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### Desire, Seriality, and Imperceptibility in Ghadah Alkandari's Heart and The Gutting

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# DESIRE, SERIALITY, AND IMPERCEPTIBILITY IN GHADAH ALKANDARI'S HEART AND THE GUTTING

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**Alkandari, Ghadah**

**becoming-imperceptible**

**Deleuze, Gilles**

**desire**

**Kuwait**

**performance art**

**series**

*This essay analyses the installation performance piece Heart and the Gutting by Kuwaiti artist Ghadah Alkandari, as a serial machine that cracks some of the rigid molarities restricting social and political life in the contemporary Middle East. Heart's style, form and performativity proliferate percepts and affects conventionally marginalized or overlooked. Alkandari's uncanny use of repetition explodes expectations regarding autobiographical content and the issue of privacy – a highly guarded aspect of life in the Middle East, especially as it concerns women. In doing so, her work manages to carve an unusual space for imperceptible components of life that otherwise escape and, in any case, have no place currently within the dominant molar institutional regimes of family, state, religion, tradition and so on. The first section discusses how Alkandari's piece functions in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the lines of segmentarity. The second section maps Heart's line of flight out of molar confines through its reconfiguration of conventional conceptions of time and, by extension, language, representation, identity and the body. The final section suggests that in the performative process of gutting or disassembling Heart, audience members themselves become imperceptible to normative judgements and inadvertently embody futures that diverge significantly from subjectivities dominant in Kuwait and the Middle East today.*

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1 To view a selection of Alkandari's work, visit her blog, *Pretty Green Bullet* (Alkandari 2009b).

2 For example, Alkandari's 2006, 2009 and 2011 exhibitions in Kuwait, at Dar Al-Funoon Gallery, the Sultan Gallery and Gallery Tilal, respectively, all featured portraits of women exclusively. Even her pivotal 2004 show at the Life Centre Complex in Kuwait, thematically organized around the experience of the old Kuwaiti *fireej* (neighbourhood), focused primarily on the quotidian experiences of women and girls. By emphasizing the female presence, Alkandari deviates from the conventional male-centred thematics of the genre of *al-fireej* painting, which dominated the Kuwaiti art scene from the late 1950s into the 1970s. For a discussion of the *al-fireej* genre, see Ali (2004: 28–34).

Kuwaiti artist Ghadah Alkandari was born in New Delhi in 1969. As the daughter of a diplomat, she spent most of her childhood and adolescence outside Kuwait. After completing a bachelor's degree in mass communications at the American University in Cairo, she returned to Kuwait, where she now lives and works. Alkandari has been exhibiting her work both locally and internationally since 1994 and is considered a seminal contemporary Kuwaiti artist.<sup>1</sup> Apart from her series of illustrations and small collages, she usually works with acrylics on oversized canvas. Before and after *Heart and the Gutting* – the installation performance piece that is the subject of this essay – Alkandari's work was and remains almost exclusively figurative, focusing predominantly on women.<sup>2</sup> At one level, Alkandari's style of painting is easily identifiable: her work combines size and colour to distort perspective and exaggerate features so that the most familiar figures and scenes become eccentric, almost caricatured. She frequently uses odd patches of colour to convey shadow and light; her women have dark, brooding eyes staring out directly at the viewer; her figures are massive and heavy, even clunky; her backgrounds are flat planes of colour. On another level, however, Alkandari's style is less easy to decipher, and to work through it one must pose a different sort of question, a Deleuzian question: What symptoms does Alkandari's style diagnose?

Gilles Deleuze writes that 'authors, if they are great, are more like doctors than patients' (Deleuze 1990: 237). They read symptoms and group them together in ways that clinically diagnose specific problems (social, cultural, civilizational or other) (Deleuze 1989b: 14; 1995: 143). An author's style reflects both her clinical diagnosis and her way out of the illness (Deleuze 1995: 140–1). What is true of style in writing is also true of style in art. Alkandari's style in her paintings evaluates a grouping of symptoms particular to women in Kuwait and in the Arab Muslim world more widely. Although historically women in Kuwait have enjoyed more rights than others in the Gulf region (in terms of political enfranchisement, education, healthcare and work), many of their legal, social, political and economic rights and opportunities remain curtailed. The reasons for these ongoing restrictions include a rise in political Islamism, a change in Kuwait's demographic distribution (more tribal and thus more traditionally oriented), political pressure from conservative neighbouring states, and internal sectarianism (drawing attention away from common causes). While small groups of women activists continue to work for change, the majority of the population remains apathetic (al-Mughni 1993: 142–4). In this context, the symptoms that Alkandari's work isolates include stagnancy, paralysis, rigidity, apathy, mutism and complacency. Her distortions, exaggerations, eccentric angles, large scale and so on, work together, first, to express these often

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3 Simon O'Sullivan (2010: 197) describes two moments in 'the aesthetics of contemporary art: one of dissent (a turn from, or refusal of, the typical) and one of affirmation (of something different). Two operations then: one of criticism, one of creativity.' I suggest Alkandari's paintings as well as her installation piece *Heart* include both moments.

4 In attempting to establish a link between *Heart* and Alkandari's seemingly unrelated paintings, I follow what Ronald Bogue

ignored symptoms; second, to critique them and therefore resist their inevitability; and third, to unleash the potential for alternative modes of sensation and becoming.<sup>3</sup>

*Heart and the Gutting* – installed and performed at the Sultan Gallery in Kuwait on 15 January 2008 from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. – both takes up and diverges from Alkandari's previous and subsequent work. Issues linked to desire, seriality and imperceptibility (in Deleuze and Guattari's specific senses) recur throughout her *oeuvre*, but nowhere are they more resonant than in this piece. While Alkandari's paintings generate percepts and affects similar to those produced in *Heart and the Gutting*, the latter's performative aspect makes these more immediate. Though this essay does not engage Alkandari's other artworks explicitly, I suggest *Heart* is linked to these works 'transversely' and that some of the general claims I make about *Heart* also apply to her paintings (Bogue 2007: 3).<sup>4</sup> As this essay demonstrates, *Heart* attains an uncanny intensity of focus that disturbs the rigid order of conventional social and political life in Kuwait, especially as it pertains to women's highly guarded privacy and their domestic and public segregation.

### Lunch Bags of Desire

describes as Deleuze's 'transverse way', 'the activity of forming transverse connections that intensify differences and bring forth new possibilities for life, in the arts, the sciences, politics, philosophy, and all other spheres of action' (Bogue 2007: 3). In taking up *Heart*, a piece installed and displayed only once, I attempt to reinvigorate a series of ephemeral percepts and affects potentially overlooked in Alkandari's other work.

