

**In Praise of**

**Dis place ment**

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## **Abstract**

My MFA studio practice and research at Carnegie Mellon University has undergone experimentation and transformations. I have produced artwork ranging from large scale urban video projection to internet art, experimental painting, media design and curation.

My conceptual investigations have focused on place and its intersection with memory and daily life. Humans, communication, individual conflicts and social discriminations, with allusions to politics, have been the subject of most of my works. Context and audience are terms of critical importance in my public practices. With a background in architecture and theater, I strive to build the most comprehensible virtual and physical venues/spaces to convey my thoughts. In my recent works I have focused on the notion of displacement and diaspora . The purest relationship between human and space: Migration.

I have tried to find the most effective ways to influence the audience using new media. My research revolves around the core of Middle Eastern studies with emphasis on Iran, social behaviour in online networks and the role of art raising awareness.

In my thesis I intended to combine all my skills, interests and concerns in one multidisciplinary piece. “Decompensation” is a result of my experiments and studies during the MFA program. Decompensation is a performative work that attempts to recreate the psychological stages which refugees perhaps pass through when moving and settling into a new social/cultural context over the span of many years:

Early Arrival, Destabilization, Exploration, Return to Normal life, and Decompensation.

In this participatory piece, the notion of "Displacement" is communicated through music, performance, and 360-degree video.

An immersive perspective provided by virtual reality is hoped to inspire an empathy for the displaced individual. Therefore, VR aims to function as a type of empathy machine in which the immersive quality enables a sensory experience. The work displaces the viewer in order to contemplate the displacement of the refugee. The immersive experience provided by virtual reality can increase empathy, through sensory experience. By activating the body and the senses, virtual reality brings new topologies of emotion, pleasure and passion to the landscape of interaction.

## **Acknowledgements**

This journey would not have been possible without the support of my parents, professors and mentors. To my parents, thank you for encouraging me in all of my pursuits and inspiring me to follow my dreams and for supporting me emotionally and financially.

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I would like to thank Laurence Shea my advisor from Drama department. I learned a lot about digital media in your classes. Specifically in expanded theater course that I took three semesters in a row! Also, I want to thank Steve Diets -my outside thesis advisor- for all suggestions and challenges which helped me to revise the initial idea of my thesis and changed the project's direction completely in a good way!

I must thank all of the School of fine Arts professors whom I have worked with over the last three years for showing me what it means to be a dedicated, each in their own unique way. Ali Momeni; one my best advisors, best friends and collaborators ever, Jon Rubin; the coolest teacher, artist and recently doctor! and Clayton Merrill, Sarah Eldridge, Melissa Ragona, Paolo Pedercini, Golan Levin, Angela Washko, and many others who have generously offered their time, advice and support throughout this journey of research and artistic evolution.

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## **In Praise Of Displacement**

### **Introduction**

#### **Where I Was?**

I am a citizen of Iran. It is impossible to live in Iran without somehow being connected to politics since it affects all facets of one's daily life. It cuts across writers, vendors, artists, designers, and all members of its society. Politics permeates Iranian culture so much so that members of its society can't think of their productions and actions as being apolitical.

Iran, on one hand, is famous, in the world, for the first charter of human rights and on the other hand is accused to be the pivot of wickedness. So it is totally normal, if two-thirds of what a taxi driver speaks about, driving one from the airport, concerns a political figure or event. Actors become representatives of political parties; directors speak about politics; painters and sculptors hint to the political situation in their statements; and what is the reason for all this? Politics is their concern, however it creates an anxiety since they can't directly address in their works of art or any other productions. The majority of movies about politics are banned and artistic works that are based on political events, criticize or defend a particular political opinion never get a display permit. As a natural release the artist and the citizen have no option but to chatter! So if this is an introduction to politics, not art, we must once more talk about the background that prompts us Iranians to talk instead of act. It is less dangerous and words are easier to say and they also disappear. Nevertheless growing up in this context the most important thing that I learned was "turning threats into opportunities", and moving to the US. -

“Displacement”- was a threat for me, yet I tried to turn it to an opportunity! I learned displacement is not essentially an unpleasant phenomenon..

Regardless of this quick background, I would like to introduce my art and myself by saying: “Humans, communication, individual conflicts and social discriminations, with allusions to politics, have been the subject of creative practice over time. Context and audience are terms of critical importance in my public practices. With a background in architecture and theater, I strive to build the most comprehensible virtual and physical venues/spaces to convey my thoughts. In my recent works I have focused on the notion of displacement and diaspora. The purest relationship between human and space: Migration. I work predominantly in the medium of performing arts and I try to find the most effective ways to influence an audience by using new media. My research revolves around the core of Middle Eastern studies with emphasis on Iran, social behavior in online networks and the role of art raising awareness.”

### **People Who Have Influenced Me?**

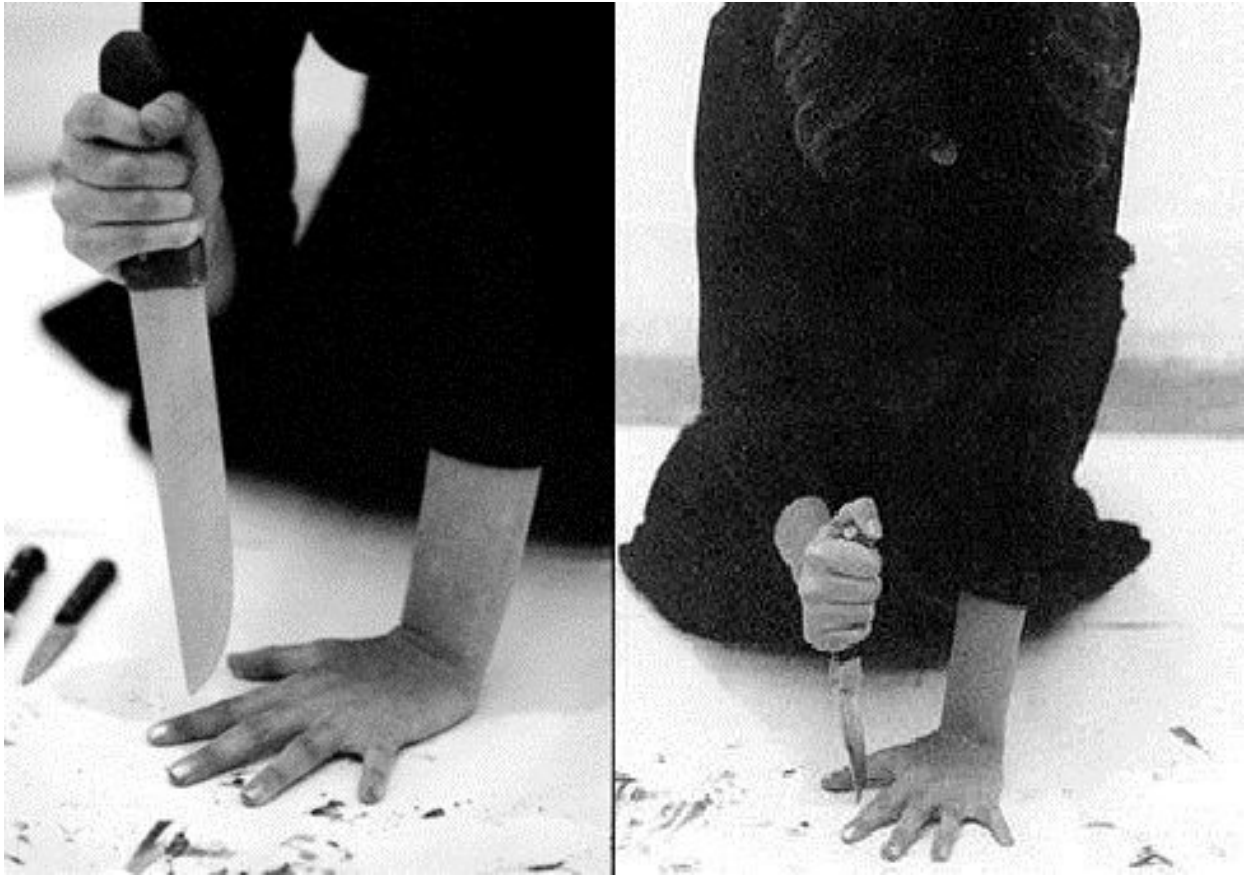
The performance artist Marina Abramović<sup>1</sup> was the first person who really changed my views about making art in relationship to a larger world (who ironically disappoints me with her recent works!) Nonetheless her earlier work gave me a new perception about an artist’s ability to communicate with the audience by using the body, as an operational function of art.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marina Abramović is a Serbian and former Yugoslav artist based in New York, a performance artist who began her career in the early 1970s. Born in 1946.

