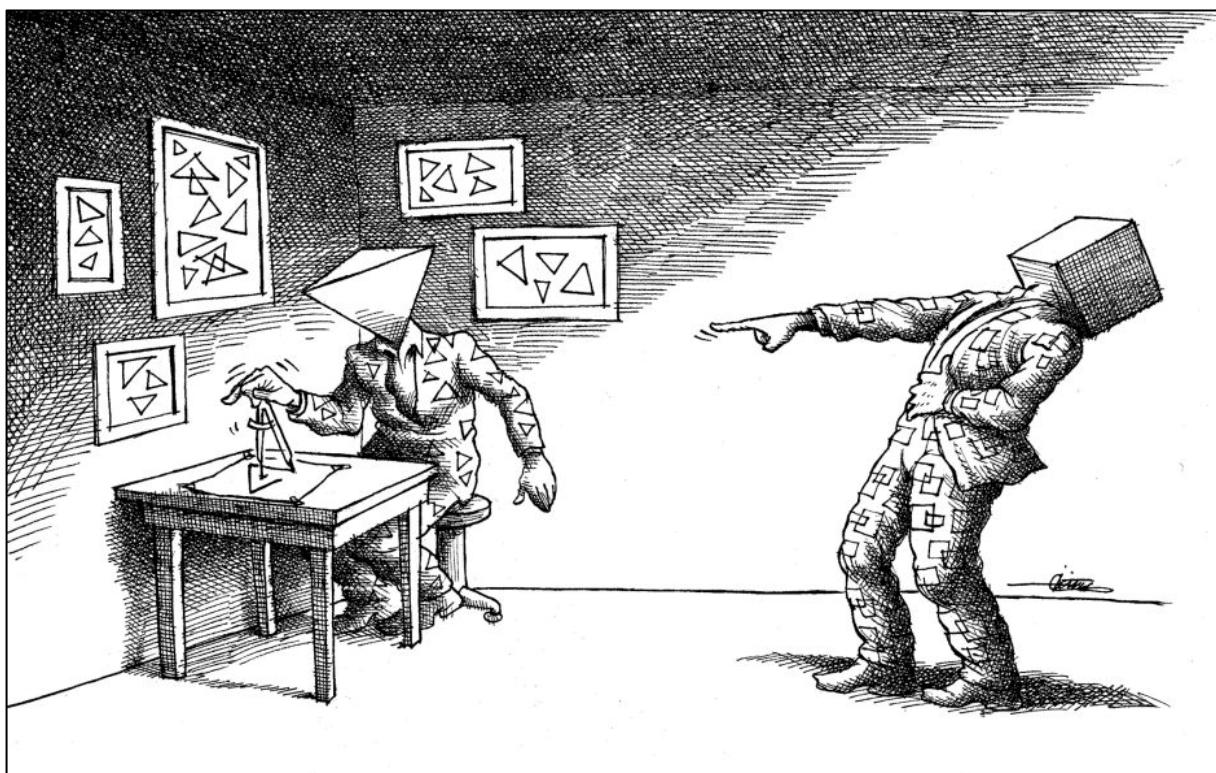


Fig. 1-10 Square Heads 2,
by Mana Neyestani

SELF-EXPRESSION — DISCLOSURE OF SELF

Of equal significance to this investigation is improving the thesis's initial concern—self-expression skill — with which individuals can distinguish themselves from others in order to reflect their own uniqueness in public.

Disclosure of self and “who” in the public realm is one of the notions that Arendt aptly presented. The primary conviction of Arendt is that “the space of appearance,” “the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly,”¹⁵ was created by “action” and “speech;” for her, the unique distinctness of human beings is revealed by speech and action:

In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities, and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and sound of the voice. This disclosure of "who" in contradistinction to "what" somebody is—his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide—is implicit in everything somebody says and does.¹⁶

The “action” and “speech” referred to here are valuable in the public realm only if they lead to the full “appearance” of the individual, and that is when deeds and words retain their original revelatory qualities and lead to the disclosure of the “who” in the public realm.

However, such self-disclosure, in Arendt’s conception, is neither an expression of one’s “true” self nor externalizing an inner potential. Her focus on the impersonal qualities of adopting a specific public persona or “mask” serves to highlight the distinction between the public and the private self. The discipline and depersonalization coming from public role-playing shape a “unique identity” for the self as a performer on the public stage.¹⁷

¹⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 199.

¹⁶ Ibid, 176.

¹⁷ Dana R. Villa, “Theatricality in the Public Realm of Hannah Arendt”, in Marcel Henaff, ed., *Public Space and Democracy* (Minnesota: University Of Minnesota Press, 2001), 154-157.

With the rise of society in the modern world, properly speaking, "political" activities embodying action and speech have been replaced by economic activities, activities connected with sheer survival. Thus, no uniqueness is revealed; instead, there are normalized behaviours imposed by society that have replaced the spontaneous "action." In fact, we entered an era in which the notion of playacting, or mask-wearing became permanently tainted, and public deeds and words merely revealed self-serving appearances. To achieve full appearance in today's societies, therefore, we need to reengage public roles by providing, in the midst of all the desire for communal sameness, the opportunity for individuals to express their uniqueness. And for all this to happen, the specific skill of self-expression in the public realm needs to be developed.

From among the various forms of human expression, human beings convey their thoughts and feelings to others most directly through speech. In a sense, speech is the primary way of enhancing self-expression. In order to apply speech as a means of self-expression in public, two methods of speech will be discussed here: public speaking and debate. While public speaking encourages critical thinking, it focuses particularly on oratory skill and eventually embodies a mere monologic performance, whereas debate is a shared performance involving at least two parties. Although debaters have to improve their public speaking skills, they additionally develop their tolerance for divergent points of view, which is a worthy quality to improve in a modern society.

PUBLIC REALM—SPACE OF APPEARANCE

In political philosophy, the concept of “public” has been an area of concern for many intellectuals. For Arendt, the term "public" signifies two closely interrelated but not altogether identical phenomena: publicity and the world. By “world” Arendt means neither the earth nor nature but the “human artifact,” the relatively permanent artifice created by “the fabrication of human hands.”¹⁸ These two senses of “public” are interrelated since both refer to something common, whether appearances seen and heard by all, or to an “objective” context inhabited by all. The difference between them is that public appearances depend not only on the availability of a public realm but also on the existence of a “human artifice” that “relates and separates men at the same time.” In Arent’s thesis, both phenomena designated by the term “public” have lost their characteristic functions in the late modern age. Under the conditions of mass society, the man-made world of things no longer serves to gather humans together, to “relate and separate” them; rather, it is increasingly subjected to the rhythms of production and consumption.¹⁹

In fact, the growth or decline of the public realm has been subject to an ongoing scholarly debate over time. The notion of the public has its roots in the concept of the ideal prototypes of the public realm, Greek agora and Pnyx, where the state’s public policies were discussed among an assembly of equal citizens. For Hannah Arendt, western civilizations have only descended since this golden age of democracy. However, for Jürgen Habermas, forums of public discussion re-emerged in the 18th century in the shape of bourgeois cafes and salons, and also through developing print media, in the form of books, pamphlets and newspapers. Although this enlightened democracy was and is less situated in the physical public space than it was in the agora, it is capable of challenging the actions of the state.²⁰

This “nonpolitical” challenge, while addressing state regulations by rational-critical public debate, gradually became a full-scale ideology of critical

¹⁸ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 52.

¹⁹ Villa, “Theatricality in the Public Realm of Hannah Arendt”, 149-150.

²⁰ Stéphane Tonnellat, *The sociology of Urban Public Spaces* (Paris: Atlantis Press, 2010), 1-2.

publicity that rationalized the practice of political power; and thus, a historically unprecedented medium for the confrontation with power was introduced by the bourgeois public sphere. These sites served as places in which individuals began again to develop their critical judgment skills through discussion of cultural and literary subjects. Subsequently, the principle of critical publicity gradually began to include governing civil society. Habermas traces the decline of the public realm back to the middle of the nineteenth century, when the rise of passive consumption of mass culture destroyed the sites of cultural discussion and debate in which the bourgeoisie had learned “the art of critical-rational public debate.” With the shift of the public from an arena for critical debate to the passive consumption of prepacked news and entertainment, publicity lost its critical character; instead, it has been entirely taken over by the marketable image and refers to the advertising efforts necessary to generate plebiscitary support for specific leaders or policies.²¹

Analogous to Habermas’ view is Richard Sennett’s conception of the ‘fall of public man’, introduced as when the public sphere created in the coffee houses of the eighteenth century was initially eroded in the mid-twentieth Century by the emergence of new broadcast media in addition to the de-centralisation of the urban form. It is the time when the public lost their public roles and became a passive audience for media content. With regard to urban development, roads and car parks separated and isolated city quarters, and subsequently, spaces through which people transited or displayed their consumption roles began to predominate over spaces in which people can act as engaged citizens.²²

From another perspective, the emergence of this critically reasoning public sphere into publicly accessible space has only been through the cafes and, recently, on the more visible but still placeless pages of the Internet.²³ We have clearly entered the era of virtual communities. The new media offer new spaces for interaction and easy access to virtual public spaces. Hundreds of debates take place on the Internet every day. It is sometimes said that the

²¹ Dana R. Villa, “Theatricality in the Public Realm of Hannah Arendt”, *Public Space and Democracy* by Marcel Henaff (Minnesota: University Of Minnesota Press, 2001), 159-161.

²² R. Sennett, *The Fall of public man*(London: Faber, 1974), 261-263.

²³ S. Tonnellat, *The sociology of Urban Public Spaces* (Paris: Atlantis Press, 2010), 1-2.

Internet might be a new space of democracy. Although these online debates are free of any social conventions and thus encourage the expression of radical beliefs along with usually content-free quality, they are no substitute for face-to-face debates, as they lack the quality to motivate improving tolerance of others' opinions. In these screen communities the uncomfortable and painful encounters with differences can be easily eliminated merely by pressing a key. Thus, genuine debate and discussion cannot be generated through these virtual debating environments, which cannot substitute for a physical place within which public discussions and debates can be carried out, a space that emphasises the significance of face-to-face interaction both in terms of enhancing communication and increasing civility through the virtue of tolerance.

THIRD REALM — SPACE OF HIDDEN APPEARANCE (HETEROTOPIA)

The idea of ‘third realm’ came into play when those dimensions of the human condition that, in contemporary terms, are commonly categorized as part of ‘cultural sphere’ could not be theorized within Arendt’s binary opposition between the private and public spheres. This third sphere gives space to everything that has no place either in the public space of appearance or the private sphere of the hidden. Placing between the public and private realms, the third realm is aptly labelled “the space of hidden appearance.”

In characterizing this third sphere based on Hippodamus’ triad of space in a human city — sacred, public, and private— and its connection to the concept of the *polis* introduced as “the fivesquare city” by Robert Jan Van Pelt²⁴, a good description for the ‘other spaces’ zone is given as follow:

According to Van Pelt, the constitution of the Greek *polis* can be represented by five fields or squares. First is the *emporium* — the wall or interface between inside and outside — represented as a big square that circumscribes the other four squares contained within it. Within the *emporium* one finds the *oikos*, or private house, the *agora* with the *stoa*, the *acropolis* with the temple or shrine, and the *necropolis* (cemetery) with the *stèla*. On closer inspection, however, this division into five squares boils down to a tripartite division... When we link the *acropolis* and the *necropolis*, we see an oblique zone in between the *oikos* and the *agora* — a diagonal bar in the scheme of ‘the fivesquare city’ between the economical and the political. This diagonal, intermediate space stretching from temple to cemetery represents the inclusive realm of all ‘other spaces’: theatre, stadium, *palaestra*, hippodrome, gymnasium, etc. This intermediate terrain corresponds to Hippodamus’ ‘third sphere’ or ‘third space’. ²⁵

²⁴ Robert Jan Van Pelt, and Carroll William Westfall , *Architectural Principles in the Age of Historicism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 169.

²⁵ De Cauter and Dehaene, *Heterotopia and The City : public space in a postcivil society*, 95.

As described, the ‘third space’ is neither political (or public) nor economical (or private) space. This quality, explicitly, represents the otherness of other spaces — *les espaces autres*— presented by Foucault, and therefore, the third space can be entitled as a heterotopia.²⁶ In recent terminology, this third category of (mostly secularized) sacred space may be best described as the ‘cultural sphere’, involving the space of religion, arts, sports, and leisure; or basically, everything that has no place either in the public or the private sphere.²⁷



Fig. 1-11 Van Pelt’s
‘fivesquare city’ visualization,
from *Heterotopia and The
City: public space in a
postcivil society* (2008)

²⁶ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986), 22-27. The French philosopher, Michel Foucault coined the novel concept of the heterotopia and defines the principles of heterotopian spaces in his lecture to a group of architects in 1967.

²⁷ De Cauter and Dehaene, *Heterotopia and The City : public space in a postcivil society*, 91.

The third realm, properly speaking, has somehow a binding role within the public realm. These worlds of ‘hidden appearance’ can take on a para-political, proto-political or infra-political role. They act as experimental terrains where ‘special societies’ gather their power to maybe one day break ground in the full daylight of the ‘space of appearance’. Jafar Panahi’s film *Offside* (2006) illustrates one instance of the infra-political role of heterotopia. It portrays six Iranian women, disguised as men, who desperately try to attend the crucial qualifying match of the 2005 football World Cup, despite a ban on women in stadiums. The para- or proto-political power of heterotopia unfolds in the slippery terrain of ‘academic activism’. The scholar who, one day, decides to leave the safe confines of academia and join the public debate, thereby taking on the role of intellectual, is using and abusing its heterotopian high ground. Heterotopias, therefore, are central to the public realm, even though, outside the political process and proceedings.²⁸

With respect to the three forms of the *vita activia* theorized by Arendt, “action” shapes the space of appearance, “work” and “labour” build the private space of hiding; “play,” as a creative element of the human condition encompassing all ritualized and theatrical, is suggested to be the activity proper to this third sphere of heterotopias. Regarding play as significant as other human activities, Huizinga greatly emphasizes the foundational character of play in the organization of society in general and the production of culture in particular. Quite analogous to Foucault’s principals of heterotopia, Huizinga’s definition in *Homo Ludens* contains seven elements: game or play is a free act (1), outside the everyday (2); without direct purpose or material end (3); that unfolds within a dedicated space and time (4); that is rule-bound (5); often associated with a club or specialized society (6) and often partly hidden or disguised (7).²⁹

Play as an activity of the third realm not only creates space, but also requires a space and a time entirely of its own. The space of play is definable by the basic spatial gesture of a magic circle that creates a significant distinction between those within the enclosure and those outside it. Entering the circle means entering a game with some sort of commitment to the rules of the

²⁸ Ibid, 100.

²⁹ Ibid, 95.

game, rules that fundamentally initiate a culture. As a seedbed of culture, this space with its condition and possibility — from ritual to theatre — offers a refuge within the conventional order of society from the normalizing forces of the everyday.³⁰

With the intention of improving the culture of debate in a society described as having an imposed veiled condition that makes it difficult for its individuals to express themselves truly and, considering specifically Iranian society, this study proposes a space based on the notion of heterotopia as the space of hidden appearance. With the help of temporary interventions that encourage people to express their views on specific issues and tolerate opponents, this investigation envisions that a culture of discussion will incrementally develop and sets the ground for further debates about other fundamental issues of the society.

The questions here are: What are the qualities of an effective debate and discussion appropriate for a public gathering? How have debates been practiced around the world and in Iran, so far? What have been the features of the physical spaces embodying those events and how have they affected the practice of sharing thoughts?

³⁰ Ibid, 96.

Chapter Two The Medium

DEBATE

It is better to debate a question without settling it, than to settle a question without debating it.

~Joseph Joubert

ETYMOLOGY

The word 'debate', (pronounced /di'beit/) comes from Old French *debat-re*, and from Romanic word *dibattere* (di + Romanic *batt-ëre* meaning "to fight," as DE-BATTLE).³¹ It originally, therefore, comes from the idea of "battle" and "fight." The relation between debate and battle is somehow analogous to the connection between ancient sports and warfare. In antiquity sport had value as a technique for military preparedness. The fighting tactics learned from combat sports were invaluable in the field of battle, as were the debating skills in the field of argument and politics. The primary difference is in the severity of rules. Ancient sports had few restrictions, and even the existing rules were not always enforced. Debate, however, is a product of politics and the city and, thus, was limited by certain rules pertaining to a civilized body politic. Thus, debate has long been regarded as a form of verbal warfare, a fight to the finish between combatants armed with reason and evidence, a contest with a definite win/lose nature.

³¹ *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, ed. Katherine Barber (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2004), s.v. "debate."

The meaning given by the Oxford Dictionary for 'debate' as a verb better clarifies its recognized nature: "to fight, strive, quarrel, and wrangle; to contest, dispute about, argue, discuss; esp. to discuss a question of public interest in a legislative or other assembly; to engage in discussion or argument; esp. in a public assembly." Thus, a 'debate' could also be defined as a 'formal discussion' in a public meeting.³²

THE ART OF DEBATE

Debate is an art, since its performance requires a specific skill and for improving that skill a systematized body of principles is intended. Here, distinctions need to be made between the art of debate and wrangling or argumentation. Debate can be defined as the art of formal and oral controversy. Being an art of formal controversy distinguishes it from a process of mere wrangling since wrangling displays no formalities or any forms of art. Debate, in contrast, requires the formality of an orderly discourse in the interchange of opinion and argument. Furthermore, as an art of oral controversy, it needs to be distinguished from argumentation, which employs either written or oral discourse. Debate, therefore, is a specialized form of argumentation presented exclusively through a method of oral expression.³³

Through debate one can also develop skills in influencing others to accept or reject belief. In fact, no one today is exempt from the necessity of influencing others to understand one's viewpoint. In a sense, debate is an art of persuasion; however, it is more than rhetoric, which is a technique of persuasion, and more than a mere verbal or performance skill. Debates, broadly speaking, are means of encouraging and improving critical thinking, self-expression, and tolerance of others' opinions.

Debate can be employed for different purposes. On some occasions debate is applied to demonstrate the superior cleverness or talent of one debater over another; in such cases, the art of debate might degenerate into sophistry or oratorical bombast. This model will be discussed more in the next part, concerning debate poems. The worthy purpose of debate, however, is to

³² Ibid.

³³ W.C. Shaw, *The Art of Debate* (Norwood, Mass.: Norwood Press, Norwood, 1922), 2.

challenge ideas to achieve a robust analysis of the question at hand. Debate is, above all, a way for those who hold opposing views to discuss controversial issues without descending to insult and emotional appeals.

The technique of debating is a method of rational decision-making based on true evidence and valid reasoning for and against a given proposition. A formal debate entails a pre-determined framework with certain rules, within which participants discuss and defend their position. Different forms of debate are being practiced today, such as parliamentary debates, Oxford-Style debates, and Lincoln-Douglas debates. Most of these formats share some general features; any debate, in general, has a proposition and two sides: one in favor of the proposition (affirmative side) and one opposed to it (negative side). And they differ in some details such as the number of debaters, time allotments, and the sequence of the speakers. Formal debates are usually held for competitive purposes, particularly during election campaigns. For instance, presidential election debates and leaders' debate. True and genuine debate is, however, to be found not in the format, but in particular characteristics of the arguments that occur within the format. Although various formats for the interchange of arguments may be more or less likely to generate real debate, it is in the qualities of the arguments themselves that true debate may be found. Debate should be regarded as "the process by which opinions are advanced, supported, disputed, and defended."³⁴ Thus, by the presence and fulfillment of all these four actions, true debate occurs. Along with the development of ideas by thorough explanation and description, a useful debate involves a cycle of careful critical analysis, in which refuting and defending the ideas presented continues until the debate has concluded.

³⁴ R.J. Branham, *Debate and Critical Analysis: The Harmony of Conflict* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 1991), 22.

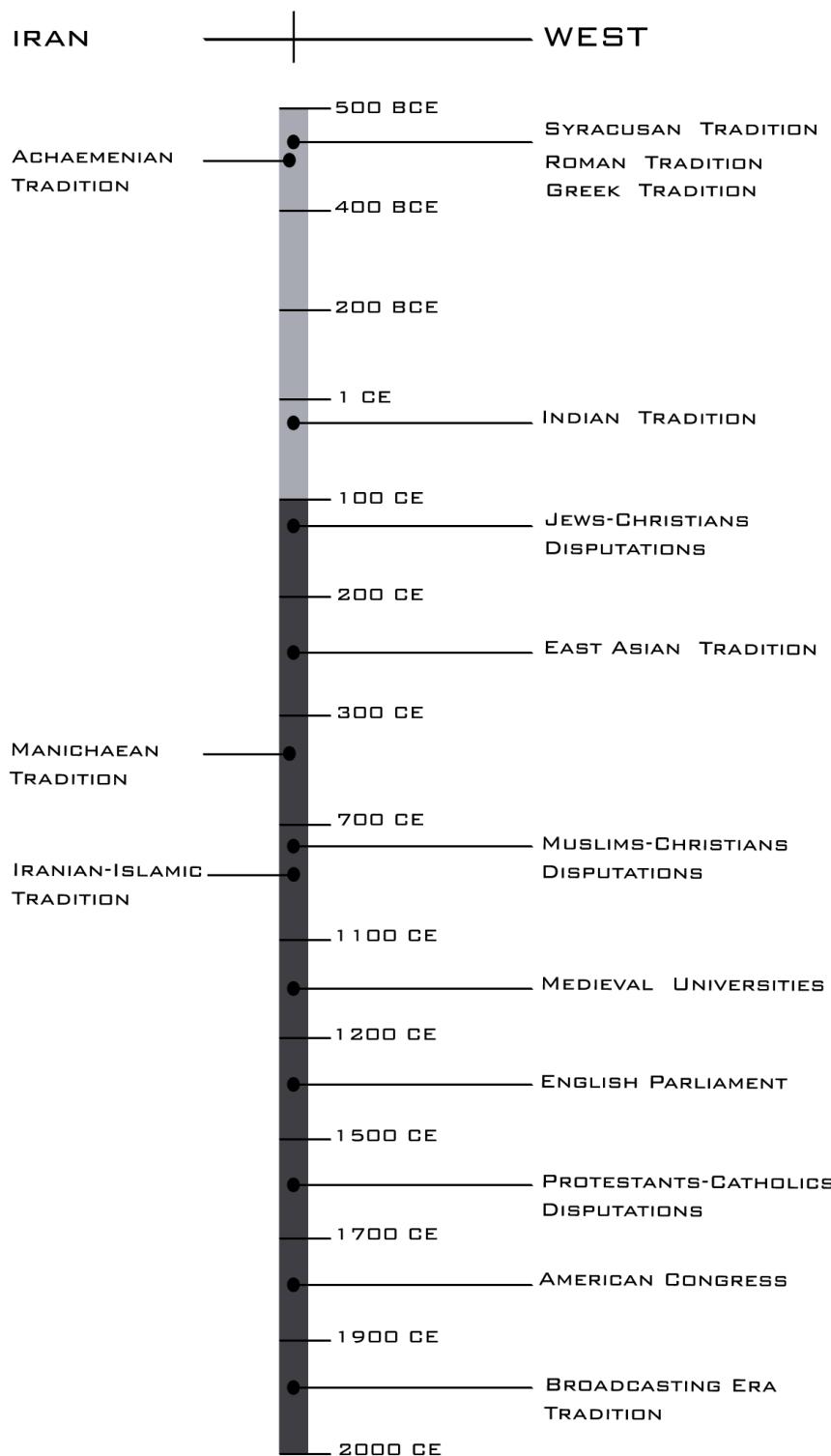


Fig. 2-1 A debate history timeline of case studies .
Drawn by author

HISTORY OF DEBATING

SYRACUSAN TRADITION: Debate has probably existed ever since human beings developed speech and reasoning. Public debate—as a debate with broader social impact—first emerged in the public realm in Syracuse, when a Greek colony was founded on the Island of Sicily. Syracusans, in 467 BC, drove the tyrant Thrasybulus from the throne, and instituted a democracy. The new government was, soon after, challenged by a refugee problem, when Syracusans who had been exiled by Thrasybulus started to return and reclaim the land that had been taken from them by the tyrant. There were no records or documentation showing their ownership; thus, they had to present their claims in court and persuade the court by oral argumentation. The outcome of each case was decided by the audience in the court, composed of sometimes hundreds of citizens. The more persuasive a speech was, the more land the refugee would gain. The increasing significance of improving speaking skills for plaintiffs led to emergence of a business opportunity. The first teachers of speech and debate started to appear, offering lessons in persuasion and rhetorical skills to plaintiffs in order to help them effectively defend themselves in court.³⁵

GREEK TRADITION: The birth of public debate is closely connected with the beginnings of democracy. The first known form of democracy (from the Greek *demos*, meaning "people" and *kratia*, meaning "rule") in Western Civilization can be traced back to the era of the polis, around 2,500 years ago. Since city-states in ancient Greece were relatively small, there was no need for representative government. Citizens of Athens held regular public meetings in which adult male citizens along with the leaders tended to debate about what choices were morally and legally right. Afterwards, the assembly proceeded to vote over policies and actions of the polis. At that time, the Pnyx, the official meeting place of the Athenian assembly, became the first important political and public forum, where debate and argument flourished.³⁶

³⁵ Ken Broda-Bahm et al., *Argument and Audience, Presenting Debates in Public Setting* (New York : International Debate Education Association, 2004), 29-30.