*Heart and the Gutting*, a rare work of performance art by a Kuwaiti artist, is composed of 206 brown paper lunch bags, dated consecutively from 23 June 2007 to 14 January 2008, a day before the exhibition.<sup>5</sup> On the night of 15 January the bags were arranged chronologically – in nine rows of twenty-one bags each and one row of seventeen bags – on a raised, rectangular, black platform (7.6m × 4.2m × 0.33m). The audience was invited to walk on to the platform, choose a bag, remove its contents, and pin them up on a corkboard (2.2m × 1.2m). The corkboard hung in the centre of a black wall (6.4m × 2.44m × 0.6m) built slightly askew but parallel to the rear long side of the rectangular platform (see Figure 1). In the exhibition notes, Alkandari implores her audience: 'Help me finish this'.<sup>6</sup>

Most of the objects in the bags were created by the artist, though a few found objects were also included. A random list includes an origami box containing an emerald-green fly; a tangle of five red earphone wires; handmade calendars marking different versions of time; multiple watercolour postcards mailed to Kuwait from Italy; a yellow napkin covered in drawings and writing; a crossword puzzle; a clay face; an origami sanbow (offering tray) containing thirty-one small pieces of paper with the words 'today you'll be OK' written on each; a handmade flipbook; assorted small drawings and/or

5 *Heart and the Gutting* resonates more closely with conceptual works by western-based Arab women artists (e.g. Palestinian artists Mona Hatoum and Emily Jacir and Lebanese artists Jamelie Hassan and Mai Ghousseub) than it does with the work of contemporary Kuwaiti artists. Although in the last four decades there has been a shift away from what Ali (2004: 31) describes as ‘national realism’ to a more abstract aesthetic, artists in Kuwait remain more visually than conceptually oriented. For a survey of contemporary Arab women artists, see Lloyd (1999). For a study of the development of art movements in the Arab world, see Shabout (2007).

6 In addition to the written instructions, the installation included a film loop screened on one of the gallery walls of Alkandari opening each one of the bags and pinning the contents on the corkboard. Although this interesting filmic component is not something I discuss here, it adds another layer of material and temporal complexity to the piece, as does



**Figure 1** *Heart and the Gutting* before the performance, Sultan Gallery, Kuwait. Photograph by Mohammed Alkandari, 15 January 2008.

paintings, both abstract and figurative; bright inkblot paintings; strips of line-drawn female figures; ribbons of blurred images of the artist dancing; and on and on. Each dated bag also contains a dated note written on a square piece of brown paper (10cm × 10cm) addressed to someone named ‘Thomas’ and signed ‘Ghadah’.<sup>7</sup> The exhibition notes describe Thomas as ‘an imaginary confidante’ who listens without interruption or judgement.<sup>8</sup>

Initially, audience members were hesitant to do what the exhibition notes asked of them. But about half an hour after the first visitor arrived, someone finally stepped gingerly on to the platform, picked up a bag, opened it, examined its contents, read the note, and then moved towards the corkboard to tack it all up. The empty bag was placed on the platform, and the first person stepped down. Soon enough, others followed suit. A buzz of excitement filled the gallery space as people stomped up on to the platform, picked specific dates or grabbed whatever was closest, looked for a place on the board to pin up their contents, then tossed their empty bags on the platform. Audience members lingered at the board, reading and viewing the lunch bag contents others had pinned up, chatting about the notes or objects with whomever they happened to be standing beside. People on the platform, no longer in a rush to step down, seemed to be attempting to piece together the fragmented story of *Heart and the Gutting* (Figure 2).

Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 192) state that the ‘essence of the “novella” as a literary genre’ is that everything in it is organized around the question, ‘What happened?’ They explain that the ‘novella has a fundamental relation

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the music (a mix of contemporary New Wave-inspired songs) that played throughout the performance.

7 I use 'Ghadah' to refer to the artist persona/narrator of *Heart and the Gutting*. I use 'Alkandari' to refer to the creator of the artist persona and *Heart and the Gutting*. This distinction itself will begin to blur in the performance process.

8 Thomas is a liminal figure. The exhibition notes inform us he does not exist, yet he is virtually present as a kind of place-holder for the audience. His name indicates he is gendered male, yet his role as silent, invisible listener to Ghadah contradicts the loud authority men assume in the patriarchal Gulf region and Middle East more widely. His name further suggests he is non-Muslim. In choosing to confide her hopes, fears, ideas and even her affair with another man to a 'Thomas' (rather than, say, a 'Leila' or a 'Dana', as would be expected of any 'good' Arab Muslim woman) Ghadah/Alkandari transgresses both gender and religious lines. Such transgressive cracks



**Figure 2** *Heart and the Gutting* in process, Sultan Gallery, Kuwait. Photograph by Mohammed Alkandari, 15 January 2008.

to *secrecy* (not with a secret matter or object to be discovered, but with the form of the secret, which remains impenetrable)' (1987: 193, original emphasis). Though clearly not a novella, 'What happened?' is the most obvious question *Heart and the Gutting* solicits from its audience. Because of the sheer repetitiveness of the notes to Thomas, audience members likely figured out at least one of the following: Ghadah's marriage is unravelling; Ghadah may be in love with another man (not Thomas); Ghadah wants to leave her husband but feels stuck because of her children; Ghadah is experiencing a major crisis. Nonetheless, the question remains mostly unanswered, for it is never revealed what pushed things to this state of crisis, this moment between what happened before and what will happen (divorce? nervous collapse? abandonment of the children?). Not even in the last bag, with the final note and object, is anything determinate revealed.<sup>9</sup>

The most predictable and apparent response to 'What happened?' occurs along the '*molar or rigid line of segmentarity*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 195, original emphasis). Molar lines of segmentarity are those that codify and organize our lives most pervasively. They include the state, institutions (marriage, not least of all), class, identity, gender and so on (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 195). Along this line, *Heart* is a familiar autobiographical narrative of a frustrated wife going through an early midlife crisis. If molarity is momentarily jarred by her betrayal of the institution of marriage, it remains ultimately intact for a number of reasons. First of

run through the entire piece and its performance.

9 The chronologically final bag, dated 14 January 2008, contains a white card (9cm × 10cm) with a line drawing of a woman holding a piece of paper in both hands. A red fingerprint (the artist's?) is stamped on the woman's head. The piece is called 'Signature'. The note to Thomas in the same bag asks: 'Are we snowflakes?' (Alkandari 2007–8: 14 January 2008). It is unlikely that this bag was the final bag to be opened or that its contents were the last to be pinned up. As such, the authority of the signature and fingerprint is undercut, extending ownership and creative control to everyone.

10 Ghadah's molar identification with being woman should not be confused with the molecular process of 'becoming-woman' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 277). The latter applies to any process of becoming other than majoritarian categories of identity or molar forms of subjectivity (the most all-encompassing being 'man'). In the process of gutting

all, though the marriage is in tatters, there is no evidence it ends. Second, Ghadah's conventional sense of guilt over the pain she would cause her husband and children should she break up the family keeps the mess of her situation tightly confined within molar lines. Finally and most significantly, although Ghadah's identity as wife and, at times, mother might be unravelling, identity itself – with its molarizing, confining force – is never in question.