<sup>2</sup> Rhythm 10 (1973)





Rhythm 10 (1973) - Marina Abramović

Aside from Abramović, Chris Burden<sup>3</sup>, especially his performance piece, called *Shoot* (1971), prompted an interest in social art. The work of both Burden and Abramović had the most significant impact on me as a young person because of their bold usage of performance in their unique brand art that aspired to reach the viewer in a daring manner and each's hope of affecting and changing society.

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher "Chris" Burden is an American artist working in performance, sculpture, and installation art. 1946-1971



*Shoot* (1971).Chris Burden

My familiarity with Chris Burden started from a similar performance, by the same title, however, produced by an Iranian artist called Amir Mobed.<sup>4</sup> In his controversial performance, made in 2010 he was tied to a target and invited the audience to shoot him with a shotgun that was on the ground. Many people actually engaged in this dangerous request yet fortunately he lived despite the risk.

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<sup>4</sup> Installation and environmental artist. Amir Mobed was born in Tehran in 1974. He began making sculptures as early as 1989,



*Come Caress Me (2009). Amir Mobed*

This act familiarized me with a wider range of performance art and enlarged my scope about this genre. From this I learned that by only using form and communicating with the audience does not make a work complete. A relevant concern connected to current social issues, is critically important when making influential performance art. Most of Chris Burden and Marina Abramović's works, which have been enormously influential in my artistic life, evince some form of social criticism. A topic I have been exploring for years centers on the issue that relevant art must be concerned and involved with its society. If it doesn't critique its society and grapple with its flaws, it is work that is shallow, ineffective, and inadequate.

Besides the two artists mentioned above, Pina Bausch<sup>5</sup>, with her peaceful, solid, and extremely beautiful performance of *Café Müller* (1978) has left a powerful imprint on my mind that would never vanish. Control of the performer over her body, the peace and clarity of the performance, and using the objects as part of the performer's body, is a lesson I have learned from her performative work.



*Café Müller* (1978).Pina Bausch

In the field of aesthetics, the first artistic installation that attracted me and gave me a new view about an artist utilizing space was Martin Creed<sup>6</sup>. From his piece *Work No. 200: Half the air in a given space* (2004) and *Work No. 916: Boxes* (2008), I became aware of the acute aesthetics of installation and perhaps his work significantly influenced me aesthetically about the use of size, proportion, space, and objects within an a particular setting. I learned about context and decontextualization through seeing his installation arts.

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<sup>5</sup> Philippina "Pina" Bausch was a German performer of modern dance, choreographer, dance teacher and ballet director.1949-2009

<sup>6</sup> Martin Creed is a British artist and musician. He won the Turner Prize in 2001 for *Work No. 227: The lights going on and off*, which was an empty room in which the lights went on and off at 5 second intervals. Creed lives and works in London. Born in 1968.



*Work No. 200, (2004) Martin Creed*

Abramović, Burden, Creed, and Mobed represent the artists who have been considerably important in the evolution of my artistic character. Parallel to these individuals, my earlier study of architecture has left a critical foundation in the way I approach the making of art. The quotations from Eisenberg, Le Corbusier, Norman Foster, and Louis Sullivan resonate continuously in my mind because of their approach to problem solving and designing. Here is an example: “Less is more!”<sup>7</sup> Additionally the young Danish architect Bjarke Ingels (BIG), has

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<sup>7</sup> phrase adopted by 1947 by architect *Ludwig Mies van der Rohe* as a precept for Minimalist design and architecture

made a radical change in my view of architecture, to a degree that I started looking at architecture as theater. Every line, which is drawn, is a scenario that must communicate with the audience. A place with no scenario, in which the audience cannot be seen, is pointlessly in vain.

### **Being jack of all trades or...?**

In 2011, day-by-day I was floating in parallel worlds of performing arts, literature, architecture, and visual arts. As a result I lacked focus for my creating performances, since I couldn't concentrate on one topic or project. In retrospect I view this time as a type of limbo in which I went from this to that, with nothing satisfying me. I went from university to the architecture studio, and then to the office of the magazines I worked as a journalist and at nights to theater rehearsals. The years 2009-2011 were peculiar; I did seem to be engaged with everything and felt as if nothing was being accomplished. After getting my BA in architecture, when I entered the professional world as a designer, on one hand there was a mania to do everything and on the other hand the professional world was so scary that I preferred to remain an amateur. Inadvertently, I became well known for creating satire in writing numerous columns. I intended to become famous as a satirist and I always wanted to either be a writer or an architect. This was a strange time since numerous magazines and journals wanted me to write for them and higher-level architecture studios accepted my job applications. It appeared that I was increasingly becoming successful yet I was not yet satisfied. I was stuck between satire, architecture, and theatre. However, in 2011 I won a prize of 2000 dollars for play writing, which was very important for me, at that time. This was a play titled "deaf rooster", a musical play with

allusions to a political situation. As a result of this I gave up architecture and focused on theater, yet a type of void existed, with nothing being really gratifying. I was in a type of limbo-land attempting to bring journalism with its connection to real life, to the theater and including architecture into the resulting performance. Bringing architecture to the theater, by being acutely aware of the space and its relevance to the social message being enacted through the performance became significantly vital. I had succeeded to blend the three of them and I started to recognize that the only way to suppress my desire to communicate relevantly was to combine and merge architecture, journalism and art jointly. By combining interdisciplinary fields and interests, one can hope to gain a larger audience and have a bigger impact.

Suddenly it felt as if I had found my way however I had to learn more about blending these different disciplines. This drive to construct a mixture of topics and techniques, technology and culture, theater and industry, space and time posed a huge challenge. It became apparent that I had to get back to the academic world so to learn more about these dissimilar areas in this quest to create a meaningful art through an amalgamation. Finally an awareness of knowing what I aspired to achieve was inspirational although somewhat scary. This period of clarification was concurrent with the demonstrations after 2009 election in Iran, when the candidate of fundamentalists were elected,. This shifting of power in Iran raised social and political concerns prompting a desire to learn and perform. An enhanced familiarity with the power of the virtual world contributed to vast information available from the endless ocean of the Internet.

I tried to further my studies in Iran, but found no place that was available for exploration and production of the disciplines I hoped to combine in my art practice. My friends kept telling

me to leave had been echoed over the years and my denial had reached a tipping point. It was becoming apparent that I had to think about leaving the country if I hoped to advance as an interdisciplinary artist.

In the quest for finding an appropriate place, I searched for months and found several universities that had interdisciplinary graduate art programs. Suddenly I found a school that offered exactly what I was looking for—freedom of choice in media, technique, and topic alongside learning. Carnegie Mellon University surfaced as the perfect place for me to study and experiment and apply my interdisciplinary approaches.

Although the journey to get here and to sustain a practice has had its own difficulties, nonetheless I feel like I made the right choice. The structure of this MFA program has familiarized me with the depths of each of these arts and has given me the power of choosing and the courage to experiment. From journalism, architecture, theater, programming and psychology, each is filling one empty space that I had in my education from Iran and experiences; and I am more eager to produce works of art as a amalgamation of all these subjects.

Undeniably I have always been afraid of being “jack of all trades and master of none”, nevertheless I have no doubt that today’s world is increasingly become one of collaboration and interdisciplinary actions. This is why I have chosen as my final thesis project, to design a virtual theater hall (a combination of architecture, dramatic literature, performance art, and internet technology).



## Chapter 1: An Overview

In this chapter of the thesis I am going to discuss two issues in parallel, and sometimes simultaneously that underlie my practice:

1. The role of art in sociopolitical actions
2. The role of artist in sociopolitical actions

Briefly, the difference between these two points is that sometimes people do engage in social activities, often without knowing how artistic it is, and that they make huge influences. However, often they neither call themselves artists, nor do they expect others to pay any attention to it, yet their action, have artistic features, becomes very influential and Accelerate political movements. Nonetheless sometimes the artist, being aware of his/her knowledge and capabilities, goes beyond the gallery or an exhibition and designs an artistic action that is based on his knowledge, can be encouraging and vital.

This action and reaction can take place in theaters or on the streets. Variety of flash mobs and street performances designed by the artist are included in this category. (There have been different discussions on the effects of art on the society and the artist's responsibility throughout history. Maybe I will discuss this somewhere in the thesis, but it is better to assume that a good artist is one who knows his/her society well and applies art for the betterment of that society. Also the reason I am addressing this issue is the unexampled reflection of such acts in the media.

