

DE/ANGULAR WORLDING:

Queer Formal Experimentations in Shi'i Material Culture as Queer Futurity

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Abstract

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De/Angular experiments at the cross path of queer futurity and Shi'i material culture using digital media tools. Drawing on José Esteban Muñoz's concept of disidentification, the project engages with virtual environment, electronic textiles, and multi-channel sound to create an installation as a speculative site through which dominant Shi'i aesthetic regimes are reconfigured. *De/Angular* asks what forms of world-making and relationality become possible when the visual, sonic, and material languages that sustain structures of authority are fractured from within.

Positioning making as a mode of thinking, *De/Angular* treats experimentation as knowledge production. Through embodied and affective encounters with materials, the work advances production of tacit knowledge that resists mere discursive articulation. In doing so, it enters

conversations in gender studies and digital arts by foregrounding sensation, material intimacy, and the non-linear transmission of meaning as critical sites of inquiry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Words can only do so much. The last six years were difficult in ways that are hard to name, and whatever I managed to survive, and whatever this work became, I owe in no small part to the many brilliant and generous people around me. I will try to account for that here, knowing I will fall short:

Afrodit, six years is no short time. I look back at how we both have changed. You have carved out a way of being that I aspire to, and watching that unfold has been one of the quiet gifts of these years. I have grown immensely because of the space you gave me. You are my forever mentor. I would not be who I am, or where I am, without you.

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Laura, you always have the most original perspective, and you share it with a generosity that is rare. Working together, on syllabi, classes, performances, SPAM, and everything in between, and simply talking with you, taught me the spirit of collective inquiry.

To my DXARTS bunch, few get lucky to have such great people with them:

Umut, thank you for walking this path with me. I could not ask for a better companion.

Maria, we have argued plenty and spared each other nothing, and somehow that is exactly why I trust you.

Esteban and Carolina, you made elsewhere feel like home for me and I am grateful for your warmth, care and laughter.

Vishal, you showed me what it looks like to move through every space entirely on your own terms, and you raised the bar of my thinking simply by being in the room.

Cristina, you just lit up the room and made me feel like all is gonna be fine. Thank you for showing me how to remain genuine in the madness.

Althea, you are just such a unique person and I admire your innovation.

Nicolás, thank you for bringing fun and relationality to our community. Cheers.

Eleanor, I will remember your kindness always.

Rihards, authenticity is rare and I learn that from you.

Eunsun, thank you for your honesty, humor and beautiful selfless presence that reminds me to stay focused on what matters.

Dan, thank you for sharing your craft freely with everyone.

Anna, our work on SPAM together was everything. I will do my best to keep the spirit of our collaboration alive by returning to the standards, softness, and humility you taught me.

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Billie, following the hidden paths is perhaps the hardest task in academia. Without you, I would not have been able to navigate this inaccessible space. Thank you for your patience, kindness, and support, not only for the administrative work, but for everything else too.

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To my partner, Peanut, my sister and friends, I will not even try. Let me keep telling you how much you mean to me where I can do it properly, over our drinks and dances.

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DEDICATION

To Firouzeh and Mehdi, without whom my worlds are dimmed.

INTERLUDE

It's 2009.

I'm standing in the middle of a university campus in Tehran. a historical military complex converted into an art school, somewhere near the Grand Bazaar

The campus is beautiful yet weird. It is stuck somewhere in time between its different functionalities. It doesn't know how to hold the proud aggression of its past alongside the young artists that it's hosting now. A few meters from its main entrance is the foreign ministry of affairs and a main bank branch with architecture reminiscent of the great Persia. The main entrance depicts machine guns and its blue tiles read:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

نَصْرٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَفَتْحٌ قَرِيبٌ

Victory is from God, and conquest is near

"What a beautiful mess." I thought as I walked in.

There are 30 other freshmen on the campus, and I am meeting with a friend I know from elementary school who is starting her studies at the same time. I am already in the familiar realm. I put my stoic cool kid face on and I stand somewhere in the corner, like I always do.

There is a group of 5 close to where my friend and I are chatting. They are loud and happy. Someone calls my name and one of the happy kids notices me. He has the classic look of an arts student, big curly hair, a pair of Converse, round sunglasses, a colorful shirt, etc. He comes to me and asks if I am who I am. I say I am. He says something about knowing my cousin from a party. He inserts his number into my phone.

In no time me and the happy bunch grow close and expand our circle. Others call us toxic, pretentious, chaotic, rude, loud, erratic. We are intimidating and inapproachable, but we need no others. We build life centered on each other, and explore every corner of the city at night in cars driving to our movie sets or parties. We love, and fuck, and get lost together. In the lost we find identities and drift between them, and in our drift, we shape the city.

We were anything and everything in any given moment. Always in motion, always chasing, always changing. We have no road map and we dream of lands, fame, love and sometimes death.

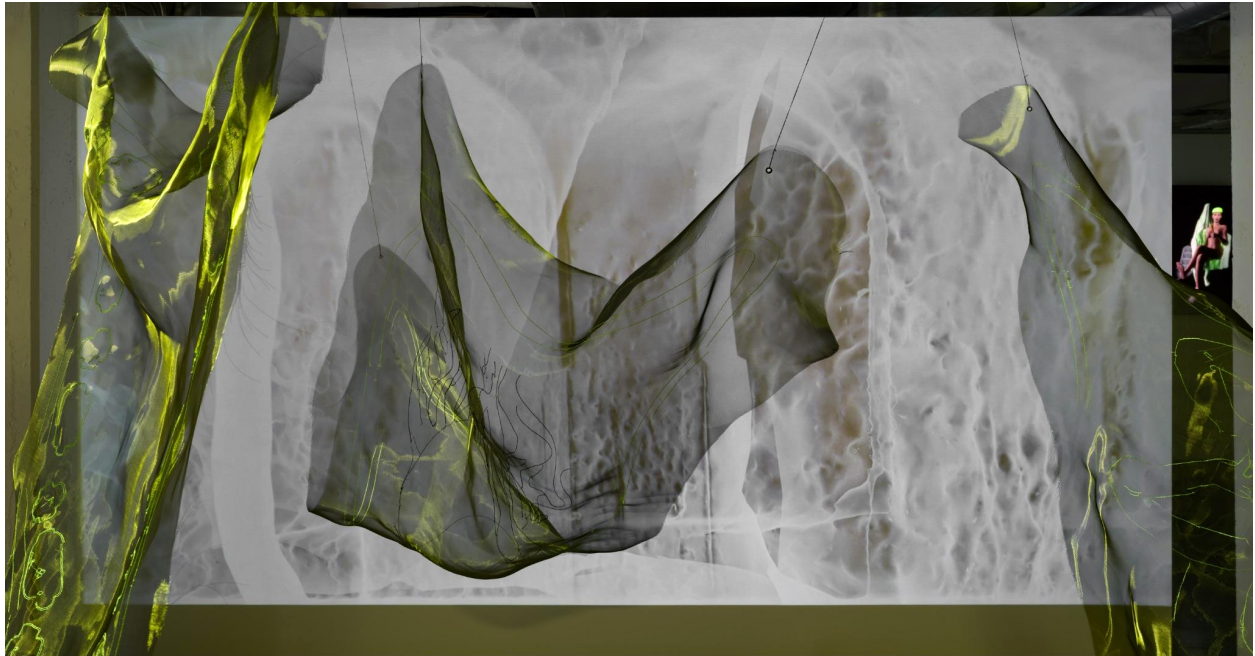
My mother says that I have wasted my twenties, and need to get myself a life. I believe her for once and leave. To build myself a first-world life.

After seven years of reading and thinking with queerness and world-building, I realize now that it was the business of worlding I “wasted” my twenties on.

To be honest, this first-world life has left little nostalgia in me, except perhaps the desire to continue worlding from afar.

This dissertation is dedicated to my folks, those whose paths crossed mine through love or hatred, desire or resentment, friendship or intolerance. As one of us once said:

“We might feed on each other’s flesh, but we will always keep the bones safe.”



Sadaf Sadri, *De/Angular*, 2026. Exhibition view, Gallery 4Culture, Seattle, WA. Photograph by Joe Freeman.

INTRODUCTION

My dissertation project, *De/Angular*, engages corporeal sensibilities and theories across digital arts methodologies and sexuality studies, and was on view at Gallery 4Culture in Seattle, WA from January through February 2026. Through this visual research, I aim to contribute to conversations around world-building in the field of digital arts by extending existing theoretical frameworks toward less traversed terrains, hijacking dominant aesthetics of Shi'i Islam as a technique for queer worlding. In doing so, I begin to theorize what I call ***De/Angular worlding*** that builds on the frameworks of Shi'i material culture and queer futurity.

Worlding draws me in, first, for its ability to open up alternative ways of being. But at a deeper level, my research finds its home in this genre of making because of how it can hold multiple

modalities, matters, and subjects together (Palmer and Hunter 2018), stretching beyond the established frameworks of relationality. This dissertation brings together the creative research I have developed over the past four years through digital and experimental arts practice and places it in dialogue with theories of world-building rooted in sexuality studies. At its core, this project proposes the term *De/Angular worlding* as a framework for understanding a mode of artistic practice that operates through disidentification, hijacking and reconfiguration emerged from my embodied experiences in Iran and my position as a Middle Eastern subject in diaspora. This process aims to destabilize the internal logics of these systems and redirect them toward alternative modes of existence.

Through visual, tactile, and sonic materials, the project engages research in ways meant to be encountered through embodied experience and affect, rather than through text alone as the primary outcome of scholarship. In this sense, the work prioritizes what study can do over what study can think (Stefano Harney et al., 2021) .

While I trace the aforementioned methodologies and frameworks in few of my works and the works of other contemporary artists, the most cohesive manifestation of this framework is explored in my installation *De/Angular*.

In this body of work, I bring together virtual world-building techniques, electronic textiles, traditional textile practices, and sound to construct an environment rooted in the visual and material language of Shi'i culture. By intervening in the cohesive constructs of the Shi'i material culture in Iran, the project disrupts the representational and spiritual contracts embedded within these forms, opening them to multiplicity and transformation.

Central to this process is my engagement with Iranian folklore and ritual practices, particularly spell-casting, which I approach as alternative communication technologies and affective systems. These practices offer a way of thinking about relationality, transmission, and

embodiment outside the logics of efficiency that structure digital systems and systems of power.

Within this framework, this dissertation explores the possibilities of imagining transnational queer world-building through and alongside digital systems, while also investigating the alternative worlds that remain embedded within, and obscured by, exclusionary structures of power. It asks how such systems with their foundations in control and regulation, can be reoriented toward speculative, relational, and non-normative modes of existence. And how materials, objects, and textile systems function as active agents in producing affective, relational, and non-archival forms of world-building.

These questions are addressed through both theoretical analysis and artistic practice itself. Accompanying my research process through material and conceptual explorations of making, this document does not follow the conventions of a traditional academic paper. Instead, it traces multiple trajectories of knowledge, loosely threaded through an articulation of potentiality and its manifestation across different materialities organized in different parts.

In Part One, I outline my methodology, grounded in the disidentificatory framework articulated by José Esteban Muñoz, and examine its resonance in the work of Mona Hatoum and Nadine Labaki alongside my video piece *Cow, Disrupted* (2022).

In Part Two, I develop my understanding of world-building through José Esteban Muñoz's concept of queer futurity, using it to ground both this project and my broader research. I turn to the work of Athi-Patra Ruga as an example of queer worlding that resonates with Muñoz's framework, with particular attention to the role of queer aesthetics. From there, I place queer form in dialogue with the constellations of meaning generated through Islamic patterns. Drawing on Kemi Adeyemi, I then articulate the concept of *De/Angular* as it unfolds in my reimagining of the Shah Mosque and recreation of Moazen Zadeh's Call to Prayer.

In Part Three, I contextualize my engagement with digital arts by bringing the potentiality of

queer futurity into dialogue with the virtual, tracing how digital space became central to my investigations in world-building. I examine the use of virtual space in the works of Bahar Noorizadeh, Klara Kofen, and Umber Majeed. I then turn to the writings of Fred Moten and Saidiya Hartman to articulate my performance within virtual space and to frame the conceptual foundations of *De/Angular*'s video works.

In Part Four, I conclude my theoretical framework by exploring my investment in textiles, beginning with a brief historical foundation that grounds my interest in electronic textiles and their temporalities. I draw on the work of Sergei Parajanov to further articulate the significance of textile as a medium within my research. I then turn to my works *Listening Patterns*, *Threads*, and *Sofreh* as foundational examples for this inquiry before moving into an in-depth discussion of the textile components of *De/Angular*.

I conclude by bringing these sectional explorations of *De/Angular* and my broader body of work into relation, returning to the central research questions of this dissertation. While I attempt to articulate a cohesive framework through which to address them, I also foreground the unfinished nature of this project, approaching it as an ongoing process of making.

In the final pages, I dedicate a brief section to the emergence of SPAM New Media Festival¹, outlining its framework and reflecting on its importance in translating my practices of world-building into physical space. I position the festival as an extension of the relational and speculative methodologies explored throughout this dissertation.

¹SPAM New Media Festival, founded in 2022 by Sadaf Sadri, is an annual festival dedicated to fostering Digital Arts conversations through performances, installations, and workshops. <https://spamnewmediafestival.com/> (Accessed May 25, 2026).

PART ONE

METHODOLOGY

In his book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999) Muñoz identifies the “worldmaking power of disidentificatory performance” (Muñoz 1999, ix), explaining that disidentification operates outside the binary of identification (assimilation) and counteridentification (revolution) and instead disidentifies with the dominant system to work with, on, and against existing structures to imagine other futures (Muñoz 1999, 12).

Disidentificatory subjects recognize themselves in the dominant culture, but refuse the terms under which that recognition is offered.

While the explicit oppositions to the exclusionary systems of control have proved invaluable at certain historical moments, the uninterrupted revolutionary life is not sustainable for all of us in the intersection of our differences, every single one of which comes with a unique set of limitations and constraints. It is in these limitations that disidentification as an approach offers potential for reworking of the system in power.

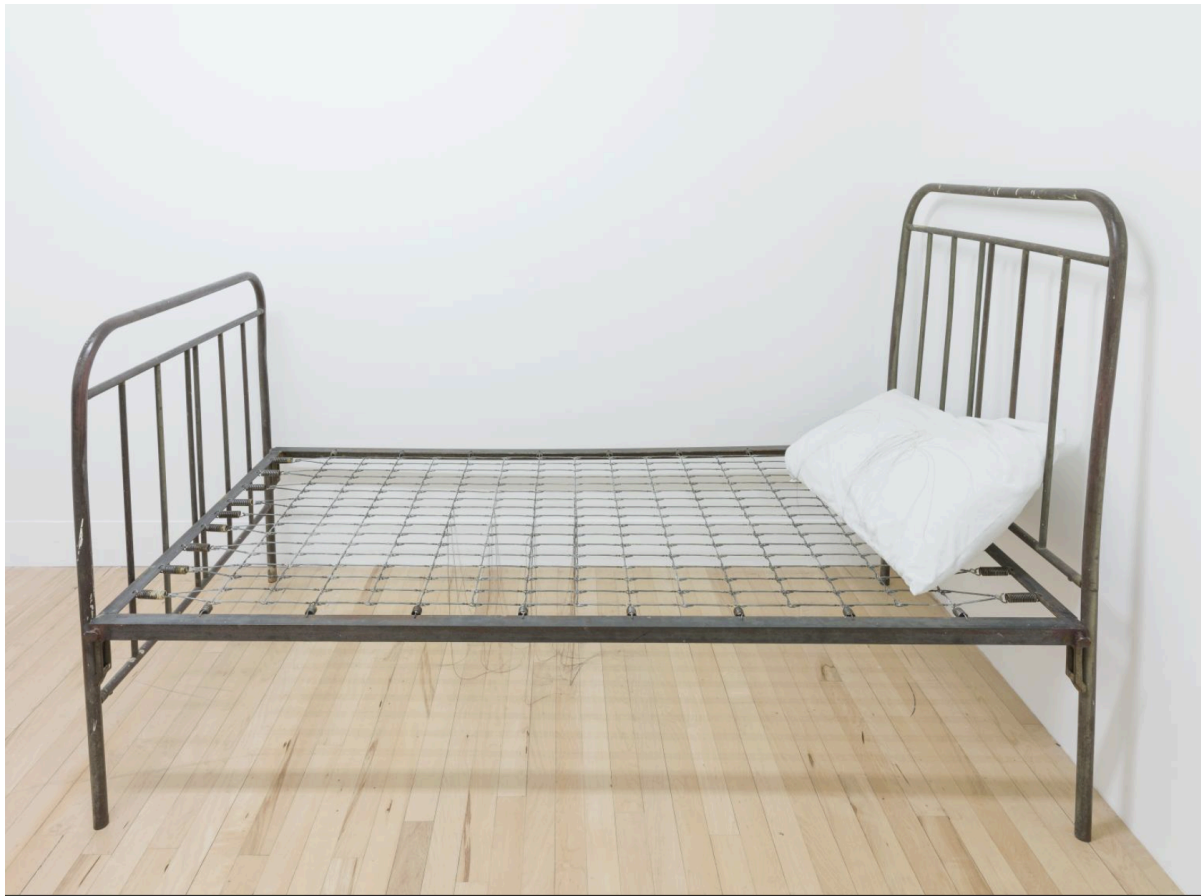
This potential is most evident in the creative ways the minoritarian subject navigates the space of the majority by crafting unique and discrete performance strategies that slowly rework the dominant culture and its tenacious violent repetition of quotidian, to open up space for existence under different terms.

Reading Mona Hatoum’s work through this lens has been particularly generative for my own inquiry into quotidian violence and a disidentificatory strategy for confronting what cannot be reconciled.

In her practice, Hatoum takes the everyday object and strips it of its expected function. Her works evoke the memory of the familiar while simultaneously withholding access to it, exposing

the latent violence embedded within the ordinary. The viewer is brought close to recognition, only to be denied full entry by being bluntly reminded that something as simple as a door does not always open for everyone.

In her exhibition *Interior/Exterior* (2010) at the Tate, she reconstructs the architecture of domestic space, rendering it inaccessible and effectively useless, as a way to interrogate the politics of home. Speaking from her position as a Palestinian artist living in diaspora, Hatoum destabilizes the assumed safety of domesticity, revealing it as historically fraught.



Mona Hatoum, *Interior/Exterior*, 2010. Tate London.

Through her use of industrial materials, domestic objects are transformed into sites of tension and potential harm. For example in *Homebound* (2000), everyday items, lamps, chairs, tables, etc, are wired together into an electrically charged network. The objects remain recognizable,

but the domestic sphere has turned hostile.



Mona Hatoum, *Homebound*, 2000. Installation view at Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St. Louis.