Ghadah's self-identification as 'woman', for example, is uncompromised. One of the notes to Thomas declares: 'I am so glad that I am a heterosexual female. I love being a woman' (Alkandari 2007–8: 2 November 2007).<sup>10</sup> Ghadah's self-identification as an 'artist' is equally unwavering. During her exhibition at the Florence Biennale, she writes Thomas the following note: 'I hope I never forget this, the privilege of being a creative. I want to take the inspiration from being here, among eight hundred and twenty-nine other creatives and retain it in my long-term memory bank' (Alkandari 2007–8: 3 December 2007). Ghadah's insistent gender, sexual and vocational identifications recircumscribe any breaks or challenges to the conventional order potentially generated by her marital betrayal.<sup>11</sup> Molarity is reterritorialized.

Along another molar line of segmentarity, *Heart* affirms the privileges afforded Ghadah by her class. Packing 206 lunch bags as intricate as these requires the luxury of time and money. The extensive travel described casually in the notes is also a marker of class. One of the notes written in Venice brings this sense of entitlement into focus: 'All we need on this earth is shelter (two bedrooms, dining, bath, living, kitchen), food and human love and affection ... Then why do I always want more?' (Alkandari 2007–8: 8 August 2007). Bracketing the potentially subversive effects of Alkandari's tongue-in-cheek humour evident throughout the piece, the harsh global reality of inequities and of what basic shelter can entail for the truly disadvantaged rarely interrupt Ghadah's narrative stream. It is, moreover, never revealed how the 'artist' or 'woman' is financed; the very silence of the notes on this matter is telling.

Just as identity, gender and class remain fixed at the molar level, so too does state power. Apart from a few rants against the superficiality of life in Kuwait, the notes and objects do little to break, resist or even register the overcoded political and economic network in the country, region or globe. Though once in a while Ghadah mentions that she is aware others are worse off than her, it is a cursory acknowledgement that does not register enough to shift attention away from herself for long (Alkandari 2007–8: 26 October 2007). The overwhelming focus of the notes is on Ghadah's marital and emotional problems. It never appears to shift beyond the personal loop. Interpreted along these molar lines, *Heart and the Gutting* is ostensibly an

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*Heart*, as audience members experience becoming-Ghadah, becoming-Alkandari, becoming-Thomas – in short, becoming-other – they inevitably begin with and pass through becoming-woman. Not because Ghadah/Alkandari is a woman but because any molecular crack-up of identity begins at this minoritarian point. As Elizabeth Grosz explains, ‘It is women’s subordinated or minoritarian status in patriarchal power relations that dictates the significance of the movement of becoming-woman, nothing else – not inherent qualities of women *per se* or their metaphorical resonances’ (1994: 177).

11 Marital betrayal does not automatically constitute betrayal in Deleuze’s sense of a double turning away ‘from the fixed powers which try to hold us back, the established powers of the earth’ (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 40). Yet marital betrayal can sometimes instigate this line of flight. As we shall see, Ghadah’s marital betrayal triggers some of the molecular cracks in *Heart*.

12 The ‘couple’ is oppositional and polarizing. Deleuze

apolitical, ahistoricist, even quietistic work of art that reiterates the logic of the dominant order at local and global levels.

But life, from Deleuze and Guattari’s perspective, is not segmented by molar lines alone. While at the molar level the wife’s marital betrayal of the ‘couple’ or binary form can signify a momentarily challenging, though ultimately recircumscribed, molar break, it is along the ‘*line of molecular or supple segmentation*’ that less obvious and more intense transformations take place (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 196–200, original emphasis).<sup>12</sup> The molecular line of supple segmentarity is the line between the molar line and the line of flight. It is an ambiguous line: one that can push deterritorialization – that is, a crack-up of overcoded, molar territories – or one that can reterritorialize such cracks, returning life to its normative tendency (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 205).

It is especially the fragmented form of *Heart and the Gutting* that expresses or maps molecular lines of becoming. Despite its meticulous chronology and marking of time, the minute the first audience member opens a bag, linearity disappears. In fact, linearity disappears even before that moment. By design, no one other than the artist will read all the notes in order or go through the contents of all the bags. The best any audience member will manage is close access to the content of one or two bags and less intimate access to the material pinned on the corkboard, much of it layered over and hidden.<sup>13</sup> The randomness of the board – notes separated from objects, disrupted sequence – cannot be ordered (Figure 3).



**Figure 3** The gutting of *Heart and the Gutting*, Sultan Gallery, Kuwait. Photograph by Mohammed Alkandari, 15 January 2008.



contrasts the couple with ‘nuptials between two reigns’. ‘Nuptials are the opposite of a couple. There are no longer binary machines: question–answer, masculine–feminine, man–animal, etc.’ (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 2). Instead, nuptials trigger opened becomings. It is my contention that despite its apparent reinscription of the couple, *Heart* ultimately breaks its constricting binary logic.

13 I thank Ghadah Alkandari for her generosity and trust in providing me with complete access to the contents of all the lunch bags. From a phenomenological view of subjectivity, my direct access to the contents might be seen as a reterritorialization (in the form of authorial centrality) of the molecularity of the audience performance; however, a Deleuzian empiricist perspective problematizes this conclusion. The zone of ‘indiscernibility’ between the contents of *Heart* (whether installed in a gallery or otherwise) and a reader (myself as part of a collective audience or otherwise) produces a relational exchange rather than another

No backstory or conclusion is decipherable. This formal upheaval or gutting is the double-movement of the artist with her audience – it is the becoming-artist of the audience and, at the same time, the becoming-audience of the artist.

It is at this level that molar identities disintegrate and new percepts and affects circulate. According to Deleuze and Guattari, ‘The artist creates blocs of percepts and affects, but the only law of creation is that the compound must stand up on its own’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 166). A percept is not the subject’s perception of some object or situation (i.e. it is not Ghadah’s perception of marriage as confinement) (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 167). Nor is an affect a particular subject’s affections, feelings or responses to certain experiences or stimuli (i.e. it is not Ghadah’s frustration over her marriage or guilt about her betrayal) (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164). Percepts and affects ‘go beyond the strength of those who undergo them’ and, as such, stand up on their own (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164). The work of art is a ‘being of sensation’ that both creates and preserves impersonal percepts and affects (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164, 166). Elizabeth Grosz clarifies that ‘the sensations produced are not the sensations of a subject, but sensation in itself, sensation as eternal, as monument. Sensation is that which is transmitted from the force of an event to the nervous system of a living being and from the actions of this being back onto the world itself’ (Grosz 2008: 71). Some of the percepts and affects *Heart and the Gutting* extracts and intensifies include the tyranny of chronology; the rigidity of the couple; the satisfaction of betrayal; the appeal of autonomy; the flexibility and permeability of subjectivity; and so on. These molecular lines *Heart and the Gutting* draws in the interstices of life in Kuwait create opportunities for experimentation and becoming, some of which will be explored in the following sections.

