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## Original Research Article

# An Analysis of Contemporary Iranian Architectural and Urban Planning Trends' Interpretations of Disorders in Tehran's Urban Appearance from an Epistemological Perspective

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## Abstract

**Problem statement:** The disorders of Tehran's urban appearance are a point of consensus among groups concerned with urban facades. However, an examination of urban specialists' opinions on the matter reveals a lack of consensus regarding the ideal urban appearance.

What epistemological foundations underpin the architectural and urbanism trends in Iran concerning the issue of disorder in Tehran's urban appearance, and which of these foundations is more suitable for managing urban appearance?

**Research objective:** This study aims to analyze the philosophical origins of the actions of Iranian architectural and urbanism trends concerning the disorder of Tehran's urban appearance.

**Research method:** To answer the research question, a qualitative method was employed in two stages based on logical reasoning. Initially, historical library studies were conducted to determine the temporal origin of the phenomenon of urban disarray. Subsequently, based on the classification of intellectual trends in Iranian architecture and urban planning a phenomenological description was made of the views of urban specialists on the causes of Tehran's urban appearances' chaos, and these views were compared to their intellectual characteristics, presented as a series of dichotomies. Finally, by examining the philosophical foundations by determining the epistemology of these dichotomies, the research question was addressed.

**Conclusion:** There is no consensus on understanding the word "Disorder" among architecture and urbanism Trends. Tending to either side of the dichotomy of form and its attributes or content is rooted in our epistemology, where the philosophical explanation of the relationship between the objective and the subjective is crucial. The kind of relationship between objectivity and subjectivity leads to two distinct outcomes in urban appearance. In the case of separation, urban appearance is perceived as an external matter, dominated by geometry and inclined towards Deterministic order, hence managed by specialists. The comprehensive plan for Tehran is a product of this approach. Conversely, in the case of the intertwining of the object and the subject urban appearance becomes perceptual, and beautifying it is neither external nor formal, thus cannot be delegated to specialists. This approach appears to be philosophically more defensible than others. The order derived from this perspective corresponds with the agency and dynamic existence of humans, characterized as inferential, minimal, and fluid.

**Keywords:** *Urban Landscape, Urban Appearance, Tehran, Beauty, Disorder.*

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## Introduction & Problem statement

Today, there is considerable discussion about the disorder in Tehran's urban appearance (Golipour et al., 2021). Here, "disorder" refers to a type of inconsistency and disharmony that is perceived as undesirable and in need of intervention (Shahbazi Chegeni et al., 2023). The term "urban appearance" specifically pertains to the physical aspects of the urban landscape, with urban facades as a significant component. To elaborate, "urban landscape" refers to the perception of the city, shaped by the intertwining of objective and subjective aspects of human experience. In this context, the objective aspect—of the city's physical form—constitutes its urban appearance (Kasravi & Hashemizadegan, 2023; Mansouri & Mokhles, 2017). Loliini identifies two primary groups concerned with building facades: the general public and urban management. He defines urban management as a spectrum that includes policymakers, administrators, experts, and practitioners involved in creating and enforcing regulations and guidelines (Lolini, 2018, as cited in Golipour et al., 2021). If, with slight modifications, urban management is distinguished between governing institutions and specialists (i.e., intermediaries for implementing governance policies through the language of architecture and urban planning), the frequency of terms such as 'disorder' and 'chaos' in the opinions of three groups—citizens, governing institutions, and urban specialists—proves the existence of a serious issue referred to as the disorder of Tehran's urban facades (Shahbazi Chegeni et al., 2023; Zarifpour Langroudi et al., 2022; Khatami & Boujari, 2020; Aminzadeh et al., 2023; Sadeghi et al., 2019; Nasr & Majedi, 2014; Behzadfar, 2013)<sup>1</sup>. The presence of heterogeneous facades within a single alley, the lack of cohesion along streets, and the discord among various architectural styles in urban facades suggest an aesthetic issue. This situation has effects beyond merely reducing visual quality; it undermines the sense of place, disrupts functional order in daily life, and adversely affects mental health, ultimately resulting in a lower quality of life (Bahrami Boroumand, 2018, 19; Grahn & Stigsdotter, 2003; Hu et al., 2023; Kweon

et al., 2008). Given Tehran's significant role in Iran, addressing this issue becomes even more urgent.