People will become more aware, whether for the purpose of their awareness or of their provocation. In conclusion, it is anticipated, based on the existing samples and modeling of the

virtual world (according to the mechanism of media), that we can propose one or more patterns for higher effectiveness of art in the virtual world and its transition into the real world.

In the last decade, the world has witnessed several social upheavals that fall within the category known as the “Arab Spring.” Some believe that Iran’s election in 2009 was the starting point of them all, and some others believe it was in Egypt and Tunisia as the point of departure. It does not really matter where it started. This period of time, these actions, and the works of art produced during this time will be the case study of this thesis, in order to objectively research and study the “performativity of social actions”.

Solo or group actions, which have engaged more people and directly or indirectly have accelerated the revolutions or the demonstrations in many Middle Eastern nations. In the first part, a discuss will ensue about those acts that consciously or unconsciously have dramatic (tragedy/comedy,) potential as well as why these social upheavals have resonated making a connection with people and prompted global interest for media audiences. Although government and social/political unrest are interconnected, one needs to inquire, what is the role of art in all this? How does the aesthetic design of posters, profile pictures, or usage of cover pictures factor into the issues of audience impact and communication? How does an artist select the audience he/she desires to reach and how does one determine the optimum way to influence them? One’s aesthetics choices can determine the critical resulting outcome on audience response and what creates the “performativity of the social act in the virtual world.”

## Projects

### Netformance

The main project that has been done based on this theory, and continues, is “Netformance”. In this project, begun in 2012, that I prefer to define as designing a virtual platform for performing arts, I try to use virtual theaters (according to the explanations given before). The intention is to use the Internet and the project’s website to function as either a virtual theater hall or a gallery. The possibility of gathering more artists and reaching a greater audience, without needing to worry about censorship, distance and time was its main priority. The important component in this project is connection. An element that has caused advancement of projects, in the previously mentioned examples; how people get connected and furthered a movement and flow of information was essential.

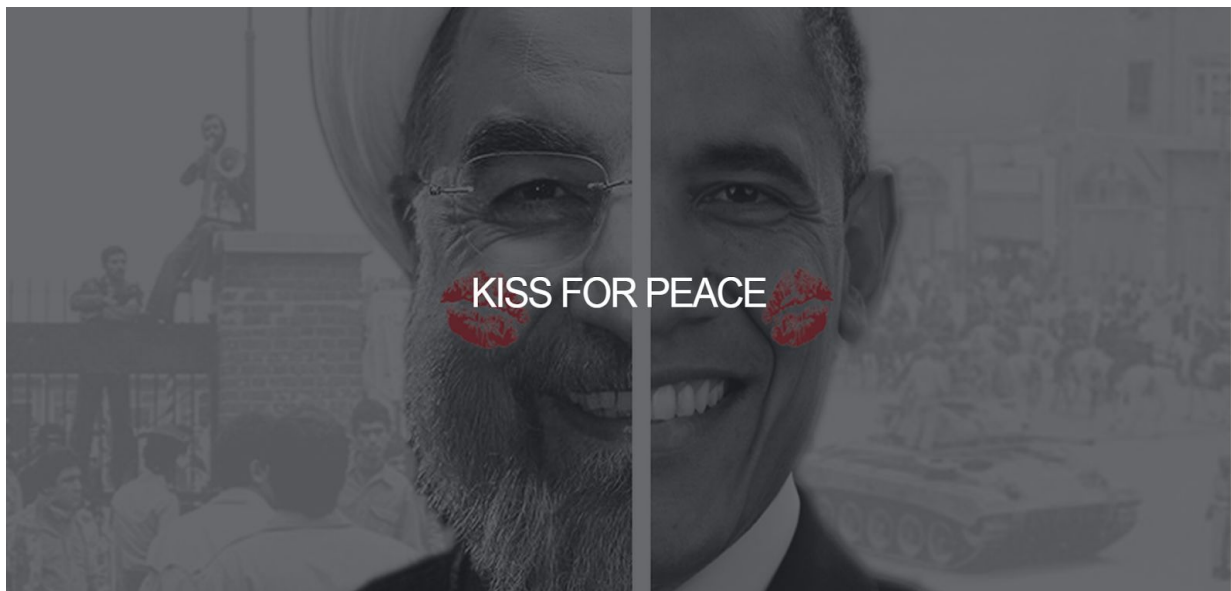


*Netformance(2013), Nima Dehghani*

These performances can take place anywhere or in any situation. To date six projects have been performed through this virtual platform, all of which, considering the social and political situation, have been related to the current issues and trends. In these projects, I have attempted to use the elements and features of the virtual world, instead of performing online, in other words that which cannot be performed in actual theaters.

### **Kiss for Peace**

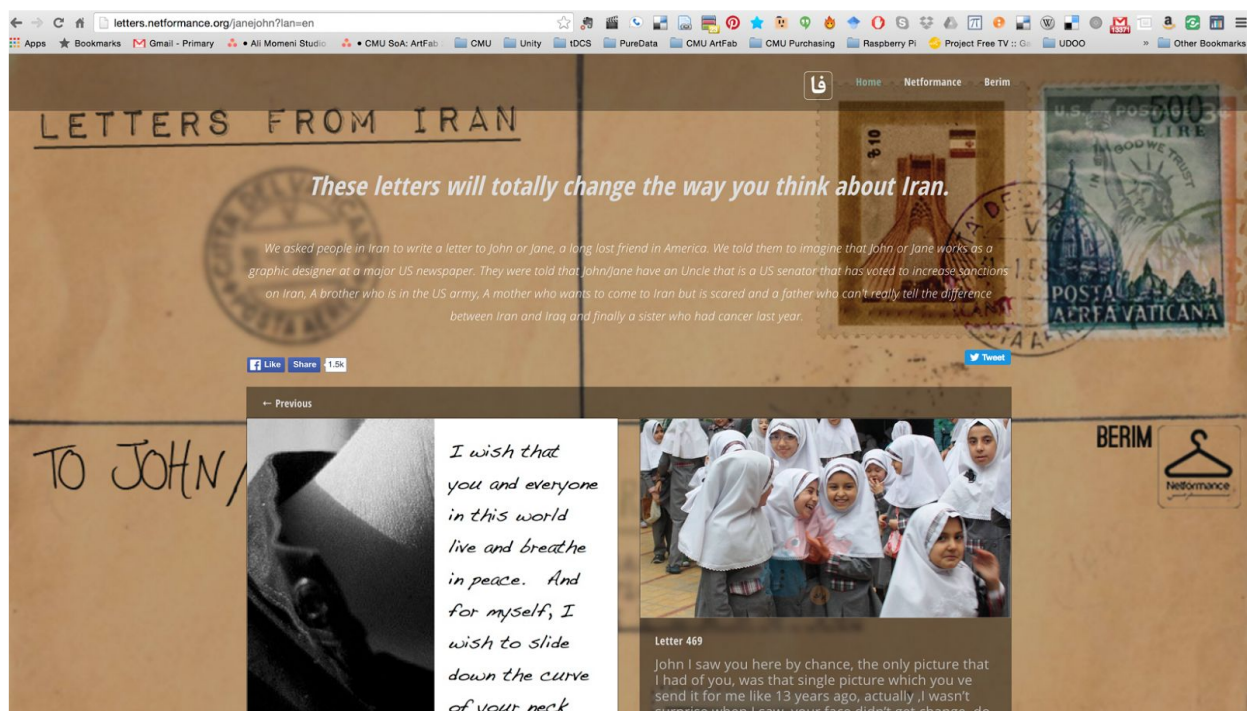
The “Kiss for Peace” 2013 was an online-public piece that represented a participatory act, by the use of Iranians’ producing selfie pictures for Americans and vice versa in which each kissed the image of the leader the pertaining countries. This work was created during the negotiations on Iran’s nuclear program in Geneva. Its intent was to demonstrate a mutual friendship between the Iranian and American people and their effort to have peace.



*KissforPeace(2013),Nima Dehghani*

## Letters

Another project that is related to “Kiss for Peace” titled, “Letters”, was made in 2013. Its intention was to draw attention to the American Congress and to try to help prevent them from applying further sanctions against Iranians. An appeal was made through the practice of creative writing to both Iranians and Americans; each was asked to write letters to each other, wishing one another a happy new year, and to openly speak about the problems resulting from even more the sanctions against Iran. Who ultimately suffers from these sanctions is not the government but many citizens who have not involved with the government. These letters were sent to the US congressmen.