As Said writes about her work “The point is that the past cannot be entirely recuperated from so much power arrayed against it on the other side: it can only be restated in the form of an object without a conclusion, or a final place, transformed by choice and conscious effort into something simultaneously different, ordinary, and irreducibly other and the same, taking place together: an object that offers neither rest nor respite.” (Said 2000, 110)

Offering a framework for the queer color of critique, disidentification derives from race, gender, sexuality and class and their systematic construction. Identity in this methodology is a great site of research as it makes visible the artificial construction of societal norms and their concrete

dispositions. And in this exposing, it brings to light the impossibility of existence for the minoritarian subject whose positionality in the structure of the system always forces them to realize that which does not exist and needs to be created. This gap is what Muñoz refers to as the “not yet”. (Muñoz 1999, 7)

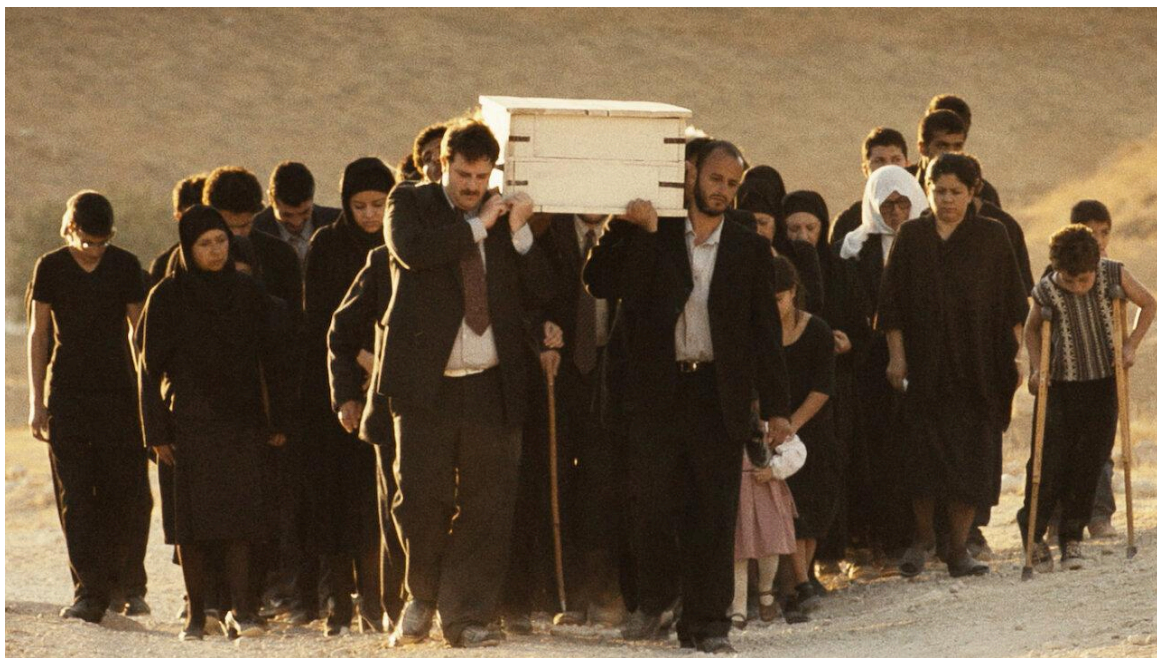
In *Where Do We Go Now?* (Labaki 2011) Nadine Labaki mobilizes fantasy as a disidentificatory strategy to approach dominant narratives of sectarian conflict by inhabiting the very terms the movie seeks to undo. While one might argue that Labaki’s speculative village bypasses the material realities of imperial entanglement and political violence, this reading risks overlooking how fantasy itself becomes a method of critique and offering of the “not yet”. The film’s simplifications such as its temporal ambiguity and its suspension of historical specificity can function as conditions of possibility for imagining otherwise. Rather than offering a faithful representation of Lebanon, Labaki constructs a space of becoming, echoing Doreen Massey’s insistence that space is relational, produced through ongoing social practices (Massey 2005). In this sense, the village is not a utopian resolution but a disidentificatory site that reworks the “Orient” as described by Edward Said, not by rejecting its imposed narratives outright, but by reorienting them toward collective futurity and responsibility. (Said 1978)

This disidentificatory logic is particularly evident in the film’s deployment of gender and religion. Labaki initially appears to rely on reductive archetypes of women as caregivers and men as agents of violence, but these roles are gradually reconfigured from within. Feminine tasks in her movie become a tactical entry point for subversion, culminating in their seizure of the village’s weapons and the reversal of spatial and social roles. Here, disidentification operates through inhabitation. The women do not reject gendered expectations wholesale, but repurpose them to interrupt cycles of violence and reimagine communal life. Similarly, religion is neither dismissed nor idealized; instead, it is reworked as an ambivalent site of attachment and critique.



Where Do We Go Now?, directed by Nadine Labaki, 2011.

In doing so, the film does not resolve the irreconcilable tensions of Lebanon's history, but disidentifies with them, opening speculative space for modes of coexistence that exceed the given terms of conflict.



Where Do We Go Now?, directed by Nadine Labaki, 2011.

As Althusar proposes, the emergence of the civil subject and their identity lies within the confines of a system and in its identification with the proposed identity, the civil subject contributes to the expansion and protection of the system (Althusser 2014), hence the disidentificatory subject with its attention to the gaps within that system is the agent of change and the activation of the potential of alternative ways of being and world-building.

Just like Labaki's exploration of gender roles demonstrates, The disidentificatory subject understands the implausible task of a complete counteridentification and existing outside of a system while one participates and contributes to the continuation of the system apparatus by participating in its economic, political, societal and educational sections. Therefore, this subject takes the ever-evolving characteristic of the system and strategizes change and resistance in the movement of the system apparatus, and as Muñoz explains, the minoritarian subject "understands that counter-discourses, like discourse, can always fluctuate for different ideological ends and a politicized agent must have the ability to adapt and shift as quickly as power does within discourse." (Muñoz 1999, 19)

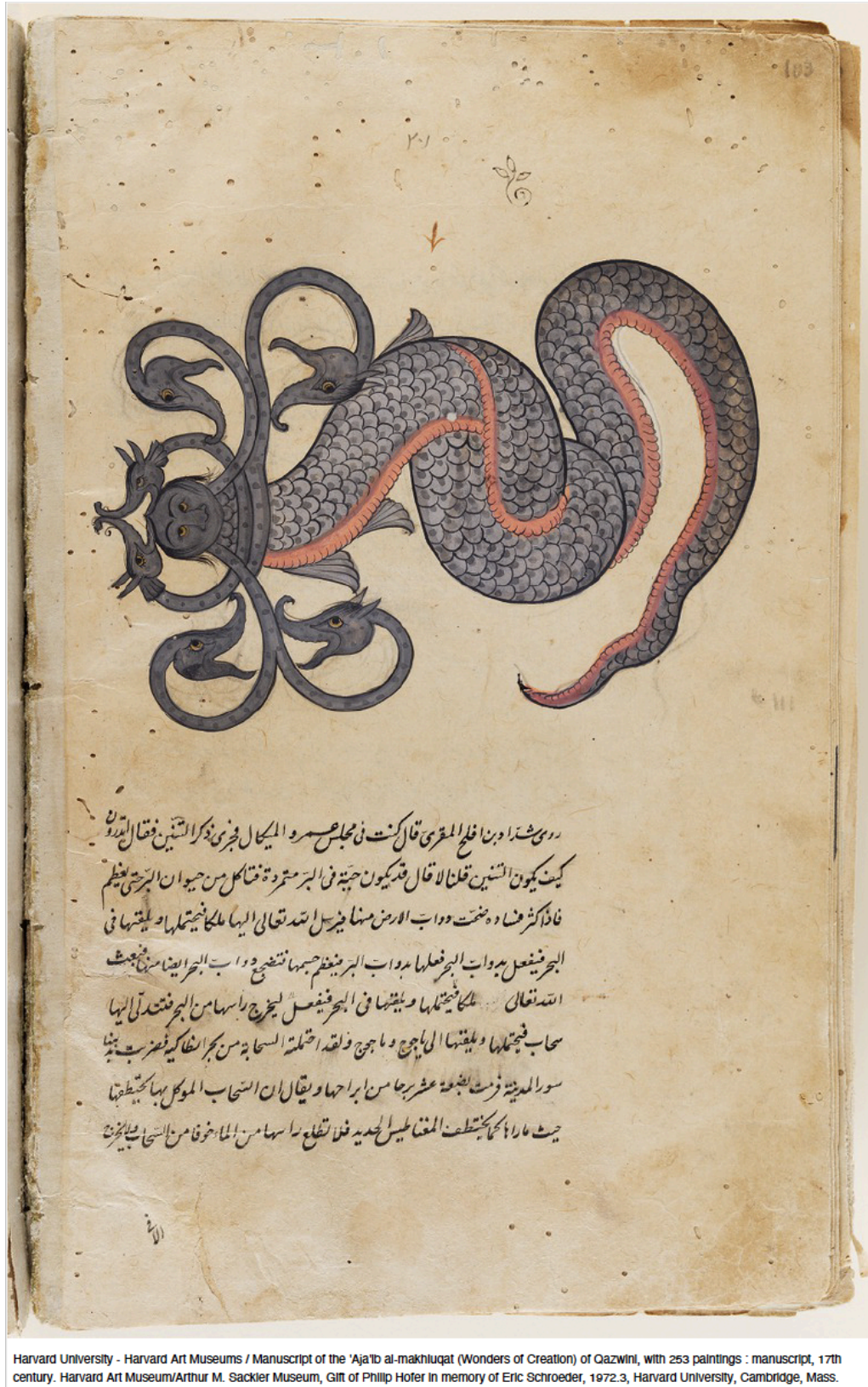
COW, DISRUPTED

As part of my methodological exploration, particularly through experiments with machine learning, I turned, in an earlier iteration of this inquiry, to the historical visual articulation of difference in Iran. This led me to عجائب المخلوقات و غرائب الموجودات (*The Wonders of Creatures and the Marvels of Creation*) by Zakariya al-Qazwini (1599). The book organizes the universe as a meaningful, divinely ordered system, moving from the heavens and celestial bodies down to the earth, its landscapes, plants, animals, and ultimately, humans. The text reflects both the scientific knowledge of its time and a fascination with the marvelous and the unknown. Within this fascination, al-Qazwini catalogs fantastical beings that exist at the threshold between the

real and the imagined, that inhabit distant lands. Through these descriptions and illustrations, he articulates a worldview in which difference and otherness are integral to understanding creation itself.

Building on al-Qazwini's speculative taxonomy of beings, I created a small dataset derived from his creatures and used Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) to produce new entities informed by his imagination. GANs were particularly suited to this project because of their generative logic, which trains on existing visual data to produce new, unforeseen outputs that mirrors the speculative and imaginative impulse already present in al-Qazwini's cosmological worldbuilding. As a technology that generates new forms from learned patterns, GANs offered a way to think through transformation and hybridity, placing them in direct conversation with the conceptual framework of the piece. Engaging machine learning as an archival practice allowed me to challenge the typical encounter with historical non-Western imaginaries as static artifacts, and instead activate them as evolving visual systems capable of producing new knowledge, extending al-Qazwini's taxonomy rather than merely reproducing it.

Due to the limited size of the dataset, the generated results did not cohere into fully legible forms and instead gestured towards abstracted textures that emerged out of accumulation functioning unrecognizable in-between.



Manuscript of the *Aja'ib al-makhlūqat* of Qazwini, 17th Century, Harvard Art Museum.

١٩٠
 تركه كان يفتح فاه و يترك كايه ينفس منها ما ذكر ايضا ابو حامد ان كان يتوضا على حجر في بحر الروم
 فخرج من تحت ذلك الحجر ذئب حية طويلة صفة المنطقة منقط قالي فوثقت خاليفا فخرجت
 رأسها من تحت الحجر اس الارب اصفر منقط منقطه سود و لها عينان واسنان فخرت
 رأسها بخر كان من فم يعل فيب شيئا فخرج من تحت الحجر يسبح في الماء وهي تحس حيات براس
 واحد كل حية ثلثة اذرع الى طول فاصطاد اصحابا مثلها فزاسها اليين من اطار لا يعمل الخدين
 وقد سلبوا فكفان جلد عا رقي من قشر البصل و كذا كاليه الجمل نعومة ولا شكوك فيها ولا عظم فذكر
 البحر يوين انما تقطع حتى تغلب السفينة واكل سكانها و هذا الحيوان يقال له ارب البحر و يسمى
 شرحه و هو احد في حيوانات الماء و منها الشيخ اليهودي قال ابو حامد لاند لسي موسى حيوان
 وجهه كوجه الانسان و له لحية بيضاء و بدنه في حجم جمل في صورة الضفدع يعرف عندهم بالشيخ
 اليهودي لانه يخرج من البحر ليلية السبب الى البر حتى يغيب الشمس ليلة الاحد لا ياكل ولا يجل
 الماء ولا يترك لو ضرب او قتل لم يرض البحر فاذا غابت الشمس ليلة الاحد و شب كما
 يشب الضفدع و يدخل البحر فلا يلحق السفن



١٥٠

To bring this exploration into conversation with contemporary anxieties around difference, I turned to the film *Cow* (*Gāv*, 1969) by Dariush Mehrjui as a site of intervention.

Gāv (Mehrjui 1969), based on the story the *Cow* in Gholam Hossein Saedi's *The Mourners of Bayal* (1964), is set in a small, impoverished Iranian village that lives in the fear of being robbed by the residents of a nearby village. In this village Mash Hassan owns the community's only cow. The cow's role is not as simple as a property but it is Mash Hassan's obsession, emotional anchor, social status, and sense of identity. Mash Hassan, just like others, lives in the fear of losing his identity and self to the villagers whose fearful shadow is depicted in the movie by frequently showing the three distant figures.



The Cow (*Gāv*), directed by Dariush Mehrjui, 1969.

When Mash Hassan leaves the village briefly for work, the cow suddenly dies. Fearing his reaction, the villagers secretly dispose of its body and tell him that the cow has run away upon his return. The incapability of processing this loss initiates Mash Hassan's gradual transformation to his cow. He sleeps in the stable, eats hay, and behaves like the animal. The villagers eventually decide to take him to the city for treatment. On the journey of taking him on

the leash to the city, still trapped in his delusion, Mash Hassan once again sees the sight of the villagers, panics and runs to his own death.



The Cow (*Gāv*), directed by Dariush Mehrjui, 1969.

In approaching *Gāv*, I employed appropriation as a method to contextualize and subvert its original narrative, reimagining it as a site for addressing questions of otherness and belonging. I was particularly drawn to this methodology because of its alignment with my concerns around sexuality. Appropriation offered a way to take a narrative that forecloses sexuality and hijack it, intervening in and redirecting its dominant meanings toward queer modes of seeing. This gesture of hijacking is central to the theoretical framework of my research, resonating with broader scholarly conversations around queer worldbuilding, and the politics of representation. Appropriation in this sense produces new meanings from inherited materials and asserts the right to reinterpret and reclaim. I adopt a perspective that is not aligned with the film's primary objective to reorient its social and affective structures. Rather than centering Mash Hassan's psychological unraveling as an allegory of the isolated condition of the depicted society, I shift the lens to foreground both the foreign villagers and the cow as active participants that signal difference and desire through which dominant social standards are revealed and destabilized.

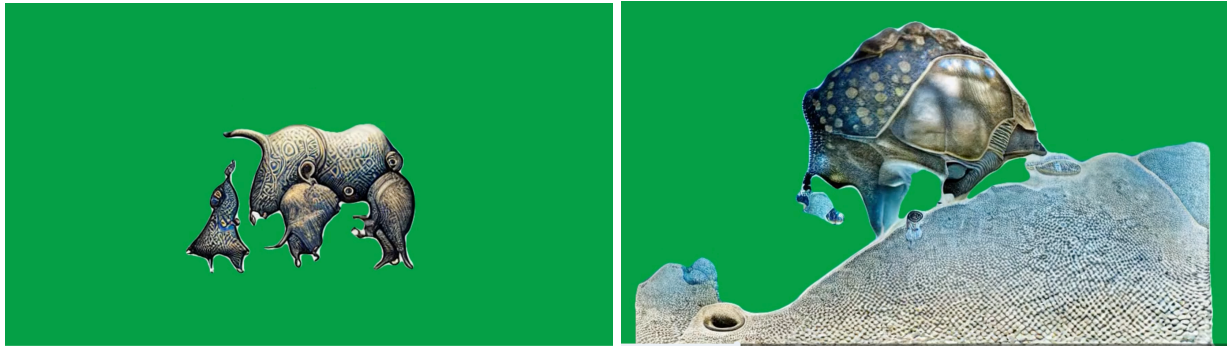
Through this shift, I attempt to expand and problematize the terms of identity and identification.

Building on my earlier engagement with the speculative archive of Zakariya al-Qazwini, I use the abstract generations to transform the cow and the foreign villagers to fantastical bodies that exceed stable categories. My reinterpretation of *Gāv* situates excess within the social body itself. Here, the so-called foreign villagers and the cow become sites through which this surplus of meaning and difference emerges and circulates. I render this excess materially through generated forms derived from al-Qazwini's archive, using them as skin.



Sadaf Sadri, Examples of generated textures using GANs, 2022

Using digital superimposition techniques, I mark the foreign villagers with these abstracted skins, distinguishing them visually as figures of difference. Through Mash Hassan's repeated encounters with the cow, he becomes intermittently contaminated by this surface, signaling his own potential and desire for change. Following the cow's death, this contamination intensifies, and Mash Hassan gradually and irreversibly transforms, becoming aligned with those he fears. Consumed by this fear, his body takes on the very difference he resists.



Work in progress, *Cow, Disrupted*, 2023

The moment of his death marks the completion of this transformation. Yet it is not transformation itself that leads to his demise, but his inflexibility, his inability to accommodate change, otherness, and the instability of identity. In this reconfiguration, the generated skin operates as a site of desire for transformation and for alternative modes of being. Mash Hassan's fear of this desire, alongside the community's failure to recognize or hold it, ultimately produces the conditions of tragedy.



Sadaf Sadri, *Cow, Disrupted*, 2023. Video still.



Sadaf Sadri, *Cow, Disrupted*, 2023. Video still.

In this sense, *Cow, Disrupted* does not simply restage *Gāv* as critique, but disidentifies with its depicted societal structure to expose the latent instability of identity as such. The generated skins, emerging from the failed legibility of the dataset, refuse to resolve into fixed form and instead insist on a mode of being that is contingent and unresolved. It is precisely within this failure of coherence that a different horizon begins to take shape. What appears as a breakdown of image and meaning, can be read instead as the opening of Muñoz's "not yet": a space where form exceeds recognition and identity is no longer bound to the regulatory demands of the social. In this way, abstraction becomes a speculative ground for reconfiguration of meaning. The in-between that these textures inhabit gestures toward a queer formal logic that holds open the possibility of worlds otherwise.

PART TWO

WHAT WORLDS ARE MADE OF

Muñoz's disidentification focuses on the present negotiation with the hostile system. This focus on survival, in my understanding, can be anti-utopian. It is a refusal of a totalizing vision of liberation that does not take into consideration the limitations of race, class, and sexuality. Hence, disidentification only experiences glimpses of utopia in its exploration of the alternatives, yet remains deeply grounded in the present. Because of these utopian glimpses, I would like to read this work alongside Muñoz's other seminal book, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) in which he explores the conditions of a queer world-building project.

In his turn to utopia Muñoz uses Ernst Bloch's classification of utopian thinking: concrete vs abstract as his inspiration. Abstract utopia brings what remains in the realm of imagination, which, at its best, is only capable of generating critique that ignites ideas of change. Concrete utopia, however, being rooted in collective historical struggles, does not result in a passive imagination but instigates the hope for change among collectives, and it is in the process of staying with this undetermined hope and dream that the new world is built. The turn to a concrete utopia that is historically situated takes into account the lived experiences and desires that came before us and has already paved the path for another future. Hence, this mode of world-building is "intensely relational with the past" (Muñoz 2009, 27)

For Muñoz, it is within aesthetic forms of performance, gesture, ornament, sound, and texture, that this concreteness becomes perceptible. Aesthetics materialize the "not yet" within the present, allowing it to be rehearsed, and inhabited. In this sense, queer futurity is not deferred to

a distant horizon but is embedded in the formal and affective textures of everyday life.

Utopia thus is made through what might be classified as excess, ornamentation, ephemerality, the decorative, the performative, as sites of surplus value. It is within this surplus that queer relationality takes shape. Aesthetic experience becomes a mode of attunement to potentiality, where the rigid structures of the “here and now” (Muñoz 2009, 1) are loosened, and other configurations of being begin to come into visibility. Muñoz locates these possibilities in the fleeting, and the non-archival. The gestures exchanged in queer gatherings, the textures of shared space, and the affective charge of performance are not fully formed worlds, but formal experiments that gesture toward ways of being otherwise.

In this framework, for me queerness itself becomes a question of form and aesthetic. Queer form operates through instability, excess, and transformation, privileging processes of becoming over fixed representation. It is within this aesthetic register that the “not yet” gains traction. This queer formal potentiality stages the conditions of possibility. To engage potentiality, then, is to remain with this instability, to attend to the minor, the ephemeral, and the in-between as sites where queer futurity is momentarily lived.

I identify this surplus value in the work of Athi-Patra Ruga as both utopian and disidentificatory, materializing as an alternative reality through his revisiting of myth alongside the historical and political conditions of post-apartheid South Africa. His ongoing construction of Azania, borrowing from a Greek term historically associated with Pan-Africanist imaginaries, mobilizes myth not as nostalgia, but as a critical response to nationalism and its failures. In this sense, Ruga plays with the structure of national myth itself, appropriating its symbolic language to reanimate it. Azania emerges as a speculative terrain where the promises of the “rainbow nation” are both invoked and undone. This gesture aligns with Muñoz’s understanding of disidentification as a practice that works within dominant ideologies while simultaneously

troubling their coherence, opening them toward other potentialities.



Athi-Patra Ruga: *Night of the Long Knives I*, 2013

In *Of Gods, Rainbows and Omissions* (2018) at London's Somerset House, he constructs an immersive and layered universe populated by recurring characters, mythologies, and symbolic systems that collectively form Azania. Moving across performance, photography, tapestry, sculpture, and film, his work depicts identity as staged and perpetually in flux. Figures such as those in *The Future White Women of Azania* (2010-Present) use adornment to operate as a calculated strategy of disorientation. These surfaces draw the viewer into a sensorial encounter that gradually exposes its underlying tensions. What emerges then is an unsteady utopian vision, a speculative space where identity, nationhood, and belonging are continuously rewritten. Ruga's utopia is to critique the limits of post-apartheid narratives by amplifying their

contradictions, and that insists, through excess and performance, on the possibility of worlds otherwise.



Athi-Patra Ruga, *Miss Azania, Exile is Waiting*, 2015.

As seen in Ruga's work this mode of world-building never forms in the bubble of the individual civil subject but at the moment of negation of the individual self by relating to the histories of those who have been making worlds before us and in joining those who share their power in motion with us to imagine. Queer futurity shapes in negation of the now and deferral of its temporality, but in being present with the rest in their negation of the present as well. This negation and its ephemeral manifestations are hence deeply rooted in aesthetics and non-archival performances, either on stage or in everyday places.

