

# Desire of Union

by  
Ardavan Mozafari

A thesis  
presented to the University of Waterloo  
in fulfillment of the  
thesis requirement for the degree of  
Master of Architecture

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2010  
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## Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Ardavan Mozafari





## Abstract

Inspired by the mysticism of Iran, this thesis can be thought of as the unfolding of a story: a story of me, you, and every other human being, each living at different stages of the plot.

This is the story of a lover, one who has been separated from his beloved; one who spends his entire life seeking his love. He climbs mountains, traverses deserts, and survives thunderstorms; nothing turns him from his chosen path. Through all his trials, he sustains the hope that he will genuinely perceive his lost love; gradually, he withdraws from everything except his longing for the beloved. In the end, however, not only is he denied the experience of truly beholding his beloved and calming his pain, but he gradually realizes that his love is unattainable, and that he only became thirstier with longing on his journey towards the beloved. He slowly finds that he has fallen in love with longing for the beloved, rather than loving the beloved, and chooses to dance and cry and chant and pray until he has drowned in desire for union with his love.

In our modern world, a significant number of traditional values have been dramatically manipulated, taking on new meanings and definitions quite different from their original or natural significance. Moreover, these traditional values are being replaced by new ones deemed more suitable to today's world. Ideas such as selflessness, humility, and longing, among others, have seemingly lost value as a consequence of the frantic pace of modern life and replaced by self-centredness, greed, aridity, exteriority, which will have a direct impact on our surrounding environment. Let's imagine a land in which selfishness is not a priority. Instead, replace it with a society driven by humane preferences. Would the architecture of that society still look like ours does today? Would it be as unsociable as it is in our so-called advanced civilization?

This thesis investigates this query through a juxtaposition of the traditional values of a Persian art with the demands of modern life. It is a study of the calligraphic art of Iran as a transcendental practice, highly intertwined with strong emotions, wherein the intention of the research is to discover the relationship between Persian calligraphy and architecture.

The thesis asserts that the lack of a lasting impression made by contemporary architecture is a consequence of self interest in modern life, which has led to a distorted definition of the beloved; this distorted view is a direction in which we have been moving for some time, and in which we continue to move.

Presenting calligraphy as a context for understanding architecture has the potential to get beyond ourselves in the spaces we author. This research aims to allow the essence of Persian calligraphy into modern space as a means to revive the true essence of architecture: reunion of feeling and space, a concept that is given too little attention in our current architecture.



## Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my gratitude to my passionate supervisor, Dereck Revington, for his generosity during this process. I would also like to thank my wonderful committee members, Fred Thompson, who has unquestionably been an inspiration in my life, and Andrew Levitt, for his genuine warm-heartedness: Many thanks for your everlasting support, patience, and encouragement over the past three years.

It has certainly been an honour to have David Warne as my external examiner: I truly appreciate your participation in this process.

Sincerest thanks to Robert Jan Van Pelt and Bob McNair. I also want to thank the great Iranian singer Shahram Nazeri for allowing me to use his inspiring compositions in this thesis.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the genuine support of my family and friends, Mehrdad Mozafari, Golnaz Mozafari, Ali Kamran, Sanaz Hafezian, Carlo Luigi Pasini, Sara Nejad, Maryam Karimi, Amr-El-Bahrawy and specifically Farhad Shahla for his valuable input.

This thesis would not have been possible without the help of my wonderful parents and my beloved Ayda Khazaei Nezhad whose enduring support has certainly been an asset in this path.



## Dedication

To every single brother and sister I lost during the 2009 disputed presidential election in Iran.



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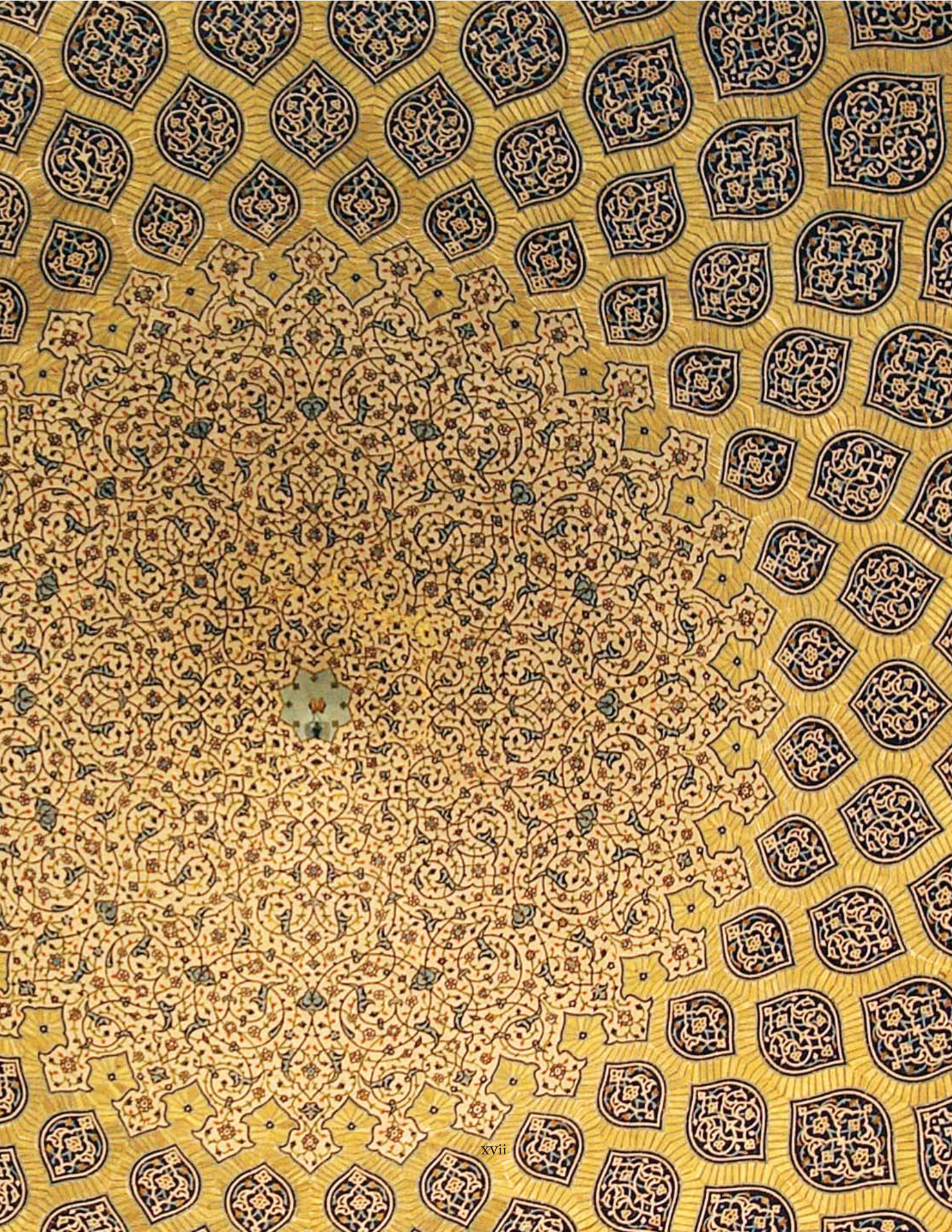
*Out there beyond ideas of right-doing and wrong-doing  
there is a land,  
I will meet you there.*

Rumi













## **Preface**



0.1. Performance by Author



## A Story : The Breathless Lover

*Inspired by mysticism and the Sufi tradition of Iran, this thesis can be thought of as the unfolding of a story: A story of me, you, and every other human being, each living at different stages of the plot.*

*This is the story of a lover who has been separated from a sacred beloved – a lover who has spent his entire life seeking his love. It is the story of the mountains he has climbed, the deserts he has walked, the thunderstorms he has survived. Never has he failed to persevere on his journey. He remains hopeful for a genuine revelation of his lost one and gradually withdraws from everything except his desire for the beloved.*

*Within his spiritual solitude resides a moment: a sacred moment encapsulated by sublime emotions, in which he dramatically evolves. Through his passion, he eventually unveils the beloved for the briefest of moments; the sky is blanched by a fulgurant light and time ceases for the breathless lover. Nothing remains but a deep, resonating silence that has the effect of a hammer relentlessly striking upon the memory of separation.*

*Has the protagonist been satisfied by what he witnessed? Was that truly the beloved, or simply an illusion evoked by the protagonist's ecstasy? Has he been able to reunite with his love?*

*Not only did he not get to behold his love and calm his pain, but the instantaneous revelation has further provoked his yearning; he is highly tempted to undertake the journey towards the beloved. He is entirely enchanted by the magnificence of what he experienced and begins to long for nothing except the unknown – what he knows as the “otherness.”*

*This is the moment when suffering will no longer torment the protagonist; on the contrary, it reveals a pleasant visage, one that will content him the most. He no longer considers grief as merely a means towards uncovering the beloved; indeed, he enthusiastically considers this transition as a denotation for love – loving the “otherness.”*

*He gradually finds himself falling in love with the act of longing for the beloved more than actually loving the beloved. The state of longing not only becomes his lifelong companion, but also extends an immediate bridge to the seemingly unattainable beloved: The lover chooses to dance, to cry, to chant, and to pray until he drowns in desire for his love. Nothing remains but a profound silence, and that is when the story ends.*

*His lungs become fully saturated with the overpowering dominance of his love, yet never before had the protagonist imagined that only upon his becoming nothing would he get to experience the sublime sense of joining his beloved.*

## Longing

“Longing” is a significant theme in the culture of Iran . As illustrated in the story of the breathless lover, longing is a state that the protagonist must reach prior to uniting with his lost piece. It is an intermediate stage that facilitates traveling the road towards the beloved. In the lives of many, ordinary wants and needs may transmute into lifelong desires yet the concept of longing in the East, and specifically in Iran, is different from what is often perceived as desire in the West. Beyond simply being a desire, longing addresses a spiritual state while desire has to do with more material appetites. Through longing one comes to a better understanding of one’s self and therefore to a better understanding of one’s beloved.

*Why should I seek? I am the same as He.  
His essence speaks through me.  
I have been looking for myself!*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jalal al-Din Rumi, Maulana, translated by Coleman Barks. Essential Rumi. San Francisco: Harper, 1995.



0.2. Performance by Author

The above poem is from *Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī*, popularly known to the English-speaking world simply as Rumi. A 13th-century jurist, theologian, and Sufi mystic, he is remembered today as one of the greatest Persian poets. His works are widely read internationally and are highly praised by Persians and Turks alike. In Iran, many compare his masterpiece, *Divan-e-Shams*, to the Quran, revering it almost as a holy book.



0.3. Rumi's tomb (Mevlana Museum) in Konya

Rumi's work, as a microcosm of Persian poetry, is about the ecstatic relationship with one's love, and the grief caused by being separated from the beloved. Rumi reveals his enduring longing for the lost part of his being through the spiritual journeys he has experienced and the rapturous dialogues he has had with his beloved:

*Thee I choose, of all the world, alone;  
 Wilt thou suffer me to sit in grief?  
 My heart is as a pen in thy hand,  
 Thou art the cause if I am glad or melancholy.  
 Save what thou willest, what will I have?  
 Save what thou showest, what do I see?  
 Thou mak'st grow out thorn and now a rose;  
 Now I smell roses and now pull thorns.  
 If thou keep'st me that, that I am;  
 If thou would'st have me this, I am this.  
 In the vessel where thou givest colour to the soul  
 Who am I, what is my love and hate? <sup>1</sup>*  
 Rumi

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholson, Reynold. Selected poems from the *divani shamsi tabriz*. London: Cambridge university press, 1898

Before beginning in earnest, I would like to elucidate the concept of *longing* through a brief elaboration on the concept of *dissolving in the beloved*, as well as on the definition of *beloved* in the ideology found in Iran.

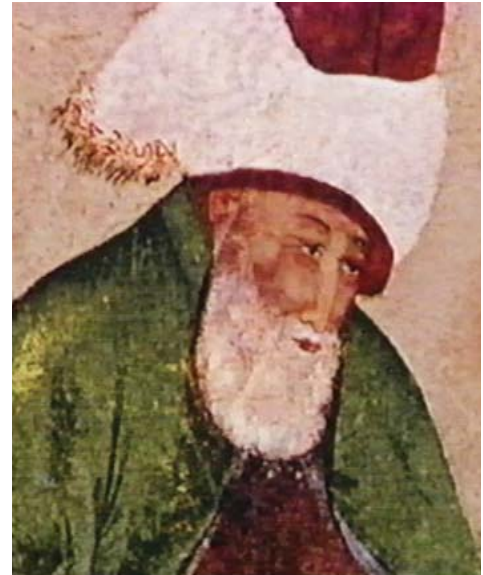
The beloved and its consequential longing certainly have a religious aspect. However, in this thesis, I am going to concentrate primarily on its philosophical aspect, which is compatible with other beliefs and belief systems. Readers are encouraged to freely explore the sacred concepts and add whatever they think may be useful with respect to their own beliefs. The idea is to explore the concept, opening up to a better way to live and to conduct our personal affairs by understanding some of the principles that govern our lives.

The beloved is a symbol of what we long to become one with. The concept of the beloved accommodates various interpretations of the lost part of our soul. It implies a desire, a state of longing for a missing piece that, if one unites with it, would provide a sense of comfort and wholeness. Beloved is the source of inspiration in one's life journey; it is the source that stimulates us to proceed on our path. One person may find embodiment of the beloved through loving a human being, while another may find this beloved divine love.

Similarly, the concept of the beloved in Rumi's work is never sketched beyond what has been taken away from him. The reader never truly discovers whether the poet is describing his love for God (longing) or his desire for Shams (desire). The relation between longing and desire in Rumi's narration may seem to be vague but it is the true essence that makes Rumi's work a masterpiece. Through this ambiguity Rumi takes us to an ineffable territory beyond words.

*I went to the master's abode and said: "where is the master?"  
He said: "The master is in love and intoxicated and a wanderer from place to place."  
I said: "I have an obligation, at least give me a clue;  
I am master's friend, nay, indeed, I am no enemy."  
They replied: "The master is fallen in love with the gardener;  
Seek him in gardens or on the bank of stream.  
Frenzied lovers pursue the object of their love;  
If anyone has fallen in love, go, wash thy hands of him!  
The fish that has known water comes not to land;  
How should a lover stay in the sphere of colour and perfume?  
The frozen snow that has beheld the face of yonder Sun,  
Is swallowed up by the sun, tho' it be piled in drifts."  
Rumi - Ibid*

Dissolving in the beloved is the highest stage of approaching the beloved, and a poetic representation of uniting with it. On one hand, it reflects on the grandeur of the beloved, and on the other, it represents the nothingness of the seeker; all this occurs when the seeker willingly closes his eyes on himself and dissolves in the oceanic dominance of his love.



0.4. Rumi's portrait

This concept is considered to be the ultimate perfection in the mystical training of the Sufi tradition. Yet this state is merely a link in a greater chain called longing, without which true dissolution of the self would never occur. Quite progressively, every link of this chain represents a higher spiritual stage attained while moving towards the ultimate goal, as if longing is a sacred journey from one's present situation towards a more transcendental state. It is a mysterious cycle of desire and dissolution, a widely propagated concept in Persian culture. This is considered to be a path that leads to the beloved, demonstrating one's spiritual maturity and commitment to the path towards the beloved.

The following is sample of the work of Rumi, displaying that longing is not merely a path but a preparation. He reveals his persistent longing through the rapturous poetic dialogues he has with the beloved:

*He said: "you are not mad, you are not worthy of this house."  
Insanity I chose, and was bound in chains.  
He said: "you are not drunk; go away you are not of our kind."  
I went and got drunk, ecstatic I became."  
He said: "you have not died, you are not drowned in ecstasy."  
I died and fell before his reviving eyes  
He said: "you are cunning, you are drunk with fantasy and doubt."  
I withdrew from all, a mute, a Sphinx I became.  
He said: "you are a candle, the qibla of this crowd you became."  
I am not with the crowd, I am not a candle, scattered smoke I became.  
He said: "you have wings, I won't give you wings."  
In the desire of his wings, wingless I became.<sup>1</sup>*

Rumi

Rumi's work is undeniably a masterful exhibition of extremes. He has skilfully transcended the spiritual and carnal worlds in which opposites congregate. There are many cases in Rumi's work where his pursuit of the beloved becomes radical and sometimes eccentric. He portrays agonizing scenes of martyrdom, sacrifice and torment, then suddenly, everts to describing sublime love, erotic situations, drinking and dancing.

*Once I find myself drowning at the bottom of the sea  
Next moment I find myself rising like a dazzling sun*

Rumi

Although inclusion of the opposites is the essence of Rumi's worldwide success, it seems necessary to briefly elucidate the symbolism that is deeply intertwined with his work. I would like to revisit the definition of longing presented in the story of the breathless lover that is inspired by Rumi's symbolism. Longing, as Rumi illustrates, can be understood as the embodiment of a spiritual journey. Through this journey one transcends from earthy concerns and wishes what the beloved wishes; the lover's own wants are gone and he is emancipated from his material desires. Similarly, there are numerous instances throughout Rumi's

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1 Translated by Iraj Anvar



work where it can be interpreted that the body is disregarded for the benefit of the soul. <sup>1</sup>

*I am the bird of heaven's garden  
Briefly encaged in my body*

*Shams! Reveal thy face!  
And I will shatter this bodily mold*  
Rumi

Yet destruction of body is merely a metaphor for criticizing the hegemony of body over spirit. Through devaluing body, it is not the poet's intention to disregard body. Rather, it is the poet's objective to advocate the equal inclusion of both: body and spirit together. It should not be forgotten that in Rumi's work, material qualities are as essential as the spiritual; dancing and kissing, smelling and touching, drinking and beholding are fundamental parts of the poet's oeuvre, all referencing the significance of body.

Many of us can easily sway towards the appetites of our body, a preference that may immediately result in disjuncture of the whole. The beloved endorsed in this thesis symbolizes the spirit that has been taken away from us, what has virtually been submerged in our own material desires. Upon union with the beloved, one may experience the whole of life. Having elaborated on the concept of the beloved, it is now evident that longing for the beloved is a journey that may cure the dissociation between body and spirit.

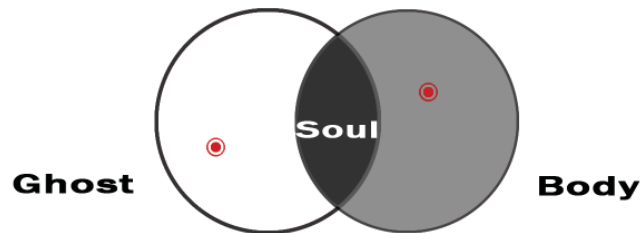
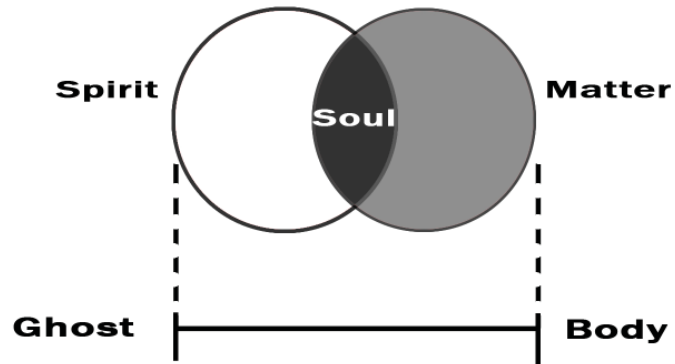
A western view of this concept can be seen through a diagram drawn by Carl Jung. It reveals the influential role of an understanding of longing in liberating us from the imposed materialism of modernity. While any diagram is limited in explaining rich and complex ideas such as love and longing, I believe the following will serve to better understand the thesis. In this evaluation, Jung describes the human as a two-sided being, possessing both physical and metaphysical tendencies. On one extreme, matter represents our body; on the other end of the spectrum resides the spirit. Located in between the two poles, we experience substantially different modes of being from time to time. Depending on our closeness to the desires of body or needs of the spirit, we may pass through many

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<sup>1</sup> This ideology is abundantly reflected in the works of Persian poets. There are many comparable precedents in the works of Hafiz, Omar Khayam, Saadi, etc.

*Like a dust!  
My body is a veil covering the face of my soul  
The moment I rip the veil!  
That's what I long for.*  
Hafez  
(Translated by author)

highs and lows; it is through this movement between extremes that the experience of a range of different emotional states comes about.



0.5. Jungian diagram developed by Author

As the diagram indicates where body and spirit overlap Jung proposed we should place ourselves. Soul is considered a valuable state because it integrates both one's material and spiritual entities. Every human being possesses these three component elements. Yet based on one's spiritual capacity, there are numerous levels between soulfulness and soullessness. As depicted in the bottom illustration, one individual may value material while another may prefer to be orientated to his spirit. To overvalue spirit is to be disembodied and to overvalue matter is to lack spirit and that's why soul is important because it integrates the two.

A more general interpretation of the same illustration indicates that, over time, one may oscillate between favouring his body and spirit. Based on this diagram, it is possible to assert that the ideal position for any individual is in the intersecting region (i.e. the soul), where our



tendencies and desires are integrated so they respond to the needs of the body and the spirit.

However, the pace of life in today's technologically advanced societies has persuaded modern man towards the preferences of his body and all material things. As a result his spiritual desires are disconnected from his material ones. This unpleasant potentially dangerous condition is a consequence of overvaluing body over spirit.

Another characteristic of longing that is portrayed in the diagram is the totality that is intertwined with the soul. Through longing for the soul, one may approach a state of inclusion, a wholeness that has been submerged in fragmentations of modern life. Quite similarly, Marshal McLuhan describes a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control. Similar principles are inferred in the story of this thesis. Through the lover's eternal yearning for his lost one, the story implies the protagonist's weariness due to fragmentations of his society, and his genuine longing for the wholeness that comes of spiritual elevation. This thesis intends to reveal the significance of longing for the soul, a state that accommodates engagement rather than detachment, wholeness rather than fragmentation.

This thesis asserts that the concept of genuine longing has been paralyzed in the corridors of modern classifications and has been replaced by temporal, material desires. This is a distortion of the natural, preferred order, one which has left us with an undesirable lifestyle, rather than a promising mode of being infused with joy and motivation. Through overlaying Rumi's ideology and Jung's diagram, it is evident that one should long for a correlation of body and spirit, to allow stimulation of the spiritual quality of life.

Today's architecture tends to skew towards material appetites, as opposed to including both the material and the immaterial. This thesis asserts that a correct understanding of longing may undo the disjuncture between contemporary architecture and deeper feeling, and may eventually result in a soulful architecture. Through this line of inquiry, the thesis studies traditional Persian calligraphy as a precedent of a practice that has been enriched through longing. It is my intention to further extend this juxtaposition into architecture and inquire if longing can or will influence our spaces.

We will see in the following chapter that longing for the beloved has enormously enriched the Iranian culture, and has had numerous implications in art, architecture and literature. Iranian artists have always expressed their longing for the beloved as a means to alleviate the suffering caused by a feeling of separation. However, it is not the artist's intention to portray longing; on the contrary, his yearning for the otherness unconsciously reverberates in his work and grants it a unique characteristic. Through longing, the work of an artist can be elevated towards a spiritual inspiration – a moment in which the beloved is revealed and a masterpiece comes into existence.



## Chapter I - Calligraphy: The Sacred Art

This chapter studies the impact of longing on a traditional Iranian art. Its intention is to provide a precedent demonstrating how a set of humane values and ethics can profoundly enrich the spiritual capacity of a practice. A “dark endless-seeming corridor” can be interpreted as the embodiment of longing in architecture where the entrance to a mosque – Sheikh Lotfolah Mosque, Isfahan, Iran – provokes the user’s yearning for release from the confining hallway and to join with the dazzling dome of the mosque and its picturesque ornaments in the backdrop.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, “the land beyond the ideas of rightdoing and wrongdoing,” where Rumi awaits us to unite with him, can be thought of the embodiment of longing in poetry.<sup>2</sup>

Yet amongst the numerous applications of longing in the arts, one branch of art in particular stands out as being exclusively founded on longing. In the context of Middle Eastern arts, calligraphy is unique in that it is a medium through which one engages in a rapturous dialogue with the beloved and experiences a unique moment of gratification. It is a sacred practice undertaken in extolment of god that, over time, has evolved within Persian culture into an artistic medium for the expression of one’s desire for union. Through this medium the artist loses the self by meditating on his yearning for the beloved, until he discovers his lost one amid the resonance of the text he writes and the imagery of his thoughts. Calligraphy is the art of longing.

*The calligrapher wrote three lines,*

*One, he read and not the other*

*One, he read and the other*

*One, he read not, nor the other*

*I am that third line,*

*waiting to be read*

*Read me! I am your third line, lost in eternity*

*A mystery I have become, longing to be read*

*Thou, my author! Why have you forsaken me?*

Ardalan Sarafraz - Translated by Author

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1 See page 96

2 See page xv

## History of Persian Calligraphy

Iranian language (i.e. Farsi) adopted the Arabic script following the Islamic invasion of Persia, circa 633-644 AD. As a part of their political domination of the country, Persia's new Arab rulers imposed the use of the Arabic language over the Persian language when a new opposition struggle began. Persia (i.e. modern Iran) was a country with a significant native culture and a considerable body of art that could endure the introduction of Islamic values; it did not wilt despite the Arab empire's political and theological conquest. Once politically conquered, the Persians began engaging in a cultural war of resistance and succeeded in forcing their own ways on the victorious Arabs.<sup>1 2</sup>

The introduction of Islam to Persia was quite different from the Muslim conquest of other countries, as the host culture adopted and integrated Islamic culture, domesticating it rather than substituting the Arab system for any resident beliefs and practices. Due to their long-established literary tradition, which considerably pre-dated the introduction of Islam, Persians were able to maintain their language; only the script switched to Arabic. Following the collapse of the Sassanid state, Parsik (modern Parsi or Farsi) came to be applied exclusively to Persian that was written in Arabic script. The Arabic script was further modified to match the Persian language, adding four letters: [p], [ch], [zh], and [g].

The switch of Persian script to Arabic was an outstanding strategy to protect the essence of Persian culture, which was embedded in the heart of the language. Having adopted Arabic script, Persians revived their cultural values in the new alphabet they now used when writing. By preserving their domestic values, Persians created a different visual style of writing from that used by Arabs; the form is known today as Persian calligraphy.

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1 Mohammadi Malayeri, Mohammad. *Tarikh-i Farhang-i Iran* (Iran's Cultural History). 4 volumes. Tehran. 1982.

