

# F. Zahir Mibineh

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## *The Night Watch*

One dusty day as I braced myself for leaving my apartment and entering the sizzling heat, I saw, on my way down the stairwell, a small stack of folded papers lying on the floor, next to the newly scattered electricity bills the postman had generously left behind. I picked one up, unfolded it and saw a copy-and-paste, photocopied map of what appeared to be Tehran. Sections from a map of Greater Tehran had been snipped out and taped alongside one another to form a geographic approximation of the city. The wasteland of highways and housing developments dividing major neighborhoods were excised from the map: its author had left spaces between each taped section and drawn arrows in-between, suggesting a flow of movement and a rough sense of orientation.

Below this there was a key of hieroglyphic symbols that corresponded to designated locations on the map, totaling eleven: for example, the first symbol looked like an owl, next to it was written an exact address—“Valiasr Street, Jam-e-Jam Street, IRIB Headquarters, No. 127-131, Tehran.” My eyes darted to the map and in one of the sections, appearing to be a slice of Northern Tehran between Park-e-Mellat and Tajrish Square, the owl symbol had been hand-drawn to mark the approximate location of the given address. The next symbol I was less sure about—perhaps it was a basket or maybe the tower of a fort next to flowing water. This symbol referred to another address, a park near Enghelab Square. I oriented myself to the map's repositioning of

Tehran's neighborhoods and quickly found the symbol etched onto a small green space between Enghelab and Azadi Squares. Not all the addresses seemed coherent, however; some specifically referred to a residential, commercial or administrative location, some invoked general areas, while others went into excruciating mundane detail—one symbol, a crane-like bird, was followed by the description of a blue trash bin, located on the right side of a small street, next to a fruit and vegetable stall, underneath a maple tree.

The map offered no more in terms of clarification than the quote, the strange key and a few paranthetical bibliographic entries (these were quite academic to my eyes, lending the impression that

the various textual references acted as study material). There was no indication of why, what for or for whom. Furthermore, at the bottom of the page, there was a geometric logo of sorts, next to which was written in English (the quote and addresses were, as expected, in Farsi) “*THE INSTITUTE FOR AGENCY AND SEEPAGE.*” I took the map, folded it and put it in my bag. I was already running late to meet A. Since A. lived close to the first address listed on the map, I decided I would, out of curiosity, take a look on my way and see whether there was anything more to be found. A part of me was duly skeptical. Yet another part was almost giddy with the anticipation of a treasure hunt-to-be. In order to mediate the two extremes, I told

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Guy Debord and Asger Jorn's Situationist maps, notably their 1957 *Guide psychogéographique de Paris*, came to my mind as I examined the metropolitan vastness of Tehran reduced to an atmospheric archipelago of distinct unities. Above the map there was a piece of quoted text (its source unspecified), written boldly:

*In today's world, in regard to the art of drawing and its instruction, it is necessary to learn the alphabet of a new language. Ancient man, before he learned to read and write, expressed his opinion to others by drawing images. Many years passed before man could create a 'script' from these ancient images. We call this first human script 'visual script.'*

myself that if anything concrete were to come out of the first address, I would attempt to visit the remaining sites, one a day—at the very least it would be something more to look forward to. Incorporating another activity into my everyday didn't trouble me—I felt as if I had been floating ever since I arrived here, not bound to one rhythm or routine, indeed urged by the circumstances to remain subtle-bodied and flexible. The days consistently revealed the unexpected, the city was no longer predictable, nothing was guaranteed and such an exercise could, I thought, offer an important challenge: attuning to one's immediate physical surroundings, however chaotic or jumbled the sensations, is to perceive the urban consciousness

communicating in its own language. My task would be, then, to translate.

The following is the result of my attempt to translate my experience of participating in, what only afterwards became clear to me, a “seminar” organized by the Institute for Agency and Seepage. I emphasize the arbitrary nature of the term “seminar” in order to make clear to the reader that what I encountered during my unconscious participation in the “seminar” was in no way official or the result of institutional engagement. The “seminar” started with the map I have already described. The process of visiting the various locations was the next step in my participation, what may be seen as my “attendance.” Now, after having somehow finished the seminar (its