QUEER FORM

Muñoz emphasizes queer aesthetics for its capacity to reorganize perception and representation itself in such a way that what has been historically erased can begin to appear. Queer aesthetics exceeds the narrow confines of identity-based frameworks by traversing political, social, and economic systems. As Hannah Yapp explains, “Queer aesthetics as a framework is meant to place pressure on and question representation as a default discourse, to push toward exploring what else queer aesthetics do in the world, and to think about what representation might enable at the structural level rather than remaining within liberal individualist presuppositions around equity, diversity, and inclusion” (Doyle and Getsy 2014, 548). Hence queer aesthetics is less about inclusion within existing systems and more about transforming the very conditions through which those systems are perceived and sustained.

Queer approaches to form often privilege how forms are repurposed, and inhabited over their original or intended meanings. This reorientation destabilizes the authority of authorship and origin, allowing forms to mutate, and spring new affects and relations. Here, meaning is displaced by becoming secondary to processes of engagement, manipulation, and encounter.

Queer form creates the conditions under which identity can be reimagined, renegotiated no, and transformed. Fawaz cautions against understanding queer form through a binary of fluidity versus rigidity. Instead, he proposes that form should be understood as always in the process of becoming concrete, never fully fixed, yet not entirely formless. “Queer form,” he writes, “can underwrite an apprehension of gendered and sexual selfhood neither as an infinitely fluid substance nor an adamant identity, but as a type of shapeshifting” (Fawaz 2022, 10). This notion of shapeshifting is particularly generative; it suggests that form is capable of taking on different configurations while retaining traces of its prior states.

Similarly in my works, I explore queer aesthetics in formal shape. I am not interested in the

representation of sexuality, while I acknowledge its importance. Instead, I situate my work in the domain of form, into the ways things are structured, how they unfold in time, how they organize attention, and how they refuse coherence.

In the next few pages that follow I set a brief historical foundation of Islamic patterns and their role in creating a cohesive structure of power and then use Massumi's understanding of the abstract to differentiate my approach to queer formal practice from the Shi'i practices in form that I attempt to disturb.

GOD AS A FOLDING LINE

“There is nothing more timely today than that truth which is timeless, than the message that comes from tradition and is relevant now because it has been relevant at all times. Such a message belongs to a now which has been, is, and will ever be present.”

Hossein Nasr opens his foreword to *The Sense of Unity* (Ardalan and Bakhtiar 1973) by foregrounding the relationship between truth, unity, and form. This articulation provides a useful point of departure for my engagement with Islamic geometries and architectural forms, particularly the mosque as both a spatial and symbolic structure. The “truth” and “unity” often understood through the concept of توحيد (*tawhid*), or the oneness of God, in Shi'i Islam operate within a cosmological framework in which meaning is stabilized through what Nasr describes as “sacred forms” (Ardalan and Bakhtiar 1973, Xi).

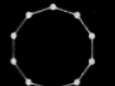
Within this framework, geometric patterns, architectural structures, and ornamental systems act as vehicles through which transcendence is made perceptible. These forms are understood to guide the subject toward unity by enveloping the body within these ordered, and infinitely extending patterns. In this sense, Islamic geometry functions as a mediating system between the material and the metaphysical by operating simultaneously on external and internal registers.

These geometric forms and patterns are not only structural elements but reflections of the inner state of the human being. Each form contains both an outward, material presence and an inward, symbolic meaning. It is through engagement with these forms that the subject moves from the horizontal plane of the ephemeral, material world (X) along a vertical axis (Y) of transcendence toward the divine.

Nader Ardalan further elaborates this framework by emphasizing the role of geometry, number, and ornament in articulating what he describes as “unity within multiplicity” (Ardalan and Bakhtiar 1973, 6). Numbers, in this context have ontological functionality as well as quantitative utility. They emanate spirit into form, structuring both the visible and invisible dimensions of existence. Geometry, grounded in these numerical relationships, becomes a language through which spiritual principles are materialized.

Ornament, similarly, is not excess but transformation. It serves to dissolve the heaviness of material surfaces, translating them into rhythmic, repeating patterns that gesture toward infinity. These patterns create a sense of continuity across time and space, aligning architecture with other temporal arts such as music through repetition and variation.

In this numerical divine system, the sphere functions as a symbol of unity, establishing proportional systems that govern other shapes and spatial relations. These relations and their meanings have been illustrated by Ardalan and Bakhtiar in the table below.

Number	Geometry		MACROCOSM	MICROCOSM	MATHEMATICAL ATTRIBUTES
	Static	Dynamic			
0			Divine Essence	Divine Essence	
1			Creator One Primordial Permanent Eternal	Creator One Primordial Permanent Eternal	The point The principle and origin of all numbers
2			Intellect Innate Acquired	Body divided into two parts Left Right	One-half of all numbers are counted by it
3			Soul Vegetative Animal Rational	Constitution of animals Two extremities and a middle	Harmony First odd number One-third of all numbers are counted by it
4			Matter Original Physical Universal Artifacts	Four humors Phlegm Blood Yellow bile Black bile	Stability First square number
5			Nature Ether Fire Air Water Earth	Five senses Sight Hearing Touch Taste Smell	First circular number
6			Body Above Below Front Back Right Left	Six powers of motion in six directions Up, down, front, back, left, right	First complete number The number of surfaces of a cube
7			Universe Seven visible planets and seven days of the week	Active powers Attraction Sustenance Digestion Repulsion Nutrition Growth Formation	First perfect number
8			Qualities Cold, dry Cold, wet Hot, wet Hot, dry	Qualities Cold, dry Cold, wet Hot, wet Hot, dry	First cubic number and the number of musical notes
9			Beings of this world Mineral Plant Animal (Each containing three parts)	Nine elements of the body Bones, brain, nerves, veins, blood, flesh, skin, nails, hair	First odd square and last of single digits
10			The Holy Tetractys First four universal Beings	Basic disposition of the body Head, neck, chest, belly, abdomen, thoracic cav- ity, pelvic girdle, two thighs, two legs, two feet	Perfect number First of two-digit numbers
12			Zodiac Aries, Leo, Sagittarius Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn Gemini, Libra, Aquarius Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces	Twelve orifices of the body Two eyes, two nostrils, two ears, two nipples, one mouth, one navel, two channels of excre- tion	First excessive number
28			Stations of the Moon (divided into four quarters)	Twenty-eight vertebrae Each quarter equals one week, seven days represent seven planets	Second complete number
360			Number of solar days	Number of veins in the body	Number of degrees in a circle

Numbers and Geometry Table, from *The Sense of Unity* by Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar.

Due to the foundational role of these patterns and angles in sustaining the meaning construct of the Islamic aesthetics, *De/Angular* starts with experimenting with bringing queer formal practices into this realm in order to explore what can emerge in the void created by disruption of the patterns.

This specific type of understanding of unity, presents a tension within my lived experience in Iran in which these very forms that guide *man* to transcendence, also operate as regulatory structures by disciplining bodies, and limiting modes of relation. This teleological abstraction that ultimately resolves into unity as a singular and coherent truth that organizes both perception and being is not aligned with my own queer embodiment which unfolds in multiplicity rather than unity.

My understanding of multiplicity in abstraction is informed by Brian Massumi's conception of the abstract and the incorporeal. Where Nasr locates abstraction in a movement toward unity, Massumi understands the incorporeal not as a resolved totality, but as an open field of indeterminacy. In this sense, what appears as unity is not a pre-given truth but an emergent effect always in process. Attention to materiality becomes crucial as a site through which the abstract is activated and felt. It is through material encounters with surfaces, textures, and embodied relations that potentiality takes shape.

It is this tension that drives my engagement with geometry. While these forms are designed to guide the subject toward unity, I approach them as systems that can be reprogrammed to unravel multiplicity.

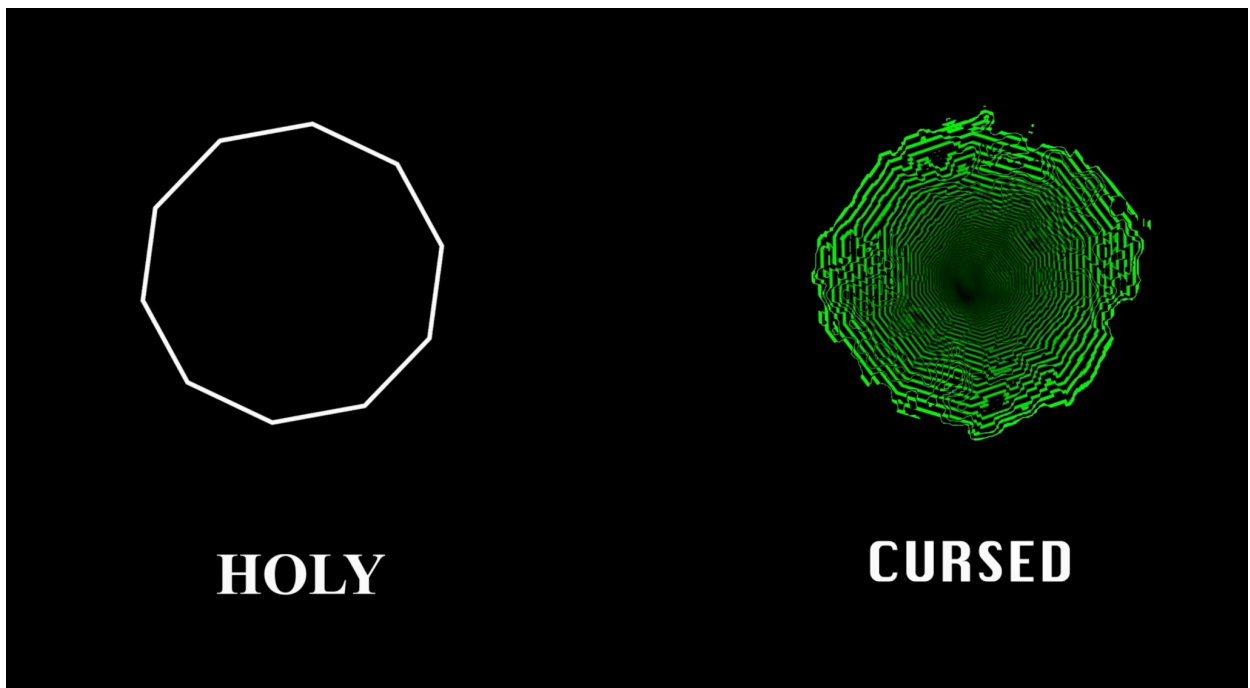
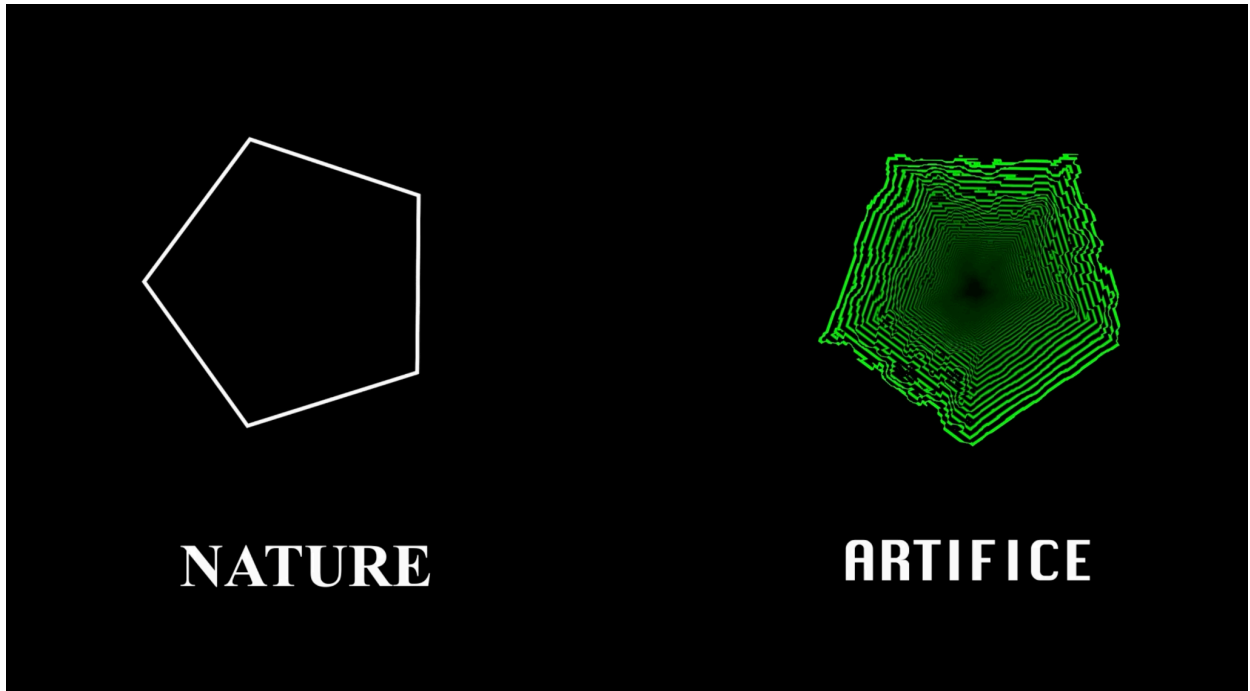
DE/ANGLES AND A CONTINUOUS LINE

Building on the role of geometry and the sharpness of its angles in sustaining a transcendental order, articulating *De/Angular* and the possible ways of disruption began by isolating the

straight line as a primary formal agent of stability. The straight line, in its continuity, becomes more than a compositional device; it operates as a structuring principle through which spiritual authority is made legible and maintained. It organizes space toward coherence, directing perception toward unity and resolution. In this sense, geometry does not simply symbolize transcendence; it actively produces the conditions through which transcendence can be apprehended and internalized.

My intervention begins at the level of this continuity. Rather than rejecting the geometric system outright, I experiment with its internal disruption by softening the angles, and destabilizing the line as a way to unsettle the authority it carries.

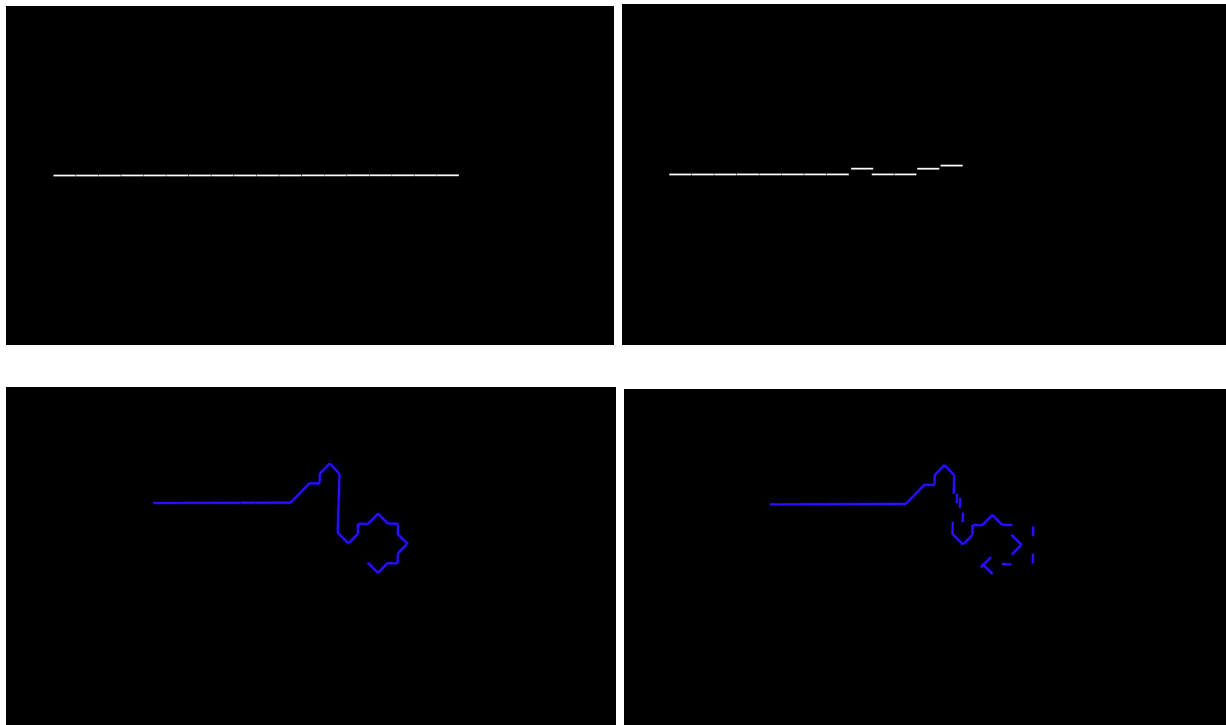
In an early experimental video work, I reconstructed geometric forms drawn from canonical shape-meaning tables, working within the logic of unity found in *Sense of Unity* (1973). Using TouchDesigner, I introduced noise into these stable forms as a method of interference and generated dynamic geometries that do more than distort. By disrupting the visual coherence that sustains symbolic clarity, the noise produces counter-meanings, opening the forms up to something more unstable and multiple.



Sadaf Sadri, Experimentation with noise and concept, 2023

In a later visual study, I extended this exploration through fracturing and misaligning the continuity of lines to generate new formal configurations.

Across these experiments, geometry shifts from a vehicle of transcendental unity to a field of aesthetic exploration moving these geometries further from their origin in unity and divine towards the potentiality of the abstract and its fluid incorporeality. The line becomes a site where meaning can slip. It is within this destabilization that I begin to realize queer form in *De/Angular*.



Sadaf Sadri, Experimentation with continuous line, 2023

The conceptualization of this experimentation and the title *De/Angular* is informed by the work of Kemi Adeyemi in *Beyond 90°: the angularities of black/queer/women/lean* (Adeyemi 2019) which interrogates the perpendicular obsession of the white ruling class that is inseparable from the Christian “contemplation of higher degrees of being” (Adeyemi 2019) that considers verticality as redemption for men’s fall from the heavens. Adeyemi further traces the material consequences of this orientation, demonstrating how such spatial imaginaries shape the

conditions under which minoritarian subjects are positioned and disciplined.

I extend Adeyemi's question "What happens when we take a cue from disability studies and do away with up-down and begin from other angles to do and theorize politics, black and otherwise?" (Adeyemi 2019, 14), to the spatial hierarchies within Shi'i material culture. In part four of this document, I further explain how this idea is articulated in my textile work by placing the queer body within this spatial position which is traditionally reserved for figures imagined as capable of transcendence and proximity to the divine and I expose the performativity of this vertical order and the impossibility of its occupation by the queer body. This gesture resonates with Adeyemi's proposal to abandon the 90-degree angle in favor of what she calls "a new methodology of authority" (Adeyemi 2019, 14).

Here, I would like to focus on extending this framework to the pervasive use of angles in Islamic geometric patterns that stabilize this constellation of meanings through precise repetition and symmetry. While Adeyemi turns toward alternative angles inhabited by bodies of color and queer bodies, in this exploration I disrupt the rigid edges that structure these patterns and hold their meanings in place. By disrupting the angles that stabilize the system, I ask what relations and meanings might emerge once that geometric certainty fractures.

THE VOID

Within Islamic tradition, the mosque is understood as the house of God, a space designed to orient the subject toward divine presence. Architecturally, it operates as a microcosm of the universe, structuring experience in a way that leads toward unity which as I explained in the last section, is achieved through the deployment of geometric forms that carry symbolic meaning: the dome as the vault of heaven, the square as the divine throne, and the circle as the sign of

unity (Ardalan and Bakhtiar 1973, 7). Geometry here is epistemological and organizes perception and guides the subject from the material to the metaphysical.

The idea of a technologically disturbed mosque emerged through my engagement with the work of Sara Ahmed, particularly her writings on spatial orientation and the phenomenology of how bodies are directed in space (Ahmed 2006). Her framework prompted me to reconsider my own embodied encounters with spaces that quietly produce exclusion through processes of orientation.

The mosque for me operates as one such space. It organizes movement with subtle precision, structuring how bodies enter, and submit.