³⁶ Ibid, 30.

ROMAN TRADITION: The Roman concept of democracy regarding the broad range of public participation in the political and legal debates differed from that of ancient Greece. Although debate still had a crucial role in the decision-making process, designated representatives rather than all citizens discussed matters of state. The 300 appointed members of the Roman Senate debated and decided most questions about state policies. The tradition of public oratory, nevertheless, survived in the Roman Forum. The open-air forum, with its elevated speaking platform (rostra), provided a venue for speeches ranging from funeral eulogies to debates over national policy.³⁷



Fig. 2-2 Cicero's orations against Catiline in the Curia Hostilia, Illustrated by H.Schmidt, 1920

³⁷ Ibid, 32-33

The debates of ancient Greece and Rome are predominant in the development of debate in the Western world and continue to influence debating today. However, other cultural traditions have made significant and sometimes different contributions to contemporary practices of debate.

INDIAN TRADITION: Debate in the East has long been part of religion and education; similarly, debating in India has its origin in religious ceremonies, and later served as a significant medium for theological disputes. At first a minor diversion during religious sacrifices, debates became popular entertainment and were part of public assemblies. Indian kings even sponsored debating contests and offered prizes for the winners. To improve the chances of winning, debaters developed systematic instruction in logic, reasoning, and debate strategy, in which they paid special attention to matters of evidence such as experience, analogies, and examples. One of the first debate manuals was written in India and describes the methods of debating as being “necessary to protect the truth.” Although Indian debaters were anxious to win, the contests were generally regarded as ways of seeking spiritual truth and providing the correctness of deeply held beliefs.³⁸

EAST ASIAN TRADITION: In China, debate had an important role in religious training and theological inquiry as well. A form of debate known as “pure talk” was conducted in the form of a very long competitive debate in circles of educated people before an audience. One person (the host) would defend the thesis for debate and another (the guest) would refute it. The audience would sometimes participate as well. Despite its game-like structure, the goal of these “pure talks” was to discover the truth about an issue that concerned everyone involved. Feudal Japan also prized debates as an important part of scholarly life. There, debates focused primarily on literary and historical texts and were practiced informally among students. It was not until the 19th century that debate took a more organized form, when religious and political debating societies were established in Japan.³⁹

³⁸ Robert J. Branham, *Debate and Critical Analysis: The Harmony of Conflict* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1991), 8-10.

³⁹ Ibid, 10-13.

RELIGIOUS DISPUTATIONS: During the Middle Ages, disputation played a significant role both in educational and religious institutions. However, the purpose of religious disputation was often to degrade the sacredness of an opponent's beliefs rather than to enhance mutual enrichment and respect among believers of different convictions. The prevalence of the practice of public disputation in late antiquity generally arose from the increasing conflicts between Jews and Christians, between Christians and pagans, and among various Christian sects.

A large number of these disputations happened between Christian and Jewish theologians when Christianity emerged from Judaism. The subject under debate in most of these Jewish-Christian polemics was the messiah; while the Christians attempted to prove that Jesus was the messiah promised by the prophets and, thus, had already come, the Jews strove to oppose that argument. The intense rivalry between Jews and Christians fostered an ongoing Jewish-Christian polemical literature. This literature, at least in the patristic period, primarily aimed at bolstering up Christianity; whereas the purpose of the disputational works of Jews often was not to convince Christians but to dissuade Jews from leaving the synagogue. Most of these encounters happened in private residences, in bishops' palaces, in royal courts, and in Churches and Synagogues.⁴⁰ In fact, Jews were commanded to attend religious disputations wherein popes, bishops, and most Christian kings were the judges. In that circumstance, 'winning' a disputation could put the security of the Jewish community at risk; thus, Jewish disputants had to be politically cautious about what they publicly expressed.⁴¹ This unfortunate history of Christian-Jewish disputation with the intention to prove how blind the Jews were, eventually degenerated into enmity between early Christians and Jews.

Similar to Christian-Jewish disputations, Protestants and Catholics entered into disputations with the presumption that the Catholic Church was the only repository of all true religion. The Protestant Reformation was sparked by Martin Luther's *The Ninety-Five Theses* in 1517, a disputation criticizing the

⁴⁰ Frank Ephraim Talmage, *Disputation and Dialogue: Readings in the Jewish-Christian Encounter* (New York: KTAV Publishing House INC., 1975), 1-2.

⁴¹ Michael J. Cook, *Evolving Jewish Views of Jesus, in Jesus Through Jewish Eyes: Rabbis and Scholars Engage an Ancient Brother in a New Conversation* by Beatrice Bruteau (New York : Orbis Books, 2001), 15-16.

Catholic Church's corrupt practices, especially the sale of indulgences. This disputation consequently shaped Protestantism (1518-1550) and led to the division of the Catholic Church.⁴² Ever since, Protestant and Catholic theologians have conducted a series of disputations, wherein each has claimed to represent true Christianity.

In brief, in most medieval religious disputations, the very concept of true debate was in question, since participants were convinced from the very beginning of a disputation that one specific side was in possession of all truth and the other side was in error.

⁴² Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*. trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1993), 204–205.



Fig. 2-3 Leipzig Disputation between Martin Luther—the iconic figure of the Protestant Reformation—and Eck, who staged the disputation to expose Luther’s doctrine in a public forum at Pleissenburg Castle in 1519, painted by Carl Friedrich Lessing, a German protestant painter. The body language embodied in most paintings of religious disputation somehow illustrates the unequal nature of these debates. Here, Lessing praised Luther by depicting him boldly defending his doctrine and the audience are amazed by his glorification, while Eck is leaning back, feeling superior to the other debater.

Early disputations between Muslims and Christians were not impressive since early Muslim attitudes towards Christians were based on complete self-sufficiency. Some even argued that there was no benefit to engage critically in religious discussions. This approach was further reinforced with the qur'anic claim that Islam was the eternal and original monotheistic religion. Since, for early Muslims, Islam was the perfect expression of God's religion, Christianity was a corrupted and inferior division of the eternal tradition to them.⁴³ This perception of Christians was analogous to Middle Eastern Christians' initial thought of Muslims as their intellectual inferiors due to Arabic's lack of significance within the Hellenistic literary realm.⁴⁴

In the eighth and ninth centuries, Muslims began to improve their methods of perceiving, judging, and engaging Christians through socio-political, cultural, and religious structures. These works primarily were carried out by four classes: the commentators (*mufassirun*), the traditionists (*muhaddithun*), the legalist (*fujahā'*), and the dialectical theologians (*mutakallimun*). It was the theologians who engaged in producing polemical literature. This group of Muslim intellectuals also engaged in discussions over the Christian scriptures, faith, and practice. In these discussions each side praised its own doctrine, encouraged conversion, reinforced its community's link to divine authority, and refuted the claims of their religious adversaries.⁴⁵

With the prevalence of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Islamic theology (*kalām*), improving debate skills became more significant, especially because Muslim jurists and orators had to use reasoning and persuasion techniques to prove their claims.

One of the Muslim polymaths who made enormous contributions to both the Islamic and Christian worlds is Averroes (Ibn Rushd), a 12th century Muslim Medieval Spanish-Arab philosopher, physician, and jurist who reintroduced Aristotelian thought to Western Europe. Born into a world where philosophy and science were starting to decline in the Muslim world, Averroes became a

⁴³ David Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), 85.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 81.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 86-87.

dedicated student of Aristotle's teachings and began to defend passionately the value of rational philosophy as opposed to Islamic conservatism.⁴⁶ He used to engage in debates with fundamentalists in the mosques where he lectured. With the support of Caliphs in Marrakesh, he consequently influenced educational matters and enhanced harmony between philosophy and religion.

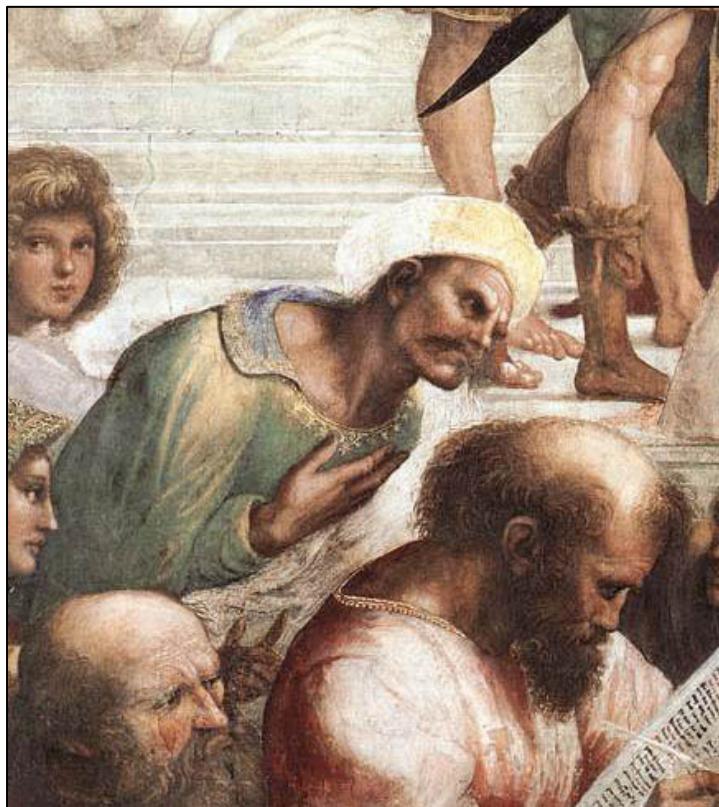


Fig. 2-4 Averroes, a close-up from The School of Athens fresco depicting the figure of Averroes standing behind Pythagoras and looking over his shoulder. Painted by Raphael between 1510 and 1511.

⁴⁶ Roger Arnaldez, *Averroes: A Rationalist in Islam*, trans. David Streight (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 1-15.

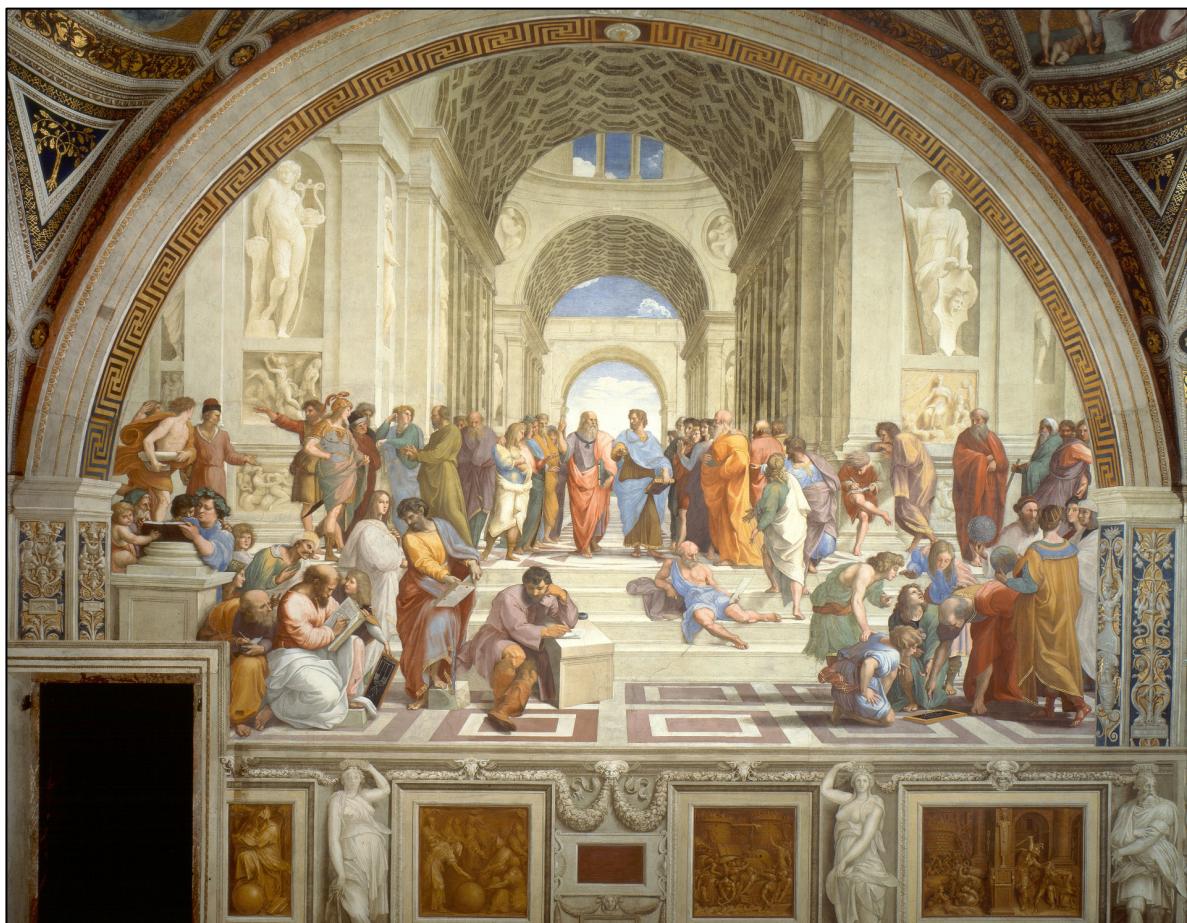


Fig. 2-5 The School of Athens is a fresco by the Italian Renaissance artist Raphael painted between 1510 and 1511. It represents all the greatest philosophers, mathematicians, and scientists from classical antiquity, who lived at different times, gathered in a large architectural framework inspired by late Roman architecture, sharing their ideas. The main figures are Plato and Aristotle, who are shown in the centre, engaged in a dialogue. The painting is a perfect embodiment of the classical spirit of the High Renaissance.

MEDIEVAL UNIVERSITIES: Emerging in the 12th century Renaissance in Europe, medieval universities organized societies of scholars in a system of lectures, individual studies, and examinations regarding the liberal art of learning. During that time, debate and rhetoric blossomed all over Europe and started to have crucial roles in the curriculum of universities. Students became accustomed to attending public debates between their masters; they were also expected to present and defend their own arguments. The issues being debated, usually, were theological or philosophical matters. As debate expanded beyond its scholarly origins, debating became a social event and new audiences in cities and courts appeared, who saw debate as an entertaining forum for intellectual dispute. However, debate issues and the sides that debaters argued remained largely abstract; and thus, these debates had little political impact and served merely as a form of entertainment. From the 17th through the 19th centuries, and as the Renaissance gave way to the Enlightenment, debate firmly continued its domination of academia. Debates were characterized by predetermined roles, rules and time limits, and were held for academic audiences. The debaters did not necessarily defend their real opinions, nor did they disagree with their opponents in real life. Even though this practice was still limited to within the universities, it had a significant influence on the development of political debate.⁴⁷

ENGLISH PARLIAMENT: In the West, the first governmental body to revive the political application of debate was the English Parliament. Founded in the 13th century during the reign of Edward III, the House of Commons became an increasingly important debate forum. It entailed publicly elected members of Parliament who debated on big political issues of the day and proposals for new policies and laws. These debates were not made public until the 18th century; even then, the parliamentary reports were published with fictitious names for debaters. Although, these debates were carefully reported, their distribution in the press helped to educate the public about significant national issues. The introduction of a public element in parliamentary procedures

⁴⁷ Branham, *Debate and Critical Analysis: The Harmony of Conflict*, 13-15.

notably influenced further development of democracy, as demands for freedom of expression grew among members of Parliament.⁴⁸

AMERICAN CONGRESS: Since the colonial government in America has its root in the practices of the British Parliament, public debate was part of the political process long before the American Revolution. With the emergence of the independence movement, debate took on significant importance, as politicians and public figures debated the issue of severing ties with England. The creation of the American Constitution in 1787 was also a product of a series of intense debates. After the constitution was approved, the American Congress became the primary debate forum discussing all national issues such as states' rights, slavery and secession. Although debate was generally thought to have personal benefits, political thinkers believed that debate bestowed its greatest benefits on the public. Debate was regarded as a way not only to make carefully considered decisions, but also to enlighten the public about controversial issues. The increasing importance of debate also let it enter the electoral process, and candidates started conducting campaign debates with their opponents. These electoral debates had a significant effect on educating the electorate and involving them in the issues of the day.⁴⁹

THE BROADCASTING ERA TRADITION: In the 1920s, as radio stations spread across the United States, debate was carried from the U.S. Congress and town meetings into the national arena. Debate shows started in which party representatives, reporters and members of political associations debated within specific rules such as time limits for debaters and audience questions. However, it was not until 1960 that a presidential debate was televised, and that was the four debates between Richard M. Nixon, the vice president of the United States, and John F. Kennedy, a U.S. senator from Massachusetts. Considering the nature of radio and television, and since the audience can tune in and out as they please, the expectations and style of debating have changed. Debates have become shorter, with a longer discussion list, and thus superficiality has crept into a lot of the broadcast debates. Moreover,

⁴⁸ Broda-Bahm et al., *Argument and Audience, Presenting Debates in Public Setting*, 35-36.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 36-37.

presidential debates have become a mixture of traditional debate and a press conference; in one format, a panel of questioners addresses a number of questions on various issues to both debaters, who answer briefly and not always to the point. Thus, these debates usually focus on irrelevant questions that provide better sound bites for the media.⁵⁰

In brief, debate has a long history of more than twenty-five centuries. It started as a manifestation of democracy in ancient Greece, and later found its place in the parliaments, schools, and the media. Debating societies and associations are now flourishing all around the world. The national Debate Education Association brings together youth from more than twenty countries and prepares them to present arguments in the competitive marketplace of ideas and to serve either in their own parliaments or to become active citizens in building open societies.

The next section explores some of the spaces in the west in which debate has taken place throughout history.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 38-39.

PLACES OF DEBATE

THE PNYX: From roughly 600 to 350 B.C., citizens of Athens regularly held public assemblies on the Pnyx hill west of the Acropolis, overlooking the agora, hundreds of meters away from the Acropolis.

All male citizens of Athens could participate and sit on a seating area opposite the stone speakers' platform, the "Bema." Two visual rules organized the public assemblies on the Pnyx: exposure both of the speaker and of the audience to one another, and fixity of place, in where the speaker stood and the audience sat. These two visual rules supported a verbal order in this theatrical space through which a single voice spoke at any one time.

Excavators have identified three successive building periods for the Pnyx. In the first period, around 450 B.C., the natural contours had not been greatly altered; the natural hill slope was utilized to form the seating area of the theatre, while the surface was made level by excavating the hard limestone. A straight retaining wall was also built on the north side, which supported the bema. In the second phase, dated to about 400 B.C. when Athens was ruled by the Thirty Tyrants, the pnyx started to face the opposite way; a semi-circular stepped retaining wall was built to the north, supporting the seating area, which no longer followed the natural slope. Two series of steps along the wall led to the auditorium, and the new Bema was put to the south. Around five hundred seats were also provided for the Councilmen elected by the Assembly. The Pnyx of the third period, around 345-335 B.C., was based on the same design, yet on a larger scale. A massive curved retaining wall was constructed of large stone blocks on the north side, and a monumental central stairway replaced the two series of steps. A new three-stepped bema was hewn into the bedrock opposite this entrance. On a terrace above the bema, the foundations were found for constructing two long stoas that were never completed. In the first century B.C., the Pnyx lost its significance and was abandoned as Athens grew and the assembly moved to the Theater of Dionysos on the South Slope of the Acropolis.⁵¹

⁵¹ H. A. Thompson, "The Pnyx in Models," *Hesperia Supplements*, Vol. 19, Studies in Attic Epigraphy, History and Topography, 1982, 133-147.

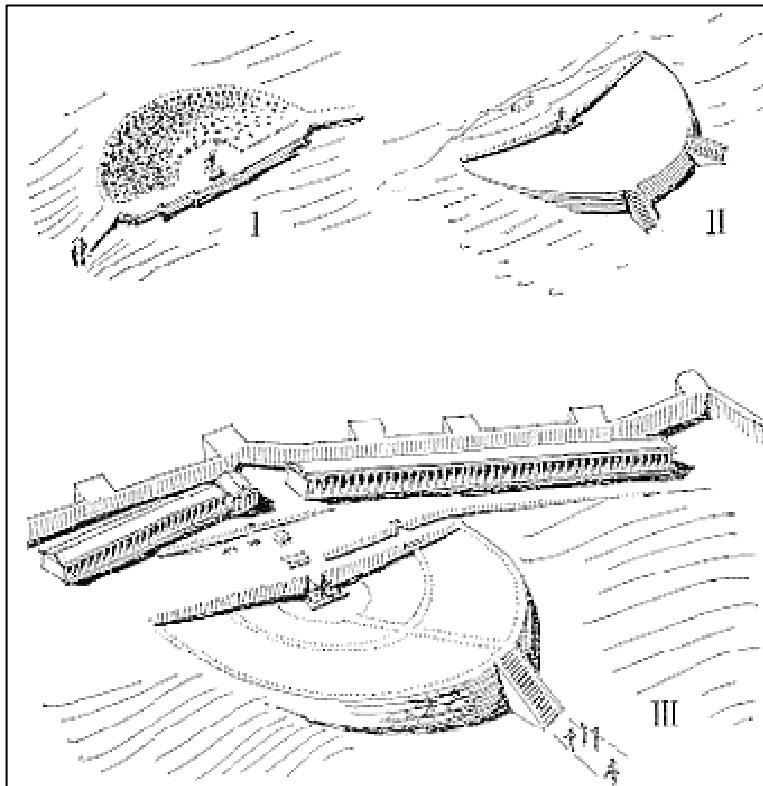


Fig. 2-6 Public Debate Forum,
The Pnyx hill, from the
northwest, late 19 century,
Athens, Greece

Fig. 2-7 Three phases of the
Pnyx, Drawing by John Travlos.