2 Zarrüküb, Abd al-Husayn. *Dü qarn-i suküt : sarguzasht-i avadis va awzā-i tārikhī dar dü qarn-i avval-i Islām* (Two Centuries of Silence). Tihrān: Sukhan. 1379 (2000)

## Calligraphy and Poetry

The Arab invasion was followed by the imposition of severe restrictions on the arts based on Islamic teachings; it was undoubtedly a major break in the history of Persian art. The Islamic ban on figural representation of any object was due to the fact that it was considered idolatry.<sup>1</sup> Portrayal of any other divine concept was challenged at the same time, as Islamic ideology holds that the act of creation is exclusively a characteristic of god, and something in which no other should participate. Not only is the person who creates intruding on god's power of creation, but furthermore, the product of that creation is subject to becoming a partner to god.

*Titus Burckhardt, a connoisseur of Islamic art, architecture and civilisation describes how the role of Singularity (Tawhid) and the prohibition of figurative art (aniconism) are fundamentally linked.*

*Islam is centred on Unity, and Unity is not expressible in terms of any image. Thus, Islamic art as a whole aims to create an ambiance which helps man to realise his primordial dignity; it therefore avoids everything that could be an 'idol' even in a relative and provisional manner - nothing must stand between man and the invisible presence of God - thus eliminating all the turmoil and passionate suggestions of the world and in their stead creating an order that expresses equilibrium, serenity and peace.*

Burckhardt, Titus. Sacred Art in East & West. London: Perennial Books, 1867, Chapter 4, pp 29

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1 The Qur'an, it can be argued, does not explicitly prohibit Muslims from using visual representation of humans and animals in an artistic form. We find that the prohibition of figurative art, known as aniconism, is found within many authentic hadith, the sayings and traditions of the prophet Muhammad. The following tradition shows an important link between figurative art and the danger of idolatry, associating partners or equals to the Creator.

“Those who paint pictures would be punished on the Day of Resurrection and it would be said to them: Breathe soul into what you have created.”

(Muslim vol.3, no. 5268)

“Narrated 'Aiysha (prophet Muhammad's wife): The Prophet entered upon me while there was a curtain having pictures (of animals) in the house. His face got red with anger, and then he got hold of the curtain and tore it into pieces. The Prophet said, 'Such people as paint these pictures will receive the severest punishment on the Day of Resurrection.'”

(Bukhari vol.8, no.130)

These hadith explicitly ban the use of images of humans and animals. We find that the prohibition focuses on a general ban on all figurative art forms, rather than a specific one on the depiction of important figures such as Muhammad or any other prophet of Islam.

After Islam outlawed any visual illustration including that of the beloved, Persian literature took up the important role of mitigating this loss of expression. Although this limitation confined many arts, it brought additional importance to text, as it was the only way to offer a legitimate portrayal of the beloved. Persian poetry, as a symbol of Persian literature, further provided a lyrical quality to this circumscribed representation. Gradually, the restriction became the source of creativity and imbued Iranian texts with significant eloquence. Persian poems have become capable of conveying complex meanings, as well as illustrating imaginary pictures. Being exposed to these theological constraints, Persian poetry presents a clear, yet imaginary, picture of the *desired one*. The strictures bestowed upon Persian literature a three-dimensional quality through which the reader could immediately picture what other mediums were unable to convey. This characteristic nurtured the renowned masterpieces by poets such as Rumi, Omar Khayam, Hafez and Saadi, which represent the pinnacle of Persian literature.

The Arabic language culture influenced by the Quran tends to present a clear explanation of the beloved along with a map of the route towards him, through which one can directly pursue the projected path towards god. Persian texts, on the contrary, often offer a dramatic presentation of the beloved by blurring both the definition of the beloved as well as the potential paths that would lead towards him; the Persian beloved engages in an act of revelation and concealment, showing a bit of ankle from time to time and disappearing a moment later, then coming back after awhile to reveal a bit of a shoulder, and so on.

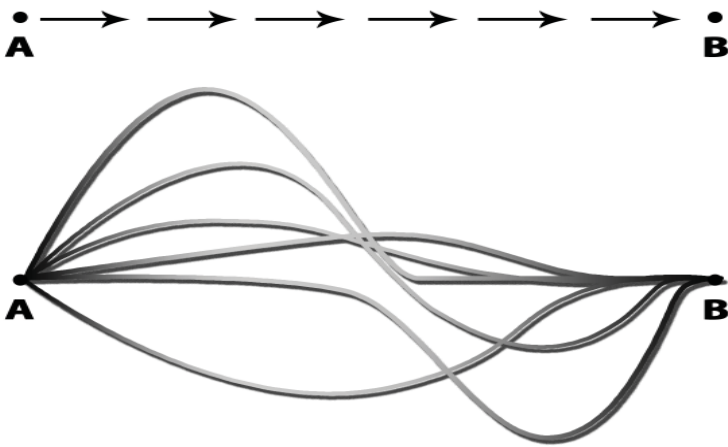
There is a sense of seriousness attached to the Arabic texts, as the written language has been rooted in Quran, which is a fairly straightforward and sober document. Quran is specifically referred to as a guidance manual; hence, it is intended to be both easily comprehended and generally persuasive. By contrast, the texts of Iran possess a charming quality due to their intricate ties with Persian poetry.

Considering the circumstantial context, I would assert that the legalistic qualities of Arabic script gradually evolved into the coquetry of Persian poetry, which is fascinatingly reflected in the calligraphy executed by each tradition; although they share the same alphabet, the two calligraphic traditions are highly distinct. Figure 1.11. reveals the evolution of the adapted script after entering Iran. Arabic calligraphy reaches its zenith in renderings of Quran and of prayers - quite different from the calligraphy in Iran. The height of Persian calligraphy is embodied in writing poems and narrating ethical prose. Influenced as it was by literature, Persian calligraphy altered its path from the severity of prayer towards the coquetry and openness of poetry.

The letters in Arabic calligraphy are designed to be perpendicular and are executed mostly on the horizontal and vertical axes, while Persian calligraphy branched towards a more dramatic practice through the use of fluid cursive forms.<sup>1</sup>

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1 A few centuries after the introduction of Islam, an extensive



1.6. Path - Diagram by Author

In 1360 AD, *Mir Ali Tabrizi* developed '*Nastaliq*', the first Persian calligraphy style which was a fair representation of the Iranian principle. *Nastaliq* has been highly endorsed since its initiation in the 14th century. Due to its perfection, it has been widely practiced over the years and is considered to be the official calligraphic form in Iran. Being referred to as the bride of Middle Eastern calligraphies, *Nastaliq* surpasses the formality of Arabic calligraphy and adds new dynamism to the process of storytelling and communication.

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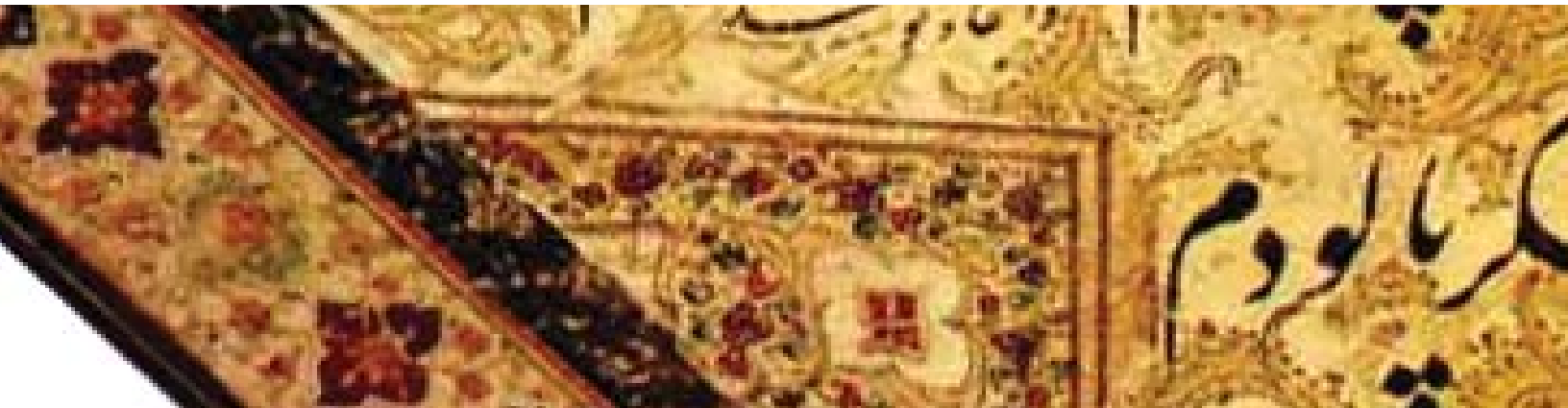
nationalistic movement began within Iran, urging the revival of pre-Islamic values. It resulted in a fundamental cultural shift that is reflected in literature and many arts including architecture, music, etc. See Chapter 3 for more on the influence of Persian culture on Islamic arts.

This style is reasonably harmonious with values endorsed in Persian poetry and adeptly represents its lyrical quality. One of the most significant properties of poetry in Iran is the fact that it is highly complex and full of hidden implications that reinforce its multivalent nature. This has provided Persian poetry with the unique quality of being open to different interpretations; beyond merely being complex, it has the capacity to draw in and connect readers approaching from different contexts.

Persian calligraphy contributes enormously to the complexity of Persian poetry and plays a consequential role in the process of communication. As it is not easily readable, Persian calligraphy adds another layer of complexity on top of the text. In its pursuit of beauty, *Nastaliq* style sometimes becomes hard to read; far from being detrimental to an appreciation of the poem, this correlates with the spirit of Persian poetry.





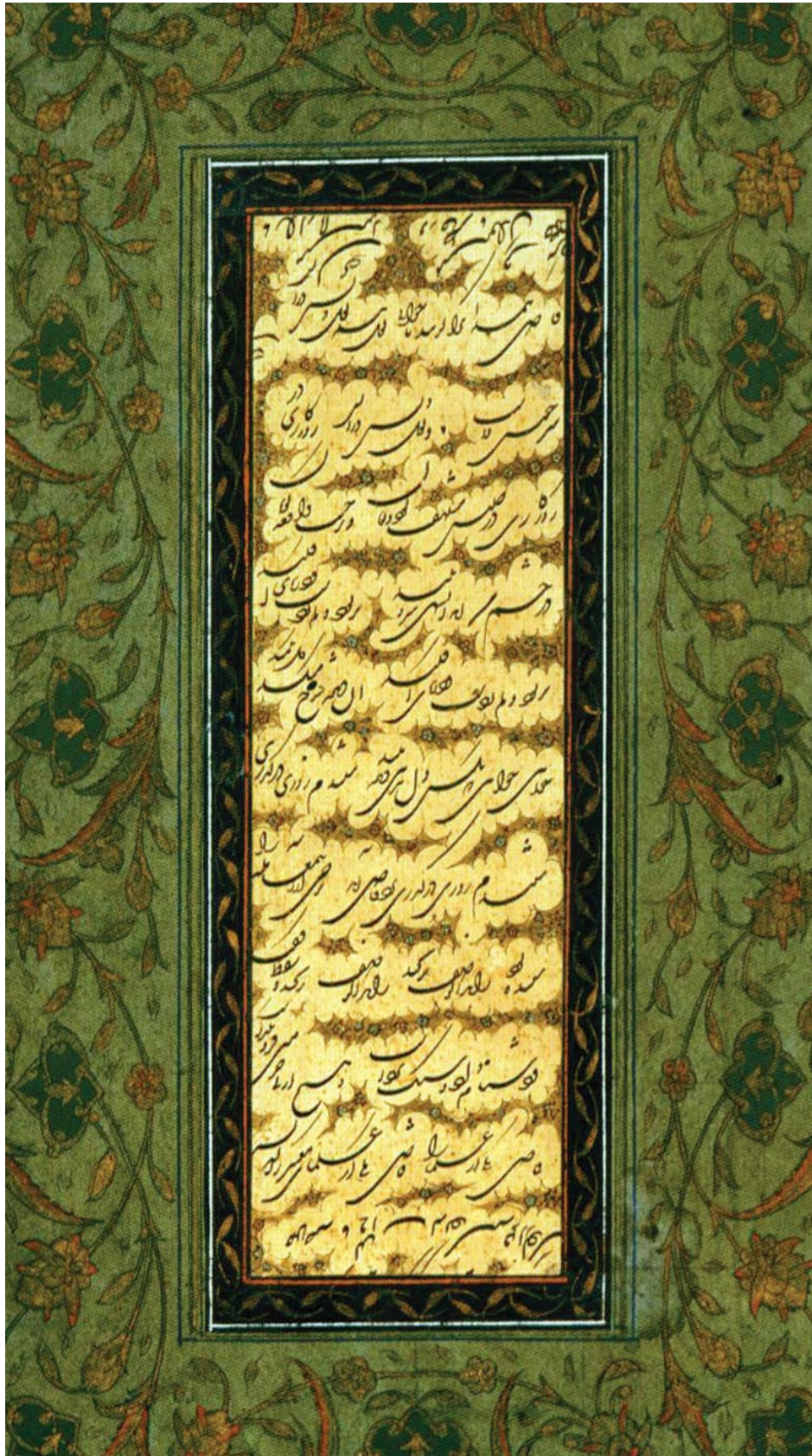


1.8. Detail - Nastaligh by Mir Emad Hasani (1554-1615)

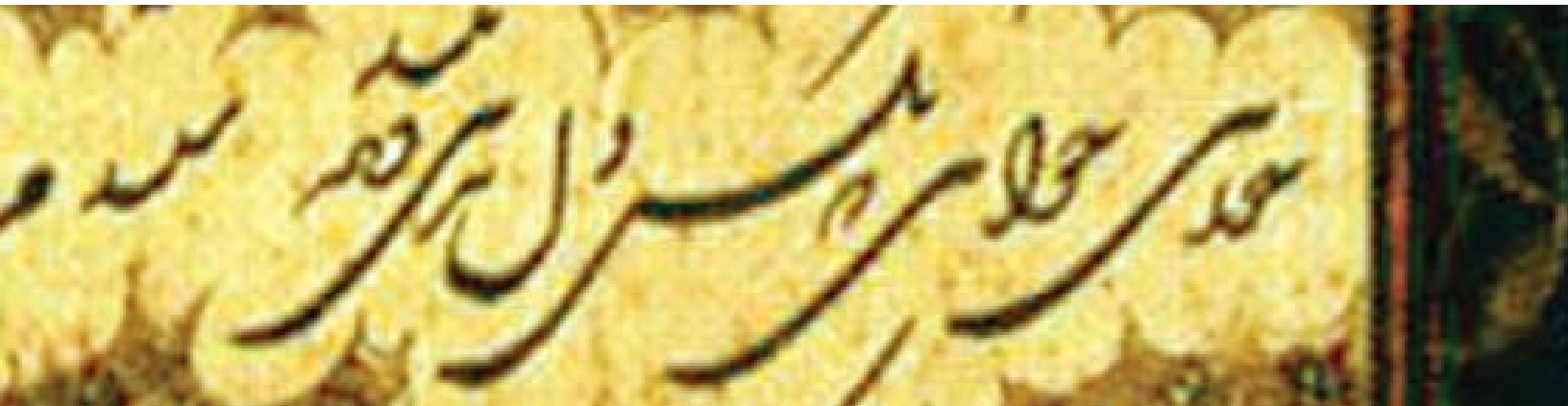


With the creation of the second major style of Persian calligraphy in the 16th century, Persians elevated their adopted script even further, to create an absolute art. *Shekasteh Nastaliq*, or simply *Shekasteh* (literally, “broken”), is a style that entirely breaks out of the existing forms and provides the calligrapher with great freedom – and authority – to create compelling pieces of arts. The fluidity of Shekasteh brings to mind the image of a lively river, a brisk breeze, or an ascending bird.



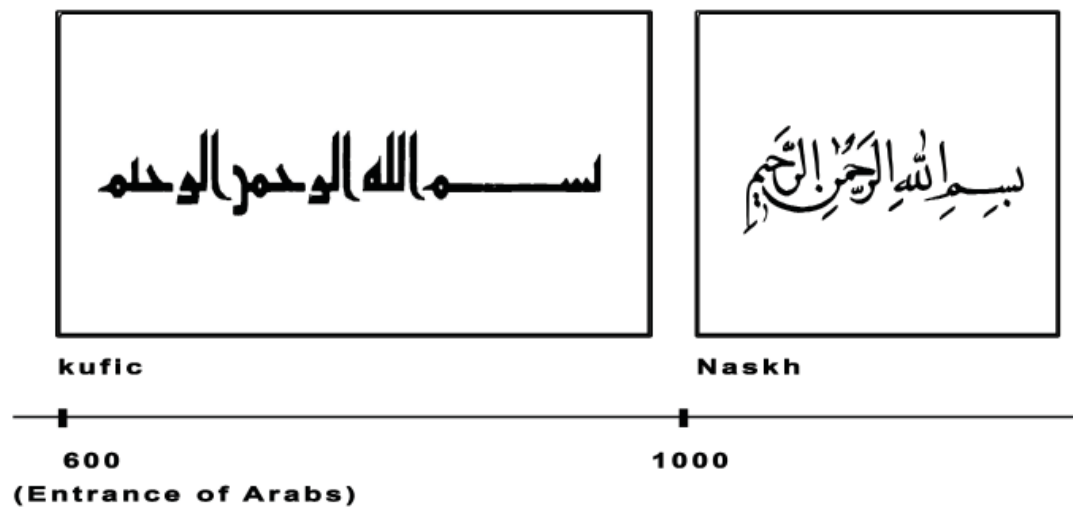


1.9. Shekasteh by Gholamreza Esfahani (1886-1925)



1.10. Detail - Shekasteh by Gholamreza Esfahani (1886-1925)

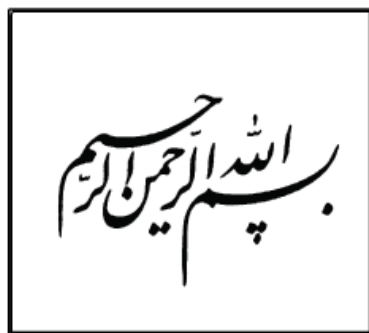




1.11. Evolution of calligraphic styles in Iran - Diagram by Author



The following is a timeline diagram of the evolution of calligraphy styles from Arabic to Persian.



**Nastaliq**



**Shekasteh**



**Shekasteh Nastaliq**

1300

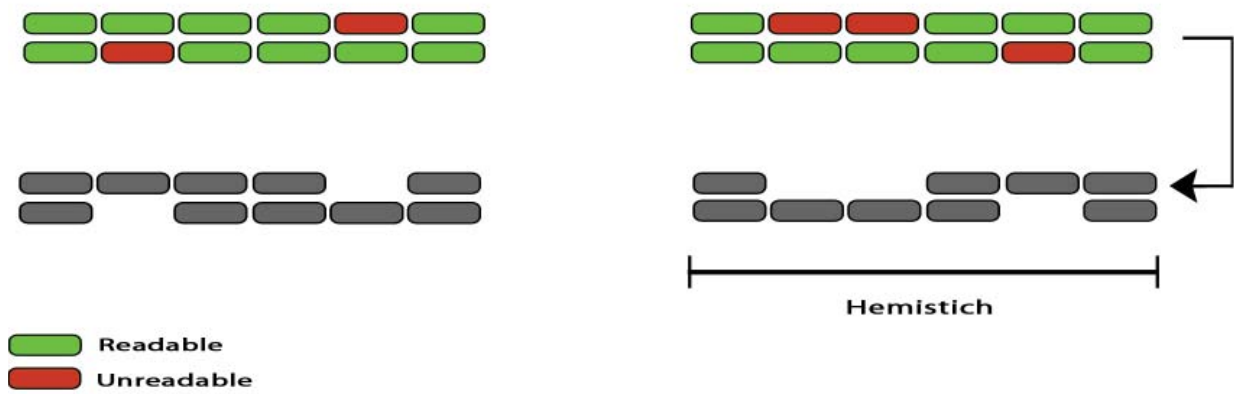
1500

1600

Present

For all its compellingly lovely appearance, Shekasteh is very difficult to read and creates a chasm between the message it is delivering and the representation of that message. When writing poetry in particular, this characteristic of Persian calligraphy aids in blurring the meaning of the text, as it is the initial layer of interaction with the text. The following analysis elucidates the active role of Persian calligraphy in poetry.

This is a symbolic presentation of a piece of poetry wherein each grey rectangle represents a word. As illustrated in the image, the illegibility of Persian calligraphy randomly conceals some words from the reader's eye, resulting in a number of lacunae in the text. This is the true essence of Persian ideology, in that it leaves the meaning open to interpretation. In this case, the reader takes an active role in order to fill in the gaps of the text with whatever word his unconscious suggests. By doing so, he becomes an active author, rather than a passive reader, and has possessed the story by creating his own version of the plot. The philosophy that Persian calligraphy and poetry try to convey is the notion that there exists a justification in everything, something worth endeavouring for. Yet this is not something you can passively receive – you must actively pursue it.



1.12. Interaction of Persian poetry and Persian calligraphy - Diagram by Author

## Calligraphy and Emotion

The immediate effect of the Islamic ban on figurative arts was undeniably a pause in the history of Middle Eastern arts. Artists had become disconnected from society, as they had lost their ability to express their emotions through their work. Since text was the only medium that could bypass the restriction in a legitimate way, the writing of the text (calligraphy) became a paramount form of artistic expression in Persian culture.

Calligraphy was one of the rare methods through which artists could bypass the limitations put in place by Islamic law and eventually express their emotions. Providing such a necessary artistic capacity elevated calligraphy to the original art of the Middle East, and a highly regarded one at that. (Golombek, Lisa, *Word Power in Islamic Art*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1993)

*Because the Quran outlawed images of living beings .... words in medieval Islam formed the basis of its art. Words carved into stone, words woven into handicrafts, simple utensils and precious objects of gold and silver, words became an intricate part of artistic design ...*

Ibid.

There are many precedents wherein the capturing of one element will bring strength to another component of the same mechanism; the following are two similar examples in which the restriction of one medium



1.13. Installation

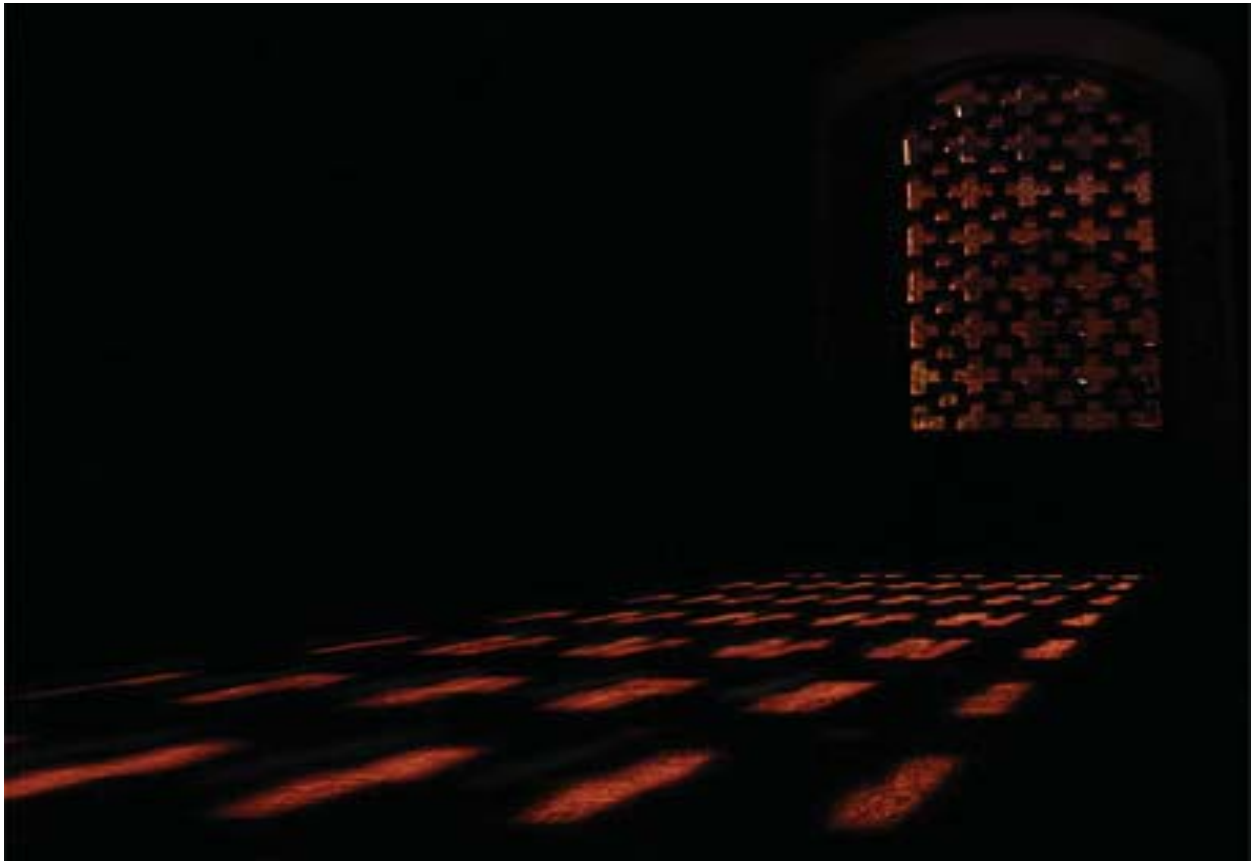


1.14. Hijab

leads to the enrichment of another medium. Hijab in Islam originally allows only the face, hands, and feet of a woman to be exposed. However, there are some extremists who take this forward and have restricted women to exposing only their eyes. This restriction prevents the participation of all other media except the eye in transmitting a message. As a result, however, the eye, counteracts the depletion of other communicative resources by becoming more expressive.

Thus, in many cases the eyes of women in Hijab are quite emotional, and incredibly expressive. In a similar example, Kimono, the Japanese woman's traditional dress, covers the whole body, concealing the silhouette. As a result, the revealing of a woman's bare neck becomes quite highly charged, especially when presented in illustrations and artistic contexts, and even bears an erotic connotation.