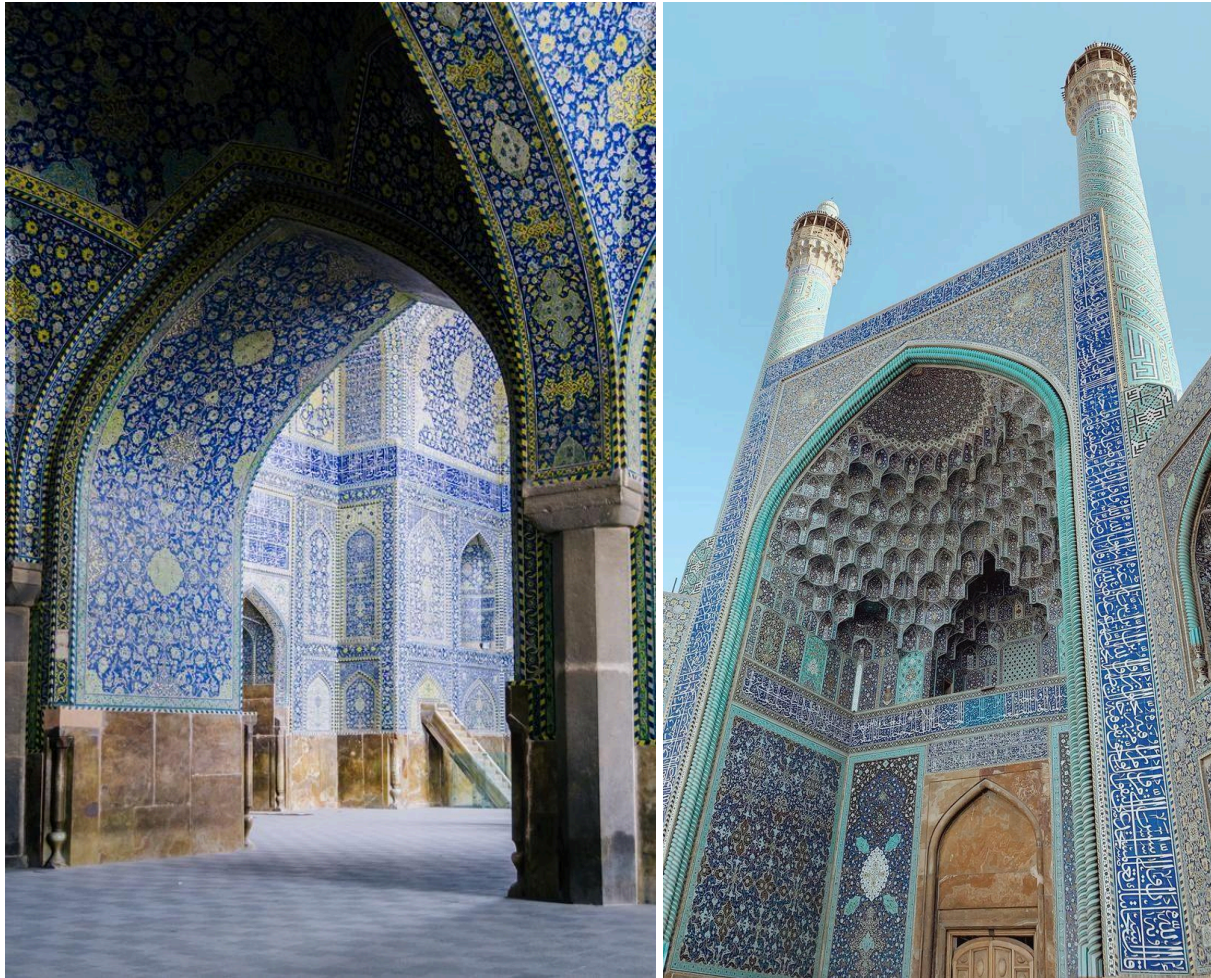
Grounded in the embodied experience of navigating transcendence through this architecture, *De/Angular* emerged as an expansion of my earlier formal engagements with geometry into the digital reconstruction of the Shah Mosque. This reconstruction became possible through my encounter with photogrammetry in the DXARTS curriculum, specifically within the Experimental Video curriculum and through the mentorship of Professor Rice, whose introduction of these tools opened an unexpected methodological path for thinking through mediated space.

The initial aim of this virtual reconstruction was to extend and disrupt the spatial and organizational logic of the site. However, through its multiple iterations, this reconstruction—what I refer to as *داریست* (Scaffolding) within *De/Angular*—shifted its focus toward the production of an alternative temporality.

This shift is enacted through the disruption of orientation and the material logic of the architecture itself. Using virtual world building tools, the work intervenes in the visual, spatial, and sonic regimes of the space. In destabilizing these regimes, *داریست* reconfigures the conditions of encounter and opens the space to host *De/Angular*'s multitude of beings and their encounter

with their visitors.

داربست is reconstructed from a dataset of tourist videos sourced from YouTube. In its multitude of stages of creation, I have used tools such as photogrammetry and Gaussian Splatter to create these fragmented, mediated spaces that mirror my own distance from the site as a queer body in diaspora.



Detailed Views, Shah Mosque, Isfahan, Iran

Photogrammetry and my experiments with Gaussian splatting became critical tools through which I could more deeply interrogate the mosque's orientation and construction. My initial explorations with photogrammetry introduced disruptions into the architectural surface, fracturing the intricate tile patterns and inserting imperfections into what is otherwise perceived

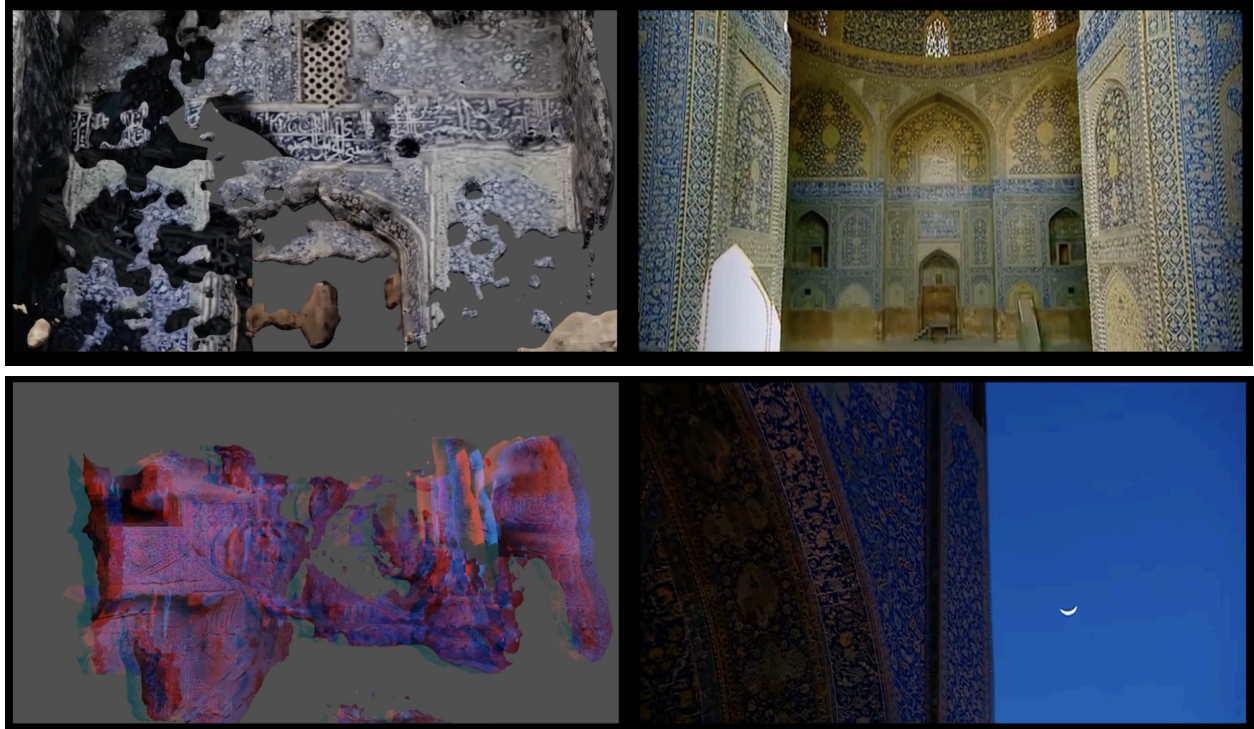
as a perfected, coherent structure. Through its inherent gaps, tears, and unstable geometries, photogrammetry produced a space that resists coherence and remains porous. These distortions are generative conditions that unsettle the visual and spatial logic of the mosque.

To extend my explorations, I reconstructed the mosque using the same dataset through Gaussian splatting, returning to the site with a different computational logic. This process was further developed across several iterations, allowing me to examine how shifts in technique produce shifts in perception and meaning. Gaussian splatting, as a more advanced rendering method, attempted to resolve the instabilities produced by photogrammetry, generating a more continuous and legible surface. It offered a model that is technically refined and hence, ideologically closer to the architectural authority of the original site. In this sense, the transition from point cloud to splat offered an epistemological expansion deemed redundant to my concept. This perfect rendering marked a shift from fragmentation and indeterminacy toward enclosure and discipline.

I landed on the broken outputs of photogrammetry which with their missing data interrupted the viewer's ability to fully inhabit or master the space, forcing a continual negotiation with absence. These absences and voids resonated with this passage from Massumi's:

"An echo, for example, cannot occur without a distance between surfaces for the sounds to bounce from. But the resonation is not on the walls. It is in the emptiness between them."(Massumi 2021, 15)

Gaussian splatting, risked sealing these thresholds of emptiness through which reorientation could occur.



Sadaf Sadri, *Mosque*, 2023. Video stills from early photogrammetry experiments.

While my experiments with Gaussian splatting did not directly produce viable models for the *scaffoldings*, they opened up alternative conceptual and material directions. One direction, which I was able to further develop within *De/Angular*, emerged from observing how Gaussian splatting produces cohesion through smoothness and blurring which offered a new take on materiality that prompted me to move beyond the generative, mathematical space of point clouds and toward a more experimental approach to the mosque's reconstruction.

In these explorations, I began to strip away the solid materiality of the architectural form, introducing instead a fluid, translucent structure that more closely aligned with my conceptual concerns. This shift allowed the mosque to exist not as a fixed object, but as a permeable and unstable environment, moving away from the repetitive logic of the original site that enables its systematic formation and continuity.

At the same time, this experimentation produced a fragmented workflow, requiring movement

between platforms such as Agisoft Metashape, TouchDesigner, Autodesk Maya, and Blender.

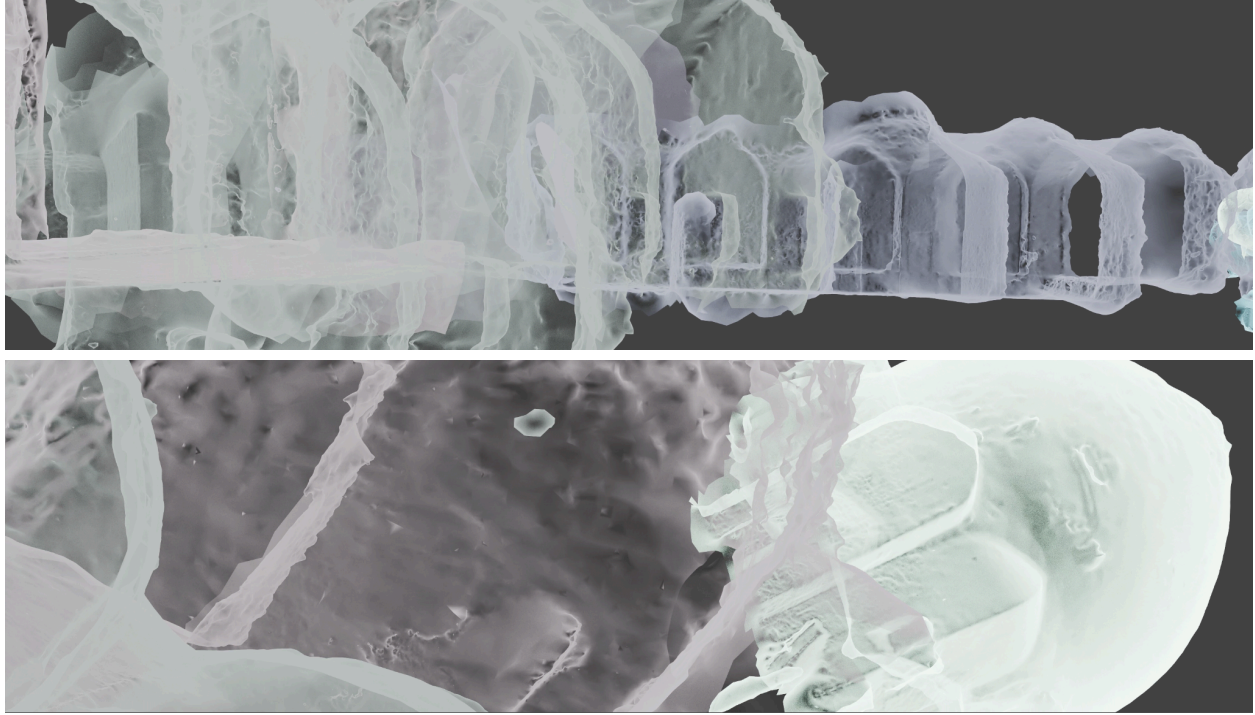
The impossibility of a seamless workflow becomes analogous to my own disjointed belonging as a body in diaspora, as well as the impossibility of inhabiting such a space without performing heteronormativity within the socio-political context of Iran. In this sense, the reconstruction is not simply a technical exercise, but a situated negotiation of access, identity, and constraint. It enters into conversation with Gayatri Gopinath's formulation of the "queer region," where belonging is always partial, mediated, and in excess of national and normative boundaries.

Reclaiming the mosque thus becomes a critical gesture of reconfiguring the terms through which access is granted. Queerness, in this work, operates as both a physical and conceptual intervention that exposes how architecture, much like the nation, regulates belonging through orientation, repetition, and control.

This approach is informed by Gayatri Gopinath's concept of "queer regions" in *Unruly Visions* (2018), where regions are understood as spatial formations that resist the stabilizing logics of the nation-state. Following this framework, I treat the mosque as a contested spatial category whose meanings circulate across temporalities, geographies, and bodies in unstable ways.

Positioning the mosque as a "queer region" allows me to intervene in its ideological and temporal regimes. In this reconfiguration, I transform the mosque as a historically rigid structure into a speculative terrain for new forms of sociality.

Expanding the notion of region beyond the confines of area studies, I situate this work within a transnational framework aligned with Gopinath's queer regional imaginary. Here, the mosque operates as a micropolitical site where architecture, bodies, and technological systems intersect. Within this convergence, I trace forms of presence that have been systematically erased yet persist across time and space.



Sadaf Sadri, Video Stills from *داریست (Scaffolding)*, 2025.

REVERSE AND CHOP

A Call To Prayer

Another manifestation of queer form in *De/Angular* emerges through sound in a 6 channel interactive sound installation. In Shi'i Islam, the call to prayer (*azan*) functions as a religious summons, but also as a temporal infrastructure that organizes everyday life. Growing up close to a mosque, the *azan* for me is a structuring rhythm. It marked the thresholds of the day three times. Before sunrise, at noon, and at sunset. Punctuating daily routines and aligning the body with a larger, collective temporality that synchronizes bodies through repetition.

Because of this visceral relationship, to engage with the mosque as a site of control and belonging requires, for me, an engagement with its sonic regime as much as its architectural one.

Temporality has long been a central concern within queer studies. Scholars such as Elizabeth Freeman and Jack Halberstam have explored how normative time disciplines bodies through repetition, productivity, and futurity, while queer temporalities emerge through disruption, delay, and non-linearity. The temporality of trans embodiment, of grief, or of diasporic existence often unfolds outside these normative structures, resisting synchronization with dominant rhythms (Freeman 2010; Halberstam 2005).

De/Angular intervenes at this level. The work disrupts the temporal order imposed by the *azan* by reversing it. The reversal itself is technically simple, a digital inversion of the audio file. Its conceptual consequences are, however, significant because the reversal of the recitation renders the semantic content of the words unintelligible, and with it, the *azan*'s capacity to summon, orient, and synchronize bodies is undone. The ritual it calls into being becomes impossible to perform, because the call can no longer be understood. This gesture maintains the recognizable structure of a specific recitation (Moazen-zadeh Ardebili's *Azan*), while rendering it temporally illegible. The reversal produces a doubled condition in which the sound remains materially familiar, yet its directionality is undone.

In the installation, this reversed *azan* plays continuously across six channels, establishing a constant sonic environment that is already displaced from its normative function. This continuous presence is a formal argument that resists marking the thresholds of the day and enforce periodicity and hence avoids marking time.

This sonic environment is further disrupted by whispered spells embedded within the soundscape, which surface across the channels. The installation also incorporates electronic textile hands as sensors. When an audience member makes contact with one of the hands, the entire soundscape ceases, and a single spell is routed through one specific speaker across the gallery space. This creates an intimate acoustic encounter between the listener and one entity,

allowing direct and embodied access to that figure's knowledge. When the hand is let go, the soundscape returns to the reversed azan, and the collective sonic environment is restored.

This act of reversal here operates as a queer formal strategy. It folds it back onto itself. For those who recognize the words, the subversion becomes audible as a distortion of meaning; for others, it registers as an unfamiliar yet affectively charged sonic texture. In both cases, the azan is displaced from its normative function and re-situated as a site of experimentation. It ceases to function as a directive and instead becomes an acoustic space through which new non-linear temporalities can emerge. Azan here is taken as a medium for queer temporal reorientation.

PART THREE

THE SURPLUS VALUE OF THE VIRTUAL

In this part, I turn to the materiality of virtual space and its alignment with the world-building framework of *De/Angular*. As theorized by Gilles Deleuze, the virtual is not opposed to the real, but to the actual. It names a field of real potential of forces, relations, and possibilities that have not yet been fully realized (Deleuze 1997). My engagement with digital media as a primary medium emerges from this understanding of the virtual as a site of becoming. The capacities for simulation, iteration, recombination, and transformation offered by digital tools allow for the construction of worlds operating through speculative and emergent logics.

Within *De/Angular*, the virtual functions as a generative terrain through which alternative modes of embodiment, relation, and spirituality can be imagined and rehearsed. In this sense, digital space becomes aligned with queer futurity as a space of potentiality oriented toward what does not yet exist, but can nevertheless be anticipated. Through processes of distortion, softening, and recomposition, the digital allows me to destabilize the visual and structural regimes that sustain hierarchy and transcendence within Shi'i aesthetics, opening space for forms and relations that remain unresolved, and in motion.

A turn to Brian Massumi's *The Parables of the Virtual* is helpful in establishing the philosophical foundation for my engagement with virtual space and the exploration of queer potentiality within it.

Massumi begins his discussion of potentiality by distinguishing it from mere possibility by mapping subject formation on the structure of a grid. This grid is a systemic structure. A code. An operative abstraction of what he describes as extensive space, in which movement is subordinated to position, and becoming is reduced to identifiable states. "The grid was

conceived as an oppositional framework of culturally constructed significations: male versus female, black versus white, gay versus straight, and so on.” (Massumi 2021, 2)

For Massumi, the grid functions as a mechanism that captures movement and potential by translating fluid processes into legible axes. Potentiality therefore cannot emerge within the logic of fixed positions alone, because the grid only recognizes what can already be located. His intervention instead turns toward affect, and movement as forces that exceed codified structures and point toward modes of becoming that are not yet fully actualized. This distinction becomes particularly generative for my project, as *De/Angular* similarly attempts to disturb the rigid geometries and classificatory systems through which bodies, spiritual authority, and relations are stabilized. The virtual, in this context, becomes valuable because it opens a space where these structures can be reoriented toward other possible forms.

The fixed positionality within the grid is achieved through the elimination of movement. The stability of each point depends on the subordination of what moves between them. What escapes the privilege of positionality in Massumi’s Deleuzian framework can be understood as the abstract. Abstract is the realm of concepts, affects, and relations that cannot be fully contained within the designated coordinates of the grid and instead occupy its in-between spaces. As Brian Massumi writes, “the abstract is never present in position, only ever in passing” (Massumi 2021, 5). This movement between fixed positions on the grid, he argues, “falls into a theoretical no-body’s land” (Massumi 2021, 4).

For Massumi, it is precisely this excess of movement that cannot be fully captured by systems of classification that carries transformative potential. Focusing on the abstract and its surplus value becomes a way of destabilizing ideological structures from within, creating openings through which alternative forms might emerge.

He theorizes this surplus through the concept of the virtual, understood as a field of potentiality that can be accessed through affect and aesthetics. Affect, in this framework, gestures toward what matter can do prior to its capture by language and representation. It names the force of becoming before it solidifies into recognizable form. In this sense, affect allows the virtual to be sensed within the actual. The virtual is therefore not separate from reality, but embedded within it as unrealized potential. Here, Massumi's virtual closely resonates with José Esteban Muñoz's notion of the "not yet." Neither the virtual nor the not yet describes a deferred utopian future detached from the present; rather, both point toward a structuring absence already latent within existing conditions.

The convergence between these frameworks lies in their shared rejection of positional closure. Both Massumi and Muñoz insist that existence cannot be reduced to what is already given. Every structure contains within itself the possibility of transformation, and it is within moments of excess, affect, abstraction, and disidentification that these possibilities begin to emerge.

For me, there is a productive parallel between philosophical virtuality and the emergence of virtual space within technological discourse. While the concept of the virtual in philosophy refers to a field of unrealized potential, the term "virtual space" originates from technological developments in the twentieth century. Ivan Sutherland, often referred to as the father of computer graphics, popularized the notion of the "virtual world," drawing inspiration from Suzanne Langer's understanding of the "virtual" (Lanier 2001) as an effect produced through art. For Sutherland, virtual worlds described computer-generated spaces capable of simulating spatial presence through technological mediation. Though immaterial, these environments could nevertheless be inhabited.