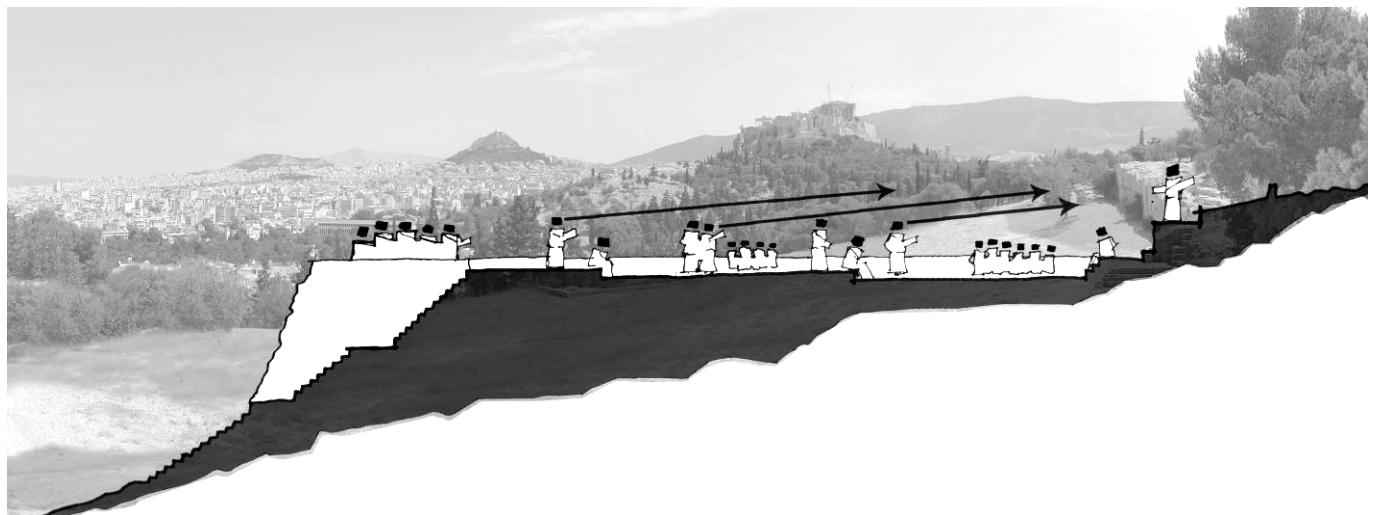


Fig. 2-8 A drawing that illustrates the exposure both of the speaker and of the citizens of Athens to one another during public debates for the purpose of decision-making on the Pnyx hill. Drawn by author.

the ruins of various civic and religious places built in different periods. The original public space in ancient Rome, however, was the Comitium, the historic meeting place of the voting assemblies of the people, which was located on the northeast corner of the Forum. Started as an open-air market place, the comitium gradually became the political, economic, and religious hub of the early Roman Kingdom and Republic.

During the Republic, the Comitium, the *Curia*, and the *Rostra* were the dominant organizational elements, and experienced a series of architectural changes. The comitium of the third century B.C. was a circular piazza attached to a stepped platform, on which the people's representatives met to debate and vote. Located to the north of the comitium was the Curia Hostilia, wherein the Senate met. The high platform from which politicians and orators addressed the people—the Rostra—was located to the south. The Rostra of this period formed a segment within the southern arc of the circular platform of the Comitium. However, the earliest form of the Comitium, around the early sixth century B.C., was probably a square extending symmetrically in front of the archaic Curia Hostilia. The first speaker's platform, created in approximately 500 B.C., was rectilinear and stood almost directly south of the Curia. After the third century B.C., the Curia Hostilia (or the Curia Cornelia) was enlarged to accommodate new senators. This enlargement, in turn, resulted in the truncation of part of the circle of the Comitium. The large space opening out from this area, commonly known today as the Forum, became the stage for legal trials and electoral campaigns, and also the scene of religious rituals and funeral laudations.^{52 53}

The physical form of the Forum experienced different alterations by the early emperors, and over time, the archaic Comitium was replaced by the larger adjacent Forum. During the late first century B.C., Caesar rearranged the Comitium and Forum spaces; he began to build new buildings such as the Basilica Iulia to house the formerly outdoor debates and trials. The Rostra was destroyed, and the construction of a new Curia—the Curia Julia—and a new Rostra started, to be completed by Augustus, the adopted heir of Caesar.

⁵² S. Brint, and M.R. Salzman, "Reflections on Political Space: The Roman Forum and Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C.," *Places, Excavations in the Roman Forum*, April 1988, 4.

⁵³ A. Vasaly, *Representations, Images of the World in Ciceronian Oratory* (Oxford, UK: University of California Press, 1993), 62-63.

Caesar's reorganizations ultimately resulted in the substantial reduction both of civic spaces and of the role of representative institutions. The first Roman emperor, Augustus, continued to build new temples, arches, and pavements in the Forum's limited open space. The monumental projects built in the late first century B.C., essentially, transformed the Forum from a citizens' meeting place into a museum of Empire. With its buildings demolished, the Roman Forum was found to have been completely abandoned as a public space by the end of the sixth century.⁵⁴

Located on the southwest side of the new Julian Forum, across the Temple of Caesar, the new Rostra was no longer accompanying the Senate house of the time (*Curia Cornelia*). Left uncompleted at Caesar's death, Augustus finished and extended the new Rostra into a rectangle at the front, and it became known as the Rostra Augusti. In 29 BC, Augustus had another Rostra built at the opposite end of the Forum as a part of Caesar's Temple, the Temple of Divus Julius. Known as the Rostra Diocletiani, this Rostra is approximately as large as the Rostra Augusti; however, it has several access doorways underneath the top platform.⁵⁵

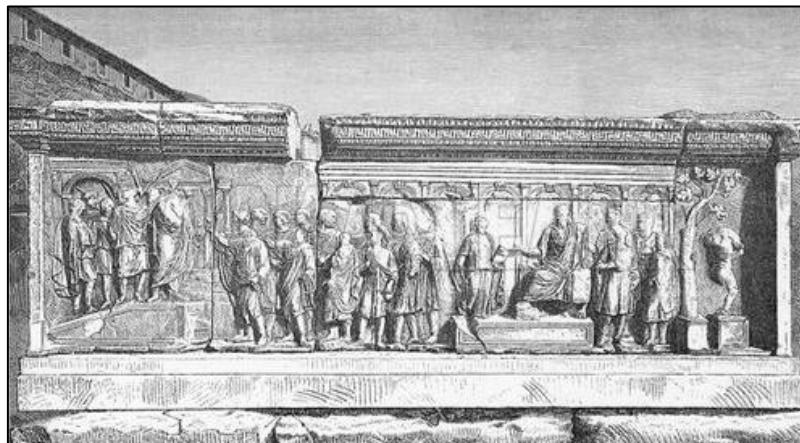


Fig. 2-9 Bas-Relief from the Forum representing (1) An Orator on the Rostra, (2) A Judge sitting in Court.

Illustration from *History of Rome* by Victor Duruy
(Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1884).

⁵⁴ D. Favro, "The Roman Forum and Roman Memory", *Places, Excavations in the Roman Forum*, April 1988, 21.

⁵⁵ John E. Stambaugh, *The Ancient Roman City* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988) 59.

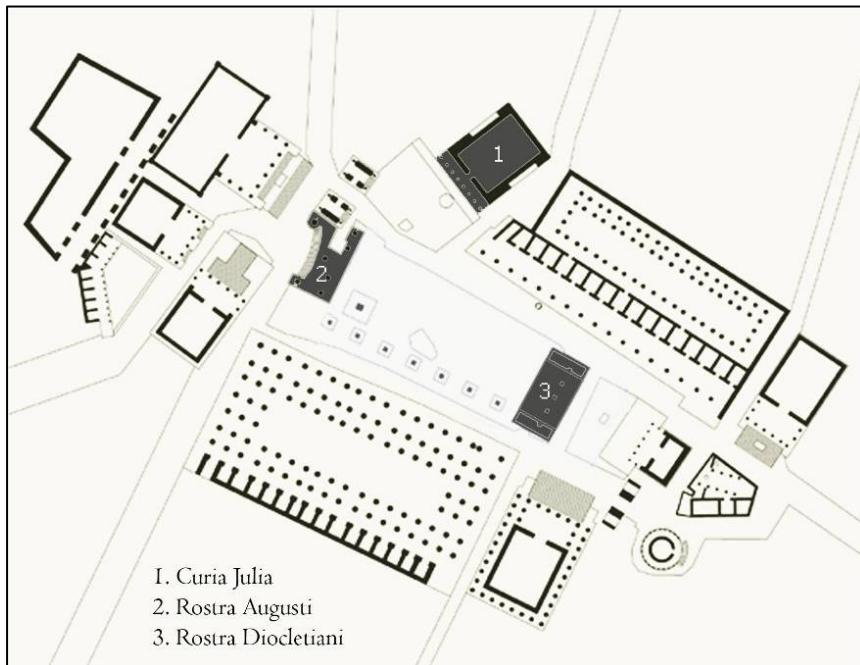
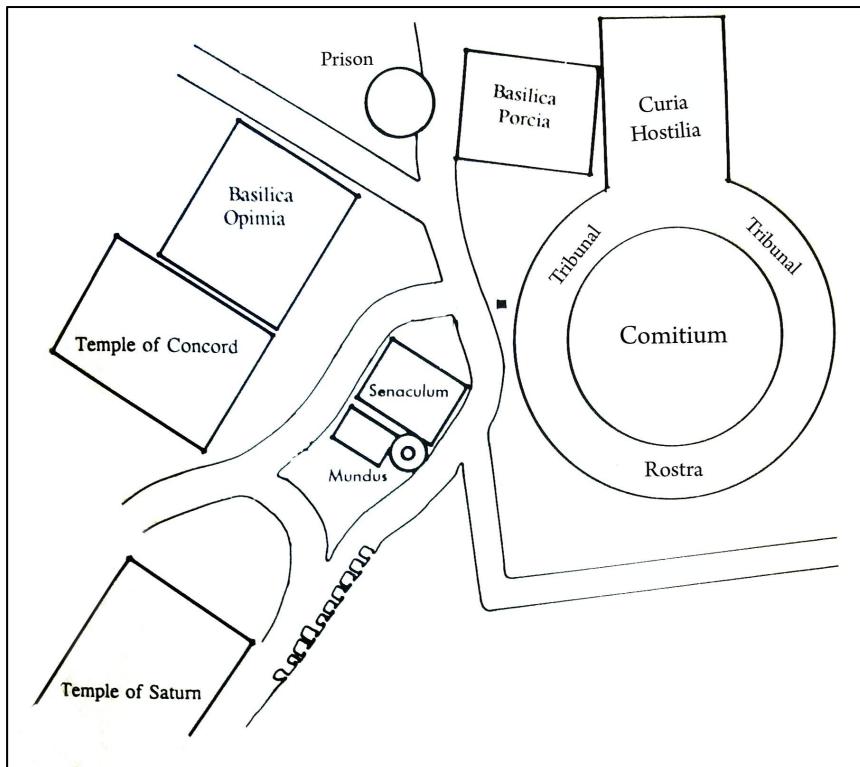


Fig. 2-10 Reconstruction of the area of the Comitium and the Curia prior to changes made by L.Cornelius Sulla (81-79 B.C.). The plan shows the circular comitium of the third century B.C., when located to the north of it was the Curia Hostilia, and to the south was the Rostra. (Adopted from, *Representations, Images of the World in Ciceronian Oratory*, 1993.

Fig. 2-11 A digital Model of the Forum in 400 AD, produced by Dean Abernathy et al., University of California, Los Angeles, 2005

The Rostra primarily offered the stage for Romans to practice the art of oratory and public speaking, specifically with juridical and political purposes. The 12-foot-high platform provided the exposure of the speaker from every spot of the Forum. At times, the numbers of those who gathered in the Forum to hear the consul were so large that they filled the open spaces in front of the Rostra and crowded the porches of the temples. The locus of debate, however, was the Curia, the building where all senatorial laws were passed. And during debates, the public was allowed to enter the house to listen to the senators' discussions. The Curia Hostilia was a simple building with a rectangular space furnished only with wooden benches for senators and a desk and chair for a speaker. The Curia Julia, which replaced the Curia Hostilia, had a great hall with three broad steps for the senator's seats on either side, which could fit a total of about three hundred senators. The speaker's podium was located at the end opposite the door facing the Forum.

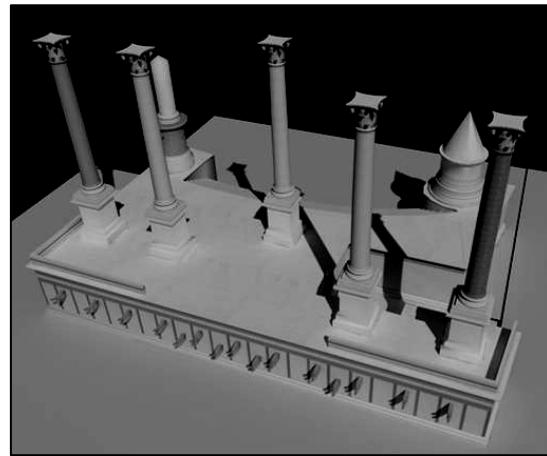


Fig. 2-1 Reconstruction of the Rostra Augusti, by Dean Abernathy et al., University of California, Los Angeles, 2005



Fig. 2-2 Reconstruction of the Curia Julia, by Dean Abernathy et al., University of California, Los Angeles, 2005

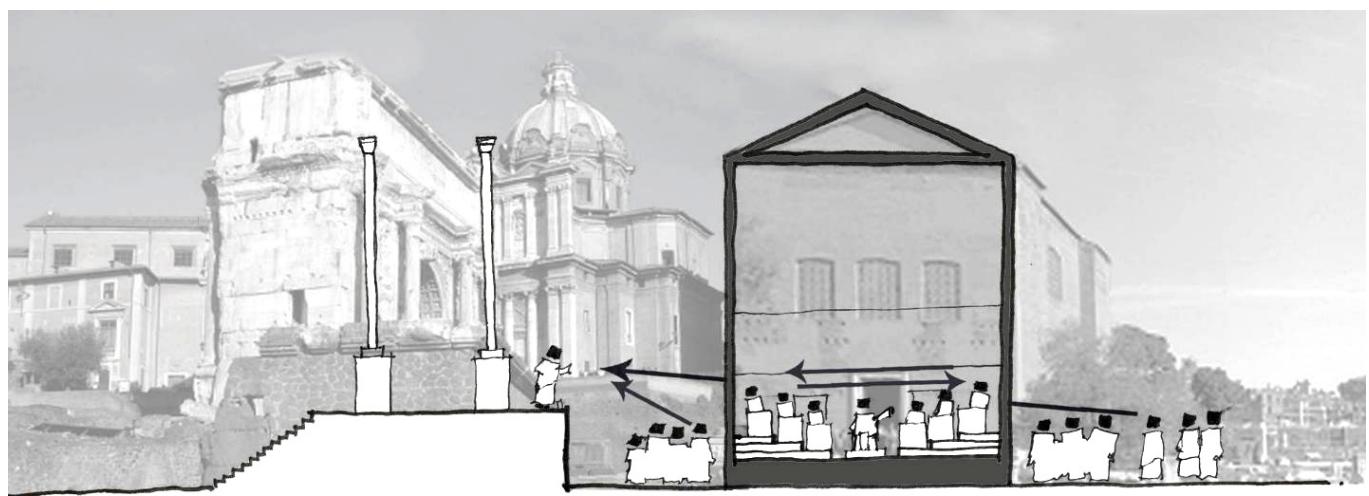


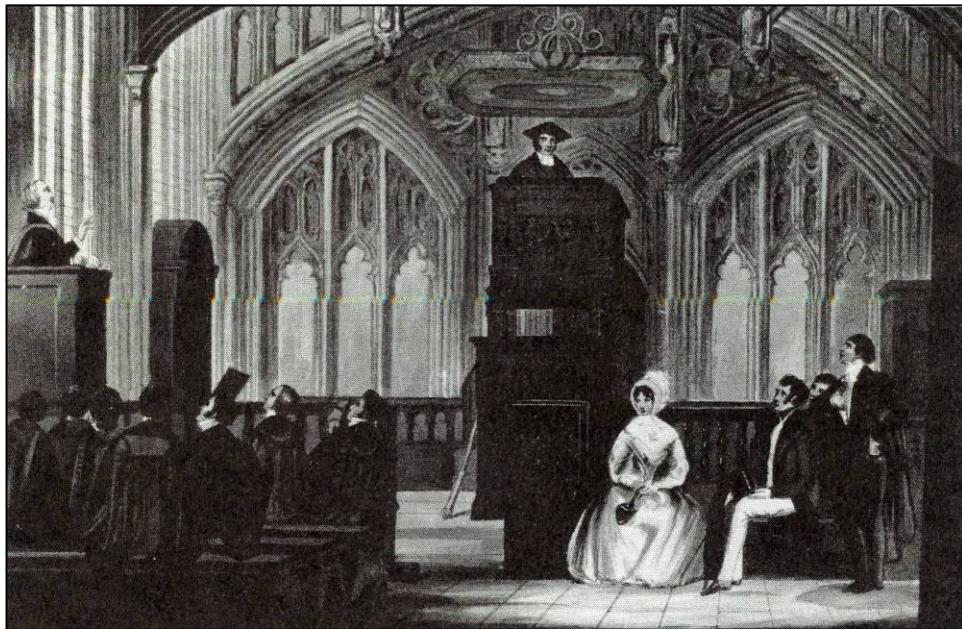
Fig. 2-14 A drawing illustrating the exposure of the orator on the Rostra Augusti to the audience at the Roman Forum along with a section of the Curia Julia depicting a stepped space on which the senate sat on two opposite sides during debates while the speaker stood at the end opposite to the door facing the Forum. Drawn by author.

OXFORD DIVINITY SCHOOL: In about 1426, the University of Oxford began to collect money for the construction of the present Divinity School in order to house the lectures and disputations on theology, the most prestigious subject in medieval universities; it was not completed until 1488. The building is a gorgeous instance of late Gothic art with its elaborate fan-vaulted ceiling and ample window space filled with stained glass.⁵⁶

The School provided a venue for the disputational performances of the Candidates for the degrees of Bachelor and Doctor of Divinity and also a space for the lectures of the school's Regius Professors of Divinity. The examination proceedings were directed by a moderator sitting on a high seat, which was removed within the next decade, and the candidate had to respond to questions raised by an opponent. The two disputants faced each other on opposite pulpits, which survived but had been lowered by 1900, and the east part of the room was for the audience. These disputations were originally intimidating and challenging intellectual argumentations and many candidates failed to pass the test. However, after a while, the standard gradually lowered, and by the end of the eighteenth century, no intellectual effort was required since candidates were provided with prearranged questions and answers and disputations were eventually replaced by written examinations.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages: New Ed. Edited by F.M. Powicke and A.B. Emden* (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), 166.

⁵⁷ Stanley Gilliam, *The Divinity School and Duke Humfrey's Library at Oxford* (New York: Clarendon Press Oxford, 1988), 41.



Over the years, the school was occupied for other debates and disputations in addition to those of the faculty of Theology; in 1625, the House of Commons, driven from London, met there; and in 1752, when Oxford Town Hall was being rebuilt, the Assizes took place in the school. The Divinity school, however, is no longer used for its original purpose. In March 1968, the school officially, and appropriately, became part of the Bodleian Library.⁵⁸

Fig. 2-15 Exercise for the Degree of Bachelor of Divinity 1845, from *The Divinity School and Duke Humphrey's Library at Oxford* by Stanley Gilliam (1998).

The picture shows the higher pulpits for disputants and the high chair of the Regius Professor, which existed before 1900.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 50.



Fig. 2-16 Divinity School, Oxford University, UK, copyright by Cornell University Library. Photograph date: ca. 1865-ca. 1885.

The symmetric concept of design provided pulpits of equal heights which reconcile with the equality concept of debating. An adequate exposure of disputants was also provided with those pulpits.

TODAY'S DEBATING CHAMBERS: Modern debating chambers in parliamentary buildings typically follow similar pattern to ancient prototypes, providing the assembly a space to debate and discuss the government's actions and policies. For instance, the layout of the Houses of Commons in both Canada and the United Kingdom demonstrates a developed version of the rectangular Roman Curia. The rectangular shape itself is generally derived from the shape of a chapel; and the arrangement of the benches follows the configuration of the chapel's choir stalls, facing across from one another. This opposed set of benches somehow reflects the nature of the two-party system and signifies the origin of the terms *left* and *right* designating political tendencies. In all cases, the broad steps for the members' seats on either side provide clear views and exposure of the members to one another. The Canadian chamber is just large enough to accommodate the 308 members. And although more than twice as many members of Parliament (MPs) are elected to the UK House of Commons (650), only about 427 MPs can be accommodated at any one time. Another difference between the Canadian and British Chambers is that British MPs do not have individual desks or assigned seats, and they sit on benches along each side.

The United States House of Representatives, however, features a semicircular stepped floor layout, a layout reminiscent of the theatrical space of the Pnyx. The same visual exposure rule that organized the Greek assembly in Pnyx is present here, yet within a double height closed space. In spite of the circular layout, the tradition of a two-party system also applies to the House of Representatives; members of the Democratic Party sit to the speaker's—the presiding officer of the chamber's—right and members of the Republican Party sit to the speaker's left. The size of the House accounts for around 440 members.

In any case, most modern parliament's chambers are additionally equipped with new technologies, seating spaces for members of the public and press, and live television coverage of the proceedings.



Fig. 2-17 The House of Commons of Canada, Ottawa, ON.



Fig. 2-18 The UK House of Commons, Westminster, London

Fig. 2-19 The U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.

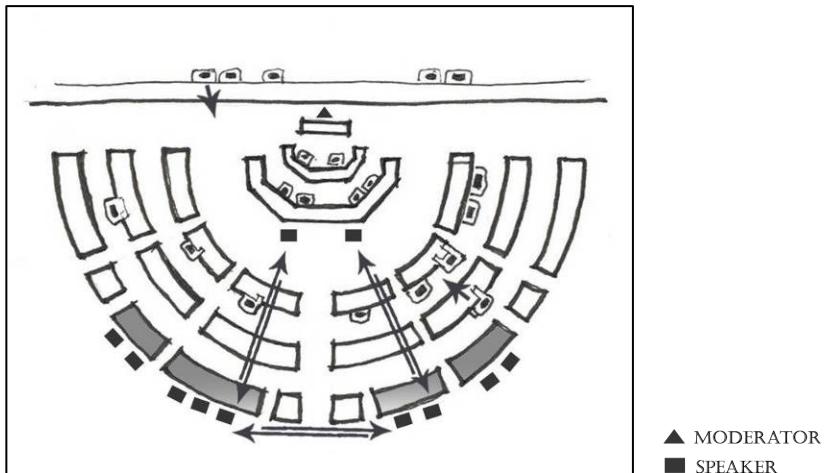


Fig. 2-20 A diagrammatic plan of the U.S. House of Representatives, the semicircular stepped floor provides clear views for members with physically less separation between the two parties. Drawn by author.