There is, in addition, a third line that must be taken into account. Deleuze and Guattari describe the ‘*line of flight*’ as ‘an exploding of the two segmentary series’ (that is, the molar and the molecular) (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 197, original emphasis). The line of flight is not an escape from life but, rather, a production of the real (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 49). Lines of flight follow the movement of the rhizome and not the familiar binary and hierarchical logic of the tree structure (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 5). The rhizome is connective and heterogeneous; it is multiple; it includes ‘asignifying ruptures’ which explode and begin again along new and old lines; it is experimental and flexible, with numerous ways in and out (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7–13).

*Heart and the Gutting* is a rhizome, and one of its lines of flight is its figuration of desire in productive, rather than negative, terms. Against the psychoanalytic understanding of desire as lack, Deleuze and Guattari conceive desire in terms of production, difference and becoming (Deleuze

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hierarchical dyad (subject-object) (Deleuze 1989a: 70–4). I offer no distinct or final interpretations here; rather, I attempt to experiment with *Heart* to produce textual effects coextensive with the gallery performance. The difference is one of degree rather than kind.

and Guattari 1983: 26, 2). Understood this way, desire is not directed towards some missing object or state of being required to make life complete. Life is an endless flow of desiring-machines which connect to produce other machines or assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 36). At the same time, desiring-machines cut or interrupt the continuities of both the machines to which they connect and their own flows (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 26). Connections and breaks are part of the endless flow of life as desire. They are life's processes of production and becoming.

It is the special dispensation of the artist to make this counterintuitive sense of life perceptible. Along its line of flight, *Heart* confounds rather than answers the question, 'What happened?' (the response to which is almost always 'the dirty little secret' of sex) (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 197). The problem with the secret as a form is that it locks life into the binary logic of dichotomy: 'the secret and disclosure, the secret and desecration' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 286). It remains part of hierarchical, arborescent logic, restricting both thought and being (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 5). Deleuze and Guattari explain: 'The question posed by desire is not "What does it mean?" but rather "How does it work?"' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 109, original emphasis). This is the more oblique and interesting question posed by *Heart and the Gutting* and prepares the conditions to register the work in non-personal, micropolitical and collective terms. In what follows I will attempt to map this particular line of flight out of the molar inclination to interpret Alkandari's project along the 'What happened and what does it mean?' track.

## Cracks in Time

In a recent interview, Alkandari states, 'I think time is a factor in my work which is often overlooked' (Alkandari 2009a: 42). Issues relating to temporality are expressed throughout Alkandari's work, but nowhere more explicitly than in *Heart and the Gutting*. It is in particular *Heart's* serial style that pushes the question of time to the foreground. As we shall see, Alkandari's piece cracks the molar line of temporal chronology and, by so doing, actually shifts those commonsense notions of identity discussed above that it appears to consolidate.

Deleuze, informed in part by Bergson, makes a distinction between two versions or senses of time: sequential and serial. On the one hand, sequence implies a linear, chronological temporality – time spatialized in order to be divided up into countable homogeneous units (years, months, weeks, hours, minutes, seconds). The Platonic notion of origin, copy and representation is implicitly sequential and hierarchical, as is the Freudian logic of identity. On

the other hand, seriality indicates a non-sequential, non-teleological, non-hierarchical sense of time as duration. Duration is time as flux (Bergson 1955: 25). It is the time we all experience as flying when we're having fun or crawling when we're bored. We can also detect duration in moments of crisis or when we encounter art (Bergson 1910: 168–70, 16–18; 1998: 340–1). Such non-normative, non(common)sensical experiences of time as condensed or stretched out can trigger a novel awareness of life as something other than a sequence of homogeneous units full of habituated perceptions and repeated actions. It enables a perception of the virtual torrent that is the condition of possibility for every actual present (Deleuze 1991: 96–8). Further, it makes it possible to recognize that such virtualities can always interrupt the present – are, in fact, always already an unrecognized component of the present – and can transform the normative, habituated, familiar order of any given time/space composite (Deleuze 1991: 100–1). What is at stake in such a shift of perception is the unblocking of the potential for different thoughts, feelings and actions, those not necessarily aligned with the interests and exigencies of the present. Such a perception registers in the present the duration of the future and its untimely possibilities now.

Thus understood, duration is not time as sequence but, rather, time as series. A key distinction between sequence and series is the latter's implicit propensity to proliferate (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 53). Sequence has to do with order, an order that may vary with each sequence, but which must follow some predefined, transcendental logic beyond itself. Sequence assumes causality, teleology and a foundation that both grounds and precedes it. Seriality, however, is immanent – it has no original cause, no ultimate purpose or order, and nothing beyond itself to establish meaning (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 35–60).

Life as a plane of immanence is the proliferation of series (lines of segmentarity), the infinite connections possible between such series (the formation of assemblages), and the ongoing transformations such connections create (becomings) (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 55). Durations are serial, as are virtualities. Duration is time without order, without sequence, without end. It is the condition of possibility for spatialized, clock time, for the transcendental logic of identity in both Plato and Freud, but it is, less obviously and more significantly, the condition of possibility for much more besides. Duration is, in short, the virtual component of life, its capacity to actualize along non-molar lines, to move at alternate speeds, to diverge and differ from itself eternally (Deleuze 1991: 42, 100–6).

Along its molar line, *Heart and the Gutting* is ordered sequentially. There is an unmistakable before and after with regards to its performance. Before the performance commences, the most conspicuous feature of the piece is the gridded order and chronological arrangement of the identical brown lunch bags, meticulously dated and neatly placed on the platform. Once the bags

are opened up, the notes to Thomas, written on identical pieces of square brown paper and also carefully dated, echo both the 206 identical lunch bags and their chronological arrangement on the platform. Many of the objects and notes mark calendrical time. For example, the object for 16 July 2007 is a red origami sanbow with twelve small square cards inside (approximately 4cm x 4cm). There is one card per month, each marked with the dates and days of the week and the name of the month. The note to Thomas for that date states: 'Since I've been counting time, I decided to make you a calendar ... Happy counting' (Alkandari 2007–8: 16 July 2007). The objects for 26–29 July 2007 also mark calendrical time with drawings that express the four seasons. Each of the notes to Thomas that correspond to the four seasons drawings deals with the question of time. On the note for 28 July 2007, for example, Ghadah writes: 'Days, weeks, months, years, decades, centuries, and millennia. I have to say that I have been able to manipulate time, speed it up when necessary, slow it down when needed' (Alkandari 2007–8: 28 July 2007). This note belies its object. The sense of time expressed here – fast (flying) or slow (crawling) – is directly aligned with the Bergsonian notion of duration and not with the conventional order of clock time the marking of seasons appears to affirm. This rift or paradox at the heart of *Heart and the Gutting* cracks up chronology and sequence at the very moment it appears to adhere incontrovertibly to its logic.

