

VESSELS OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY:

This is my intension to analyse whether my drawing practice can react to the geographical forces that I have experienced as an immigrant to recognize the collective of political equality and injustice?

Exploration of my cultural origins leads me to find inner harmony that has a fundamental meaning for my practice. My drawing follows a very personal experience of displacement. Going through this dislocating journey makes me experiment lack of a sense of place. On the other hand, along this path, I have been exposed to various opposite terms and situations. Most of these significant contrasts are much more closely tied to a series of associations and networks of mental and contextual pieces brought into my life experience choice. They dominate largely in my memories where I have forced myself to adapt to living in two contrasting worlds of Iran and Canada. After significant episodes such as a movement, immigration, revolution and a war in a life time, similar to my experience, memory will become a fact in a human body rather than just an instinct. After a while, my memories become shards and shreds of my personality creating the structure of who I am. In my situation, I am treating history and memory with the same value to indicate my wish to seek sanctuary and revive intertwined memories of culture and heritage over my personal memories reconstruction.

Opposing spatial experiences build a new platform to express my chaotic perceptions of the places that I have lived in. By introducing the contrary conditions simultaneously, I want to represent facing both restriction and freedom. To host these contrasts/contradictions of my memory collection, I will translate them into codes/diagrams by referring to basic geometry. Each of the physical places and emotional moments I have lived in have their own symbols in my mind. Collecting data based on these symbols/memories will help me create a directory of images. A sense of the past, present and future including memory, myth and trauma drives me forward to react and connect to my origins. In referring to my memory collection, the cultural content defines those memories as much as my mental screens. "After all, remembering involves more than just recall of facts, as various mental filters that are quite independent of those facts nevertheless affect the way we process them in our minds..." (Zerubavel, 2003). The cultural content is the fact of Iran's political and social situation over the last three decades which reveals all of the conflicts that have affected my life. Growing up while I was facing different contradictions between my beliefs and my society's religious legislations taught me I was living in layers of lies around me where I had to put on a mask in order to survive within that society. 'If the source of the both-and phenomenon is contradiction, its basis is hierarchy, which yields several levels of meanings among elements with varying values, it can include elements that are both good and awkward, big and little, closed and open, continuous and articulated; round and square, structural and spatial. An architecture which includes varying levels of meaning breeds ambiguity and tension.' (Venturi, 1966)

The idea of hierarchy: ‘which yields several levels of meanings among elements with varying values,’ in meaning of spaces and the movement towards contradiction is a key direction for my study inspired by the great Robert Venturi. He specifically talks about architecture but his theory could be expanded to my drawing practice in which I am trying to find out a connection or relationship between all the contrasts I have been exposed to during my life journey.

Through this new process in my practice, there are three key contemporary artists whose works and ideas more closely related to my art practice. One of these artists is *Ernesto Neto*. His artworks challenge his viewers’ different senses simultaneously in a way to examine people’s reaction towards physical and emotional boundaries of space. My intension is to use his concept to come up with an idea to incorporate my architectural knowledge into my drawing practice. As an architect, my training has led me to think and draw in three dimensions. This could be a great practice for me to put together the viewers’ spatial experience of my art piece and the impact of digital design. Neto’s idea to incorporate the architectural spaces as part of his installation is a



Figure 1- *Leviathan Thot*, Neto, 2006.

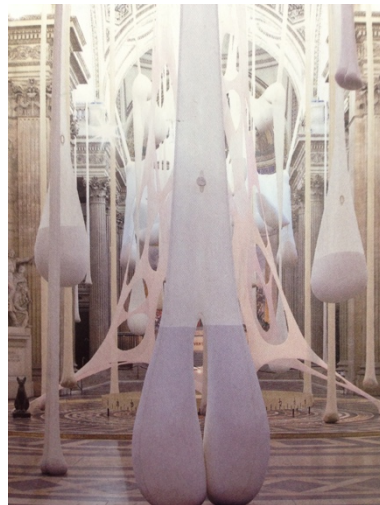


Figure 2 - *Leviathan Thot*, Neto, 2006.



Figure 3 - *O Casamento – Lili*, Neto, Lito e os loucos, 2000.

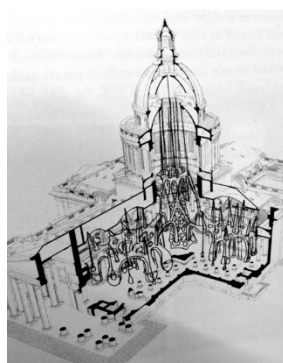


Figure 4 - Architectural plan for *Leviathan Thot*, Neto, 2006.

great example for my research about double feeling of being lost and not lost at the same time since the viewer steps inside Neto’s art space, he experiments of being in a new space as if he is lost within a familiar atmosphere. Designing and creating multiple physical thresholds inside and outside of a place remind me of my experience of being physically present in one environment but mentally being absent from that specific location.