Letters(2013),Nima Dehghani

## Webcam

The “Webcam” 2014 project was another an online performance, inclusive of ten monologues by ten writers and actors, which was enacted in an art gallery in Tehran. Here the performance was made available to a vast group since the online audiences were able to witness the live performance as it unfolded in real time. Whether it was related to the hot trends of the moment or not, it was done as a test run for online theater and virtual audience, based on the experiences of live performances and at the same time making it possible for the audience to comment and affect the performance.



*Webcam(2013), Nima Dehghani*

## Above

The “Above” or “Imaginary Festival,” 2015 embodies another endeavor following the previous virtual events. It was constructed to be a dialogue between Tehran and London. In this work seven artists from Tehran and seven artists from London were invited to design a big imaginary event to be performed on rooftops in Tehran or London. In the Iranian part of the project, fantasy and breaking free from the prevailing daily limitations became the fundamental essence of this piece. In London criticizing the role of politics in art festivals was the main challenge. The final fabrications and final results will eventually be published in form of postcards.

It was good experience for me working on this collaborative project and as well as engaging in the curatorial process. I used this experience in other projects as well as my thesis project.



*Imaginary Performance, Above(2015), Christopher Brat Bailey*

## HomeTweetHome

This work is an attempt to share a personal phenomenon that addresses memory, displacement and coincidence. Sensing familiar images or things in another place that are reminiscent from one's previous life experience and its people can be a disconcerting occurrence. This state of ambiguity or disorientation is often associated with the term liminal that originated in anthropology when referring to states in rituals. However, today it has recently been broadened to describe political and cultural change. According to Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra who wrote "During liminal periods of all kinds, social hierarchies may be reversed or temporarily dissolved, continuity of tradition may become uncertain, and future outcomes once taken for granted may be thrown into doubt."<sup>8</sup>

Victor Turner who re-discovered the importance of Liminality in 1963 posits, "If Liminality is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it potentially can be seen as a period of scrutiny for central values and axioms of the culture where it occurs-- one where normal limits to thought, self-understanding, and behavior are undone."<sup>9</sup> Horvath believes that, liminal situations can be, and in actual fact in modern era, rather quite different: periods of uncertainty, anguish, even existential fear: a facing of the abyss in void."

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<sup>8</sup> Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra, *Introduction: Liminality and Cultures of Change* (International Political Anthropology 2009)

<sup>9</sup> Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage", in *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 156



As an artist who came to Pittsburgh from Iran and has lived in the United States for nearly three years, I have experienced states related to liminality at different times—walking down streets, seeing people, smelling foods, and just being in a particular place stirs up familiar sensibilities from Iran. The originator of this term and the theory Arnold Van Gennep in who in 1909 introduced the concept of liminality to the field of anthropology describes rites of passage such as coming-of-age rituals as having the following three-part structure:

1. Separation
2. Liminal period
3. Reassimilation

Collectively these summarize concerns that underlie my current project *Home tweet Home* which is a continuation of my investigations about immigration, migration, urban life, separation and memory.

Technology capturing an augmented reality is the only plausible media for representation of this experience—it is a two-way relation between feelings and technology. However, memory and longing for one's homeland play a significant role in this project. Furthermore, my concerns spark an association with the realm of the liminal and liminality as mentioned above. Liminality refers to the character of the threshold – whether understood as realized in the event of approach or withdrawal or in the transitory places in which that occurs. Yet whereas the idea of the threshold refers us immediately to something that is both spatial and embodied – the threshold is “that across” which we step, over which we move, in order to enter or depart – the idea of the

liminal refers us to something more general and abstract, but also more associated with the temporal—it fleeting yet enlightening!



*HomeTweetHome(2015)*, Nima Dehghani

It is important to understand values in cross-cultural communication because they serve as multifaceted standards that guide human conduct in a variety of ways. Values are central to comparative understanding of peoples and cross-cultural communication. Both individuals in the Middle East and the United States try to communicate with each other and explain their policies and actions in terms of important values. Yet, one of the greatest difficulties of communication across cultures and studying social values and religion is ethnocentrism. Americans historically have been ethnocentric in judging Middle Easterners and consequently have failed to comprehend the dynamics of Middle Eastern culture, which is complex and cannot be easily categorized. The remedy perhaps lies in what might be called cultural relativism, a concept that

emphasizes the need to study values and social norms of other people within the framework of their culture, not one's own.



*HomeTweetHome(2015), Nima Dehghani*

## **Chapter2**

### **Multiple Displacements**

For the MFA exhibition in the Miller Gallery titled “Decompensation,” the final project of my graduate investigation work, culminated in a study of undefined layers of performance. This work is linked to my past experiences, particularly the Webcam project that I had worked on layers of aliveness. But this time, the focus is on the layers of displacement and the influence of displacement and decontextualization on the audience. I was intended to explore the idea of relocating the audience within the piece, virtually and physically.

### **Decontextualization and displacement**

In my other project titled “Webcam”, the artwork itself was a subject to displace through different platforms. A piece was performed and its consequences was studied through audience's' reactions in various contexts. Whereas in this project, It's the audience who experiences the displacement through context, not the artwork.. In a sense, in both of these projects, “Displacement” is a mutual element that attempts to elevate the effect of the piece. That is a trick to either attract or shock the audience in order to facilitate the cognition process of what the artwork endeavor to communicate This distinction perhaps is similar to the difference if cubism and futurism. Where the Cubists strove to eliminate three-dimensional space and thus bring the image in the picture closer to the observer, although still at a distance, the Futurists attempted to suck the observer into a pictorial vortex. The greatest difference between these two

proto-abstract movements, however, is that the one, Cubism, is concerned with forms in static relationships while Futurism is concerned with them in a kinetic state. In cubism the subject is depicted in a type of 4<sup>th</sup> dimension in which observer is witness to multiple sides of the same object while in futurism the observer a witness of movement and traveling in time.

### **Why do we displace?**

We have seen context alteration in many projects. (Installation in a kitchen, Underwater concert, performances in unconventional environment, etc.). This is usually in favor of

- 1: drawing more attention to the subject
- 2: discovering intact openings in audience's mind to influence ( If a subject was supposed to have an impact using the old attitude, the repetition would be useless)
- 3: Making a mere change in perspective that would result in more hidden aspect to be discovered by the audience.

It seems necessary to deconstruct and modify the details and representative manner to reduce audience distance with the piece first, and then let him/her absorb the concept. For instance in the performance "Sleep no more" the audience members are being directed to a hotel room, and during this transition they hear the narrative and experience the play. The displacement is what makes it striking. The audience enjoys the displacement itself, in space and context, regardless of what is supposed to be communicated through the piece. The makes the piece easier for reception and the story easier to believe. This performance has displaced both the context (theatre stage to a hotel) and the audience. There are so many examples in performances

that move the audience across the city. This displacement and exploration would make audience eager to discover. Then it would make sense to hide the truth somewhere in performance and let the audience navigate through the path and in order to discover the so-called truth for him/herself.

### **Is watching a movie Displacement?**

What does an “image” represent or convey? An image is merely a window. All the media that we watch such as television and cinema are providing windows into these other worlds. Looking at these windows could be counted as “Displacement” back in first days of emergence of motion picture or even photography since it was a new platform to experience a vista or a circumstance. Today motion picture is a rudimentary medium and is losing its believability comparing to days when audiences escaped the theatre because they have “believed” the aliens in the scary movie ("Reaction To Alien Part 1 [The Making Of A L I E N]" 2016.) Now 3d movies and VR are trying to make digital world more attractive and immersive to keep the audience amazed. Although VR protagonists do not feel very optimistic about its future, VR is still a fascinating way to attract the audience. In VR, the structural frame to see the unfolding pageant is provided yet it doesn't want audience in the window, but instead it wants them through the window, on the other side, in the world, inhabiting the world.

One might ask, What is taking happening in this work?

- First displacement: the participant/visitor is in the real world (gallery) and gets into the piece and becomes participant with the displaced individual.

- Second displacement: the virtual space is in itself a picture of another place yet is connected to the real world.
- Third displacement: the participant's transitions between different stages (between real world and virtual world)
- Fourth displacement (which is potential): their edited image is largely displayed in the real space.

### **The Value of Time and Place**

What does a viewer look for in an image or a picture of something?