Since the solutions that have been adopted so far, focusing on the form and shape of architecture to control visual aspects and intervene in improving the chaotic state of the urban landscape, have proven to be ineffective and lacking the necessary acceptance, it seems that a deeper understanding of the issue requires an analysis of theoretical frameworks. This article aims to analyze the issue by examining the intellectual origins of urban specialists, who serve as a key reference group with a direct influence on developing solutions.

## Research Question

What epistemological foundations underpin the architectural and urbanism trends in Iran concerning the issue of disorder in Tehran's urban appearance, and which of these foundations is more suitable for managing urban appearance?

## Literature Review

Given the various aspects of urban appearance, it is possible to categorize the topic into two distinct groups: "theoretical" versus "practical." In this classification, social, economic, psychological, and aesthetic issues fall under the category of theoretical challenges, while design, tools, technical considerations, and the execution of facades are categorized as practical challenges. Generally, there is no shortage of content-focused research on the disorder in Tehran's urban appearance. However, in light of the objective of this article, studies specifically related to the actors in urban appearance and their interpretations of the disorder are relatively scarce. The article titled "Reading the Factors Affecting the Promotion of Residential Facades in Tehran from the perspective of activists," authored by Golipour et al. (2021) elucidates the role of stakeholders in Tehran's residential facades, which is noteworthy in this context. Additionally, Khatami & Boujari (2020)'s article "Analyzing the Challenges of Tehran Urban Facades in the Recent Century," takes a historical perspective on facades during the Pahlavi era and the Islamic Republic, identifying urban rulers, investors, and architects as

influential elements in the issue of urban facades. Aminzadeh et al. (2023) examined the role of law and governance in managing urban appearance in the article titled “Critical Review of Rules and Regulations Affecting the Facades of New Buildings (Case Study: Hakimieh Neighborhood in Tehran),”. The article “Examining the social and cultural factors affecting the quality of urban architecture and the image of the city” (Rezazadeh, 2010) addresses the significance of urban content on architectural quality and urban appearance. The research titled “*Interaction between “Culture” and “Architecture” Recognition of Effective Cultural Factors on Iranian Architecture in the Contemporary Era*” (Moazemi, 2012) explores the issue of disorder within the broader context of architecture in Iran through a cultural lens. This study identifies the roots of the chaotic state of architecture and urbanism in Iran as the disordered thoughts and dreams of the Iranian society, along with cultural disconnections and disorientation in a society characterized by a notable short-term perspective. Critics argue that this theory refers to a short-term government; otherwise, if Iranian society were truly short-term, the country would not have remained stable for several millennia (Tabatabai, 2017). Furthermore, historical evidence of the traditional urban form shows little indication of hostility between the governing authorities and the populace.

The research titled “Explaining the concept of empathetic imagination in Rorty’s pragmatist thoughts as a plan to get out of the disorder in the facade of residential buildings in contemporary cities” approaches the issue through a pragmatist lens, rather than through dichotomous confrontations. Drawing on the ideas of American philosopher Richard Rorty, it identifies individualism as a contributing factor to the disorder of urban appearance and proposes participatory engagement as a solution (Shahbazi Chegeni et al., 2023). The article “Aesthetic experience of Built environment,” (Pakzad & Saki, 2014) authored by Jahan Shah Pakzad and Elaheh Saki, examines the concept of beauty in the history of urban planning and design, specifically discussing the predominance of an

objectivist approach to this concept and the reliance on formalistic criteria for creating beautiful spaces.

