

Freaking Out on the Floor

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a. The only photo I took before dancing - © Houman Riazi



- *I am scared; scared of being enclosed by multi-s.
The inevitable condition of being exposed to multiplicity puts my understanding of instability at stake, problematizes it with an imposed cynical meaning.*

For Deleuze and Guattari, though, hidden potential lies beneath these so-called negative notions. They welcome these moving moments to become something else. Their approach toward Schizophrenia, for instance, is to consider it as an opportunity to understand the world rather than recognizing it as a mental disorder. Following their constant perspective shifts, they offer the condition of “*being on the edge of the crowd, at periphery; but ... belong to it;*” to start the process of *becoming-minoritarian*.¹ Before anything, we need to know what *multiplicity* is. Simply put, it is the conditions in which different things come together simultaneously. But it does not suffice to say so, for in multiplicity the correlation of things matters, how these correlational conditions are shaped, how to consider them as a whole, and most importantly, how to relate them to our condition of being. For this matter, Deleuze and Guattari bring up the notion of *Body without Organs* (BwO) through another perspective shift, this time about masochism. “[T]he masochist body [makes] himself a BwO under such condition that the BwO can no longer be populated by anything but intensities of pain, *pain waves*. It is false to say that the masochist is looking for pain but just as false to say that he is looking for a type of BwO that only pain can fill.”² The wave-like quality of pain and the condition of in-betweenness is worth highlighting here since it refers to the rhizomatic quality of becoming. This condition of pain passing through BwO is the same condition of the egg before crossing the threshold, before the stratification of the bird since “the egg always designates this intensive reality, which is not undifferentiated, but is where things and organs are distinguished solely by *gradients*, migrations, zones of proximity. The egg is the BwO.”³

For defining *multiplicity*, Deleuze and Guattari talk about rhizome and contrast it with the tree, but what is the message behind this contrast, and how does this relate to the notion of multiplicity? Rhizome and tree correspond to the notion of continuity versus discontinuity and multiplicity versus one and many. Here, multiplicity holds an immeasurable quality which resonates with *gradients* and *rhizome*.⁴ This immeasurable quality can be better understood through how temperature is addressed. In this way, although we talk about a certain degree of 70°F we are essentially talking about gradients because it is not easy to distinguish 71°F

from 70°F. The same goes for measuring the speed that changes relatively. For Deleuze and Guattari, multiplicity is not discrete. The relation between multiplicity and one/many is for them as much the same as the comparison of line and points. While in a Cartesian coordinate system, a point encompasses X and Y coordinates, a line encompasses an infinite number of points. It is so that within this Cartesian system, a line is defined by an equation of X and Y, representative of all those infinite points in a symbolic format. “A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb “to be,” but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, “and ... and ... and ...” This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb ‘to be.’”⁵

Deleuze and Guattari, who are actively looking for solutions (solution in its general meaning of finding the way out, or to speak in their language, draw the lines of flights), offer the process of *becoming* after constructing their metaphysical universe of thoughts. In fact, this process from introducing rhizomatic quality to explaining becoming and its meanings is what a major part of *A Thousand Plateaus* is about where a wide range of topics from geology, and quantum physics to biology, the theory of evolution, and cosmology is covered. In part of their interconnected argument on multiplicity, they introduce *intensity* and *speed* as two factors (among others) related to the continuously changing nature of the world. To understand the two, further illumination is provided by bringing up the examples of the egg (for intensity) and the performance of Glenn Gould (for speed). Inside the egg, before the formation of the bird, it is not clear which part of the yolk and white is supposed to be the wing, head, leg, etc., while through a continuous process, its status changes into solidity; into the “discrete.” This “rhizomatic” notion is addressed by them in music as well. “When Glenn Gould speeds up the performance of a piece, he is not just displaying virtuosity, he is transforming the musical points into lines, he is making the whole piece proliferate.”⁶

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*I am scared; scared of watching these seven screens.
Because I was told that the multiplicity of these screens stresses the instability.
Who is not scared of watching Organs without Body?*

Beatriz Colomina’s argument on the film *Glimpses of The USA, 1959*—produced by Charles and Ray Eames—offers an opening to

answer this question. Her argument starts from a kitchen in Moscow's World Fair, 1959, split in half; a surreal exhibition space designed for a political debate where the USA and USSR shook hands in the midst of the cold war. Ironically and regardless of their conflict of interest, "instead of discussing 'missiles, bombs, or even modes of government ... [Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev] argued over the relative merits of American and Soviet washing machines, televisions, and electric ranges.'" ⁷ A subtle shift is happening here in the relationship between media and message, a change in the normality of the kitchen as a living space, and the normality of its function and meaning which was presented by Richard Nixon as such:

"To us diversity, the right to change, is the most important thing ... We don't have one decision made at the top by one government official ... We have many different manufacturers and many different kinds of washing machines so that the housewife has a choice." ⁸

This shift in the relationship between media and message evolved in a new format for production of moving images in *Glimpses of The USA* when experts of different fields, from photographers and film directors to journalists and architects, were asked to join Charles and Ray Eames for producing "2200 still and moving images ... present[ing] 'a typical workday' in the life of the United States ... and 'a typical weekend day.'" ⁹ Colomina conveyed the message of *Glimpses of The USA* as "we are the same but, on the material level, we have more." ¹⁰ But isn't the message exactly the opposite? To be "better" on the material level and more? Isn't it in fact, an act of speech to be politically correct? Not to impose this betterness directly, rather sugarcoating it by the agency of images? This question may highlight the underlying messages. In this case, the imposition of changing the status of the audience (Russians) into 'the same' is conditioned in the sense that you can be the same if only you obtain our washing machines, our televisions, our technology. Consequently, not only a certain relationship of power is acknowledged in the message, this power is also protected. As Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek says, it is as if having a friendly oppressor rather than an old-fashion one:

"... if you have a boss who is up there, the old-fashioned boss [what Žižek calls "traditional authoritarian"], shouting at you, exerting full brutal authority, in a way, it's much easier to rebel than to have a friendly boss [what Žižek calls "post-modern non-authoritarian"] who embraces you ... where then it almost appears impolite to protest." ¹¹

The *multiplicity* of images in *Glimpses of The USA* follows the same logic where “repetition was done for credibility” which made uncertainty a part of the message and, thus, made the underlying message of *being the same* improbable.¹² The message is unattainable by avoiding the audience from objectifying it. After watching the film, one cannot address the highway, the city, or the landscape because they are highways, cities, and landscapes. This simple shift calls for the desire; for that envious feeling that Colomina talks about.¹³ At the same time, it negates precision and leaves one in doubt. *Glimpses of The USA* is Organs without Body as much the same as American washing machines, televisions and technology. What exactly do mean if they are extracted from their context? It is the same argument that Zizek brings regarding the role of organs in hard-core pornography “when the very unity of the bodily self-experience is magically dissolved, so that the spectator perceives the bodies of the actors not as unified totalities but as a kind of vaguely coordinated agglomerate of partial objects: here the mouth, there a breast, over there the anus, close to it the vaginal opening.”¹⁴

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I am scared; scared of colors.

What color is the sacred?

What color is deceiving?

What can be done by multiplicity of colors?

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Carolyn Kane’s critical reading of Jeremy Blake’s *Chemical Sundown* (2001) and Paul Sharits’ *T.O.U.C.H.I.N.G* (1968) may help reach a higher resolution of the argument. Before anything, it is crucial to mention the purpose of linking the aforementioned artworks to Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of *multiplicity* in this part is only for elaboration, not objectification, finding causality, or claiming an intentional attempt of the artist. Although traces of this notion of *multiplicity* are visible in the work of both Sharits and Blake, their approach is different. While the quality of speed is more understandable in Sharits’ *T.O.U.C.H.I.N.G* (1968), it is the *intensity* of images that relates Blake’s *Chemical Sundown* (2001) to the notion of *multiplicity*.

Since both artworks are in the form of *moving* images, we focus on the *multiplicity* of images; that is, not about asking, “how many images are produced?” but “how are the moving images providing a rizhomatic quality of being one whole?” for the former approach is discrete, fragmented and tree-like while the latter is continuous, intensive and rhizomatic.

