

# **WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE**

**by**

**Somayeh Khakshoor**

M.Sc., Tarbiat Modares University, 2012

B.A, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, 2007

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

in the

School for the Contemporary Arts

Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

© Somayeh Khakshoor 2021

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Fall 2021

Copyright in this work is held by the author. Please ensure that any reproduction or re-use is done in accordance with the relevant national copyright legislation.

## Declaration of Committee

**Name:** **Somayeh Khakshoor**

**Degree:** **Master of Fine Arts**

**Title:** **WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE**

**Committee:** **Chair: Peter Dickinson**  
Professor, Contemporary Arts

**Laura U. Marks**  
Supervisor  
Professor, Contemporary Arts

**Allyson Clay**  
Committee Member  
Professor Emerita, Contemporary Arts

**Jay White**  
Committee Member  
Assistant Professor, Emily Carr University of Art +  
Design

**Sandra Semchuk**  
Examiner  
Associate Professor, Emily Carr University of Art +  
Design

## Abstract

*WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE* is an experiment in recasting time as space. The photos of this back-projected photo-collage have been juxtaposed by means of a moving-image approach so that time can be perceived not in a linear manner, but through an infinite number of coexisting, multidirectional paths of undetermined lengths. This medium allows for the creation of “smooth/nomadic” spaces—as described in Deleuze and Guattari’s elaborations on nomadology—for the wandering eye of the viewer.

*WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE* is the result of a collaboration/dialogue with a ravine and its myriad inhabitants, including non-human and human traces. The photos have been taken during countless walks in a ravine currently known as Renfrew Ravine. The ravine is located in the traditional territories of the *xʷməθkʷəyəm* (Musqueam), *Sḵw̓xwú7mesh* (Squamish) and *səlílwətaʔt* (Tseil-Waututh) Nations and it is part of the Still Creek Watershed which enters the *qíqéyt* (Qayqayt) Nation territories and is traditionally a shared harvesting and gathering place for all four of these Nations.

**Keywords:** photo-collage; montage; back-projection; nomadology; nomadic art; colonialism; indigenous land claims; unceded territories; immigration

*To the first sound that I could hear.*

## **Acknowledgements**

My most heartfelt gratitude goes to Laura U. Marks, Allyson Clay, Jay White, and the ravine for their wisdom and generosity.

# Table of Contents

Declaration of Committee .....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Dedication .....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	v
Table of Contents .....	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
<b>Defence Statement.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Context I: <i>background of the work, in relation to previous practice</i> .....	1
Context II: <i>spatial movies: a reflection on spatial (a)temporality</i> .....	1
Context III: <i>“Smooth” Time/Spaces</i> .....	4
Project Description .....	6
The Yellow: <i>Or How I Heard Your Voice</i> .....	9
Process: <i>Nomadic Versus Migrant Methodology</i> .....	13
The Black: <i>Or How I Kept Your Secret</i> .....	15
<b>Works Cited .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Appendix A. Reflections on the Slippery vs. the Floating State of In-Betweenness</b> .....	<b>23</b>
Prelude.....	23
Intellectual Uncertainty vs. the Schizophrenic Wisdom of the State of I-do-not-Know....	25
The Path—from the immigrant to the nomadic state.....	27
Smooth pilgrimage .....	30
Afterword.....	34
<b>Works Cited .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Appendix B. Video Documentation.....</b>	<b>38</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1.	two narratives made by hypothetical audience’s eye paths on the shoe travelogue .....	2
Figure 2.	from <i>WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE</i> , 2020. ....	8
Figure 3.	Lucio Fontana, <i>Concetto spaziale. Attese</i> , 1963-1964. Water-based paint on canvas, 47 x 38.5 cm. Private collection—left. <a href="https://www.artesvelata.it/lucio-fontana/">https://www.artesvelata.it/lucio-fontana/</a> , and satellite view of the ravine on Google Maps—right <a href="https://www.google.com/maps/@49.2476242,-123.0446854,1202m/data=!3m1!1e3">https://www.google.com/maps/@49.2476242,-123.0446854,1202m/data=!3m1!1e3</a> .....	12
Figure 4.	a digital process work of <i>WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE</i> before the integration of black tiles .....	15
Figure 5.	a tile from <i>WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE</i> , 2021, shot in 2020.....	18
Figure 6.	assemblage process of <i>WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE</i> , 2021, dimensions variable. Visual Art Studio, SFU Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, Vancouver, Canada. ....	18
Figure 7.	<i>WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE</i> , 2021, dimensions variable. Audain Gallery, SFU Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, Vancouver, Canada. ....	19
Figure 8.	<i>WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE</i> , 2021, dimensions variable. Audain Gallery, SFU Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, Vancouver, Canada. ....	20
Figure 9.	<i>WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE</i> , 2021, dimensions variable. Audain Gallery, SFU Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, Vancouver, Canada. ....	20
Figure 10.	<i>WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE</i> , 2021, dimensions variable. Audain Gallery, SFU Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, Vancouver, Canada. ....	21
Figure 11.	<i>WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE</i> , 2021, dimensions variable. Audain Gallery, SFU Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, Vancouver, Canada. ....	21

# Defence Statement

## Context I:

### *background of the work, in relation to previous practice*

Among all the experiments that I did during the past two years, there were some with a more direct and immediate influence in the development of my graduating project. For one of my main projects, I proposed working on a set of three travelogues, which started with a “travelogue” into an object (one of my shoes) and wished to end with an abstract video travelogue of the Northern lights. Due to the restrictions of the pandemic, only the first one of the planned triad of travelogues was created and presented in the form of a digital maquette with 393 pieces of macro photographs installed on a virtual wall, in a quasi-organic order.<sup>1</sup> For the other two works in the triad, I had intended to use mediums such as video, painting, and text, but in fact, during the process of sequencing the photos/frames which were taken through the eyes of an animator rather than a photographer, I became so very fascinated with the idea of piece(s) of a moving image scattered on the wall, not following a linear temporal path, and transforming time into space, that I decided to develop and materialize this medium in my graduating project. With this approach, the “movie” was not a time-based entity anymore in the sense that we commonly perceive it, but instead, time as its elemental feature was transformed into space, and the audience could make concurrent movies in their own mind by looking at the “frames”, i.e., photographic stills, in any order and reproduce an experience of spatial (a)temporality.

## Context II:

### *spatial movies: a reflection on spatial (a)temporality*

My understanding of time as space is not necessarily associated with the scientific notion of spacetime—which I cannot claim to know anything grounded about—but it is rather based on the most personal lived experiences which convinced me, like

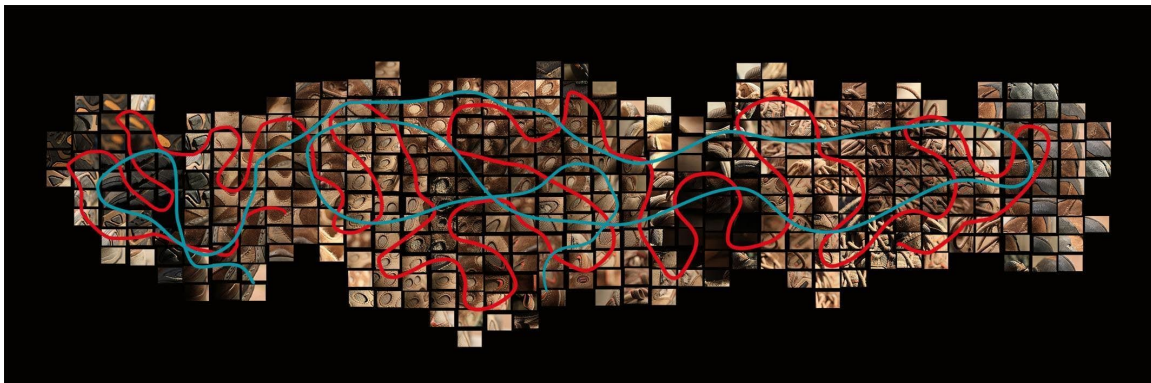
---

<sup>1</sup> This piece also reflected my obsession with objects that might be traced back in my old practice of stop-motion animation, which often requires a patient and deep relationship with objects. I did my previous MA thesis on the integral uncanny qualities of stop-motion animation; for that I used mostly a Freudian approach to study the objects and how we perceive life in them in an uncanny manner. But my later focus on Persian classical literature and Sufism transformed this relationship into a more intimate and promising one.



many others, that time is a quality and not a quantity, and while we might keep our gaze at some moments, most others slip through our life. It is a concept grasped by memory, and memory flies in all directions. Moreover, I can never be sure whether the dancer is dancing to the music, or the music is actually following the dancer. How can one be sure that something in the future cannot be the cause of an event in the past?