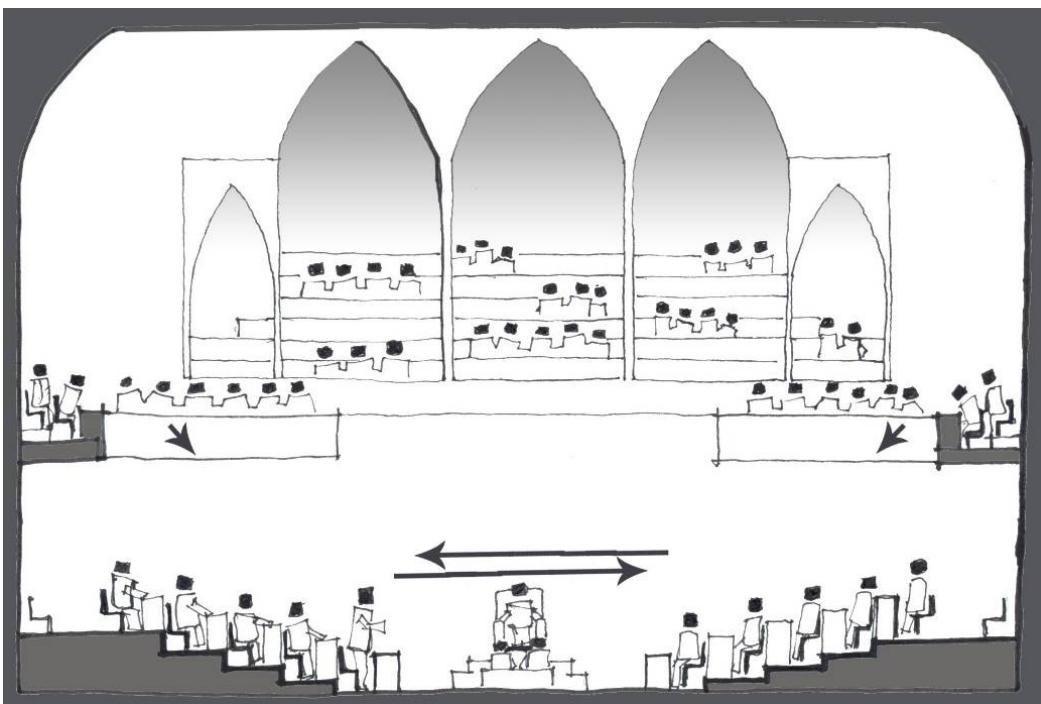


Fig. 2-21 A diagrammatic section of the Canadian House of Commons illustrating two parties sitting on stepped floor at opposite sides, a similar setting to that of Roman Senate, while debaters speak from their own place. The public is placed in galleries on the second floor. Drawn by author.

Along with senate chambers, some educational institutes throughout the world started to emphasize promoting debating skills by providing debate programs and discussion spaces. To mention one instance, the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue works as a conference facility, with around 14 discussion rooms. Also, as part of Simon Fraser University in downtown Vancouver, the Asia Pacific Hall design intends specifically to encourage dialogue with clear views provided by the hall's circular design. The Centre additionally attempts to enhance the quality of communication between participants with the help of advanced information technologies such as videoconferencing, webcasting, and language interpretation.

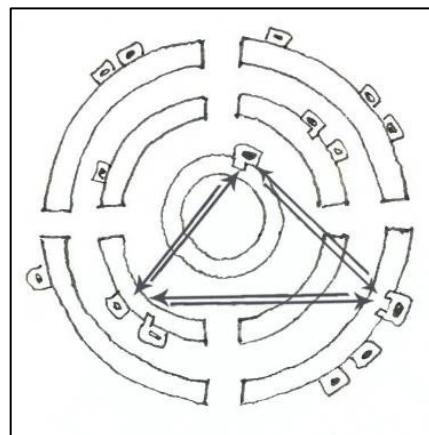


Fig. 2-22 A place for Dialogue, the Asia Pacific Hall, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada.

Fig. 2-3 The drawing shows the Asia Pacific Hall layout, which follows a full circle layout and the debaters can address the assembly from their own seats.

The world's most prestigious debating space currently belongs to the Oxford Union debating society of Oxford University. Established in 1823 and founded on an ideal of the freedom of speech, the Oxford Union has for many years been a forum for sophisticated debating and has hosted guests ranging from Ronald Reagan to the Dalai Lama. The Union aims to promote debate and discussion not just in Oxford University, but across the globe. By placing its focus on the competitive marketplace of ideas, "Oxford-Style" debate is a formal debate format similar to that in the House of Commons that provides a valuable training ground for many future politicians. The Union Chamber is host to several weekly and competitive debating events. The space itself follows the rectangular layout, in which two sides of the argument are facing one another, while more rows of benches are provided for the audience in front of the speaker and around the debate space on the second floor.



Fig. 2-23 Today's most prestigious Debating Space, the Oxford Union Debate Chamber, Oxford, UK

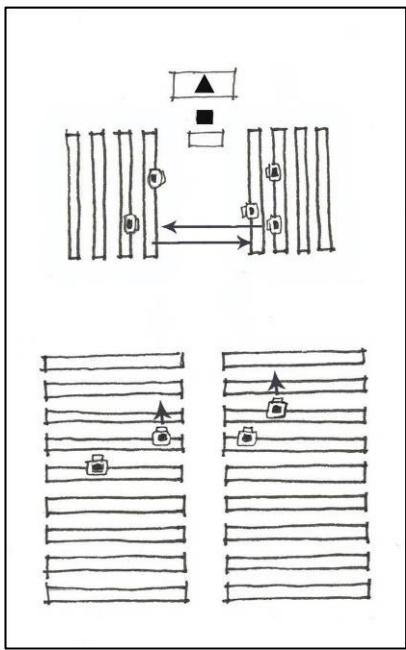


Fig. 2-4 A drawing showing the seating layout of the two opposite sides facing each other and the audience, while the debaters leave their place and stand at the middle facing the audience, Oxford Union Debate Chamber. Drawn by author

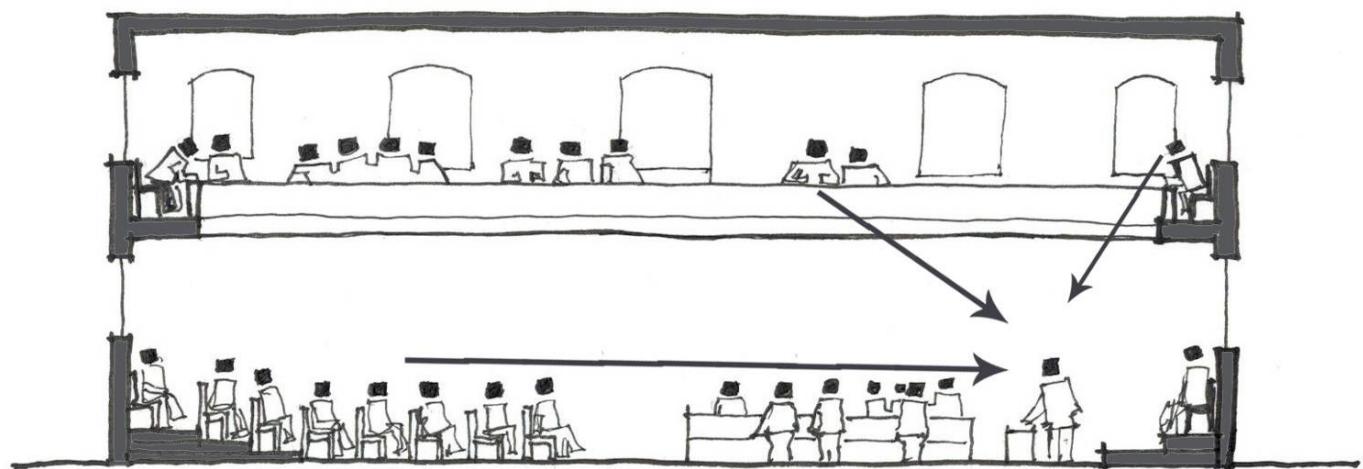


Fig. 2-5 A diagrammatic section of the Chamber illustrating the exposure of the participant while debating an issue. Drawn by author.

SPEAKERS' CORNER: An instance of a public space hosting more informal debates can be found at the north-east corner of Hyde Park in London, England, known as Speakers' Corner. In 1872, after the Chartists held large protests on the edge of London's Hyde Park against the suppression of the rights of working people, including the right of assembly, the British Parliament granted the Park Authorities the right to permit public assemblies. That led to the birth of Speakers' Corner. It became an open-air forum where public speaking, debate and discussion are allowed.

The ongoing public event at Speakers' Corner has been one of London's most unique attractions for over 150 years. A visit to Speakers' Corner on any given Sunday morning, walking around from huddle to huddle, offers a glimpse of London's past, where Londoners engage in open serious discussions that can quickly become loud and fierce debates . In this classless forum, speakers require no qualification or invitation and tourists can often be seen entering into heated discussion with locals and other visitors. In other words, since no class restrictions and entry requirements are needed to engage in debates at Speakers' Corner, these debates have had broader influence on the public than university debate programs. In fact, one of the most influential symbols of the role of public place in enhancing public life and discourse is Speakers' Corner.

This open public space has no design plan specific to the art of oratory and debate. Within the British democratic tradition of soapbox oratory⁵⁹, anyone who wishes to discuss a topic takes a soap-box, or a pedestal, or anything they can stand on, down to that corner of Hyde Park and then starts attracting an audience by applying oratory skills. Despite the active participation of the audience and the fact that they do not appear just as passive receivers of rhetorical messages at the Corner, the physical quality of this open forum, similar to the theatrical space of the Pnyx , usually encourages public speaking that eventually embodies a mere monologic performance, whereas debate is a shared performance. Therefore, in designing a space for debate and discussion, the space itself needs to emphasize and encourage the shared performance.

⁵⁹ A soapbox is a raised platform on which one stands to make a speech, often about a political subject. The term originates from the days when speakers would elevate themselves by standing on a wooden crate originally used for shipment of soap or other dry goods from a manufacturer to a retail store.



Fig. 2-6 Soapbox orators are trying to sell their own ideas, Speakers' Corner at Hyde Park, London, UK



Fig. 2-7 The interaction between a speaker and his audience, Speakers' Corner at Hyde Park, London, UK



Fig. 2-8 A drawing illustrating the interaction between speakers and their audience and the quality of exposure that encourages public speaking at Speakers' Corner. The juxtaposition of different circles of discussions engages passersby who walk around from huddle to huddle. Drawn by author.

MOSQUE: From the very advent of Islam, mosques were centres of community activities as well as places of worship. A mosque is symbolically very important to Muslims and is the most consistent feature of Islamic towns. Not only has it been a place of prayer and spirituality, but it has also been a centre of social and political activities, an educational institution, and the focal point of communal life. All the important news relating to vital issues of Islamic cities or communities was announced in the mosques.

Mosques are other instances of spaces wherein discussions and public speeches happen. Friday-noon prayer is the most important socio-religious activity at the mosque when the imam preaches and gives important speeches from the *minbar* to the congregation. The minbar is a raised platform in the front area of a mosque, from which sermons or speeches are given. It includes a staircase leading to the top platform, which is sometimes covered by a small dome. The speaker either sits or stands on the minbar while preaching, and the minbar provides a clear view and voice of the imam for the worshipers.

Mosques generally have square or rectangular plans, with covered prayer halls and a surrounded courtyard. Initially emerging in the mosques of the warm Middle Eastern and Mediterranean climates, the courtyard was assigned to accommodate the large number of worshippers during Friday prayers. Before the introduction of such structures as domes and *iwans*⁶⁰ and the prominence of the four-iwan arrangement, most early mosques had flat roofs on prayer halls, which required the use of numerous columns and supports. One of the most remarkable hypostyle mosques is the Great Mosque of Cordoba—founded in 784 CE—in Spain, supported by over 850 columns.

Within the tradition of this mosque, each master picked a column in the mosque for holding lectures. Similar to Speakers' Corner, round gatherings also shaped naturally around the column where a master would be giving a lecture. Therefore, the column was the only element that initiated a gathering for discussion, as does the soap-box at Speakers' Corner. However, as discussed for the Speakers' Corner, this space also mainly encourages public speaking and monologic performances.

⁶⁰ An iwan (Persian: ایوان eyvān) is a rectangular hall or space, usually vaulted, walled on three sides, with one end entirely open.



Fig. 2-9 — An Arial view of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, Cordoba, Spain

Fig. 2-10 The gatherings of Muslims for lectures around the columns. Film stills from "Destiny" (El-Maseer), 1997

Fig. 2-11 The Imam preaches from the minbar. Film stills from "Destiny" (El-Maseer), 1997

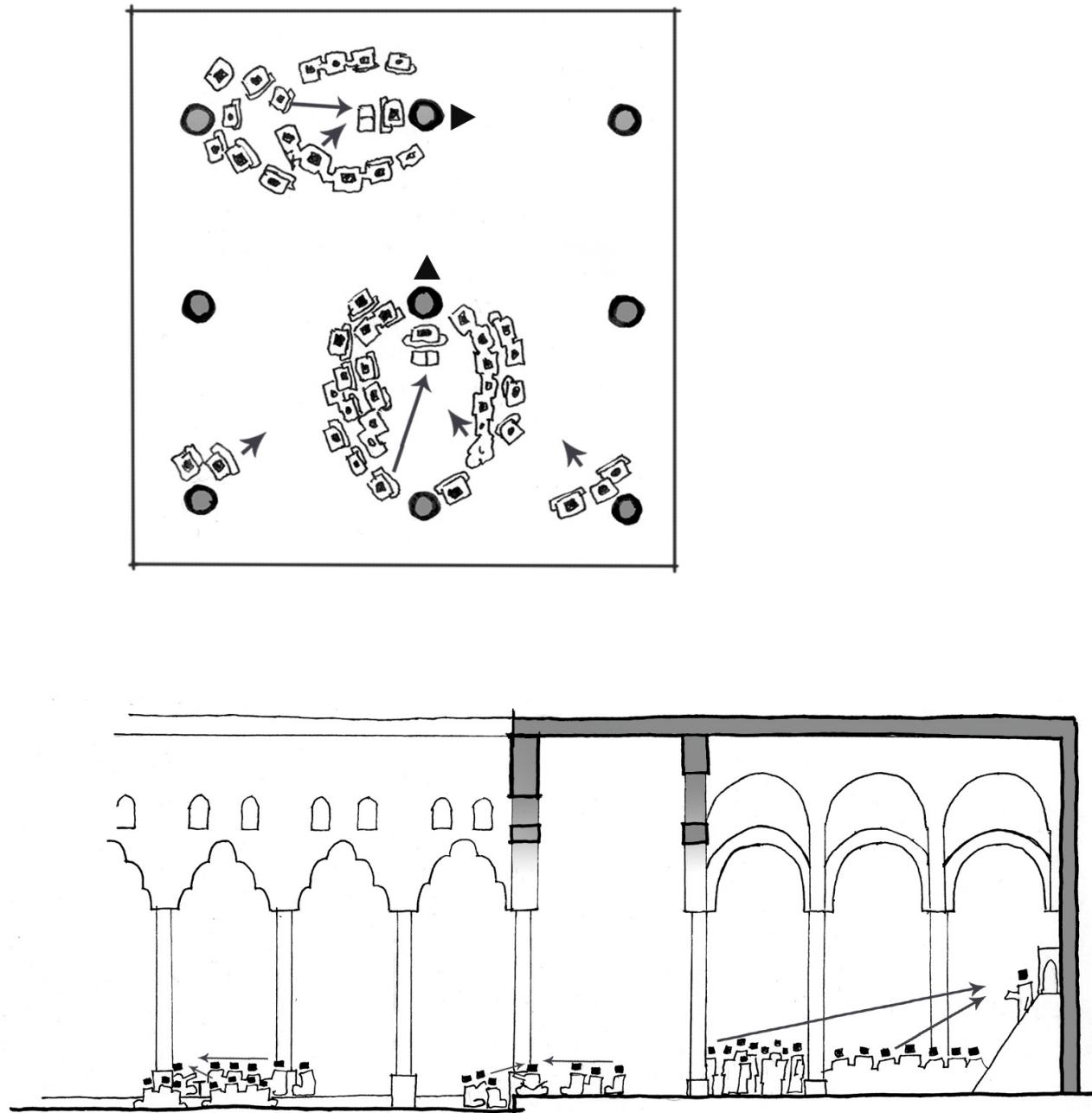


Fig. 2-12 – Diagrammatic plan and section illustrating the tradition of debate and oratory practiced in Spanish Islamic mosques. Each master picked a column in the mosque for holding lectures and debates. Drawn by author based on film stills from "Destiny" (*El-Maseer*), 1997

MONAZERE

*If you engage in a monazere with a mountain, it shall only remain silent
and reflect your sound.*

Kamaluddin Ismail Isfahani

ETYMOLOGY

Monazere (Persian: مناظره, pronounced monāzere) is the Persian word for 'debate'. The word comes from the Arabic نظر (nazar), which means "to see." Monazere may be literally glossed as 'to see together', to think about and discuss the truth and the essence of a matter. It means to discuss or dispute about an issue. A form of inquiry and debate based on asking and answering questions to illuminate ideas.⁶¹

DEBATE POETRY

A debate poem depicts a dialogue between two opponents, usually two natural opposites (e.g., sun vs. moon, winter vs. summer) and illustrates the superiority

⁶¹ *The Dehkhoda Dictionary* (Persian: دهخدا لغت‌نامه), ed. Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda (Tehran : Tehran University Press, 1955), s.v. “مناظره.”

of one debater over another. In most cases, a debate poem holds a didactic and moral message.

We can trace back debate poems in Persian literature to the Arsacid era (189 BCE until 284 CE). The oldest existing instance is "Drakht-i Asurig" (The Babylonian tree) poem in Arsacid Pahlavi⁶², which is also the only existing debate poem before Islam. The poem is framed as a versified contest over precedence between a goat and a palm tree. It begins with a riddle in which a brief description of a tree is given, although the reader understands that it is a palm tree. Then the tree itself enumerates the benefits it provides. The goat, subsequently, rises to the challenge, first ridiculing the palm tree, then indicating the benefits it offers, which finally results in the superiority of the goat over the palm tree. According to some scholars, the contest is a manifestation of the contrast between pastoral life, symbolized by the goat, and the agricultural life, symbolized by the palm tree.⁶³

The first Persian poet who specifically worked in this literary genre is Asadi Tusi (died in 1702.) Five of his *monazerat* (debates) have survived. The five surviving debates are called "Shab o Ruz" (the night vs. the Day), "Arab o Ajam" (The Arab vs. the Persian), "Mogh o Mosalman" (the Magian vs. the Muslim), "Neyza o Kaman" (the spear vs. the Bow) and the "Asman o Zamin" (the Sky vs. the Earth). In all his monazerat he depicts a one-on-one debate in which each debater tries to prove his or her superiority over the other, leading to victory.

Sometime monazere emerges as prose in Persian literature. There is a fictitious story in the Gulistan of Sa'di about an informal debate, which tells us much about Sa'di's attitude towards life. The narrator meets "one looking like a dervish but lacking their characteristics" in a gathering. The Dervish is engaged in attacking the rich, saying that "the dervish's hands are tied by lack of power and the rich man's legs are broken because of lack of caring for others." The narrator "found these words unpalatable" especially as he himself had been "nurtured by the great." The rich man and Dervish start an argument over who

⁶² Arsacid Pahlavi (Parthian) was the official language of the Arsacid dynastic empire in Iran. Parthian and Middle Persian (a language of Sassanid Iran) are known as Middle Iranian languages (400 BCE – 900 CE).

⁶³ M. Ruh-al-Amini, "Jostârî mardom-šenâsî az manzûma-ye Derakht-e âsûrîg," in *Haftad maqala*, ed. Y. Mahdawi and i. Afsar (Tehran: Armaghan-e farhangi, 1990), 323-36.

is superior to the other, they took their dispute to the judge's court who points out to a broader picture:

You who admired the rich and admonished the poor, know that where there is flower there is thorn, wine results in hangover, and treasures are guarded by serpents; and where there is large pearl there is man-eating shark ... Do you not observe in the garden that there is both fragrant willow and dry wood? Likewise, among the rich are both grateful and ungrateful, and among the poor, both patient and impatient.⁶⁴

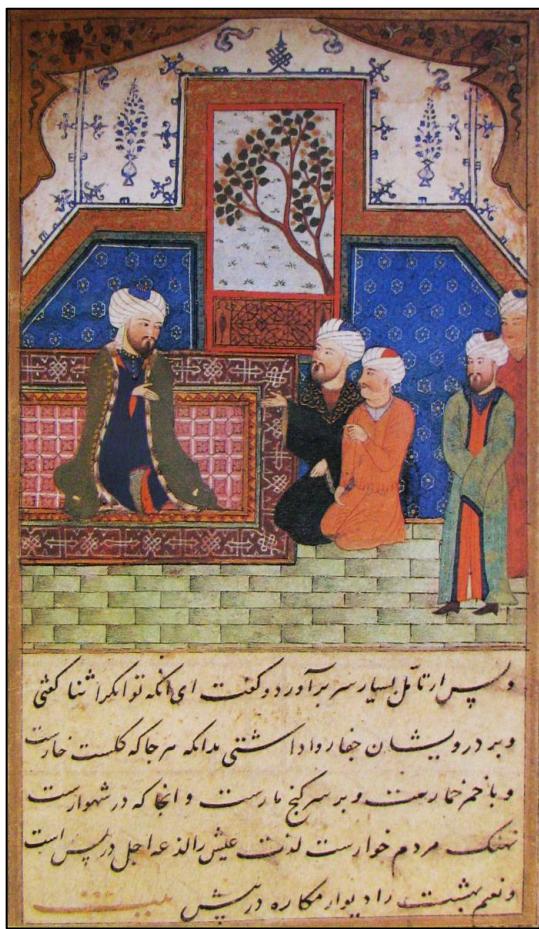


Fig. 2-32 A painting depicting Sa'di and his opponent seeking justice after their debate, Gulistan of Sa'di, circa 1460 from *Persian Miniature Painting* by Norah M. Titley.

⁶⁴ Homa Katouzian, *Sa'di: The Poet of Life, Love and Compassion* (Oxford, UK: One World Publications, 2006), 19-21.

The poem written on the painting is the one translated above.

In recent Persian poetry, *monazere* claims the largest portion of Parvin E'tesami's — a 20th century Persian poet— poems. She composed approximately sixty-five poems in the style of monazere and seventy-five anecdotes, fables, and allegories. In her debates, through using various figures, Parvin eloquently expresses her basic thoughts about life and death, social justice, ethics, education, and the supreme importance of knowledge. In her poems, using conventional imagery, she develops the debate by providing a thesis and a corresponding antithesis. Her own observation then appears at the end as a synthesis or conclusion. The major themes of Parvin's poetry are fatalism; introduction of liberal measures for enlightening the masses; poverty of the masses vis-a-vis the exploitative schemes of the upper class; and the plight of the orphans, the aged, and the destitute. A most important theme in her later compositions, however, is the plight of Iranian women, especially their lack of access to education and their role in the society.

In the poem "God's Weaver," Parvin not only gives voice to one who has been traditionally suppressed but also questions the very validity of the value system that has so suppressed her. "God's Weaver" is a debate poem, between a busy spider and a lazy fellow. The poem is allegorical; the spider and the weaver represent something specific in Iran around the 1930s.

Master of fine designs, architect of masterpieces, the spider, this emblem for the woman artist, is vulnerable to the insensitivity and attack of the heavy-handed observer. The observer, vain and arrogant, degrades the spider's work. He emphasizes the insignificance, worthlessness, and above all the unmarketability of the spider's art.⁶⁵

The lazy fellow said: "What a superficial job!
Heaven is in no need of such operations.

There are mountains to climb in this world's workshop.
Who'll ever exalt you, you wisp of straw?

You spin threads for others to sweep away.
You design plans for others to spoil.

⁶⁵ Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 114-116.

No one who is wise ever builds a house
that can be blown to bits by a sneeze.

You lay foundations on shifting sands.
You draw nice patterns, but as if on water.

Improve yourself; see if you're worth your salt.
Weave brocade, if you have the skill.

No one's ever made a shirt from your rotten fabric;
nor did anyone ever thread your flimsy yarn.

Who'll ever notice you there behind the door?
You'll never be called an artist.

A puff of smoke or wind, and you are homeless.
A breath or bit of moisture, and you are engulfed.

Who'd ever deliver you wool or yarn?
Who'd ever ask you to make cashmere?"

