

Semati, Mehdi, Northern Illinois University, United States

Where the Streets Have Two Names (Tehran's Aesthetic Rejoinder)

The city is awoken by a storm of feelings and bursts of passion. In July 2009, Tehran was brimming with exhilaration, joy and hope; later fear, sorrow, defiance and anger grip the city. Up to this point, Iranian society had succeeded in managing its contradictions: theocracy and democratic elements, Islamization and secularization, official culture and underground culture, state media and viral media had coexisted in a volatile social space. People's rejection of the fraudulent election has now pitted the state against society. The state unwittingly has created the space for the intersection of underground culture, a broad coalition challenging the state, popular religious culture and viral politics. If the state monopolizes the official media, people will weave a critical consciousness through micromedia that are available to them. If politics is forbidden, culture will do: poets, rappers, rockers, writers and other artists will take to the streets to express the city's feelings. That which cannot be said is expressed with passion. The political is expressed beyond the impersonal and the limited institutional space of oppositional politics. In this context, the paranoid state lashes out at culture; all that is culture is suspect and grounds for violence. As the paralysis continues, it feels like 1979. The city is, once again, on the brink.