Along the line of hidden and revealed and their mutual interaction, I would like to highlight the significance of this concept in architecture



1.15. Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Isfahan, Iran, 1615

and the emotional language evoked through their juxtaposition. As an example, the application of this strategy in the architecture of *Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque* in Isfahan, Iran, has brought worldwide attention to the edifice. The architect has adeptly laid out a romantic dialogue between the hidden dome and its restricted revelation through a brick screen. See page 96 for more on the mosque's strategy to minimize the architectural elements as a means towards reinforcing the notion of the dome, a space that is emotionally charged.

By looking at the picture of the girl in Hijab, Sheikh Lotfollah mosque, and many other examples presented (or to be presented) from Rumi's work, it strikes me that longing is a repetitive cycle between the hidden and the revealed. Following the Islamic ban on illustrations, the yearning for emotional expression elevates calligraphy in Iran to the foremost medium for conveying impressions and hidden implications.

Calligraphy gradually became a threshold in the journey towards whole-

ness, a gate that would open to sensation and, to a great extent, end the disconnect between emotion and expression. It evolved from being merely a means of communication to being a container of emotions, a medium through which feelings could be expressed. The Islamic restrictions imposed on figurative art soon brought a great amount of attention as well as responsibility to calligraphy, and promoted it to the status of an absolute art, comparable with the art of painting in the West.

Having already explained the interaction of emotion and calligraphy, I will elaborate on the foremost feeling that is attached to Persian calligraphy. Due to various political and cultural conflicts of the time, the calligraphy of Iran became the narrator of nostalgia, a vehicle for expression of one's longing: longing for what has been taken away.

Those Iranians who had become believers of Islam used calligraphy in order to reflect their longing for god, while those who were irritated by the Islamic invasion revealed their longing for the defeated glory of the past through writing calligraphy. Some mystic Iranians sought the otherness by musing through calligraphy. The various emotions transmitted through the medium of calligraphy reveals the influential role of Persian poetry in defining longing in calligraphy.

In writing calligraphy, the conceptual longing embedded in Persian poetry transmits to the unconscious of the writer and instinctively permeates the visual aspect of the art. The following is a brief demonstration of the influence of poetry on Persian calligraphy that maps how the main characteristic of poetry is revealed in calligraphy:

By presenting a holistic image of the beloved, Persian poetry not only evokes various possible paths towards the beloved, but at the same time diverts attention from the beloved to the path towards the beloved by blurring the definition of the beloved.



*Today, like every other day, we wake up empty  
and frightened. Don't open the door to the study  
and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.  
Let the beauty we love be what we do.  
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.*<sup>1</sup>  
Rumi

The intention is to transfer one's focus away from what is interpreted as the goal and onto the path itself; imagine, for example, that the bridge that connects two points is as important as each point is.

This concept brings substantial attention to the quality of the process as an independent entity. Similarly, the very rationale behind referencing to the beloved as *the otherness* is to stay away from a clear definition of good or bad. By picturing an undefined destination, there suddenly appear countless possible ways to reach the beloved, based on one's personal interpretation of the goal. One may perceive divine love, while another might seek a mundane beloved, each resulting in a dramatically different path.

Having discussed the importance of the path in Persian poetry, the following paragraphs explain how this notion has influenced the calligraphy of Iran.

The importance of path and the concept of *in between* transmits from poetry to calligraphy through the creation of a new style of calligraphy in Iran called *Siyah Mashgh*. In this style, the focus is not on the message of the text (the goal); it is completely on the process of writing (the path towards the goal).

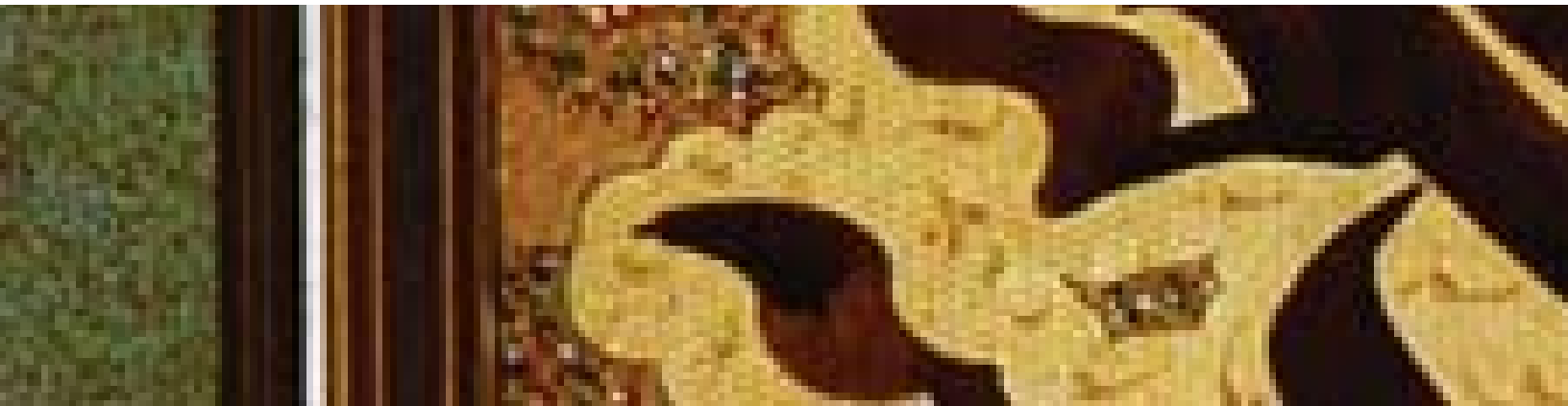
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1 Open Secret: Versions of Rumi, Translated by Coleman Barks and Translated by John Moyne

In the history of the calligraphy of Iran, *Siyah Mashgh* is the last step of full domestication and integration of the Arabic script. In this style, the writing itself entirely overcomes the textual requirements and becomes an absolute art. *Siyah Mashgh*, literally *inked drill*, is a totally vibrant style of writing that opens new doors to the art of calligraphy as its panels communicate via composition and form, rather than through content. In *Siah Mashgh*, a few repeating letters or words inks virtually the whole panel. Thus, the content is less significant than the procedure of writing. In the writing of *Siyah Mashgh*, the calligrapher disconnects from the outside world through experiencing the emotional highs and



1.16. Siyah Mashgh by Gholamreza Esfahani



1.17. Detail - Siyah Mashgh by Gholamreza Esfahani





## **Chapter II - Medium & Feeling**

This chapter presents a mediumistic mapping of calligraphy. It investigates the role and properties of calligraphy as a medium with the intention of exploring the relationship of medium and feeling, a shared characteristic of the calligraphic and architectural media. Through this examination of feeling and medium, this chapter shifts focus from calligraphy to architecture.

## Medium is the Message

*The medium is the message* is a phrase, coined by Marshall McLuhan, that posits that the essence of a medium embeds itself in the presented message, creating a symbiotic relationship in which the medium influences how the message is perceived. The phrase was introduced in McLuhan's most widely known book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, published in 1964.<sup>1</sup> McLuhan proposes that media itself, and not the content it carries, should be the focus of study. He said that a medium affects the society in which it plays a role not only through the content delivered over the medium, but also by the characteristics of the medium itself.

The Persian-Arab conflicts lasted a long time after the Islamic conquest of Persia. The Persian resistance against the victorious Arab culture resulted in the application of the Arabic script to the Persian language, as opposed to fundamental replacement of Persian language by Arabic.<sup>2</sup> This created a mixture of both cultures in which one was realized in the medium and the other in the message. This is an example of McLuhan's theory in which the medium dramatically influences the message.

By accepting the new script, Persians were able to continue speaking their own language, rather than Arabic, and could promote the newly introduced religion of Islam in a language other than its original, Arabic. All of the Islamic rituals were translated from Arabic to Farsi, a shift extending from the preaching at mosques to the religion's promotion via word of mouth. When the medium changed from Arabic to Farsi, the content was no longer of significance, which perfectly aligns with McLuhan's theory. All of a sudden, Islam was a different entity than before, resulting in an entirely different social and cultural structure from that of Arabs; this medium-based branching concluded in the development of a more moderate version of Islam within Iran. A great portion of the Iranian population considers itself to be "secular Muslim"; that is, they do not practice the rituals of Islam in their everyday lives (e.g. daily prayers, hijab, dietary law, etc). Unfortunately, there are no hard statistics to endorse this claim in a society where people would be hesitant to reveal their true feelings about religion. Yet this notion of secular Islam prevails in many different aspects and strata of life in Iran.





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1 Originally published in 1964 by Mentor, New York; reissued 1994, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts with an introduction by Lewis Lapham

2 After the fall of Sasanian dynasty in 651, the Umayyad Arabs adopted many of the Persian customs especially the administrative and the court mannerisms.

Margaret K., The official Persianization of Kurdish, Paper presented at the Eighth International Congress of Phonetic Sciences, Leeds, England, (Aug. 1975).



	Arabic	Persian
Calligraphy		
	Geometric	Fluid
Tiling		

2.18. Calligraphy and Tiling - Diagram by Author

*“Iran was indeed Islamized, but it was not Arabized. Persians remained Persians. And after an interval of silence, Iran reemerged as a separate, different and distinctive element within Islam, eventually adding a new element even to Islam itself. Culturally, politically, and most remarkable of all even religiously, the Iranian contribution to this new Islamic civilization is of immense importance. The work of Iranians can be seen in every field of cultural endeavor, including Arabic poetry, to which poets of Iranian origin composing their poems in Arabic made a very significant contribution. In a sense, Iranian Islam is a second advent of Islam itself, a new Islam sometimes referred to as Islam-i Ajam. It was this Persian Islam, rather than the original Arab Islam, that was brought to new areas and new peoples: to the Turks, first in Central Asia and then in the Middle East in the country which came to be called Turkey, and of course to India. The Ottoman Turks brought a form of Iranian civilization to the walls of Vienna...”*

Lewis, Bernard, “Iran in history”, Tel Aviv University, Retrieved 2007-04-03

Marshal McLuhan warns us that we are often distracted by the content of a medium, and this is the very strategy that Persians applied to subvert the imposition of Arabic ideology on their culture.

In the book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* McLuhan writes, “it is only too typical that the content of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium.”<sup>1</sup> And it is the character of the medium that is its potency or effect – that is, its message. Hence, the adoption of Arabic script resulted in the survival of the Farsi language and today’s Persian speakers.

By adopting the Arabic script, the Persians succeeded in navigating a severe cultural crisis that could have resulted in the extinction of Farsi. This cultural resistance is quite unprecedented in the context of Islamic conquest; in most other countries conquered by Islam, the host country witnessed the replacement of its language with Arabic consequent to the introduction of the book and the subsequent Arabic textual tradition. Egypt is a striking example of a well-established civilization with a strong culture that, despite its robust history, was entirely reshaped by Arabs. After the Islamic conquest in 639 AD, the ancient Coptic language of Egypt was supplanted by Arabic in 706 AD, when it formally became the official language of the government.

Although the switching of script from Persian to Arabic might seem to indicate that the Arabic language dominated the Farsi language, it was essentially a strategic move by the Persians to preserve their language. Iran’s new Arab rulers approved of overlaying the Farsi language onto Arabic script because doing so made it compatible with the concept of the book and the promulgation of Quran. It was essential that the new adherents of Islam be able to read the Quran, which was made feasible through the switch of Persian script to Arabic.

To explain the overlay of one language onto another alphabet, consider the following example. It is as if one wants to write a Farsi word in the English alphabet. As an example, the word

آزادی

from Farsi (meaning freedom) could be written in English as

‘AZADI’

which is a comparable breakdown/one-by-one substitution of the same letters and vowels from Farsi to English.

A+Z+A+D+I = : آ + ز + ا + د + ی

Through application of this concept, Farsi continued in use and became the medium through which the new Islamic values were conveyed. The medium of Farsi language, as McLuhan suggests, gradually becomes the message and embeds itself in the content, fundamentally reconfiguring it as a new entity. Thus, it was not so much about what the Arabic values were saying; it was about how Persians were saying it.



2.19. Persian poetry adorned with Persian Miniature, 1585 - From *Divan of Hafiz*

In this image I have tried to describe diagrammatically the adoption of Arabic culture and text in the Persian context. Gradually, the formality of Arabic values - which stemmed from the legal proclivities of Quran - were tempered by the new environment and context. Persians increasingly started to subvert the dogma that was imposed on their culture, subsuming it into a poetic entity. The fluidity of Persian poetry, along with openness of Persian calligraphy, played an influential role in releasing the shackles of Islamic formality and easing Islam's strictures towards a more moderate state.



2.20. Diagram by Author

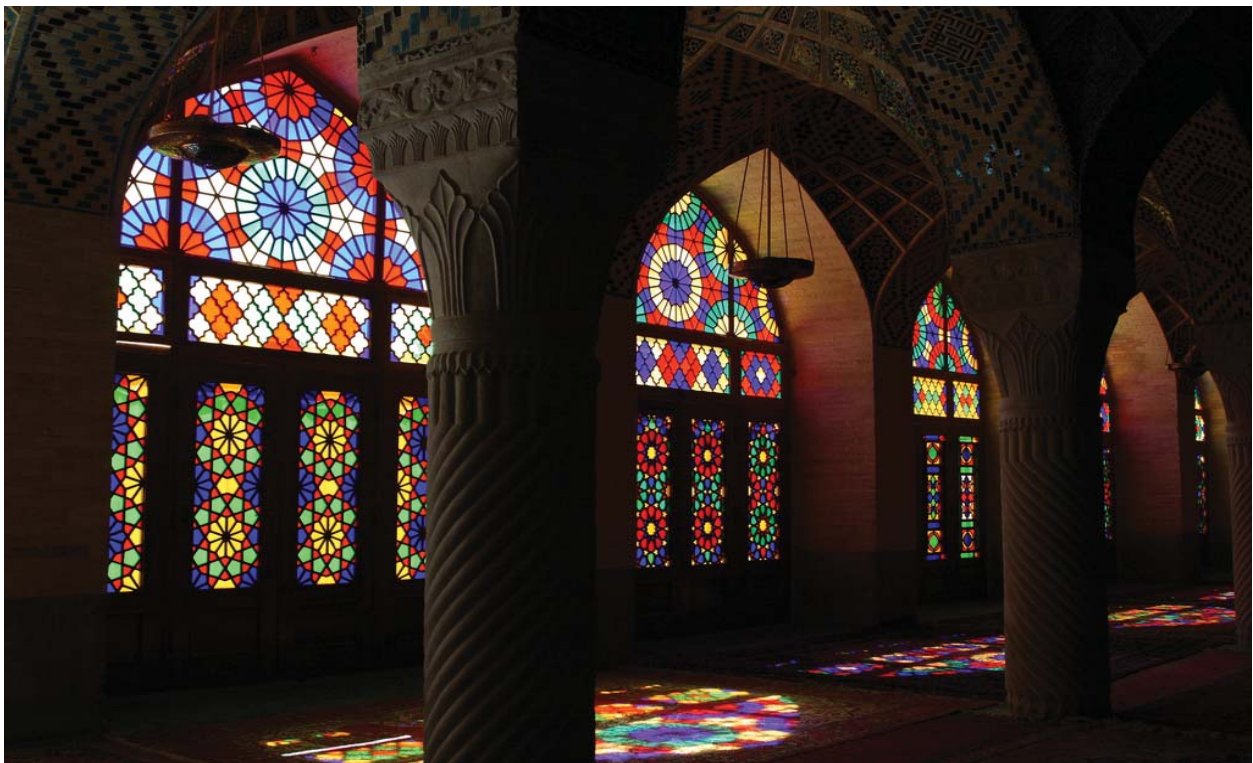
*Come, come, whoever you are,  
Wanderer, idolater, worshiper of fire,  
Come even though you have broken your vows a thousand times,  
Come, and come yet again.  
Ours is not a caravan of despair. <sup>1</sup>*  
Rumi

The moderation slowly retrieves the significance of emotions that were indirectly banned through the rigidity of Islam. The state that Persian poetry craves and strives to attain is the opposite of dogma: a fluid realm that not only peacefully accommodates the extremes, but also considers them as essential components of perfection. This wholeness is the true essence that Persian poetry longs for, and the very quality through which the medium of Farsi language subverts Arabic dogmatism: a longing for that sense of respect and the wish for a more humane way of understanding things.

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<sup>1</sup> Muslim Narratives and the Discourse of English. Malak, Amin. 2004, p. 151

*Nasirolmolk Mosque* in Shiraz, is an architectural embodiment of this concept. The Islamic ornamentation and tiling patterns on columns and ceiling are perfectly embraced by the colourful Persian lighting pattern. In the next page you can see juxtaposition of Arabic tiling pattern with fluid and colourful tiling pattern of Iran adorning the central arcade.



2.21. Nasirolmolk Mosque, Shiraz, Iran









2.22. Nasir-ol-Mulk Mosque, Shiraz, Iran

*Lovers think they are looking for each other,  
but there is only one search: wandering  
This world is wandering that, both inside one  
transparent sky. In here  
there is no dogma and no heresy.*  
Rumi

In order to release the shackles of fragmentation, Persians lean towards a holistic presentation of things in which various interpretations are suggested with no indication of which might be right or wrong - because there is indeed no right or wrong.

*Out there beyond ideas of right-doing and wrong-doing  
there is a land,  
I will meet you there.<sup>1</sup>*  
Rumi

Wholeness, however, is realized in the Iranian arts through a deliberately obfuscated presentation of the beloved. The ambiguity of destination implies the ineffability and grandeur of the beloved, at the same time that it constitutes the notion of a gap—a gap that the rational mind is unable to perceive. Comprehending the gap requires correlating one's bodily senses with the input of one's spirit, and being able to integrate these two. This, I believe, is the reason why wholeness is presented throughout the Iranian arts as an indescribable fact, something that could merely be embodied, realized, or achieved through the gap. It unveils the significance of void as an essential component of the Iranian arts: from architecture and calligraphy to poetry, as it is believed that the beloved is not found in the apparent, yet exists among the imperceptible, not in the revealed, yet through the concealed.

*Last night, the master was roaming about the city, a lantern in his hand  
Crying, "I am tired of devil and beast, I desire a man."  
"He is not to be found", they said. "We have sought him long."*

*"The unfindable", said the master "is what I want".*  
Rumi

The definition of the beloved (destination) as an invisible entity correlates, in a way, with Juhani Pallasmaa's theory as presented in his book, *The Eye of the Skin*. Pallasmaa criticizes the dominance of the visual realm in our culture, which has pervaded architectural practise and education. My understanding of his writing is that he presents the dominance of sight over the other senses as a fragmentation that has disconnected the modern man from wholeness. He implies that defining one's objective through the visual results in a misconception of the goal. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty encourages the overlaying of the senses, stating that "My perception is not a sum of visual, tactile, and audible

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1 Jalal al-Din Rumi, Maulana, translated by Coleman Barks. *Essential Rumi*. San Francisco: Harper, 1995, p. 16

givens: I perceive in a total way with my whole being: I grasp a unique structure of the thing, a unique way of being, which speaks to all my senses at once.”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, Rumi’s representation of the goal as an invisible otherness that is only realized through the gap constitutes an intuitive approach towards the beloved, as opposed to one driven by intellect alone. Through intuition, all senses correlate; in the other approach, the mind represents division.

*Love is the ark appointed for the righteous,  
Which annuls the danger and provides a way of escape.  
Sell your cleverness and buy bewilderment.  
Cleverness is mere opinion, bewilderment intuition.*<sup>2</sup>  
Rumi

In order to elaborate on the mutual relationship of poetry and calligraphy of Iran in eluding the restrictions placed on the arts, I will demonstrate how the aforementioned intuitive qualities translate from poetry to calligraphy, and particularly how they illustrate strategic qualities such as manifestation of right or wrong, encouraging the notion of the gap, and longing for subversion of dogma.

Through the study of the formerly presented style of Persian calligraphy called *Siyah Mashq*, we will see how calligraphy in practice makes use of the conceptual qualities of poetry to confront the formality of the adopted Arabic script.

In *Siyah Mashq*, the constant repetition of words makes reading become difficult; the meaning drowns in a sea of script, an effect quite similar to McLuhan’s theory that privileges the role of the medium over that of the actual content. In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan describes the “content” of a medium as a juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind.

Similarly, *Siyah Mashq* intends to create gaps in the process of delivering the message as a means to divert attention from the content to the message to the medium by which it was delivered (see figure 2.24.). In this case, the message is wholeness that is realized through hollowness or nothingness. By applying gaps in the process of communication, the meaning is opened up to different interpretations. This style aims to blur the content presented and imbue it with a fluid quality; it allows the construction of collective meanings and individual interpretations, rather than forcing the consideration of a certain ideology. Presenting a realm in which leading is not a principle indicates that there are many directions one may take, as there is no right or wrong.

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1 Quote from Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin*, London, 1995

2 *The Spiritual Couplets of Maulana Jalalu-d-Din Muhammad Rumi*, Edward Henry Whinfield, 1898



Works by the contemporary photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto are an artistic precedent in which blurring the message encourages various interpretations, along with viewer engagement.. In particular, his out-of-focus shots of buildings present the nonstable sense of a building; the spirit that is bound with the body of the building, yet is not easily perceived without intuition.



2.23. Hiroshi Sugimoto, Saint Benedict Chapel by Peter Zumthor, 2000-2001, gelatin silver print, 51x61cm

Similarly, Siyah Mashq style of writing, elevates the notion of inbetween as a major component of the message through inking the whole panel. The hollow space that is surrounded by the script is suddenly elevated from background to foreground and engages in an active role similar to that of the letters and words. The forsaken void of the panel abruptly bears significant implications of the imperceptible beloved, meanings that words and letters could not even come close to capturing.



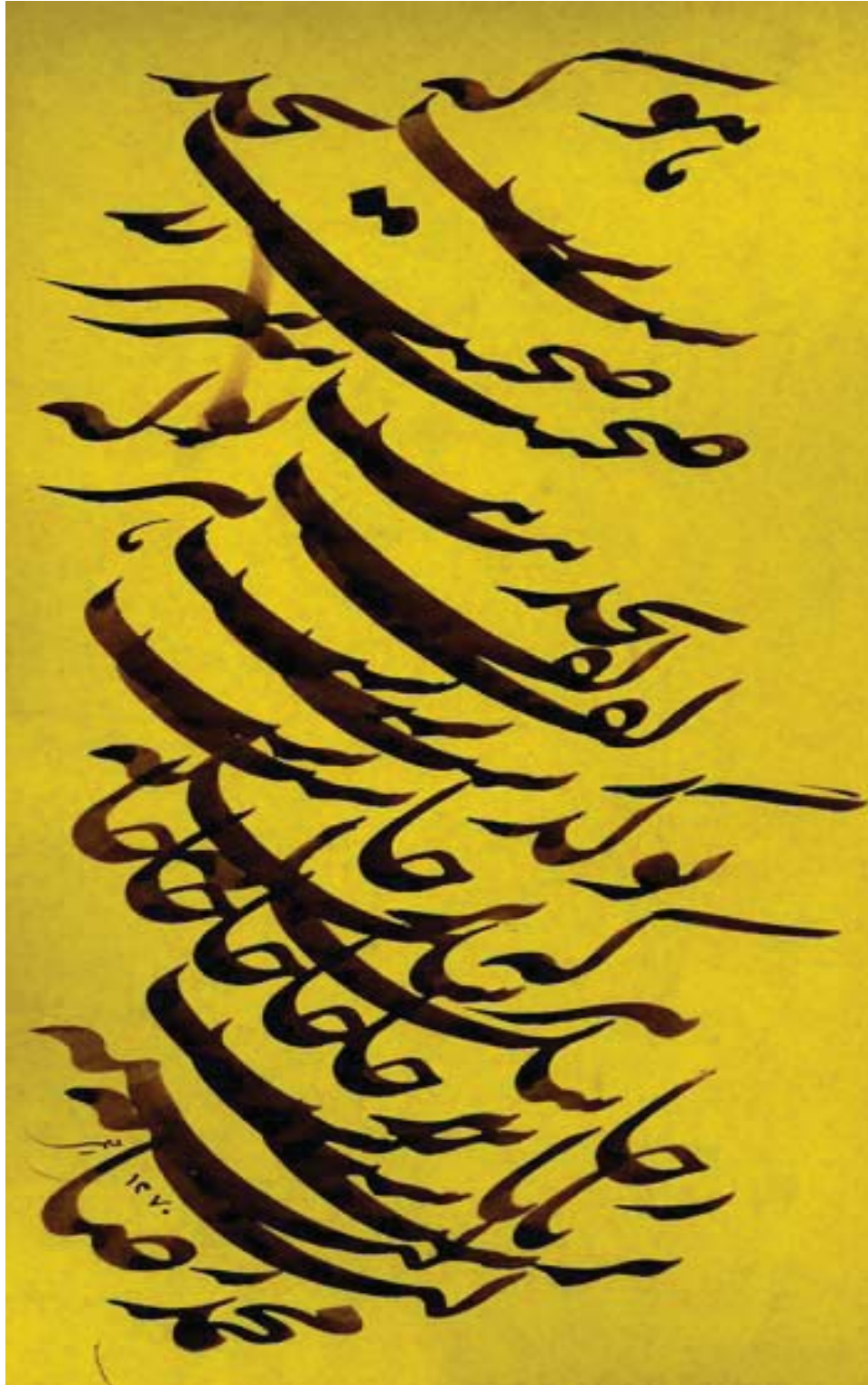
2.24. Siyah Mashgh by Mohamad Reza Rahimi



## Survey

The following survey investigates the function of Persian calligraphy as a medium, inquiring into this practice's capacity to connect to the reader's inner feelings. The survey reveals that, springing from one single piece of calligraphy there can be an indefinite number of interpretations based on the reader's unconscious. In this survey, I gave two pieces of writing to different Farsi speakers and asked them to project their understanding of the content. The participants are varied in sex, age, and profession.

Art Piece 1



2.25. Siyah Mashgh by Mohamad Reza Rahimi



Participant 1- Words: Birth, hair, firm, health  
Interpretation: n/a



Participant 2- Words: health, accuracy  
Interpretations: only the word, 'health' carries dots;  
all other words do not have  
this feature.



Participant 3- Words: n/a  
Interpretation: n/a



Participant 4- Words: the beloved, companionship, night, you,  
past, any one, rise  
Interpretations: "love that is gone with the wind,"  
"nostalgia and loneliness," "re  
gret", "unfeasible wish".



Participant 5- Words: night, companionship, past, broken, hair,  
hatred  
Interpretation: sorrow, separation, power of be  
loved, perplexity of the lover



Participant 6- Words: companionship, hair, about, that is firm,  
one who rise, dynasty, firm, One night  
passed speaking of your hair.  
Interpretation: Many are passionate about  
the beauty of your hair, but no matter if one  
commits hypocrisy; your hair will still hold  
its beauty.