The spider, convinced its art would eventually triumph in mysterious ways, insists that her perspective is valuable, that, in fact, it can be appreciated in another setting. Backing its argument with indisputable logic, it contends that its work is precious and brings a good price in another realm where values are different.

There exists another market, my dear Sir,
where my fabric is well appreciated.

No matter how great the customer, the gold treasure—
neither can compare with the eye of an expert.

You are blind to the curtains of my walls.
How do you expect to see the veil of secrets?

You keep calling me, the spider,
when you've nothing to your name but arrogance.

I've been a weaver from the beginning,
and this I'll be as long as I live.

I've taken every opportunity, used every chance,
to weave, to weave, and to weave.

This is my calling, important or not.
I am the apprentice, time is the master.⁶⁶

In “God’s Weaver,” the feminine metaphor of spinning is elevated from mere duty and labour to the status of an accomplishment. The spider, secluded and concealed behind curtains, establishes the value of her neglected, unpretentious artistic talent. Identifying with the spider, the poet dreams of a magic place where she need not conceal herself and her art in obscurity.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Ibid , 116.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 117.

HISTORY OF MONAZERE

To discuss the history of debate practices in Iran, first I looked into some monazerat that happened as formal debates between intellectuals in royal palaces. By taking a brief look at the history of monazere and debating in Iranian history, it is clear that most documented debates are from post-Islamic times. Some instances of such debates are touched on in the *Tārīkh-e Bayhaqī* (Beyhaqi history), a book that covers the history of the Ghaznavids Empire in the 11th century CE. The monazeres practiced by religious scholars, generally speaking, were based on question and answers—Socratic debate.

THE ACHAEMENIAN TRADITION: The oldest reference to debate is in Herodotus's "*Thalia*," where he depicts a debate among seven Persian noblemen (circa 500 BC). The debate focuses on what form of government the Persians should have after the death of King Cambyses. Otanes favors isonomia; he claims that monarchy suggests the King's impunity and such freedom ruins the man, but "the rule of the multitude holds power accountable." The next speaker, Megabyzus, supports oligarchy; he argues that while Otanes is right about monarchy he is incorrect about giving power to the multitude. Such power in the hands of many, Megabyzus believes, results only in violence since the masses lack the knowledge to run a government efficiently. Megabyzus, therefore, suggests that Persia should be governed by its best men.

The last speaker, Darius, encourages a continuation of the monarchy. He argues that monarchy allows the best man to rule while oligarchy produces only bitterness among its members. Furthermore, the rule of the many produces "wickedness," which results in the destruction of the state. However, through this violence, Darius believes, an "idol" emerges whom the people then make King. Darius concludes his argument by claiming that the freedom the Persians now enjoy came from monarchy and therefore monarchy should be maintained. After hearing the three speakers, the other four noblemen sided with Darius, and the group voted to choose monarchy.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Herodotus, *Histories of Herodotus*, trans. George Rawlinson (London: John Merry, 1862), 392-401.

In the aforementioned event, debate played a significant role in the government's decision-making process; however, unlike in the West, where debate has found its crucial place in politics and law, debate in the East, and specifically in Iran, has only been a part of religion and education. Consequently, similar to the nature of medieval religious disputations, discussed in the previous chapter, these religious debates and monazerat often embodied the inequality of the two sides; and in most occasions, the debate implicitly had a predetermined winner who was going to argue in favour of the state-endorsed faith.

MANICHAEAN TRADITION: Manichaeism was a gnostic religion that existed between the third and the fifteenth centuries CE.⁶⁹ Manichaean cosmology described the world as a combat between the forces of light and darkness, good and evil, and life and death. Originated in the Sassanid era,⁷⁰ the Religion of Light, as it is referred to in Manichaean sources, extended its influence through a missionary program by Mani and his disciples, first in Mesopotamia and then throughout its neighboring territories, as far east as China and as far west as the Roman Empire.⁷¹ The impact and diffusion of Manichaean religion out from its Mesopotamian home elicited local resistance, sometimes in the form of public debates.

Mani, an Arsacid Iranian by birth, with a Jewish-Christian background, was the prophet and the founder of Manichaeism. An agonistic exchange of words, as stated in the *Cologne Mani-Codex*,⁷² marked the beginning of the breach between Mani and the other Jewish-Christian Baptists in Babylonia. The hagiographic narrative maintained that young Mani initially refrained from

⁶⁹ The last evidence for Manichaean presence is documented in Fukien Province of South China (Lieu 1992, 302-304).

⁷⁰ Sassanid Empire was the last pre-Islamic Persian Empire, ruled by the Sassanid Dynasty from AD 224 to AD 651.

⁷¹ Zsuzsanna Gulacsi, *Medieval Manichaen Book Art: A Codicological Study of Iranian and Turkic Illuminated Book Fragments from 8th-11th Century East Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 2.

⁷² The Cologne Mani-Codex is a minute papyrus codex, dated on paleographical evidence to the fifth century CE, found near Asyut (the ancient Lycopolis), Egypt; it contains a Greek text describing the life of Mani.

disputing with his fellow sectarians even when receiving revelations of errors in the Baptists' religious practices and beliefs. He finally began to make his doubts public at about 25 years of age, when he openly disputed the two central pillars of the sect—the tradition of Elchasaius and the value of ablution—by posing questions in a public setting. As described in the Mani-Codex, this lopsided debate nearly ended in mob violence since the other members of the sect became furious due to their incapability of responding to his questions; and the Baptists, consequently, decided to expel Mani.⁷³

After his expulsion, Mani began traveling as far east as India and commenced his mission by possessing the double gift of special revelation and the aid of a *suzugos*. His disciples and followers, however, studied Mani's writings extensively to ensure the success of their own missionary efforts. Although disputation was central to Manichaean religious identity, the Manichaeans tended to bring into question the very legitimacy of other religions—Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism—more by means of radical reinterpretation than direct negation. In fact, the use of public debate in the usual sense and as part of the Manichaean missionary activity is almost unattested. They did not aim to draw the audience into debate, though it happened sometimes, but to allow them to acknowledge the Manichaean kerygma as the solution to real theological problems.⁷⁴

⁷³ Richard Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity* (L.A.: University of California Press, 1995), 72.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 71-74.



Fig. 2-33 A painting illustrating a sermon scene of Manichaeans. In the upper half, two elects seated on lotus supports perform the sermon, while in the lower half of this scene, members of the Uyghur royal family (identified by their headgear) are depicted listening to the sermon.

from Medieval Manichaen Book Art: A Codicological Study of Iranian and Turkic Illuminated Book Fragments from 8th-11th Century East Central Asia. The work was painted by a specific painter, trained in the West Asian tradition, and at the same time link the use of this painter's style to the 126-year era of the carbon date.

By posing aporetic questions, the Manichean practiced public debate as a means of securing their audiences' attention and thus, preparing the way for their preaching. They developed a repertoire of certain topics to draw Christians' attention, and from such opening gambits they moved on to the Manichaean doctrine of the two principles. In areas where Christian communities abounded, especially on the Roman Empire's eastern border, Manichaean missionaries quickly discovered that many people there were particularly interested in the status of the Hebrew bible as divine revelation. By initially focusing on this issue, Manichaeans positioned themselves to preach their own particular message of the principles of light and darkness to their engrossed listeners. Most staged public debates involving Manichaeans, however, were initiated by local Catholics and other Christians in order to counter the missionaries' influence. Consequently, Manichaeans had to be equipped with writings that were specifically intended for use in these situations of controversy.⁷⁵

The hostility that the Manichaeans were confronted by did not necessarily stem from opposition to their radical ideas; it was primarily a product of the antagonism of state-endorsed faiths that were intolerant of any religious views different from their own. Therefore, our main knowledge about Manichaeism comes from polemical accounts written from these official religions' viewpoints.⁷⁶ In the later Roman Empire, with increasingly powerful local bishops acting as religious police to enforce their own interests, and a hostile imperial legislation that supported the bishops, Manichaeans, similar to many other religious groups, could no longer compete as equals in the religious market of late antiquity. Within this new context, in which unsupervised debate between Manichaeans and Christians presented a lack of effective closure, the emphasis was placed instead on the authority of written documents and on carefully controlled public disputations conducted by Christian authorities.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Ibid, 70-75, 103.

⁷⁶ Gulcsi, *Medieval Manichaen Book Art: A Codicological Study of Iranian and Turkic Illuminated Book Fragments from 8th-11th Century East Central Asia*, 2.

⁷⁷ Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity*, 103-104, 108.

ISLAMIC TRADITION: With the prevalence of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and Islamic theology (kalām), improving debate skills became more significant, especially because Muslim jurists and orators had to use reasoning and persuasion techniques to prove their claims. Therefore, they gradually started to establish monazare and rules of debate.

Developing Aristotelian logic, great Persian Muslim scholars and polymaths such as Ibn Sīnā (commonly known as Avicenna) and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (known as Tusi in the West) started to structure a medieval logic in order to preclude possibilities of sophistry and fallacy from the Islamic monazere. In fact, Ibn Sina was the founder of Avicennian logic, which replaced Aristotelian logic as the dominant system of logic in the Islamic world.

To further illustrate the occasions of practicing monazere in the history of Iran, we need to look at the reigns of different kings. Most of these monazeres had taken place in caliphs' majlis. Yahya ibn Khalid al-Barmaki⁷⁸ was the vizier of the Caliph al-Mahdi (ruled 775–785 AD) and tutor of Hārūn al-Rashid (ruled 786–809 AD). He was believed to be a man of wisdom and knowledge, devoted to philosophical discussions. His majlis was frequented by many Muslim theologians and scholars and others of various sects and beliefs. To depict one instance, a debate on love is addressed here in which Yahya invited thirteen theologians who had previously debated on a variety of philosophical and theological topics, "to speak of love [ishq], without disputing, each presenting whatever occurs to him as it comes to his mind," an event that reminds us of Plato's Symposium. In this majlis, the discussion on love is divided stylistically into two sections, joined by the speech of the Magian as a transitional passage. The debate in the first section, the one among the mutakallimun (those who practice kalām or debate), is definitive, rhetorical, and highly figurative, without any dispute, while the second section is discursive and framed by statements that disclose difference rather than agreement. However, as Mas'udi claims, no one has been able to arrive at a clear understanding of the nature of love. The link provided by the speech of the Magian combines both figurative and discursive elements, metaphorical and philosophical definitions. Here in this debate, the investigation is presented

⁷⁸ Barmakids were a noble Persian family from Balkh who came to great political power under the Abbasid caliphs.

from both the realm of *kalām* and philosophy, in short, of a tradition of study and debate.⁷⁹

In those days Bagdad was the centre of monazere events, which were mainly on religion, between different religious intellectuals practicing fiqh and *kalām*. Caliph Al-Ma'mun, the son of Harun al-Rashid,⁸⁰ even dedicated a debate space at his court, the dar-al-monazere (debate house), in which he held debates on logical, theological, and legal matters.⁸¹ He used to conduct scientific and intellectual sessions to which he invited great thinkers, leading scientists, and the atheists of the century. Al-Ma'mun was very fond of listening to debates between scholars of different religions. Tuesday was assigned as the official day for the inter-faith debate session, and the event usually ended in the evening. It is said that Al-Ma'mun was trying to convey the message that Muslims, and specifically Muslim caliphs, are also patrons and supporters of philosophy, reasoning, and discussion.

However, what is noticeable in all these instances is the right to debate. It was as though an implied right based on credibility and reliability existed. In all these formal debates, scholars and mutakallimun were invited by the caliph or his vizier to discuss a specific topic. That is why debates were merely a medium for intellectuals to discuss concepts, while other people took roles simply as witnesses and then decided which intellectual to follow after the debate.

Within this convention, an individual should not engage in a debate or discussion unless they were widely believed to be credible in that area of discussion, a discussion in which they could only speak if they have sufficient resources, or if their views were pre-approved by someone who did.

⁷⁹ Julie S. Meisami, *Mas'ūdī on Love and the Fall of the Barmakids*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 252-277.

⁸⁰ Al-Ma'mun served as governor of Khurasan— a historical region of Greater Iran— and as caliph after the death of his brother, Al-Amin. He reigned from 813 until 833 AD.

⁸¹ Zabihallah Safa, *Tarikh-e oloum-e aghli dar tamaddon-e eslami* (Tehran, University of Tehran Press, 1958), 129.

PLACES OF MONAZERE

KING'S PALACE: Kings' palaces and caliphs' majlises, as previously discussed, were the house for formal debates. One caliph would dedicate a separate room for monazere event, as did Al-Ma'mun. In terms of the arrangement, the king or caliph sat on his imperial throne and other participants stood around the hall and the mutakallim of each group made his speech at his turn with the permission of the caliph or his vizier and posed their questions respectively.

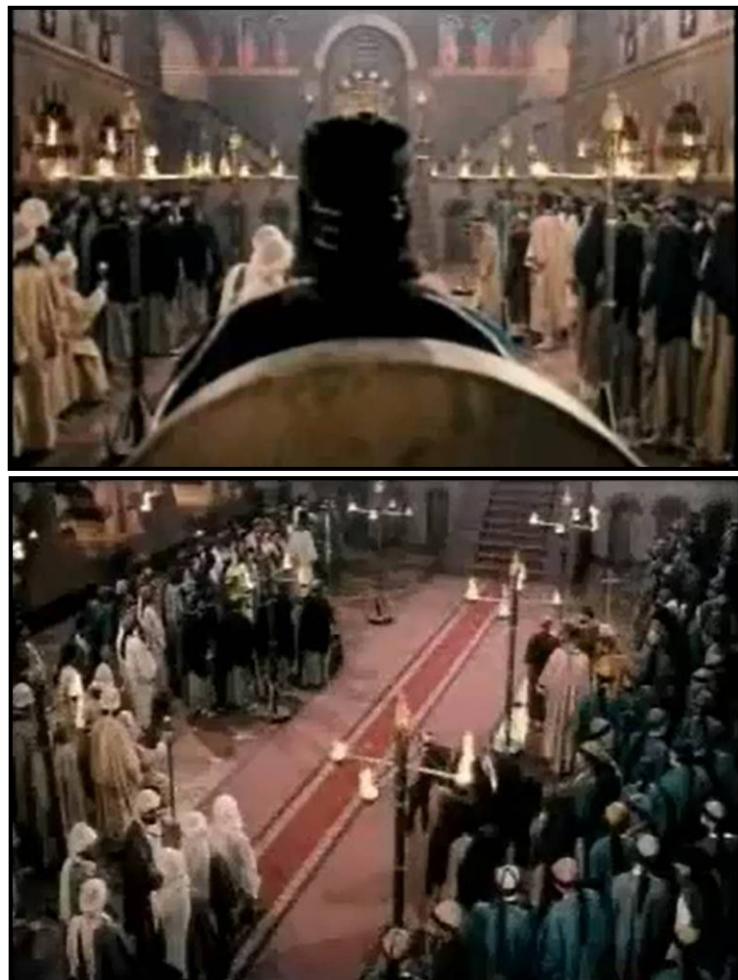


Fig. 2-34 debate
gatherings at Al-Ma'mun's
court, film still from
"revayat eshq", 2001

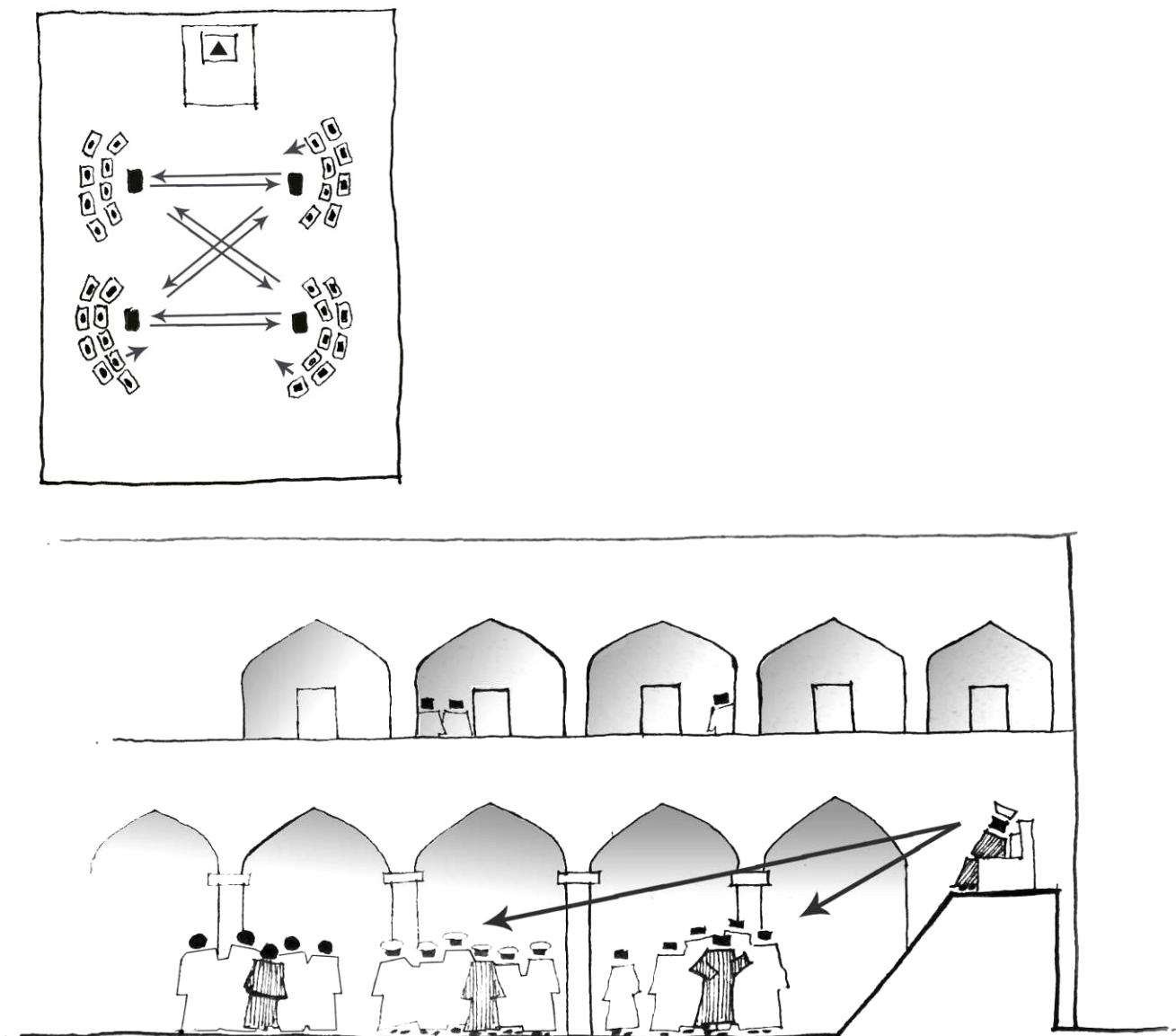


Fig. 2-35 — Diagrammatic plan and section illustrating the exposure of the debaters to the caliph and to others. The drawings also try to show how each side had a specific speaker addressing questions to the other sides. Drawn by author based on film still from "revyat eshq", 2001

MADRASA: madresa is the other place in which discussions and Socratic debates used to happen. The term madrasa (plural: madaris) specifically refers to an educational institution offering instruction particularly in Islamic theology and religious law . The Quran, hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), fiqh (jurisprudence), and law are the focus of the madrasa's curriculum, since these schools ultimately intend to prepare future Islamic scholars (ulama). However, there is no universally fixed course of study. In emphasizing classical traditions, teachers lectured and students learned through rote memorization. The origin of madrasa dates back to the eleventh century, when the first Nizamiyya College was established in Baghdad by Nizam al-Mulk , the vizier of the Seljuk empire.⁸²

The madrasa combined the site for education with student residences. Offering food, lodging, and a free education, madaris spread rapidly throughout the Muslim world. In the heyday of promoting madaris, scientific and philosophical issues were also more openly discussed at madaris, as long as they were not mingled with politics. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the era of Western colonial rule, secular institutions of higher education undermined the importance of madrasa system throughout the Islamic world.

The madrasa building typically was linked to the mosque. It was usually a courtyard building surrounded by arched rooms and iwans.⁸³ The rooms housed two or three students, and Iwans were the place for lectures. One-on-one discussions took place at *pishtaq*, the formal gateway to the iwan, and also at arched entrances of the rooms.

⁸² Jeanne Moulton, *Madrasa Education: What Creative Associates has learned* (Washington, D.C.: Creative Associates International, Inc., 2008), 2.

⁸³ An iwan (Persian: ایوان eyvān) is a rectangular hall or space, usually vaulted, walled on three sides, with one end entirely open.

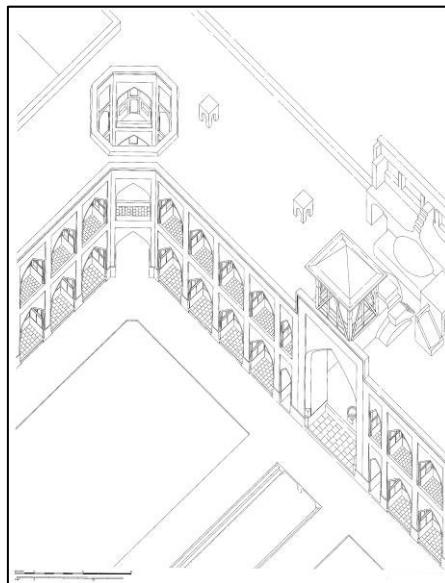
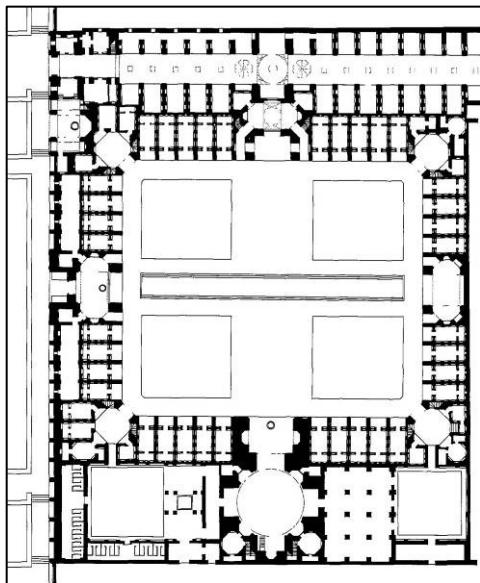


Fig. 2-36 plan and axonometric of southwest corner of courtyard, Madar-e Shah Madrasa, Isfahan, Iran.

Fig. 2-37 Pishtaq as a study and discussion space, Madar-e Shah Madrasa, Isfahan, Iran.