During the making of my shoe travelogue, I found the medium resonating with the same ideas. What I mean by the medium is a population of still images that reference the frames of a film, which are juxtaposed on the wall where the maker does not sequence them in a linear order, but considers them as a whole, that is taking into account the relationship of the frames in all directions—up, down, left, right, etc. It means that, if the frames get together in an editing software, or by using an algorithm, with whatever successive order, we should have a proper moving-image piece. In the shoe travelogue, as my first experiment in this medium, most of the “narratives” had a morphing quality—i.e., slow transitional changes as a result of sequencing similar images in a way to produce fluid connections between them. Still, I think it is not a necessity for this medium, and putting apparently unrelated pictures next to each other or having what Robert Breer calls “collisions of totally disparate images”<sup>2</sup> would not remove the moving-image quality of the piece made in the mind of the viewer.



**Figure 1. two narratives made by hypothetical audience’s eye paths on the shoe travelogue**

In a fractal way, the work as a whole has a mosaic quality, reminding of the densely tiled walls of Persian Islamic architecture, or pixels of a scrambled digital image, while each succession of frames/still images would make a unique narration as

---

<sup>2</sup> Robert Breer’s description of his movie *Recreation* (1957)

important as the whole picture—stories within stories, as in *The Thousand and One Nights*. This can provide not only a unique narrative for each audience member but also an unrepeatable one each time (see figure 1). On a more macro scale, each frame/still image would also have its own story and value to be considered separately and gazed upon for as long as the viewer wishes. In this medium, though every frame would have an equal spatial value, based on the audience's choice, some frames would be lingered upon, and some just skipped through. To make referring to this medium that was just described easier, I would call it *spatial movie*. The main quality of a spatial movie would be deviation from its time-based qualities, which in turn facilitates another deviation that is peeling and unfolding<sup>3</sup> different layers of the space. In other words, clearly, it is breaking from the time limits which makes it possible to break from a singular viewpoint and to experience different directions and spots within a space simultaneously.

This type of playfulness in breaking the conventional rules of time and specially space can be traced back in a radical way to Persian miniatures. In these works sometimes time is broken by having multiple stories happening at the same time—thus covering an extended timespan in a single image, and the space is broken in many ways such as presenting both close and long distances equally, or intrusion of the external into the internal spaces. As an example, one can see how Kamāl ud-Dīn Behzād, 15th century Persian painter from Herat (now Afghanistan), in his painting *Yusuf and Zulaikha* (*Joseph chased by Potiphar's wife*) turns the spaces inside out by mingling the most interior/hidden spaces of Zulaikha's room with the space outside the palace.

This type of approach towards the space, that is using concurrent viewpoints instead of a central one, is also of interest to David Hockney, who has done a research project on the “lost techniques of the old masters”, describing how painters such as Van Eyck, and he himself, create “the sense of closeness to everything yet at the same time depth” by using multiple viewpoints (Hockney, 2001, 94). This is seen in Hockney's “photographic collages” and “composite polaroids”<sup>4</sup> and also in what I am referring to as a spatial movie here.

---

<sup>3</sup> Wherever I use the term “unfoldment” or “enfoldment” I am implicitly referring to Laura U. Marks' brilliant work, *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art* (2010)

<sup>4</sup> This is how these works are currently referred to on David Hockney's official website (<https://www.hockney.com/>). These photo collages with cubist features are also famously known

To mention more of such affinities in the realm of photography, using the practice of photo collage, assemblage, and installation—sometimes done in the physical installation of a series and sometimes within the single work itself—one can point out works of artists such as Nan Goldin, A.L. Steiner, Carmen Winant, and Wolfgang Tillmans. On the other hand, in the world of moving image, similar works to spatial movies could be Peter Kubelka's *Monument Film* sculptures, Stan Brakhage's filmstrips, and Paul Sharits' *Frozen Films*, though I think all these examples still follow more or less linear paths echoing cinematic temporality.

Finally, it might also be of interest to mention that Persian miniatures or, in Marks' words, this "immersive illusion that satisfies the senses and yet draws the beholder, by degree and degree, into an awareness of the metadata that created the illusion" (Marks, 2010, 279), had yet another impact on my work when it came to materializing a spatial movie for my MFA graduating project. That was the technique of using minute size as a way of breaking the private space between the viewer and the image, by pulling the viewer in close to look, which I believe creates a gateway to the world of fantasy. By choosing a small size for the pictures I was hoping to break the physical distance between the audience and the work. I believe this physical closeness to a work, in order to discover new details, helps the audience enter the realm of sensorial fantasy and it might be considered as the key to what Stewart describes as "attending the miniature world", experiencing an "interior temporality of the subject" and "losing" the connection with the outside world (Stewart, 1993, 66-67).

### **Context III: "Smooth" Time/Spaces**

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari suggest a triad set of features for nomad art (vs sedentary art)<sup>5</sup> which seem to be closely interconnected with each other: close-range vision vs, long-distance vision, haptic space vs. optical space (1987, 492), and abstract line vs. concrete line (496). I believe that what I call the "spatial movie", as a medium, is subject to having these three characteristics of nomadic art, and therefore

---

as "joiners" which is what Hockney first called them in the 80s. (see *Hockney on Photography: Conversations with Paul Joyce* (1988))

<sup>5</sup> Here, it might be necessary to mention that Deleuze and Guattari use terms such as "nomad" and "nomadology" or "sedentary" not in the literal sense, but to describe an outlook which can be applicable in many different realms.

maybe a spatial movie could be considered as a re-creation of the “smooth space” as much as the material of felt is.<sup>6</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari use the word *haptic* rather than *tactile* to avoid opposition between the two senses of touch and vision and invite “the assumption that the eye itself may fulfill this non-optical function” (492). A spatial movie seems to be apt for creating a multisensory experience, and this quality seems to be due not only to the multiple iterations of textures with strong sensory associations—such as wet, rough, cold, etc.—but also to the “close” distance of the photographs, which is the second characteristic of nomadic works of art, as defined by Deleuze and Guattari. Their concept of close vision also seems to resonate with Hockney’s idea of multiple viewpoints and creating a sense of closeness even from afar (Hockney, 2001, 94). Further, Deleuze and Guattari write: “The first aspect of the haptic, smooth space of close vision is that its orientations, landmarks, and linkages are in continuous variation; it operates step by step” (1987, 493). This continuous step-by-step composite structuring, which resembles an eye crawling on the surface of the subject, is what in fact I was seeking in creating a spatial movie.

Finally, Deleuze and Guattari’s elaboration on the abstract line can be applicable to the potential narrative lines represented in my work—with no beginning and no end—as one of the essential features of a spatial movie.

A line that delimits nothing, that describes no contour, that no longer goes from one point to another but instead passes between points, that is always declining from the horizontal and the vertical and deviating from the diagonal, that is constantly changing direction, a mutant line of this kind that is without outside or inside, form or background, beginning or end and that is as alive as a continuous variation— such a line is truly an abstract line, and describes a smooth space. (497-498)

Though the medium of the spatial movie seems to be connected with smooth space, it is clear that this connection can be close or distant based on the artist’s choices about what to narrate and how, and the viewers’ decisions as to where to look, and how.

---

<sup>6</sup> Deleuze and Guattari use felt as an example to show smooth space, in contrast with woven fabric as a striated space (475).

## Project Description

In my MFA graduating project *WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE*, which was presented at the Audain Gallery during the Graduating MFA fall show in 2021, I tried to convey the experience of a travelogue—as opposed to the portrait—inside a specific ravine. The project was presented in the form of a back-lit photo collage of 644 photographs, along with approximately the same number of black paper tiles cut approximately to the same sizes as the photographs. They were then mounted onto a 283 x 150 cm frame with a stretched translucent white fabric surface along with the black paper pieces, altogether covering the entire surface of the fabric. The colour photographs are printed with an approximate size of 6.8 x 4.1 cm, on four different types of printing papers: matte, luster, translucent, and transparent<sup>7</sup>. During the show, the piece was hung from the ceiling of the gallery between two 8x8-foot black walls that separated the piece from the rest of the gallery and created a somewhat private viewing experience. A long black box sat on the floor underneath the central hanging “collage”. The central hanging piece was lit from behind by a short-throw projector, projecting a loop of a short personal movie that I made for this project, specifically for the purpose of not being seen; instead, its purpose was to illuminate the collage, forming another being/movie.

*WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE* is an experiment in recasting time as space. The photos/frames have been juxtaposed by means of a moving-image approach so that time can be perceived not in a linear manner, but through an infinite number of coexisting, multidirectional paths of undetermined lengths. In other words, “the montage has been translated into the collage.”<sup>8</sup> The work can be experienced as one single movie, as well as many movies with no beginning and no end—all scattered and interwoven on a surface. The wandering eye of the observer is encouraged to play an active role in sparking one or more personal cinematic experiences. The tiles/photographs were meant to have both collective and individual identities.

---

<sup>7</sup> Since I used both sides of the transparent paper, in the end I used five different textures.

<sup>8</sup> As my supervisor, Allyson Clay, put it.

The pictures have been taken during countless walks in a ravine currently known as Renfrew Ravine<sup>9</sup>. *WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE* is the result of a collaboration with the ravine and its myriad inhabitants, including non-human and human traces; whether on the pictures, behind the screen, or absent. The ravine is located in the traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and sə́lilwətaʔt (Tseil-Waututh) nations. It is part of the Still Creek Watershed which enters the qiqéyt (Qayqayt) nation territories and is traditionally a shared harvesting and gathering place for all four of these nations.