“The Street: A Comparative Analysis of the Urban Landscape in Contemporary Tehran” (Atashinbar, 2013) is a study within the specialized field of landscape architecture that examines the impact of modernism on the landscape of streets in Tehran. The author considers order to be the primary element in analyzing the landscape of the streets, juxtaposed against disorder, and explores its various forms. This research is one of the few that has been conducted with a focus on the context of Iran and adopts an existential rather than an objectivist perspective on the issue of the landscape of the streets.

The research titled “*Aesthetic-physical analysis of urban space*” (Moulavi, 2005) aims to develop the capacity to analyze urban space using aesthetic criteria accepted by urban designers, focusing on the concepts of form and content within urban environments. This thesis asserts the objectivity of beauty and the commonality of aesthetic judgment among people. According to the author, urban space can be considered from two perspectives: structural and content-related. The structure and content influence each other; however, since the goal of this research is to conduct an aesthetic analysis of the urban structure (which includes visual elements and the interactions between these elements that create spatial composition), it does not address the issue of content. This paper primarily focuses on architectural and urban planning issues without delving into broader contexts such as culture, although it utilizes philosophical insights to deepen the discussion.

## Research Methodology

This research aims to investigate the perspectives of Iranian contemporary trends of architecture and urbanism concerning the issue of disorder in Tehran’s urban appearance. It employs a phenomenological and philosophical research approach, extracting results through logical reasoning and inference. So, the study is qualitative in nature and is considered applicable due to its potential implementation in urban appearance management. In the first section, the study sought to

identify commonalities in the views of urban knowledge holders regarding the reasons for disorder in Tehran's urban appearance. Using a phenomenological approach, it attempted to "describe" the insights of urban experts gathered from written sources and interviews. In the next step, the classification presented in the book "An Overview of Architectural and Urban Planning Trends in Contemporary Iran" was used to categorize architectural and urban planning trends that historically contributed to the phenomenon of disorder. Given that the majority of the activities of architectural and urban planning figures and trends are concentrated in Tehran; this categorization is relevant to the city as well. During this stage, the descriptions collected from architectural and urban planning specialists in the first step are positioned within the identified trends and analyzed based on the intellectual origins of each particular movement, emphasizing its theoretical framework. The dual definition of form and content emerges as the outcome of this section. In the third section, the article employs philosophical research methods to demonstrate the differences between underlying thought frameworks. It delves into epistemology, examining the relationship between the objective and subjective realms through three approaches: objectivism, subjectivism, and object-subject synthesis. Ultimately, the study concludes by summarizing the findings and analyzing the outputs derived from reliance on each architectural and urban planning movement to address the issue of disorder in Tehran's urban appearance, thereby introducing an acceptable form of order.

## Discussion

In his later philosophy, Wittgenstein illustrated how philosophers' misuse of everyday language can lead to confusion. He argued that the meaning of a word becomes clearer through careful attention to its usage, a concept derived from his philosophy of language that serves as a valuable theoretical tool for enhancing our understanding of vocabulary. When a word raises questions for us, the best way to comprehend it is to explore the diverse contexts in which it is applied (Thompson, 2016). The disorder in Tehran's urban

appearance and the ugliness stemming from it is a topic that has prompted commentary from a variety of political and cultural elites, as well as architectural and urban planning specialists. It appears that there is a "conceptual consensus" regarding the existence of "disorder" and its definition. However, whether this consensus genuinely holds requires further verification. This article is structured into two sections: the first examines disorder as a phenomenon through the lens of various architectural and urban planning trends in the country from a specific historical point onward, while the second compares the overarching epistemologies of these trends.