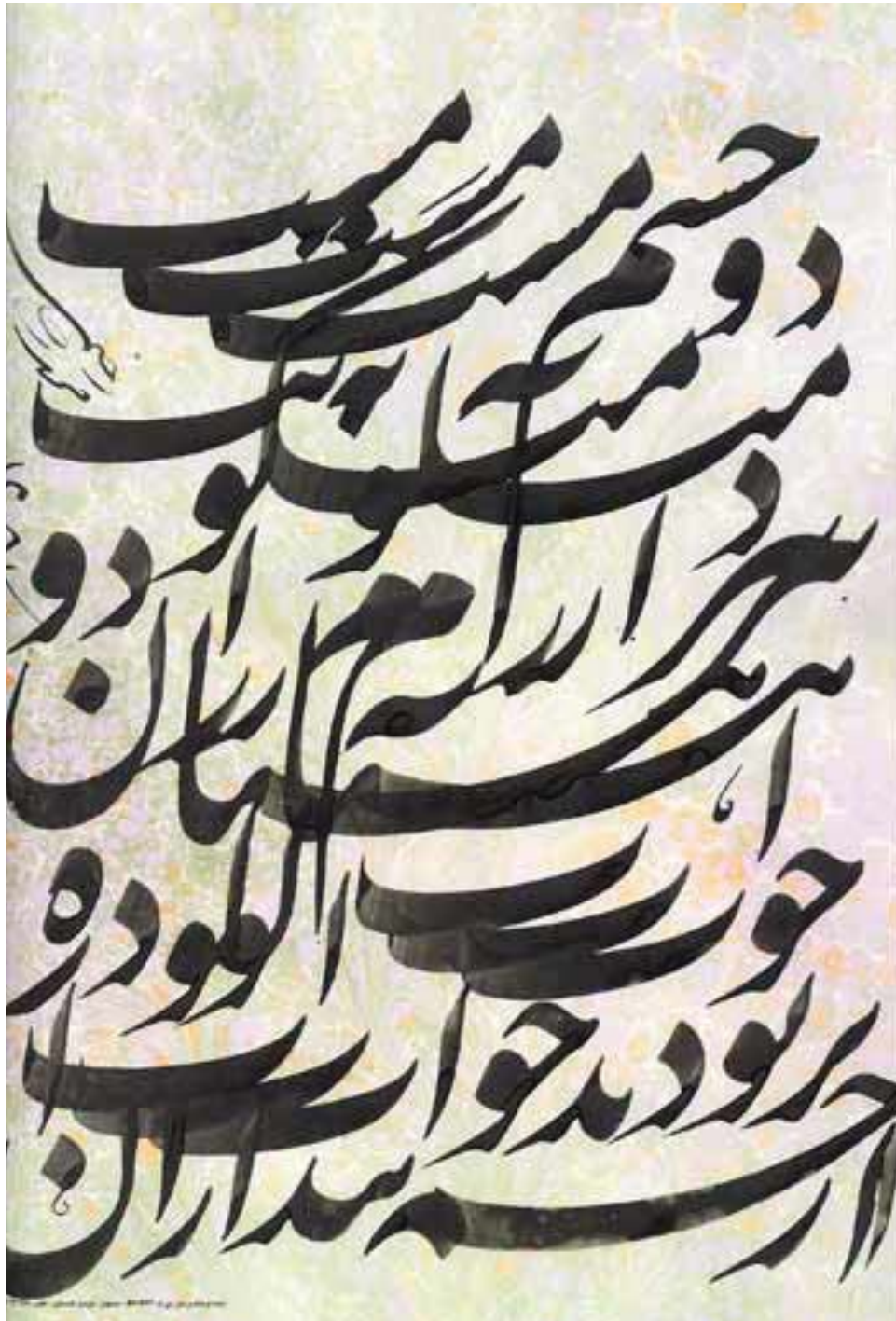


Participant 7- Words: The beloved. Hair, firm, tradition, past  
Interpretation: swear on the beauty of the hair of  
the beloved ... the hair that has caused the  
loss of many lives.



Participant 8- Words: the beloved, "One night passed speaking of  
your hair. Whoever has raised , the dynasty  
is still firm in place."  
Interpretation: n/a

Art Piece 2



2.26. Siyah Mashgh by Mohamad Reza Rahimi





Participant 1- Words: sleep, eyes, sleepy  
 Interpretation: A reckless job, similar to that by a student who just attempts to complete a job because of an obligation or force.



Participant 2- Words: the word combination, “they are awake,” draws attention: “I sleep early at nights, and I feel envy of those who are awake all night long.”



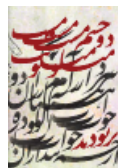
Participant 3- Words: a pair of ravishing eyes  
 Interpretations: any Persian song that carries ‘a pair of eyes’ within the lines, like “a pair of black eyes.”



Participant 4- Words: A pair of ravishing eyes, threshold, sleepy, ‘taking sleep away from the eyes of those awake.’  
 Interpretation: joy, happiness, cheerfulness, hope.



Participant 5- Words: a pair of ravishing eyes had taken consciousness away, a couple of sleepless fellows  
 Interpretation: commending the companion



Participant 6- Words: a pair of ravishing eyes, take away, slowly, sleepy, sky, to seize away sleep from the eyes,  
 Interpretation: a pair of ravishing eyes have made the crowd passionate



Participant 7- Words: a pair of ravishing eyes  
 Interpretation: sleepy; has sieved away sleep from the eyes of the awake.



Participant 8- Words: A pair of ravishing eyes ... sleepy; has sieved away sleep from the eyes of the awake.  
 Interpretation: n/a

## Analysis

Through study of the survey it can be perceived that Persian calligraphy is a medium capable of connecting to the reader's inner feelings. As presented, the results are profoundly variable from one case to another; in some cases, the results are quite contradictory. It is compelling to note how one piece of calligraphy can produce as many interpretations as there are participants.

There is certainly a wholeness intertwined with this practice -due to participation of both spirit and body. Persian calligraphy as a result has become a medium, or a passage through which one can travel inwards towards his soul and access his sentiments. It is perceivable that this emotional journey may even be more engaging for the calligrapher than the reader, as the calligrapher is the person who lives with what is being written.

Hence, as illustrated in the survey, the medium of Persian calligraphy has evolved to a means for accommodating one's longing - for connecting to what one is missing. By accessing one's own soul, the unknown beloved is unveiled; one is fulfilled by being eventually connected to that he has loved for so long.

Persian calligraphy is the art of longing. It is a process where the act of writing becomes more important than the content that is being written. Persian calligraphy is a medium through which one detaches from signals of content, reaches a profound meditative state where one rapturously engages in longing and dancing and crying and chanting for the beloved, until one drowns in the reverberation of one's own thoughts, embodied by the words he writes.

As illustrated in this section, Persian calligraphy takes a journey from the formality of an imposed script to a poetic state that embraces absolute freedom. It exhibits a fluidity that accommodates the true essence of human connectedness. Persian calligraphy is a prime example of a medium that survives through inclusion, through wholeness, and through the association of emotions.





## Case Studies

This series of examples illustrates the significance of medium when dealing with the presentation of message. Parallel to McLuhan's theory, each precedent presented demonstrates the influential impact of its respective medium on the message it delivers. On another level, each example investigates the notion of wholeness in its relative medium.

*The medium is the message* expresses with perfect economy the idea that how we do something has much to do with the results we obtain, no matter what our original intent may be. This idea is present in Henry David Thoreau's observation that "we do not ride on the railroad, it rides upon us."<sup>1</sup> It is there in Mark Twain's wonderful quip, that when you have a hammer in your hand, everything looks like a nail. It is entirely absent, however, from the slogan used by the National Rifle Association, which states that "guns don't kill people, people do."<sup>2</sup> If you believe that the existence of guns themselves has increased the potential for violence in society, then you are with McLuhan.

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1 Quote from Strate, Lance , *Media Transcendence*, 4th issue of the academic journal, *McLuhan Studies*

2 Ibid.

## 1- This Will Kill That

Victor Hugo, in his masterpiece, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, reveals his concern regarding the change of medium in a famous passage:

*“Pasquedieu! What are your books?”*

*“Here is one,” replied the archdeacon, opening the window of his cell; he pointed to the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, whose two black towers, stone walls, and huge roof were silhouetted against the starry vault of heaven, like a monstrous two-headed sphinx in the middle of the City.*

*For some time the archdeacon contemplated in silence this gigantic structure; then, with a sigh, pointing with his right hand to the printed book opened on the table, and with his left hand to Notre Dame, and casting a mournful glance from book to church, “Alas!” he said, “this will kill that.”*

Hugo, Victor. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, New York: Modern Library, 1831

The idea that “The book will kill the cathedral; the words will kill the image” reflects the crisis triggered by the new printing press. From pyramids and temples through churches and forts, writes Victor Hugo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, humans have always thought in terms of structures. But the printing press spread literacy: it changed the way Europeans expressed themselves by taking language to the people. The new printing medium had greatly influenced the communication pattern. People tended to communicate through printing as opposed to the conventional methods. “The invention of printing was the greatest event in history,” Hugo writes. “It was the parent revolution; it was the fundamental change in mankind’s mode of expression, it was human thought doffing one garment to clothe itself in another.” (Ibid, p 182)

With the change of medium from all senses (cathedral) to eye (book), the importance of the cathedral will dramatically fade, as printing would take the cathedral to every door instead of having people to go to the cathedral. In the former pattern, people tend to travel to the cathedral to listen to the archdeacons’ preaching; only in that specific location could the message fully connect, among all the myriad reverberations of sound, light, and message. The spatial setting of the cathedral adds to the richness of the message and imbues it with transcendental sentiments.

In the new pattern however, printing paralyzes the wholeness of the message and eliminates the inclusion of all senses in perceiving the message, as it communicates solely through vision. Patrick Süskind phrases this change quite eloquently in his book *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* “the author’s voice sank in ink”.<sup>1</sup>

---

1 London : Penguin Books, 1987

*“As McLuhan taught us, sound comes to us from all directions at once, surrounding us. The hearing subject is therefore situated in the center of acoustic space, in the middle of the aural ecosystem. The experience of the reader is entirely different. The fixed gaze can only focus on one fragment of the visual field at a time. We move from letter to letter, word to word, line to line. And we learn to read our environment as if it were a book. We become voyeurs, outsiders looking in, occupying an objective position and objectifying what we see.*

*With the power of this alien vision, we can reorder the world and impose a linear structure. In this way, McLuhan could determine that the shift from ear to eye began with writing over five millennia ago, reached its peak with the invention of the printing press some five centuries ago, and came to an end with television about five decades ago.*

*The history of civilization is the story of the war between the ear and the eye.”*

Strate, Lance , Media Transcendence, 4th issue of the academic journal, McLuhan Studies

On another level, reading is criticised for reducing the value of the message when compared to hearing. As the author Walter J. Ong suggests, the written language differs dramatically from the spoken, because the act of writing deals with the alphabet and the subsequent formalities of grammar. In the spoken language, however, words flow into each other much more freely, allowing the construction of a soulful message.

*When other dialects of a given language besides the grapholect vary from the grammar of the grapholect, they are not ungrammatical: they are simply using different grammar, for language is structure, and it is impossible to use a language without a grammar.*

Ong, Walter J., Orality and literacy. London and New York: Methuen, 1982, p 108

*In the printed book, these vague psychic ‘places’ became quite physically and visibly localized. A new noetic world was shaping up, spatially organized. In this new world, the book was less like an utterance, and more like a thing. Manuscript culture has preserved a feeling for a book as a kind of utterance, an occurrence in the course of conversation, rather than as an object.*

Ibid, p 125

I would like to add to the earlier quote that by criticizing the dominance of eye over other senses, this research is not suggesting replacing the ear with the eye. In fact, it is positioned against any dominance and advocates a state of inclusion wherein all senses are overlaid and equally engaged.

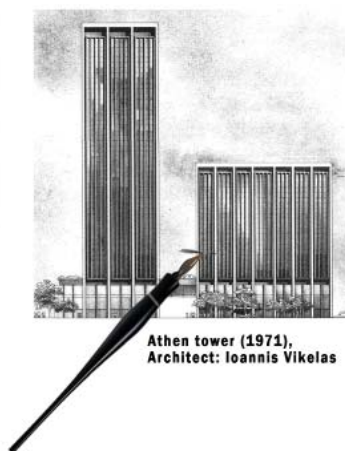
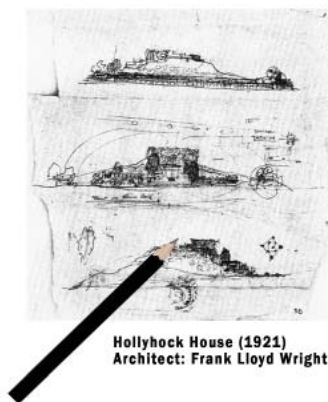
Quasimodo, Hugo's protagonist in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, has one eye; this characteristic immediately implies the decline of the visual as a problematic development of modern life. At the same time, the one-eyed protagonist cannot see perspective, which provides him with a holistic view in contrast with that of others. The holistic vision implies the wholeness that was being replaced by the fragmentations of the new era.

His physical disorder is the symbol of his fundamental difference from the environment in which he lives, and from its existing values. The holistic protagonist is the bell ringer of the cathedral, a symbolic representation of the one who warns the others of the dangers of the advent of technology, the detachment and the disconnection that this paradigm shift will bring.

Hugo's choice of time and place for the setting of history is a brilliant decision. A cathedral in the Gothic era, one of the extremes of architecture, is a perfect container of emotions, bearing enormous conceptual burdens within the physical confines of the edifice itself.

## 2- Suburban Housewife Chauffeur

The change of medium over the course of history has significantly influenced the development of architecture and urban design and their respective archetypes. In the urban scale, as an example, the impact of cars on the way buildings and cities function is undeniable. Lewis Mumford contends that the car turned the suburban housewife into a full-time chauffeur. “Nobody ever knew what the effect of the wheel would be on the arrangement of human life, says McLuhan in *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (New York, 1964). By the thirteenth century, the wheel has become a common feature of life; McLuhan explains in the same book that “the effect [of the wheel] on town life was extraordinary.” He continues: “with the coming of the horse-drawn bus and streetcar, American towns developed housing that was no longer within sight of shop or factory. The railroad next took over the development of the suburbs, with housing kept within walking distance of the railroad stop. Shops and hotels around the railroad gave some concentration and form to the suburb. The automobile, followed by the airplane, dissolved this grouping and ended the pedestrian, or human scale of the suburb.” (Ibid)



### 2.27. Architectural Medium - By Author

In architecture, a study of prevalent architectural languages over the past two centuries reveals the striking influence of the media used by architects in the process of designing buildings. The qualities of a space that was originally sketched in charcoal are, in most cases, different from those of a space laid out in fountain pen. Likewise, the architecture of the “ink era” often differs from that of the “digital era,” and so on. The inherent qualities and tonalities of the charcoal pen are embodied in an Alvar Aalto space through shadow and light, and can also be referenced in strategies pertaining to form, circulation, etc. Meanwhile, the rigidity of an ink-pen drawing is typically reflected in the characteristics of



the space. The abstract, straightforward space that is often created by an exposed structure is the result of the tendencies of the era in which it was created, while, at the same time, being equally driven by the medium in which it was planned and subsequently executed.

The malleability and organic nature of the charcoal can be thought of as referencing wholeness, as opposed to the static fountain pen. One may provide flexibility and diversity to the design, while the other may be characterized by rigidity and constancy.

Juhani Pallasmaa, in *The eyes of the skin*, examines the influence of our visual life on the disassociation of emotions within modern architecture. This notion has distorted the concept of genuine longing in the contemporary architect. The desire for that sense of belonging in architecture has been replaced with the desire for fetishism in architecture, as a consequence of ocularcentrism. Pallasmaa refers to the works of Martin Heidegger, Michael Foucault, and Jacques Derrida and reflects that they have all argued that the thought and culture of modernity have not only continued the historical privileging of sight, but furthered its negative tendencies. Each, in his own separate way, has regarded the visual dominance of the modern era as distinctly different from the priorities of earlier times.

“The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture.”

Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin*. London, 1995, p15, quoted from Heidegger, Martin, ‘The age of the works picture’, in Martin Heidegger, *the questions concerning technology and other essay*. New York: Harper & Tow, 1977, p134

In another example, the influence of linguistics and logocentrism on architecture is stressed in Juhani Pallasmaa’s other work, *Encounter: Architectural Essays*. He argues that today’s avant-garde seems to have a logocentric world view that has led to a state in which the meaning of architecture is explained, rather than experienced. He laments that the significance of a building is seen to rest more in its conceptual and verbal aspirations than in one’s sensory and bodily encounter with the work itself.

*Instead of being an embodied existential metaphor conveyed through the tectonic materiality of building, architecture is seen to derive and communicate its meaning through networks of verbalized explanations. There is a curious air of simultaneous over-intellectualization and mystification, of opening and closing, revealing and hiding. Much of theorizing seems to be a matter of achieving a distance from the reality of architecture, rather than attempting to closely understand its essence.*

Pallasmaa, Juhani, *Encounter: Architectural Essays*, Rakennustieto. Helsinki, 2005, p 172-173

### 3- Logo Architecture

Computer-aided design has enabled architecture to surpass its conventions and fly towards new horizons. Yet the medium seems to have dominated the practice of contemporary architecture, leading it to fly dangerously close to the sun. In *The Feeling of Things*, Adam Caruso describes the design product of computers; because they are substantially new and because of their unprecedented programmatic origins, he, along with Pallasmaa, considers them independent of known architectural syntax. These new kinds of organisational and topographical programs generate forms that are only now becoming imaginable through the use of vastly more powerful computers.

*Computer imaging tends to flatten our magnificent, multi-sensory, simultaneous and synchronic capacities of imagination by turning the design process into a passive visual manipulation, a retinal journey. The computer creates a distance between the maker and the object, whereas drawing by hand, as well as model-making, puts the designer into a haptic contact with the object or space.*

Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin*, London, 1995, p12

The products of computer-aided design sometimes tend towards gigantism as a consequence of easy scalability on computer screens. On another level, the limitation of the screen-based view endorses the notion of fragmentation by making it difficult for the designer to have a holistic view of the project and the respective proportions of each of its components. Hence, the ritual in the process of architectural design has drastically shifted towards quantity rather than quality, which is a direct reflection of the inherent properties of the medium used for design. A great number of today's renowned buildings, those that are said to best represent contemporary architecture, simply look like an alien sitting on earth: intriguing and chic, yet at the same time superficial, hostile and intimidating. Having been created via a machine, rather than emanating directly from a human hand, it is possible that these spaces can never connect to the true essence of human beings - emotion.

*The superstars, who practice on an unprecedented global scale, move their work further into science-fictional stratosphere. Like architectural Dan Dares and Wonder Women, they egg each other on with ever larger and more formally outlandish projects, work that is insistent on being unprecedented and unrelated to past architectures. Sightless and emerging from an elusive global condition, these projects increasingly engage only with the egos of their authors.*

Caruso, Adam. *The feeling of things*. Ediciones Poligrafa, Barcelona, p. 12

*Why is this understanding of "the medium is the message" particularly useful? We tend to notice changes - even slight changes that, unfortunately, we often tend to discount in significance. "The medium is the message" tells us*

*that noticing change in our societal or cultural ground conditions indicates the presence of a new message, that is, the effects of a new medium. With this early warning, we can set out to characterize and identify the new medium before it becomes obvious to everyone - a process that often takes years or even decades. And if we discover that the new medium brings along effects that might be detrimental to our society or culture, we have the opportunity to influence the development and evolution of the new innovation before the effects becomes pervasive. As McLuhan reminds us, "Control over change would seem to consist in moving not with it but ahead of it. Anticipation gives the power to deflect and control force." (McLuhan 199)*

Federman, M., What is the Meaning of the Medium is the Message?  
2004, July 23



### Chapter III - Inside The White Cube

In the preceding chapter, the central role of medium in the process of delivering a message was defined. Through study of Persian calligraphy as an example of a medium that subverted the imposed dogma (content), it was possible to elucidate how the wholeness or fragmentation characteristics of a medium may funnel the content to extremely different realms. This notion was further expounded through an examination of three different precedents where each medium has fundamentally influenced the product.

The following chapter highlights the significant role that the architectural medium can play in addressing wholeness in everyday life by subverting the imposed rituals of modernism. Based on Jung's diagram, presented earlier in the thesis, this chapter investigates the concept of wholeness in architecture and its close relation with soulfulness. The attachment of architecture and soul is what architects should be longing for as a means for emotionally enriching a space.

*“The medium is the message” implies that we must begin in the middle, with the medium. The medium comes first. Before the sculpture, there is the stone and the chisel. Before the painting, there is the paint and canvas. Before the song, there is the instrument and voice. [...]The medium of speech precedes*

*the messages formed through language. [...] Before architecture, there is the matter, light, texture, human, and above all, emotion.*

Strate, Lance , Media Transcendence, 4th issue of the academic journal, McLuhan Studies

*The White Cube* as the symbol of contemporary architecture's dogma is studied in this section. It is an entirely revealed, rectilinear, single unit of space that its quality of being entirely exposed diminishes the appeal of the space; its quality of being geometrically structured constrains the fluidity of the space, and the quality of being mathematically countable subsumes the wholeness of the space into a space that tends to segregate.

*Literate man, civilized man, tends to restrict and enclose space and to separate functions, whereas tribal man had freely extended the form of his body to include the universe.*

McLuhan, Marshal. Understanding Media. Penguin Group, New York, 1964, p 118

*The White Cube* represents the pace of modern life; it represents multifunctionality and rapidity. The white cube can be used as a bedroom, a living room, a one-bedroom suite, a duplex house, or a multi-storey high-rise. In examining this architectural trope, it is important to understand the difference between wholeness and applicability. By being applicable to numerous circumstances, the contemporary space has disassociated from the human condition and has moved towards being a senseless space that merely operates as an enclosure rather than a container of emotion. Wholeness refers to a state of inclusion in which numerous number of layers correlate in a building; while applicability results in disassociation of the fundamentals. Through study of the *White Cube* this chapter accentuates *Inside the White Cube* as the container of feeling. *Inside the White Cube* is a concept that intends to transcend the dogma of specific modern architecture by attempting to engage emotion in space.



*It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity.*

Albert Einstein

Considering the *White Cube* as the symbol of modern architecture, *Inside the White Cube* is a study that involves entering a space driven by emotions, although located in a confined material context. Moving along previous studies on concepts such as beloved and longing, the emotions that I am seeking to convey are to a certain extent inclining towards the sacred.

Walter J. Ong makes an important point about how technology affects us, asserting that *“technology exercises its most significant effects and its most real presence not in the external world, but within the mind, within consciousness. The external product designed by consciousness somehow re-enters consciousness, to affect the way we think, to make possible new kinds of noetic [the interactions among communication, mind, and technology] processes....”*<sup>1</sup>

Through this exercise, I have investigated various design alterations in a single unit of space where the intention is to provoke feelings.<sup>2</sup> By designing the interior, I have tried to convert the severity and plainness of a White Cube into a fluid and engaging space. Following is a sample that intends to enrich the White Cube with a sense of longing.

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1 Ong, Walter J., *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology?*, Cornell UP, Ithaca, 1971, p 102

2 See Appendix A for design options

The opposite image is a precedent where white cube has been subverted by artist's installation. The intimacy that is bound with the interior is in contrast with the greater interior space that contains the piece.

*Since the 1970s, [...] even architecture has emerged as commodity in its own right, with brand-name architects producing logo buildings. I wonder if architecture has the capacity to marshal energy, to imagine an environment that holds the emotions of a place and the significance of human endeavour.*

Caruso, Adam, *The feeling of things*, Ediciones Poligrafa, Barcelona, p. 19

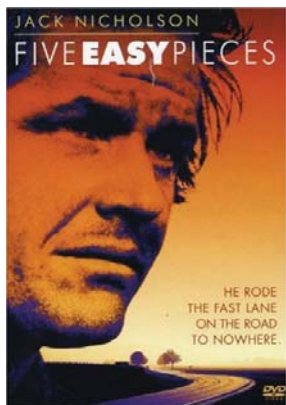
In the documentary *Sketches of Frank Gehry*<sup>1</sup>, Gehry criticizes the disconnection of modern architecture. He explains his work by stating that “being born to a modern society, where ornamentation is a sin in architecture, I had to find a way to make my spaces humanized. That’s where I started to introduce new materials to architecture as a way to convey feeling in space.” Gehry deserves to be credited for questioning the dogma of modern architecture –yet the critique of his work is a different topic. In our modern world, where everything is regulated, we often tend to follow the ordinary rather than creating our own method, what has been referred to as ‘matching’ rather than ‘making’ by scholars such as E. H. Gombrich and Marshal McLuhan.

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1 Directed by Sydney Pollack, 2005



3.28. Installation - Artist unknown



## No Substitutions

In the most memorable classic scene from the movie *Five Easy Pieces* (1970)<sup>1 2</sup> in a roadside diner on his way home, the protagonist is again aggravated and exasperated by meaningless rules. A live-by-the-rules waitress stubbornly refuses to serve him a plain omelette (with tomatoes instead of potatoes), a cup of coffee and a side order of wheat toast, because she dryly explains: “No substitutions”.

---

1 Directed by Bob Rafelson.

2 Quoted from filmsite.org

Dupea: I'd like a plain omelette, no potatoes, tomatoes instead, a cup of coffee, and wheat toast.

Waitress: (She points to the menu) No substitutions.

Dupea: What do you mean? You don't have any tomatoes?

Waitress: Only what's on the menu. You can have a number two - a plain omelette. It comes with cottage fries and rolls.

Dupea: Yeah, I know what it comes with. But it's not what I want.

Waitress: Well, I'll come back when you make up your mind.

Dupea: Wait a minute. I have made up my mind. I'd like a plain omelette, no potatoes on the plate, a cup of coffee, and a side order of wheat toast.

Waitress: I'm sorry, we don't have any side orders of toast...an English muffin or a coffee roll.

Dupea: What do you mean you don't make side orders of toast? You make sandwiches, don't you?

Waitress: Would you like to talk to the manager?

Dupea: ...You've got bread and a toaster of some kind?

Waitress: I don't make the rules.

Dupea: OK, I'll make it as easy for you as I can. I'd like an omelette, plain, and a chicken salad sandwich on wheat toast, no mayonnaise, no butter, no lettuce. And a cup of coffee.

