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BETWIXT AND BETWEEN: Virtuality, Liminality, Media and Memory

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**BETWIXT AND BETWEEN:
Virtuality, Liminality, Media and Memory**

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by

Slavica Panic

!
**Graduate Program
In
Visual Arts**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts**

**School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada**

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

Using the concept of liminality found in the work of anthropologist Victor Turner, this thesis explores connections among experiences of media, memory, and the virtual. I examine how these phenomena influence and inform everyday life, and especially how they play out in experiences of displacement, exile and migration. I analyze them as forms of contemporary ritual which play a key role in the construction of our identities in a globalized world. The thesis discusses displacement and its relationship to the concept of “home”, paying particular attention to media representations of home and mediated experiences of home. I look to the work of Salman Rushdie, Edward Said and Homi Bhabha in understanding the experience of being in-between and “beyond” cultures. Margaret Morse’s layered understanding of the virtual and Richard Cavell and Arjun Appadurai’s accounts of new forms of global mediation are addressed. This theoretical material then informs a discussion of the work of artists Mona Hatoum and Pipilotti Rist.

Keywords:

Media, memory, the virtual, the liminal, ritual, displacement, Victor Turner, Margaret Morse, Homi Bhabha, Arjun Appadurai, Richard Cavell, Mona Hatoum, Pipilotti Rist, *The Wizard of Oz*.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I am interested in understanding the relationship between ideas of the real and the virtual, and in the ways in which space, identity and memory are negotiated across these two realms and across a globalized world. My recent experience as an international art student from Eastern Europe, one influenced by Western culture from an early age and now living in Canada, led me to become interested in better understanding my new environment and in making sense of my new reality. Likewise, my previous interest in technology and in the idea of the virtual, gained a new perspective and so I decided to explore it further. In this new situation, some remembered events and images from my past were inflected in new and unexpected ways. So I will explore the specific space in which I found myself, in which experiences of media, memory, the virtual, and the liminal, influence and inform everyday life. Also, I will discuss how technology helps in bridging distance and opens up other questions regarding ideas of home and displacement. Being in-between two different spaces is something that I find appealing, as it is filled with mystery and challenge, and so understanding the position of betwixt and between became the topic of my research.

My research for this thesis was triggered by a single image: the small crack of light that appears at night beneath doors in North America. It has haunted me for many months since my arrival, provoking me to try to solve the puzzle. As I discuss below, the crack of light under the door is uncommon in Serbia, yet I had seen it many times before in my childhood, in mediated form. My desire to understand the meanings that lie behind that image has prompted my research into other concepts that have become equally important for my thesis, such as the real and the virtual, home, media and displacement.

The first chapter presents the theoretical background of the thesis. Through an analysis of the liminal in Victor Turner's work on ritual, I explore the relationship between the ideas of the real and the virtual and discuss their interaction in a media-saturated world.

The second chapter examines the idea of home in Salman Rushdie's critical analysis of the movie *The Wizard of Oz* (this is the film that inspired my videos, *Device* and *Place*). I examine the relationship between home and displacement in the present day, including the role of displacement in the work of Mona Hatoum and Homi Bhabha's thoughts on exile and national identity.

Finally, in the third chapter I explore the video works of Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist who addresses displacement at the level of gender and who uses materials from different media in order to construct an imaginary, dream-like world. I discuss the construction of modern subjectivities proposed in the writings of Arjun Appadurai and Homi Bhabha.