### • The historical context of architectural and urbanism trends in Iran since the 1960s

The concept of rapid urbanization refers to the significant increase in Tehran's urban population compared to earlier periods, which is largely attributed to a shift from reliance on agricultural surplus to dependence on oil revenue. This change, coupled with uneven social development planning and an excessive focus on expanding the urban fabric, led to the disintegration of the previously established urban network and the emergence of macrocephaly in the capital's growth (Abadian, 2019). Historically, chaos in Tehran's urban structure arose alongside the land reforms associated with the top-down modernization policies of the White Revolution in January 1962. The transformation of livelihoods and settlement systems in rural areas, combined with the government's push for rapid development in line with global trends, turned the city into a physical manifestation of this development. The inability of urban development plans to effectively manage this sudden growth resulted in a chaotic urban environment (Habibi et al., 2010). According to the categorization presented in the book «). Intellectual trends in the Contemporary Iranian Architectural and urbanism (1978-2004) " (ibid.), various architectural and urban planning trends are explored alongside the physical transformations of Tehran. Table 2 provides insights from individuals within these trends regarding the disorder in Tehran's urban appearance, along with a classification of their proposed solutions.

### • **Top-Down modernization: 1960-1978**

Architects during this period primarily embraced the ideas of the Bauhaus school and modernism, which can be broadly categorized as supporters of the International Style. Early indications of a growing awareness of tradition and context can be seen in the works of some architects from this era, influenced by the rise of postmodernism.

Urbanism during this time was characterized by developments that adhered to the International Style. The foundation of urbanism in this period was grounded in the Athens Charter. However, the disarray and mismatches resulting from such development became spatially and architecturally evident within the city. Attractive urban plans were consistently approved by the “Supreme Urban Planning Council,” yet, in practice, they contributed to the chaos and disorder of the spatial-organizational structure of the 1970s. These comprehensive urban plans not only failed to control the city’s chaotic conditions but also laid the groundwork for new problems (*ibid.*).

### • **Bidirectional modernization: 1981-2001<sup>2</sup>**

#### - **Culturalism: originalism, traditionalism, historicism**

In 1979, the Islamic Revolution ushered in new perspectives on architecture and urbanism. The rebellion against the modernism and top-down development of the previous era reinforced a return to roots. This new trend is marked by a nostalgic yearning for the lost beauty of the past and a significant rejection of recent history. Prominent figures in this movement include Hadi Nadimi, Mehdi Hojjat, Baqher Ayatollahzadeh Shirazi, Mohammad Reza Haeri, Hossein Soltanzadeh, and Abbas Farokh Zanouzi.

#### - **Modernism: ecologism, structuralism, modernism, expressionism**

This approach views scientific processes and the use of urban planning tools as a means to organize spatial and architectural forms on a global scale. Another defining characteristic of this trend is its emphasis on development. Prominent individuals associated with this movement include Iraj Etesam, Mansour Flamaki, Cyrus Bavar, Behrouz Pakdaman, Sohrab

Mashhoodi, Manouchehr Mazini, Majid Ghamami, and Darab Diba.

#### - **Postmodernism: realistic postmodernism, neo-traditionalism**

This orientation promotes the revival and renewal of indigenous architectural and urbanism values, emphasizing the rule of law, pluralism, participation, discourse, and rationality to seek unity with their surroundings. The return to tradition and its reinterpretation within these frameworks fosters new order and values. Notable figures in this category include Ali Akbar Sarami, Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti, and Kamran Safamanesh (*ibid.*).

### **Urban Appearance Disorder: A Shared Verbal Term rather Than a Conceptual One**

Table 1 illustrates that, while the concept of urban appearance disorder in Tehran may seem straightforward, its interpretation varies among different schools of thought due to their diverse origins. For example, two specialists—one modernist and the other postmodernist—might both recognize the inadequacy of principles and criteria as a cause of this disorder. However, their differing intellectual traditions lead to distinct principles and criteria. In other words, urban appearance disorder is more of a shared verbal term among specialists than a conceptual one. This lack of agreement on what constitutes disorder suggests a corresponding lack of consensus on potential solutions; therefore, there is no unified vision of an ideal and harmonious urban appearance. The implementation of policies stemming from either perspective significantly impacts the city’s visual character. As highlighted in the literature review, urban space can be analyzed from two dimensions: physical and content-related. Emphasizing the objectivity of the city and aiming to beautify it based on formal considerations is rooted in aesthetics that seem to require philosophical inquiry. Likewise, integrating content into the understanding of beauty adds complexities beyond mere formal attributes to the urban appearance. A summary of these approaches is presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Classification of Urban Specialists Who Have Commented on the Disorder of Tehran’s Urban Appearance Based on the Classification of Contemporary Architectural and Urbanism Trends in Iran. Source: Author.