Waitress: A number two, chicken salad sandwich, hold the butter, the lettuce and the mayonnaise. And a cup of coffee. Anything else?

Dupea: Yeah. Now all you have to do is hold the chicken, bring me the toast, give me a check for the chicken salad sandwich, and you haven't broken any rules.

Waitress: (spitefully) You want me to hold the chicken, huh?

Dupea: I want you to hold it between your knees.

Waitress: (turning and telling him to look at the sign that says, "No Substitutions") Do you see that sign, sir? Yes, you'll all have to leave. I'm not taking any more of your smartness and sarcasm.

Dupea: You see this sign? (He sweeps all the water glasses and menus off the table.)

As illustrated, matching is a matter of logic. It is “why” things work, while making is the “why not” that inspires the creation of new things. The analytical structure of modern life has encouraged modern man towards matching rather than making.

*“Literate man, once having accepted the analytic technology of fragmentation, is not nearly so accessible to cosmic patterns as tribal man. He prefers separateness and compartmented spaces, rather than the open cosmos. He becomes less inclined to accept his body as a model of the universe, or to see his house –or any other of the media of communication, for that matter - as a ritual extension of his body. Once men have adopted the visual dynamic of the phonetic alphabet, they begin to lose the tribal man’s obsession with cosmic order and ritual as recurrent on the physical organs and their social extension. Indifference to the cosmic, however, fosters intense concentration on minute segments and specialist tasks, which is the strength of western man. For the specialist is one who never makes a small mistake while moving toward the grand fallacy.*

McLuhan, Marshal. Understanding Media. Penguin Group, New York, 1964, p 118,

A significant portion of today’s architecture seems to have been lost in the corridors of matching. Modern architecture has become unable to accommodate form and material in a way that can sustain an emotional charge in our spaces. This has led the condition of numerous contemporary buildings to what may be referred to as a soulless architecture, a status that Thomas Moore believes is a consequence of the fact that “We don’t believe in the soul and therefore give it no place in our hierarchy of values.”

*Architecture is a balancing act between opposites: stability and movement, mass and void, opacity and transparency, shadow and light. The modern sensibility has primarily aspired the latter set of extremes to the dynamic of movement, weightlessness, transparency, and light.*

Pallasmaa, Juhani, Encounter: Architectural Essays, Rakennustieto, Helsinki, 2005, p 172-173

The following is a study intended to explicate the problematic issues of modern life that have directly influenced the architectural medium. Having a clear knowledge of these problems provides the architect with the ability to safeguard architecture from such threats.



*The great malady of the twentieth century, implicated in all of our troubles and affecting us individually and socially, is the "loss of soul." When soul is neglected, it doesn't just go away; it appears symptomatically in obsessions, addictions, violence, and loss of meaning. Our temptation is to isolate these symptoms or to eradicate them one by one; but the root problem is that we have lost our wisdom about the soul, even our interest in it.*

Moore, Thomas, *Care of the Soul*, Harper Collins, New York, 1992, p xi

In his book *Care of the Soul*, Thomas Moore presents an analysis of the reasons that lead to disassociation of the soul and further suggests concrete ways in which we can foster soulfulness in our everyday lives. To describe this process, he borrows a key phrase from Christianity: *Cura animarum*, the cure of the souls, is the title used for parish priests, as they were symbolically in charge of the souls of those who lived within the boundaries of their church region. By taking up this image and applying it to modern man, Moore illustrates the responsibility we each have to our own soul. He continues that, just as the priest was available at life's crucial moments, not as a doctor or healer but simply to accompany and tend the soul in times of birth, illness, marriage, crisis and death, we can respond to our own soul as it winds its way through the maze of our life's unfolding.

One can see already how the concept of care of soul is different in scope and aim from most modern notions of psychology and psychotherapy. It isn't about curing, fixing, changing, adjusting, or making healthy, and it isn't about some idea of perfection, or even improvement. Moore perceives psychology as a secular science, while care of the soul is a sacred art.

"Care of the soul speaks to the longings we feel and to symptoms that drive us crazy, but it is not a path away from shadow or death"<sup>1</sup>. Care of the soul presents the soul as a multifaceted entity prone to both moments of darkness and happiness - what define a soulful life. Through this approach, there is a great sense of wholeness attached to one's relation with his soul. A similar precedent for care of the soul would be the Persian poetry presented earlier . By shying away from value judgments or an inclination towards defining right or wrong, Persian poetry encourages caring of the soul. This is the essence that exists in almost every human being – whether conscious or unconscious - the essence that provides Persian poetry with such universality that many people hailing from different cultural contexts can connect to it. Moore explains that "By trying to avoid human mistakes and failures, we move beyond the reach on soul."<sup>2</sup>

*It takes a broad vision to know that a piece of the sky and a chunk of the earth lie lodged in the heart of every human being, and that if we are going to care for that heart we will have to know the sky and the earth as well as*

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1 Ibid, p xvi

2 Ibid, p 9

*human behaviour. This is exactly the advice of Renaissance doctor Paracelsus: "If the physician understands things exactly and sees and recognizes all illness in the macrocosm outside man, and if he has a clear idea of man and his whole nature, then and only then is he a physician. This would not be possible without profound knowledge of the outer man, who is nothing other than heaven and earth.*

Moore, Thomas, 'Care of the Soul, Harper Collins, New York, 1992, p 20

In a parallel manner, I believe, architecture, as the container of human beings should accommodate not only man, but also the psyche that embraces him; what I will refer to it as the outside man. Much like the body contains the inside man, architecture, as the extension of body, houses the outside man. The enclosure of a building should represent the occupant's outside man; and only when the architect has a clear understanding of sky and earth may architecture approach the soul.

Moore says, "In care of the soul, we ourselves have both the task and pleasure of organizing and shaping our lives for the good of the soul." The question I would like to pose in this research is: Do we, as contemporary architects, accommodate the soul in our spaces? Do we organize our spaces for the good of the soul? Soul is the quality of things and, as such, one cannot point to it. More significantly than what is revealed by the material side of architecture, soul is about the immaterial architecture. It resides in between the architectural components, and in their wholeness.

*[...] You know when you feel at home, when you can take your shoes off and relax. This feeling of being at home can be communicated to other people even though they live in different kinds of homes. [...] The architectural vanguard has not recently much discussed the significance, or the defining characteristic of homeyness.*

Caruso, Adam, The feeling of things, Ediciones Poligrafa, Barcelona, p 37

*"[...] what we truly long for is the soul [...] Lacking that soulfulness, we attempt to gather these alluring satisfactions to us in great masses, thinking apparently that quantity will make up the lack of quality."*

Ibid, p 38

*The dominance of the eye and the suppression of the other senses tends to push us into detachment, isolation and exteriority. [...] The fact that the modernist idiom has not generally been able to penetrate the surface of popular taste and values seems to be due to its one-sided intellectual and visual emphasis; modernist design at large has housed the intellectual and the eye, but it has left the body and the other senses, as well as our memories, imagination and dreams, homeless.*

Pallasmaa, Juhani, *The Eyes of the Skin*, London, 1995, p19

Juhani Pallasmaa criticises the dominance of the eye over other senses in modern life and further expounds on the suppressing influence of our visually driven life on the quality of the modern architectural product indicating that “it is important to survey critically the role of vision in relation to the other senses in our understanding and practice of the art of architecture.”<sup>1</sup>

The hegemony of vision over other senses is a consequence of the newly defined pace of life in the modern era. “The only sense that is fast enough to keep pace with the astounding increase of speed in the technological world is sight,” says Pallasmaa.<sup>2</sup> Martin Jay, in his book *Downcast Eyes* traces the development of the modern vision-centred culture through such diverse fields as the invention of the printing press, artificial illumination, photography, visual poetry and new experience of time. Walter J. Ong, by putting orality and literacy together, situates the advent of vision-centred life as a consequence of printing and language, which subsumed the acoustic world into the visual world. “In this new world, the book was less like an utterance, and more like a thing”, says Ong, “[...] for language is structure and it is impossible to use language without a grammar.”<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, the acoustic and tactile qualities of architecture seem to be dissolving into the visual grammar of modern architecture. Ocularcentrism negates the active role of other senses in the process of architectural creation and results in a single-sided space that is only appealing to the eye. The newly coined term, ‘Sexy Architecture,’ is the modern definition of a successful space. “An unending rainfall of images”<sup>4</sup> results in a space that withdraws from wholeness and inclusion, one that gradually derogates all other senses.

David Michael Levin warns about the strong power in vision by pointing out that “There is a very strong tendency in vision to grasp and fixate, to reify and totalise: a tendency to dominate, secure, and control[...].”<sup>5</sup>

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1 Ibid, p 16

2 Ibid, p 21

3 Ong, Walter J., “Orality and literacy,” *New Accents*, London and New York, 1982, p 108

4 Calvino, Italo, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, Vintage Books, New York, 1988, p57

5 Levin, David Michael, “Decline and Fall – Ocularcentrism in Heidegger’s Reising of the History of Metaphysics”, Levin, 1993, p 205, quoted in Pallasmaa, Juhani, *The Eyes of the Skin*

The narcissistic eye views architecture solely as a means of self-expression, and as an influential-artistic game detached from essential mental and societal connections, whereas the nihilistic eye deliberately advanced sensory and mental detachment and alienation.

*Architecture must again learn to speak of materiality, gravity, and the logic of its own making. Architecture has to become a plastic art again and to fully engage our bodily participation.*<sup>1</sup>

Pallasma, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin*, London, 1995

In order to illustrate the threat of the dominance of vision over modern life and endorse the decline of ocularcentrism, I would like to go back to the story of the thesis – the breathless lover - and reflect on the decline of visual dominance. The first revelation of the beloved plays a central role in the plot. Not only does it provoke the protagonist's yearning to unite with the beloved, it blinds him temporarily. Having lost his sight, the protagonist evolves from being a follower to a wanderer; it is in this gap where he eventually finds his love.



3.29. Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, 1602-1602, Oil on canvas, 107×146cm

*In the traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, God communicates through the medium of the word, both spoken and written. It is significant*

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1 By endorsing Pallasmaa's theory of fully engaging our body, the thesis reinforces the analysis presented earlier in Chapter 1. Based on the diagram presented therein, we inferred that the ideal position for any human is in the intersecting region of soul where body and spirit unite: the place where our tendencies and desires synchronously respond to body and spirit and where they both benefit, from the interaction. Through full engagement of the bodily senses from one side and the spiritual capacity from the other, one may approach his beloved, be it God or the creation of a soulful architecture.

*that Genesis describes His first act as taking the form of speech, the message being “Let there be light.” Speech and sound precede light and vision, just as orality comes before literacy.*

Strate, Lance, Media Transcendence, 4th issue of the academic journal, McLuhan Studies

Similarly, in *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*, Thomas announced that, unless he could thrust his hand into Christ’s side, he would not believe what he had been told. A week later, Christ appeared, asked Thomas to reach out his hands to touch Him and said, ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’<sup>1</sup>

Having discussed the foremost threats of modern life on architecture – soullessness and ocularcentrism- one may have already extrapolated that both cases are, to a certain degree, driven by self interest.

Egocentric contemporary architecture concentrates on the individual at the expense of the spirit of the collective. The following quote from Vitruvius reinforces the notion of wholeness in architecture.

*“Vitruvius insightfully described an assembly of early humans around a fire initially caused by lightning. He speculated that, while keeping the fire going, humans learned to speak. This event literally disclosed a clearing in the forest: a political and public space whose main quality was to be a place for individuals to participate in a political and cosmic order larger than themselves. Vitruvius recognized this to be the most original quality of architecture and the making of cities. This story questions all formalistic and self-referential assumptions of modern architecture: unless architecture offers a space of participation to others it is irrelevant, regardless of its aesthetic or technological attributes.”<sup>2</sup>*

According to Vitruvius’s view, the segmented space is unable to fully execute the necessary architectural requirements - in this case, bearing emotions. In a society where selfishness is a preference – for both the user and the author of a space - the disassociation of emotions in the architectural setting seems to be epidemic.

Self-interest in architecture has resulted in an inconsistent visage for our cities, because hundreds of separate interests fronting onto a single street compete with each other, rather than contributing to the collective. Every building has become merely an embodiment of body rather than both body and soul; it represents its own interests rather than integrating with the greater soul of the city.

Self-interest in an extreme form known as narcissism is being unusually encouraged by our media-influenced culture as a means to enhance consumerism. Selfishness may results in a superficial life only capable of communicating with the surface of things; this shallow state is what has entirely immobilized the spiritual life of modern man and left him with no true longing. Narcissistic society has fully occupied him with

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1 John 20:29 NKJV

2 Alberto Perez-Gomez, ‘The wall and the stair’ in ‘Archipelago’, ED: MacKeith, Peter, Rekennustetor, Keuruu, 2006



longing for fragmented appetites of the body, rather than longing for wholeness of the soul. This thesis asserts that longing is a path that can undo selfishness. It is a path through which one finds one's own soul and liberates oneself from the needs of the body. In the following example from Rumi's work, he elucidates the significance of "longing for the beloved" in one's life.

*If in thirst you drink water from a cup, you see God in it.  
Those who are not in love with God  
will see only their own faces in it.*<sup>1</sup>  
Rumi



3.30. Caravaggio, Narcissus, 1594-1596

Longing has a constructive role in one's journey towards the beloved. When the artist is consciously aware of his separation from a part of his soul, his longing reverberates in his work and reveals in the moment of inspiration, the moment in which the beloved appears. In a perfectly structured essay, *Body and Image*<sup>2</sup>, Peter Zumthor discusses the significant impact of an architect's inner world on the quality of his work.

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1 Essential Sufism, James Fadiman and Robert Frager. 1997

2 Peter Zumthor, 'Body and Image' in 'Archipelago', ED: MacKeith, Peter, Rekennustetor, Keuruu, 2006, p 201-210



Zumthor suggests that the magic of the moments we experience in our real life instantly merge with our other, earlier experiences and, in this process, none of these images remain as they once were. “Memories distil and intensify the image experience of the moment. Evidently, an image experience instantly refers to an inner image, which is, in turn, the product of experienced, conceived or dreamed image realities.” He continues: “I experience reality, concrete reality, in an intense fashion, I find that I long for it. It is an affirmation of reality that makes me feel sheltered in the world.”

He admires the ability to dream as a fantastic gift of human beings through which he can picture the image of his desired space somewhere between his experience in the present and the memory of his earlier experiences.

Zumthor reveals his longing for the concrete realization of his desired image, which is the architectural end product. He further describes that his inner images from the past profoundly enrich the final picture of the design, as if his longing for a soulful architecture encourages the association of his inner being with the process of architectural creation.

*Designing, projecting an image allows me to anticipate something, to generate something I had not known before; it becomes an act of creating reality. [...] And I sense a longing for powerful bodies, for realities and presences, for forms that impress me and easily rival the power of pictures. I believe that the desire for the beautiful body will never fade. I myself love the body of architecture, its existence, the presence of things and living with them. But if architecture were my beloved, I would not be able to decide: what do I love more, the real body, its gently undulating lines, the feeling of touching it – or the picture, my image of it.*

Peter Zumthor, ‘Body and Image’ in ‘Archipelago’, ED: MacKeith, Peter, Rekenustetor, Keuruu, 2006, p 201-210

The aforementioned citation from Zumthor points to the argument of the thesis regarding longing. Zumthor finds the true essence of his work through his longing for what he loves and, furthermore, endorses the idea of inclusion of body and spirit through his hesitation to disclose his passion for the body of architecture or its spirit.

Through the study of Persian calligraphy and its spiritual qualities, this thesis asserts that longing for the soul is the predominant characteristic of calligraphy, and is the reason for its highly esteemed position among the arts of Iran.

Rumi, in one of his most famous pieces, presents an inspiring juxtaposition of one's longing and his inner soul:

*I searched for God among the Christians and on the Cross and therein I found Him not.  
I went into the ancient temples of idolatry; no trace of Him was there.  
I entered the mountain cave of Hira and then went as far as Qandhar but God I found not.  
With set purpose I fared to the summit of Mount Caucasus and found there only 'anqa's habitation.  
Then I directed my search to the Kaaba, the resort of old and young; God was not there even.  
Turning to philosophy I inquired about him from ibn Sina but found Him not within his range.  
I fared then to the scene of the Prophet's experience of a great divine manifestation only a "two bow-lengths' distance from him" but God was not there even in that exalted court.  
Finally, I looked into my own heart and there I saw Him; He was nowhere else.<sup>1</sup>*

We need to become aware of the longing that is inside us in order to reach the wholeness. Yet the *longing* in modern society is often projected

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1 Translated by Coleman Barks

upon us by external forces at work in society. Longing has become limited to material desires and is being defined for us by the media and advertisements. It is perceived that the concept of *soul* has been replaced by that of *style* in our contemporary architecture. Rather than referencing his own soul, and the collective soul of mankind, in his work, the contemporary architect relies on conventional methods and egoistic impulse alone.

*The aim of soul work, therefore, is not adjustment of accepted norms or to an image of the statistically healthy individual. Rather, the goal is richly elaborated life, connected to society and nature, woven into the culture of family, nation, and globe. The idea is not to be superficially adjusted, but to profoundly connected...*

Moore, Thomas, *Care of the Soul*, Harper Collins, New York, 1992, p xi

Peter Zumthor explains that, in his earlier projects, he experienced sudden moments of despair, in which all he saw in those efforts were others and not himself. "The Japanese artist Kori Mori recently said to me, in my drawing I must see myself," says Zumthor. <sup>1</sup>

*Technology seems to determine the way we live our lives in the new millennium. The electronic flow of data in the veins of the global Net keeps things in constant change. The speed and scope of the change have impacted societies around world. Yet on the individual level we long for peace and tranquility, beauty and continuity. Something characteristic of the nature around us. One might call it the spirit of nature.*

Hornborg, Michael & Toivanen, Erkki, in intro: Zumthor, Peter, *Zumthor Spirit of nature wood architecture award 2006*

When the process of architectural creation makes space for the architect's soul, the product becomes unique and independent. There is a certain character to such a building that tends to inspire social participation. In contrast, the mass production of modern life presents a "copy-paste" style of architecture in which the space is meant to make use of the simplest architectural components in order to be applicable to an infinite number of possible users. Handwritten architecture has been replaced by stamp or copy architecture, in which the buyer longs for a photoprint of the space he would be occupying. <sup>2 3</sup>

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1 Peter Zumthor, 'Body and Image' in 'Archipelago', ED: MacKeith, Peter, Rekennustetor, Keuruu, 2006, p 205

2 "The hegemony of vision has been reinforced in our time by a multitude of technological inventions and the endless multiplication and production of images."

Pallasma, Juhani, *The Eyes of the Skin*, London, 1995, pp21

3 "Buildings today exist for the media, for journals, for books, for the Web. Even when constructed they serve chiefly as visual wonders to see during sporting events on television or as backdrops for photo shots in fashion magazines. "

Kazys Varnelis, Robert Sumrell, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, Advanced Studio V



## Architectural Precedents

In the following section I study two architectural precedents where each architect has skilfully authored a space that is capable of connecting to the occupant's most inner feelings.

Brother Claus Chapel, Peter Zumthor, Mechernich,  
Germany, 2007

Brother Clause Chapel, designed by Peter Zumthor, uses the rammed concrete technique in construction. In this technique, farmers poured a layer of concrete over a teepee of timber every day for 24 days, leaving a texture similar to that of rammed earth. The timber was then burnt out by colliers, using the same process as making charcoal; this left a charred interior.

Sitting in my apartment, thousands of kilometres away from the Brother Claus Chapel in Mechernich, Germany, I feel my senses engage in a dialogue with the radiance being diffused from the edifice. Without a doubt, my longing to see the building is a powerful stimulus, yet by no means do I believe this yearning is about me; it is all about the building and its physical presence and draw. Looking out into the dark night, I can fully sense the sparkling dawn about the chapel and the rays of the





3.31. Brother Claus Chapel, Mechernich, Germany

sun unfolding on its wavy skin.

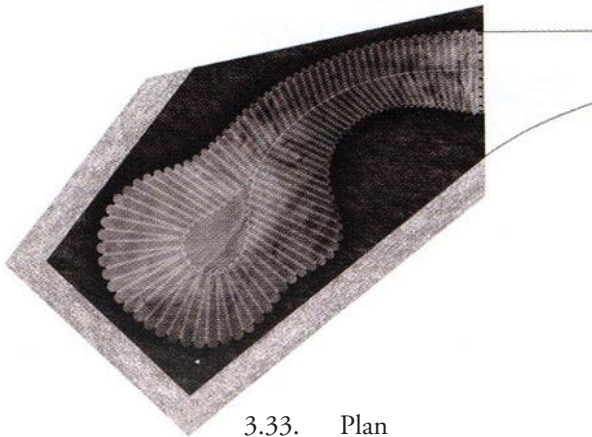
Without having seen Peter Zumthor's chapel in person, I can still intuitively perceive how it would feel to be enclosed by that building. When I close my eyes, I can feel the ascension of being in that chimney; even my body on the sofa tends to move upward. When I close my eyes, I can smell the burnt wood and the story of its sacrifice in favour of concrete. When I close my eyes, I can hear the memory of the concrete, its melancholy dialogue with its lost companion, timber, as it was burning in his arms.

Brother Claus Chapel, to me, steps beyond the state of being a 'building' to a 'container'—a container of emotions. In such a building, vision is no longer a key player. I believe that even experiencing that space with closed eyes, one's senses can still communicate with the spatial qualities of the building: The space that is not centered on vision descends upon our senses and communicates to our soul.

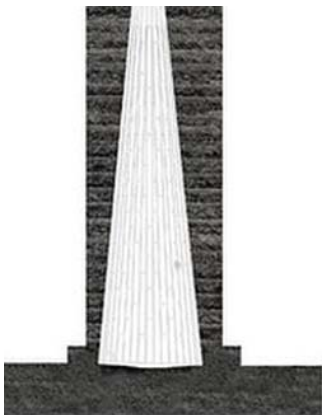
The Brother Claus Chapel stands out among other buildings through the architect's success in containing emotions. Through his carefully balanced juxtaposition of matter and void, Zumthor has enhanced the mutual journey from one to another. He rejects the conventional by endorsing the significance of the void. Zumthor skilfully blurs the notion



3.32. Brother Claus Chapel, Mechernich, Germany



3.33. Plan



3.34. Section



3.35. Section

of an edge between material and void, which suddenly presents a poetic union of the material and the immaterial.

The charred concrete wall represents a matter that has not been rationalized by the noetic mind, one that is, rather, driven by sentiments. The tonality of concrete provides a range of different opacities that gives an emotional depth to the material: a profundity that pairs with the tonality provided by natural lighting on the concrete surface. Moreover, the combination of opacities and tones is accompanied yet by another layer of complexity: the pattern of timber embedded on the concrete surface. The notion of the burnt timber – reflected in concrete - diverts attention from matter to the void. Void, in this case, is an ineffable quantity that, despite being, by definition, concealed from the eye, nonetheless has an equal share in creating the meaning of the space.

In observing the chapel, it is as if matter (concrete) longs to regenerate an embodiment of the void (timber) – albeit an imaginary one - in the same fashion that the whole building longs to define the indefinite hollow of its surrounding pasture. In a way, Zumthor endorses the essential role of both body (matter) and soul (void) in architecture. Brother Claus Chapel is an example of a building that engages all senses equally in the process of communication. In the magic of a moment spent within the chapel, it seems impossible to enjoy the material without instantly merging with the immaterial –and vice versa.



3.36. Brother Claus Chapel, Mechernich, Germany

## Sheikh Lotfolah Mosque, Muhammad Reza Ibn Ustad Hosein Banna Isfahani, Isfahan, Iran, 1615

To me, Sheikh Lotfolah Mosque is one of the most unusual and inspiring Iranian structures. Located in Isfahan, central Iran, the mosque was built during the Safavid dynasty, during a reign that stretched from 1602-1619. It was designed by Muhammad Reza Ibn Ustad Hosein Banna Isfahani and served as a private chapel for the women of the shah's harem.

It is one of the famous three structures that are located on the main square of the city, Naghsh-e Jahan Square. When I revisited this building last year, I was moved by the grandeur of what I beheld before my eyes. I intuitively felt that the building possesses a generative spirit, one that tends to offer more upon every visit. It seems that the building holds an immeasurable reservoir of embedded codes that can only be perceived gradually, and through one's ongoing commitment. In this sense, the occupant is encouraged to participate in the process of communication.