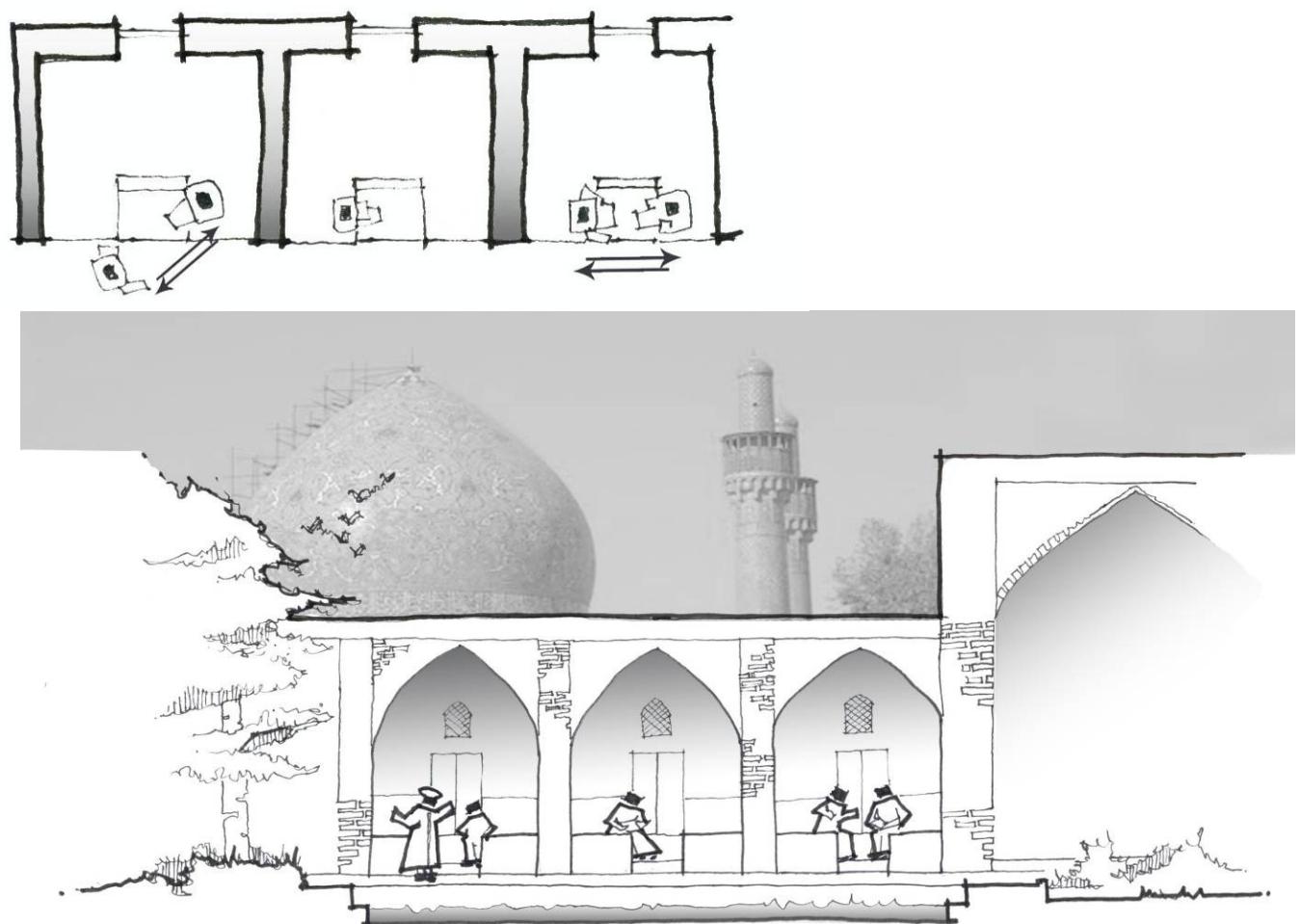


Fig. 2-38 Diagrammatic plan and section that show the spatial quality of the semi-open pishtaq embodying one-on-one discussions in a courtyard of a madrasa. Drawn by author

TEAHOUSE (*qahva-khana*): Teahouses are explored here as traditional public spaces in Iran where discussions used to happen. Teahouses were initially known as *qahva-khana* (coffee houses). Although coffee was rarely served there, it was known by its old name until recent years.⁸⁴ Qahva-khana or traditional teahouse refers to any place providing soft drinks, the more commonly strong *chai* (tea), the ever-present *ghalyan* (hookah), and sometimes even light meals. People gathered at such places to drink tea or coffee, play chess and other traditional games, discuss the daily news, and to amuse themselves with music, singing, and dancing.

The first coffee houses appeared in Qazvin city, during the reign of Shah Tahmasb I (1514 –1576), one of the Safavid dynasty's shahs. However, they started to grow more numerous during Shah Abbas I ruled (996-1038), when they started to emerge in several cities, especially in Isfahan. They mainly appeared around the Naqsh-e Jahan square and other crowded centers in Isfahan. Most were large vaulted buildings with central pools, and *taqnamas* (arched recesses) around with raised floors. The shah sometimes invited European visitors and even foreign ambassadors to a banquet at a teahouse in which the guests were treated to performances by local artists and dancers.

In traditional cities, where there were no other places for public entertainment such as cinemas, clubs, radio or television broadcasting, teahouses were the only places for people to gather to spend their spare time. People from all social classes who had retired from their daily work would gather and spend hours there.

From the beginning, teahouses had been frequented by a diverse group of people, including scholars, poets, musicians, high officials, clergymen, traditional athletes, dervishes, dealers, traders, merchants, and vendors. However, each class had its own implied specific spot to sit. The elite often sat on high traditional benches covered with Persian rugs, while high officials and clergymen sat on chairs, merchants and dealers on benches, and the unemployed and poor on the ground. Teahouses, generally speaking, remained open from early morning until late at night. They served as business meeting hubs during the day, as places to rest and exchange news in the afternoon, and as spaces for entertainment such as epic storytelling, magic, and oratory shows

⁸⁴ In Iran, tea replaced coffee as the most popular beverage in the late 19 century; however, the term *qahva-khana* remained even more common than *ai-khana*(teahouse).

at nights. Sometimes two or three performances would happen simultaneously in a single large teahouse: a storyteller might be performing in one corner and a poet in another.⁸⁵

In Iranian traditional society, the *qahva-khana* (teahouse) and Zurkhaneh (traditional gymnasium) were two united institutions in developing the national identity. The atmosphere of both was filled with courteous, valiant, and chivalrous virtues.⁸⁶ The walls of a teahouse were filled with paintings of epic stories and national heroes. The significance of teahouses was usually not due to the architecture of the buildings, but to their role in influencing the culture of the time. Storytellers, orators, and painters, in that era, played a significant role in educating people about Persian cultural and literary heritage.

Teahouses during the Safavid period began to act as the main meeting place for artists, intellectuals, and even high officials. They gradually became the main meeting places in the cities, and discussions on various issues including social, economic, and even political issues grew in teahouses. Thus, Shah Abbas, worrying about the possibility of politics being discussed freely, assigned mullahs—Islamic clerics—to watch over the teahouses. They used to sit there everyday and entertain people with nicely turned points of history, law, and poetry and somehow avoided controversial questions of state; and so politics was kept in the background.⁸⁷

The emergence of teahouses increased in the Qajar era, especially in Tehran, which became the new capital city. The first teahouses were built in the bazaar fabric, close to the main group of guilds of the city. Some professions made teahouses their guild hub in order to discuss and make

⁸⁵ The tradition of epic storytelling in teahouses: a storyteller would erect a screen (*parda*) painted with a narrative scene and explain the story to people, who would reward him with money. The pictures were usually episodes from the shah-nama and religious events.

⁸⁶ The zurkhaneh is a traditional Iranian gymnasium for men, where exercises are performed accompanied by a guide who sings Persian poetry along with beating a drum. The word *zurkhaneh* in Persian means 'house of strength', which is applied to the growing of the individual's spirituality and the strengthening of the body.

⁸⁷ "Qahva-khana dar roozegar gozashte va haal," *Mosaferan International Magazine, cultural Inheritance, Tourism, Hotel Management* 54 (May 2010), 50.

decisions about their professional issues. However, teahouses increasingly began to emerge in many other streets, districts, inns, transportation centres, and around city gates. They were generally gathering spaces for exchanging news, business meetings, and discussing social and economical issues. Cafe Naderi in Tehran — built in 1927 at the central district of the city—is the first European style coffee house, and worked as a magnet to the intellectual and literary figures of the 40s and 50s and a host for literary-cultural debates similar to those debates that used to happen in bourgeois Cafes. Frequented by prominent Iranian social and political critics, Cafe Naderi owes its reputation to writers, and poets such as Jalal Al-e-Ahmad, Sadeq Hedayat, Simin Dāneshvar, and Nimā. Although still frequented by people for its food, it does not serve as the main discussion hub anymore.



Fig. 2-39 — Yoozbashi *Qahvakhana*, a painting depicting the interior environment of a traditional teahouse, painted by Ahmad Khalili—one of Iranian teahouse painters, 2006



Fig. 2-40 Cafe Naderi in Tehran, a modern teahouse hosting different intellectuals.

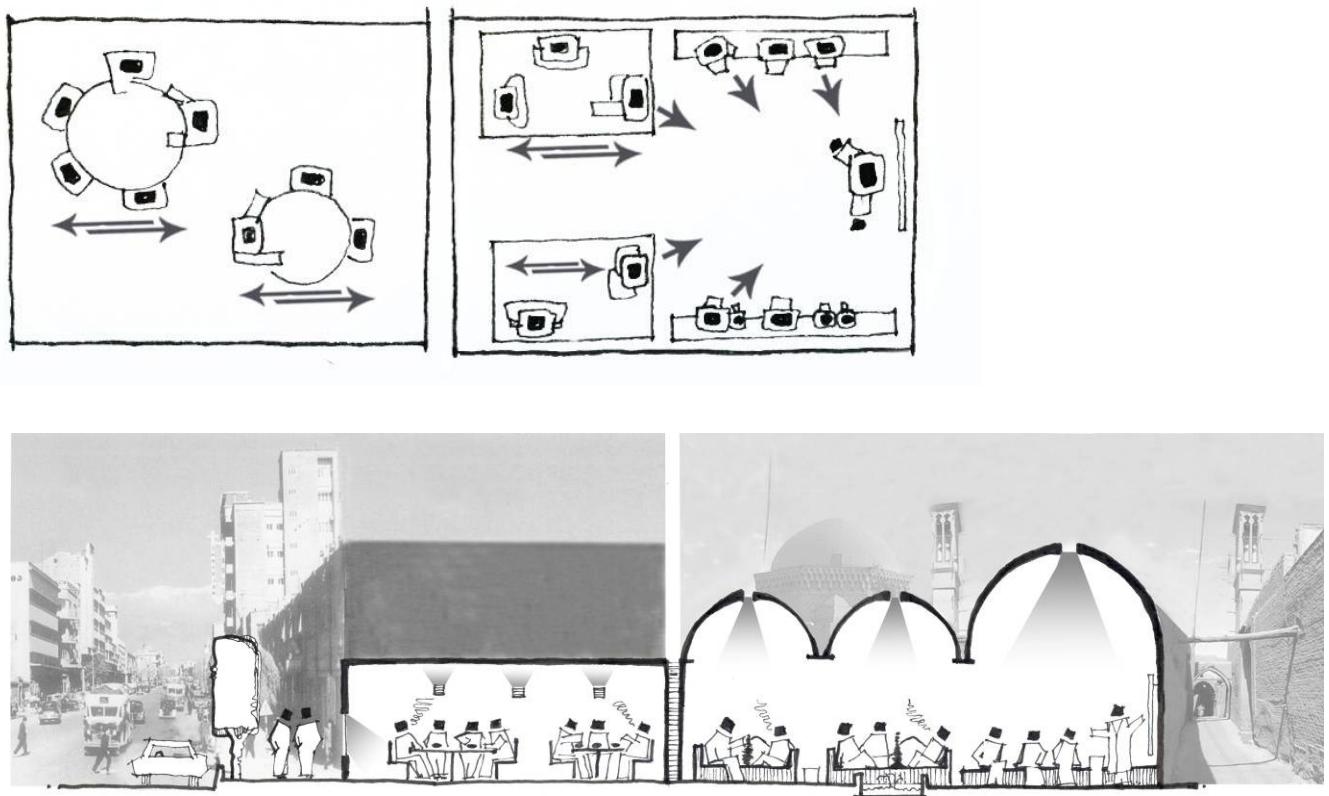


Fig. 2-41 Diagrammatic plan and section illustrating the cozy environment of a traditional teahouse that hosted oratory performances and informal discussions (at right) compared to the more formal environment of a modern coffeehouse (at left), while both generally encouraged private discussions. Drawn by author.

With the emergence of cinema, theatre, and new versions of coffee houses (coffee shops) and night clubs in the beginning of Pahlavi's dynasty, teahouses became somewhat abandoned and obsolete. In fact, the teahouse lost its significant socio-cultural role and its previous strong identity since orators, storytellers, and poets were abandoned from this body of culture; and thus it became a place for the mere loitering of the lower class. Although some historical buildings such as hammams have been renovated to be used as teahouses, the original socio-cultural role of coffeehouses still remain lost since the mere architecture of the building is considered in the renovation process without any specific consideration for the revival of the ritual and culture of coffee houses which represents a significant part of Iranian society.

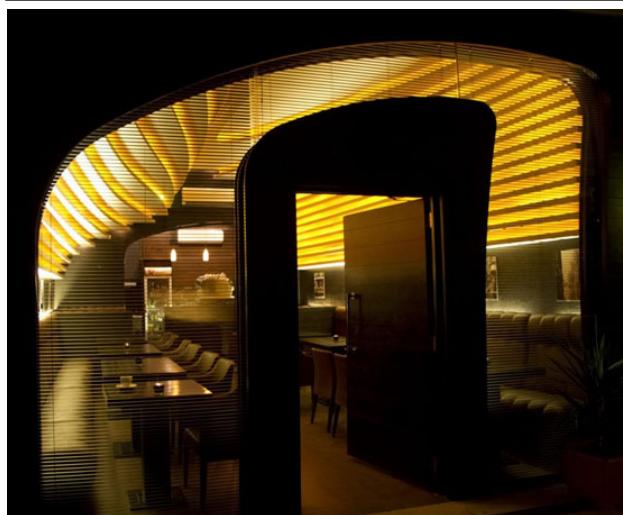
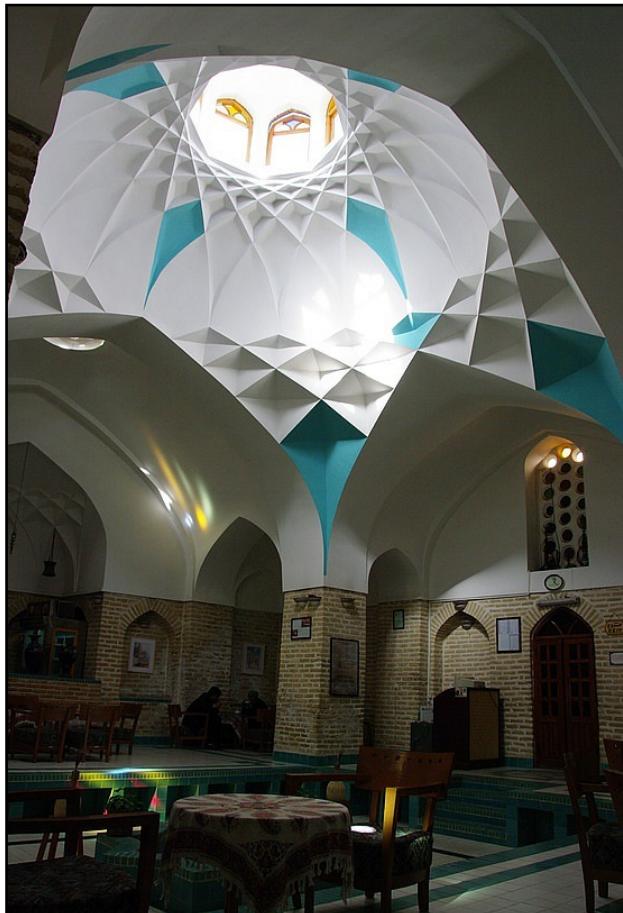


Fig. 2-42 An old hammam (bathhouse) renovated into a teahouse, Khan teahouse Yazd.

Fig. 2-43 A Modern coffee shop in Velenjak Shopping Center-Tehran

Chapter Three The Discourse

DEBATE PHILOSOPHY

- *Discussion and Debate: a Re-Examination* ~ Wayne N. Thompson
- *Debating is Debating—And should be* ~ Hugo E. Hellman

A DEBATE ABOUT DEBATE

On the real and valuable purpose of debating, there have always been disagreements, especially between teachers of debate. The many issues inherent in the theory of debate, and the teaching and practicing of it, have themselves been subjects of debate between many teachers of debate. This section presents a summary of a polemical piece on whether debates should be a means of truth-seeking or persuasion. In his article "Discussion and Debate: a Re-Examination," Wayne N. Thompson, a professor of Speech at the University of Houston, favors 'discussion' over 'debate' and suggests that it should replace debate in the curriculum. In response to this argument, Hugo E. Hellman , the director of the School of Speech at the Marquette University, in "Debating is Debating—And should be," argues that both discussion and debate are part of the deliberative process and that, in a democracy, there must be room for debate when discussion fails to reach a compromise. Here, both ideas will be expanded.

In his article, Wayne N. Thompson introduces a new philosophy of debate and tries to challenge the validity of some aspects of the older debate theory. He argues that debating should not be a game or contest, or an exercise in sophistry, since these misconceptions cloud the real purpose of debate, which is the finding of truth. He also claims that the thesis that debate is properly a form of persuasion rests upon moving opinion in a predetermined direction and the premise that ideas should be imposed upon the public, whereas the concept that debate should be a form of investigating and testing a proposed solution rests upon the premise that both sides should be presented and that the listeners should make the decision. He states that defining winning as the overcoming of an opponent is not a proper objective of debating; instead, the ideal debater, the one with the greatest social utility, is the one who develops his case to its true degree of power. He introduces the change in debate's competitive nature to become "which team developed its case more completely and accurately?" rather than "which team overcame its opponent?" He believes debaters should be considered as co-workers rather than antagonists and should debate upon a proposition and not against an opponent. He also believes that the philosophy through which the debater is helping himself, his opponent, and his listeners think a decision is more consistent with our ideals of democracy than is the old philosophy that the debater is trying to make others agree with him.⁸⁸

In opposition to the above proposition, comes the argument that "debating is debating and should be." Hugo E. Hellman believes that debate is a contest and a game by definition, since debaters argue and refute and follow certain rules for timing and speaking order. He argues that the use of "investigator" and "co-worker" indicates that the proposition intends to have the debater adopt the attitude of the discussant, and when he or she does, debating ceases to be debating and becomes discussion. To him, adopting this philosophy would mean the death of debating as we have always understood it, debating in which the debater tries to win and does his level best to be a persuader, and debating in which the opposition is an antagonist. He argues

⁸⁸ Wayne N. Thompson, "Discussion and Debate: A Re-examination," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 30 (October, 1944), 288-99.

that since the problems we face today are more often of the nature: "should we or should not we?" our job as citizens is not solution finding or problem solving which is achieved through discussion, but of decision making which is achieved through the process of debate. And if we must label something "the essence of democracy," debate might bear the title as logically as discussion. He continues to argue that this democracy that the proponent of discussion presents is an ideal democracy and Utopia in which all of our citizens, when faced with a problem, will sit down together "in a face-to-face or co-acting group" with the pure and open minds characteristic of "the discussion attitude" to solve the problem. They raise the questions: Should we prepare students for a life in Utopia? To teach them not to "debate" in a world in which there will be people who will, is like teaching them not to fight in a world in which there will be men who take up the sword.⁸⁹

I understand both sides of the argument; however, I acknowledge right and wrong on both sides. Regarding the argument on the theory of debate, I believe, we first need to consider the purpose of the debating skill that we want to improve. If it is to educate people for political professions, the art of persuasion will become the main skill to improve through the medium of debate. For politicians, lawyers, and even architects, debate needs to be a contest in which winning means overcoming of an opponent. This model is also commonly used during political elections to win over voters. These specific circumstances justify and even necessitate the practice of persuasion. In reality, finding the truth has little place in political purposes.

Although I think the argument that "debate should be competitive because it has been competitive" is not strong, the desire to win, I believe, works as a motivation to tolerate the rough and boring process of argumentation. However, as mentioned by the first side of this argument, the concept of "winner" would be better redefined from 'the one/the team who overcomes the opponent' to 'the one/the team who develops its case more completely and accurately.'

Regarding the argument on ideal democracy and Utopia, I do not think teaching and encouraging people to understand others' views would be equal to asking them to learn how to live in Utopia. In fact, I do not see the world as a

⁸⁹ Hugo E. Hellman, "Debating is Debating—And should be," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 31(third issue, 1945), 295-300.

mere field of battle for which the goal of education should be growing more “debaters” and fighters. I believe that, in this case, political games will even enter into people's personal relationships. Teaching people how to debate, how to discuss, and how to engage in a dialogue mean completely different concepts. Therefore, before framing the type of debate intended for this investigation, debate, discussion, and dialogue need to be differentiated here.

The meaning and usage of debate and discussion, generally speaking, are often confused. Debates are centered on a specific proposition in which each side tries to prove their own statement and oppose the argument made by the other side. They are considered as means of rational decision making based on valid reasoning. Discussions, on the other hand, include assertions made by two or more people who do their best to establish the validity of the topic.

Decisions may also be made through discussion, a discussion in which the participants have compatible purposes and are willing to accept the consensus of the group. Of course, an Informal debate may happen within a discussion process.

Dialogue is a collaborative inquiry with an openness to possibilities beyond each individual's own beliefs and views. Unlike debate, which usually converts into a “verbal fight” to win an argument by listening for flaws in the opponent's argument, dialogue listens to other arguments in order to understand something new or from a different perspective.⁹⁰ It provides an opportunity through which unexpected insights can happen and everyone seeks to integrate diversity rather than extract the best answer. Therefore, unlike in debate and discussion, where change is hard to achieve, an issue or decision is more capable of constant development and change when it is the subject of a dialogue. In such an environment, each person would be able to express ideas, fears, and propositions more freely since there is no more worrying about defending one's own position. Dialogue is, therefore, reserved for complex issues where sharing, understanding, proposing and evaluating options lead to innovative solutions.

To sum up, debate tends to have two sides with strong convictions. Each side tries its best to convince the other side or third party by providing sound

⁹⁰ A. McGee-Cooper and D. Trammell, *Dialogue: The Power of Understanding* <<http://www.http://amca.com/books-resources/articles/>> accessed October 22, 2011.

reasoning or facts; thus, one side must ultimately win. In discussion, to make a point of difference does not imply that the other side is wrong, only that you disagree with it. And dialogue is a discussion between people whose role is not to be right or to win over a third party, but to broaden their perspectives and seek collective meaning.

Dialogue	Debate	Discussion
The goal: To broaden our perspective and find common ground	The goal : To win	The goal: To present solutions
One listens to understand without judgement to find collective meaning	One listens to find flaws to counter arguments	One listens for places of disagreement to find answers
Reveals assumptions for re-evaluation, an openness to being wrong and to change	Defends assumptions as truth, a determination to be right	Shares assumptions to find the right one.
Causes introspection on one's own position	Causes critique of the other person	Causes achieving preset goals
Opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions	Defends one's own positions as the best solution and excludes other solutions	Determine the best solution from the solutions presented
Validates other's experiences and feelings	Discount the validity of feelings	Avoid feelings
Articulate areas of conflict and differences	Focus on conflict and differences	Avoid areas of strong conflict and differences
Builds relationships	Disregards relationships	Retains relationships
Is divergent and remains open-ended	Are convergent and demand a conclusion	

Table 3-1 Differences among dialogue, discussion, and debate, adopted from Nagda's *The Building Blocks of Dialogue* (2004), Bidol's *Interactive Communication* (1986), Berman's *A Comparison of Dialogue and Debate* (1993)

All these three forms of conversation have their own purposes, and their differences should not imply that one outweighs the others. The chart above is simply intended to articulate the differences. Although dialogue engages the valuable virtue of diversity, there are certainly times when discussion and debate are useful instructional strategies.

FRAMING THE THESIS DEBATE

To argue as citizens, generally speaking, we need to improve both the skills of cooperative argument as well as skills—such as persuasion—needed to present arguments in the competitive marketplace of ideas. However, for the purpose of this investigation, which is to educate people in the art of discussion and how to value divergent views and tolerate opposing ideas, “persuasion” suggests persuading others that you are making strong arguments with sound evidence, rather than imposing your ideas upon the public and making people agree with you.