Field	Specialists	Reasons for Disorder	Intellectual Trend	Urban Appearance
Architecture	Iraj Etesam	Urbanism Gone Rong (Etesam, as cited in Tagheer chehre-ye ..., 2016)	modernism	Scientific Constructivism Purity in Form Architecture and Urbanism Based on the Concept of Development Formalism Rationalism Absolutism
	Iraj Kalantari (2005)	The Limited Role of Architects in Construction		
	Cyrus Bavar (2007)	Duality of Tradition and Modernity in Urban Society		
	Farhad Ahmadi	The Effect of Postmodernism (Ahmadi, as cited in, Simaye shahri ..., 2016)		
	Darab Diba	Uneven Development (Diba, as cited in Az amozesh-e ..., 2014)		
	Abdorreza Zokaee	Imitation of Modern Form (Zokayi, as cited in Shafiee, 2015)		
	Akbar Zargar	Iranian Culture and Lifestyle (Zargar, as cited in Mirqaracholu, 2013)		
	Hosein Sheikh Zein-al-Din (1996)	Contradictory Practices of the Administrative System	Historicism	Formalist
	Kamran Safamanesh (2020)	Imitation of the Modern World	Postmodernism	
	Ali Akbar Sarami	Transfer of Development Rights (Saremi, as cited in Az amozesh-e ..., 2014)		
	Seyyed Mohammad Beheshti	Disordered Cultural and Social Conditions (Beheshti, as cited in Me’ mari-ye Modern-e..., 2014)		
	Mahdi Mahmoudi	Inappropriate Education (Mahmoudi, as cited in Shahr dar ..., 2022)		
	Hadi Nadimi	Disordered Architecture as a Result of Disordered Culture (Nadimi, as cited in Ashoftetgi-ye me’ mari ..., 2017)		
	Mahdi Hojjat	Construction Rather than Architecture (Hojjat, as cited in Goft o gooye ..., 2016)		
Mohammad Reza Haeri (1996)	Construction Rather than Architecture	Culturalism& traditionalism		Return to the Unchangeable Divine Tradition Understanding the Essence of Islamic Art Symbolism Nostalgic Perspective of the Lost Beauty Rejecting Modernism History-Based Architecture and Urbanism
Atefeh Karbasi (2012)	The Dominance of Change, Distinction; Plurality			
Seyyed Amir Mansouri (2007)	Oblivion of the Moral and Logical Social System	Landscape	Perception of the Environment Holistic Approach Contextualism	Symbolist
Simon Bell	In Tehran, every builder constructs according to their preferences (Bell, as cited in schat, 2010)			

Rest of Table 1.

Field	Specialists	Reasons for Disorder	Intellectual Trend	Urban Appearance	
Urbanism	Jahanshah Pakzad (2020)	Inappropriate Approach	Modernism	Formalist	
	Kamran Zekavat (2010)	Lack of Regulations for Controlling Urban Appearance			Focus on International Accomplishments Scientific Process Non-Holistic Approach Segmentation into Subsidiary and Transformative Components of the City
	Manouchehr Mozayeni (2008)	Desire to show off			Objective Approach
	Bengt Larsson	Inharmonious of Different Styles (Larson, as cited in Me'mari-ye Tehran ..., 2011)	Postmodernism	Contextualist	
	Seyyed Hosein Bahreini (1995)	The Erasure of Past Symbols as a Result of the Dominance of Modernism			Regenerating the Principles of the Past Urbanism Public Participation Sustainability Contextualism
Mahmoud Tavassoli (1992)	Lack of Clear Principles				
Razieh Rezazadeh (2010)	Weakness in the Formulation of Principles and Standards				

Table 2. Classification of Architectural and Urbanism Trends Based on the Duality of Form or Content in Urban Appearance. Source: Author.