Strangely, upon being exposed once again to the magnificence of the





3.37. Sheikh Lotfolah Mosque, Isfahan, Iran



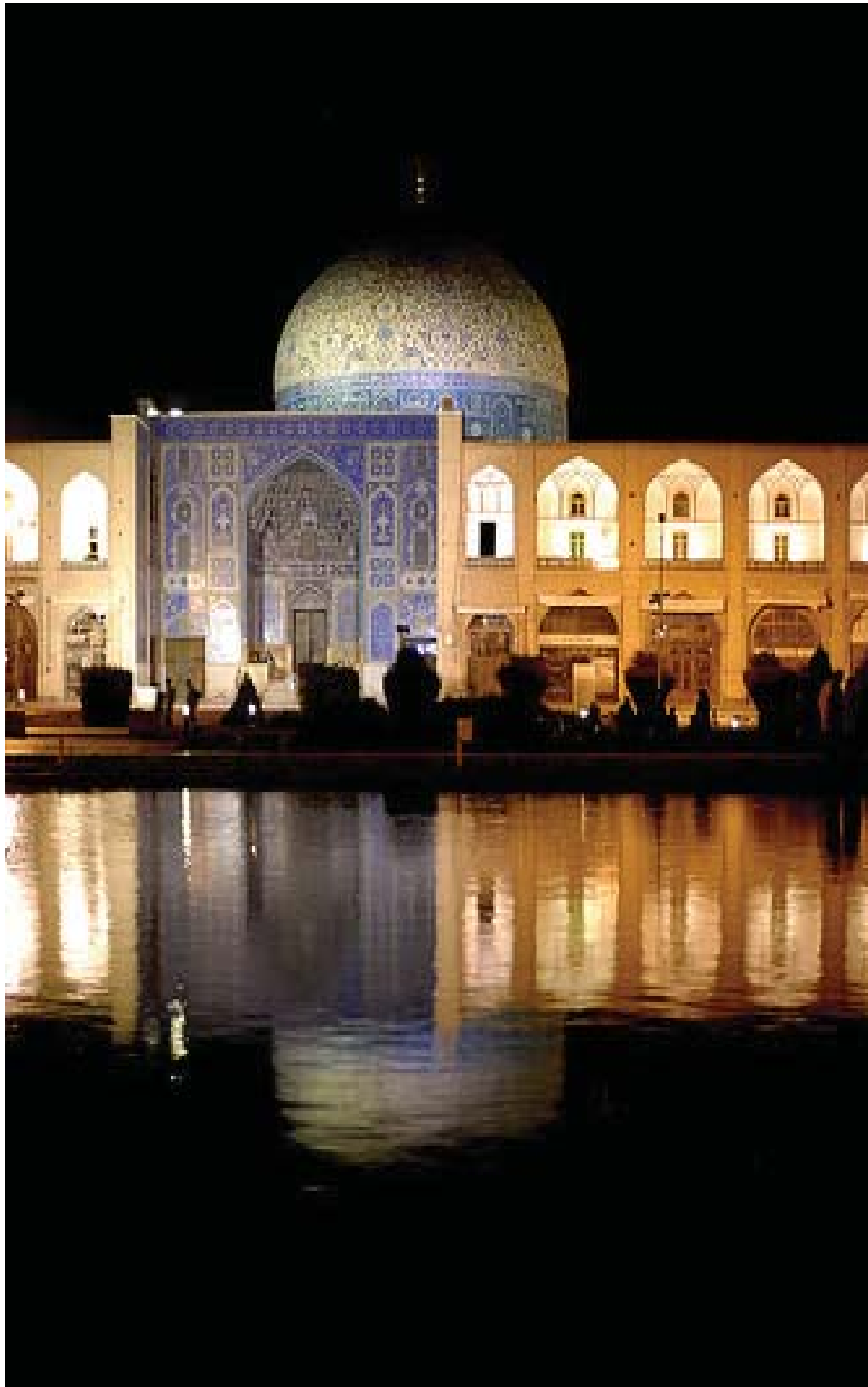


3.38. Sheikh Lotfolah Mosque, Isfahan, Iran

dome, the unique emotional mode I experienced was as original and powerful as it was in my very first visit.

Beyond the splendour of the edifice, there is yet another level of spatial eloquence that evokes a sense of soulfulness in Sheikh Lotfolah Mosque. There is a rapturous narrative attached to this specific building that provides it with a poetic quality.

Behind the entrance portal, a narrow, dimly lit passageway with three bends begins; it is the only access towards the dome. Being visually blocked by each bend, the user longs to pass the confinement of the shallow, seemingly endless corridor. What motivates him to take this journey is the obfuscation of a source of light he was exposed to at the beginning of the path; he seeks its revelation once more. By allowing light through a brick screen wall in the corridor's body, the architect brilliantly defines the notion of hope in the dark hallway with the promise of light, while at the same time evoking the worshiper's longing



3.39. Sheikh Lotfolah Mosque, View from Naqshi Jahan Square







3.40. Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Isfahan, Iran



3.41. Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Isfahan, Iran, View from corridor to main entrance

for what is being promised to him beyond the screen. The corridor's purpose is not simply to align the mosque towards Mecca. Rather, its aim is to create a striking contrast between the oppressive, gloomy narrowness of the approach and the spaciousness and light of the prayer hall at its end.

Upon turning at the last bend, the grandeur of heaven is revealed before the worshiper. He abruptly finds himself in the middle of the dome, relieved from the oppression of the dark hallway. Having been captured by the ultimate revelation, he unites with the soul of the building. The explosion of space around him suddenly brings an end to his longing and provides a metaphysical quality to his perception of the dome; he has experienced the story – the soul – of the building.

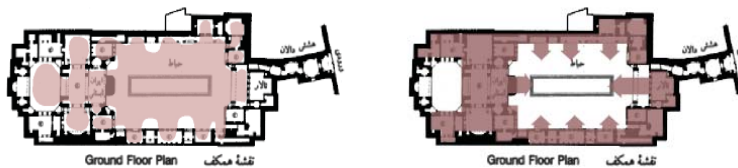
In Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, the architect applies the language of building and design to its highest possible extent, as a means of storytelling: The corridor highlights the significance of the “path” in the ideology of Iran. The journey through the building constitutes a constructive stage preparing one for meeting with the beloved. In the same manner, the vast prayer hall, topped with a spectacular dome that is extraordinary both in form and colour, represents the wholeness of the beloved in the story.

Unlike many other classic mosques, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque does not

follow the conventional style of its time; it eliminates some of the architectural pieces considered most essential to this type of structure, such as minarets, a courtyard, etc. Its designer privileged the concept of storytelling over that of architectural dogmatism, and reduced the architectural components to the most fundamental ones: the path that is realized through corridor, the beloved that is realized through void <sup>1</sup> of the prayer hall, and the longing that resides in between.

1 In the art and architecture of Iran, void is an essential element - an ineffable hollow in the center that is detached, but at the same time is a source of attachment; that is visible, but at the same time concealed.

- Example #1, one can see the significant role of void in architecture of Iranian houses embodied through the courtyard.



3.42. Borujerdi's House, Ground Floor Plan, Kashan, Iran

- Example # 2, contrasting the architecture of Persepolis and the Acropolis reveals the importance of the void in the architectural organization of Persepolis, where building is more about the void rather than the matter. The columns in Persepolis are less robust, opening up the space and allowing them to freely float in the void. The distance between columns is greater in Perspolis endorsing the notion of the void; the Acropolis structures are more static and therefore pertain to more matter than void.



3.43. Perspolis Column, Shiraz, Iran



3.44. Acropolis Column, Athens, Greece



3.45. Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Isfahan, Iran



## Synthesis

Before starting this research, my perception of the potential relationship of calligraphy and architecture was one that related to form. My intention was to apply the freedom of Persian calligraphy onto the strictures and austerity of modern space. Yet, having done this research, I have come to a better understanding of the inherent nature of Persian calligraphy, which is quite clearly transcendent of form: Calligraphy's true essence is emotional, a practice and value worth applying to the practice of architecture. Persian calligraphy, as represented throughout this thesis, is a journey on which one transcends from earthly concerns and longs for union with the beloved.

In the process of this research, I have tried to present a parallel analysis between Persian spiritual culture and architecture. In order to study the relationships between the two media and examine how the soulfulness of Persian calligraphy can be applied to architecture, I have bridged the two practices and found a number of natural points of intersection between them. I would like to borrow from calligraphy the word *longing* and finish this chapter by posing a question to the architectural community:

Do we as architects of a social phenomenon have a legitimate longing for union with the beloved in the process of architectural creation?



*What is needed most in architecture today is the very thing that is most needed in life: Integrity. Just as it is in a human being, so integrity is the deepest quality in a building [...] If we succeed, we will have done a great service to the moral nature – the psyche- of our democratic society [...] Stand up for integrity in your building and you stand for integrity not only in the life of those who did the building but socially a reciprocal relationship is inevitable.*

Wright, Frank Lloyd, 'Integrity', in *The Natural House*, 1954. Published in *Frank Lloyd Wright: Writing and buildings*, selected by Edgar Kaufman and Ben Raeburn, Horizon Press, New York, 1960, p 292-3

It is interesting that the latter citation from Frank Lloyd Wright has such an overtly religious tone: He almost sounds like a preacher. But why do architects preach in the first place? I would argue that is mainly because we, as architects, believe architecture, beyond being defined through matter, is a medium through which one can pursue a sacred path towards a better understanding of one's self. This is the true essence that encourages the architect to speak, yet not through preaching, but through space making and matter.



## **Chapter IV - The Space of Performance : Longing**



## LONGING

Performed : 27 April 2010

Location : School of Architecture, Cambridge, Ontario

Running Time : 9 minutes

Producer : Ardavan Mozafari

Screenplay : Ardavan Mozafari

Based on the book *DIVAN-E-SHAMS* By Rumi



4.46. Performance by Author





## INTRODUCTION

### INT. LOFT AT THE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE– LATE EVENING

Lights off.

The space is blacked out.

A lighting fixture placed in the ceiling drops a faint light on a squared 5' x 5' white canvas paper on the floor that is surrounded by a white fabric laid around it. The setting draws attention and the audience creates a circle.

A man in long a black costume, barefoot steps on the white canvas and stands in the center of the circle under the light.

The light intensifies and illuminates the stage while extending a deep shadow of the man encircling him on the white canvas.

### THE MAN

*This is the story of a lover, one who has been separated from a sacred beloved; one who spends his entire life seeking his love. He climbs mountains, traverses deserts, and survives thunderstorms; nothing turns him from his chosen path. Through all his trials, he sustains the hope that he will genuinely perceive his lost love; gradually, he withdraws from everything except his longing for the beloved. In the end, however, not only is he denied the experience of truly beholding his beloved and calming his pain, but he gradually realizes that his love is unattainable, and that he only became thirstier with longing on his journey towards the beloved. He slowly finds that he has fallen in love with longing for the beloved, rather than loving the beloved, and chooses to dance and cry and chant and pray until he has drowned in desire for union with his love.*

Light fades out.

The man kneels on one knee.

The fabric laid on the floor around the canvas is pulled up from four corners creating a white cube around the man. The thin cloth provides to the audience a diaphanous presentation of the inside.

ACT I – SEPARATION

Suddenly a solo reed begins to play.

The man is still.

Few seconds later, a dim light illuminates him.

The man notices the light and raises his head towards the source.

The light very smoothly increases. Bewildered and anxious he suddenly notices the white cube that contains him.

Curious and fearful he approaches the enclosure and extends his hand to touch it for the first time. He keeps pushing his hand against the enclosure to break it, yet the flexible barrier perfectly contains him.

As he becomes agitated from being confined the music reaches its pinnacle.

He quits struggling and sits on the white canvas in grief as the music pace slows.

He returns to a kneeling position.

The music ends.

Room blacks out.

ACT II – SUFFEREING

After a few seconds a melancholic instrumental music begins.

Singer warbles in Farsi:

*“Thou my beloved!”, “Thou my soul!”, “Allas!”*

The cube is all of a sudden occupied by the images such as carpet, desert, etc that are being projected on its surfaces.

The man kneels motionless inside.

The projectors’ light slightly illuminates the audience for the first time.

[Two projectors cover all four surfaces of the cube. Each projector triggers two parallel facades. The projection light creates an image on the first surface; then passes through the thin fabric and creates the same image on the other side of the cube]. Each projector runs a different slideshow. All images refresh at the same time.

Music and the slideshow end.

Once the screening stops the space fades to dark.

### ACT III – RAPTURE

Slowly, mystic music begins. It is pertaining to Sama dances of the Derivishes. Despite the previous music there is singing in this piece. The singer, Shahram Nazeri sings a poem from Rumi:

*“I don’t know why I am devastated from that wine  
I don’t know why I am lost from that no where”*

The light quickly turns on.

The man promptly raises his head and looks at the source of light with hope.

His body floats up towards the light and he instinctively gets up.

His eyes lock onto the light.

He unconsciously opens his arms and the music rises as he starts to whirl under the light that spills upon him.

He whirls quickly.

The whirling speeds up as the music approaches its pinnacle. The light suddenly shuts off.

He is silhouetted by one dim light as he swirls.

ACT IV – REVELATION

Still swirling, the singer cries loud, a dazzling flash occurs, and the man falls.

The music ends abruptly.

The room seems darker than ever before.

Nothing happens for a few seconds.

A faint light starts to illuminate the stage.

The audience realize that the curtain has dropped in the pinnacle.

The man is still, catching his breath.

The man opens his eyes and is shocked by what has happened. He looks at the missing barrier and beholds the outside world for the first time.

He looks up to the source of light and slowly raises his hands as a sign of gratitude.

## ACT V – DISSOLUTION

The man stands up.

Music begins.

He turns his head around and looks at the audience curiously.

He slowly takes short steps and walks within the fabric on the floor.

He stops and looks at the outside world.

He looks at the dropped barrier and suddenly takes a quick long step and exits the cage.

He stops, turns around and looks at where he was being kept from a new angle.

He touches the loose string that used to hold the barrier.

He gently starts walking around the cage.

He constantly detects things he has never experienced before.

He stops in front of one of the viewers.

His eyes lock onto the viewer's eyes.

He extends his hand towards the viewer's face and touches him/her with his finger tips.

His body gently reacts to the bond.

As the music continues he keeps walking between the audience as if he is looking for something.

Suddenly as the music pace speeds up he becomes terrified by finding himself among the crowd.

Anxious, he keeps turning his head and looking at their faces.

The man quickly walks back towards his cage.

He steps into the previously barrier.

He falls down on the canvas.

As the music reaches its crescendo he starts pulling up the fabric yearningly.

Every single attempt, the barrier falls down.



He quits and goes back to kneeling position.

Music slows, lights fade down.

Music ends.

A few seconds later, music begins with a loud single key encouraging the man to move.

He quickly unravels.

Lights increase.

He gets up and walks towards the corner of the stage.

He bends and picks up from the floor an ink container and a reed pen.

He walks back to the canvas and kneels.

Slow music begins as he starts to write on the white canvas.

Ink in one hand, pen in the other.

He writes Persian calligraphy. [Starting from a corner, as he proceeds, his writing starts to form a circle].

His body correlates with highs and lows of the music as he writes.

Once finished the writing he puts down ink and drops the pen.

He looks at his writing.

The man stands up.

His eyes locked onto the text, he walks gently around it.

He stops and stands loose.

He steps into the black circle he just wrote.

He suddenly drops on his knees in the centre of the circle.

He entangles.

The lights slowly turn off.

The space fades to dark.

Music slows down and slowly fades into darkness.

Music stops, silence dominates.

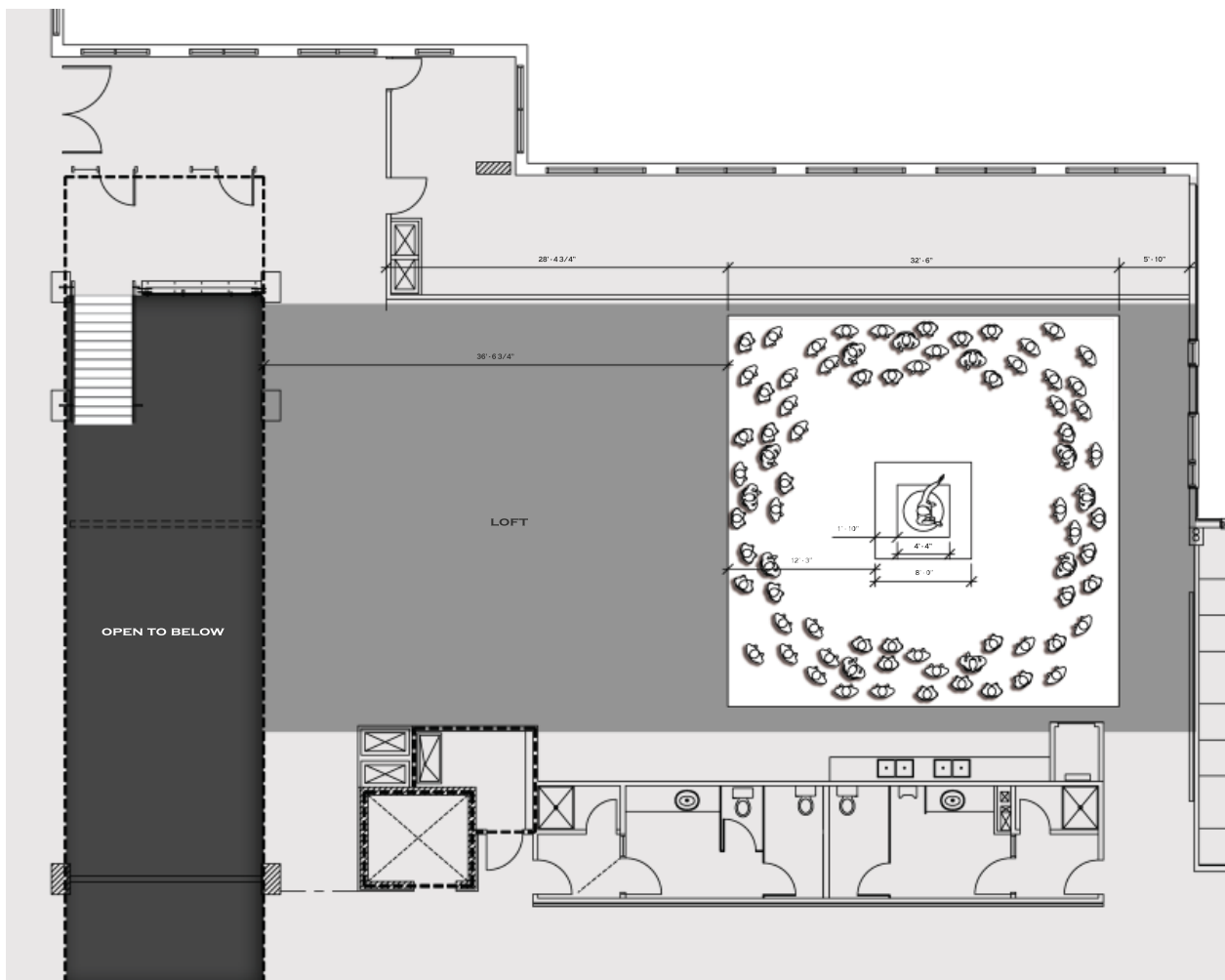
Like the last breath, the music suddenly continues, instantaneously reaches its pinnacle and abruptly ends.

Persian calligraphy that contains the man:

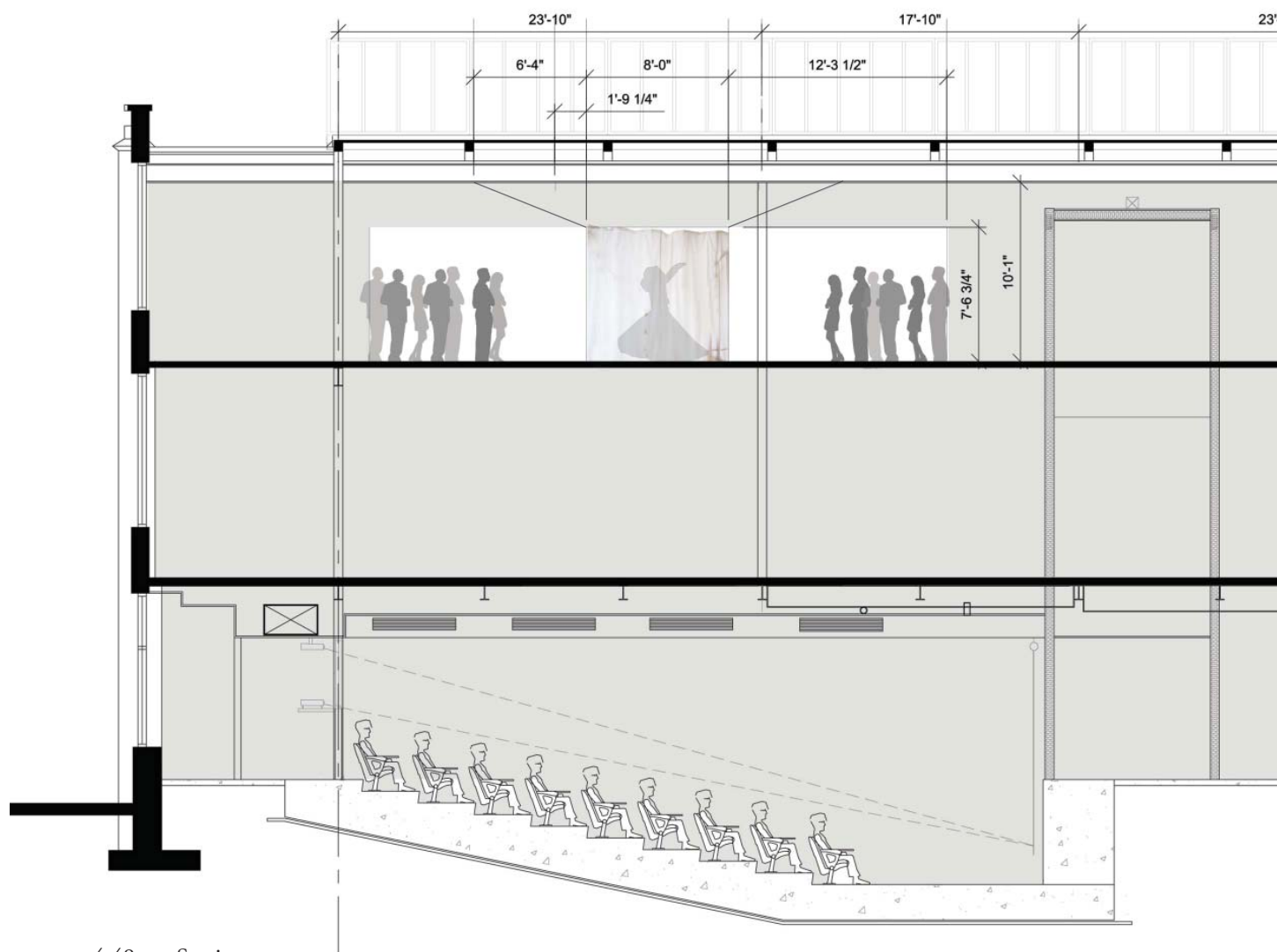
*“With the whole world I have fallen in love  
Everything in the world is a sign of my beloved”*

## Technical Notes

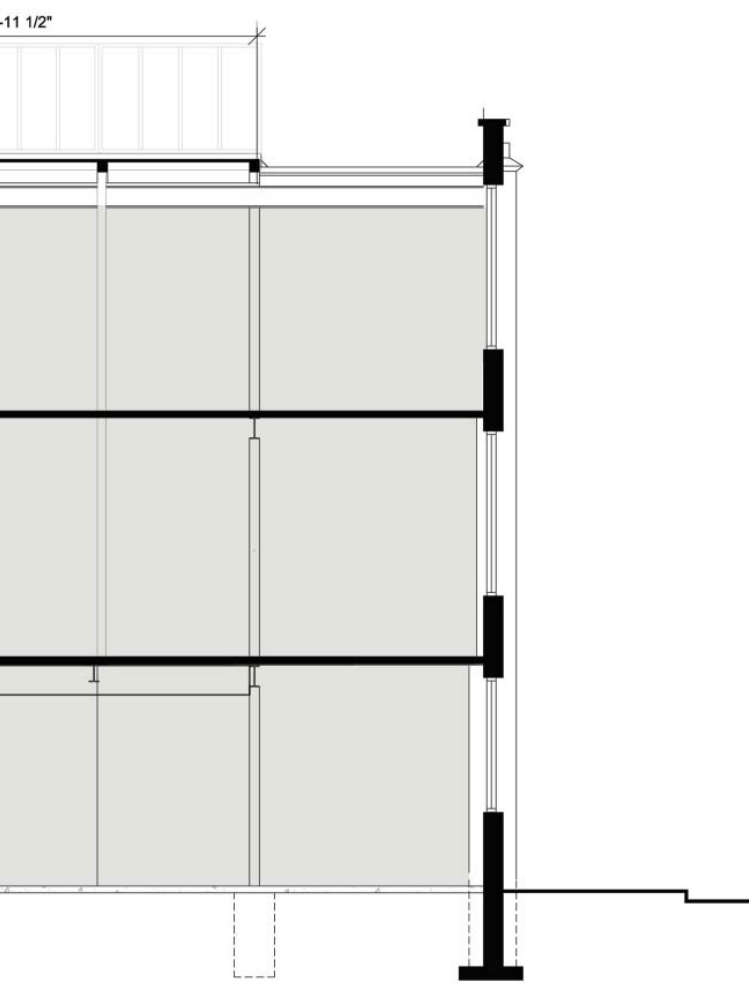
1- Stage Design



4.47. Plan  
Scale 1 : 250



4.48. Section  
Scale 1 : 250



2- Lighting

A01 – Halogen Light 45 WATTS (x4)

Colour: Warm White

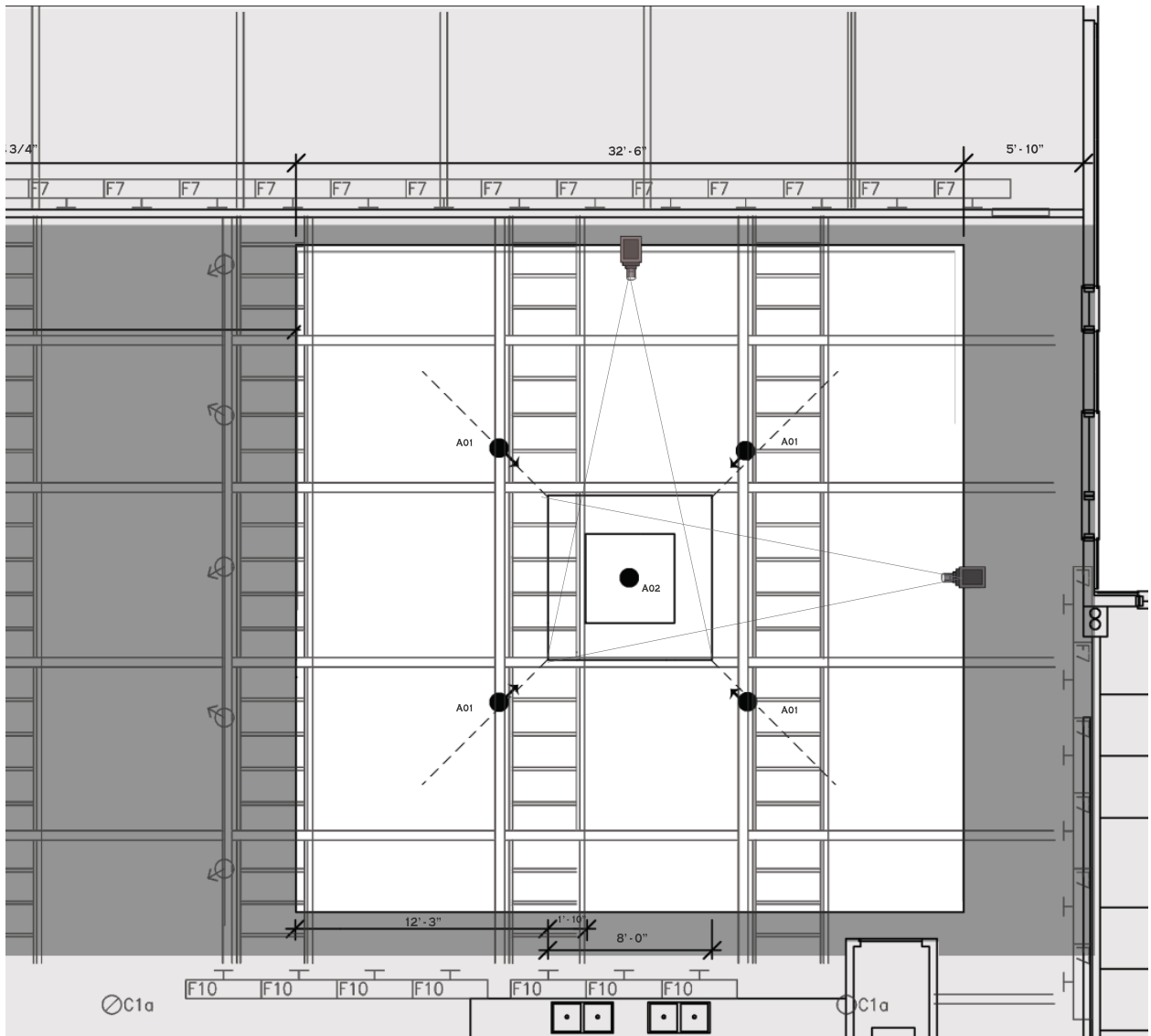
Diffuser: Polyacrylate

A02 – Halogen Light 100 WATTS

Colour: Warm White

Diffuser: Flat





4.49. Lighting Plan  
Scale 1 : 150

3- Music

All Compositions are from the album *Passion of Rumi*, Released 2008.  
Vocals by *Shahram Nazeri*, Composed by *Hafez Nazeri*.