---

<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, I have not been able to find the Indigenous name of this place yet.



Figure 2. *from WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE, 2020.*

## **The Yellow: *Or How I Heard Your Voice***

*All are guests in the world and yet,  
Only a few know who the host is.*  
— Rūmī, #432, *Diwan-e Shams-e Tabrizi*

I was sitting at a bus stop. It was September 2019, on one of the last days of my temporary residence right after arriving at what is currently known as Vancouver, Canada. There, I noticed a bushy discreet entrance on the other side of the street. I entered and while going down the slope encountered a wild, deep, and lush ravine with a shining river at the bottom. It was a totally unexpected amazement to confront such a wonderworld within a densely residential area that looked almost homogenous. Months later, time decided to halt in the form of a pandemic, and it seized us all where we were. Those days, for a reason which had nothing to do with the pandemic, my spirit was on fire and my recurrent travels to that ravine acted like a healing remedy.

I can remember the next visit after that first one quite vividly. My new residence was only a mile away from the ravine. That early morning, I decided to go there and, on my way, saw a white-headed eagle and a seagull in the sky, dancing and singing in circles for a long time. Epic and as unexpected as the ravine, it was the first time I was seeing a bald eagle, and I never saw one again anywhere close to that neighborhood. It is true that later that I found out that eagles' presence in the cities is not a healthy environmental sign. But to me, that was like a call. From that day on, the ravine became a secret palace I had to visit daily.

This place made me discover water for the first time. That mass of transparency, covering the earth, tightly hugging the earth, kissing it, getting in and out of it, with that shiny wobbling skin constantly going up and down. Reflecting is not the right word, it "was" the trees and the sky. Skewed and moving, changing constantly, these reflections looked somehow more real than reality. I was touching the unique texture of water as if for the first time and was amazed by its playfully odd wetness. The ravine taught me water. It is true that this water stream which was once filled with salmons is now craving for one; it is true that on my last visit I found a huge sad shopping cart in the creek; it is true that sometimes it smelled very strange; still, despite all its current sorrows, I learned a lot from this ravine about water and its wonders.



I was excited to find an approximately thirty meter wide labyrinth made from stones on the site of the ravine. A maze without walls. I was in awe by Ariadne's<sup>10</sup> magic presence in those days, until I found out that the labyrinth was made based on the labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France, and even its central rosette contains remains from the quarry that the cathedral was cut from. I felt uneasy with the heavily colonial connotation of the piece in the ravine. A few meters away from this maze lies the yellow sign. It took me a long time to read the words on it that were blacked out. After that, I could not enjoy the labyrinth anymore.

Trying to absorb every bit of the ravine, on every visit, I had blackberries and sometimes wild apples to eat. I think of eating, when done innocently, as the most magical way of mingling separate entities together. By eating those berries I was carrying the ravine, becoming the ravine, or the ravine was becoming me and I thought of it as a warm welcoming. But it was only after presenting the work that I figured out that what is known as Himalayan blackberry or Armenian blackberry is actually an invasive settler plant that has been growing madly on Turtle Island and taking over the habitat of indigenous plants of this land. Sadly, I also realized that this plant is native to Armenia and the north of Iran and was brought to this continent and naturalized only after 1885. This new finding shook me profoundly as a potential immigrant—specifically one from Iran. Blackberry fruits are juicy, abundant, delicious, and nutritious; but this does not negate the fact that blackberry is invasive and its very presence deprives other native plants of their space. I do not want to be a blackberry anywhere other than in its native land.

A gift of one's solitude is the amplified power of hearing the surrounding space's whispers and feeling the presence of absent souls. What I brought to the ravine with me was this solitude, and my senses. I did not intend to bring my "past", my identity, my cultural background to the ravine. Rather, I wanted to bring my "presence", not-knowing, naked being, and just see. I am a nomad at heart, always on the path. I need to travel, not towards, but inside. During the COVID-19 peak, when the world was still, this ravine generously let me travel inside every day. It was the most comforting company I had during one of the toughest periods of my life, and it made me feel like I was at home.

---

<sup>10</sup> In Greek mythology Ariadne is associated with mazes and labyrinths. She is best known for having helped Theseus escape the Minotaur but being abandoned by him on the island of Naxos. On those days I happened to face her story from different sources a few times.

Ironically, this welcoming piece of ancient land, which includes innumerable human and non-human beings and traces, was the one teaching me, with extreme patience and through its pure hospitality, that here I am nothing but an uninvited guest. One does not necessarily need words to communicate. As Rūmī wrote: “Without speech and without sign or scroll, hundreds of thousands of interpreters arise from the heart” (Rūmī and Nicholson I.1208).<sup>11</sup> The ravine was my illuminating *Sheykh*<sup>12</sup> here: “the speaking mute”<sup>13</sup> revealing the hidden complexities of my life here (‘Aṭṭār 2012, 642). And I am now one of the innumerable souls residing in its memory.

This geographical depression on the surface of the planet, this open wound of the city that silently witnessed and survived all the invasions, this unexpected slash in the midst of a densely residential area of working-class settler communities, like a Lucio Fontana’s *Taglio*, with all its paradoxes and ironic witty hints, invites the gaze of the viewer into the darkness behind.

This project is a record of a gaze into that darkness.

---

<sup>11</sup> غیر نطق و غیر ایما و سجد صد هزاران ترجمان خیزد ز دل  
(مثنوی، دفتر اول، بخش ۶۶، بیت ۷)

<sup>12</sup> A title used for a Sufi master

<sup>13</sup> Reference to the story of Abu Bakr Vasiti in the biographies of Sufis (*Tazkirat al-Awliya*): “One must be a speaking mute, not a mute speaker” — مرد باید که گنگ گویا بود نه گویای گنگ.

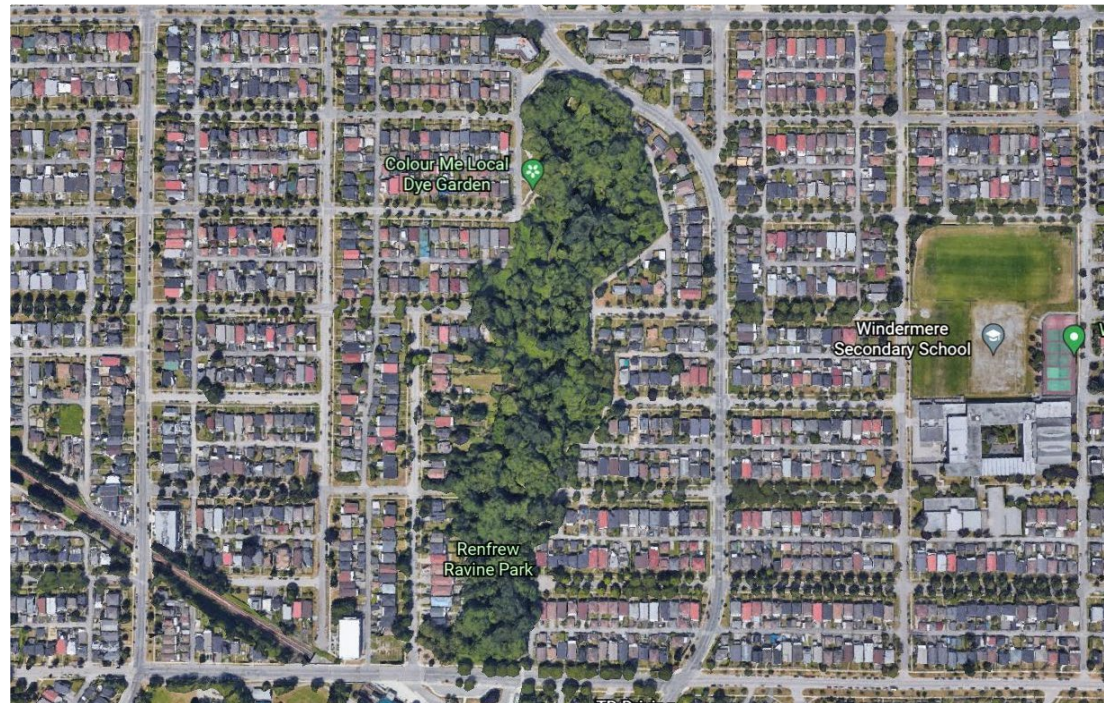
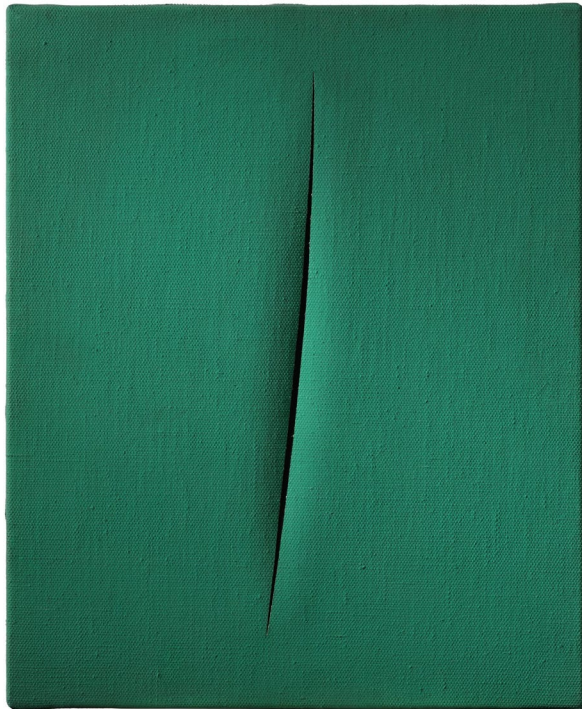