CHAPTER ONE: NEITHER HERE NOR THERE

A gap beneath the door is uncommon in my home country, as doors simply fit into their frames. Nonetheless, I knew that image very well, although from a different source of experience – the cinema. (Fig.1.1) This immediately took me back to my childhood in Serbia, when I would watch American film noir movies on television. Like cinema, the illuminated gap involves a projection of light, a projection that has multiple meanings. So, light shining through the gap is a sign of difference to me. Watching the crack of light under the door, I was at the same time in three different places: standing outside a door in Canada, in my parent's house as a child watching TV, and living out an imaginary movie, finally learning the secret of that space, through which characters were usually passing an important note, or through which the audience could see the shadow of the murderer, etc. Now, it is in front of me: strange, but familiar, mine but everyone else's too, here but also somewhere else, now but also then. Standing in front of a door, in the physical space, the light is real to me, although a simple touch can not make it tangible: the image and memories associated with it are based on mediation, and its meaning is stronger to me as it goes far beyond mere perception; here, the mediated has become real, but not actual. It is real in the sense that I am aware of my presence in front of the door, looking at the crack of light, however, the image of it is more complex, it is a merging of perception, art and memory. The real and the mediated have collapsed together and distinguishing them seems impossible.

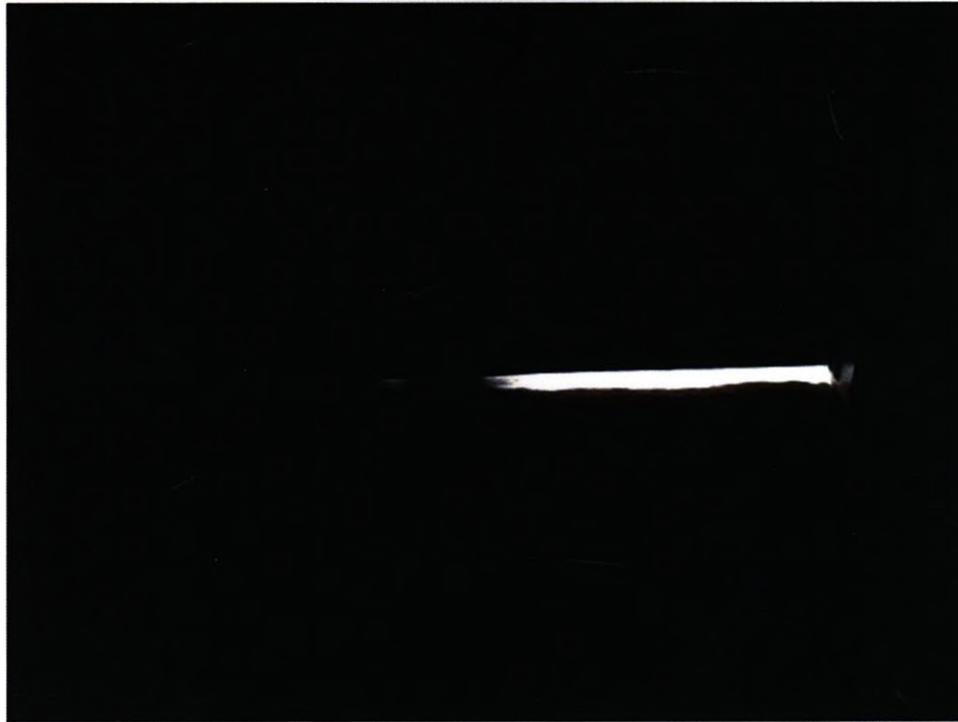


Fig.1.1: Slavica Panic, *Here and There*, (2007), video still.

The new place in which I have found myself had existed very vividly in my imagination through representations on television, in cinema, the press etc., and so was already part of my identity. I became interested in the ambiguities of everyday life, moments when everyday events and objects appear as new and, oddly familiar, uncanny. Physical displacement did not take me away. On the one hand, it brought me closer (in)to my dreams, where everything is possible, open, surreal and magical. On the other hand, it gave another dimension to the life that I had been leading before. Despite the fact that surroundings, events, people, everything that I knew in my former life had suddenly become fairly remote, the contact had not disappeared, due to electronic communication. So my former reality was now transferred into another realm, a very vivid one, in which I could still have influence over many events, and therefore, to be a part of the life there as well as here.