Music Piece #1 (Act 1)- *Mystic*

Music Piece #2 (Act 2)- *Enchanted 1*

Music Piece #3 (Act 3 & 4)- *Beyond*

Music Piece #5 (Act 5)- *The Passion of Rumi*

4- Projection

Projector no. 1 - Slideshow image list:

1- Arg-e-Bam exterior perspective, Kerman, Iran	0:00 – 0:05
2- Picture of parallel walls	0:05 – 0:10
3- Persian carpet, Tabriz pattern	0:10 - 0:15
4- Hand-woven shawl from southern Iran	0:15 – 0:20
5- Persian calligraphy demonstrating the word 'and'	0:20 – 0:25
6- Quran in Kufic text	0:25 – 0:30
7- Light and Shadow	0:30 – 0:35
8- Candle lights	0:35 – 0:40
9- 'Nothing' sculpture from Parviz Tanavoli	0:40 - 0:45

Projector no. 2 - Slideshow image list:

1- Persian carpet, Tabriz pattern	0:00 – 0:05
2- Quran in Kufic text	0:05 – 0:10

3- Arg-e-Bam exterior perspective, Kerman, Iran	0:10 - 0:15
4- Candle lights	0:15 – 0:20
5- Persian calligraphy demonstrating the word ‘and’	0:20 – 0:25
6- Picture of parallel walls	0:25 – 0:30
7- ‘Nothing’ sculpture from Parviz Tanavoli	0:30 – 0:35
8- Hand-woven shawl from southern Iran	0:35 – 0:40
9- Light and Shadow	0:40 - 0:45

#### 5- Crew List

Ardavan Mozafari	Writer/Director/Producer/Production Design/ Stage Design
Ayda K Nezhad	Sound Assistant/Light Assistant/Costume Design
Ali Kamran	Still Photography
Ian Thompson	Play Advisor
Sanaz Hafezian	Projector Assistant
Farhad Shahla	Projector Assistant
Nima Dezhkam	Projector Assistant
Bob McNair	Camera

#### 6- Synopsis of Characters

The Man – A young man approximately 28-38 years in age. Preferably long hair with no facial hair.

The following photographs are taken during the defense session at the school of architecture in Cambridge April 2010 and are supplemented by photographs from a public rehearsal at the Lennox Contemporary Gallery in Toronto Fall 2009.



4.50. Performance by Author







4.51. Performance by Author



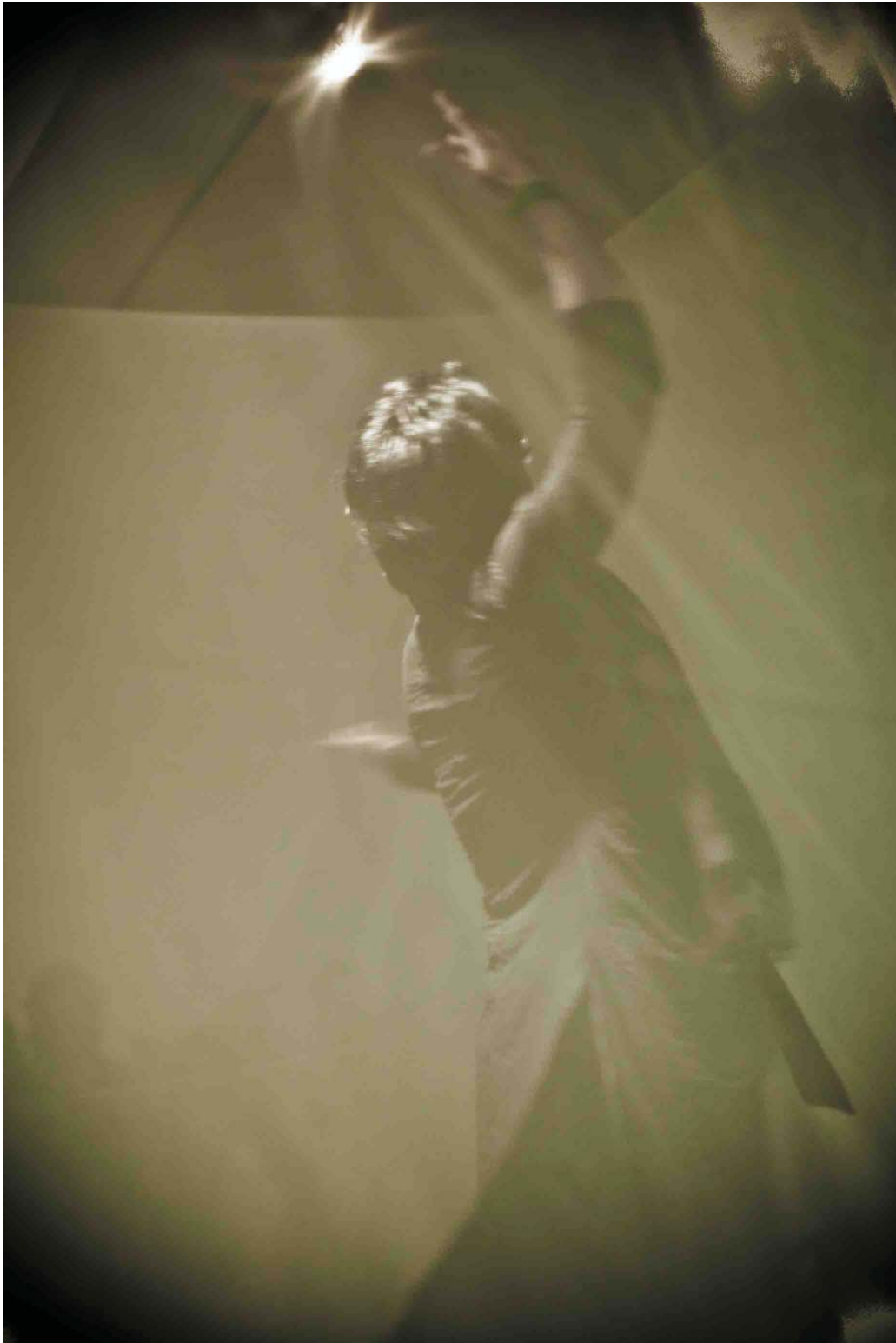




4.52. Performance by Author



4.53. Performance by Author



4.54. Performance by Author



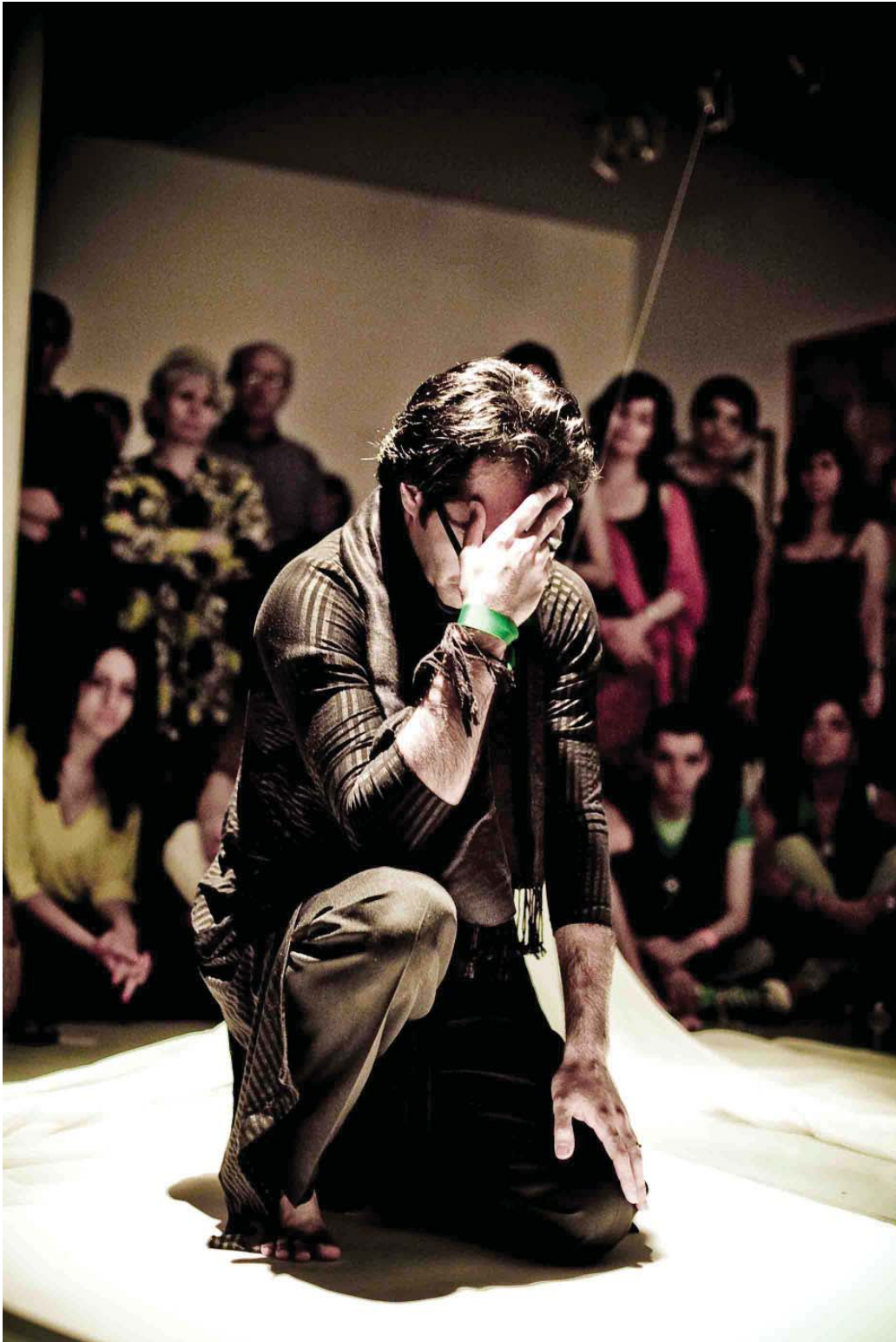




4.55. Performance by Author





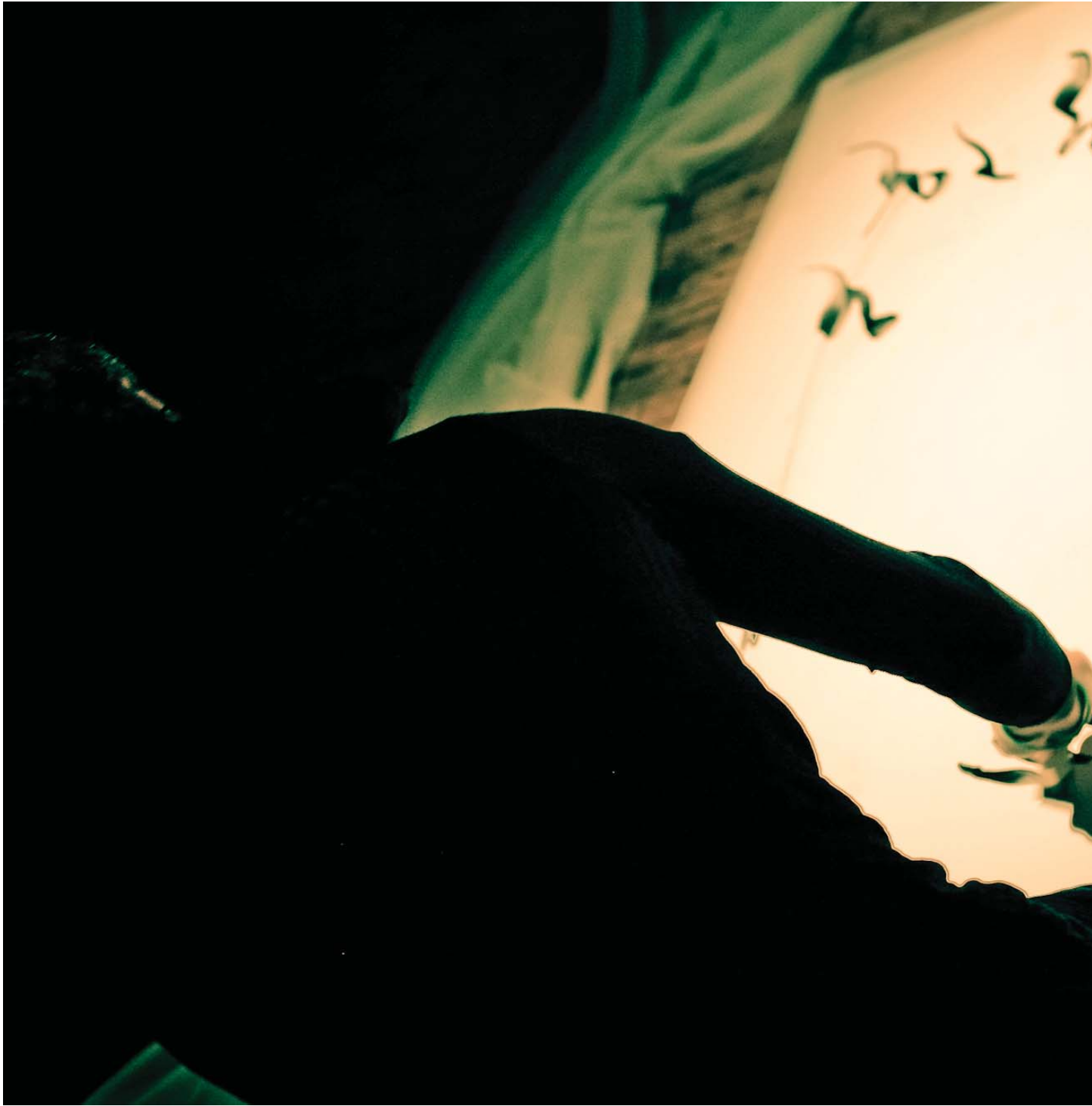


4.56. Performance by Author



4.57. Performance by Author





4.58. Performance by Author







4.59. Performance by Author







4.60. Performance by Author



*“With the whole world I have fallen in love  
Everything in the world is a sign of my beloved”*

Saadi











4.61. (Overleaf) Afjei, Nasrollah, Majles-e Avval,  
Oil and ink on canvas

## **Appendix A**

This section is comprised of a series of design explorations as well as supporting documents for the performance piece.

## □ Inside the White Cube

*Inside the White Cube* is a concept that intends to transcend the dogma of modern architecture by attempting to engage emotion in space.

Considering the white cube as the symbol of modern architecture, Inside the White Cube is a practice that involves entering a space driven by emotions, although located in a confined material context. Moving along previous studies on concepts such as beloved and longing, the emotions that I am seeking to convey are to a certain extent inclining towards the sacred.

Walter J. Ong makes an important point about how technology affects us, asserting that “technology exercises its most significant effects and its most real presence not in the external world, but within the mind, within consciousness. The external product designed by consciousness somehow re-enters consciousness, to affect the way we think, to make possible new kinds of noetic [the interactions among communication, mind, and technology] processes...”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ong, Walter J., *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology*, Cornell UP, Ithaca, 1971, p 102

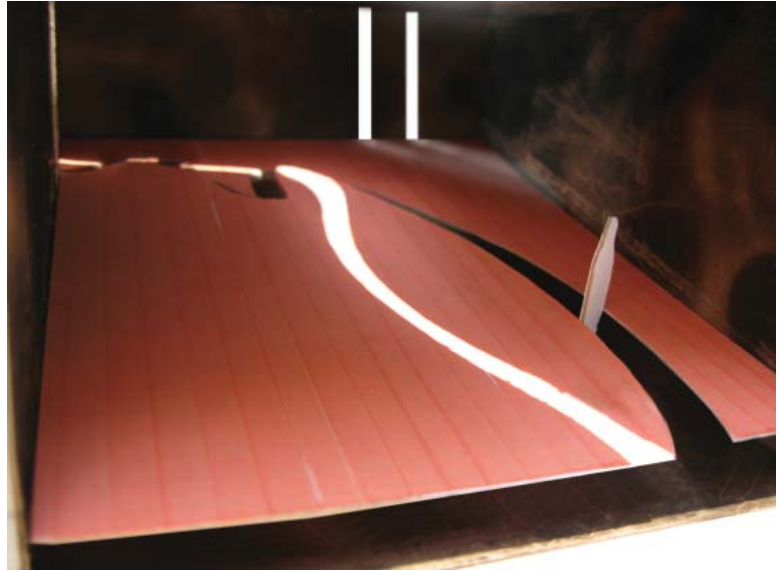




5.60. Design Exercise by Author

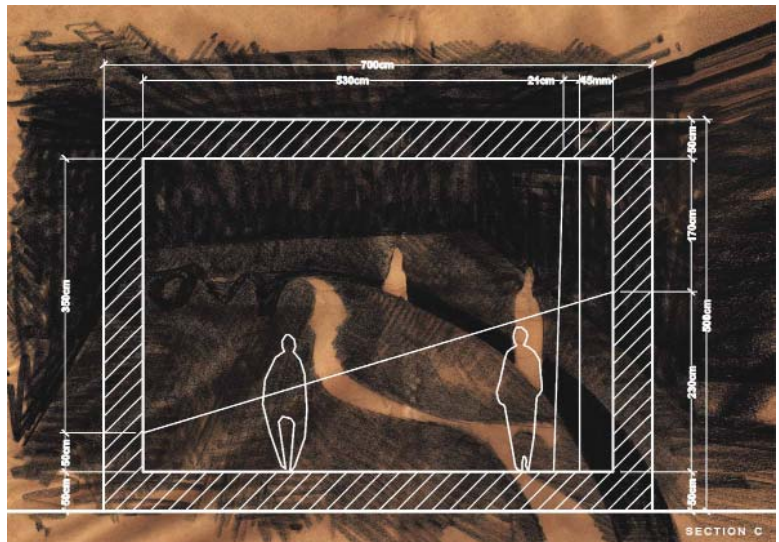
Through this exercise, I have investigated various design alterations in a single unit of space where the intention is to provoke feelings. By designing the interior, I have tried to convert the severity and plainness of a White Cube into a fluid and engaging space. Following is a sample that intends to enrich the White Cube with a sense of longing.

The interior space in the following practice is the narration of a seeker who is



5.61. Design Exercise by Author

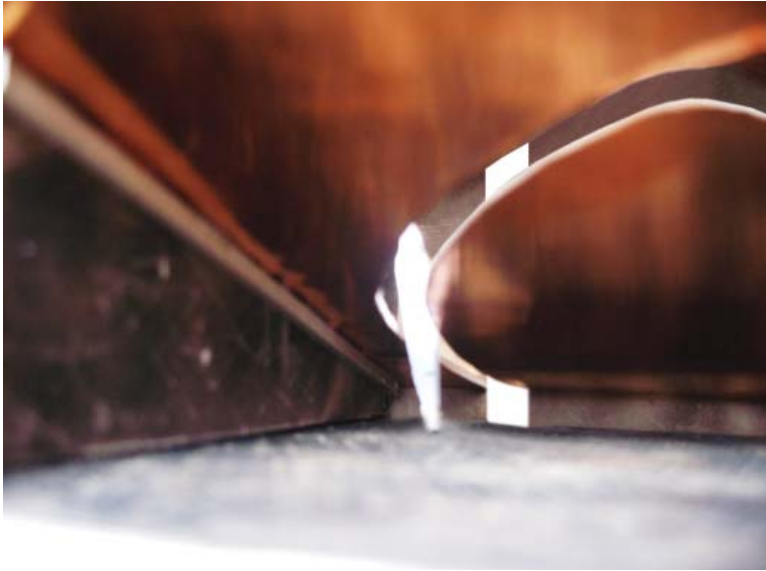
destined to proceed in a restrictive path, a path that evokes the user's longing to escape from his confinement. Through studying one of the numerous possible paths towards the beloved, the space demonstrates highs and lows that one would experience in one's journey towards one's love.



5.62. Section

The curved, narrowing path on a sloped surface, represents the confinement that separates the seeker from the whole, one that he must

conquer in order to unite with his love. The passage is carved out of a copper surface with extremely sharp edges, enhancing the peril of the path. The user longs to reach the point where he passes the height of the restrictive surface and enters the other half of the box, the other world. Yet with every step he takes forward in the diagonal path, he terrifyingly plunges deeper and deeper into the copper panel, drowning along the path. The interior has a distinctive smell, as the burnt metal finish is

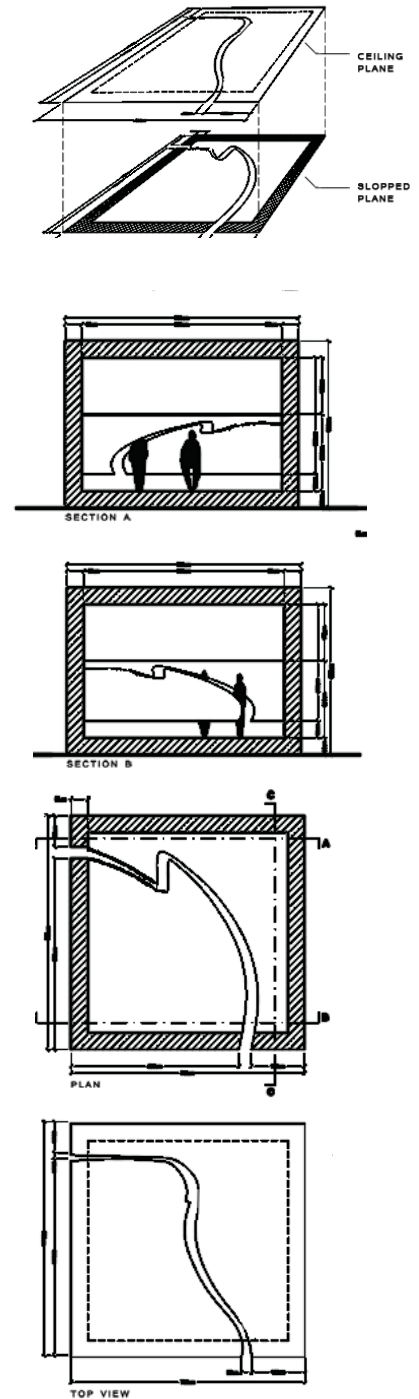


5.63. Design Exercise by Author

polished with oil. The sound of the user's footsteps on the metal panel has the effect of a ticking clock, resonating with his longing for escape.

All of a sudden, he finds himself on the border of the upper world and the world beneath, in a liminal space. Only in that profound moment does the line of natural lighting on the ceiling intersect the line of the path; this is the only moment at which he can see the sky.

Having now entered the other world, he walks freed from any constraints. Looking back to where he began the journey, he is shocked by what he sees: nothing but a fearful, gloomy hollow under the copper panel. Only then does he realize that the suffering he received from the path was in fact his salvation from the confinement of the panel. He might not have survived had the confining path not provoked his longing to liberate from the confinement.



5.64. Perspective, section, plan

## □ The Container

Endorsing the concept of hollowness or void as an integral component of life imbues the system with a sense of completeness; it creates a totality, rather than leaving an ironic emptiness by omitting the concept of void. In this line of inquiry, various precedents were studied. In Persian calligraphy, for instance, the white of the paper, as defined and outlined by the application of ink, comes to take an active role in the composition as a whole; void becomes a design element. In Sheikh Lotfolah Mosque and in Brother Claus Chapel, *hollow* is embodied on a different scale. The chapel contains within itself a piece of void from the vast landscape, and the mosque presents the hollow of the grand dome as a component of the whole.

The following piece is an attempt to evoke the notion of hollowness or void in the physical space. Inspired by Persian calligraphy, the sculpture contains the hollow while being embraced in another, dominant hollow, thereby creating a duality through which it both performs as what is being contained and as the container itself: the void and the solid.