Content			Form		
Contextualist	Contextualist	Contextualist	Symbolist	Pluralist	Formalist
Postmodernism (Urbanism)	Landscape (Architecture)	Modernism (Urbanism)	Traditionalism (Architecture)	Postmodernism (Urbanism)	Modernism (Architecture)

• **Epistemological foundations of urban appearance**

The ideal urban appearance derived from each architectural and urbanism trend is rooted in their epistemologies. In other words, the perception of beauty according to each trend is contingent upon its foundational knowledge and the relationship it posits with reality. Therefore, to analyze the content of the classifications presented in Table 2, one must delve into the philosophical domain, specifically their epistemology. Epistemology, or the theory of knowledge, is a branch of philosophy that addresses

questions regarding the possibility and nature of knowledge, including inquiries such as how we come to know things (Couper, 2020, 275). Epistemology focuses on the relationship between the object and the subject, and today, there is an intellectual battle between two camps; a battle that Simon Blackburn characterizes as the confrontation between “objectivists” and “subjectivists.” Traditionalists, modernists, rationalists, cosmopolitans, and natural scientists are categorized as “objectivists,” while relativists, postmodernists, social constructivists, and contextualists—including many fields within the social



internal (Abdolkarimi, 2008). The epistemology of subjectivism posits that it is the subject that creates meaning and imposes it upon the object. The foundation of this philosophy is that our understanding and perception of reality are determinative in the construction of knowledge. Unlike objectivist researchers, whose mantra is “to see is to believe,” subjectivist says that our beliefs shape reality (Reese, 1980, 554-555).

In this view, the external world is an expression of human mental constructs, and subjective experience is the foundation of all criteria and laws. The premise of subjectivism is based on the belief that reality is not accessible, and each individual provides a different account of reality. From this perspective, authenticity lies in interpretation rather than reality, and interpretation is a product of the mind. In fact, reality does not change; rather, perceptions do (Palmer, 2008). In the subjectivist outlook, it is the mind that projects meaning onto the object. Since, in subjectivism, beauty is a function of the perceptual qualities of the perceiver, any attempt to “identify criteria for beauty” is futile. In this framework, one cannot speak of beautiful objects or urban landscapes. In other words, beauty cannot be regarded as an objective quality of certain objects or works. While encountering a natural or artistic piece may evoke a pleasurable feeling, this sensation has no referential significance and does not represent anything intrinsic to the natural or artistic objects themselves. Certainly, the cause of this feeling lies in a quality within the objects that is conceptually present to us; however, the feeling itself cannot reveal the cause of it (Salmani, 2010). In this perspective, by eliminating the referential nature of the external reality, including urban landscapes, evaluation and judgment of them become impossible.

#### • The reciprocal relationship between subject and object

Aesthetics, after traversing the previous two stages, reached the threshold of phenomenology. By breaking the duality of object and subject, newer philosophical interpretations adopted an interactive perspective, showing that the sense of beauty arises