This convergence between philosophical virtuality and technological virtual space becomes significant for my practice. Digital environments operate as spaces where structures can be

recomposed, and speculative worlds rehearsed. In *De/Angular*, virtual space therefore becomes more than a medium or aesthetic container. It becomes a site through which the potentiality embedded within queer futurity can be materially explored, and temporarily actualized.

This technologically mediated space has been explored in various ways since its emergence as both a technical and aesthetic field. One particularly inspiring example can be found in *Admiror, or Revolutionary Sentiments* (2024), Bahar Noorizadeh and Klara Kofen construct a speculative virtual environment that operates as a stage for the rehearsal of political affect. The CGI-rendered space, part palace, part theme park, part financialized utopia, hosts characters who perform revolution as a kind of choreographed routine which deems liberation a site of an enacted desire that is never realized. At a moment when the global condition of human rights renders the idea of revolution implausible, *Admiror* captures this contradiction by turning political action into a looped performance, emptied of consequence and saturated with feeling.

Noorizadeh and Kofen stage the virtual space as an affective infrastructure that suggests both capitalism and its oppositions are sustained through rehearsed sentiments of sympathy, outrage and solidarity, all of which risk becoming aestheticized gestures. Therefore, The palace of *Admiror* is not a utopian alternative, but a critical apparatus where the performative script of revolution is exposed and rehearsed.

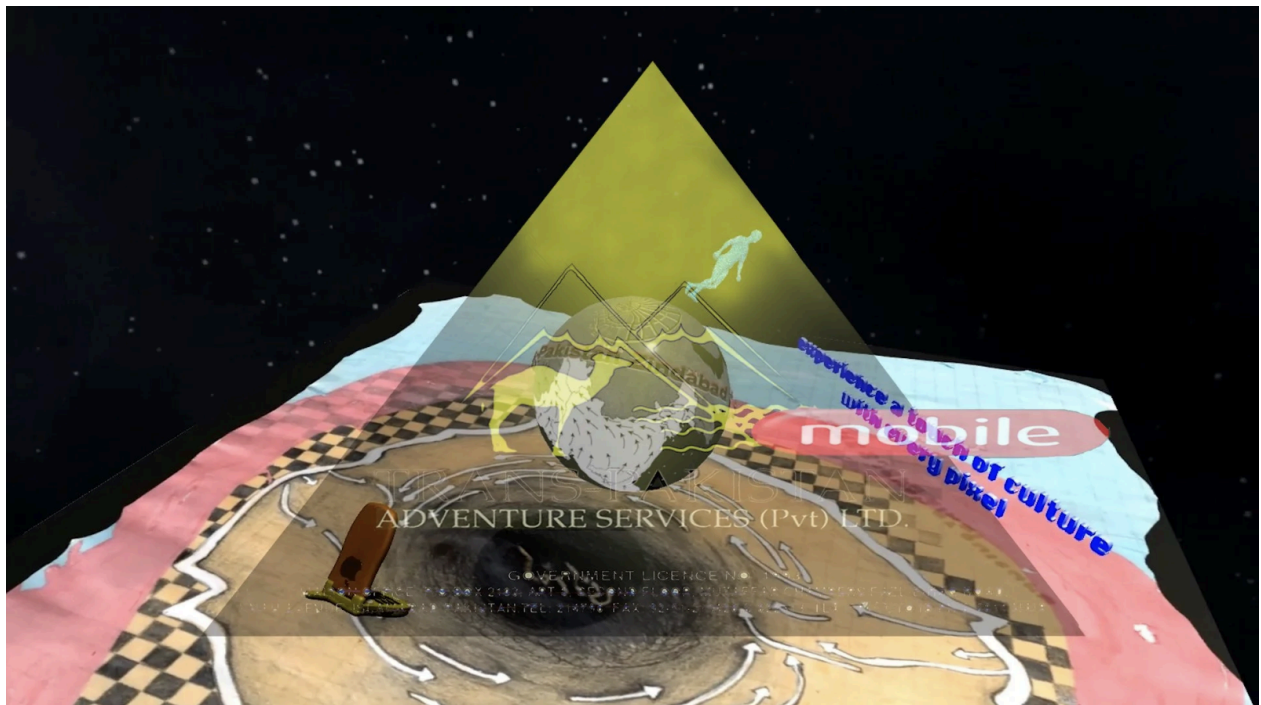


Admiror, Or Revolutionary Sentiments by Bahar Noorizadeh and Klara Kofen, at Medialab Matadero, Madrid, 2024.

Umber Majeed's use of virtual space in world-building has also informed my thinking around world-building.. In *Made In Trans-Pakistan*, they use augmented reality and video as well as ceramics and sculpture to construct a layered multimedia environment that examines the entanglement of nostalgia, urbanization, and speculative development in Lahore. Drawing from her uncle's failed tourism company "Trans-Pakistan," which she reimagines as *Trans-Pakistan Adventure Services*, Majeed transforms personal archive into a broader critique of national aspiration and capitalist spectacle. This gesture is further grounded in the architectural logic of Bahria Town, a privatized urban development that reproduces European landmarks within a heavily securitized, quasi-Islamic environment. By reworking these spaces digitally and sculpturally, Majeed exposes how imported fantasies of modernity are localized, and aestheticized, producing environments that are at once aspirational and deeply uncanny.

The installation operates through a language of doubling and distortion: a monumental fountain is re-rendered with augmented reality horses and streams of plastic bags, while pixelated Urdu text emerges from a destabilized, checkered ground, evoking a diasporic split between presence and displacement. Throughout the space, monochrome graphic patterns and translations of historical poetry unsettle linguistic and spatial norms, while directional arrows guide viewers counterclockwise, subtly resisting the rationalized flow of urban planning.

Rather than presenting a coherent virtual world, Majeed constructs a fragmented, sensorial system where the personal and the governmental, the kitsch and the corporate, the real and the digital continuously collapse into one another. In doing so, *Trans-Pakistan* positions virtual and augmented space as a critical apparatus for unpacking how urban futures in South Asia are imagined, marketed, and lived through contradiction.



Umber Majeed, *Made In Trans-Pakistan*

THE DIGITAL NON-SUBJECT FORMATION

Disidentificatory Performance in the Virtual Space

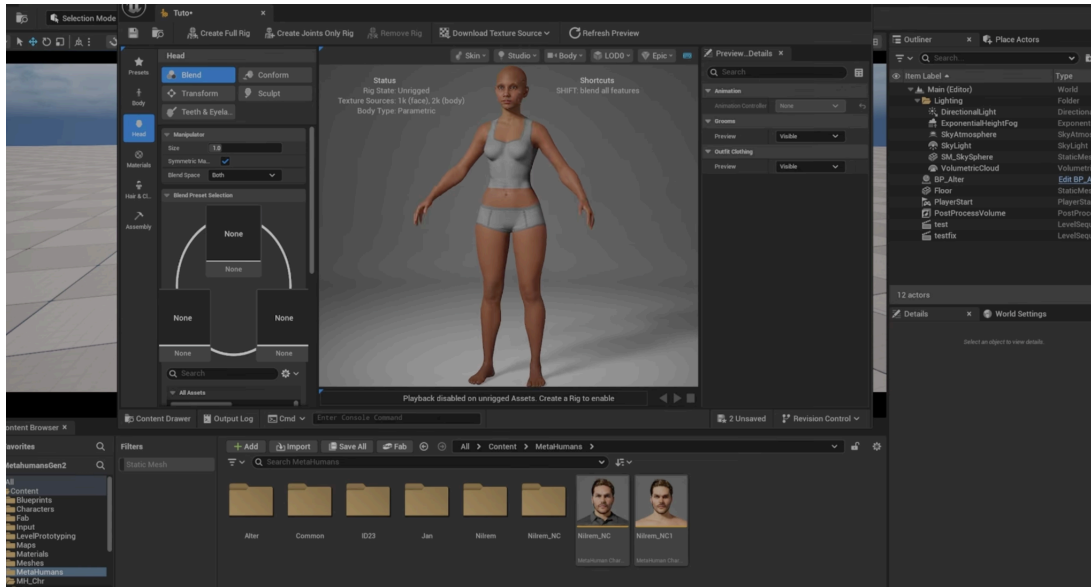
Saidya Hartman and Fred Moten have been central in conceptualization of my understanding of performance in virtual space in *De/Angular*. Moten's exploration of how the object resists, vocalizes, and destabilizes subjectivity has formed the theoretical foundation for my inquiry into the possibilities objecthood can create in virtual performance which has led me to two foundational questions in this work (Moten 2003). How might Moten's framework extend to other historically objectified and erased embodiments, particularly within Iran's Shi'i culture? How does objecthood perform in virtual space?

To define the conditions that produce Black performance, I begin with Fred Moten's formulation of the "stagedness of the violently quotidian" (Moten 2003, 1) developed through engagement with Saidiya Hartman's account of "the terror of the mundane and quotidian" (Hartman 1997, 4). Hartman's attention to the ordinary operations of racial violence illuminates how Blackness becomes constituted through regimes of forced visibility and performativity. The notion of "stagedness" points to the repetitive and choreographed dimensions of oppression, through which hegemonic structures continuously position subjects within prescribed social roles.

I see the role of Shi'i visual culture in shaping a "violently quotidian" reality in Iran, where their constant repetition enforces accepted ways of existing while erasing those who fall outside of these norms. This visual culture does not function as static historical symbols, but as active forces embedded in the everyday, appearing in cafes, mosques, communal spaces, and my grandmother's house.

By dismantling the conditions that define Black performance and reduce the Black body to objecthood, Hartman challenges the subject/object binary. Rather than simply advocating for a transition from object to subject, she reveals that this very framework sustains hegemonic power. Assigning subjectivity to the Black body does not liberate it, but instead reinforces the same oppressive structures. Hartman further argues that the call to subjectivity is often a call to subjugation, subjectivity itself is weaponized to create the illusion of agency, ultimately shifting blame onto the object for its own oppression (Hartman 1997, 6) refusing to see the enslaved body as an object is itself a form of “overlooking” (Hartman 1997, 17). This “overlooking” refers to a failure to acknowledge that certain bodies are systematically deemed objects for the advancement of oppressive structures.

Thinking with Hartman and Moten informed my experimentation with the creation of a non-subject avatar using a photogrammetry 3D model of my face in the Metahuman tool of Unreal Engine. The female body generated by the engine comes with default clothing. Removing the underwear of the Metahuman leaves the body with no visible nipples or vagina, the restoration of which would require a process of skin painting and texture replacement. I deliberately skipped this step in order to further distance the digital body from the experience of the human body and to emphasize the potential of the non-subject to emerge as an entity in the virtual space rather than as a simple recreation of a human form. This emphasis on the non-subject entity opens the possibility of exploring desire beyond the limitations imposed on humans as civil subjects. The avatar, alongside the other entities in this project, therefore asks what might emerge when one steps outside the role of the civil subject, a position that has historically remained inaccessible to queer Middle Eastern bodies in any context. Hence my avatar as an object refuses any offerings for its spectator subject to feed on.



Metahuman in original costume in Unreal engine by (MR3D-Dev 2025).



The Viper in the bosom, original avatar, 2025.

SHIA MATERIAL CULTURE AND *DE/ANGULAR*

De/Angular takes Shi'i material culture as its point of departure because of the central role these aesthetics have played in staging patriarchal authority and legitimizing structures of governance in Iran. Objects, patterns, architectures, and sonic materials associated with Shi'i ritual practices have long operated as active participants in the production of political and spiritual legitimacy, particularly through claims of continuity with the lineage of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad.

My interest lies in approaching these objects as agential entities and exploring what can emerge from recreation and re-situation of these objects within alternative contexts that can expose the limits of the worlds they traditionally inhabit. By displacing them from their inherited frameworks of meaning and power, I ask: What alternative worlds, previously rendered unintelligible, can be revealed through the reconfiguration of these materials?

Much of the philosophical and theological discourse privileging transcendence, unity, and immaterial truth nevertheless depends upon material mediation. Rather than treating materiality as secondary or derivative within Shi'i systems of thought, I approach it as constitutive of how power, spirituality, and subjecthood are staged and reproduced. As Pedram Khosronejad argues, the assumption that the outward appearance of religion is inconsequential to inner spiritual experience is no longer sufficient for understanding contemporary religious formations (Khosronejad 2011, 8). Within Shi'i material culture, objects do not merely reflect belief; they participate in producing the sensory and affective conditions through which belief and authority become lived realities.

BRIEF HISTORICAL GROUNDING

In the sixteenth century, the Safavid dynasty established Shi'ism as the official religion and used visual and material culture as central tools for constructing religious and political legitimacy. The Safavids mobilized imagery, architecture, and objects to align their rule with the lineage of the Prophet and his descendants, thereby embedding authority within both visual and material regimes (Khosronejad 2011, 46). This strategy continued into the Qajar dynasty, where rulers expanded the use of material culture to situate themselves within both Islamic and global histories of power.

Through paintings of the Prophet's ascension (معراج), Safavid rulers such as Shah Ismail and Shah Tahmasb engaged in visual strategies that blurred distinctions between prophetic and royal authority. As Christiane Gruber argues, these images functioned as visual evidence to a complex amalgam of Shi'i messianism, Sufi spirituality, and political ambition. The motif of ascension, with its strong vertical orientation, not only affirmed the Prophet's spiritual authority (نبوت), but also opened a symbolic space through which rulers could claim proximity to divine sanction and Shah Ismail as "manifestation in the world as ruler of mankind" (Khosronejad 2011, 49)



The Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey (*Mi'raj*), Mid 1550s-early 1560s, National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The use of veiling within these images further complicates the relationship between visibility and representation. In some cases, the veiling of the Prophet's face produced ambiguity, allowing for slippages between the identity of the Prophet and that of the ruler. In later Safavid contexts, however, this veil came to signify the impossibility of representation itself, the idea that the Prophet's inner reality exceeds any outward depiction. Here, materiality does not resolve into clarity but produces opacity, excess, and interpretive instability.

Across these visual and material practices lies a shared ideological structure grounded in the articulation of Mohammad (نبوت) and Ali (ولایت). Representations of the ascension of Prophet Muhammad do more than narrate a miraculous event; they establish a vertical axis of authority that links the earthly to the divine. This upward movement becomes a cosmological model through which legitimacy is organized. Within Shi'ite material culture, this vertical logic is extended and reappropriated, enabling rulers to position themselves within this chain of transmission and to claim a form of divinely sanctioned authority. The imagery of ascension thus produces a spatial and symbolic framework in which sovereignty can be visualized as descending from the divine through prophetic and imamic lineage. This structure persists beyond the Safavid period, continuing to inform the ideological foundations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the linkage between prophecy and leadership remains central to the articulation of political and religious authority.

SNAKES LICK

The world reconstructed in *De/Angular* is grounded in my experience of Twelver Shi'i culture and in the assignment of the epithet *Seyedeh* to my name, a designation that marks me as a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and situates my body within inherited structures of lineage and patriarchal legitimacy. Hence I approach Shi'i material culture through a strategy of reworking and disidentification to inhabit its visual and symbolic systems to destabilize them.

Through technology mediation, these materials are displaced from their normative functions and reorganized toward alternative forms of embodiment and connection. In doing so, *De/Angular* moves against the technologies of patriarchal governance and the dominant imaginaries that have historically disciplined queer, femme, and marginalized bodies out of visibility. Rather than reproducing structures of transcendence and authority, the work uses virtual space to rehearse other modes of intimacy, and collective existence that remain excluded from the present social order.

This destabilization begins with the appearance of an avatar wearing a neon green *Ammameh*, a long piece of cloth wrapped around the head and traditionally associated with Muslim clerics. Within Shi'i clerical culture, the color of the *Ammameh* functions as a visual code through which lineage and authority are staged and recognized. A black *Ammameh* signifies descendants of the Prophet, while a white one marks clerics who do not claim prophetic ancestry. This avatar, however, appears in a neon green *Ammameh*, deliberately departing from these established conventions.

Historically, green has been associated with the Prophet's household and with the notion of a lineage believed to descend from heaven. By rendering the *Ammameh* in an artificial neon green, *De/Angular* simultaneously appropriates and destabilizes this symbolic system. The synthetic intensity of the color exposes the performative and constructed nature of inherited

authority, transforming the clerical garment from a marker of transcendental legitimacy into a speculative aesthetic object within virtual space. The neon green *Ammameh* interrupts the visual continuity through which prophetic lineage is naturalized and reproduced.



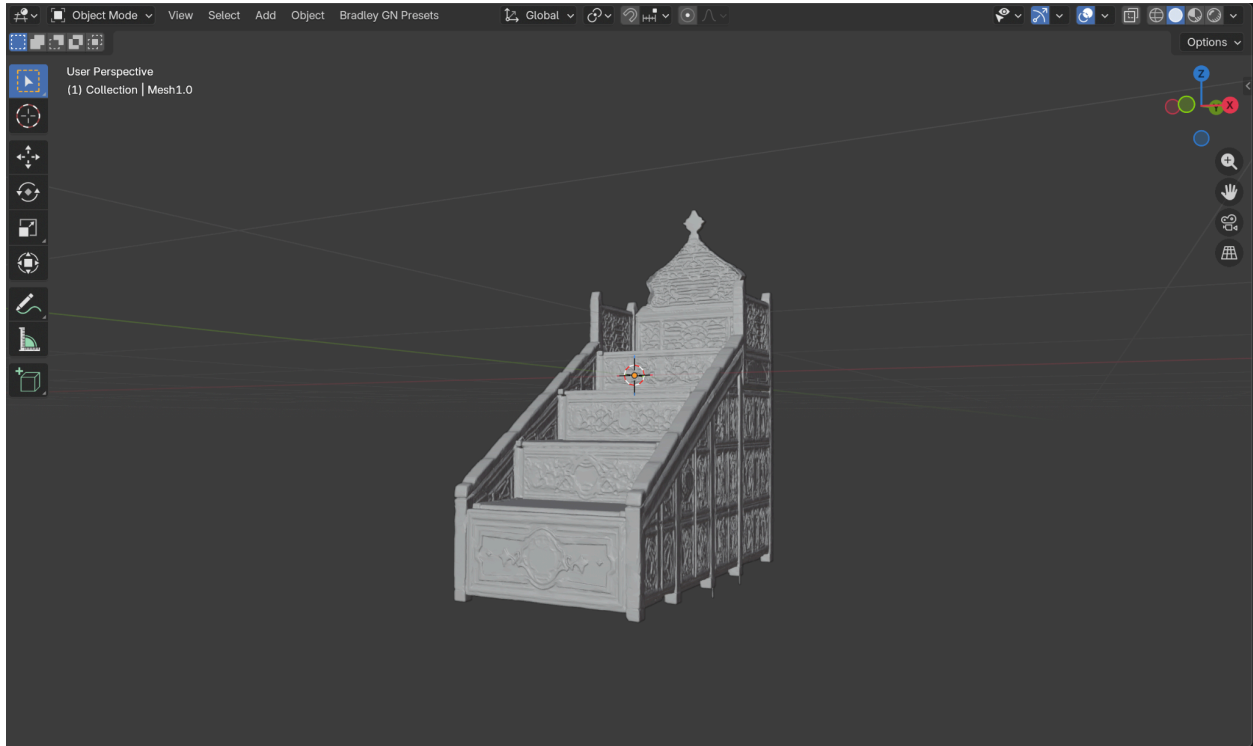
مار در آستین (*Viper in the Bosom*), 2025.

This non-subject representation of myself, titled مار در آستین (*Viper in the Bosom*), inhabits the reconstructed mosque and performs forms of relationality with other entities within the virtual space of the appropriated mosque. Existing outside the framework of the civil subject, the avatar moves through this speculative environment as an excessive presence that negotiates intimacy, embodiment, and desire beyond the structures imposed by Shi'i visual culture.

The avatar appears across three scenes, each unfolding within a dark and unrecognizable environment. These dark spaces abstractly resemble the voids within the restructured mosque itself.

In one of the videos, the avatar and another entity float above a *Minbar* suspended within darkness. Traditionally used in mosques as an elevated platform from which the Imam delivers sermons and leads prayer, the *Minbar* operates as an architectural object that spatializes hierarchy and religious authority. According to Nader Ardalan, the *Minbar* symbolically evokes the mountain (Nader 1973, 68), a form deeply tied to pre-Islamic spatial cosmologies in which mountains functioned as sacred sites carrying palaces, tombs, and fire temples. The *Minbar* can therefore be understood as a continuation of earlier structures of sovereignty, recalling the pre-Islamic *takht* (throne) as a site through which political and spiritual authority was elevated and staged.

Within Shi'i structures, this lineage of authority becomes transferred onto the figure of the Imam, whose position as spiritual and political leader continues to shape contemporary systems of governance in Iran. By suspending the *Minbar* within an ungrounded virtual void and placing non-subject entities above it, *De/Angular* dislocates this architecture from its stabilizing function. The object no longer secures transcendence or legitimized authority; instead, it becomes a floating remnant within a speculative space where structures of power are fragmented.