The materiality of the thresholds (nylons material) he has integrated in his installations is in conflict with his choice of ancient stone buildings. “I began to think that I should work with a variety of focal points. I decided that I want to make people a little dizzy so that when they think that the answer is here, I want to lead them to

another place” (Neto, 1995). His choice of material and large scale three dimensional pieces invites and provokes more attention and curiosity to get involved with the art experiment. It could be a great opportunity to tackle the idea of peoples’ perception of dimension when they can be part of the art piece physically and mentally.

Another artist is *Matthew Ritchie* who has been involved in a broad range of art projects. He has used coding software in some of his artworks to analyze his drawings through algorithms. His idea of finding a new strategy in this chaotic informational world is the concept that I am going to study. On the other hand, his reaction to the architecture and his art involvement in architecture teaching are very fascinating and educating for me. “Building systems that share effectively must share more than effective of scale and energy; they must share strategies of meaning” (Ritchie, 2012). The way that he approaches to a built form is to suggest a shared system of growth in large scale constructions. This is very appealing to think about how I can use his ‘sharing our skin’ idea in the large scale of human culture. Where the cultural edges overlap, we can challenge the concept of shared collective memories no matter what background we are from. His idea of skin, façade and gesture is guidance for me to think through different layers of my approach towards multi cultures and multi places that I am trying to refer to in my art practice. “The skin, primary human system



Figure 5 - **Remanence**: Ink & Acrylic on Phototex & Glass, Interactive Sound Installation, Ritchie, ICA Boston, 2014.



Figure 6 - **This Garden At This Hour**: Installation Views, Ritchie, Spring 2014.



Figure 7 - **The Temptation of the Diagram**: Installation view, Ritchie, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, 2014.



Figure 8 - **Proposition Player**: Installation views, Ritchie, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, 2004.

for communicating and homeostasis, is of course a key concept in understanding both the façade and the gesture. Just as surely as skyscrapers are not social spaces, curtain walls are not skins...” (Ritchei, 2012).

The last architect-artist is *Benjamin Dillenburger* whose works explore complexity in architecture by using purely geometric strategies. I want to use his idea of deformation and irritation to develop my collective memory formation out of my memory distortion. We can experience different notions of surprise, irritation, excitement and enjoyment not only through our minds but also with all our senses when we are exploring his architectural sculptures. “The Arabesque Wall’s rhythmic, interwoven curve elicits viewers’ individual interpretations and engages viewers to approach it, touch it and to explore. Each perspective offers new impressions.” (Dillenburger, 2015). His approach towards architecture fabrication and design is very similar to Nest’s idea of viewers’ engagement with his art pieces. For me, it is very provocative to follow their ideas of viewers’