from patterns that “connect” humans and objects. In these interpretations, the concept of beauty is linked to notions such as pleasure and perception, placing beauty within the processing experiences of the perceiver. Thus, beauty emerges from the interaction between the features of stimuli and the cognitive and emotional processes of the perceiver (Pakzad & Saki, 2014). In Blackburn’s debate on truth, phenomenologists align with the subjectivist camp. The phenomenological attribute is sometimes loosely equated with subjectivity (Thompson, 2016). Phenomenology emphasizes subjective knowledge and the knowing subject, thereby diverging significantly from objectivism. In the third type of epistemology described by Swaffield, Deming & Swaffield, 2011 neither experience nor interpretation can be disregarded; rather, interpretation should be grounded in reality. Here, the emphasis is on the human understanding of an accessible reality; the subject and object interact. This approach, which might essentially be a synthesis of the two approaches, posits that theory and practice (object and subject) do not have precedence over one another (Moieni Alamdar, 2006). A critical presumption challenged by phenomenologists is the “natural attitude,” which they argue must be set aside—this is the positivist approach that assumes the existence of an external world independent of human awareness, regardless of whether humans perceive it or not.

In phenomenology, the human being is present in the world and inseparable from it. This notion is beyond both objectivism and subjectivism, which respectively prioritize external objectivity or the perceiving mind. The phenomenological approach to existence sees things as appearing to us, and through this, we reveal the way things are and discover both objects and even ourselves. In phenomenology, the subject and object are seen as being in complete unity (Nesbitt, 2014) (Table 3).

#### - Discussion on the epistemology of Tehran’s urban appearance

Since the late 1960s, Tehran has experienced three comprehensive urban plans, and despite a regime change from monarchy to the Islamic Republic, the city’s roadmap for guidance and development has

Table 3. Aesthetic in Objective and Subjective Paradigms. Source: Author.

Paradigm	Aesthetic	Principality	Primacy in perception
Objectivism	In Object	Object	Object
Subjectivism	is in the eye of the beholder	Subject	Subject
Objectivism/ Subjectivism	In the interaction subject and object	Object/ Subject	perceived simultaneously

remained consistent. The 1969 comprehensive plan by Farmanfarmaian, which was prepared under an authoritarian government with a modernist approach (Kalantari & Mansouri, 2021), is rooted in the first type of epistemology. Characteristics identified by the Atelier Parisien d’Urbanisme (APUR) in their critique of Tehran’s most recent comprehensive plan, approved in 2007 (known as the Strategic-Structural Master Plan, currently the guiding document for Tehran’s development), also reflect this first type of epistemology. These characteristics include the dominance of a strong central government, the absence of local government, the prevalence of a sensory-based approach in drafting the comprehensive plan, and the disregard for the citizens’ goals and desires as a prerequisite for diagnosing urban issues (Mansouri, 2009). Additionally, the mechanistic approach of the 2007 comprehensive plan and its neglect of cultural, national, and local conditions, its physical nature, and the lack of comprehensive considerations necessary for urban development are notable criticisms (Mansouri, 2016). Overall, among the three types of epistemologies discussed, the first type, which emphasizes the separation of subject and object, has had the most influence on shaping the management of Tehran’s urban form. The emphasis of this epistemology in urban planning is on quantitative planning and geometric forms. The city shaped by this paradigm is not one formed by the collective will of its citizens but rather one designed by a singular will, serving as a product of superior rationality (Toulmin, 1990). Essentially, comprehensive and detailed plans are rooted in the modernist thinking of the late 20th century, and their epistemology should be analyzed based on the disconnection between the physical city and its citizens. From the perspective of the third epistemology,

the unilateral nature of design in the modern city is criticized (Heynen, 1999). The involvement of citizens’ subjectivity raises three objections to the modern urban appearance: The city is designed and constructed precisely as it was conceptualized. Its form is entirely geometric, seeking to impose definitive order on the urban appearance. Ideally, it is situated on a blank, placeless, and timeless canvas, meaning it lacks specific spatial and temporal characteristics (Fortier, 1995). In other words, the separation of the city’s form from its content creates a new dichotomy between the variability inherent in human existence and perception, and the uniformity imposed by a singular will or taste. A city shaped by superior rationality seeks maximum order and uniformity, which results in quantitative management and decision-making by specialists. In recent decades, postmodernists, as critics of the reductionist perspective of modernism, introduced the third type of epistemology, incorporating discussions of history, context, and meaning into the city’s physical form. They moved beyond logical, top-down approaches in planning and positivist epistemologies in urban theory (Warren, 2009). The theory of place, emerging from a philosophical synthesis of objectivity and subjectivity, has appeared in architectural and urban thought in recent decades. Phenomenologists demonstrate that understanding the world cannot be separated from the individual’s subjectivity and their cultural and historical contexts, establishing a different relationship between object and subject. Landscape theory posits a dynamic relationship between object and subject, proposing that the solution lies in the boundaries of the three domains of natural sciences, social sciences, and the arts (Hashemizadegan, 2019). This stands in contrast to the reductionist scientific approach. At its core, the theory asserts that human