In the bag for 31 August 2007 there is another calendar of small cards, this time in a yellow origami sanbow. Unlike the first calendar cards mentioned, these twelve square cards mark only months (not days or dates). Already time is expressed in a less constrained and ordered manner than in July – bigger, looser units (months) rather than smaller ones (days). This may seem a trivial distinction, but, again, it hints at the secret cracks traversing the entire piece. The rift or paradox at the heart of *Heart* comes down to this: a desire to lasso time (and, by extension, meaning, perception, affects and identity) and an expression of desire as the gutting of time (and, by extension, meaning, perception, affects and identity). In the 31 August 2007 note to Thomas, Ghadah writes:

The month is over. A new one begins. How soon the dates become obsolete. I wish I had a date to count down to. I need to quantify things especially now when everything I am depends on days. Nothing is certain anymore. I'm being torn apart. But I feel it's time I took control because God knows I've been out of it the past three months. Things must change and it must start from the core. With me and my father. I must make complete peace with him because if I don't I'll never rest easy. Of course, he doesn't know any of this. But maybe one day he will. (Alkandari 2007–8: 31 August 2007)

Even as she earlier acknowledges, even celebrates, the speed and slowness of time as duration, here she seems to struggle to rein it all in – time, identity, meaning, all of it. Ghadah’s Oedipalization of her dilemma and its solution follows a conventional psychoanalytic impulse. To read the source of her troubles as rooted in the family triangle appears to confirm the notion of desire as lack. What needs to be uncovered and then interpreted as the cause behind her problems is the dirty little secret of the father and the family dynamic. Once this missing key is found, presumably everything will make sense again and Ghadah will be able to ‘rest easy’.

But, in fact, this is not the form *Heart and the Gutting* constructs or the narrative path it leads its audience along. Like Deleuze and Guattari’s Kafka, Alkandari exaggerates the Oedipal form to the point of absurdity (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 10). Instead of confirming clock time, fixed identity, and desire as lack by way of the father and/or the patriarchal logic that ostensibly orders it all, *Heart* guts the entire structure of this foundational logic by proliferating and repeating series ‘beyond all bounds’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 10). Along its molecular lines, *Heart* cracks the fixity of identity and the rigidity of conventional time and it does so by its proliferation of series.

Deleuze and Guattari state that proliferating series ‘work to unblock a situation that had closed elsewhere at an impasse’. Triangulation, they go on to explain, fixes positions (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 53). Oedipal triangles fix the child between mother and father; sexual or love triangles fix the lover between two others; art triangles fix the artist between audience and work; etc. Deleuze and Guattari argue that such triangulations are completely arbitrary and locked within the terms of a gratuitous binary logic – one term between two others and only two others. ‘Why two or three and not more? ... What stops another term ... from doubling and triangulating in his or her own right?’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 54). *Heart and the Gutting*, like Kafka’s novels, is ‘so vacillating, so supple and transformable, that [it is] ready to open onto series that break [its] form and explode [its] terms’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 54). As I have attempted to argue, these cracks already inhabit the piece even where it seems to be most conventionally ordered, most triangulated. Leaving aside for the moment the more obvious explosion expressed through the performance of *Heart*, I would like to turn here to seriality and repetition within the piece itself.

Deleuze argues that ‘*the serial form is necessarily realized in the simultaneity of at least two series*’ (Deleuze 1990: 36, original emphasis). In other words, ‘the serial form is thus essentially multi-serial’ (Deleuze 1990: 37). If the sequence of lunch bags is, at the most obvious level, an apparently homogeneous form (dividing time and itself into exchangeable, equal units), heterogeneity is subsumed within the bags; an immanent plane of virtuality vibrates just beneath the surface. From the repetition of calendrical cards to an endless variety of serial paintings, drawings, photos and objects, *Heart*

throbs with lines of creation that are linked and then abruptly end. A sequence of bags may contain four or six paintings that fit together as a puzzle or that share a similar style, and then, for no reason, will be followed by bags that begin a different series of painting (a few collages on cardboard here, a range of Klee-inspired paintings there). Sometimes these series will be picked up months later. Other times we never see their like again. Often such series are interrupted by bags that are singular, seemingly unrelated to and disconnected from the other bags (only one clay head; only one crossword puzzle; only one tangle of red earphone wires; etc.). The relentless notes to Thomas, usually expressing the same concerns, the same fears, the same lament, form another series within the piece. But the notes deviate in topic (if not form) just enough to express both a break in sequence and the constant potential to shift gears inherent to the piece.

Not only do the linked objects and notes in the bags construct serial lines, many of the objects and notes within specific bags express *Heart's* serial form explicitly. The object for 3 July 2007 is a collage (12cm × 12.5cm) of randomly arranged, printed images of Ghadah's eyes and hands glued on white card.<sup>14</sup> The images are ripped up with ragged edges, painted over in places, with scraps of white paper glued over and beneath. On the other side of the card is written the following:

When you wake up and day rests on  
 your chest like a boulder  
 you know it's time to gather  
 your tonsils, little toe and  
 appendix  
 and learn to fly.  
 (Alkandari 2007–8: 3 July 2007)

The note to Thomas for the same date says, 'I always feel like I'm in the periphery' (Alkandari 2007–8: 3 July 2007). In contrast to her affirmation of consolidated, molar identity elsewhere, here we begin to see molecular cracks in the edifice. Her body is both visually and verbally in pieces: hands, eyes, tonsils, toe, appendix. Not a centrally organized body with conventional meaning (that is, not a woman, a wife, an artist, a lover), but a peripheral Body without Organs (BwO) – a body as plane of immanence, a body open to experimentation, molecular becomings, even flight (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 149–66).

Unfolding serially by way of this collage, its caption and note is the object, caption and note for 5 July 2007. The latter object is a white origami box (7.5cm × 7.5cm × 4cm) with 'don't break me' written on the lid (Figure 4). Inside the box is a collection of thirty-five cards (3cm × 4cm) stacked and held together with a white paper sleeve marked 'egg'. Each of the cards are

14 In chapter 17 of *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, entitled 'The Eye and the Hand', Deleuze suggests that the artist's relationship between the eye and the hand can take four modes: digital, tactile, manual and haptic (Deleuze 2004: 124–5). Regarding the haptic, Deleuze states: 'One might say that painters paint with their eyes, but only insofar as they touch with their eyes' (Deleuze 2004: 125). It is this haptic function of art that *Heart* puts to work.