Figure 3. Lucio Fontana, *Concetto spaziale. Attese*, 1963-1964. Water-based paint on canvas, 47 x 38.5 cm. Private collection—left. <https://www.artesvelata.it/lucio-fontana/>, and satellite view of the ravine on Google Maps—right <https://www.google.com/maps/@49.2476242,-123.0446854,1202m/data=!3m1!1e3>

## **Process:** ***Nomadic Versus Migrant Methodology***

In the appended essay, “Reflections on the Slippery vs the Floating State of In-Betweenness”, I tried to find a clear explanation for the binary of migrant vs nomadic as two different approaches of artmaking, as well as thinking processes mostly based on Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of nomadology in their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, as well as to clarify the manifestation of nomadic and migrant approaches with examples from different sources including works of art, Sufi texts, and lived experiences. Under the light of this terminology, here, by briefly analyzing nomadic qualities, I would like to reflect upon the process of making *WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE*.

Both the nomad and the migrant travel between two points, if not more. They both experience being on the path. But they have very different experiences of in-betweenness. As Deleuze and Guattari write:

The nomad is not at all the same as the migrant; for the migrant goes principally from one point to another, even if the second point is uncertain, unforeseen, or not well localized. But the nomad goes from point to point only as a consequence and as a factual necessity; in principle, points for him are relays along a trajectory. (1987, 380)

Deleuze and Guattari differentiate between the nomad and the migrant by emphasizing the subordination of the points to the paths for the nomad, while stating the contrary to be true for the migrant. This can have nothing to do with the literal geographical displacement of either the nomad or the migrant, and instead is vividly applied in real-life situations as a mindset, as well as in the process of artmaking.

For example, it can be stated that whenever the mind envisions an image or an ideal of the outcome and tries to achieve it, or in other words, whenever the “result” overrides “the process,” a migrant mindset is ruling the situation. On the other hand, a nomadic methodology of artmaking embraces the path at every step. For a nomad, the path is the guide, and on every step defines the direction; any piece of new finding/discovery can affect the direction of the process. For a nomad artist,

improvisation<sup>14</sup> is constantly at play; the artist is in a continuous dialogue, an interaction, a collaboration, with her immediate surroundings; be it the subject, the material, or the body/mind of the audience.

This approach might sometimes be misread as an “easygoing” approach where the subjectivity of the artist is not strong enough to make decisions, but I would argue that, in fact, a nomad soul would need massive strength and courage—which a Sufi would say comes from the power of love—in order not to cling to an image of a final destination, to trust the path, and welcome the unknown. This way, the nomad artist is actually creating a dialogue or a game between herself and her surroundings in a loving manner. Her “subordination to the path” is not out of fear. For her the path is “smooth”, and in response to her loving gestures of listening, the path also bends in her favour. This constant dialogue is the way she keeps the door open for any element of magic to enter and bring the work of art to life. This is the artist’s alchemy.<sup>15</sup>

In this project, I was trying not to “subordinate” the process to any final points/results and to be open to changing directions based on my communication with “the path”—the ravine, the material, the space, new findings, and, certainly not least, misfortunes and limitations. That was the reason why, in this project, found material and facilities, even during the last hour before the opening, were welcome and much more preferred over new or constructed ones, and in turn they led to favorable happenings—the walls, the blocks, the blue gel on the projector, parts of the black papers I used for test, and using all the test printing papers I had.

Obviously, just as in verbal communication, this “communication” was not successful all the time during this process. For example, regarding the dialogue with the space, I think the one between me and the gallery space did not occur as cheerfully as that which happened between me and the ravine, or even the studio space. In fact, this is a familiar issue, as I always feel a bit awkward in galleries. Had this communication occurred more smoothly, I believe the work would have experienced fewer challenges to

---

<sup>14</sup> Here, improvisation does not necessarily refer to its literal application in performance arts.

<sup>15</sup> But I believe this nomadic approach has its own dangers too, including falling into the trap of projections. Just like any verbal communication, a communication without words can also fall into the abyss of misunderstanding, and the listener/nomad should always be cautious and consider these misinterpretations.

get integrated into the spatial specificities of the gallery. Still, I was satisfied with the result.

## **The Black: *Or How I Kept Your Secret***

*No lamp I saw brighter than darkness,  
And no speech I heard better than silence.*  
— Bāyazīd-e Basṭāmī<sup>16</sup>

In this project, the black was first nothing but a neutral background. A background that looked better than white on the computer screen as it made colors pop out more dramatically. The use of black could have also made the visual experience more akin to the one someone might have in a cinema “darkroom”, hence evoking a cinematic experience that fitted my purpose (see figure 4). In the digital maquette, this division of negative and positive space created a resemblance with a map—continents of similar batches of frames, as sequences of my spatial movie floating into an ocean of nothingness—and though it was not how I wanted the work to be read, I had reluctantly accepted it.



**Figure 4.** a digital process work of *WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE* before the integration of black tiles

In my process works, I tried to create that black background by cutting out rectangular frames into a big black sheet, making a sort of a general passepartout. The result was terrible: a bulk of neutrality, a cold, heavy, and dead bed, ultimately freezing

---

<sup>16</sup> 9th-century Sufi from north-central Iran, known as Sultān-ul-Ārifīn (King of the Mystics)



my pictures. So I tried to impose the fragmentation of the work on the black background by constructing it out of numerous pieces of black paper of the same size as the photographs. Now these pieces could create a texture that appeared much more alive and integrated into the main work. I used as many different textures of black paper as I could find, to give a distinct character to each one of them. To show my respect and love for each one of them, I did not use batch cutting but cut them one by one. I had to spend time with each one of those sacred pieces of nothingness, pregnant with becoming. Occasionally, the act of cutting those black frames was like a practice of repeating the لا mantra to me.<sup>17</sup>

My enthusiasm about these black rectangles was also affected by a conversation with my supervisory committee that led the project into a new direction. The challenge proposed during that conversation was how to be respectful to the ravine as a living entity and not to nakedly expose aspects of it that might be harshly disrespectful—e.g. drug trash, human violent traces on trees, pollution—and at the same time how not to idealize the ravine by presenting an unreal image of it.<sup>18</sup> I am grateful that the process of making this work made me think more about this dilemma, as it is an important ethical challenge that is applicable to many realms, especially when the material is a “real” being and the work has a documentary element to it, even if remotely. In fact, a complete image of any subject cannot exist. In response to this challenge, the role of the black frames became much stronger to me; as covers, between the frames, which were on one hand more pleasing and brought much more breathing space, balance, and fluidity to the work and saved it from being cluttered and jammed, and on the other hand acted as explicit references to those parts of the ravine that it would otherwise be disrespectful to reveal. Now, I wanted to make the work resemble a single image with dropped tiles/pixels. By showing the concealment instead of the concealed I intended to remain respectful to the ravine, while trying to be aware about the blurry border between manipulative omissions and respectful concealment.

---

<sup>17</sup> As mentioned above, لا (la) is an Arabic word meaning *no*, *not*, and *don't* and it is the title of one of my projects.

<sup>18</sup> The idea that Jay White introduced in that conversation was to see the photographs I had collected from the ravine as the footage that I had recorded of a human being and, while editing those images, to ethically consider that person's wish about how they want to be presented.

The black could also act as an acknowledgment of words from the ravine that I was not able to hear, or, even if I heard them, I was not able to understand or decode. This suddenly opened the space for the emergence of the ineffable, the magic. It is believed that Ineffability or indescribability is an essential mark of the mystical (Gellman, 2014). Rūmī (1207–1273 CE) chose the pen-name *Khāmūsh* for himself, which means “Silent” (Nasr 1987, 115). He states that “To utter words is to shut the window: the very act of expression is the concealment” (Rūmī and Nicholson 1926, VI.699).<sup>19</sup> The sublime lies in the darkness. But this darkness is not dark because of the lack of light. To elaborate on the seemingly paradoxical role of darkness, one can refer to the paradoxical concept of the “black light” in the context of Sufism. There have been diverse interpretations of this concept, but the one which makes more sense is light-without-matter (Corbin 1994, 99). There is a difference between “the darkness which is matter” which refers to everything-but-light, and “the darkness which is an absence of matter” which refers to nothing-but-light: the blackness of the stratosphere (Corbin 100). But I like to think that black light is something not definable with our materialistic mind that is not capable of thinking of anything which is neither matter nor lack of it, and the gateways to it only lie deep inside matter, on Earth. These gateways may hold all and nothing at the same time. Like the river in *Siddhartha*,<sup>20</sup> they contain all the voices and stories of before the beginning of time. *WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE*, believes that somewhere deep in the ravine and every other being, be it a human being or a cup, there are secret spots for those gateways.