To develop a culture of tolerance in a society, generally speaking, first applying a systematic instruction and dedicated practice is required. Although “dialogue” touches the tolerance for divergent views more effectively than “debate,” for effective dialogue to take place, first, I believe, society needs to learn argumentation skills within the disciplined structure of debate. Practicing a type of debate, initially, is essential since a degree of formality with certain rules for timing is needed to make participants commit to discussion and tolerate uncomfortable encounters with opposing views. Moreover, the competitive nature of debate ignites a passion to win that acts as a motivation to tolerate the rough process of argumentation. This motivation is necessary, especially in a so-called reluctant society that needs to learn to engage in constructive discussion effectively. However, the definition of a “winner” requires reconsideration regarding the concerns of this investigation. Defining winning as overcoming an opponent is only appropriate for the competitive realm of business; here, “winner” is better defined as the participant who develops an argument with a broader perspective and tolerates opposing views better. Defining competition as a testing of different sides of a proposition will also lead to the possibility of having more than two sides to an argument. Consequently, this type of debate will help develop, in both those engaged in the debate and those witnessing it, an attitude necessary for life in a diverse

society. The term “citizenry debate” will hereafter be used to signify the type of debate intended and characterized for this investigation.

Developing the citizenry debate skills, of course, can be further fulfilled through the education system and with the help of the authority of the classroom. Debate and discussion courses are part of educational curricula in most western high schools, but only as optional courses with the intention of improving political debating skills. Members of any generation who have practiced citizenry debates in school must feel the need, after graduation, of a space and opportunity wherein they can continue that excitement and passion for discussion and practice their citizenry debate skills. Having a public space in which to hold these heated discussions will certainly engage and involve the public and influence a wider group than just intellectuals.

The culture-making task, broadly speaking, works within the passage of time. Therefore, practicing a culture of dialogue can be instilled incrementally in society through exposure to public spaces within which people can engage in citizenry discussion and debates on a regular basis.

FRAMING THE DISCOURSE

Space has no room, time not a moment for man.

He is excluded.

in order to “include” him —help his becoming—he must be gathered into their meaning (man is the subject as well as the object of architecture).

Whatever space and time mean place and occasion mean more.

For space in the image of man is place and time in the image of man is occasion.

~ Aldo Van Eyck

PUBLIC SPACE

In order to identify the quality of a public space for debate and discussion, first the notion of “public space,” which has been the area of concern for many intellectuals, needs to be specified. In a general sense, for people to be aware of and appreciate their complex society and to reinforce their collective identity, there must be a place where they can occasionally see and experience a diverse cross section of that society. The design of public spaces is especially significant in creating a sense of belonging and a shared experience of a city.⁹¹

⁹¹ N. Corbett, *Transforming Cities: Revival in the Square* (London, UK: RIBA Publishing, 2004), 10.

Public spaces are usually defined as dynamic social spaces such as urban squares, streets, parks, recreation areas, and other publicly accessible and managed spaces, as opposed to the more settled and private realm of housing and work. In other words, they provide “the channels for movement, the nodes of communication, and the common ground for play and relaxation.”⁹² Labelled as “third places” by Ray Oldenburg⁹³, these social environments, separate from the first and second places of home and work, are essential to communal life and foster broader civic engagement.

Public space, generally speaking, can be addressed through the notions of either a public sphere or publicly accessible space. While the former suggests the possibility for a debate or a discourse and participative democracy, the latter focuses more on the idea of individual liberties, incorporating the concept of accessibility, both physical and psychological. Although more attention has been given to the accessibility factor, a public space acts successfully by providing both accessibility and communication qualities. Under one sociological approach, distinct forms of public spaces in the west have been introduced, such as the street, the commercial centre, the cafe and the square, the train station, and finally, the park. The street helps in exploring the relationship between public space and the form of the city; the commercial center addresses accessibility and ownership issues; train stations point at the link between mobility and public space; the café and the square illustrate two specific forms of communication: the conversation and the demonstration. In fact, cafes and restaurants as places of encounter and discussion generate a “public sphere” just as tea houses did in Iran. In recent years, they have taken on new salience among urban planners as an asset for the vitality of public space. Finally, parks address the role of citizen's participation in the design of the city. Urban parks offer city dwellers a piece of nature, a respite from the daily grind, and an opportunity for practicing sports and recreation. However, less well known is the fact that parks are places of heavy socialization, places with numerous social contacts, both among regulars and among occasional

⁹² S. Carr, *Public Space* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3.

⁹³ R. Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (Washington, D.C: Marlowe & Company, 1999), 16.

visitors. Although similar to cafés, parks are usually identified as local places; they are open to anybody, from poor to rich, and from inhabitant to visitor.⁹⁴

THE SITE

Public spaces throughout Iranian history (from around 500 years B.C.) have been used for different purposes, such as places for national ceremonies, commercial activities, important news announcements, crowning ceremonies, etc. During the 14th century A.D., when public spaces were used as venues for ceremonies and social communication, Persian gardens were also introduced as places in which to experience nature. In the early 20th century A.D., some of these gardens were converted to urban parks for public recreation and socialization in most Iranian big cities.⁹⁵

Parks were traditionally considered as providers of recreational opportunities; however, urban parks can make broader contributions to the vitality of communities. From a socio-cultural perspective, urban parks can play a significant role in enhancing public life, especially for increasingly urbanised societies. They can provide good opportunities for social interactions and citizens' participation in fostering the collective identity. It was only recently, however, that the often-overlooked socio-cultural role of parks drew Iranian designers' attention. This missed quality generally stems from the fact that the first parks in Iran were conversions of Persian gardens that did not have the required infrastructure to include further roles. Although the significance of artworks and cultural spaces gradually began to be considered in the design of Iranian urban parks, a new convention still requires introduction: how to use urban parks not just as places for leisure activities, but also as significant nodes of communication and cultural exchange.

⁹⁴ S. Tonnelat, *The sociology of urban public spaces* (Paris: Atlantis Press, 2010), 2.

⁹⁵ Hami Ahmad et al., "Users' Preferences of Usability and Sustainability of old Urban Park in Tabriz, Iran," *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences* 5(11): 1899-1905, 2011, accessed June 03, 2012.

Fig. 3-1 Naghsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan, Iran. A public space adopting the Persian garden's fourfold pattern. As a high walled garden surrounding shady trees, streams, and fountains, the Persian garden was an answer to the aridity of the local climate.



Fig. 3-2 Laleh Park is one of the modern urban parks in Iran that considered the socio-cultural role of parks. Built in 1966, Laleh Park, as a large recreation area in central Tehran, embodies artworks and cultural spaces such as Iran's National Rug Gallery to the northwest, and the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art to the west. And thus, it gradually became one of the significant hubs for Tehranis.



For the focus of this investigation, therefore, urban parks will be the selected form of public space, given that parks in Iran are the main recreational spaces of cities and widely engage a diverse group of people and provide opportunities for the spontaneous exposure of differences. From another perspective, the juxtaposition of these two spaces—parks and the proposed space for citizenry debate—is somehow reminiscent of a tradition of democracy implemented in the Greek Polis with the help of two places, the agora and the Pnyx, even though two very different kinds of democracy were practiced in each. The agora was a place of diversity that prepared people for debate; and the Pnyx helped citizen to concentrate and visually discipline their debating. This ancient prototype illustrates how the coexistence of a space of diversity—the agora—and a space of debate—the Pnyx—can be put to democratic use.⁹⁶

Iranian urban parks are demographically open since they are made use of by people from a variety of backgrounds—differentiated by age, class, occupation, ethnicity—and by people embracing a variety of values and world views. A space could be dedicated, in the midst of all that diversity, for people to engage those differences.

In addition, as discussed in part one, since debates in Iran have been practiced and bound by the limits of an authoritative body of knowledge and credibility factors, encouraging and engaging a diverse range of people with varied viewpoints and ideologies will break the boundaries and will address the tolerance issue more effectively than before. Bringing discussion events that are now taking place in universities to public spaces, and encouraging the consequent exposure of the public to the art of discussion with respect for divergent views, we can hope to initiate a public culture of dialogue and tolerance. Consequently, a new convention will be introduced for fostering the use of an urban park by having the park, along with other cultural spaces, surrounding the proposed space, creating a new hidden space of appearance.

Walking around from huddle to huddle, offers passersby debates of different heat and flow into which they can enter without any required qualifications. This would provide an opportunity similar to that of Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park for the public to enhance their discussion skills as well as oratory and public speaking skills.

⁹⁶ R. Sennett, *The Spaces of Democracy* (Michigan, The University of Michigan, 1998) 21

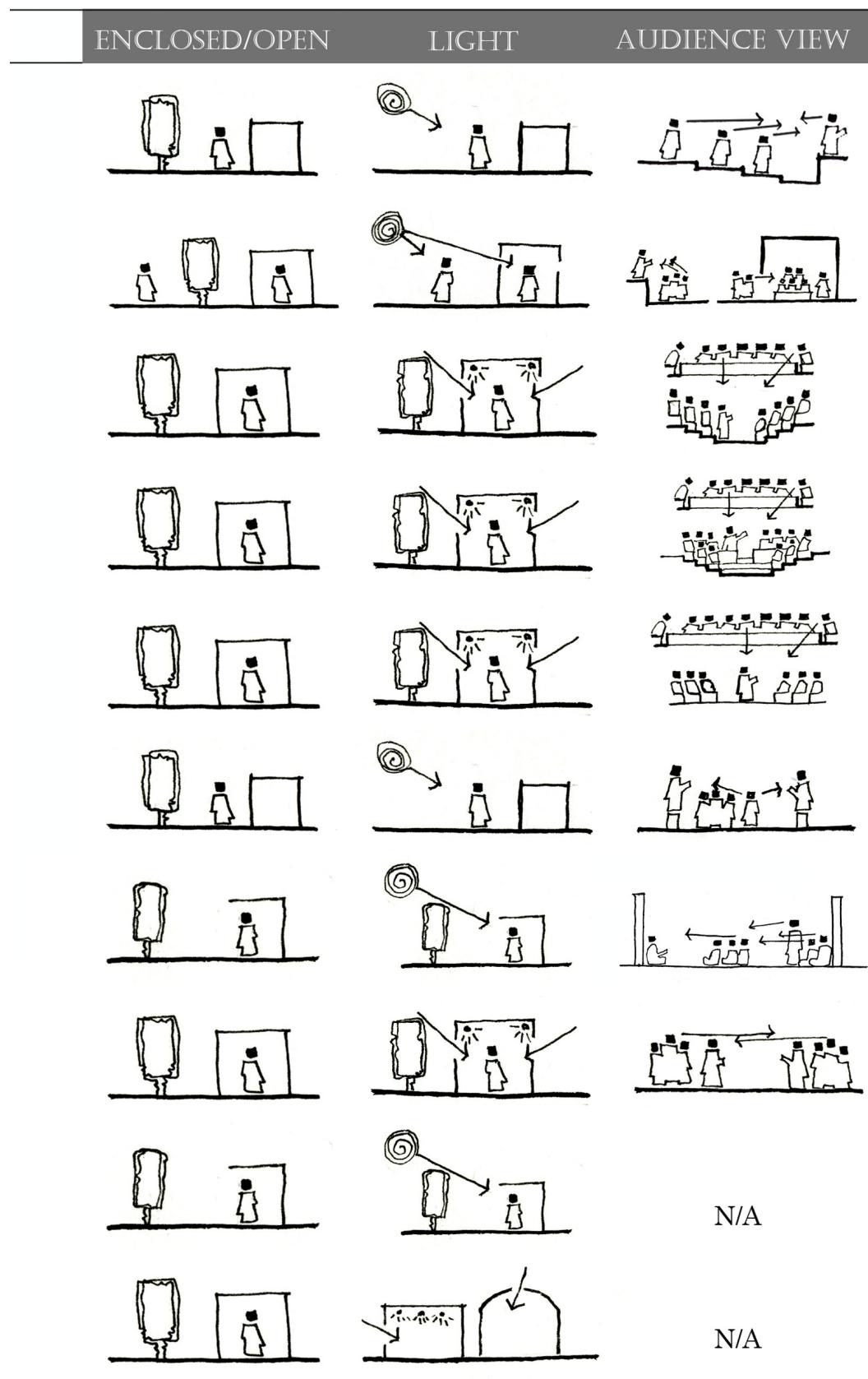
THE SPACE

This does not aim to propose a solid and lasting building for citizenry discussion, rather a ‘kit-of-parts’, some design guidelines for spaces capable of holding citizenry debates and discussions. With the focus of the thesis on Iranian society, the proposal integrates the overlooked skills of public discussion, with the help of temporary debate interventions to be used on a regular basis around the cities. These set-ups create situations in which people who wander the cities in search for events and new experiences could engage, and develop their public roles and discussion skills.

Placing these interventions in parks throughout the cities will also foster the socio-cultural role and the use of urban parks. In order to introduce and establish this new convention for Iranian society, these interventions can be set up next to a gallery, a cinema, or an exhibition that is hosting specific events within a park, and be used as centres for discussions about those events.

The following pages present a diagrammatic spatial analysis of the investigation’s case studies, based on six specific factors, including shape, scale, the exposure of participant to each other and to the audience, the openness of the space, and the quality of light.

Table 3-1 A table in the following two pages analyzes the investigation’s precedents considering six specific qualities of space, Drawn by author.



▲ MODERATOR
■ SPEAKER

A DIALOGUE OF SPACE

The common layouts of spaces used for debate and discussion were either rectangular or circular/semi-circular. The rectangle, with opposing seats, reflects and enhances the competitive nature of a two-sided debate. This is the layout of debate chambers with political purposes such as those of the House of Commons. A “face-to-face” encounter enables and encourages each party to monitor the other party’s gestures and respond effectively.

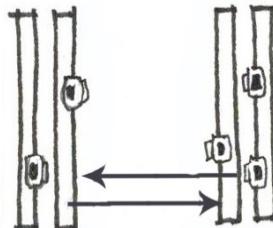


Fig. 3-3 Rectangular Layout

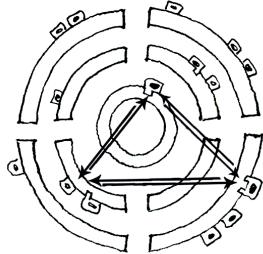


Fig. 3-4 Circular Layout

The circle, on the other hand, is used for an egalitarian space, an arrangement that encourages equality. It meets the need for all to feel as though they are participants rather than merely recipients of information.

Equality is expressed in the rectangular layout as well. The two sides have conditions equal to each other. An instance is the design of the pulpits at the Oxford Divinity School, in which the two disputants face each other in symmetrical manner and debate.

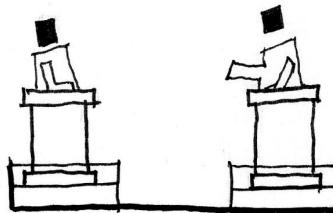


Fig. 3-5 Pulpits

However, facing each other on elevated opposing pulpits creates an intimidating, challenging environment in which winning implies overcoming the opponent; whereas a circular arrangement that places all the participants at same level encourages equal participation, commitment, and mutual respect. Moreover, a two-sided debate can happen in a circular layout; such is apparent

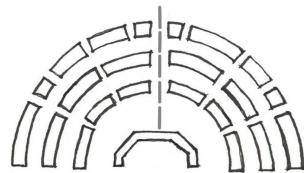


Fig. 3-6 Two sides in a semi-circle

in the practice of the two-party system within a semi-circular arrangement in the U.S. House of Representative.

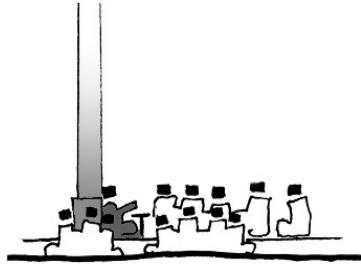


Fig. 3-7 The Column

Round gatherings shaped naturally in Spanish mosques around a column where a master would give a lecture. The column was the only element that initiated a gathering for discussion. The soap-box at Speakers' Corner is another such architectural element. People also form a circle around the person who speaks on the soap-box. We see an ancient manifestation of this semi-circular gathering around the bema, the stone speakers' platform on Pnyx hill.

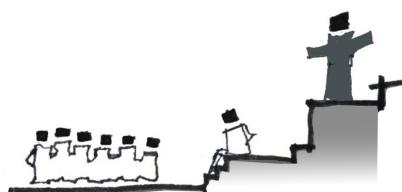


Fig. 3-8 The Bema

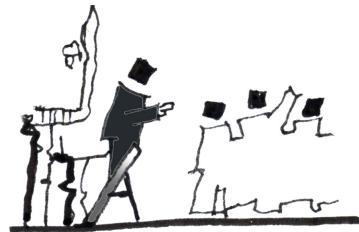


Fig. 3-9 The Soap-box

All three of these examples use those architectural elements to amplify the words of one speaker. However, their arrangements do not elicit equal participation from the members, although the audience may pose questions and make comments. In other words, they simply touch on public speaking and the art of oratory. The elevated speaker's position, however, provides a better view and exposes the speaker by view, voice, and body. However, the high platform for the speaker can also be used as part of a debate in which debaters take the principle place to make their speech.

A stepped floor improves sightlines of participants to one another in debates in both rectangular and circular arrangements.



Fig. 3-10 Participants' View



Fig. 3-11 UK House of Commons



Fig. 3-12 U.S. House of Representatives

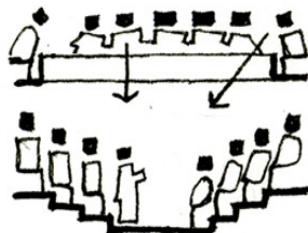


Fig. 3-13 Audience View

Participants do not have equal exposure to one another and cannot have effective eye contact with people who are sitting behind. However, this approach can improve the view of the audience and will also reduce their interference visually. Most recently built debate chambers provide galleries, usually on upper floors, for members of the public and press to watch the proceedings.

To provide an equal exposure for the debaters, however, a gathering of people sitting around at the same level would do.

In fact, for a public assembly, a relatively small-scale setting is preferable, since, in face-to-face interaction, it becomes very difficult to have genuine eye contact and keep track of the reactions of more than six to eight participants at a time.

From a cultural view, the Iranian debate precedents—teahouses and madrasas—also show how Iranians tended



Fig. 3-14 A discussion Group of eight

to engage in debate with small numbers of people. This tendency is further illustrated for me with the experience of my friends in Iran. They unanimously believe that they feel comfortable debating with no more than eight people and no less than three people. However, debating by nature does not require a small group in order to be effective. For instance, the average number of participants in debate chambers is 300-400 people.

These large numbers of people use a formal setting with a strong authority to moderate the proceedings.

In fact, a crucial element influencing the proceedings of these large gatherings is security, either a physical or conceptual one. Rules of conduct are implemented in debate chambers to ensure safety, and they specifically protect certain forms of speech. Although the members have the privilege of free speech, this freedom is circumscribed by the written rules of the House. To illustrate, Today's Robert's Rules of Order is the basic handbook, involving a set of rules, for conducting public meetings, assemblies that allow every voice to be heard and to make decisions effectively. A similar and adaptable "rules of order" can be arranged for citizenry debate gatherings, especially because this debate aims to enhance the tolerance culture of the public. Even in an informal gathering such as that of Speakers' Corner, over which a Speakers' Corner committee has no jurisdiction, a brief Codes of Conduct can be adopted as a reminder to people to behave considerately and cooperatively.



Fig3-15 The Lichfield Code of Conduct

In formal debate chambers, the highest authority of the house, the speaker, is responsible for interpreting and enforcing all rules and must remain politically impartial at all times. The Speaker's disciplinary powers ensure that the debate is focussed and the dignity and decorum of the house is maintained, although members must take responsibility for their own behaviour. Such an authority is also noticeable in the practice of discussions and debates at mosques and caliphs' courts. All these authoritative bodies create an intellectual space for the gatherings that is as significant as the physical one. Therefore, for the purpose of conducting public debates, the assembly can assign a person to make sure that everyone follows the rules of the game, someone who maintains order and decorum of the event.



Fig. 3-16 The Speaker's Chair,
The House of Commons of
Canada

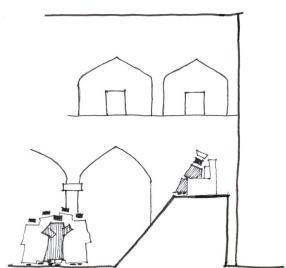


Fig. 3-17 The Cliph

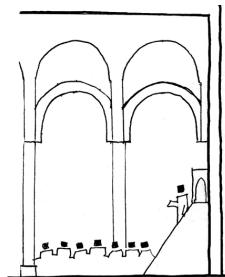


Fig. 3-18 The Imam on Minbar

In addition, being held in sheltered and enclosed spaces helps participants take what they are doing seriously. For debate chambers specifically, it provides the discipline needed to moderate over such large numbers.

In the public gatherings such as those in the Speakers' Corner and mosques, on the other hand, the average number of people is approximately 30-40 and these gatherings usually happen in open or semi-open spaces such

as those of mosque and madrasa wherein discussions have an educational purpose.

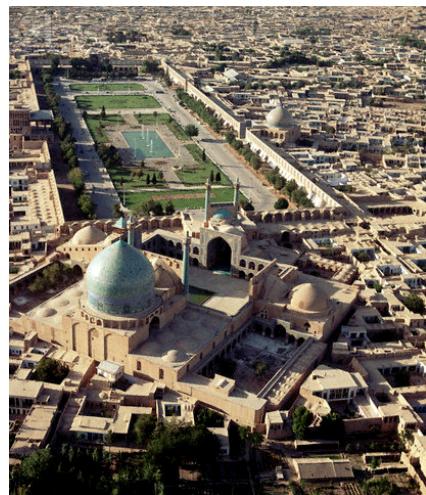


Fig. 3-19 Naghsh-e Jahan Square, Isfahan

In this regard, the Iranian tradition of enclosure in cities responding to patterns of social intercourse particular to Islamic society further encourages enclosing the space of debate. The biggest open spaces were usually the mosque's courtyard. In fact, the absence of open public spaces in the tradition of Islamic cities is remarkable to a visitor from the West. This may explain why Iranians usually feel uncomfortable when exposed in an open public space. Moreover, it may explain why the only exception of an open space, Naghsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan, failed to work like a Roman piazza.

Although an enclosed space may engage Iranians in debates more effectively, I believe a debate, with no more than ten people, can be held in either an open or closed space.

The courtyard, which acts as a semi-open space and has strongly proven itself throughout Iranian history of architecture, can be considered. A series of small discussions can be held in this semi-closed, semi-exposed space, and the rough process of arguing can become pleasant with the addition of a piece of nature.

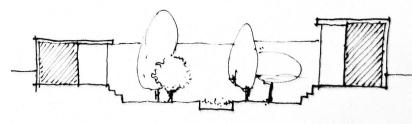


Fig3-20 The Courtyard

The notion of enclosure and openness also touches on the light. Natural light for the open and semi-open spaces is important. Furthermore the lighting of formal settings in these case studies basically includes the use of both daylight, as well as artificial lights, usually illuminating the space from high above.



Fig. 3-21 Indirect Lighting

For the space where the focus needs to be more on discussions than on its architectural elements, and requires minimal glare, ambient lighting is sufficient. This type of lighting provides an area with overall and uniform illumination and radiates a comfortable level of brightness.

Moreover a higher luminosity in the center of the room will emphasize the formality of the space.



Fig. 3-22 Indirect Lighting from top centre

The type of seating and table intended for the space can also influence the event's effectiveness.

The British debate chamber provides benches along each side for members of the House of Commons. Debaters leave their place to the only table at the chamber to give their speeches.

A similar approach is applied at the Oxford Union wherein there is one table at the middle to which debaters of each side go to speak.

The Canadian House of Commons provides individual desks for members and the speakers of each side speak from their own seat.