Focusing on Sharits' *T.O.U.C.H.I.N.G* (1968), it is a twelve-minute color film consists of photographs featuring the face and upper part of the poet David Franks' naked body "beginning with fairly neutral images that, midway through the film, become violent and sexually explicit. As the photographs flash on and off, they are interspersed with full frames of color." (Kane, 2014, p. 255) Instead of music, the repetition of the word 'destroy' is overly heard, which gradually distorts, cut shorter, and plays faster toward the end. The irony of this artwork lies in the fact that despite all its fragmentary elements—from the title of the artwork to the manipulation of sound and disrupted frames—it is perceived as a whole where one cannot pause the video and point to specifics but must perceive it as one. The use of colors in the background, the use of negative photos the act of destroying [starting from the tongue] and the background voice of 'destroy' not only provide a body without organ but also desexualize the character through overlaying of color negatives and original photos. It is worth noticing the underlying criticism of stereotypes in this piece. We have a European white male (what Deleuze and Guattari knew as majority) with long hairs that recognizing his gender is challenged because (1) only the upper part of his body is framed, (2) the visual effects produced by overlying the color negatives, and (3) the use of pink-ish and purple-ish colors. Sharit's work is an attempt to escape the binary categorization of male/female. It is this masochist that lets the pain pass through their body not for pain, not for pleasure but rather for becoming something else.

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b. Paul Sharits, *T.O.U.C.H.I.N.G*. 1968. 16mm, color, sound. 12 minutes. Film still. Courtesy of Paul Sharits Estate and Christopher Sharits. (Photo is extracted from the book *Chromatic Algorithms: Synthetic Color, Computer Art, and Aesthetics after Code* written by Carolyn Kane.)



Blake uses an opposite approach in *Chemical Sundown* (2001) and achieves the same result. In this case, “layers of fluid and ephemeral colors continue to play games with history and perception. In a final scene, rigid horizontal lines morph into a series of orange, purple, and yellow waves that loosely represent the chemical colors of the Hollywood sunset. The colors become fuzzy and blur into each other, giving way to an aerial view of Los Angeles and the darkness that falls after sundown.” (Kane, 2014, p. 274) Here, the continuity of images, that ever-changing intensive condition, is what prevents one from separating the frames and pointing to specifics. Despite the role of colors in dematerialization of T.O.U.C.H.I.N.G, here colors are providing a new materiality for the digitalized cityscape of Los Angeles through a process which is not comparable with the initial image at the end. Here again, the rhizomatic process offers a form of becoming or at least, draws a line of flight which may lead to a becoming.

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*I am scared; scared of becoming-woman.
Because I see my folks on the floor.*

Following the thread which links *Multiplicity, intensity, and speed*, one may get lost to connect them with *becoming-minoritarian* and the meaning of *becoming*. While different kinds of becomings coexist in the argument of Deleuze and Guattari, they all converge on *becoming-minoritarian*. Starting with *becoming-wolf*, they discuss one of Freud’s cases, the Wolf-man and his dream. They stand against Oedipal reading of Freud in this case with heavy criticism and offer instead the notion of becoming-wolf: “Freud obviously knows nothing about the fascination exerted by wolves and the meaning of their silent call, the call to become-wolf.” And they expand this criticism through their argument by different means: “They [psychoanalysts] see the animal as a representative of derives, or a representation of the parents. They do not see the reality of a becoming-animal, that it is affect in itself, the drive in person, and represents nothing [from without].” This condition of becoming, which moves the person who is affected, is neither imitation nor physical transformation but rather a change in the feeling; the same as the experience of hard biting and transformation of the jaw in the Wolf-man’s case:

“A dentist told the Wolf-man that he ‘would soon lose all his teeth because of the violence of his bite’—and that his gums were pocked with pustules and little holes. ... The wolf, as the instantaneous apprehension of multiplicity in a given region, is not a representative, a substitute, but an I feel.”¹⁵

This feeling though, is always measured by one's position in the pack and this never-ending condition of positioning is the key that links the notion of *becoming* and *multiplicity*:

"In becoming-wolf, the important thing is the position of the mass, and above all the position of the subject itself in relation to the pack or wolf-multiplicity: how the subject joins or does not join the pack, how far away it stays, how it does or does not hold to the multiplicity."¹⁶

But what kind of feeling are we talking about when we refer to "affect"? "The **affect** is not a personal feeling, nor is it a characteristic; it is the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel."¹⁷ As you may see, it is through the meaning of affect that the idea of *becoming* unfolds. For affect relates the one who is inside the pack, inside the peopling, to the outsider, to the one who is doing something different, who possesses different capacities than the rest of the pack. It is from this moment of being *affected* that the process of *becoming* starts. "Whenever there is multiplicity, you will also find an exceptional individual, and it is with that individual that an alliance must be made in order to become-animal." Going through Deleuze and Guattari's argument, it seems that a certain level of randomness involves in addressing the starting point of this becoming process. Before reaching the core of the argument, we need to understand the nature of this randomness.