---

<sup>19</sup> حرف گفتن بستن آن روزنست عین اظهار سخن پوشیدنست  
(مثنوی، دفتر ششم، بخش ۲۰، بیت ۱۴)

<sup>20</sup> the 1922 novel by Hermann Hesse





Figure 5. a tile from *WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE*, 2021, shot in 2020.

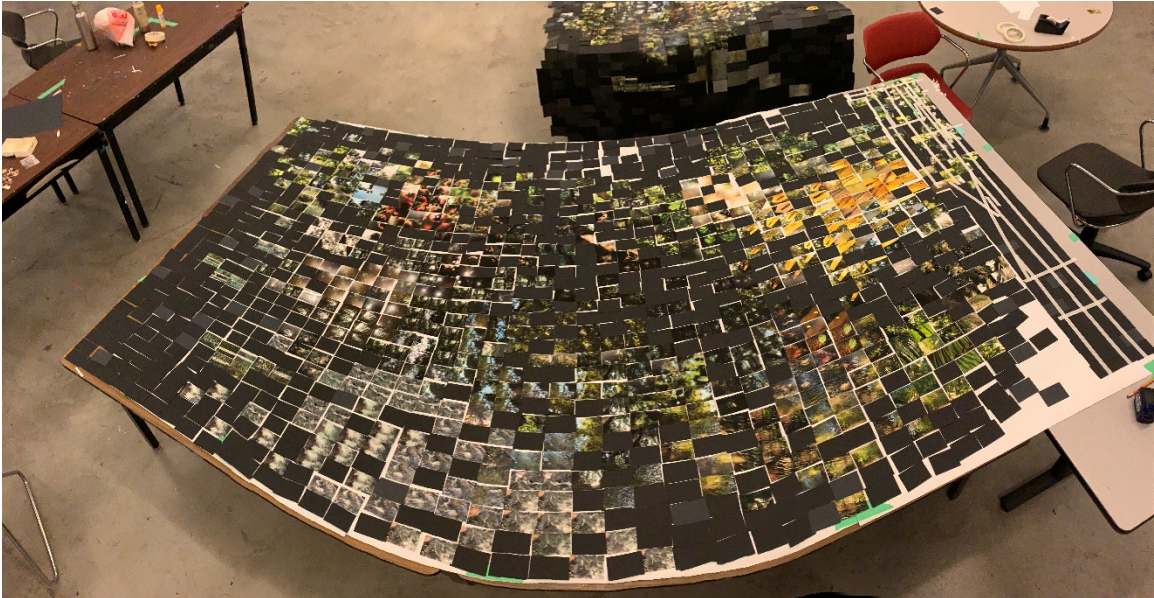


Figure 6. assemblage process of *WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE*, 2021, dimensions variable. Visual Art Studio, SFU Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, Vancouver, Canada.



Figure 7. *WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE*, 2021, dimensions variable. Audain Gallery, SFU Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, Vancouver, Canada.





Figure 8. *WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE*, 2021, dimensions variable. Audain Gallery, SFU Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, Vancouver, Canada.

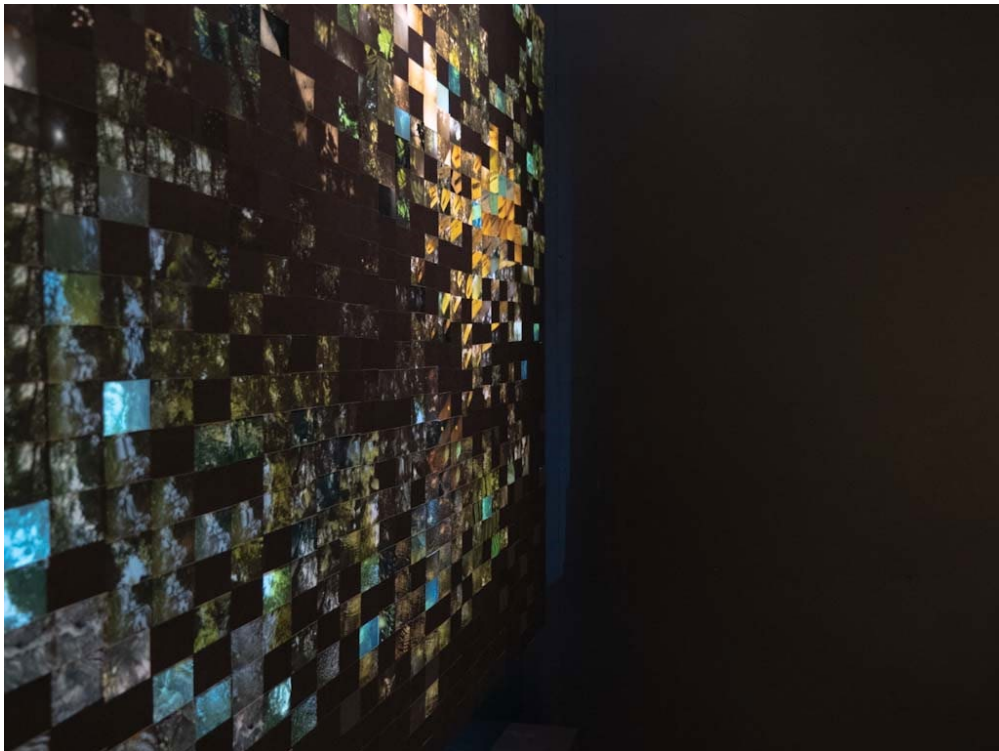


Figure 9. *WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE*, 2021, dimensions variable. Audain Gallery, SFU Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, Vancouver, Canada.



Figure 10. ***WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE***, 2021, dimensions variable. Audain Gallery, SFU Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, Vancouver, Canada.



Figure 11. ***WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE***, 2021, dimensions variable. Audain Gallery, SFU Goldcorp Centre for the Arts, Vancouver, Canada.



## Works Cited

- 'Aṭṭār, Farīduddīn. *Tazkirat Al-Awliyā'*. Edited by Muḥammad Esti'lāmī. Tehran: Zavvār, 2012.
- Corbin, Henry. *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*. Translated by Nancy Pearson. New Lebanon, NY: Omega Publications, 1994.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Gellman, Jerome, "Mysticism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = [<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/mysticism/>](https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/mysticism/)
- Hockney, David. *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters*. New York: Viking Studio, 2006.
- Hockney, David, and Paul Joyce. *Hockney on photography: conversations with Paul Joyce*. New York: Harmony Books, 1988.
- Marks, Laura U. *Enfoldment and Infinity: an Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010.
- Nasr, Seyyed H. *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987.
- Rūmī, Mawlana Jalaluddin. *Kulliyāt-i Shamsī Tabrīzī [The Works of Šams Tabrīzī]*. Edited by Badi' uzzamān Forōzānfar. Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1984.
- Rūmī, Jalālu'ddīn and Reynold Alleyne Nicholson. *The Mathnawī of Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī: Edited from the Oldest Manuscripts Available, with Critical Notes, Translation & Commentary by Reynold A. Nicholson*. Lond.on: Messrs. Luzac and Co., 1926. Retrieved from Internet Archive website: <https://archive.org/details/in.gov.ignca.20683/page/n5/mode/2up>
- Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993.

## Appendix A.

# Reflections on the Slippery vs. the Floating State of In-Betweenness

## Prelude

Camel caravans under the starry night sky, by creeks of water, with trees on the sides, dancing in the wind; I can still clearly smell the scent, hear the sound, and feel the breeze of these settings that my grandmother painted in my imagination to tell the stories of her childhood with her nomad family. I'm not sure whether these stories planted the seed of nomadism in my mind or if it was something else, but as time passed, I experienced the slow and steady growth of a desire for nomadism in me, as an ultimate alternative for the reign of that "monstre délicat": the Ennui<sup>1</sup>. I did all I could, desperately trying to practice such lifestyle: solo-travelling in Iran—not as a tourist but as a follower of "necessity"—to far-fetched places, including Hezar-Masjed mountains<sup>2</sup> where I spent a brief time with a nomadic community. But as years went by, this idea slowly transformed from a merely romantic desire for living freely on the wind—as a lifestyle—into a general outlook, close to an epistemological approach, not constrained by its literal meaning anymore.

Further, coming across Deleuze and Guatari's concept of nomadology in their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* helped me materialize and clarify these vague, but persisting thoughts around nomadic qualities. It is now clear to me that the main feature which attracts me to the idea of nomadism is not anymore necessarily the constant geographical displacement, but it is how a nomadic mind who ceaselessly tends to put itself in *processes* is fundamentally leaving, arriving, and in transit, all at the same time. I see this approach close to what can be considered a

---

<sup>1</sup> From Charles Baudelaire's poem, "Au Lecteur" in *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857) (Baudelaire, 1961, 9).