Sadaf Sadri, 3D Model of *Minbar*, 2026

In this scene, my avatar, embraced by one of the entities, maintains direct eye contact with the audience while slowly sucking on *Nabat*, a form of rock candy commonly consumed in Iran. Positioned within the fragmented virtual mosque, this act transforms an everyday cultural object into a performative device.

The slowness of this action, extended throughout the other videos in *De/Angular*, functions as a disruption of normative temporality within both digital space and the rhythm of spectatorship. Rather than moving toward narrative resolution, the work lingers in duration. This elongated temporality becomes particularly significant in relation to queer and femme embodiment, which are often denied the spatial and temporal expansiveness afforded to normative subjects. By stretching gestures beyond expected rhythms, the work insists on occupying a duration that hegemonic structures frequently withhold from queer bodies.

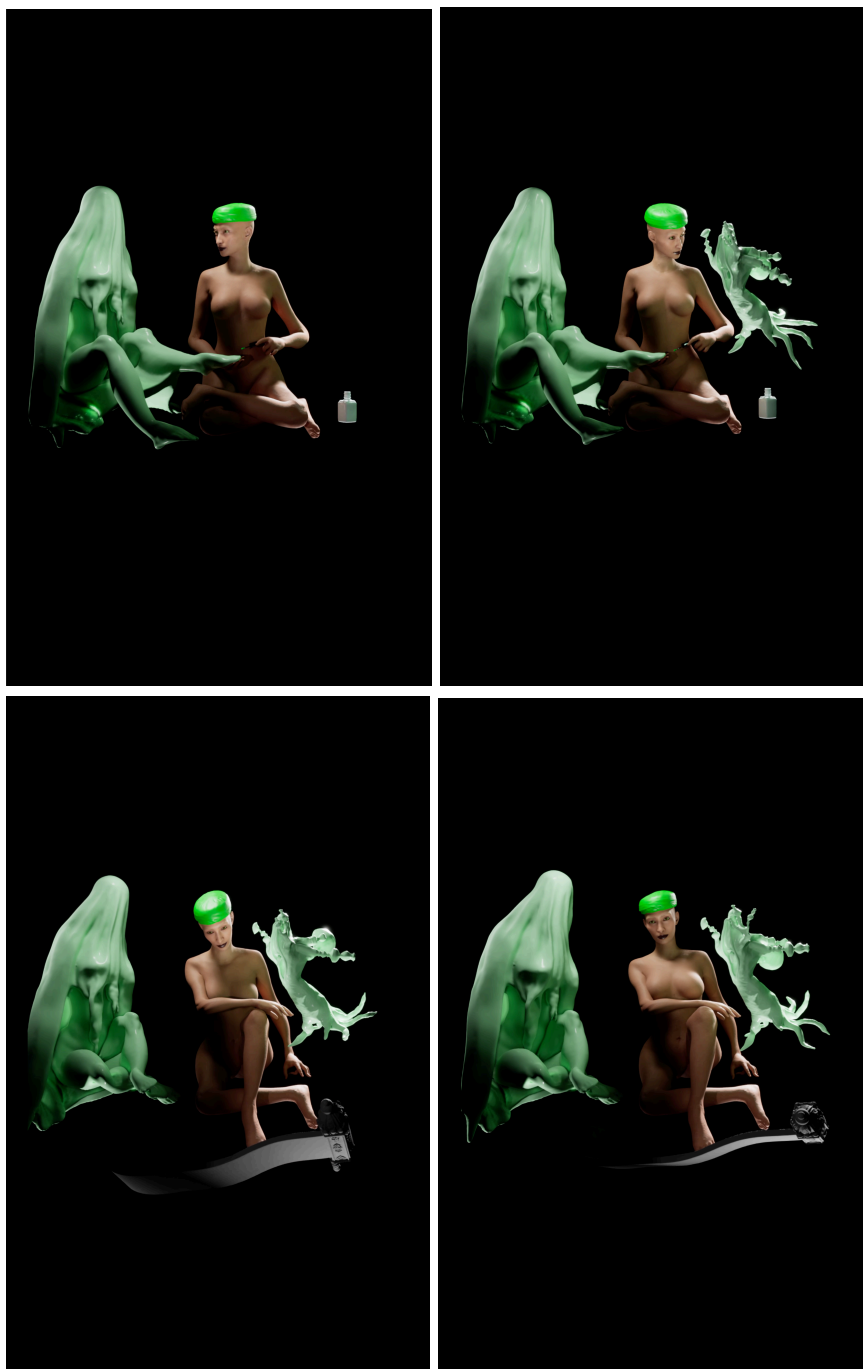


Still from لیس (Lick), 2026

In another video, the avatar is engaged in the quotidian act of polishing another entity's nails, a gesture that creates space for an affective relation to emerge between itself and the other. The scene unfolds through subtle gestures and shared duration, allowing relationality to emerge through ordinary acts of proximity.

After some time, a third entity joins the scene, expanding the encounter into a collective space of exchange. As the entities converse, the avatar gradually shifts its attention toward the spectator, holding their gaze in a gesture that operates simultaneously as invitation and acknowledgment. This moment foregrounds the conditions of spectatorship embedded within the work, making

the viewer aware of their own position as observer while also implicating them within the affective space of the encounter. In returning the gaze, the non-subject entity interrupts the passive consumption of its image and instead produces a reciprocal relation that remains unresolved.



Still from سه تایی (*Threes*), 2026

The entities in *De/Angular* are inspired by ongoing conversations around monstrosity, queerness, and race. The deliberate choice to work with twelve monster-like figures drawn from Iranian folklore and to form kinship with them as a way of breaking from the patriarchal heritage assigned to my name, is central to this piece. Queerness has historically been associated with monstrosity, marking certain bodies as aberrant, or outside the boundaries of the civil subject. In this sense, the figure of the monster-like entities in this work offers a form of freedom to imagine other ways of existing and relating.

Reflecting on my experience growing up within Shi'i culture, where one is encouraged to form spiritual connections with the Imams and the Prophet in pursuit of hope, guidance, and protection, I began to ask a different question: how might one make kin with entities that have been excluded from these systems of belonging? How might we learn to hear the noise of what has been silenced in order to imagine alternative forms of connection and being?

This question led me to the spell-casting practices of Islamic occult sciences, as practices that have been rejected both by science and theology and rely on affective and ephemeral modes of communication between human subjects and more than human non-subjects.

For each entity in the work, a spell is written based on its folkloric characteristics and stories. These spells are embroidered onto sculptural hands inspired by the Hamsa, a protective symbol in Shi'i material culture often associated with the hand of Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad. In this work, however, the hands are deliberately rendered as left hands, subtly disrupting the original form. When touched by the audience, each hand reveals the spell of its corresponding entity, creating a moment of connection between the viewer and the creature and allowing these marginalized figures to enter into new networks of relation.

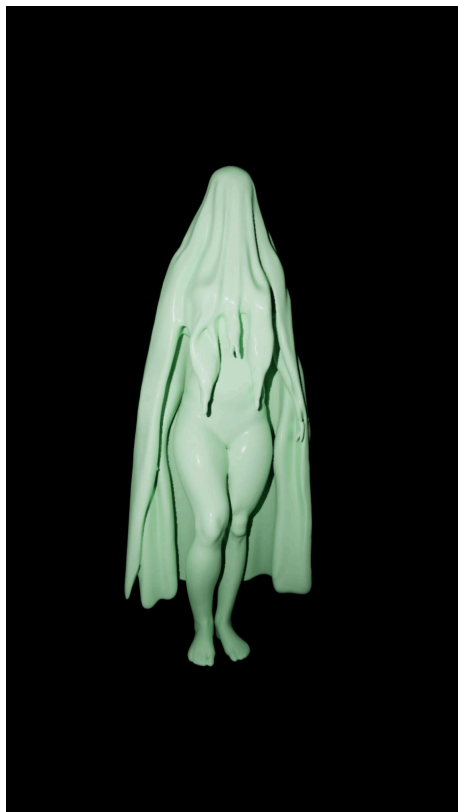
Each of these hands is accompanied by the face of the avatar that repeats these spells in silence, until touched. Here, affect and touch become the only way of relationality and exchange of wisdom.



Exhibition view, *De/Angular*, 2026, 4Culture Gallery (Photo: Joe Freeman)

The two entities that accompany my avatar are imaginative embodiments drawn from twelve creatures and older femme figures in Iranian folklore(selected from the invaluable repository of myths and folklore of the Eranshahr group), often described as disruptors of family structures who steal children or threaten the lives of young mothers. While they do not directly represent any of the twelve figures, for me they are an assemblage of these folkloric presences. In this assemblage, the entities operate as more than symbols; they are active participants in the world-making of *De/Angular*, generating an affective space.

In Twelver Shi‘ism, twelve signifies the lineage of the Prophet’s twelve divinely appointed successors. By invoking this sacred number, the work situates these queer and disruptive entities in dialogue with structures of spiritual and temporal authority, reconfiguring the inherited frameworks of power into a speculative space.



Entities Sketches, 2026

My approach to Middle Eastern mythological figures is heavily indebted to the practice of Morehshin Allahyari. A Kurdish-Iranian multi-media artist whose research is informed by the studies of alchemy and mythical beings of the MENA region. A forward looking futurity informed by the past is the core meaning of many of Morehshin's work including "She Who Sees The Unknown" a project in which she recreates mythical Middle Eastern female creatures as agents of transformation., she uses " Re-Figuring" (Allahyari 2016) where the importance lies in examining what can be imagined by "re-imagining the past—especially the kind of past that is forgotten or misrepresented?" (Allahyari 2016)

Allahyari uses digital tools to bring these figures back to life to render them visible and powerful as beings that subvert the binaries. For her, the digital becomes the speculative site of resistance.



Morehshin Allahyari, *She who sees the unknown*, 2017. TRANSFER Gallery, New York City.

PART FOUR

My introduction to electronic textiles developed during my master's studies at the University of Washington through my work with Afroditi Psarra and the DXARTS SoftLab. Through Dr. Psarra's work and classes, I was introduced to the possibilities of soft circuits, DIY electronics, and textile-based computation as alternative technological paradigms. The Softlab as a critical space encouraged my more extensive research through decentralization both as a technical condition and as an affective and embodied one creating circuitry which is soft and intimately entangled with the body.

My relationship to textiles, however, was formed before this encounter by both a personal, maternal lineage and a broader political one. I first came to know textiles through touch and texture. My mother's sewing patterns scattered across the floor, needles tucked into cushions, and the rhythm of a Singer sewing machine, painted gold on black metal, which she later replaced with a plastic automated one (white with baby blue buttons). Her engagement with textiles seemed to echo her connection to my otherwise emotionally inaccessible grandmother. Besides sewing, she spent long hours embroidering, exchanging patterns of often dissonant subjects - blonde women on horses, last supper, rural European villages - and exchanged the finished pieces with my aunts, who perhaps got to textiles craft for the same reason as her. One of her pieces of a village with two houses that uncannily resembles the home they live in a northern region of Iran ended up being the only thing I bring to the United States when I immigrate.



Mom's Embroidery, Photo Taken in Seattle, WA 2024

Textiles also appeared to me as instruments of power within the visual and spatial regime of the Iranian nation-state. I grew up surrounded by large-scale textile installations deployed in religious and political contexts: banners suspended during Muharram processions, decorative fabrics marking Mid-Sha'ban celebrations, mosque hangings, and state-sponsored displays commemorating the 22nd of Bahman which marks the victory of the Islamic Republic over the Pahlavi dynasty. These textiles operated atmospheric structures and I remember moving beneath their overwhelming scale as a child while their presence shaped my physical orientation in space. They produced a sensory form of power unlike anything I knew.

Textiles emerge as my medium through the convergence of these personal and political conditions.

TIRAZ AND WOVEN SOVEREIGNTIES

A brief consideration of textiles and their entanglement with political power in Shi'i Islam is necessary to situate my engagement with the medium, particularly within the visual and material culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran where my corporeal experience with textile and power is shaped.

The aesthetics I have inherited and work with are shaped by long histories in which textiles function as carriers and signifiers of authority. Understanding this lineage allows my experimentation with textile aesthetics to be read as formal exploration that rework historically embedded systems of power.

In her research, Fadaee Tehrani explains that the etymology of the word *tiraz* originated in Iran, both goes back to decorating and adornment as well as referring to poetry but in most sources it is believed to be understood as embroidery (Fadaee Tehrani 2023). In this particular embroidery technique used in the Sasanid era threads of silk and gold were used to adorn the valuable fabric and in a more prevalent use it refers to the imperial garments of the Sasanid which included the portraits of the kings that turned textiles to vehicles for the circulation of sovereignty. Imperial garments bore figural representations of rulers, allowing the image of the king to move across the empire through bodies. In this way, textiles operated as decorative objects and as mobile surfaces through which political authority was materialized and disseminated.

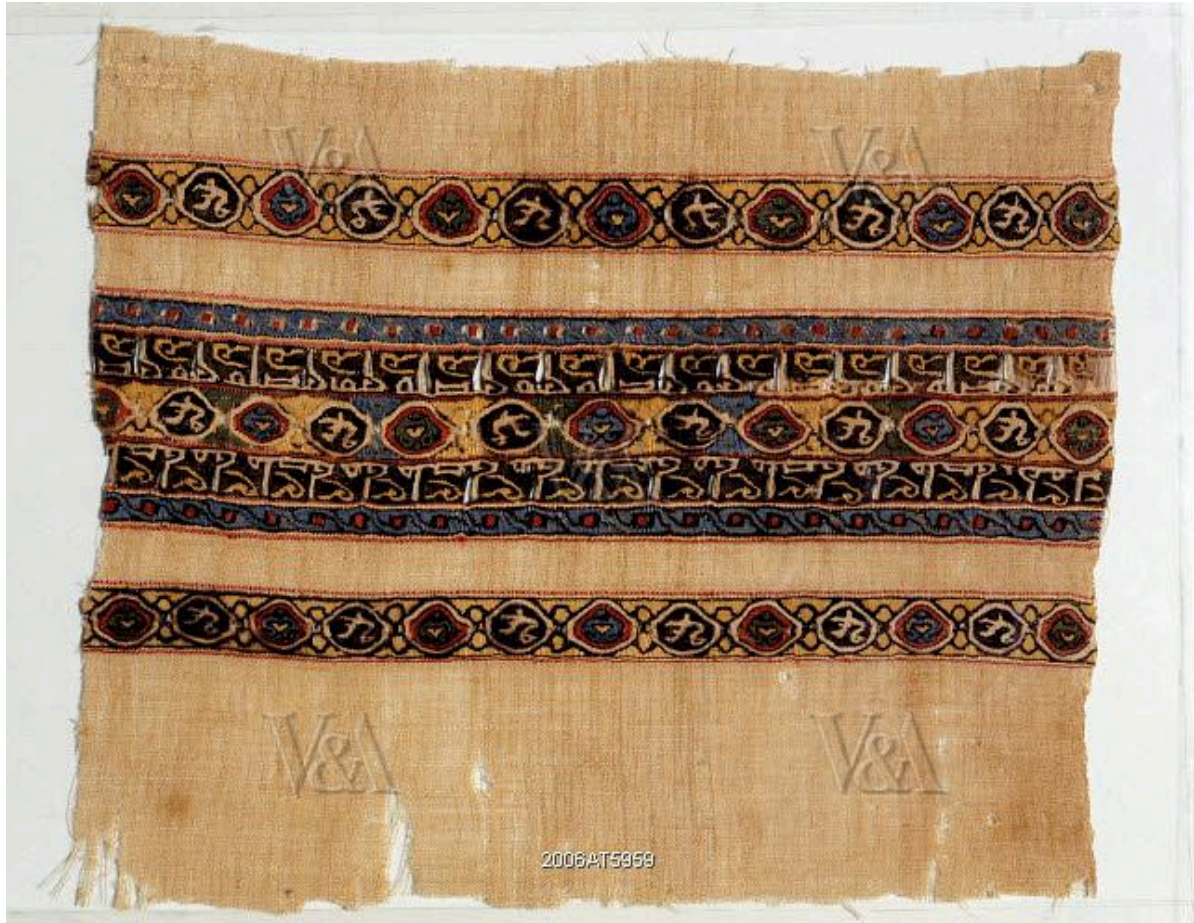
With the expansion of the rule of Islam over the lands of their predecessor kings, Islamic rulers adopt the same aesthetics and material traditions but remove the figurative portrayals of the

kings and instead use this tradition to create their adaptation of it with inscriptions. Arabic inscriptions first appeared on textiles in 693 under the Umayyad Caliphate, when existing Greek inscriptions were replaced with phrases such as “blessings” and “in the name of God” (Louise 2015, 85). It is during this period that *tiraz* begins to take shape as a formalized practice, with caliphs incorporating their names and titles into inscribed garments. *Tiraz* functioned as “an emblem of dignity reserved for the sovereign, for those whom he wishes to honor by authorizing them to make use of it” (Louise 2015, 85).

The production of *tiraz* textiles operated across two distinct tiers of exclusive workshops serving the caliph and court, and public ateliers that produced garments for aristocratic elites (Julia Cohen and Maryam Ekhtiar 2015). The inscriptions woven or embroidered into these textiles typically included invocations of God, the name and titles of the reigning caliph, expressions of praise, and prayers for the well-being of the ruler or the garment’s owner. Through these inscriptions, textiles became legible surfaces of authority, embedding political and religious power directly into the fabric.

The turban, often paired with *tiraz*, further encoded rank and status through its form and method of wrapping, extending the semiotics of textile into bodily comportment.

The use of *tiraz* reached particular prominence under the Fatimid Caliphate, an Isma‘ili Shi‘i dynasty that located legitimate authority in the descendants of Ali ibn Abi Talib through the line of Imam Isma‘il (Louise 2015, 85). Within this framework, *tiraz* functioned as a key instrument in articulating and disseminating claims to religious and political legitimacy. The prominence of these inscribed textiles reflects the Fatimid investment in material forms of authority that could circulate across bodies and spaces. This system declined with the fall of the Fatimid Caliphate in 1171, when power shifted to the Abbasids.



Tiraz with Arabic calligraphy and circular motifs. Linen and silk. Egypt, Fatimid Dynasty, 11th century, Victoria and Albert Museum.

The significance of tiraz expanded further during the Fatimid period, particularly through the ceremonial practice of the robe of honor (*khil'a*). This ritual, which dates back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, involved the gifting of inscribed garments to signify political favor and inclusion within structures of authority to mark bodies as belonging to particular networks of allegiance and governance.

Beyond their role in courtly and political contexts, textiles also operated within religious and funerary practices. Tiraz fabrics were sometimes used as burial shrouds, with inscriptions positioned over the face of the deceased, suggesting a protective or mediating function between the body and the divine.

In Shi'i contexts, textiles continue to hold devotional significance through practices such as *nazr*, where fabric objects are dedicated, and imbued with spiritual and healing capacities. Nazr can take multiple material forms, from knotting pieces of fabric onto holy shrines to channel the healing power of saints, to offering black textiles to mosques for Muharram rituals and commemorative processions. These textiles function as active agents within material and metaphysical exchanges.



Green Fabric Tied to a Zarīh for *Nazr*. Source Unknown.

This complex circulation of textiles points to their malleability and their capacity to redistribute systems of meaning. For me, this potential opens a space for both the reconstruction of inherited histories and the speculation of alternative worlds. In investigating these reconstructions both in material and design. By introducing circuitry and responsiveness into these historically charged forms, I attempt to rework their centralized authoritarian logic toward alternative platforms for other modes of relation.

TEXTILE AS PORTAL

In my textile practice, I draw from the cultural and symbolic functions of textiles. A particularly generative reference for this approach can be found in the films of Sergei Parajanov, especially in *Sayat Nova* (also known as *The Color of Pomegranates*). Across his work, textiles do not operate as decorative elements but as structuring devices that shape temporality. I read his carpets and tapestries as portals and perceptual thresholds that reorganize how the viewer encounters the image. They function as spatial and temporal interfaces, collapsing depth and replacing cinematic illusion with a flattened, symbolic plane.

Through this flattening, Parajanov shifts the logic of cinema away from narrative immersion and toward symbolic density. His textiles confront the viewer as surfaces saturated with meaning that can be traversed through affect rather. These surfaces hold multiple temporalities of craft, ritual, myth, and lived memory at the same time. Hence when bodies are placed on or against carpets and tapestries, they are accumulated in the field of time. Each motif, color, and compositional arrangement opens onto layered meanings, disrupting linear narration and moving the viewer into a non-linear temporality.

In this sense, the carpet operates as a portal not through physical passage but through perceptual activation. Reading Parajanov through José Esteban Muñoz, this excess of ornamentation and symbolic opacity can be understood as a queer strategy within the constraints of Soviet cultural and political production. Meaning is dispersed across pattern, color, and form, allowing alternative narratives to emerge, without direct confrontation.



Stills from *Sayat Nova*, 1969. Directed by Sergei Parajanov

In my work, textile traditions are reconfigured through digital and sculptural processes to transform the surface into a site of intrusion where, the subpar, the marginal, or the demonized, emerges from within the structure and reorients the field of meaning.