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"The error we must guard against is to believe that there is a kind of logical order to this string, these crossings or transformations. ... The reason is simple. It is because no one, not even God, can say in advance ... whether a given multiplicity will or will not cross over into another given multiplicity, or even if given heterogeneous elements will enter symbiosis, will form a consistent, or confunctioning, multiplicity susceptible to transformation. No one can say where the line of flight will pass."¹⁸

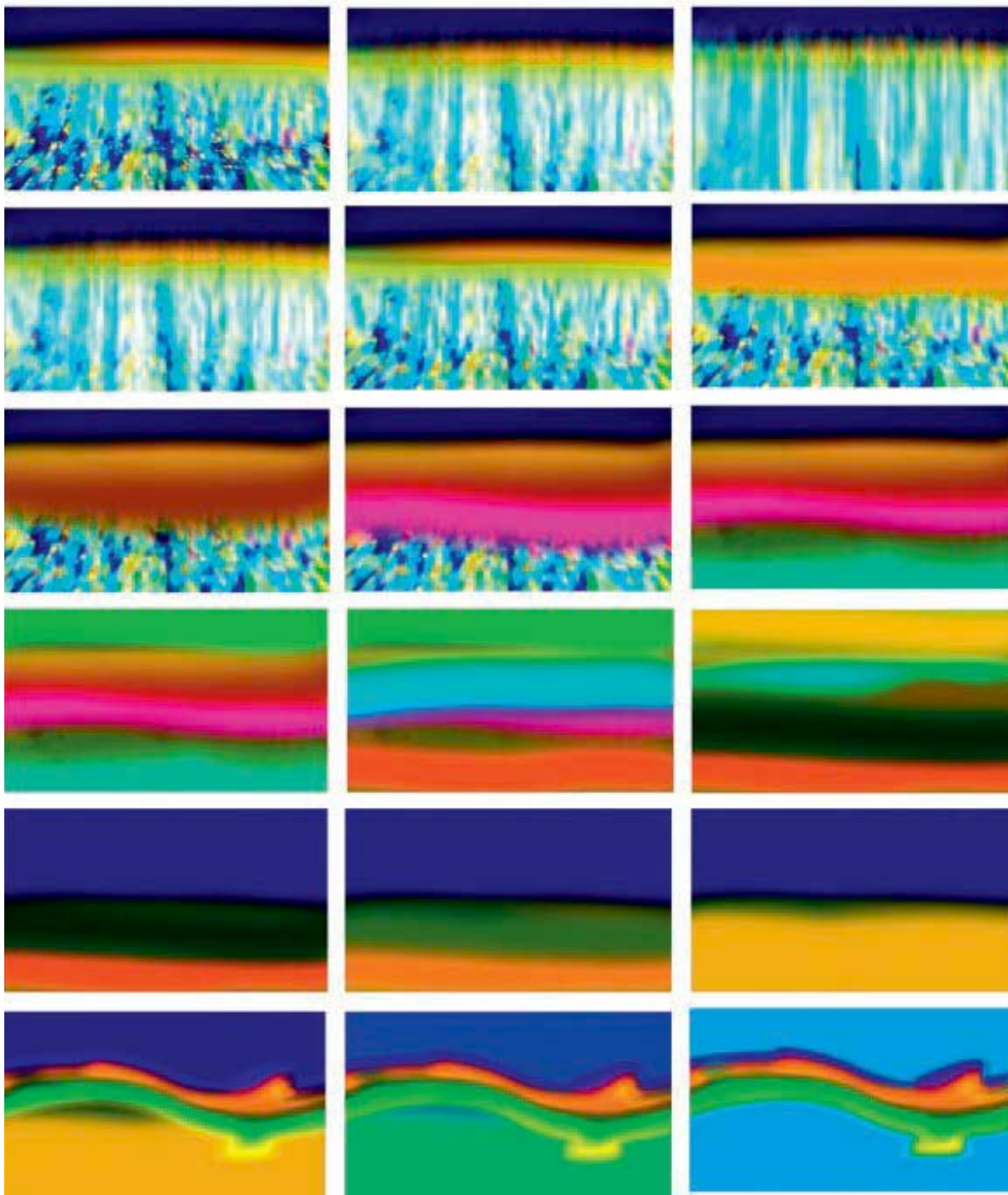
To better illustrate this quality of randomness, Deleuze and Guattari bring up the example of swarm movement:

"In any event, the pack has a borderline, and an anomalous position, whenever in a given space an animal is on the line or in the act of drawing the line in relation to which all the other members of the pack will fall into one of two halves, left or right: a peripheral position, such that it is impossible to tell if the anomalous is still in the band, already outside the band, or the shifting boundary of the band ... as in a swarm of mosquitoes, where "each individual moves randomly unless it sees the rest of [the swarm] in the same half-space; then it hurries to re-enter the group."¹⁹

We have to freeze our argument here and discuss a radical proposal of Deleuze and Guattari about becoming-woman and then come back and link all the nods at the end of this section. A major part of Deleuze

and Guattari's argument on *Becoming-minoritarian* passes through becoming-woman. They delicately define two important aspects of this process; that is, (1) "becoming-woman is not imitating or assuming the female form, but emitting particles that enter the relation of movement and rest, or the zone of proximity of a microfemininity,

c. Jeremy Blake, *Chemical Sundown*, 2001. Sequence from digital animation, 12 minute continuous. The hazy and polluted Los Angeles skyline depicted at sunset. Courtesy of Kinz + Tillou Fine Art. (Photo is extracted from the book *Chromatic Algorithms: Synthetic Color, Computer Art, and Aesthetics after Code* written by Carolyn Kane.)



in other words, that produce in us a molecular woman.”²⁰ In this case, “us” refers to both man and woman; and (2) “The girl is not certainly defined by virginity; she is defined by a relation of movement and rest, speed and slowness, by a combination of atoms, an emission of particles ... She never ceases to roam upon a body without organs.”²¹ In this case, they negate part of the criticisms coming from the essentialist viewpoint and puts the woman equal to a Body without Organs. Despite their careful attention to the boundaries of this process, there are yet many disagreements coming from the lens of Feminism, parts of which are for criticizing Deleuze from an essentialist viewpoint which brings in the notion of form and this is what Deleuze and Guattari tried to avoid very clearly during their argument. But part of the criticism roots in misunderstanding Deleuze and Guattari’s argument and for this matter, the rest of the argument has the intention to elaborate on the meaning of becoming-woman.

Considering the relationship between *intensity*, *speed*, *Body without Organs*, *Organs without body*, *multiplicity*, and *randomness*, we have reached an overall understanding of becoming and to be specific, becoming-woman. What welds the nods and provides the big picture though, is the recent movement of Woman-Life-Freedom in Iran in which all the aforementioned notions are deeply embedded. While the emergence of an oppositional movement against dictatorship is not something new, it being led by women is surprising, if not anything more. In fact, this phenomenon of women, being at the same time, the leaders and frontliners of a social movement within a social, cultural, political, and religious context that is overcharged by masculinity and male power from different angles, is shaking many grounds of theory. Aligning it with Deleuze and Guattari’s argument, one may ask about the starting point and this is where the notion of *randomness* sticks out. In a surface-level reading, it started with Mahsa Amini, a Kurdish girl, being arrested by “Morality Police” and being killed shortly after for not following the imposing orders of hijab. On a deeper level though, there have been many ongoing socio-political struggles between Iranians and the government that converged at this point and manifested in this format and is not necessarily a direct consequence of this single unjust event. It is not thus, easy to point out the exact moment of stratification for such a movement same as the difficulty of spotting the moment when the bird is formed inside the egg. Another part of the irony of this situation roots in its imperceptible *speed*. In other words, because of the intensive nature of ongoing changes, both sides—the government and the opposition—have to

constantly measure their position in their own pack, and at the same time, the high *speed* of changes problematizes their becomings. At this moment, an analogy can be drawn between the movement in Iran and what happened after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Within the same Deleuzian frame, Floyd's death stirred up previous racial struggles and called for a change toward becoming-black. The key difference between the two though, is about the role of women. As addressed by Zizek, Iran's movement is bringing in a different version of feminism. It distances itself from the Western feminism in which "it mostly attracts and *mobilizes* middle-class, upper-middle-class women," not only for its different form of communication and context, but also for offering a different kind of becoming-woman; the kind that is of specific interest to Deleuze and Guattari; the one that immediately involves men as well. (emphasis added)²² It is within this moment of crisis that a mutual concern is collectively understood; the concern that is ironically targeting women's hijab in the first place as a radically genderized issue but does not stop there. That is, the understanding that "Iranian men will not be really free, without the full freedom of women."²³ This mentality is manifested in streets when oppositions coupled the chanting slogan "Man-Homeland-Prosperity" with "Woman-Life-Freedom." This is the moment of becoming-woman not only for Iranian men and women but a step further toward national unification. It is important to note the diverse micro-cultural and ethnic context of Iran that gathers Kurds, Lurs, Mazandarani, Gilaks, Talyshs, and Balochs. The initial tensions of Iran's movement began in Kurdistan (Where Kurds live in Northwestern Iran) for Mahsa Amini was a Kurdish girl, but it has not been limited to that specific geo-cultural region because of the extended mentality of mutual interest in freedom that Iranians as a nation will not be really free without the full freedom of all ethnic minorities.