**Figure 4 'egg', Heart and the Gutting. Photograph by author, 3 August 2008.**

mini collages (of the same type as the collage for 3 July 2007 discussed above), with scraps of Ghadah's body parts glued on, including her eyes, hands, feet, mouth, and blurred sections of her face. Fifteen of the cards have one or more of the following words glued on them: 'egg'; 'i'; 'am'; 'not'; 'sane'; 'crack'; 'fragmented humpty'; 'dumpty'; 'ole'; 'humpty dumpty sat on the wall humpty dumpty had a'; and 'great fall'. Like playing cards, the thirty-five cards can be shuffled randomly. The words will not likely be read sequentially. This piece (which I shall refer to as 'egg') is looser than the earlier collage because the body pieces are less fixed and ordered. Glued inside the box is the following typed note:

now i know why artists can sometimes sound like weirdos. they don't mean to. it's cos they've cracked. normal, accepted grammar does not apply to them anymore. they can't speak, they cannot articulate. they are just a bunch of babbling baboons.  
 (Alkandari 2007–8: 5 July 2007)

The note to Thomas in the same bag says, 'I've been fragmented, put together, only to find myself shattered again ... Here are the pieces, put me

back together any way you like' (Alkandari 2007–8: 5 July 2007). Again, the object and notes convey a molecular crack-up of molar identity, a BwO. By inviting Thomas (and her audience) to put Ghadah together differently, any way he/we want to, Alkandari suggests such reconfigurations of the body are always possible for everyone, though it is, perhaps, only in times of crisis or through art that we may come to recognize this. By forcing its audience to betray its own injunction, 'don't break me', 'egg' (and, by extension, *Heart*) reveals the contingency of all identic and ontological imperatives (to be a good wife, to be a good citizen, to be a good mother, to be a certain kind of artist, etc.). Deleuze and Guattari describe the BwO as an egg. They declare:

The BwO is the egg. But the egg is not regressive; on the contrary, it is perfectly contemporary, you always carry it with you as your own milieu of experimentation, your associated milieu ... The egg is the BwO. The BwO is not 'before' the organism; it is adjacent to it and is continually in the process of constructing itself. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 164)

The BwO is not desire as lack but, rather, desire as a plane of immanence (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 165). It is the virtual component of extension or actualization – what can always still become. The BwO can be understood in terms of Bergson's duration – the vibrating flow or flux before spatiotemporal organization (whether social, political, economic, marital, religious or whatever else). It is not a fragmented body missing unity but, rather, the body as a machine – 'connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities' – which can link with other 'collective machines' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 161). By isolating a hand, an eye, a foot, a mouth, a face (no longer Ghadah's hands or eyes or feet or face), 'egg' depersonalizes body parts, opening a body's virtual capacity or potential to become endlessly different – that is, to experience and embody different perceptions and affections and meanings. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, "'A" stomach, "an" eye, "a" mouth: the indefinite article does not lack anything; it is not indeterminate or undifferentiated, but expresses the pure determination of intensity, intensive difference. The indefinite article is the conductor of desire' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 164).

Not only does 'egg' deterritorialize molar identity, it also connects this deterritorialization with the disarticulation of language and the function of art. In their study on Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari argue that his *oeuvre* constitutes a 'minor literature'; the three characteristics of this form of literature include 'the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 18). Deleuze and Guattari describe a minor language as underdeveloped, a *patois*, a third world, a desert (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 18). It is to write 'like a dog digging a hole, a



rat digging its burrow' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 18) or, perhaps, like 'a babbling baboon' (Alkandari 2007–8: 5 July 2007). A cracked minor language is precisely what, in 'egg', Ghadah says artists often use.

The connection between the plasticity of language and the body is expressed on 2 January 2008. The lunch bag contains two paintings on white card (8cm × 10cm each) of the profile of a gender-neutral grey face with red cheeks and black hair. One of the cards has the word 'fish' written on it, the other the word 'bird', both connected to the mouth of the respective faces by a black dotted line. The note to Thomas along with these objects asks:

Would I rather be a bird or a fish? A bird flies, weightless ... but then so does a fish. A bird doesn't have to contend with sharks or other marine predators. A bird won't ever find a hook in its dinner. A fish, however, will never experience a bullet in the chest or a broken wing. A fish is always wet with oily oily skin. A bird has feathers. They are both majestic. I'd like to be a bit of both. (Alkandari 2007–8: 2 January 2008)

Both the note and the paintings convey a strange sense of becoming something other than human – Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 274–5, 304–5). In imagining fish-affects and bird-affects, Alkandari again depersonalizes the body at the same time that she delinks the conventional signifier–signified dyad (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 240). The profiles are labelled 'bird' and 'fish', not 'human' or 'man' or 'woman', as would normally and normatively be expected. There occurs a 'theft' or 'betrayal' between two – between human and fish or between human and bird or between bird and fish, or even between all three together (and, by extension, between an endlessly unfolding series of other animals too) (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 7, 40). Through this betrayal of what it means to be human (not a man or woman, but animals) is expressed the virtual plasticity of the body to become other things – to feel, to perceive, to know in ways other than the most ordinary or common.

Deleuze and Guattari underscore Spinoza's question, 'What can a body do?' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 256; Spinoza 1994: 155–6). Among other things, a body can multiply and intensify its affections and perceptions. A betrayal of the human body is a declaration that bodies can do far more and be vastly different than they have done and been so far (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 257). Ghadah puts it this way:

How does the body know what it needs to change in order to survive? Or is it survival of the most susceptible to change? What's my body thinking now? It's a form of intelligence that we haven't tapped into yet. If I mutate, will I be accepted

by a non-mutant? I'd be an outcast, not contender for genetically modified human of the millennium. (Alkandari 2007–8: 29 December 2007)

At the level of form, style and expression, *Heart and the Gutting* constitutes a radical betrayal of time, language, representation, identity, the body, and almost every other molar line of non-mutant segmentarity. As such, it reveals the dirty little secret of the marital betrayal ostensibly at the heart of *Heart* to be the most reactive and least imaginative interpretation solicited by those most reactive and least imaginative interpretative questions, 'What happened and what does it mean?' Any definitive narrative coherence and chronology an audience might want to invest in *Heart* disappears. Instead, *Heart's* huge verbal component constitutes a minor (dis)articulation – a disjointed, intensive usage of cracked English in an Arabic-speaking country. Through its proliferation of verbal series (notes to Thomas, letters, postcards, captions, etc.) and visual series (the seemingly endless objects, linked or discrete), *Heart* subverts both the sequential, homogeneous, clock time its chronological form appears to consolidate and the attendant habituated sense of molar identity and normative life it seems to affirm in places. *Heart and the Gutting* performs throughout what 'egg' suggests 'weirdo' artists do as a matter of course. It transmutes 'normal, accepted grammar', thereby preparing the conditions for mutant flight.