<sup>2</sup> Located in North Khorasan, Iran.

combination of Nietzschean concepts of “Amor Fati”<sup>3</sup>, and the “Will”; that is, saying Yes to the obstacles on the path on the one hand, and moving forward, like a river, on the other.

The hypothesis at the heart of this essay is nothing new for an educated reader; as it has been practiced or discussed thoroughly, in diverse times and places, by uncountable anonymous or well-known poets and thinkers like Shams<sup>4</sup>, Rimbaud<sup>5</sup>, and Deleuze & Guattari. Conversely, it has also been frowned upon and considered outdated by many scholars of our time. However, it is still a fresh and vital concept for the practitioner who is writing this essay; so fresh and vital that she could not resist writing about it, despite knowing that the reader might easily consider this subject matter already exhausted. Bearing that in mind, the hypothesis behind this essay is that, while all is in-between, in any process (be it the creative process of art-making or going through the mundane tasks of daily life) there is a distinction between the uncanny sense of in-betweenness—which I like to think of as the immigrant mindset or limbo state—and a clear, lively sense of in-betweenness—which I like to think of as nomadism, or the state of “intermezzo” as Deleuze and Guattari call it (380). One might see associations between the immigrant mindset and psychoanalysis on the one hand, and between nomadology and metaphysics on the other. To elaborate more on these concepts, though the main argument in this essay revolves around Deleuze & Guattari’s analogies of nomadology and its related concepts, I would also recognize them in the context of my own familiar background and try to show their intertextual connections.

Nonetheless, it might be necessary to emphasize here that rather than a formal academic text, this essay resembles more a reflective, personal travelogue, illustrating the journey from immigrant/psychoanalytical inclinations to nomadic/meta-physical

---

<sup>3</sup> The Latin phrase *Amor fati* which can be translated as “love of one’s fate” is known to be a Nietzschean value. In his Book IV of *The Gay Science* Nietzsche asserts:

I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: someday I wish to be only a Yes-sayer. (Nietzsche, 157)

<sup>4</sup> Shams-i Tabrīzī (1185–1248), the Persian poet who never wrote.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891), French poet

ones—while the words immigrant and nomad here are being used neither in their literal senses in historical, socio-political, or cultural contexts, nor even in a purely metaphorical way; rather, they are being used just to clarify and illustrate two different approaches to being.

## Intellectual Uncertainty vs. the Schizophrenic Wisdom of the State of I-do-not-Know

*Let go all your scheming, lover,  
Let yourself go mad,  
go mad<sup>6</sup>.*

— Rumi, “#2131,” *Diwan-e Shams-e Tabrizi*

Years ago, I did my master’s thesis around the integral uncanny qualities of stop-motion animation; for that I used mostly a Freudian approach to study the objects and how we perceive life in them in an uncanny manner. Therefore, a basic part of that research was to get to know “the uncanny” which I would still rather relate to a limbo state more than anything else: where you are not sure. Here, I would like to first show how I think this “not-knowing” can be read in two different ways—rising anxiety or relief, from a psychoanalytic viewpoint versus the “metaphysical<sup>7</sup>” one.

Before Freud, it was the German psychiatrist, Ernst Jentsch, who first raised the issue of the uncanny experience in his essay *On the Psychology of the Uncanny* through a psychoanalytic review of the short story *The Sandman*—written in 1816 by E. T. A. Hoffmann. *The Sandman* is a moving story of a young man, Nathanael, who falls in love with a girl and loses his sanity after finding out that she is actually an automaton. Ernst Jentsch ascribes the essential factor in the rising of uncanniness to “intellectual uncertainty” which gets clear in the context of this short story where the protagonist cannot distinguish between the actual and the desired reality that he had believed to be true. Though Freud based his theory around Jentsch’s short essay, he found his definition

---

<sup>6</sup> Translated by Franklin Lewis, from the book *Rumi Past and Present, East and West*.  
A bit more:

Turn yourself into a stranger;  
raze your house to the ground;  
then come and stand under one roof,  
    beneath the same roof  
and live among the lovers.

<sup>7</sup> Deleuze called himself a “pure metaphysician” (Smith and Protevi, 2020).



insufficient, because he believed “on the whole, Jentsch did not get beyond this relation of the uncanny to the novel and unfamiliar”; not surprisingly, instead he suggested that we should seek the roots of the uncanny experience in childhood (Freud 620). Although Freud wanted to go beyond the “intellectual uncertainty” and discover other aspects of the uncanny, neither him, nor his successors did not deny this integral feature of it. In any case, here in this essay, it is that uncertainty aspect of the uncanny that would be useful to address.

I still find Jentsch’s simple phrase to explain the uncanny descriptive of the most complicated, disturbing, and nauseous psychological experiences one can have. That moment when you first realize your dear one who is acting weirdly, might now have gotten what they call schizophrenia; but you are not sure yet. That transition of your previous attitude towards them, from a trustworthy playmate, alike, familiar, to an alien, to someone who is not there anymore; but you are not sure yet. For those who go through this transitional experience, this “yet” never ends. The familiar face of the one they once knew is constantly tempting them to jump into the abyss of the past and acts as a persistent blow to the reality of their present encounter. Though confronting a schizophrenic is not a comfortable experience for anyone, a new acquaintance who gets to know them from the very beginning as a “mentally sick” person would never fall into that slippery, uncanny, transitional experience. It is clear in this example that the main source of the anxiety is caused by an alienation of the familiar: by slipping into a limbo state of uncertainty.

However, from the point of view of the schizophrenic, though every piece of reality including their dear ones’ identity is shattered and altered, it is rather renewed than estranged. Their world is now a “smooth” world having lost its rigidity; quite like the world of dreams, where you easily *accept* the morphing nature of reality. For them, having lost their interest in certainty of the real world, the uncertainty and its accompanied uncanny has no meaning. They never lose their certainty, because they see what they see. Still, they constantly try hard to understand the “logic” of their own world while accepting all its unique qualities. This effort might be extremely painful and sharp, hot and dry, like the desert-lostness, but it is not nauseous and wobbling, wet and cold, like the seasickness—i.e. the experience that normal people around them have of them.

Though I do not intend to get into Deleuze and Guattari's discussion about schizophrenia, I cannot resist briefly commenting on how it seems interesting that while psychoanalysis considers schizophrenia as an "otherness", as a *problem*, "metaphysics"/philosophy—at least in a close-to-Deluzian approach—see it as a rather positive condition (Wielen), potentially capable of solving some *problems* of the sobriety.

## The Path—from the immigrant to the nomadic state

*That type of flowing still I am*<sup>8</sup>  
— Rumi, "#1759," *Diwan-e Shams-e Tabrizi*

To further clarify the aforementioned two different approaches towards the state of in-betweenness, let us move on from comparing the schizophrenic/painful/desert-lost stability and the sober/nauseous/seasick uncanniness, to a milder but probably more applicable comparison between nomadic versus immigrational approaches. I believe this terminology can vividly clarify two different types of artmaking processes, as well as thinking processes. I chose nomad vs. immigrant (instead of sedentary) because I believe particularly artmaking is a voyage process—where you start from a point, with a plan, to achieve a goal, which is materializing an idea—and therefore not sedentary in nature.

Both the nomad and the immigrant travel between two points, if not more. They both experience being on the path. Still, it seems to me that the immigrant's experience has a mild but chronic uncanny quality which creates an anxiety that is instead quite foreign to the nomad. As Deleuze and Guattari write:

The nomad is not at all the same as the migrant; for the migrant goes principally from one point to another, even if the second point is uncertain, unforeseen, or not well localized. But the nomad goes from point to point only as a consequence and as a factual necessity; in principle, points for him are relays along a trajectory. (380)

Here Deleuze and Guattari differentiate between the nomad and the migrant by emphasizing the subordination of the points to the paths for the nomad, while stating the contrary to be true for the migrant; and the reason behind that is "factual necessity"

---

<sup>8</sup> ... این چنین ساکن روان که منم

being the nomad's motive for their journey/trajectory towards wherever they can find the answer to, as opposed to the abstract reasons of the migrant to reach an uncertain destination.

However, it seems to me that the immigrant's anxiety that we are talking about here, the persistent uncanny in-between experience, is not only linked to the "uncertain" condition of their destination but had started much earlier. In fact, the immigrant starts their immigration process once they see themselves alienated in their home.

The word uncanny, which is referring to a concept originally born in the German context, is the translation of *unheimlich* from German language, which literally means unhomely<sup>9</sup>; in this sense, uncanny refers to the estrangement from what was once homely. So, the immigrant, feeling this anxiety caused by the alienation, starts their journey in search of home. But home for an immigrant is an abstract notion. It is an ideal concept. The immigrant is in nature a sedentary; but a sedentary whose stability is shaken by a complicated mental image, by a feeling of dissatisfaction. They aspire to gain the lost "stability" after moving. But this stability, this "home" can never be achieved in their destination where they cannot help but feel not belonging to. It is as if the destination seems always too close, but never reached; so, they constantly move while they seem to stay. It's a never-ending limbo state.