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*I am scared;
 scared of multiplicity,
 scared of Organs without Body,
 scared of colors,
 and
 scared of becoming.*

As if being high, standing on the corner of the nightclub, at periphery of the dancing floor; and ... belong to it. The strobe light cascading over dancing figures at the rate of 80 blinks per second; everything in slow motion. Refrains of music in my head. Pole dancers put on their exotic costumes covering everything except their breasts, buttocks and vaginas.

1. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 29.

2. Deleuze and Guattari, 152 (emphasis added).

3. Deleuze and Guattari, 164 (emphasis added). For more details about this comparison

see Plateau 6. How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?

4. This immeasurable quality can be better understood through the example of addressing hotness and coldness. In this way, although we talk about a certain degree of 70°F we are essentially talking about gradients because it is not easy to distinguish 71°F from 70°F. The same goes for measuring

- the speed that changes relatively.
5. Deleuze and Guattari, 25.
 6. Deleuze and Guattari, 8.
 7. Beatriz Colomina, "Enclosed by Images: The Eameses' Multimedia Architecture," *Grey Room* 2, no. 1 (2001): 8.
 8. Colomina, 9. While the quotation first founded in Colomina's paper, it was originally quoted by May in *Homeward Bound*, 17. For transcripts of the debate see "The Two Worlds: a Day-Long Debate," *New York Times*, 25 July 1959, 1-3; "When Nixon Took on Khrushchev," a report of the meeting, and the text of Nixon's address at the opening of the American National Exhibition in Moscow on 24 July 1959, printed in "Setting Russia Straight On Facts about U.S., U.S. News and World Report, 3 August 1959, 36-39, 70-72; "Encounter," *Newsweek*, 3 August 1959, 15-19; an "Better to See Once," *Times*, 3 August 1959, 12-14.
 9. Colomina, 9.
 10. Colomina, 13.
 11. Slavoj Žižek. *Lacan's Four Discourses and the Real*. 2014, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHNH2lkrG5w>.
 12. Colomina, "Enclosed by Images: The Eameses' Multimedia Architecture," 19.
 13. "Envy—that is what the American exhibition seems to have been designed to produce (despite vigorous denials by Nixon in his debate with Khrushchev: 'We do not claim to astonish Soviet people')." Colomina, B. (2001). Enclosed by Images: The Eameses' Multi-media Architecture. *Grey Room*(2), 6-29.
 14. S. Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (Taylor & Francis, 2016), 153.
 15. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 31–32.
 16. Deleuze and Guattari, 28–29.
 17. Deleuze and Guattari, 240. (emphasis added).
 18. Deleuze and Guattari, 250.
 19. Deleuze and Guattari, 245.
 18. Deleuze and Guattari, 275.
 19. Deleuze and Guattari, 276.
 20. Deleuze and Guattari, 275.
 21. Deleuze and Guattari, 276.
 22. Application of the verb 'mobilize' is closely resonating with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of affect and the consequence of being moved by, drawing the line of flight and finally, becoming-minoritarian. (The quotation is extracted from a video published by Slavoj Žižek in response to Iran's movement of Woman-Life-Freedom. Since the original source who published this video is not validated, two accessible online multimedia platforms of Instagram (an Instagram account that is not proved to be owned by Slavoj Žižek himself) and YouTube are referenced here: Žižek, S. (2022b). Slavoj Žižek sends a message of solidarity to the Iranians' woman, life & freedom movement. digitPro. https://youtu.be/D_k1K9z5QjA and Žižek, S. (2022a). (no title). slavojzizeks. <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CjJNgBYvMQ2/>.
 23. Žižek, S. (2022b). Slavoj Žižek sends a message of solidarity to the Iranians' woman, life & freedom movement. digitPro. https://youtu.be/D_k1K9z5QjA and Žižek, S. (2022a). (no title). slavojzizeks. <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CjJNgBYvMQ2/>.