### Futures Imperceptible

Up to this point, I have discussed how, in its shift from ordered sequence to proliferating series, *Heart and the Gutting* destabilizes the very molar lines of organization it appears to consolidate. Even as it affirms identic stratifications of gender, class, employment and state, *Heart* deterritorializes linear time, paradoxically undercutting its own molarity. The heterogeneous, endlessly bifurcating networks created between the objects and notes in the bags are intensified through the performative component of this rhizomatic piece. *Heart's* shift from representation to performance manages to further disrupt or break molar lines by activating a desiring-machine that involves not only itself but the approximately two hundred audience members drawn into its pulsing form. This section explores how, through the process of gutting *Heart*, audience members become imperceptible and inadvertently map futures which – from the vantage point of the currently dominant embodied subjectivities in Kuwait (Muslim, Arab, patriarchal, heterosexist, conservative, classist, apathetic, etc.) – seem and feel impossible.

In *Francis Bacon*, Deleuze states that 'music must render non-sonorous forces sonorous, and painting must render invisible forces visible – how can

time be painted, how can time be heard?’ (Deleuze 2004: 48). Deleuze argues that it cannot occur through representation or through the invention of forms. Instead, it is a matter of ‘capturing forces’ (Deleuze 2004: 48). To capture imperceptible forces (invisible, inaudible) – Deleuze calls them ‘the powers of the future’ – and to render them sensible is the special capacity of art (Deleuze 2004: 52). ‘It is for this reason’, as Grosz explains, ‘that art is not frivolous, an indulgence or luxury, an embellishment of what is most central: it is the most vital and direct form of impact on and through the body and make[s] of the body a link with forces it cannot otherwise perceive and act upon’ (Grosz 2008: 23). Through its performative component, *Heart* renders duration (and/as the virtual) sensible by directly engaging the bodies of its audience and triggering corporeal transmutations. In so doing, *Heart* unleashes a non-linear sense of futurity in the present (Nietzsche’s untimely), with radical implications in a Middle Eastern milieu.

As discussed above, Deleuze and Guattari, following both Spinoza and Nietzsche, conceive of life as an endlessly differentiating plane of pure immanence (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 156). Life as immanence – that is, as productive desire – is constantly in the process of becoming something other than it is by forging connections (assemblages) and making breaks (opening up potentials for other assemblages). When it comes to the production of art specifically, Deleuze and Guattari identify the plane of composition as its condition of possibility (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 196). What *Heart* shares in common with all works of art that unfold through and as the plane of composition is its transformation of blocs of materiality into blocs of sensation – that is, ‘a compound of percepts and affects’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164). Deleuze and Guattari do not understand percepts and affects subjectively (an individual’s perceptions and affections); rather, percepts and affects ‘are *beings* whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 164, original emphasis). Percepts are ‘*non-human landscapes of nature*’, while affects are ‘*non-human becomings of man*’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 169, original emphasis). Art’s capacity to dehumanize nature and man opens both up to the virtual potential to become something other than human all too human. Beings of sensation move through bodies, act upon them, but, at the same time, bodies become part of sensation, thus blurring the opposition between art and audience or artist and art: ‘As a spectator, I experience the sensation only by entering the painting, by reaching the unity of the sensing and the sensed’ (Deleuze 2004: 31). This is exactly what happens to the ‘spectator’ of *Heart*.

In fact, *Heart*’s audience members were never only spectators; inadvertently they became participants (the becoming-artist of the audience). In asking her audience to help her finish the piece, Alkandari calls into question the finality and autonomy of any art object. To draw attention to *Heart*’s unfinished status is to undercut instantly the apparent rigidity of its neatly

gridded form. About the unfinished quality of Kafka's work, Deleuze and Guattari state that it is not 'fragmentary' (which could imply that it lacks wholeness or unity) but, rather, that it is 'unlimited' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 73). A work without limits is a work without borders or conclusions. *Heart's* unlimited or proliferating seriality applies both to its inherent form (as discussed in the second section) and to its performance. As participants open bags, chronology disappears, not only because the bags cannot be opened in order, but also because the contents of the bags can only be pinned up on the corkboard at random. But *Heart's* performative seriality extends beyond this technical or formal characteristic discussed earlier.

The contents of the bags reveal intimate details about the life of an Arab Muslim woman, details conventionally off limits and certainly never visible or audible in the public domain. By breaking the code of invisibility and silence on betrayal, desire, sex, discontent, subversion, anger, religious dissent and so on, *Heart and the Gutting* unblocks the conventional divisions and doxa currently strangling certain versions of life in Kuwait and the Middle East, especially for women.<sup>15</sup> It isn't by revealing secrets, however, that these codes are broken. *Heart* – ostensibly set up around the question 'What happened?' – never holds back its secret. Ghadah spills out her guts in her notes to Thomas, and audience members, in their gutting of *Heart*, are privy to all the sordid details. *Heart* tells them exactly what happened, everything they think they want to know, and, in so doing, undercuts the authority of the binary form of secrecy–disclosure ordering most societal divisions (Sedgwick 1990: 1–16). In presenting the secret to her audience, Alkandari takes away its power to control and authorize meaning, behaviour, speech and feelings. One of the objects is an origami sanbow with a small origami box inside (Alkandari 2007–8: 14 September 2007). 'What's in a box?' is written on the cover, and inside is a little red card with the words 'the secret'. The secret of *Heart*, as this object suggests, is no secret at all – nothing but an overblown signifier ordering and limiting our perception of what lives can be.<sup>16</sup>

Codes of silence and invisibility are broken not by the disclosure of secrets but by performance. Audience members are offered access to hidden secrets, but only if they are willing to perform on stage. In the acts of performing disclosure (opening a bag, reading an intimate note, handling a personal object, pinning everything up for all to see) and of witnessing a couple of hundred other acts of disclosure, audience members themselves reveal secrecy to be an empty signifier. In place of an answer, audience members experience what it could be like to escape final answers – and the rigidity implicit to this normative impulse to conclude – altogether. One of Ghadah's notes to Thomas states:

15 The May 2009 election of four women to the National Assembly for the first time in Kuwait's history was a marginally hopeful sign, a tiny crack in an otherwise rigid molarity. However, the February 2012 election of a conservative Islamist and tribalist majority to parliament (with no women either elected as members or appointed by the government as ministers) signalled a molar reterritorialization.

16 The note to Thomas for the same date says as much: 'I'm great at keeping secrets: but only because I never found them particularly exciting in the first place. I think that if I were ever challenged with a hot item of gossip, something truly earth-shattering, I'd eventually buckle' (Alkandari 2007–8: 14 September 2007).

I've been obsessed with the circle ... cells ... both biological and of the prison variety ... being trapped, suffocated and claustrophobic. Everything seems to be going in circles – no end no beginning just a whole bunch of middle. Is it possible to break these cycles, change a few things around and put them back together to go on and on without me? I would like that very much, Thomas. (Alkandari 2007–8: 18 August 2007)

It is in the middle that the possibility of a break – a line of flight – can occur (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: viii). In the process of its performance, *Heart's* gridded chronology is quickly taken over by a rhizomatic proliferation or multiplicity. *Heart* becomes a desiring-machine, breaking the conventional affect of satisfaction that may come with disclosure and establishing in its place less orthodox connections between a multitude of forces: between audience and the artist persona (Ghadah), audience and Thomas, audience and Alkandari, audience members with each other, audience and *Heart* (the bags, the process, the board, the notes, the objects, etc.), to list only the most obvious.