The constant Sisyphus attempt of the immigrant to reach that destination shows itself in their neurotic effort to dissolve themselves in the new (not)home and receive the approval of the "state apparatus" ruling over their destination/desired home. The immigrant desperately tries to mingle, to conflate, to homogenize<sup>10</sup>, but it is never enough; those efforts never seem to result in a homely serenity. The anxiety pushes them to have an assimilative tendency. Their minority identity is a prison they wish to break/dissolve in the majority.

On the other hand, the nomadic mind correlates with the surroundings to facilitate their lives, and therefore trade cultural or material objects in an interactive way

---

<sup>9</sup> In his lengthy etymological explanation Freud mentions how this word is contradictory in itself as *heimlich* means both homely and hidden/strange, but that is not our point of interest here.

<sup>10</sup> Though Deleuze and Guattari consider homogeneity a nomadic quality belonging to the "smoothness" of space, I think what the immigrant does is a neurotic act homogenizing themselves with their surroundings in search of the return of the sedentary state.

while keeping the varieties untouched, using the awkward cultural differences to feed their sense of humor in an easy way. In fact the nomad prefers not to ever dissolve or root in their surroundings, because it makes moving on more difficult<sup>11</sup>; according to Deleuze and Guattari every “point is reached only in order to be left behind” by the nomad (380).

From a nomadic viewpoint the immigrants’ ideal is based on a layered illusion: 1) There is a place called home “out” there, and not here. 2) It is steady and stable. 3) The destination will become home if I learn how to dissolve in it. Each of these levels is dominated by a hidden sense of uncertainty or insecurity: a yet-in-betweenness causing a persistent vicious anxiety, or the uncanny by definition.

Whereas anxiety pushes the immigrant to move constantly while seeking stillness, the nomad keeps their stillness while moving. One might recall Rumi who sees the search for rest to be the cause of restlessness; he goes on: the only way to settle down is to seek unsettlement<sup>12</sup> (165). For the nomadic mind, stability—i.e., the sedentary/immigrant ideal— is a myth. The space is smooth<sup>13</sup>, or else it is dead. Not only natural and political borders and their inhabitants move steadily in space, but every figure, every particle, moves into itself. Like a sea which is constantly devouring itself<sup>14</sup> (Rumi 663). This nomadic worldview has an affinity with Sadrā’s theory of Substantial Motion (*Al-harakat al-jawhariyya*) uncovering the “invisible transformation that takes place continuously in the inner structure of entities; their substance (*jawhar*)” (Emadi 18). The nomad’s mind seeks this “unsettlement” (Rumi 165) and celebrates this “internal motion which interconnects all beings” (Emadi 18) as signs of the vitality of the space. A living space is smooth, and the nomad helps smoothen it further by stirring it, like an

---

<sup>11</sup> Here again, I emphasize that I have nothing for or against literal immigrants or nomads; this is all about a thinking/acting model.

<sup>12</sup> Ghazal #323, my translation from Persian ( جمله بی قراریت از طلب قرار توست / طالب بی قرار شوم، تا که قرار (ایدت)

<sup>13</sup> For the smooth/nomadic or striated/sedentary space please see chapter 14 of Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

<sup>14</sup> Ghazal #1759 (بحر من غرقه گشت هم در خویش)

immense piece of dough, with their own slow but steady movement. That seems to be one of the main differences between the nomad and the immigrant approach<sup>15</sup>.

Deleuze and Guattari, too, strongly suggest that the nomad is “*he who does not move*”<sup>16</sup>. They believe that by clinging to the smooth space left by the receding forest, the nomad never actually departs; “the nomad moves, but while seated, and he is only seated while moving”<sup>17</sup> (Deleuze and Guattari 381).

From another viewpoint, the reason for the nomadic settlement while moving could also be that they are seated on and clinging to *themselves*, rather than the space. Again, what moves them is their *own* essential, concrete needs of air, water, food, and freedom, versus an abstract home-complex. For the nomad home is their body, their immediate surrounding. The nomad’s home moves along with them. Therefore, every single step is simultaneously the point of departure and destination in itself.

## Smooth pilgrimage

In the smooth space, where the nomad moves/lives, the idea of pilgrimage or the transformational journey is also redefined. The destination can transform from a fixed geographical point to another point in a different direction<sup>18</sup>; or it can change into someone the pilgrim meets on their way to that fixed point<sup>19</sup>; or the traveller and the destination can even switch their roles, with the destination travelling towards the traveller<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, the path should continually bend itself in the direction of the playful flying destination. This can be applied to a modern nomad with limitless possibilities

---

<sup>15</sup> In this text I use immigrant and migrant interchangeably, as the immigrant seems just like a more intense and apparently successful version of the migrant: a migrant who managed to convince the authorities of their destination country to accept them; but it is clear from the fragility and conditioning of their citizenship that this can never be what it seems to be.

<sup>16</sup> Deleuze and Guattari cited this quotation from Arnold J. Toynbee (1889–1975), British historian and philosopher of history.

<sup>17</sup> Here they are referring to the Bedouin galloping: that “feat of balance”.

<sup>18</sup> Reference to the change of the qibla (Arabic: تحويل القبلة)

<sup>19</sup> A recurrent story in the biographies of Sufis (*Tazkirat al-Awliya*) is the story of a pilgrim (e.g. Abu Sa’eed) who meets someone (e.g. Abu al-Hassan Kharaqani) on his way and the wise, witty, burning words of the latter makes them believe that friend was their destination; therefore they return home.

<sup>20</sup> Another recurrent story in the biographies of Sufis: e.g. *Ka’bah* comes to meet Rābi’a (‘Aṭṭār, 2012, 63).

when moving from one place to another for a reason (please note that this destination might simply be accomplishing a task, such as artmaking). But the sedentary/immigrant—now entitled as the tourist—will not feel satisfied unless they reach that geographically fixed, “holy” destination and then return home (point zero) safe and sound: unspoiled.

Unlike the sedentary who sees the land as a stable property, Deleuze and Guattari mention that for a nomad “the land ceases to be land, tending to become simply ground (*sol*) or support” (381). But I think, more than that, for the nomad the smoothness of the land/space arises from the fact that they see it as not just a place/ground, but as a lively being, breathing, interacting, communicating; so much so that it might misunderstand your sign and start moving with your words, if you choose them carelessly<sup>21</sup>.

I think it is also of crucial importance to notice that the nomad does not turn property—be it land or objects—into an abstract concept; for them property is valid as long as it has a meaningful function to facilitate life. In fact, as Marks also mentions, nomadic life cannot tolerate any form of abstraction. That is because in nomadic life a “close attention to the senses” is necessary for survival (Marks 6). Therefore, for a nomad there is no psychological attachment, identification, or gravity towards things/points. They call their minimal vulnerable possession “windy” because they know it goes away just as it comes; and vice versa<sup>22</sup>.

The nomad’s movements seem to have no gravity towards points other than the nomad themselves—an extreme form of which resembles the manner of the *Uwaysi*<sup>23</sup>, those unique stars who move not towards a destination outside, but dive deeply into themselves. While the compass shows the magnetic north to the immigrant, they move

---

<sup>21</sup> When Ibrahim Adham (late Sufi leaving his kingdom to live a nomadic life, b. 718 AD) went on a mountain to listen to a guru’s lecture, he was asked what is the sign of a perfect human? “His sign is that when he asks the mountain to flow, it does” he answered, and right then the mountain started to flow, so he had to shout, “I’m not talking to you mountain! I was just giving an example.” (Naṣīrī Jāmī, 2012, 149)

<sup>22</sup> Among some Iranian nomadic communities the cattle, being their only source of income, is literally called “windy possession” (*māl-e-bādi*). (Papeli Yazdi, 2017, 395)

<sup>23</sup> *Uwaysi* manner is an often not-very-well understood manner of Sufism where you do not follow a guide outside, and instead the guide lies within you. The guide (sheykh/pīr/ostād) and annihilation in him has a crucial role in the journey of a Sufi.

towards an unreachable west on the globe (where there's always somewhere more to the west). But since the nomad's inner center could be equated to a strong magnetic field, in an act of "ascent out of cartographical dimensions" they constantly reside in a north, which contains west and east at the same time—that "midnight sun" Henry Corbin seems to see as the destination (Corbin 39).

Nomad's movement is floating, flowing, fluid, but not wet or muddy. There is a difference between the liquidity of the immigrant and the one of the nomad. I used to have recurrent disturbing dreams, filled with watery images. The water seemed too wet, slippery, sticky, dirty, threatening, inevitable. But gradually, water started to show other qualities and transformed into another type of material. Very recently, I had a strange dream in which I was in a river for a reason, passing buildings and people. The water in that dream specifically had an extremely pleasant materiality. Everything seemed floating with astonishing weightlessness in that clear shining flow, while it had a majestic "vortical or swirling" movement, with no haste, no threatening or repulsive clue. It was bulky, crawling on itself, but light as if in the state of no-gravity. It was extremely heavy and light at the same time. I see the immigrant liquidity as that wet, slippery, sticky, or in one word uncanny, and the nomadic liquidity as that fluid vortical dignity.