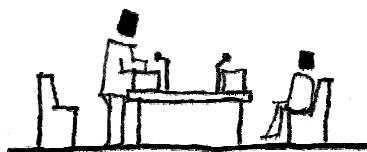


Fig. 3-23 The UK House of Commons

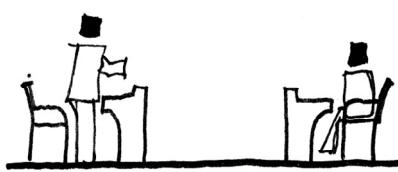


Fig. 3-24 The House of Commons of Canada

Americans make use of both approaches depending on the state. The House of Representatives in Washington has semi circular rows of benches and two big tables for speakers of each party. These are placed in the third row labeled as Democratic and Republican committee tables. Sometimes two podiums, usually used for lectures and speeches, are put at the centre, behind which debaters stand and elicit questions.

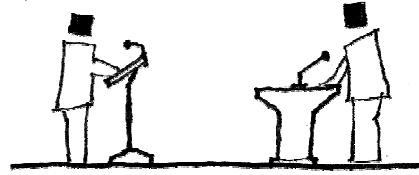
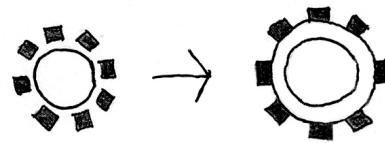


Fig. 3-25 The U.S. House of Representatives

A small group of people can have either their own seats or a shared bench. And the person who wants to speak can either speak from their place, or leave their place and come to face the assembly at a specific spot, a particular point on the circle.

Looking at all these debate chambers, the architectural element that plays a significant role, I believe, is the table, an element on which the rules of the game are placed and speeches are made.

A shared table also has a different impression as opposed to separate tables. A shared table would probably help in enhancing a sense of mutuality, putting all different and maybe opposing thoughts and beliefs on a common ground.



However, consideration needs to be taken on how to gather participants around the table. Having them gather at a round table, similar to that of a dining table, is different from sitting at a hollow round table, which implies a different formality.

Fig. 3-26 Influence of The Table on Formality

Consequently, rather than proposing a closed narrative and a clear-cut model for the space of public debates, the proposal instead imagines a spatial toolkit for application to the specific cultural and urban context, a configuration, easily be assembled to shape “debate booths.” These assemblies can be rearranged into multiple versions using the same kit of parts. The proposal encourages flexibility in assembly; and thus, any result will not try to render one single architectural solution, rather acts as an option that focuses on providing the necessary means to carry out effective citizenry debates.

The focus of democracy now, generally speaking, is shifted from issues of formal governance to citizenship and issues of participation. This has everything to do with the physical city and its design. Democratic design now would be different than that of Athens’s pnyx, a semi-circular theatre for the political use of its citizens. Designing democratic space today suggests creating a forum for citizen participation.⁹⁷ The proposal supports a user-centered design approach where communities co-design their own debate and discussion areas to suit their needs and interests, a spatial structure that, though clearly determinate, lends itself to being ‘played’ in a variety of ways.

⁹⁷ Richard Sennett, “The Open City, Housing and Urban Neighbourhoods,” *Urban Age Newspaper Essay*, November 2006: 4.

AFTERWORD

Spring 2012, three years after my first review session at the School of Architecture, UW, it was my defence day, the time when we sat around for two rounds of questions on my thesis. I could vividly feel the absence of a tension, the tension of struggling to hide my personal views while answering questions. The unfamiliar question: “what do you think about this concept, ideology, or this event?” has become a “right” question to my ears. I was not worrying about sharing my personal thoughts and feelings anymore, even though they were not always based on “reliable” facts.

In that environment, no one tried to win over the other, but to listen to other arguments without judgement in order to understand something new or from a different perspective. Once again, I felt the desire to discover hidden aspects of the topic, the desire to experience being challenged by opposing viewpoints. Whenever I heard an “I disagree with you,” I felt that fascinating passion for sharing, and these thoughts ran through my head: *Yes, a different viewpoint. Tell us about what it is that you see and we cannot. Help us to discover your personal ideology and thereby, broaden our perspectives.*

Although I had a thirst to hear more and to get deep into each idea that was brought up, it was one of those discussions with a specific time allotment and where decisions needed to be made at the end. It finished, but all I could feel was the “right” feeling of engaging in an effective discussion, a feeling that I am determined to experience and explore more.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: AN EXPERIMENT ON GESTURES

At one point of the research I became interested in focusing on the gestures involved in a debate. A typical debate usually embodies passion and gestures similar to those in a theatre performance.

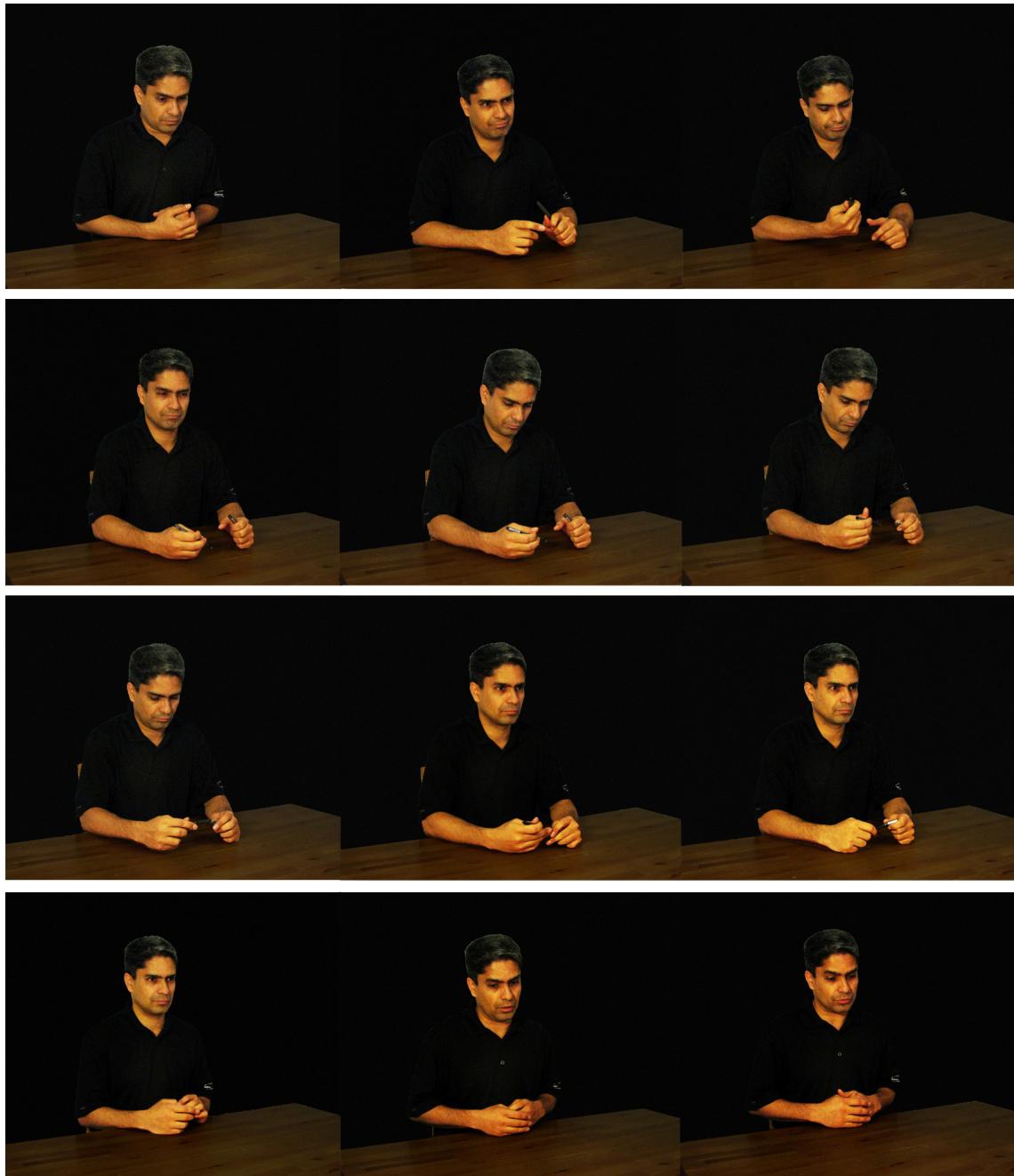
Within a series of photos I intended to illustrate the two common described behaviours in times of clashing ideas: frustration and indifference. This intention is depicted within two scenarios. The first one is a decision-making meeting in a company and an employee who holds an opposing opinion to that of his employer. The employee prefers to keep his opposing ideas to himself for two reasons: feeling insecure about his position and also indifferent, as he does not believe his ideas could make any changes. He may even pretend to views that he thinks would be appealing to his employer.

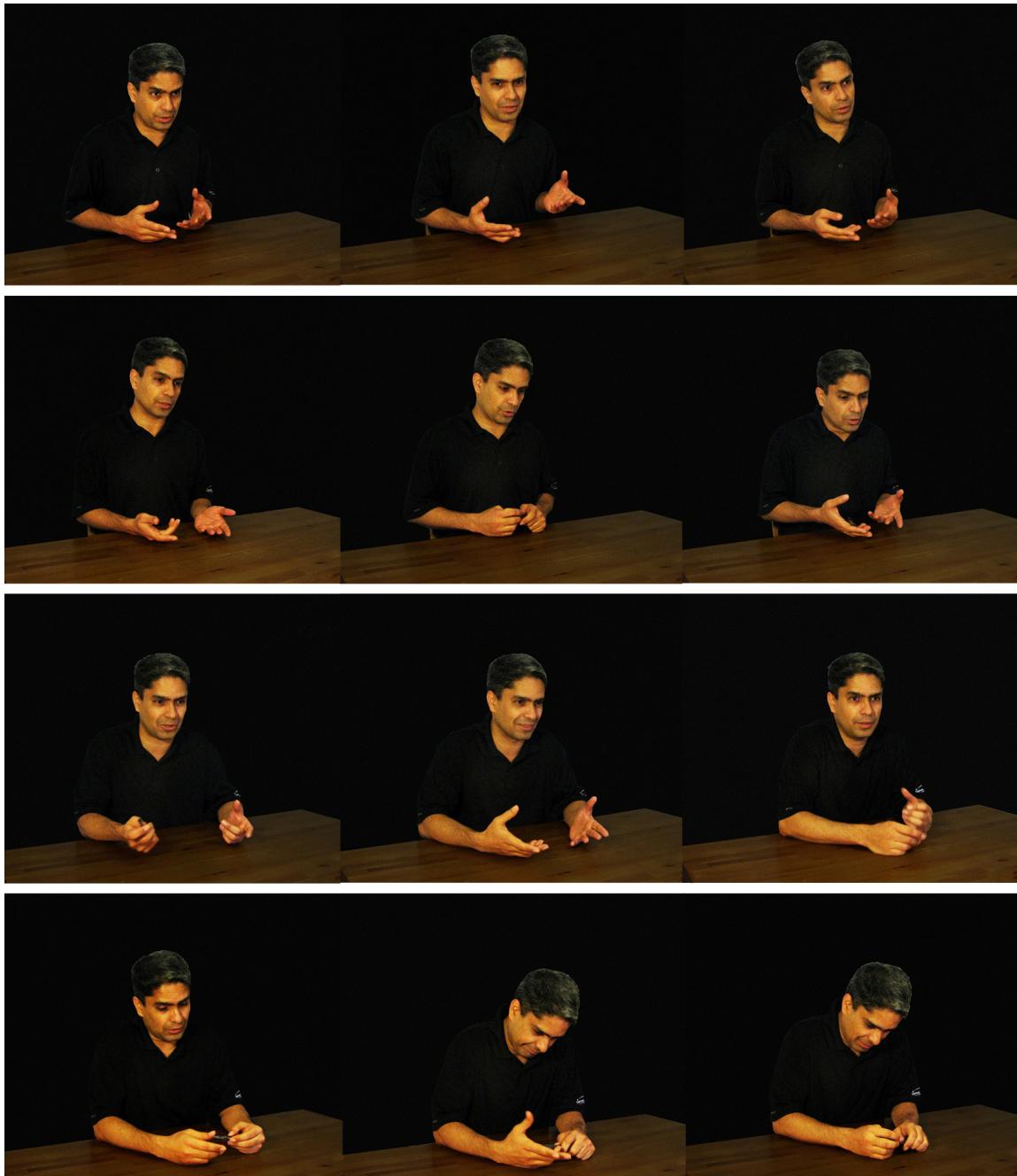
In the second scenario, however, the person does not mind hurting the other side and gets frustrated by the opposing idea and even leaves the discussion at the end.

The idea of photographs comes from action shots of Adolf Hitler, taken by his personal photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann, in 1927. This is how Hoffmann captioned the shots: “Adolf Hitler rehearses supposedly spontaneous gestures while listening to a recording of one of his previous speeches.”⁹⁸ Apparently, the photos were unable to illustrate the myth of Hitler’s “natural” oratorial skills and Hitler ordered Hoffmann to destroy the negatives. However, Hoffmann did not, and they were published in Hoffmann’s memoirs.

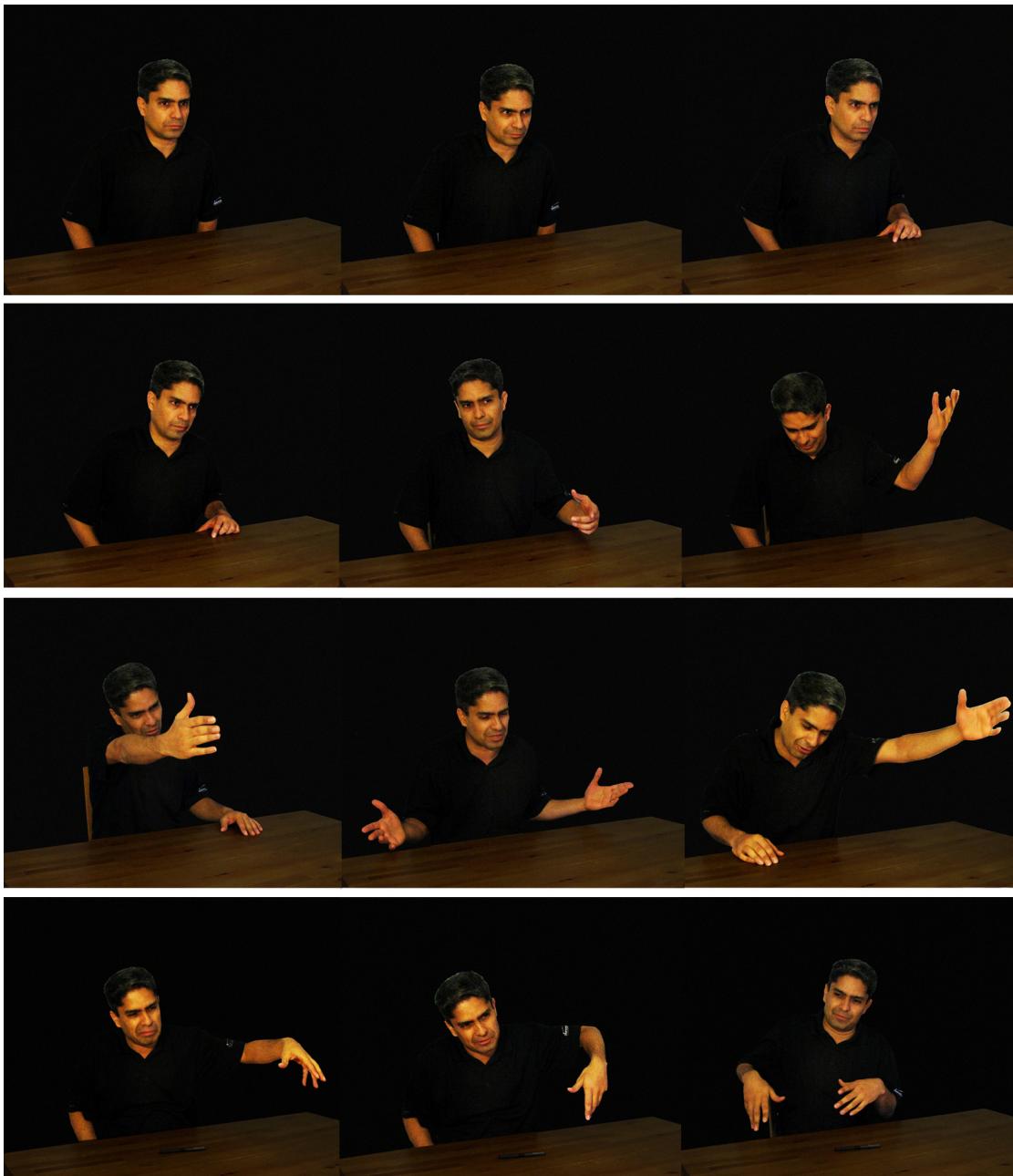
⁹⁸ Hoffmann, Heinrich, *Hitler was my Friend*, R.H. Stevens trans. (London: Burke, 1955), 72.

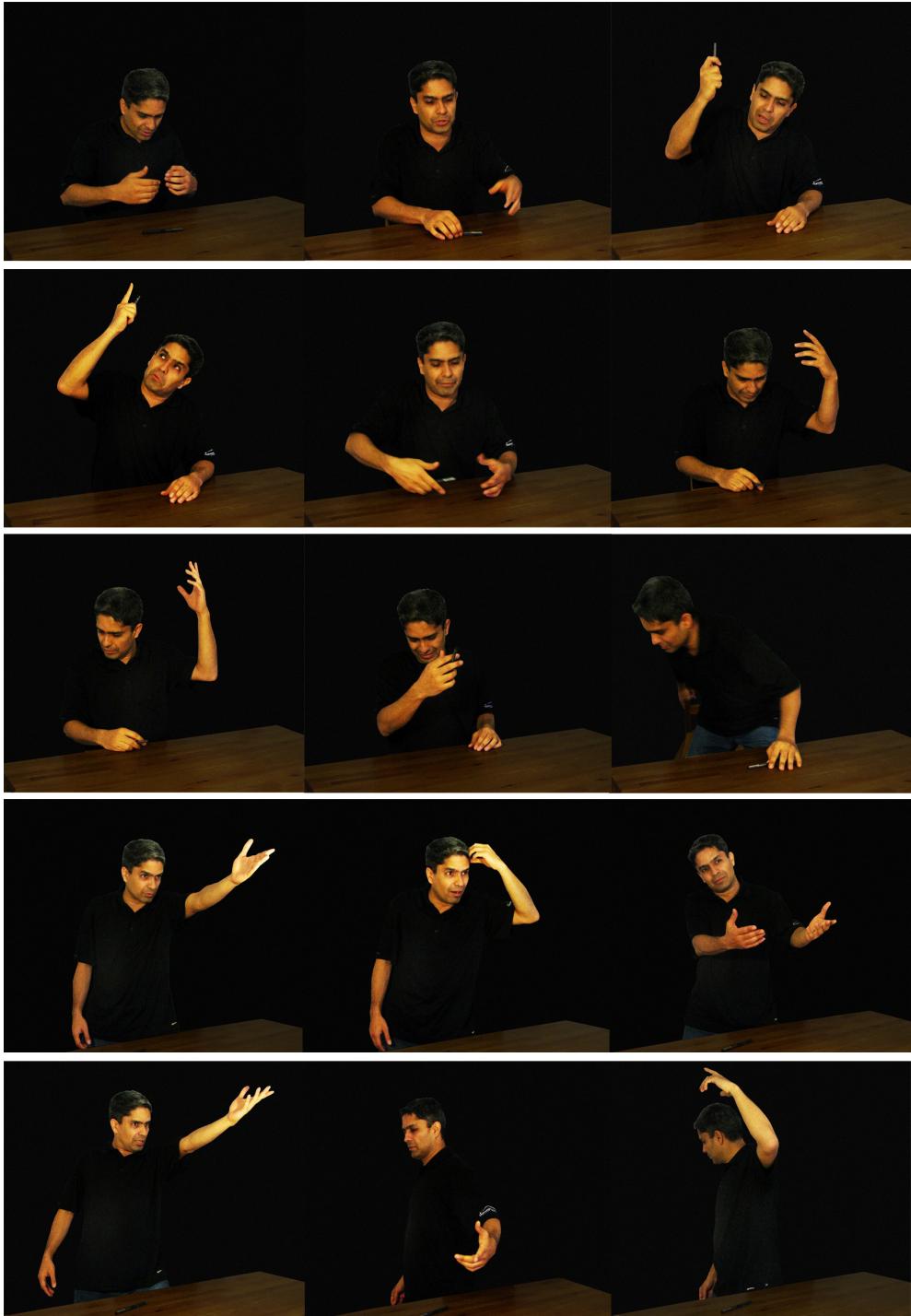
SCENARIO ONE





SCENARIO TWO





APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWS

I interviewed some of my friends and family in Iran and asked them questions about a place in which they would feel comfortable discussing and debating. The following is a collection of their answers:

Parisa, a 28 year-old Masters' student,

"I see the comfortable space as a semi-closed space with high ceiling and lighting from above; it involves a number of different gathering spaces in circular shapes with tables in the middle of each. They can have different materials and colors. I prefer fixed seating without back rest, I want to move, turn, and use my hands freely; I don't want barriers like back and arm rest. It needs to be a fixed seating not a movable one, probably a kind of a wide bench. I would like all participants to sit at one level and be able to see each other's faces and make eye contacts. I want my voice to be heard easily. Yet, I don't want to sit too close to them. I want to fill the stiffness and toughness of the benches and the stability of the space. I feel comfortable to debate with no more than 8 people and no less than 3 people."

Nima, a 28 year-old department of transportation employee,

"There should be a serious landmark and sign with a vivid entrance or something indicating that there are some serious discussions happening. I prefer a circular shape with just one side open. I want to be in a semi private atmosphere, a kind of privacy needed for a discussion to not be interrupted by outsiders. A disciplined space, a roofed space sheltered from rain and sun. Food or snack if provided would be nice, as well."

Mehri, a 53 year-old house wife,

"I feel more comfortable talking in a group of 7-8 people, rather than in a large (20-30 people) group. I see it as an open space wherein I could easily see others talking in different groups in circular shapes. The space could be roofed, yet a kind of a light and bright roof like a tent."

Navid, a 31 year-old software quality assurance tester,

"An enclosed space with low light. I need to sit on a comfortable chair with backrest. I want no interruption from outsiders, yet it is alright if I can see people outside passing by. I just don't want to be exposed to them. So, dark inside and bright outside. The group needs to have a kind of privacy to follow the discussion. I prefer a group of less than 10 and more than 4. And a table in the middle with tea or coffee sets on it would be nice."

Mehrdad, a 43 year-old IT manager,

"There need to be a time allotment, I don't like to engage in a debate wherein one person talks the most and some cannot even participate. Someone needs to moderate the discussion. A revolving chair that helps me to see every participants, is nice. One person speaks at a time, and I would like the speaker to stand in front of the group and speak. The group is better to be up to 10 people. Maybe it can have a kind of a board to draw and visualize concepts of the talk. The environment is better to be not too dark and not too bright."

Fariba, a 32 year-old Masters' Student,

"The space had better use natural light, direct and indirect, and no sharp colors like red or blue, warm material, instead. Separate flexible and movable seats in a space with high ceiling. A group of 3 to 10 people would be nice. There need to be some place on which participants can write and read. Having a clock would be helpful. Passersby can pass; can be like a hotel lobby, maybe a space like a lounge that you can drink a tea. Sometimes I like to walk and talk. Some books and pictures can be on the walls. A place like a balcony can be used for the following discussions."

And someone like Ali, a 26 year-old university student, even says: "I just want to have an opportunity to speak, no matter where or in what group or on what seating!"

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