Ghadah wonders whether it would be 'possible to break these cycles' (of rigidity and orthodoxy) by putting elements together differently (creating new assemblages); as a desiring-machine, this is precisely what *Heart and the Gutting* does (Alkandari 2007–8: 18 August 2007). *Heart*, a plane of composition, becomes the condition of possibility for the becoming-other of audience and artist. The bags and notes to Thomas, the silent recipient who, participants are informed from the start, does not exist, are also bags and notes to the participants themselves. Participants experience becoming-Thomas; that is, they sense what it might be like to be someone who listens to an 'other' (different gender, different ethnicity, different religion, etc.), what it might be like to be someone who does not judge even the most radical behaviour.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, participants also become-Ghadah – sense what it might be like to be the one going through this crisis. In addition, participants potentially also experience becoming-Alkandari. *Heart's* high degree of intimacy creates a threshold between objects and participants. It begins to feel like the objects and words could just as easily belong to the participants themselves as to Ghadah or to Alkandari.<sup>18</sup> Assemblages are formed between audience members and various objects and notes that do not simply break apart once the show is 'over'. The fact that some audience members felt attached enough to the bags, objects and notes to walk out with them after the show demonstrates this point.

In the note cited above, Ghadah asks whether it would be possible for the assemblages 'to go on and on without [her]' (Alkandari 2007–8: 18 August 2007). In fact, the proliferation of assemblages is, in a sense, contingent upon Alkandari's, if not Ghadah's, disappearance. In (over)

17 Needless to say, one culture's radical is another's normal. What *Heart* could do in Saudi Arabia or Iran, for example, is decidedly different to what it could do in London or New York. This does not mean, however, that it can only work effectively in the Middle East. To date, *Heart* has not been exhibited anywhere other than Kuwait.

18 This distinction I have been making between Ghadah and Alkandari is not one the average participant would likely have made. The tendency in Kuwait is to conflate artists with their work, reducing the potential effects (and affects) of varied genres to the autobiographical. It is this monologic impulse *Heart* destabilizes.

exposing Ghadah, Alkandari puts the artist under erasure. Paradoxically, to make the imperceptible – the inaudible, the invisible, the secret – perceptible, the artist must make herself (as fixed identity) disappear. For audience members to become-Thomas, become-Ghadah, become-Alkandari, become-other, Alkandari must (and does) relinquish artistic authority. She becomes-imperceptible: no longer woman, mother, heterosexual, wife, Kuwaiti, artist, or any number of other identic classifications enumerated in the piece. In sweeping participants along this deterritorializing line of flight, ‘Alkandari’ or *Heart* unblocks the potential for experimental living, a proliferation of becomings that cannot be predicted in advance, are imperceptible, and which express an altogether different variety of secrecy.

There is no endpoint to the becomings initiated by *Heart*. Deleuze and Guattari call this in between movement of becoming a ‘zone of indetermination’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 173). It cannot be predicted in advance what may (or may never) emerge. ‘This’, they say, ‘is what is called an *affect*’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 173, original emphasis). At the same time, the process of opening bags, reading notes and handling and viewing endlessly different objects creates flux (or duration) as percept: a kaleidoscope landscape where configurations other than the current rigid stratifications are possible. Deleuze and Guattari argue that, for the artist, ‘It is always a question of freeing life wherever it is imprisoned, or of tempting it into an uncertain combat’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 171). Life in Kuwait and in much of the Middle East today – notwithstanding the Arab Spring – is imprisoned within molar lines of religious extremism, tribalism, sectarianism, sexism, heterosexism, xenophobic conservatism, anti-intellectualism, racism and classism, among other traps. Kuwait lurches from crisis to crisis – politically, economically and socially – seemingly oblivious to the link between its predicaments and its inflexible molarity.<sup>19</sup> In recent years the attention of the National Assembly has been focused on so-called morality issues: the gender segregation of universities and private schools; the creation of a ‘morality police’ and public dress code; the banning of books, films and music; a prohibition on churches; the death penalty for ‘blasphemy’; among other inanities. The grave problems plaguing its systems of education and healthcare are mostly ignored, as are the serious environmental threats to its air, land and sea. The inevitable future economic catastrophe that will hit this oil-producing, rentier state once the world ends its dependency on fossil fuels is rarely addressed publicly.

In the context of this dismal impasse, *Heart and the Gutting* constitutes a line of flight for its participants and, at least virtually, for Kuwait itself. To perform the piece, participants must move: they must step up on to the island landscape of the platform, bend over to pick up a bag, walk to the corkboard, stretch or stoop to pin everything in place, hover around

19 The five dissolutions of parliament since 2006 point to a serious national crisis in Kuwait, as does the unusually contentious and polarizing nature of recent parliamentary elections.



**Figure 5** Connecting through *Heart and the Gutting*, Sultan Gallery, Kuwait. Photograph by Mohammed Alkandari, January 15, 2008.

the board to see other objects and to read more notes, step down off the platform, and maybe begin the process all over again (though never exactly the same way). This physical movement matches and enfolds the more ephemeral processes of becoming-other and becoming-imperceptible *Heart* also initiates, as discussed above. Through their performances, participants enact duration: the infinite potential to embody non-molar affects and percepts (in other words, difference itself). That this process is described as a ‘gutting’ registers how difficult molecular transformations can be. Fellow participants are closer to each other than they ever would be in a public setting and even at most art gallery exhibitions in Kuwait, which are generally elite, formal affairs (Figure 5). Brushing shoulders or hands as they engage with the corkboard, strangers – no longer distinguished to quite the same extent by the usual molar markers – exchange comments, laughter, surprise, bewilderment, excitement, etc. This intimacy invites not merely affinity but also exchange or, in Deleuze’s terms, ‘double-theft’: me and/as Ghadah; me and/as Thomas; me and/as Alkandari; and, significantly, me and/as you too (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 7). A note to Thomas asks, ‘Are we all interconnected somehow?’ (Alkandari 2007–8: 26 September 2007). *Heart and the Gutting* affirms emphatically that we are.

The process of gutting *Heart* creates an active assemblage of objects, paintings, writing, music, film and people becoming-other. It cracks the rigidity of a deadlocked Kuwait and its paralysed populace at micropolitical

corporeal levels. These cracks and flights – mostly imperceptible – will not likely disrupt or deterritorialize molarity in Kuwait or the Middle East in any dramatic or noticeable ways. Nonetheless, their untimely existence – in the form of *Heart* (as desiring-machine) and its gutting (as assemblage) – is a reminder that change is always ongoing in small ways despite concerted and for the most part successful attempts to stifle it.

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