Taking pictures is capturing moments of a particular time and place and they aid us in recalling the memory as well as preserving significant moments those of us and for future generations. By taking artistic pictures, moments and relations with aesthetic values can be made. News images notify the audience and give them information from another place that they are not in or familiar with. An artist can complicate, beautify and even design a transition method between two points and hence convey more information and better feeling to the audience. This is what liveness in art means. In my piece in which I designed multiple displacements I tried to bridge the actual time/reality with virtuality, many times, then the value of time would be perceived more than always. (Imagine a time machine, and it sending you to another place. You would notice the time change through travel, through relocating in new spaces and new contexts. Dependent if one is traveling into the past or future would determine what one might encounter and see. In this

project with its different stages and frequent transition through the shifting stages I lead them through a type of travel emotional time and ambiguous space.



*The Time Machine*(1960), George Pal

### What is “image”?

What is a picture? asks Lacan in his 11th seminar: “*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*”<sup>10</sup>. Lacan’s original formulation of the gaze is something like a pastiche: he winds noncommittally through the concepts of Sartre’s and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the gaze, attesting to both their usefulness and limitations. In other words, Lacan’s theory of the gaze in *Seminar XI* is not, at least initially, original at all nor does it appear to be terribly rigorous: he analogizes with them, criticizes them, and assigns them an indeterminate validity before finally appropriating them (this could explain the ubiquitous confusion surrounding the

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<sup>10</sup> Lacan, *Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, 1998.



concept of the Lacanian gaze). However, by a certain reading, we can see Lacan selective advance several promising aspects of these original phenomenological accounts before integrating them in a final analysis. As Athena V. Colman notes in her essay —Lacan’s Anamorphic Object: Beneath Freud’s *Unheimlich* the phenomenological gaze of Sartre becomes properly psychoanalytic when it is paired with Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the chiasm; i.e., the phenomenological unison of active and passive implied in the act of touching and seeing.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Touch and Sight**

“The immediate experience of the lived body appears to be founded on the sense of touch in contradistinction to the rest of the senses. The dominant position of touch in Husserl’s philosophy is evident in the long quote above from Cartesian Meditations: touch is either the first or the only example epitomizing the ego’s ability to control and manipulate, directly and at will, its organs of sensation. In %37 Ideas too, entitled “Differences between the Visual and Tactual Realms”, Husserl theorizes that “the privilege of the localization of the touch sensations”, that reveals the instrumentality of that particular sense in the constitution of the body proper. He leaves no doubt as to the primacy of touch in relation to sight. A subject whose only sense was the sense of vision could not at all have an appearing Body; [...] The Body as such can be constituted originally only in actuality and in everything that is localized with the sensations of

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<sup>11</sup> "What is a Picture?": The Role of Lacan’s Theory the Gaze, Anamorphosis and Chiasm in the Formation of the Subject in Seminar XI, Ian Delairre

touch: for example, warmth, coldness, pain, etc. [...] [The Body] becomes a Body only by incorporating tactile sensations.”<sup>12</sup>

The differentiation between touch and sight is grounded in the latter’s deficiency: the eye is never in immediate contact with the seen object; moreover, the eye cannot be seen directly by the seeing eye, it cannot optically be given to the ego in an unmediated way. The mediation of external space and a mirror is necessary so that I could look, always indirectly, at my eyes. With respect to the prosthesis of a mirror, Husserl claims: “I see something, of which I judge indirectly, by way of "empathy", that it is identical with my eye as a thing [...] in the same way that I see the eye of another”<sup>13</sup>

Based on these concepts, and returning to the idea of participants’ gestures, I want to focus on their bodies’ unconscious movements, film them, capture them and use the interesting moments as a separate photo, animation or even a collection of them in a figurative video installation by framing each as a segment and a secondary purpose of the piece.

I would like to challenge the audience based on the idea of ‘mirror stage’ by Lacan: “The young child's identification with his own image (what Lacan terms the "Ideal-I" or "ideal ego"), a stage that occurs anywhere from 6-18 months of age. For Lacan, this act marks the primordial recognition of one's self as "I," although at a point before entrance into language and the symbolic order. This stage's misrecognition or *méconnaissance* (seeing an ideal-I where there is a fragmented, chaotic body) subsequently "characterizes the ego in all its structures"<sup>14</sup>. In

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<sup>12</sup> Ian Delairre, "What is a Picture?": The Role of Lacan’s Theory the Gaze, Anamorphosis and Chiasm in the Formation of the Subject in Seminar XI

<sup>13</sup> Eftichios Pirovolakis, *Derrida and Husserl’s Phenomenology of Touch: “Inter” as the Uncanny Condition of the Lived Body*

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

particular, this creation of an ideal version of the self gives preverbal impetus to the creation of narcissistic phantasies in the fully developed subject. That fantasy image of self can be filled in by others who we may want to emulate in our adult lives (role models, et cetera), anyone that we set up as a mirror for ourselves. The mirror stage establishes what Lacan terms the "imaginary order" and, through the imaginary, continues to assert its influence on the subject even after the subject enters the symbolic order. See the Lacan Module on Psychosexual Development.”

### **Virtual Reality**

Virtual Reality (VR), also referred to as immersive multimedia, is an environment simulated by computer. It can simulate physical presence in places in real world or imaginary world. Sensory experiences including virtual sight, taste, smell and Virtual Reality can recreate touch.

### **How does the audience react to the VR phenomenon?**

As an artist, it was very amusing, exciting and challenging to work with VR technology and to address the world of VR. On one hand, I did not want to play the role of a game designer, and on the other hand, I wanted to pursue my artistic role in this project using that technology. As a result, I decided to remain an amateur yet be a professional artist. Thus, the best thing was to get a general knowledge and familiarity of this phenomenon and then examine it from various angles. I have chosen to work through a process of subtraction, displacement, reemphasis and replacement.

## Gestures

One of the very attracting aspects of VR is to observe the people who are using it; observing the participants or the audience who engage in the virtual space and enter a new world from the moment they put on the headset is enthralling. Continuing my researches on displacement—this displacement phenomena became very important to me; the fact that people are in the real world and the ones around them can see and touch them, but they completely fade away, into the virtual world.

Maybe VR is still new and unknown and not enough attention has been paid to this aspect of it, but paying attention to the below pictures are primarily interesting, secondly scary, and thirdly thought provoking. Virtual realities artificially create sensory experience, which can include sight, touch, hearing, and smell.

It is scary how people can descend into the virtual world since the immersive environment can be similar to the real world in order to create a lifelike experience. With the walls they build around themselves and considering their understanding of reality and their conception of their own body, after a while they move away from the physical world and enter another world.

The reaction of people to what they see in the VR and their gestures are very interesting for the audience. When engaged in the technology of VR and its unfolding pageantry people cannot see their own body and oft become unconscious about their gestures. They tend to resemble their self and their usual body movements tend to mutate into someone who is stumbling in the dark or perhaps is imbibed.

The difference is that this is only the effect of the 3D images they see in the VR, not alcohol. People sink into another world without thinking about their movements. But sometimes they try to think about it and that's when they get cognition without touching.

### **Concept**

I have always been interested in immigrants' stories, the notion and difficulties of displacement, and making empathetic works about refugees' lives to raise the knowledge about their situation, also to get the audience engaged with work to put themselves on their positions.

I started my research on the psychological, social and cultural aspect' of refugees' lives. Based on the interviews with immigrants and refugees that I had done for my earlier projects "telepuppet" during the second year of graduate student, I collected a range of their stories using specialized puppets. I was collecting a good amount of materials to write the script until I found this article on Internet titled "Psychological stages of the refugee process: A model for therapeutic interventions by Carlos J. Gonsalves,"<sup>15</sup> which was based on 1500 interviews with Latin American refugees, and the summary of the article was: "Five stages are described through which refugees pass: early arrival, destabilization, exploration and re-stabilization, return to normal life, and decompensation."<sup>16</sup> I became deeply inspired by these five stages and focused on each stage so to explore each one through VR videos.

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<sup>15</sup> Carlos J. Gonsalves, Psychological stages of the refugee process: A model for therapeutic interventions, *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, Vol 23(5), Oct 1992

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

**Medium**

Having worked in different fields: design, architecture, visual arts, performing arts and video art, and always-social practice have been my concern. It was imperative that my thesis represented a combination of all of my skills and interests, a multimedia piece using my experiences also following my passion to experiment with new technologies and new media. I can acknowledge that this thesis project represents a summation of what I've aspired to accomplish years ago. It represents that which I set out to achieve during this period of grad school.