These qualities remind me the brief levitation scene in Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) where the spaceship enters a zone with no gravity and makes the film's protagonist and his wife—or rather the embodiment of his late wife's memory—floating in the air along with the candelabrum, the chandelier, the open book of *Don Quixote*, in a space surrounded by Bruegel paintings and Bach's organ prelude ... no gravity except for the one between Kris and his incarnated love, softly clinging to each other—home at last. In this mesmerizing scene all is still and moving at the same time in a "smooth" setting<sup>24</sup>.

Deleuze's concept of an *espace quelconque*—any-space-whatsoever—refers to a "place" which mutates into "space" after being inflected by a user or a traveller (Parr 261). This smoothening, vitalizing process is constantly performed by the nomad spirit moving from place to place (ibid. 262). In return, the smoothened space serves the nomad by moving them with its flow.

---

<sup>24</sup> Link to the scene: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcglyhUre4w>

Time and space are inseparable. Therefore, one can say that, from a nomadic approach, not only space but also time is smooth. Nomadic time is expandable or squeezable. It is smooth, flying in all directions. There is no reason why an event in the future could not be the cause of an event in the past—as in the final scene of *La Jetée* (1962) by Chris Marker. How do we know that what we are doing now is in no way causing the suffering imposed by European colonization of the Americas in past centuries or even the Mongol conquests? Who knows if the dancer is dancing to the music or the music is actually following the dancer?

In fact, this idea of the smooth time has always inspired artists in literary and cinematic narratives, to the extent that one can find many traces of its leakage into the realm of mainstream storytelling media. In a recent conversation I had with Prof. Laura Marks, she made one of her witty jokes about how superficially excited some directors become with the worn-out idea of non-linearity of time and conceive huge projects around such a simple idea, using it as the only point of their films; I believe that implicitly her point was to push me to go beyond this kind of excitement. In my opinion, for a nomadic artist time and space are integrated—I would rather call these inseparable entities borrowing the Bakhtinian concept of chronotope (Bakhtin 84). Non-linearity or the smoothness of time and space is a natural, integral quality of the chronotope, which is only the setting or the material of their work.

But who is a nomadic artist after all? And what is nomadic art<sup>25</sup>? Is it about geographically displaced artists or could nomadism be used as a methodology independent of cartographical (dis)placements? How can an artist practice and go further into their nomadic qualities in a time period when *any* imposed conditions, such as a pandemic, keeps them in their quarters? On the other hand, can the experience of an actual immigration/exile, help grow a nomadic approach, towards all its positively helpful aspects? In other words, can this imposed physical displacement help transform the artist from an immigrant to a nomad? In general, how can the artist enliven the

---

<sup>25</sup> For some suggestions about nomadic art, please read the chapter, *The Aesthetic Model: Nomad Art* from Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. There, they consider a brilliant triad set of features for nomad art (vs. sedentary art) which is the haptic (vs. optic), the close-distance (vs. long-distance), and the abstract (vs. concrete). Also, for ideas about nomadic cinema, please read Laura U. Marks' wonderful essay: *Asphalt nomadism: the new desert in Arab independent cinema*.



nomad inside? And if they do, does it help to make the process of artmaking into a more meaningful experience?

It might seem obvious that for the nomad artist it is a necessity to defamiliarize and untutor<sup>26</sup> the perception to experience anew; but for the immigrant artist an untutored encounter with the world is unsettling—*unheimlich*. A nomadic artist invites improvisation as an opportunity for a dialectical and dialogical relationship with the smooth space to get them on the right trajectory for enlivening the work; but to the immigrant artist it is a risky test of their technical skills, better to avoid. For the nomadic artist, changing the initial plan, altering the first image, during the process of artmaking is a sign of bliss they can enthusiastically embrace; but for the immigrant artist it is a sign of failure of which they feel ashamed. For the nomadic artist, the work, after having been made and even after having been watched/heard/etc., just starts its life in the mind of the audience<sup>27</sup>, as it is the “becoming”—of the work, the audience, the artist, etc.—that matters, and not merely that which “is”; but the immigrant does not feel at ease unless they make sure that the audience receives their intended content. This list can go on with a thousand more predictable examples. But those unpredictable events of the nomadic life, those blissful moments of magic interactions with the space, those ineffable personal experiences, can only be manifested in the form of the smooth silence between sounds, and the smooth blank space between words.

## Afterword

Despite all their implied fascination with nomadology, Deleuze and Guattari end their considerations on the smooth space with this snappy warning: “Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us” (500). They are quite aware of and warn us about the danger of the transformation of orthodox nomadism into fascism. They emphasize that when the war machine—as the nomad structure—takes over the State, it might build a fascist regime, a cancerous body rather than a totalitarian organism (Deleuze and Guattari 215, 230). But the idea of a pervasive, universal smooth space seems wrong, not only because the fleshy smooth needs a bony structure to make a healthy being, or because all-smooth means inhuman catastrophic chaos, but also because the nomad in

---

<sup>26</sup> Here, I’m referring to Stan Brakhage’s concept of the untutored eye.

<sup>27</sup> I remember this idea from a comment Abbas Kiarostami made in his film *10 on Ten* (2004).

nature belongs to the margins, and the bulk of the body cannot be the margin. The nomad knows this and that is why they are in peace with their being the minority.

Furthermore, as the smooth and striated constantly transform into one another (Deleuze and Guattari 493), a pure nomadic world cannot last long and soon the very smooth gets solidified; as it happens with most, if not all, of religious/reforming/idealist movements, starting as a healthy war-machine, rebellious forces shaking the rotten rigid systems of thought and soon after, transforming into a very rigid systems of thought themselves. The smooth can only keep its vitality and smoothness by a constant vortical movement which can be caused by a persistent *stirring* through the flow, to avoid transformation into a swamp. It seems that turning nomadism into a socio-political ideal, or a final solution, makes the emergence of that swamp very probable. I believe, even on a personal level, that keeping a balance between the nomad and sedentary parts of the soul can sustain a much healthier spirit, and provide artworks which are alchemically alive<sup>28</sup>. A true nomad does not reside even in their nomadism; they embrace the constant cyclic transformation, even between the nomad and the sedentary. Life occurs only “between” day and night, dark and light, inhale and exhale, yes and no, stillness and flow<sup>29</sup>.

---

<sup>28</sup> Here, I am referring to Nathaniel Dorsky’s concept of Alchemy. (Dorsky, 2003, 25)

<sup>29</sup> I worked with this concept while exploring different phases of ♃ along with different phases of the Moon, in my previous project, ♃.

## Works Cited

- Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008.
- Baudelaire, Charles. *Les Fleurs Du Mal*. Ligarán Éditions, 1961. *ProQuest Ebook Central*. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/sfu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=2087103>
- Corbin, Henry. *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*. Translated by Nancy Pearson. New Lebanon, NY: Omega Publications, 1994.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Dorsky, Nathaniel. *Devotional Cinema* (3rd ed.). Berkeley, CA: Tuumba Press, 2003.
- Emadi, Azadeh. "16th Century Persian Tiles in Dialogue with 21st Century Digital Tiles in the Sadrian Universe." *Kimiya-Ye-Honar*, vol. 4, no. 17, 17, Advanced Research Institute of Arts (ARIA), June 2016, pp. 16–31. [URL: http://kimiahonar.ir/article-1-593-en.html](http://kimiahonar.ir/article-1-593-en.html)
- ‘Aṭṭār, Farīduddīn. *Tazkirat Al-Awliyā’*. Edited by Muḥammad Esti‘lāmī. Tehran: Zavvār, 2012.
- Marks, Laura U. "Asphalt Nomadism: The New Desert in Arab Independent Cinema." *Landscape and Film*, edited by Martin Lefebvre, Routledge, 2006, pp. 153–75. *sfu-primo.com*, doi:10.4324/9780203959404-11. <https://www.sfu.ca/~lmarks/downloads/files/Asphalt%20Nomadism.pdf>
- Naṣīrī Jāmī, Ḥassan. *Ebrāhīm e-Adham*. Tehran: Mola, 2012.
- Papeli Yazdi, Mohamad Hosein. *Shazde Hammam [Bathing Prince]*. Mashhad: Papeli, 2017.
- Parr, Adrian. *Deleuze Dictionary Revised Edition*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.
- Rūmī, Mawlana Jalaluddin. *Kulliyāt-i Shamsī Tabrīzī* [The Works of Šams Tabrīzī]. Edited by Badi`uzzamān Forōzānfar. Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1984.
- Smith, Daniel, and John Protevi. "Gilles Deleuze." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2020, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2020. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/deleuze/>

Wielen, Julie Van der. "Living the Intensive Order: Common Sense and Schizophrenia in Deleuze and Guattari." *Nursing Philosophy*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2018, p. e12226.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/nup.12226>

## **Appendix B.**

### **Video Documentation**

**Made by:** Somayeh Khakshoor

**Description:**

*WHERE I HEARD YOUR VOICE* at the Audain Gallery, September 2021

**File Name:**

Where\_I\_Heard\_Your\_Voice\_Audain\_Gallery\_2021.mp4