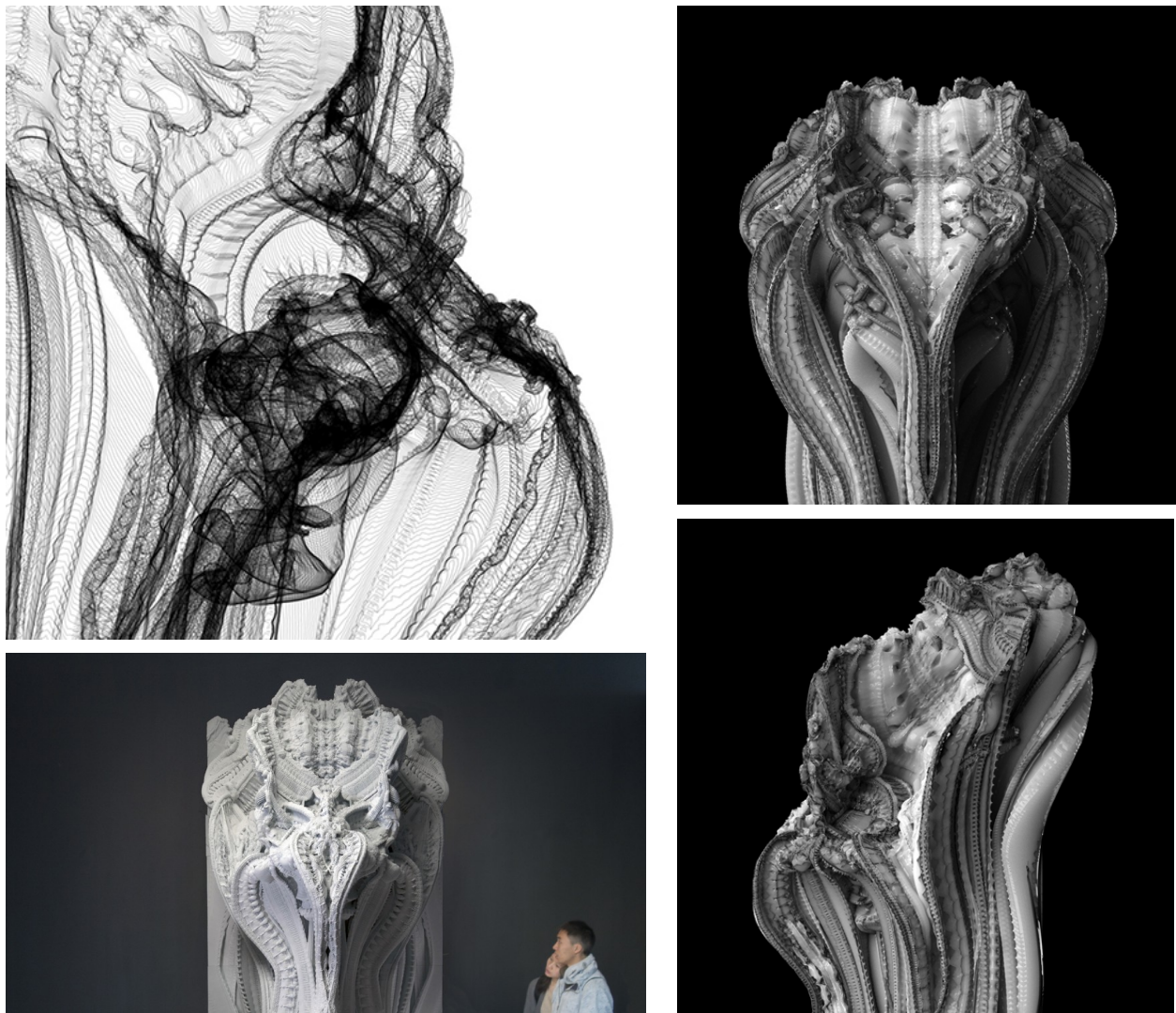


Figure 9 - *Arabesque Wall*: Design Exchange, Dillenburger, Toronto for the 3DXL exhibition, 2014/2015.

impact on my art work in a way to create a platform for people to become a part of my drawing. "Phenomena should be judged by the experiences it generates. Phenomena evoke curiosity and encourage visitors to interact with it: to touch it, dive into it, get lost in it, and ultimately to become part of it." (Dillenburger, 2015). Learning from his art pieces as examples of phenomena is a new direction to follow so that I could look at each art piece as a new wonder to explore.

In order to be able to answer this research essay question, first I want to build a logical solution based on my findings from all those artists and information that I have read and learned. I will gather my memories into visual diagrams and create a data collection of images (symbolically). To incorporate logic into my drawings as an abstract solution to react to the fundamental meanings, I choose to use mathematics as a symbol of order and control inside my chaotic collective memory. The next dilemma after collecting all the elements is creating the connection between mathematical equations and the drawings. The best approach is to analyse my memory collection through statistical factors via computer programming. I am referring to statistics because these factors provide me with a measurable scale to go forward in my drawing equation. On the other hand, statistics play a role of social rule in my method when I want to abstract my memory collection. As a result, I will be able to map out the relationship between the moments of my life journey.

One of the statistical features I want to use as an analysis method is the use of a probability distribution function. This method represents the impact of different events in my daily life. The idea of probability distribution function is used to show the occurrence probability of possible events in an experiment. From a statistical point of view, there are different types of probability distributions based on the type of outcome and process each is related to. In my analysis, I will use two of the most commonly used probability distributions to create a new drawing from randomly generated chaotic points and lines considered as distribution free. Symbolically, the input drawing is the idea of my life so far and the output drawing will show the relationship of randomness and choice in my life. Dividing the original drawing into small pixels (symbol of life fractions), I will use the following distributions to generate new connecting pixels (symbol of life threads):

1) Normal distribution: resulted from individual random variables that are independent. (Normally distributed variables with certain confidence intervals)

2) Weibull distribution: widely used in reliability engineering and failure analysis where different parameters of the probability function have specific meanings in the lifetime of a product.

In conclusion, I believe as a person who is trying to express and react through art, there is a possibility to discover a meaning hidden in layers of my personal journey. In my own experience, this meaning could be a mutual human nature needed to be heard and freed in a rational structure no matter who you are and which authentic group you belong to. Coming from one of the most chaotic geopolitical regions, it is very challenging to build a new character that has an equal voice

in this new environment. The heaviness of carrying the baggage of being different as an immigrant will be always my fuel to become stronger and more vocal through my art practice. The drawing process I explained in this essay gives me an opportunity to spectacle more deeply into my life and myself as an individual in order to fulfil the curiosity of who I am as an artist. As the great poet Rumi says:

*Lord, said David, since you do not need us,
why did you create these two worlds?
Reality replied: O prisoner of time,
I was a secret treasure of kindness and generosity,
and I wished this treasure to be known,
so, I created a mirror: its shining face, the heart;
its darkened back, the world;
The back would please you if you've never seen the face.*

I am bridging back to something more profoundly rooted, to some original scheme into my drawing which is mostly drawn with my memories of what has been happened so far in my surroundings. I have also been very selective based on the impact of those events on my life as an individual as well as others as a collective.

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