**Politics and VR**

Before and after I did this project I was being asked frequently “ why did you use VR headsets instead of 360 doms? Why do you separate the audience and make this with isolated cells?” I intended to have my pictures in your head, and I wanted to have viewers inside my pictures. I don't like it when people are immersed in their cell phones constantly and don't pay any attention to their acute surroundings, at the same time that I'm challenging this culture, but I want them to choose to see my piece and to get into the depth of my piece because I believe people get more sensitive and ready to absorb and think in their loneliness. I had experienced the idea of individual theater and cell-like venues in “The Manual” in 2012, that the audience could get into the isolated room with a vending machine in, then see and interact with the performer inside the machine, and experience the play individually. It gives the audience the right to choose and at the same time criticizes the core of totalitarian governments power.



*The Manual* (2012), Nima Dehghani

Personal world of virtual reality may suffer from a degree of closure, isolation and disappointment. The same closure that “... the designers of mid-century democratic surrounds would have abjured. Surrealists, Russian Constructivists, and fascists all designed multimedia environments that aimed to melt away the individuality of viewers. To that end, their multimedia environments tended to stress continuous, uninterrupted imagery, often of faceless crowds or abstract forms. In contrast, for Bayer and Steichen and those who took up the democratic surround thereafter, it was up to the audience to put the different pieces of the expressive puzzles together. By doing so, they could put *themselves* together, and experience a kind of democratic self-realization in the process.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Turner, Fred. 2016. "The Politics Of Virtual Reality". The American Prospect. <http://prospect.org/article/politics-virtual-reality>.

So, I found this medium most appropriate for the way that I have chosen to criticise politics, and the role of media in transformation of information. And started to think about how media and politics interact.

“ To date, most approaches to the issue derive from the century-old insights of Walter Lippmann. In 1922, reacting in part to the role of the media in World War I propaganda, Lippmann had become increasingly afraid for American democracy. Media, wrote Lippmann, put “pictures in our heads.”<sup>18</sup> These pictures become all we know of the world beyond what we see in person, with our own eyes, or touch with our own fingers. They provide the grounds on which we decide whom to vote for, and more generally, what kinds of issues and people we see as important. In Lippmann’s view, those who have the power to paint and circulate the pictures, and to exclude alternative worldviews, also have an unlegislated power to shape our politics.”<sup>19</sup>

Also, in 360-degree video the idea of surrounding the audience with images was so important for me. Edward Steichen and Bauhaus refugee Herbert Bayer used in the project “Road to Victory”.this same idea. In this undertaking, visitors were presented with a pathway through a series of poignant imagery. Included in this project were pictures of the American landscape, ordinary citizens, the attack on Pearl Harbor and in the end they arrived at a wall-sized mural of marching American troops punctuated by large, pullout portraits of individual citizens.

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<sup>18</sup> Turner, Fred. 2016. *The Politics Of Virtual Reality*. The American Prospect.  
<http://prospect.org/article/politics-virtual-reality>

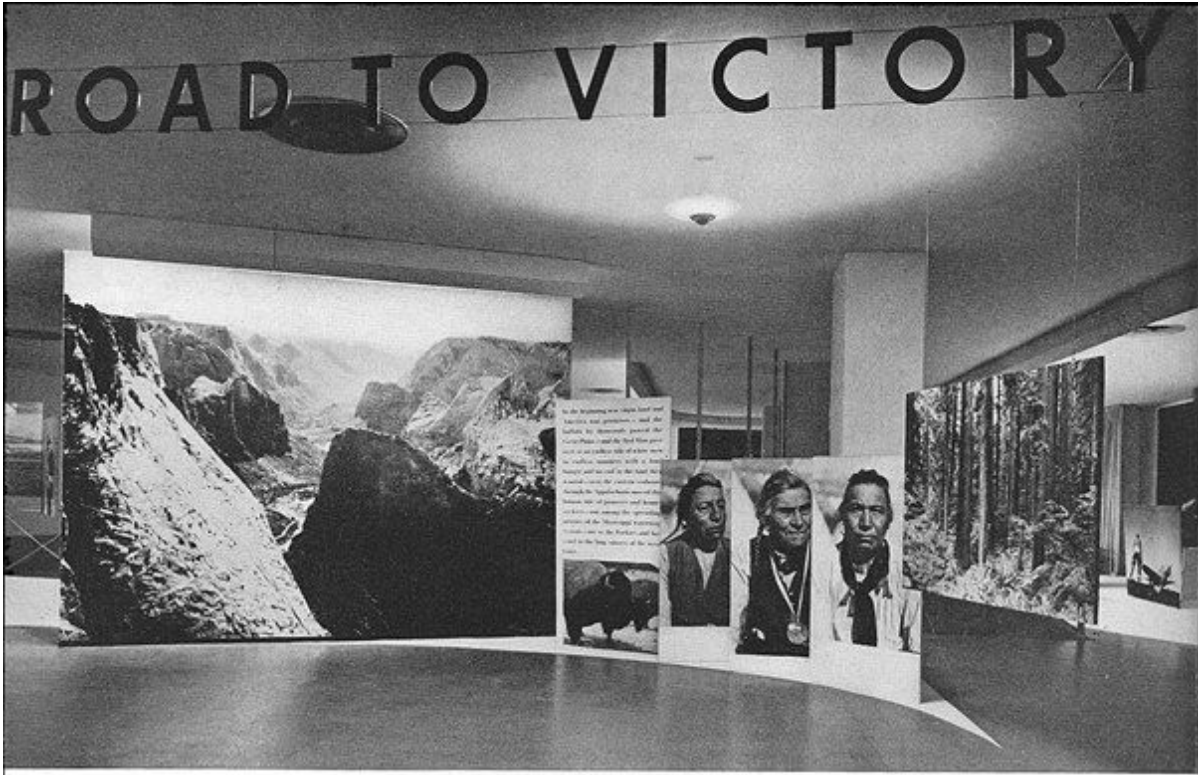
<sup>19</sup> Ibid





*Road to Victory (1912)*, Edward Steichen and Herbert Bayer

The design of the show was new, unlike a traditional display of pictures. If this were a conventional exhibition, visitors would probably have entered a square room with same sized photographs mounted in sequence at eye level. However, in “Road to Victory” the images would be found anywhere from high over the visitors’ heads to down by their feet or colliding with one another at strange angles. It was not a gallery with white walls, but a twisting pathway through a world of images. The design of the show excited the audience, according to newspaper critics. Viewers would move from image to image, looking up, down, clustering in front of colliding pictures or pausing in a gap between them. Each audience could have an independent experience, they could individually choose where to pay attention to and make meaning of the world around them in their own way. As one reviewer put it, the exhibition did not “mold” visitors’ opinions, “for that word smacks of the Fascist concept of dominating men’s minds.”



*Road to Victory* (1912), Edward Steichen and Herbert Bayer

The show's design felt so liberating to artists and designers of that in its era it went on to become a model for some of the most influential exhibitions and performances of the next several decades.

### **Empathy machine**

In this project, staged empathy is designed as a new framework to observe how ardent feelings are provoked by 360-degree video performance. In recent years, renewed interest towards virtual reality has been to the point called by journalists and practitioners an “empathy

machine”.<sup>20</sup> The concept of empathy is defined as “inner imitation for the purpose of gaining knowledge of another”. Virtual reality work engages with empathy but there is no critical method to analyze how.

### **VR storytelling and refugees crisis**

During my research on recent projects I located many VR projects about refugees. Different projects have been embarked on with the purpose of generating empathy and sharing with others the complicated plight. There are several projects that associate deeply with your emotion.



*Clouds Over Sidra*, (2015), Chris Milk and Gabo Arora

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<sup>20</sup> Chris Milk, *How virtual reality can create the ultimate empathy machine*, TedTalk 2015  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/chris\\_milk\\_how\\_virtual\\_reality\\_can\\_create\\_the\\_ultimate\\_empathy\\_machine?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/chris_milk_how_virtual_reality_can_create_the_ultimate_empathy_machine?language=en)

“Clouds Over Sidra, is a virtual reality film for the United Nations in partnership with Samsung. The film was commissioned as part of the UN’s advocacy at the World Economic Forum in Davos to state and business leaders and offers a unique perspective into the lives of the world’s most vulnerable people. “Clouds Over Sidra” follows a twelve year old in the Za’atari camp in Jordan – home to 84,000 Syrian refugees. It follows her to school, to her makeshift tent and even to the football pitch.”<sup>21</sup>

Other examples from other storytelling mediums that include “audience involvement” have been played with, like in game design and porn industry but they are surprisingly unsuccessful compared to their truly linear counterparts.

### **Documentary performance and VR**

This was my first time that I wanted to make a documentary performance, based on scientific articles. It’s not just a video, it’s not just a documentary performance, and it perhaps can be seen as a multidisciplinary work that can be considered a spherical video performance installation.