perception of place is dependent both on the physical attributes of space and on their experience of it, making it impossible to separate the two. The order derived from this epistemology is interpretive, emerging from the plurality of understandings and wills of those shaping the urban appearance.

### Conclusion

Since the emergence of the problem of disorder in the urban appearance of Tehran during the 1960s, different schools of architecture and urbanism have agreed on the term “disorder,” but not on its conception. Analyzing specialists’ opinions and examining the intellectual and philosophical foundations of each school reveals a duality between form and content. Prioritizing either form and its attributes or content (citizens, history, and geography) presents two distinct worlds for those responsible for managing the urban appearance.

From a philosophical perspective, the dominance of an epistemology emphasizing the separation of objectivity and subjectivity frames the organization of Tehran’s urban facades in terms of formal attributes and delegates the task of regulation to specialists, implying a tendency towards standardization. In this approach, geometry becomes a tool for governance, producing a pre-determined, measurable urban appearance that specialists can manage. However, recognizing the role of the mind in perceiving beauty also implies accepting diversity in public interpretation. This approach shifts the focus towards acknowledging multiple truths and understandings, recognizing that no individual or

group holds a monopoly over the truth, and embracing the diverse perspectives among people.

By introducing subjectivity into the discussion, this approach contrasts with the rigidity of a form-centered perspective and infuses fluidity and dynamism into the issue of urban appearance. The intertwining of subject and object locates beauty in the relationship between them. Thus, from a phenomenological standpoint, enhancing the urban façade cannot be delegated to a specific group, even if they possess urban knowledge. Since beauty is a product of the interaction between subject and object, artificial phenomena, including cities, should be seen as the result of this interaction. This approach, in contrast to the previous tendency, leans towards accepting plurality.

The outcome of this theory, which seems philosophically more defensible than other approaches, is that instead of a specialist-centered approach, urban appearance management should seek citizens’ perceptions. One approach that emphasizes content in the context of urban appearance is the landscape perspective, which, based on the theory of place, acknowledges a third type of relationship between object and subject. The accepted order in this approach embraces the inherent diversity of urban content—citizens, history, and geography—and therefore cannot be subject to the views of a specific group. This order is minimal and fluid, standing in direct opposition to the deterministic order followed in Tehran’s urban development guidelines for the past six decades (Table 4).

Table 4. Order in Urban Appearance Relative to Epistemology. Source: Author.

Urban Appearance Management	Logic	Limit of Order	Style	Epistemology	Order in Urban Appearance
Specialist-Oriented	Fixed	Maximal	Modern	Separation of Object and Subject	Deterministic
Perception-Oriented	fluid	Minimal	Postmodern	intertwining of subject and object	Perceptive
unmanageable	fluid	Chaotic	Eclectic	Eclectic	Without Order

### Endnotes

1. The opinions of people regarding Tehran should be seen through the works of intellectuals, writers, poets, and artists. Due to the significant impact of visual arts, we can refer to filmmakers who observe the people, draw

inspiration from them, and represent both the people and their city. Notable examples include Tehran: Tehran by Dariush Mehrjui and Mehdi Karampour (2009), The Tenants by Dariush Mehrjui (1986), and Under the Skin of the City by Rakhshan Bani-Etemad (2000).

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