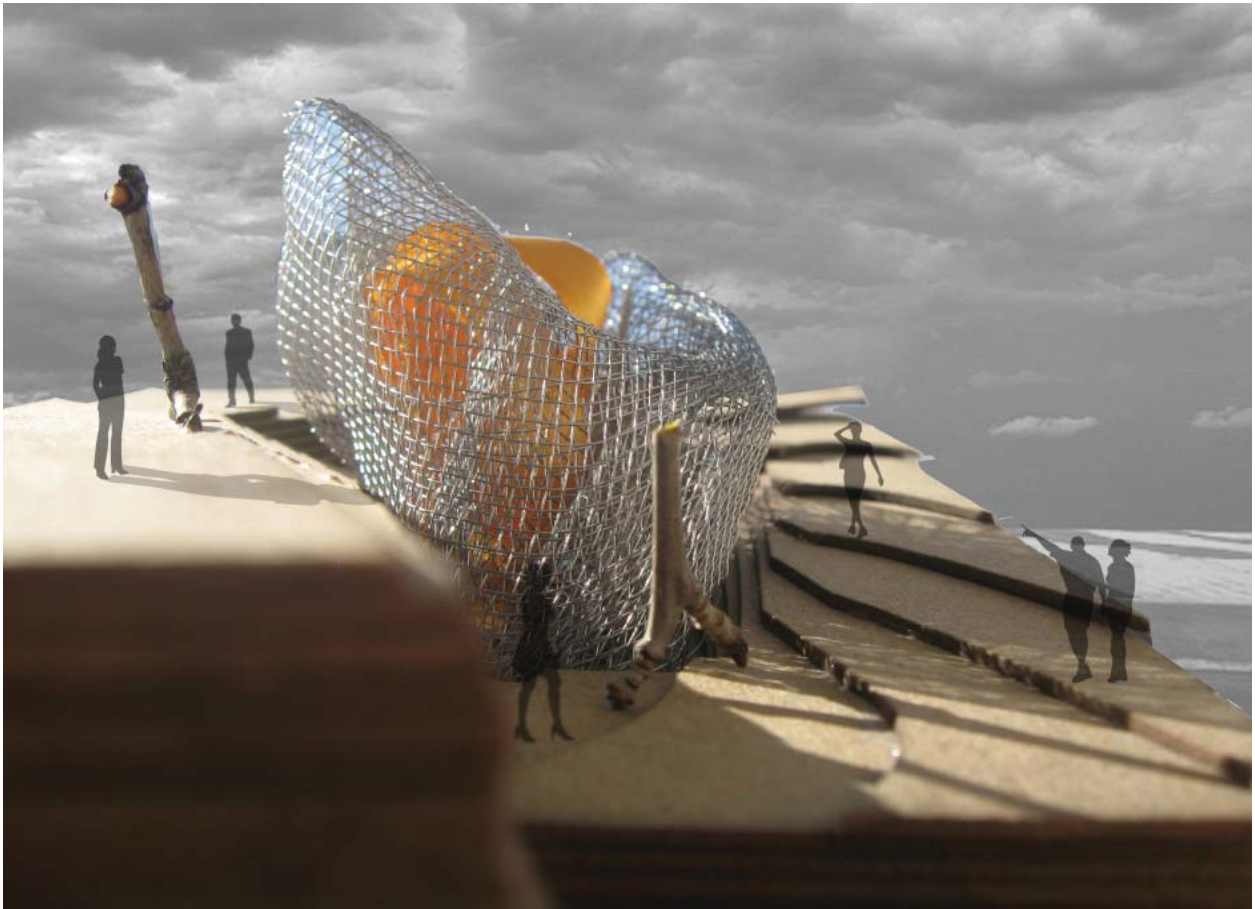


5.65. Design Exercise by Author

## □ Riser

Inspired by the architectural language applied in Sheikh Lotfolah Mosque, this piece explores the concept of longing in an exterior environment. Through partially concealing the core, the setting encourages users to climb a set of stairs, yearning to experience the essence, free from obstruction of the Hijab.





5.66. Design Exercise by Author

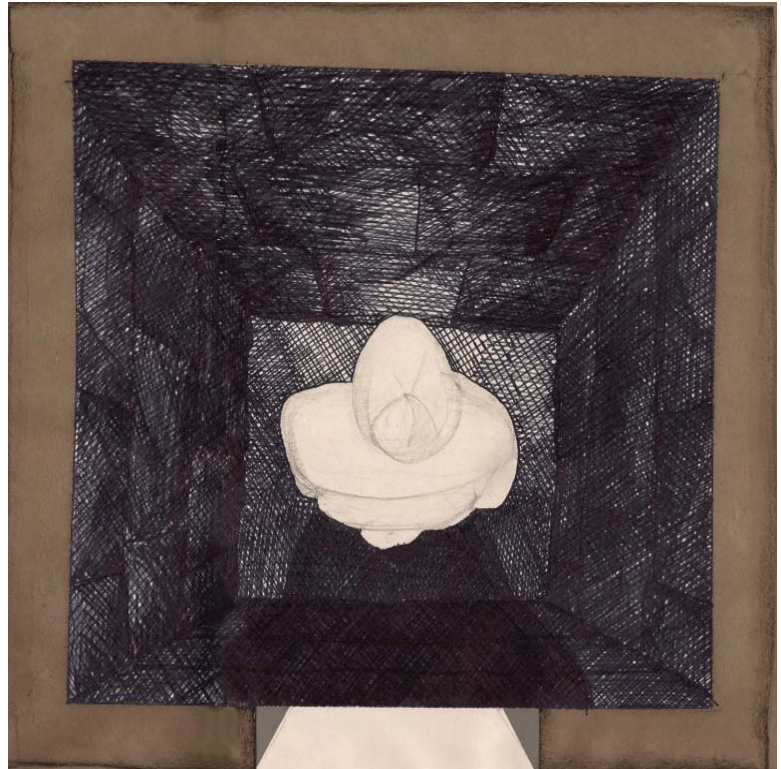
## □ Solitary Temple

An ordinary man, who resides in a town located on the edge of a desert has for a long time contemplated the legend that there is a solitary temple somewhere out in the desert where god would respond to the prayers of worshipers who made the arduous journey to visit the temple. Yet the difficult, long walk through the desert necessary to reach the temple has meant that few undertake the journey; the true significance of the temple is lost, and it is now nothing but a rumour.

One day, pressured by the hardship of life, the protagonist decides to attempt the ordeal and sets out on the path to the temple. After a day of walking, thirsty and exhausted, the man arrives at the temple, absolutely shocked by its humble appearance compared to what he had imagined after hearing of the mystical place for all those years. All that can be seen is a cube, of roughly human scale, with a shallow opening accommodating no more than one person at a time. He crawls inside through the opening and kneels before the light of his candle; he prays and prays.

Having done his prayers, he returns to his hometown worried about whether god really heard his prayers during his visit to the temple. A month after his visit, the man feels a need to revisit the temple, a desire to retrace his path. This eventually becomes a regular pilgrimage for him; traveling to the temple has now become the most important part of his life.

During one of his visits, while kneeling before the light of the candle in the profound silence of the temple, he hears a voice calling his name. "I am your soul!" says the voice, "I will reveal myself and you must promise to keep this dialogue an eternal secret." Once he has made this vow, the man's soul calmly creeps out of his body and fills the gap between his body and the temple's inner surface, almost suffocating him with its enveloping presence. Being embraced by the soul, the man's immediate environment evolves into an extension of his genuine feelings. Stunned by the grandeur of what he experiences, he engages in a rapturous dialogue with his beloved within the body of the temple.



5.67. Design Exercise by Author

## □ Performance : Longing

This piece is realized through the design of a performance in which the architectural setting, along with the storytelling sequence, attempts to convey a sense of longing. It's a different exploration of the ideas that have been discussed in the thesis, made through a new window: a spatial experience. This piece was performed at the school of architecture in my defence day 27 April, 2010.

The performance is comprised of five acts, each representing a different stage of longing. In order to provide a clear understanding of this piece, I would like to refer to the story presented in the introduction of the thesis – the story of the breathless lover. The five stages can be thought of as emotional modes that a seeker experiences in his journey towards the beloved. The modes have been extracted from Rumi's poetry and his definition of longing. They are essential steps in the path that Rumi sketches; they are the theoretical structure underpinning Rumi's work:



5.68. Performance by Author

Act 1 – separation	When the seeker realizes for the first time that he is separated from a dear beloved
Act 2 – suffering	A consequence of being aware of imprisonment
Act 3 – rapture	Extreme ecstatic modes for liberation from the enclosure
Act 4 – revelation	An instantaneous disclosure of the beloved following the seeker's passion
Act 5 – dissolution	The seeker's selflessness is a requirement for union with the beloved

The performance is nine minutes long and is divided into five acts. The actor, like the architecture, is mute; music in each episode is specifically edited to correlate with the spatial setting of each act. By juxtaposing the mute actor and the mute, still architecture, the performance accentuates the notion of the liminal space and unveils the silent melody that is ever-present within the space.

The medium of performance enables the design to divert attention from the body of architecture to the spirit that resides between the architecture. The stage setting in the performance serves to build and convey an atmosphere. My intention in designing a performance has been to accomplish the following:

- To convey an atmosphere. The design is intended to provoke a sense of longing.
- To bring to the foreground the spirit of architecture, as opposed to its body.

At the same time the user is experiencing the central white cube, the cube is experiencing the user. The performance accentuates this interaction and, further, proposes that architecture is the void that rests between the building and the user.

The central fabric core symbolizes the veil which separates the protagonist from his beloved while referencing the white cube examined in the previous sections of the thesis. In this setting, the white cube represents modern architecture and the dogma that is affiliated with it: It is a barrier that the protagonist must overcome in order to unite with his beloved.

*My body is a veil covering the face of my soul*<sup>1</sup>

Hafez

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1 Translated by Author



I would like to briefly explain the steps leading to the final performance. The following process comprises of sketches, practices, rehearsals and so on.

The opposite images are from an exploration in the formal qualities of Persian calligraphy, e.g. proportions, geometry, ascension, descent, and so on. In order to examine calligraphy in a new light, I began by examining it in a new scale. By projecting a calligraphic composition on the screen and taking a closer look at the blown-up image, I was able to study the text in a new scale; atop the enlarged images, I sketched the geometric qualities that were embedded in the letters and words.

Moving forward, I started detailing the design and putting the architectural setting into the appropriate context. In this stage, I was planning for the performance to take place in the atrium space in the school of architecture at Cambridge, Ontario. I got all the required drawings from Levitt Goodman Architects, who renovated the school, and started making accurate maquettes to allow me to examine design properties such as dimensions, lighting, materials, sequence, and the flow of the narrative in a larger scale.. The following images are taken from the maquette, developed using a number of different software programs, and finally edited using animation software to simulate the actual performance. Five music pieces were also prepared and edited for each act.

The atrium at the school of architecture is a central void, ascending all the way to the roof, and visually connecting all three levels. It is 11.5m (37'-10" ft) high x 18.3 m (60'-3" ft) long x 6.75 m (22'-2" ft) wide. The original design proposal was meant to occupy one-third of the space in its full height and divide it from the rest of atrium with black fabric in order to completely block the influx of natural light. This would create a new space, 6.75 m (22'-2" ft) x 6.75 m (22'-2" ft) x 11.5m (37'-10" ft), as the performance area, in which three fundamental components are located on different floor levels:

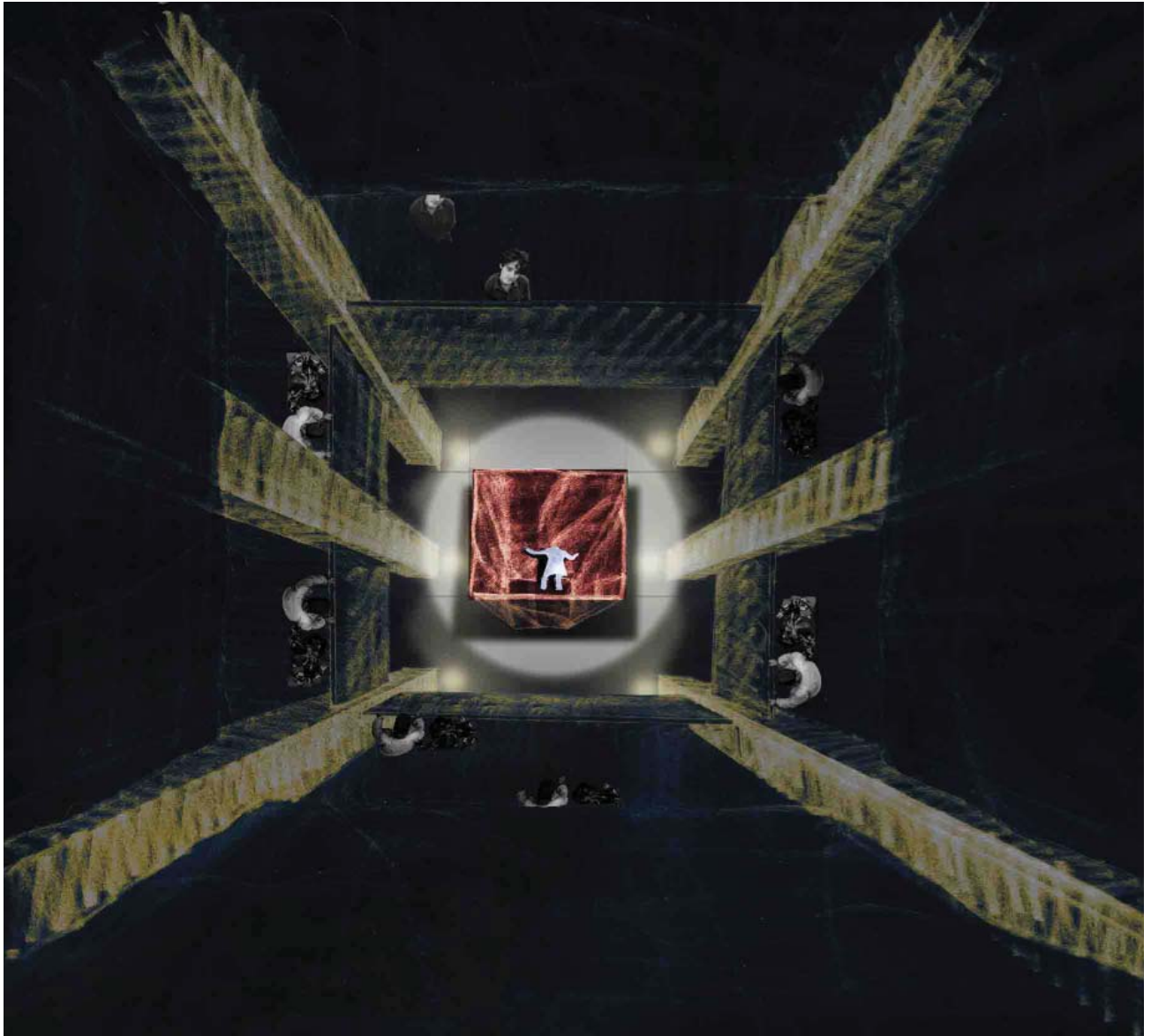
- Actor is on the first floor,
- Viewers stand on the second floor all around the box,
- Large projection screens are hung from the ceiling. They start from above the viewers' height and go up all the way to the third floor.

The viewers, being placed on the middle level, must constantly look up and down in order to follow the images that are being projected on the screens above them, along with the actual play that is taking place on the first floor.



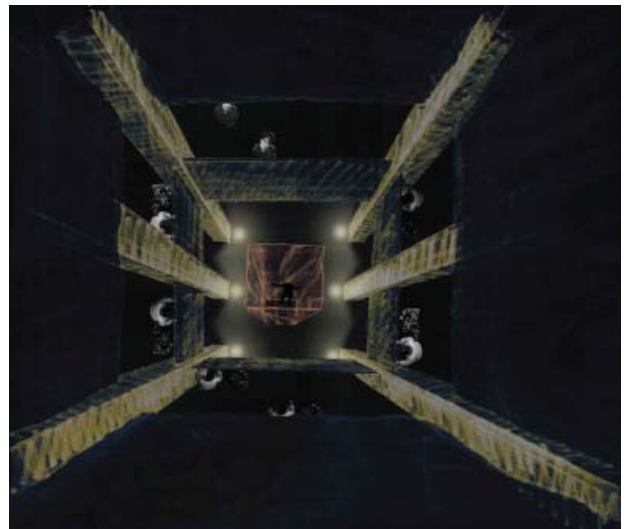
5.69. Design Exercise by Author

This image is a visualization of a scene addressing stage, actor, audience, projection screens and, more importantly, the performance's lighting.



5.70. Performance stage setting by Author

Act 1



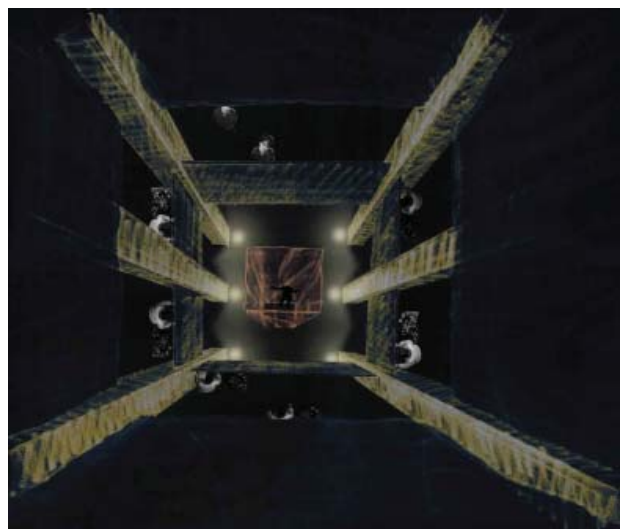
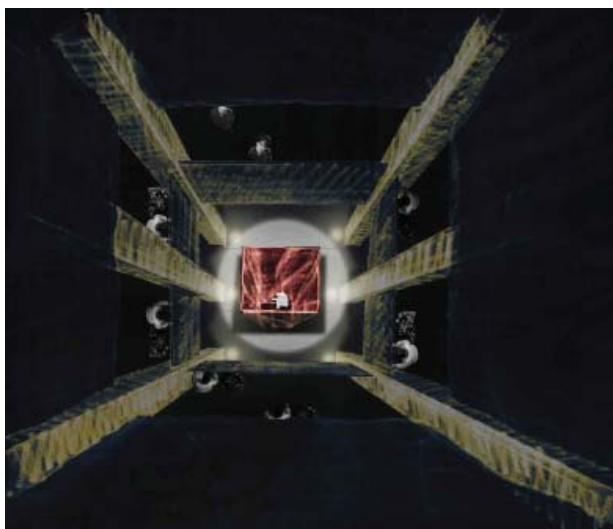
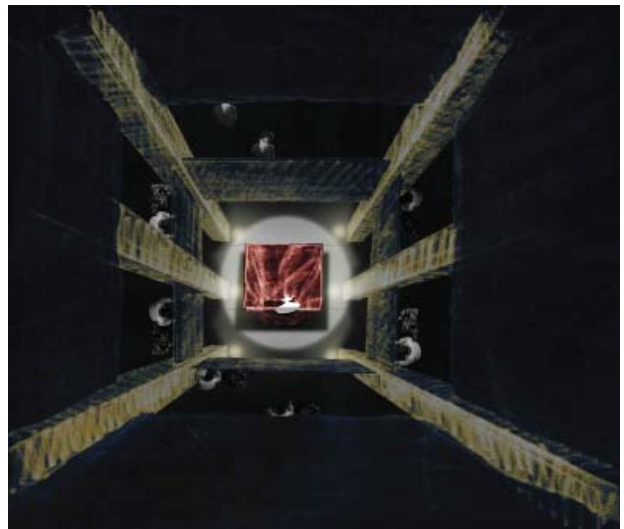
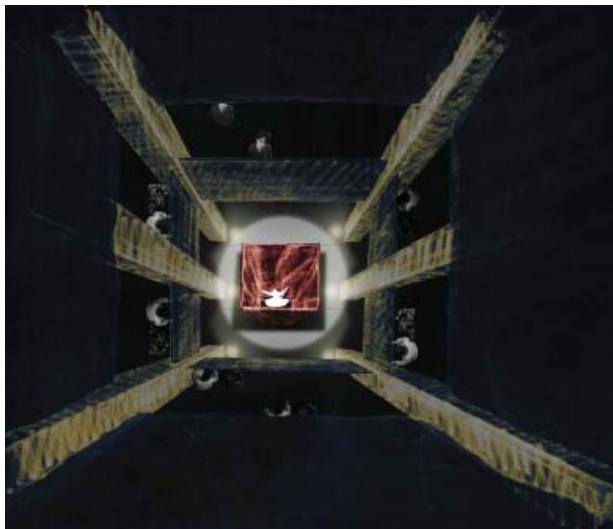
5.71. Performance stage setting by Author

Act 2



5.72. Performance stage setting by Author

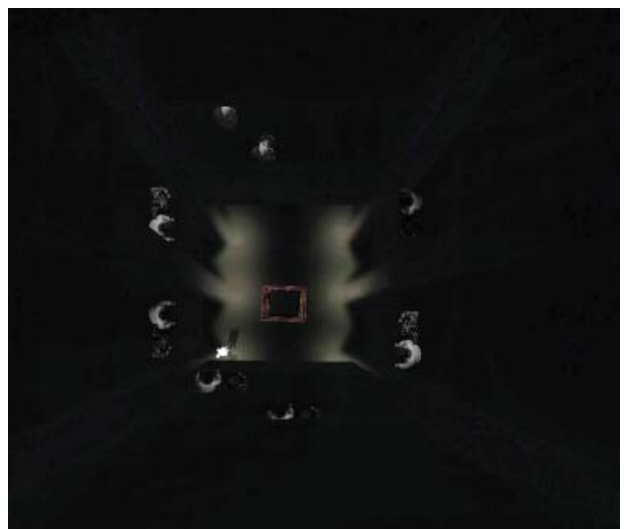
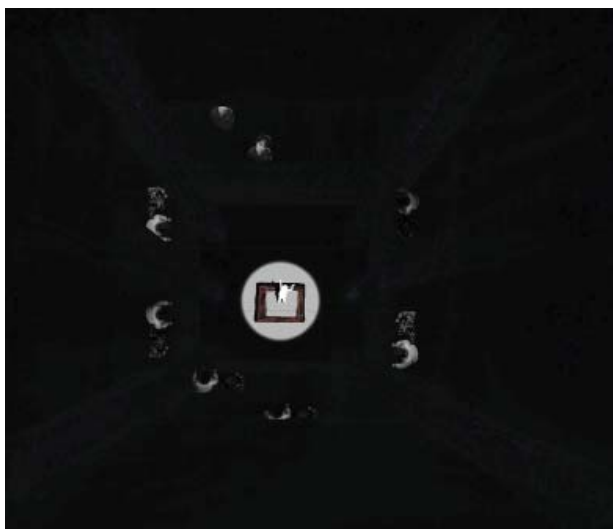
Act 3



5.73. Performance stage setting by Author

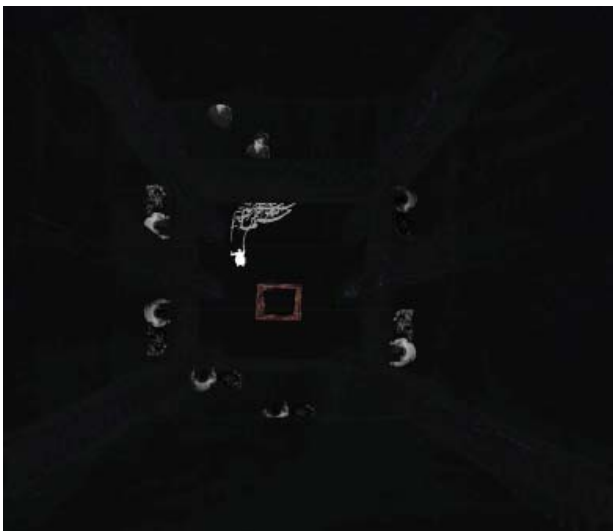


Act 4



5.74. Performance stage setting by Author

Act 5



5.75. Performance stage setting by Author

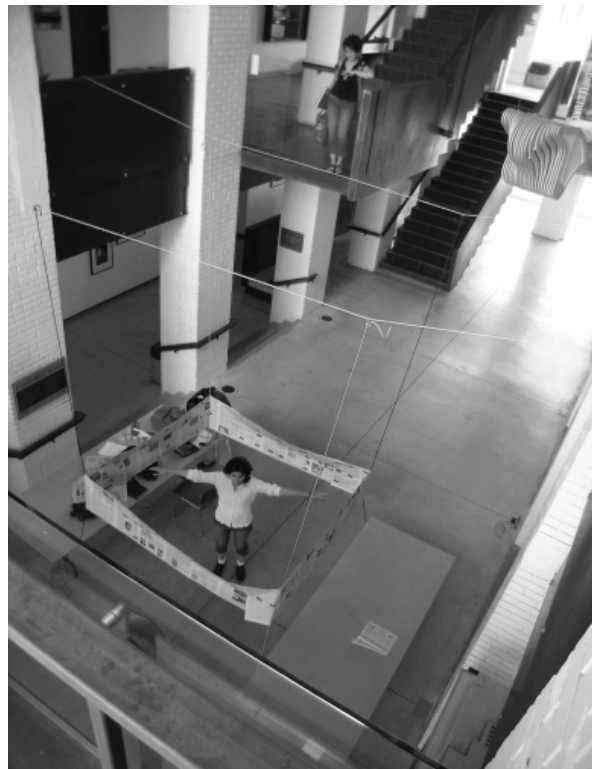


Having created a digital sample of the work, I took the design into the actual space and practiced the play. In addition to being a rehearsal, this practice session was intended to detail the stage design and to give me a better understanding of the spatial interaction inherent to the performance. The following are pictures from the practice in the atrium space.



5.76. Performance rehearsal





Later, when I was confirming the detail of the design with the building's administration, I faced a major problem that I had never taken into account in my planning phases. Due to emergency plan concerns and requirements regarding fire exit accessibility, it was not possible to block off a portion of the atrium space in its full length; people had to be able to walk through or around the stage. For the same reasons, it was impossible to black out the space fully. Considering the width of the atrium, 6.75 m (22'-2" ft), and the minimum required width of the stage, it was unfortunately not possible under the circumstances to accommodate an access point from the side of the stage.

This unanticipated problem was, in a way, relevant to the topic at hand: It was as if the dogma that has been discussed in the thesis was in effect, and I needed to find a way to subvert it. With partial changes in the spatial articulation of the design, I was able to reconfigure the performance for another space in the school of architecture, the loft. This is the next largest space in the building, and is designed to be fairly flexible in order to accommodate various events; the space measures (58'-8" ft) long x (39'-11" ft) wide.

In the new design, the three different levels of the initial design are incorporated on one level - the same level where the actual performance takes place. As often happens, as much as the alteration took away from the original idea, it has nonetheless offered new possibilities. One of the significant potentials of the new layout was the opportunity to interact with viewers and to engage them directly in parts of the performance. Furthermore, altering the spatial properties of the performance and its spatial context necessitated modifying the narrative and, consequently, the musical compositions.

The following pictures are from a practice session demonstrating the sequence of scenes in the new design.





5.77. Performance rehearsal





5.78. Performance rehearsal





5.79. Performance rehearsal





## Appendix B

This appendix includes video file of final performance at defence session. the thesis. The file is “Longing-Thesis Performance.mp4” and can be found on the DVD in the sleeve on the inside back cover of the thesis book. If you have accessed this thesis from a source other than the University of Waterloo, you may not have access to this file. You may access it by searching for this thesis at <http://uwspace.uwaterloo.ca>.

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[All citations from Rumi are from Divani Shams and translated by Author unless otherwise noted.]

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