“The documentary genre has certainly flourished in 360 video. It clearly feels tremendously affecting to be in a refugee camp. Nothing is being asked of them. They can just look around and witness. You could argue this takes away some of the magic of the true documentarian artiste, who will build the *mise en scene* for maximum effect, but there’s no denying it’s a powerful empathy hit. But it doesn’t require us to HAVE to see something happen, like linear narrative might. Fictional or genre based narrative stories aren’t always afforded the

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<sup>21</sup> "The United Nations – Clouds Over Sidra." *Vrse.works*. N.p., n.d. Web. 08 May 2016.

luxury of a voice over. Many of my VR projects have started earnestly as VR ‘stories’, but ultimately descended into something akin to voyeuristic explorations, full of audio or action cues designed to attract your attention to one part of the world, so that we can deliver something we feel is key. This is problematic to say the least. And always brings up the most frustrating of questions. What’s the point of doing this in VR? Wouldn’t this be better served in 16:9? I ask every new VR content maker to ask themselves this question on a regular basis.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cartel Communique, *Why VR “Storytelling” does not currently work. And can it ever work?.* *Medium*. N.p., 11 Jan. 2016. Web

## Chapter3

### Final Project: Decompensation

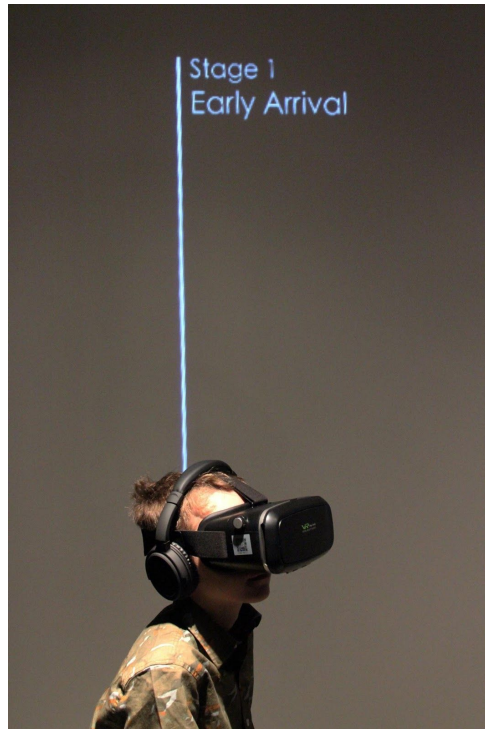
Through the five stages, I faced different challenges. In each stage I used different techniques and ideas and based on the scripts each scene was designed. Below is a summary of scenic design, gesture design, filming and editing techniques that I used to generate the best experience for the audience.



*Decompensation* (2016), Nima Dehghani

#### Stage 1: Early Arrival

In this first stage newcomers, despite inappropriate cultural behaviors, tend to remain cognitively and emotionally defended from awareness of their cultural errors. In their terms, applicability is less than adequate and clarity is more than adequate. For Stage 1, Early Arrival, as with the other stages that follow, I attempt to describe typical refugee experiences, discuss the stage design and animation technique as well as the audience gesture while watching it.



*Decompensation* (2016), Nima Dehghani

In this stage refugees arrive at a host country with a variety of behavioral and affective responses. Behaviorally, many are confused and disorganized and continue to live in the host country almost as though they were still in their own homeland. Affectively, refugees report reactions ranging from a sense of abandonment and utter despair to feelings of relief and excitement. They have escaped the trauma leading to their flight however, they simultaneously feel the loss of their own country and the estrangement of their host countries.

The video in this stage attempts to depict the moment the refugee leaves behind all his belongings, bonds, city and memories and the loss he experiences. This is a critical stage since it opens up the project's narrative. However, I intended to take a neutral or unbiased view and

avoid implanting a perception into observer's mind. Therefore the image is simple, abstract, and minimal.

The camera's angle and circular pattern within as well as performer's action speed is designed in a way in which the stage's dynamic and general sense is reflected. In Stage 1 we only have one front image and one back image (performer is standing in the front and there exist a tempting light in the back.) merely to inform the audience about the spherical space he is observing and the 360-degree rotation capability.



*Decompensation* (2016), Nima Dehghani

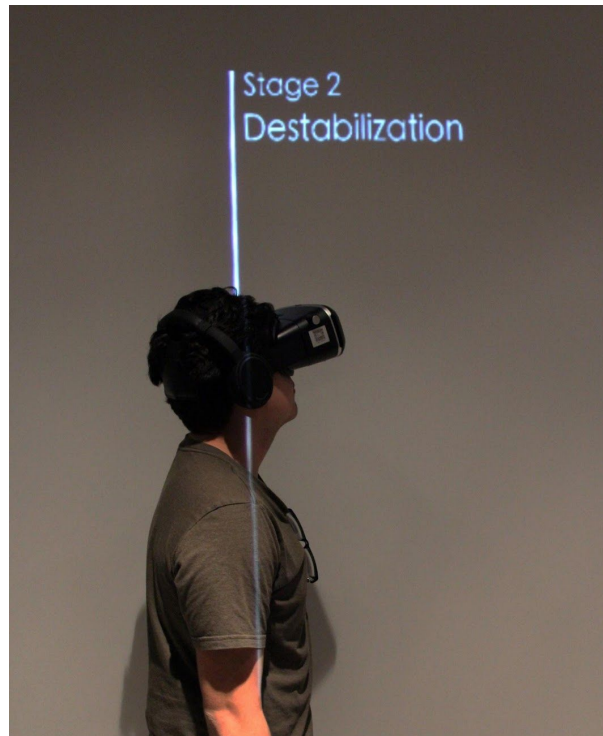
This phase shows the path refugees take usually. An abstracted reference to the familiar tragic scene of the sinking boat let the audience immerse more deeply while the image is moving faster and calls for faster rotation and movement of the audience.

### **Stage 2: Destabilization**

Destabilization is a stage characterized by major upset and crises. It captures the stress and demands ongoing during the transition from the homeland to the host country. Cognitive and behavioral destabilization is crucial in making possible the intercultural learning of the



succeeding stages. During this stage, applicability and clarity drop below levels of mere adequacy.



*Decompensation* (2016), Nima Dehghani

Stage 2 is experienced as extremely stressful and painful by newcomers. Cognitive distortions no longer work, and individuals are confronted by the need to make sense out of the new culture they are encountering. As Grove and Torbiorn expressed it, some flee (retreat to a ghetto), some fight (remain hostile to the new culture), and others “go native” (uncritically ape the new culture). Such strategies may work for a while, but when used over a long period of time they typically lead to more intense conflict. In terms of time, Stage 2 can last as long as 3–4 years.



*Decompensation* (2016), Nima Dehghani

Once the immediate sociocultural and psychological shocks of relocation recede, the need to survive economically looms as the major psychological preoccupation of refugees within 3–6 months after their arrival. For refugees, economic need, even more than crumbling cognitive defenses, forces them to make some accommodations to the new culture. Thus, the pressure of economic survival leads refugees to move beyond merely replicating life in the ‘homeland’ to genuine culture learning. These economically driven changes can also have important psychological consequences. Problems with the language of the host country often leave refugees who are skilled workers or professionals unable to find equivalent employment. Thus, anger begins to surface and resistance to learning the new culture is often expressed openly.



*Decompensation* (2016), Nima Dehghani

Simple and familiar symbols are used to represent this stage in a 360 degree atmosphere. The audience's patchy and interrupted movement and rotation also reflects the stress and anger of this scene.

### **Stage 3: Exploration and Re-stabilization**

Stage 3, is seen by Grove and Torbiorn (1985) as being one of "progressive recovery" (p. 215) from the impact of the host country's differences in cognitive worldview and customary behavioral patterns. Applicability now rises above adequacy (refugees thus experience a renewed sense of stability), but clarity continues to be less than adequate (they continue to strive for understanding and test different explanations).



*Decompensation* (2016), Nima Dehghani

The exploration and restabilization stage tends to occur 3–5 years after migration depending on the management of the previous stage. The major characteristic of this stage is that refugees are experimenting with different cultural learning strategies because clarity is not yet firmly established. For instance, refugees continue to ask, “How do I fit into a mainly North American workplace?” or “How do I make friends with North American neighbors?”



*Decompensation* (2016), Nima Dehghani

The 360-degree camera is used here and based on the idea of finding oneself and we move from the abstract space to the real world. Metaphorically, the scene resembles a jungle and “dissolving in context” is represented using the chrome technique-editing tool. The video directs audience head rotating fast and frequent as if there is a hide and seek game going on. In another part of this stage, focusing on the communication theme, we see a party going on in which the performer would dance with you virtually and calls for the audience interaction. Here I took advantage of all the facilities that virtual reality yields —Immersive video, and 360-degree video would offer, in order to turn the mere observer into an active participant.