To think of the carpet or tapestry as a portal, then, is to move beyond metaphor toward an operative understanding of textiles as world-making devices. In Parajanov's cinema, as in my own electronic textile practice, the textile is an active mediator that produces temporal and perceptual shifts. It enables non-linear engagement and holds multiple temporalities to invite forms of interaction that exceed conventional spectatorship.



Stills from *Sayat Nova*, 1969. Directed by Sergei Parajanov

Electronic textile practice extends this logic further by introducing responsiveness. Fabric becomes a site of temporal layering where the slow time of handcraft meets the immediacy of computation. The process of sewing conductive thread, embedding sensors, and constructing soft circuits demands repetition, patience, and embodied attention, aligning e-textiles with traditional textile practices. Yet the works remain open as the code can be rewritten and responsiveness can be recalibrated. The textile is never fully complete and it persists as a site of ongoing temporal negotiation.

At the level of interaction, e-textiles complicate linear time through anticipation and latency. They wait. Presence activates events that are ephemeral and contingent, producing micro-temporalities that unfold in real time. In this sense, electronic textiles move closer to

performance than to static objecthood. Each encounter generates a fleeting duration that collapses distinctions between body and object, user and system.

In the following pages, I revisit a number of my textile works to further examine how these conditions emerge through my practice.

LISTENING PATTERNS

Textile as Land

In *Listening Patterns*, my first electronic textile embroidery experiment, I approach textile as an alternative terrain through which to articulate the history of Palestine. This work was developed through an independent study with Professor Daniela Rosner, whose conceptual and technical guidance was instrumental in shaping my engagement with electronic textiles and its imaginative possibilities. By recomposing motifs from Iranian and Palestinian embroidery traditions, alongside electronic textile interventions, I transform a fabric structure shaped like a prayer rug into a speculative landscape.

Listening Patterns (2023) investigates the intersection of textile traditions, sound, and computational processes, using ritual as a means of activating political imagination. The work takes the form of a prayer mat that merges Persian textile aesthetics with Palestinian Tatreez embroidery and embedded soft speakers, transforming fabric into a sonic interface.

The conceptual framework of the piece draws from the Persian garden, traditionally understood as an enclosed paradise and a metaphysical site of contemplation. In conversation with notions of utopia and queer futurity, I use the symbolic language of the Persian garden to construct a visual and spatial framework inspired by a historical prayer rug from the collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art depicting a Persian garden. Within this framework, I situate selected Palestinian Tatreez motifs sourced from Tirazain²'s repository of embroidery symbols.

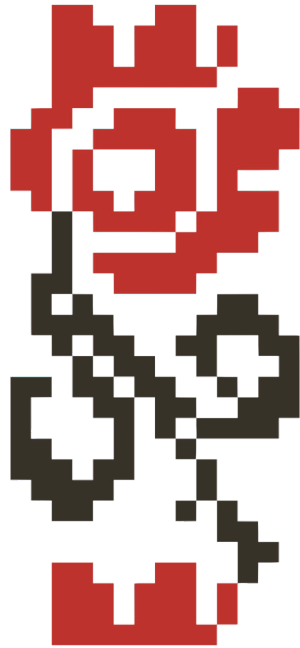
² Tirazain (طرازین) is a digital archive that aims to document and preserve Palestinian Embroidery. <https://tirazain.com/> (Accessed June 3rd, 2026)



Persian Textile, 19th Century, the MET Collection



Many of the selected motifs echo symbolic forms found across Persian textile traditions while carrying distinct meanings within Palestinian Tatreez. For instance, the rosette, which in Iranian visual traditions signifies beauty and love, symbolizes growth and fertility in Palestinian Tatreez. In *Listening Patterns*, this motif becomes the form of the embroidered speakers embedded within the mat.



Rosette Symbol from Tirazain Archive (Left) and the embroidered speaker (Right)

Similarly, the olive tree, one of the most enduring national symbols in Palestine, signifies ancestral presence, continuity, and attachment to land through its longstanding presence across the landscape of the West Bank. Additional motifs, such as leeches, evoke health and prosperity. Through these layered symbols, Tatreez turns ornamentation as a site of identity, and resistance.

By embedding these motifs within the structure of a prayer mat, the work stages an encounter between two visual traditions that rely on abstraction, and symbolism to articulate both lived realities and speculative visions of refuge, and land. Following formulations of aesthetics as a world-building practice and a site of relationality, I situate this work within that terrain.

Sound plays a central role in activating this encounter. Using field recordings sourced from Palestine through Radio Aporee³ including street ambience, environmental recordings of a Bazaar and a pet shop, and the call to prayer⁴, the mat becomes a listening device that invites the

³ Radio Aporee is an ongoing sound platform and archive built collaboratively by artists, phonographers, and field recordists, assembling an expansive global corpus of sounds alongside tools for artistic practice and research. <https://aporee.org/> (accessed June 3rd, 2026)

⁴ The sounds used in this work were borrowed from the following contributors to the platform: blackhole-factory, busterksound, rtachmv, mina amplified, and Patrick Tubin McGinley.

audience to kneel in the position of *sajdah* (prostration in Islamic prayer, where the forehead touches the ground) in order to listen to the sounds of the land. The embroidered speakers, shaped as Tatreez rosettes, transform ornamental forms into sonic conduits. In this way, the work constructs a multisensory environment in which listening becomes a mode of political and affective engagement, inviting the audience into a slowed and contemplative relationship with Palestine.



Sadaf Sadri, *Listening Patterns*, 2023

THREADS

Textile As Affective Communication Surface

Threads is an electronic textile tapestry developed through the visual language of Shi'i devotional banners commonly present during Muharram commemorative rituals. Historically, these banners function as material declarations of belief, loyalty, mourning, and collective identification, carrying religious poetry, invocations, and political allegiances through public space.



Devotional Textile for Muharram Ritual Proceedings, Iran. Source Unknown.

Rather than reproducing devotional or triumphalist scripture, *Threads* incorporates the words of a poetic verse widely circulated within Persian literary and oral culture that has gained renewed political force during Iran's ongoing revolutionary movements:

سپید گلِ سرخ، یک گلِ نصرانی
ما را ز سر بریده می‌ترسانی؟
ما گر ز سر بریده می‌ترسیدیم
در محفلِ عاشقان نمی‌رقصیدیم

The poem evokes themes of martyrdom, fearlessness, and sacrificial love. Through its continued repetition across protests and social media, the verse has transformed into a contemporary expression of resistance against state violence.

At the center of the installation, embroidered map-like forms connect three embedded electronic boards that communicate wirelessly through ESP-NOW, a decentralized peer-to-peer communication protocol. Rather than transmitting readable language, the boards exchange encrypted signals that are translated into tactile responses on the tapestry. When one touches the textile, the boards communicate across the fabric structure, activating synchronized vibration motors embedded beneath the embroidery. These pulsations resemble breathing, allowing the audience to physically sense the presence of transmission moving through the textile.

By translating communication into vibration, *Threads* shifts language away from visual legibility and toward embodied sensation. Encryption as a technical process for political and affective strategy to create forms of connection that circulate beneath regimes of surveillance.



Sadaf Sadri, *Threads*, 2024



Sadaf Sadri, *Threads*, 2024

SOFREH

Zine as a gathering space

This project emerged from my longstanding interest in the presentation of monsters and older women in Iranian folklore, a field largely shaped by the scholarship of Hedayat and Donaldson⁵, both of whom frame these figures as superstitions indicative of a nation's backwardness. As my research in this area deepened, I encountered the work of the Eranshahr group⁶, whose repository of mythical creatures and beings prompted me to explore my own relationship to these entities and to anti-scientific approaches to tacit knowledge more critically.

Exploring Eranshahr's repository, I identified 12 figures commonly presented as older women or otherworldly entities that threaten the family structure by instilling fear by targeting young children and mothers. As this collective of 12 figures resonated with my broader research within sexuality studies, I employed textile and free-form sewing techniques to materialize them, imagining a new space of belonging for those who, alongside these entities, occupy the margins.

I chose the form of a سفره (Sofreh) as the central object of this piece which is a cloth traditionally used to lay out meals in Iran. The design of the Sofreh was inspired by Islamic iconography, yet it hosts these 12 entities⁷, whose illustrations are drawn from Eranshahr's research.

⁵ For this treatment of folklore as superstition, see Sadegh Hedayat, فرهنگ عامیانه ی مردم (Tehran: Cheshme Publications, 1991); Bess Donaldson, *The Wild Rue: A Study of Muhammadan Magic and Folklore in Iran* (London: Luzac and Co., 1938)

⁶Eranshahr is a volunteer-based research and production studio whose goal is to make Iranian culture, history, and mythology accessible to a global audience. Through various projects, the team uncovers and reinterprets cultural knowledge, sharing it as free online resources and through physical books and games. See *Eranshahr*, accessed [accessed May 31, 2026], <https://www.eranshahr.com/>.

⁷The 12 entities and their illustrators are as follows: Gotu Karsanli (illustrated by Erfan Aghvami), Hajebukhare (illustrated by Farima Keshavarz), Dadakalaaku (illustrated by Mohammad Rasoulipour), Dig-Be-Sar (illustrated by Erfan Aghvami), Nini-Khomkhomu (illustrated by Mohammad Rasoulipour and Erfan Aghvami), Banda (illustrated by Zeinab Eslami), Khale Ghulak (illustrated by Mohammad Rasoulipour), Nane-Sho (illustrated by Mohammad Rasoulipour), Mool (illustrated by Farima Keshavarz), Astin Deraze (illustrated by Yalda Rasekhi), and Omme Xazra va-Allif (illustrated by Yalda



Still from مادر (*Mother*), 1991. Directed by Ali Hatami.

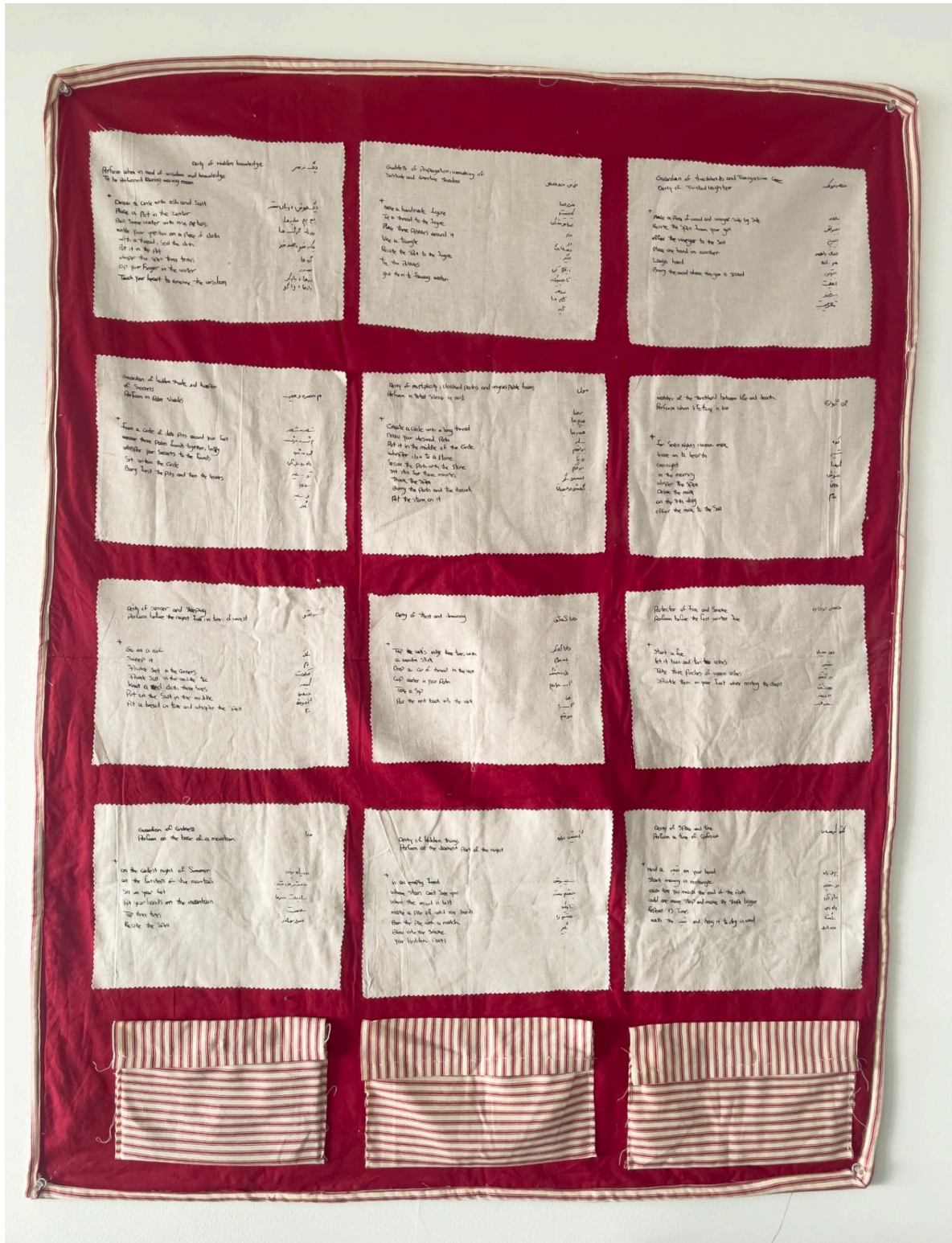
The 12 entities are physically present in the front of the piece. On the back, For each entity, I speculated one spell and one ritual. The zine offers different modalities of connection and kinship with the entities: one could engage with them individually through the spell and ritual assigned to each being, or a collective could gather around the piece and, by holding a proximity sensor in the shape of a left hand, activate the embedded sound to conjure all 12 entities simultaneously.

While *DE/ANGULAR* traverses different domains than this piece, the explorations of the entities, the adaptation of Shi'i iconographic forms, and the spells and rituals that emerged from it established the conceptual foundation for the deeper explorations rooted in the same concepts in *DE/ANGULAR*.

Rasekhi). For more information about the entities and the researchers, see <https://www.eranshahr.com/>, (accessed May 31, 2026).



Sadaf Sadri, *Sofreh* (Front), 2025



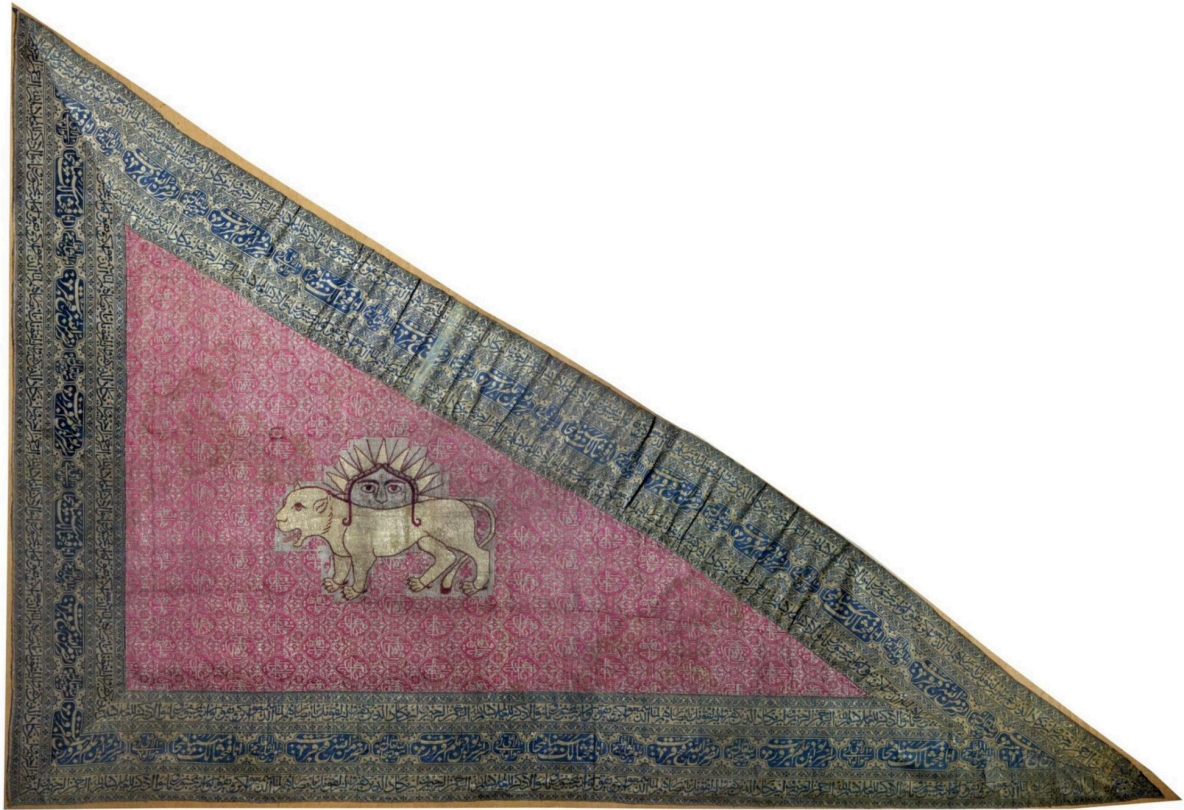
Sadaf Sadri, *Sofreh* (Back), 2025

***DE/ANGULAR* TEXTILES**



Sadaf Sadri, *De/Angular*, 2026. Exhibition view, Gallery 4Culture, Seattle, WA. Photograph by Joe Freeman.

In *De/Angular*, I begin by dissecting the compositional and symbolic structure of Shi'i iconography, which traditionally stages authority through carefully orchestrated visual hierarchies. Drawing from the visual language of Shi'i ceremonial banners, I reconstruct their forms while disrupting their inherited systems of representation. Historically, such banners often center the figure or symbol of a sanctified authority, most commonly the lion associated with Imam Ali, surrounded by inscriptions invoking praise, victory, and divine legitimacy. Within these compositions, language, ornament, and figuration operate together to stabilize religious and political power. Rather than reproducing this structure, I approach it as a system to be dismantled and reprogrammed.



Triangular banner, brocaded silk and metal thread, Iran, Qajar period, 1800–1840, Victoria and Albert Museum.

According to the V&A Museum's documentation the Qur'anic texts on the textiles read

("Banner" 2003):

نَصْرٌ مِنْ اللَّهِ وَفَتْحٌ قَرِيبٌ

Help from God and speedy victory

إِنَّا فَتَحْنَا لَكَ فَتْحًا مُبِينًا

Verily, We have granted you a signal victory

هُوَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى سُبْحَانَهُ

He is God Most High, may He be praised"

هو الأعلى الولي

He is God, Most High, may he be praised

هو الفتاح العليم

He is the Opener [of gates/sustenance], the All-Knowing

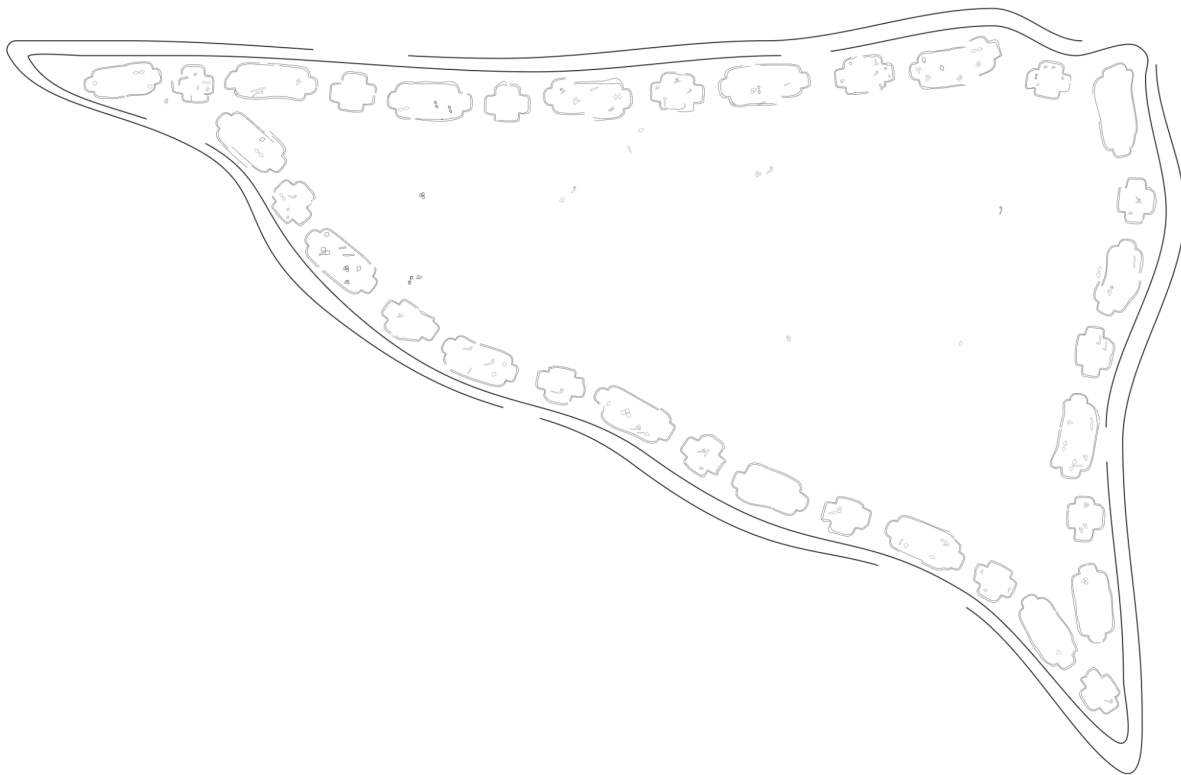
Drawing from Shi'i iconographic traditions, I fragment the banner into layered components, each subjected to a process of removal and substitution. Through this disassembly space is opened for insurgent forms.



