

# Preface

Iranian architect Bahram Shirdel, whose work has been referred to in this book, in an interview with *Shargh Daily* (18 June 2016) contends that Iranian architects are generally ‘Westoxification’ (*Gharbzade*). He argues that traditionalist and modernist architects in Iran are two sides of the same coin; they are incapable of bringing original Iranian archetypes into the twenty-first century context and generate a particular type of development which is rooted in our historical architecture and urbanism.

This statement, from an architect who graduated from Western architectural schools and collaborated with some prominent thinkers and architects such as Jeffrey Kipnis and Peter Eisenman, resonates with a long-standing question which Vartan Avanesian addressed some 70 years ago. In the first issue of the magazine ‘Architect’ published in August 1946, Avanesian raised a challenging question which, I would argue, is still the central question for Iranian architects and urban planners, if not for all individuals and intellectuals. He noted that Iranian architects ‘are faced with two differing viewpoints; should one imitate the past and recreate the valuable works of that era; or should one look to the future and adapt architectural design to the modern way of life’. In fact, this oscillation between two extremes of Modernity and Tradition has been the essential, ontological and practical question which has overwhelmed the production of urban space in Iran during the past 150 years. Standing or moving between two affirmative and negative modes towards Modernity and Tradition has registered itself as a critical ‘urban condition’: a state of uncertainty and continuous tension which has not always been constructive but destructive in social, political, cultural and economic realms. This book addresses this long-standing ‘urban condition’ in the architecture and urban planning disciplines.

This book is rooted in my 20 years of intellectual engagement with the same question Avanesian raised: the challenge of Tradition and Modernity in various aspects of contemporary Iran, including architecture and urbanism. I was particularly interested in looking at turning points in which these two extremes could interact and reconcile in a creative way and generate a condition in-between to which I refer in this book as ‘space-in-between’: a state of affairs in which two

extremes are in tension but constructively communicate and interchange. Architecture and urban planning of the late 1960s and 1970s until the advent of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 were rich enough to produce such a space-in-between.

My work on the theory of Critical Regionalism (Kenneth Frampton) during 2005–2009 provided me with the necessary grounded knowledge to look at the architectural and urban works of this period from a different but systematic perspective. The more I contemplated this theory, the more I became confident that the architectural works of three leading architects, namely Kamran Diba, Nader Ardalan, and Hossein Amanat, are authentic critical regionalist works in which a ‘space-in-between’ has been creatively produced.

The book has five chapters. The first chapter shows how architecture and urban planning in Tehran have been crystallized in a space between two extremes of Westernization and modernization on the one hand, and Traditionalism on the other. It underlines the exigency of a mediatory approach, what I refer to as the ‘in-between’, through which the two arms of the dichotomy can come together in a continuous, productive dialogue. The second chapter introduces the theory of Critical Regionalism as a theory of ‘in-between’ and discusses its central arguments. The third chapter is a critical regionalist analysis of the writings, projects and works of three architects, Diba, Ardalan and Amanat. It demonstrates how central qualities of a critical regionalist approach have been concretized and manifested in these works in order to form a ‘space-in-between’. In the next chapter, these architects respond to my challenging questions which encourage them to narrate their singular narrative from the production of ‘space-in-between’ and their substantial contribution to it. Two final chapters go beyond the 1970s and show how the architecture and urbanism of post-revolutionary Iran continued to take place within two extremes of Modernity and Tradition. It argues for the urgency of the creation of a new ‘space-in-between’ which reflects the possibilities and needs of the contemporary and future Iran.

I do believe that the contemporary architecture and urbanism of Iran has not yet been sufficiently documented, studied and analysed. This book, I hope very much, could be a valuable contribution to this lacuna.

Oxford, UK  
August 2017

M. Reza Shirazi

Contemporary Architecture and Urbanism in Iran  
Tradition, Modernity, and the Production of  
'Space-in-Between'

Shirazi, M.R.

2018, X, 193 p. 76 illus., 53 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-72184-2