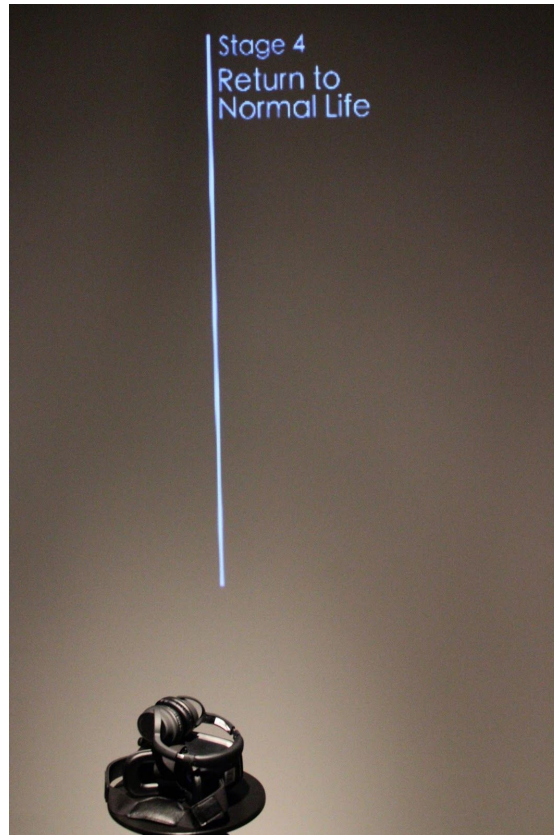




*Decompensation* (2016), Nima Dehghani

#### **Stage 4: Return to Normal Life**

By Stage 4, designated here as a return to normal life, the process of linkage to the host country has mostly been accomplished. Applicability is high and clarity improves beyond mere adequacy. The host country that the individual experienced initially as new and exciting, then as confusing and even threatening, now becomes a routine backdrop for daily life.



*Decompensation* (2016), Nima Dehghani

The major characteristic of refugees at this stage is their ability to learn effectively the beliefs and behaviors of the new culture. They have selected the particular values of their native culture to retain in their self concepts, and they have come to respect and to understand the values of their new country. They have achieved some compromise between their former life commitments and the possibilities of the new culture. However, the struggle for refugees is often not complete. Family transitions, such as when their children enter adolescence, can be expected to produce renewed conflicts for them. It is such intergenerational conflict that now leads to

psychological discomfort and feelings of loss.



*Decompensation* (2016), Nima Dehghani

360-degree camera is also used in this stage. Here we see more still images that are still and neutral. Audience would move smooth and slowly. You can perceive the calmness through audience reaction to the video.

### **Stage 5: Decompensation**

In stage 5, there was a 360-degree environment again, but I decided to use not more than 30 degrees of it. Everything is as slow, as neutral and as senseless as possible. I intended to visually demonstrate the sensation of decompensation, to define “decompensation” by image, by performance. Here is a definition of this word :



# de·com·pen·sa·tion

/dēˌkɑmpənˈsɑʃ(ə)n/

noun MEDICINE

the failure of an organ (especially the liver or heart) to compensate for the functional overload resulting from disease.

- PSYCHIATRY

the failure to generate effective psychological coping mechanisms in response to stress, resulting in personality disturbance or disintegration, especially that which causes relapse in schizophrenia.



### **Custom Design**

Custom design played an important role in the project. The performer's clothing was chosen to be deliberately simple, ornament-less and black, since clothing is more than just a cover in this project. It is an element representing the appearance of refugee's presence in society and how he is known. Custom also narrates the story of apparent adaptation to the context through different stages.



*Decompensation* (2016), Nima Dehghani

“When you photograph people in color, you photograph their clothes. But when you photograph people in Black and white, you photograph their souls!”<sup>23</sup>

### **Feedback, review and conclusion**

The project *Decompensation* is done, the thesis show is finished.. After the formal opening reception of the exhibition, it had over two hundred viewers during the two-week duration of the show, I started asking myself, why am I using VR? Other significant questions surfaced as a result of this investigation. I fabricated this project, and continued to ask such questions again, and, again, and answered them as a type of self reflective interview as provided below.

#### **1. Why use VR to tell this story?**

VR provides a combination of storytelling and technology. As a playwright and storyteller, I am always asking, “How can I bring the viewer closer into the story?” When there are events like the refugee crisis, it’s hard to put into words what exactly is being seen and felt. VR captures emotion and feeling. You are standing there on a beach and you look out on the water and at any given time you can spot 12 different refugee boats. Sometimes there are volunteers and it’s happening in front and behind and there is emotion and fear. VR really captures those feelings. But I didn’t want to make a documentary VR, it doesn’t matter if you

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<sup>23</sup> Fayle, Thelma, and Ted Grant. *Ted Grant: Sixty Years of Legendary Photojournalism*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print.,208

feel you're in the world of refugees, it matters when you just get a sense of what has happened to them. I just wanted to tell a neutral story based on real experiences.

## **2. What were the challenges with this project?**

Since the stage is spherical, you should be concerned about all angles and what's happening in each part of the video, I've learned how to design classical or experimental sets aesthetically and compositionally, however, this 360 VR environment has its own difficulties, one needs to be aware of every details: the varying motions as well as the performer's action, not only inside the goggles, but also the viewer's interactions with the video needs to be pre-studied, because even one wrong movement can ruin the viewer's experience.

## **3. How do you set up a shot with VR?**

There is no single frame in VR. The shot you're taking is above, below, and around. The tradition frame is removed. You're not just thinking what fits in a 16 by 9 window, but you are thinking about what's behind and in front of you.

## **4. What kind of reaction results from the story shared?**

Some people have watched the first stage - "Early Arrival"- and immediately wanted to leave and check other pieces. (Maybe because of the length of the first video, or perhaps not, understanding the idea that they can turn around and explore the videos was helpful). However, others were interested to experience the other sequential stages of the narrative. But there have

been several instances where people take off the goggles and they're so impressed. Yet in an immersive environment they were able to do that. And for me as an artist and storyteller, this is a positive sign that some type of communication is ensuing. That it is emotionally moving people prompting them to be sympathetic and perhaps do something.

### **5. What do viewers see that they wouldn't see in a more traditional photos and text, or 2-D video story?**

It was desired to put the viewer right there in the moment with the refugee-performer. By being enclosed within the technological equipment, he/she is closer to the action, however not only nearer, one becomes part of the scene with the performer. After the second stage (8 to 10 minutes) it is hoped that the viewer would feel totally immersed in that world.

It could be shown as a 360 video installation or dome video projection, but I liked the sense of being isolated, and sharing that moment only with a single individual, because it is all about personal internal feeling, so 360 degree video could not facilitate the process of conveying such personal responses and feelings.

We could be refugees, easily, just being born in another time, another place would have changed our lives, using this technology I'm just giving a visitor to this piece a chance to experience an essence of what being a refugee might be like in the 20 minutes of the narrative work. The individuals experiencing displacement could be us. They like many of us only want stability. They want their children to be educated. They want to go to the movies or have dinner

or a dance party with a friend. They want to make a life for themselves. They want a life. The viewer just see a concise summary of what would happen to them through their disturbing journey. With this set design I am attempting to relocate the viewer, displacing the objects and humans through some playful rules and actions, like what “forced migration” does. Again, I don’t want to show the reality of their lives, just a glance of what they feel. My piece is just a video work that I chose to show employing cellphones with more angles. Current technology is only a tool or vehicle to make this experience more pleasant and impressive.

**What is the next step, how would I develop this project in the future?**

I definitely want to continue working on this project. Using this immersive technology and sharing stories of displacement continue to be focal points of my work. After completing this piece, it is evident that I need to delve further to develop this project. Firstly, I aim to make it more interactive. Because of economic restraints I was limited to using limited technology that influenced the outcome of the project. In the future, higher quality cameras, as well as improved recording, lighting, filming and screening equipment would be used. This will have a significant effect on users experience. In order to begin capturing a refugee’s complex range of experiences, it will be necessary to collect a diverse range of stories, conduct more interviews from an array of individuals with varying point of views. Furthermore, as I embark on developing this project I will not be restricted by the time restraints of completing a body of

work to be exhibited in the MFA exhibition. This project is the beginning and a demonstration of my synthesis of working in an interdisciplinary manner as an artist and social communicator.

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