Imam 'Ali with Hasan and Husayn, Painting, 19th Century, Qajar Period, Harvard Art Museum.

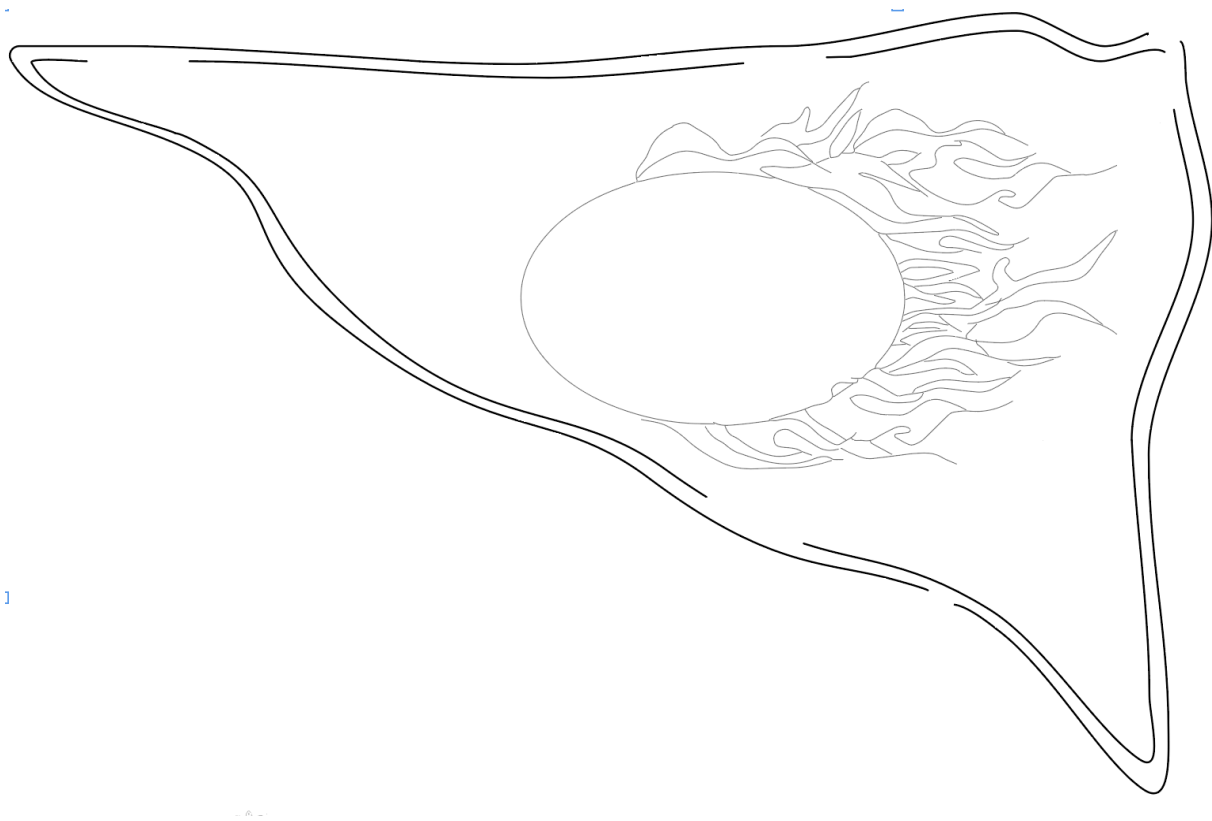
Here, the perfect triangular shape of the banner and its uninterrupted border are ruptured, undoing their claim to coherence and containment, and opening a breach through which the subpar can intrude and reorganize the space from within.

The first layer isolates the ornamental border of the banner and strips it of its textual content. What remains are diacritics, marks that once functioned as supplements to language, now suspended without their linguistic anchor. Detached from legibility, these marks become rhythmic, gestural traces that gesture toward communication beyond semantic clarity. In the absence of readable language, the border suggests other modes of coded exchange.



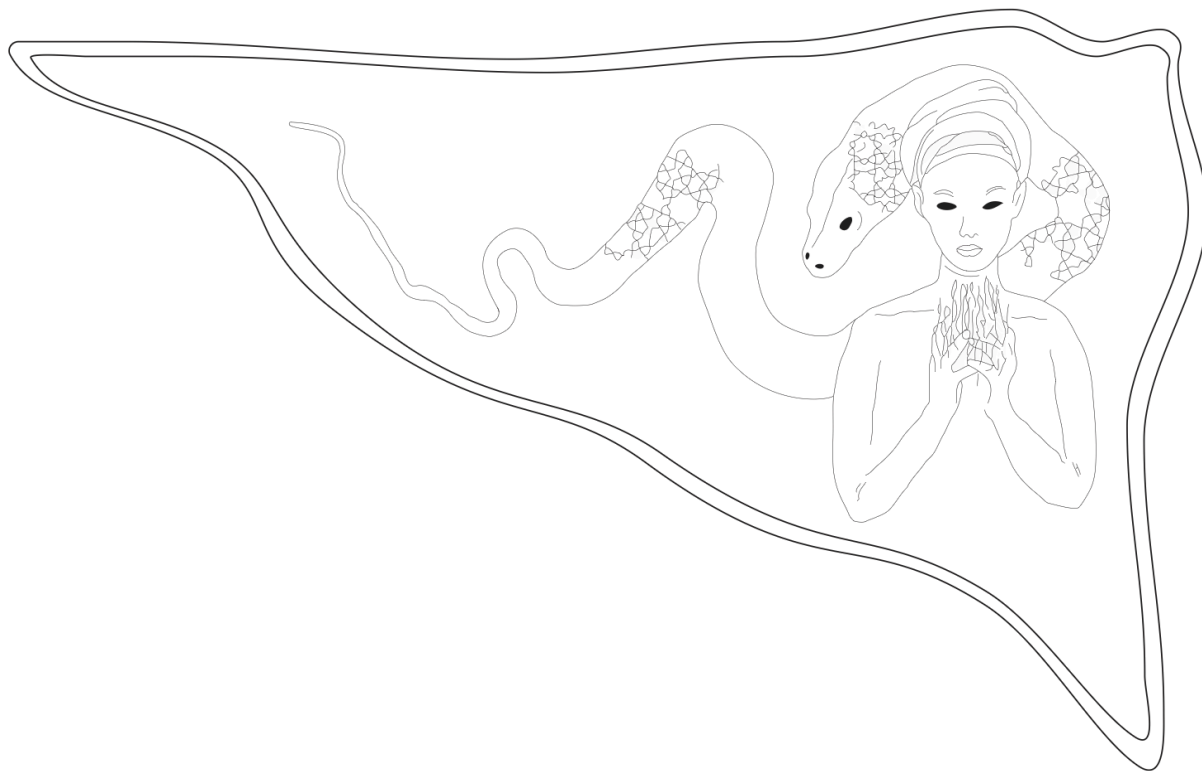
Sadaf Sadri, Textile Design, *De/Angular*, 2025 (First Layer)

The second layer reconfigures the architectural frame that typically houses the central ruling figure. Following Kemi Adeyemi's investigations of angularity that I discussed before (Adeyemi 2019), rotated and displaced, the frame is denied its vertical orientation and upward thrust to interrupt its aspirational movement toward transcendence. This reorientation destabilizes the visual logic of elevation and reverence, collapsing the hierarchy that positions the figure as an object of devotion. The frame no longer supports authority; it becomes a site of disorientation and refuses to hold power in place.



Sadaf Sadri, Textile Design, *De/Angular*, 2025 (Second Layer)

Within this disrupted structure, the third layer introduces the avatar who occupies the space traditionally reserved for the sanctified body. Occupying this space, the avatar does not seek to replace authority with another stable figure, but to trouble the very conditions under which such figures are produced. Emerging from my ongoing practice of speculative embodiment, the avatar operates as an unstable presence that represents multitudes of erased beings. A snake accompanies the avatar referring to the proverb مار در آستین پروراندن which prompts the avatar's name as the viper in the bosom.



Sadaf Sadri, Textile Design, *De/Angular*, 2025 (Third Layer)

The final layer replaces the angelic figures often found in Shi'i visual culture with a figure borrowed from a spell from the book *طَلسمات طمطم هندي* that is referred to as an occult manual. This figure, rooted in Islamic occult traditions, introduces a reconfiguration of forces.



Sadaf Sadri, Textile Design, *De/Angular*, 2025 (Fourth Layer)

Unlike angelic figures, which often operate within Shi'i visual culture to stabilize sacred authority and divine order, this hybrid figure derives from a talismanic image associated with rituals of separation. Removed from its original linguistic and operative function, the figure no longer performs the magical task for which it was designed. Instead, detached from the efficacy of its textual invocations, it becomes a destabilized presence that disrupts the clarity of mediation and introduces a field of forces that cannot be fully contained within binaries such as sacred/profane or protective/dangerous.

In addition to the conceptual exploration of the banner form itself, I have been drawn to incorporating textile into this project for two major reasons.

First, bringing textile and virtual space together allows me to explore the extension of the virtual onto the two-dimensional surface of the tapestry, and the reciprocal extension of the textile textures into the virtual space of the *Scaffolding*, suggests a continuous process of material and immaterial exchange. Through this gesture, I explore how structures of metaphysical authority migrate into computational and virtual environments while simultaneously insisting on the continued occupation of physical space by bodies and identities that are often denied visibility and permanence within dominant systems of representation.

Second, working with textile and craft allows me to engage forms of knowledge and labor that have historically been marginalized within technological and institutional frameworks. Textile practices carry histories of domesticity, collectivity, ritual, and embodied transmission, operating through repetition, touch, and intimacy rather than spectacle or monumentality.

QUEER MIDDLE EASTERN FUTURITIES

Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to place different materialities, temporalities, and conceptual frameworks into conversation in order to open alternative trajectories within queer futurity and speculative world-making practices centered on the Middle East. In doing so, I hope to contribute to a field that remains comparatively underexamined within both digital arts discourse and dominant frameworks of queer theory.

Through my artistic practice, I have engaged disidentificatory methodologies as a way of negotiating my own experience of power as it is organized through the theological, spatial, and visual structures of Shi'i Islam in Iran. Rather than positioning myself entirely outside these structures, my work moves through their textures, symbols, and aesthetic languages in order to contaminate, and reorient them toward other possibilities. By drawing parallels between these larger systems of authority and my own lived experience as a queer embodied being navigating both material and incorporeal spaces, I attempt to propose alternative modes of relationality, embodiment, and meaning-making that emerge through the condition of transnational diaspora.

Central to this process is an interrogation of how power reproduces itself visually and affectively through repetition. The religious iconographies, architectural structures, geometries, ritual objects, and systems of mediation explored throughout this dissertation symbolize authority and actively participate in stabilizing patriarchal, nationalist, and theological imaginaries. I approach these materials as unstable materials capable of mutation. Through softness, distortion, noise, virtual embodiment, and spatial disruption, my work attempts to expose the instability already latent within these systems and to imagine how they might be inhabited otherwise.

At the same time, this dissertation understands queer futurity not simply as the projection of an ideal future, but as an ongoing practice of constructing partial and fragile openings within the present. Inspired by José Esteban Muñoz's conception of relationality and collective futurity, I understand world-making as something that cannot emerge through isolated authorship alone, but through forms of collaboration, and shared speculation that exceed individual subjectivity.

Therefore my understanding of *De/Angular* is not a completed framework, but only the beginning of an expanding ecosystem of experimentation. This project has only begun to scratch the surface of the vast and complex entanglements between queer embodiment, Islamic aesthetics, virtuality, occult practices, diaspora, and technological mediation. Moving forward, I hope to extend *De/Angular* beyond traditional exhibition spaces and institutional frameworks toward more decentralized and participatory platforms such as the interactive systems, and collaborative environments on the web. I am particularly interested in exploring how decentralized digital spaces might function as sites of distribution and infrastructures for collective imagining as well as how textile can extend these virtual spaces to physical materiality of the embodied experience.

Ultimately, the future of this project lies in continuing to build spaces where inherited structures of authority can be inhabited differently in unexpected corners of the web or who knows? maybe even a small night club.

COLLECTIVE WORLDING

SPAM New Media Festival

In this section, I briefly document my work on the SPAM New Media Festival (SPAM), which was established during my first year of PhD studies at the Center for Digital Arts and Experimental Media (DXARTS) at the University of Washington.

The festival emerged as a space for collective and grassroots experimentation centered around emerging practices in digital arts. More than an exhibition platform, SPAM developed as an attempt to create conditions for gathering, collaboration, and experimentation within the institutional structures of the university.

Conceptually, SPAM is aligned with my broader artistic and theoretical explorations of world-building. Throughout this dissertation, I have approached world-building as the production of fictional environments or speculative narratives as well as the collective construction of alternative modes of relation. In this sense, SPAM became an extension of these concerns into curatorial and organizational practice. The festival sought to produce temporary infrastructures through which artists, students, and collaborators could encounter one another differently and imagine forms of creative life that exceed the isolating logics of academic production.

Inspired by *The Undercommons* (Harney and Moten 2013), SPAM gradually became a site of what Moten and Harney describe as “fugitive planning” within the university system. For many artists and students working within institutional structures, the university simultaneously operates as a site of refuge and restriction. While it offers resources, access, and temporary stability, it also imposes regimes of productivity, competition, professionalization, and legibility that often constrain experimental and collective forms of practice. Within this environment,

organizing SPAM became a way to rehearse other possibilities for being together. It became a modest attempt to “produce fugitivity” within the institution itself.

Through small and often precarious acts of collective labor such as late-night installations, informal collaborations, shared technical knowledge, collective troubleshooting, and the creation of spaces where unfinished, risky, or unconventional practices could still be encountered seriously, SPAM produced a space for alternative belonging. The festival functioned as an evolving social infrastructure sustained through mutual investment and collective desire. The instability and impermanence of the festival became part of its conceptual and political significance. Each iteration temporarily assembled a network of artists and participants whose practices often existed at the margins of institutional visibility.

The collective dimension of SPAM also shaped my understanding of world-building beyond the level of representation. In many discussions of speculative art and futurity, world-building is often understood through the creation of fictional universes, virtual environments, or narrative imaginaries. However, my experience organizing SPAM emphasized that worlds are built through social relations, infrastructures of care, and collectivities even if temporarily. The festival itself became a form of speculative practice in constructing conditions under which alternative artistic and social relations could briefly emerge.

If queerness is not simply an identity but a horizon, a mode of collectively imagining and enacting worlds that do not yet fully exist, then SPAM, in many ways, operated through this horizontality. The festival functioned as a temporary enactment of another way of organizing artistic life, one grounded in experimentation, collectivity, and shared vulnerability.

Importantly, this collective world-building also informed my own artistic methodology. Much of my work throughout this dissertation has explored the destabilization of rigid systems of authority, hierarchy, and mediation through speculative and disidentificatory practices.

Curating SPAM extended these concerns into organizational space. If my artworks attempt to imagine alternative symbolic and aesthetic worlds, the festival attempts to materialize, however temporarily, an alternative social world. In this way, curatorial practice became inseparable from artistic research. Organizing the festival was not external to my practice, but one of the ways through which my investigations into queer futurity, collectivity, and speculative world-building could take social form.

During its four iterations, SPAM gradually expanded its collective reach beyond the confines of the University of Washington and began engaging with various cultural organizations, artists, curators, and cultural workers across King County and beyond. What initially emerged as a grassroots experiment among students and emerging artists evolved into a broader network of shared investment and mutual support that connected people across social boundaries.

For me, this expansion of collectivity was especially significant. As an immigrant artist in Seattle, navigating artistic and academic spaces has not always felt welcoming. Even after years of living and working within these environments, I often found myself feeling disassociated, suspended between simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility that made it difficult for me to imagine myself as part of a larger social and artistic relation.

Yet each iteration of SPAM became a reminder that I exist in relation with many others navigating similar struggles and precarities. Through the process of organizing exhibitions and performances, SPAM generated moments of proximity between artists and cultural workers who might not otherwise encounter one another within the segmented structures of institutional life.

In this sense, the festival's collective dimension was not simply organizational but affective, grounded in mutual support, resource sharing, and collaborative experimentation. The festival itself became a living experiment in constructing alternative socialities within conditions that often discourage them.

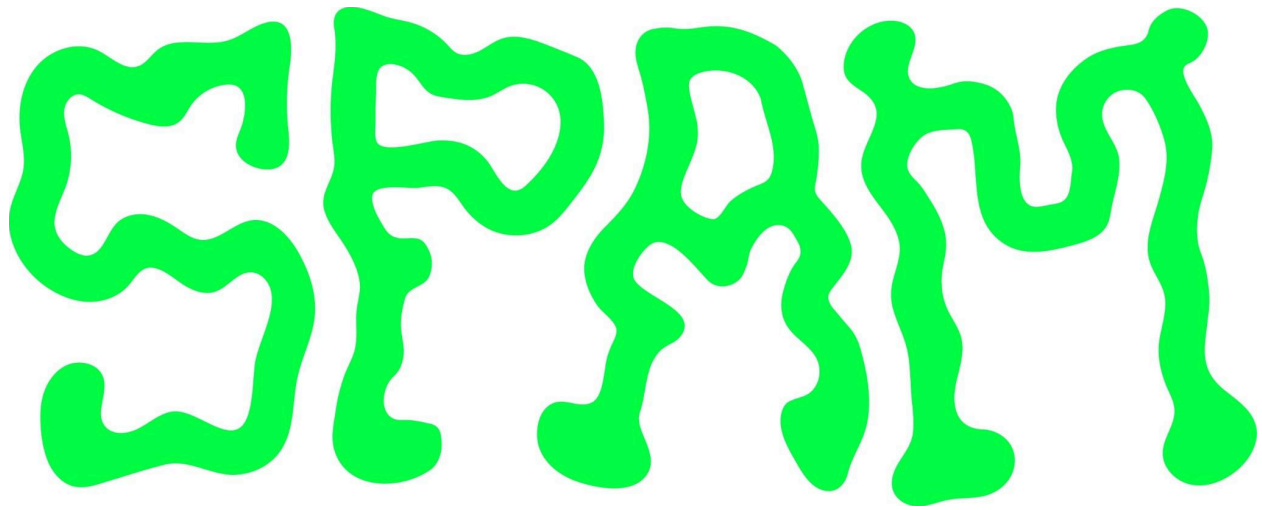
As I think about the future of the SPAM New Media Festival, I do not necessarily imagine its growth in terms of institutional scale, permanence, or professionalization. Instead, I remain interested in SPAM's capacity to continue functioning as a flexible and collective infrastructure for experimentation, especially for emerging artists and practitioners whose works and methodologies remain marginal to dominant institutional frameworks. I think SPAM's meaning precisely resides in its instability and openness and its ability to shift forms, and to remain responsive to the people who constitute it.

In many ways, I see the future of SPAM as aligned with the forms of speculative world-building explored throughout this dissertation. If world-building is understood not only as the construction of fictional worlds but also as the collective production of alternative social relations, then the continuation of SPAM depends on sustaining spaces where different modes of artistic and communal life can still be imagined and rehearsed together. This means continuing to create conditions for collaboration across disciplines, institutions, and communities while resisting pressures toward rigid institutionalization or exclusivity.

Following the logic of fugitivity articulated by Moten and Harvey, I do not see the goal of the festival as becoming fully absorbed into institutional structures or gaining legitimacy through conventional markers of success. Rather, its value lies in its capacity to maintain spaces of experimentation and relation that are not entirely reducible to institutional measures of productivity. The festival's future therefore depends less on expansion for its own sake and more on preserving its ability to remain porous, collaborative, and collectively sustained.

At the same time, I do not imagine SPAM as a utopian space free of contradiction. Like any collective structure, it remains shaped by exhaustion, limited resources, institutional pressures, and the ongoing labor required to sustain participation. Yet perhaps this incompleteness is precisely what allows it to remain alive. Rather than presenting a finished or idealized model of

collectivity, I hope that SPAM continues to function as an evolving experiment in practicing alternative ways of being together through art and technology. Its future, for me, lies in continuing to hold open this space of experimentation.



SPAM New Media Logo by Arthur Derksen, 2022

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