I have found this new situation challenging and complex; it has provoked me to ask questions about the real/virtual binary. I have never before felt its importance as intensely as

I do now. Thinking about distinctions between the real and the virtual has been important for understanding space, identity, and home, concepts which never would have interested me in the same way had I not landed here. In this thesis I will focus on experiences of the middle, the in-between, of being neither “here” nor “there,” or both “here” and “there.” This is the so-called liminal stage in rituals, in which participants undergo challenges and transitions. In light of my experience of the gap beneath the door, in Canada, in the movies, it is important to note here that the in-between state described as the liminal derives its name from the Latin word for threshold, the sill of a doorway.

I will also discuss the influence of media and the immeasurable importance of imagination in creating our sense of reality. Finally, I will closely examine and draw parallels between the experiences of being in a liminal stage with the concept of the technologically created. Here two opposed ideas, the real and the virtual, coexist and overlap each other and help to construct each other.

My recent experiences in Canada have caused me to rethink the concept of reality in my media saturated world: how do we know what is really “here” and what is “there,” what are the parameters that distinguish the two? Richard Cavell, a Marshall McLuhan scholar, writes about how media influence and shape reality and how certain images, as well as experiences of events become part of our identity. Cavell writes, “if mechanical objects had extended our bodies and our senses, the electronic world extended our very consciousness, and it was our tendency to take this world as real and natural that prompted McLuhan to say that ‘we dream awake.’”¹ By taking as an extreme example the movie *Alien 4*, he explains how the inversions of the real and the simulated, and the conscious and the unconscious, can

¹ Richard Cavell, “Dreaming Awake: Mass Media as Ritual,” in *Ritual Economics. Working Papers in the Humanities Series*, ed. Lorenzo Buj (Windsor: University of Windsor Publications, 2004), 38.

create extensions of ourselves. What is “outside” us becomes difficult to discern, what is foreign appears as the familiar, and vice versa. He writes about the main character, Ripley, who originates from Earth and is about to re-enter it, although this time as a clone whose life has been spent entirely on the spaceship. While approaching the Earth, she cannot recall anything about life there, the place from where she came from is foreign to her; “the earth – terra firma – has itself become an exercise in virtuality – something experienced through a screen – and the “human” has collapsed into the “other” which is misrecognized as the “self.””² Media influence our reality and we live our lives without knowing how much of our identity is determined by experiences that we received only through media, until we find ourselves in some other environment and realize how much “somewhere else” is actually very familiar to us, and how some images, derived from media are more important than something that was physically around us all the time.

I am interested in how reality is conceived in displacement; if media influences reality, what can we say about electronic media, which are arguably more widespread than traditional mass media, more oriented toward personal choice, and distributed through a variety of devices that have become extended parts of ourselves, and, as Cavell would argue, of our very consciousnesses.³ If we can now “travel” and “visit” different places by typing words in an Internet browser, what then is “our” reality, where are we, and who are we? Richard Cavell writes about how electronic culture “has to do with displacement – with the nature of being *here* where much of our time is occupied with a sense of being *there*.”⁴

Cavell’s writings are influenced by McLuhan’s theory of mass media. In turn, both theories have roots in Harold Innis’s theory of space and time. Harold Innis is one of the

² Cavell, 40.

³ Cavell, 38.

founding theorists of Canadian communication thought, who has developed his concept of communication by making the distinction between time-binding cultures and space-binding cultures and between the media each respective culture uses. As Robert Babe writes, “according to Innis, space-bound cultures use predominantly space-binding media – media that are light, transportable, easy to work with, and have a large capacity to carry and store messages. Time-bound or traditional cultures, conversely, rely predominantly on time-binding media – media with low message capacity, intractable, difficult to move, and enduring.”⁵ Mass media, as space-binding media, have the power of enabling the experiencing and sharing of the same event around the world by billions of people. Cavell identifies the virtual space of media with ritual space and with a state of liminality. Thus media are “increasingly taking on the materiality of the spaces in which we live and 'become human.’”⁶, and “permit us to perceive patterns in the apparently chaotic flows of global culture - that we find ourselves, as we enter more and more into the liminality of the virtual, dreaming awake.”⁷ It seems that the real and the virtual intertwine and constitute each other, and with the increasing development of technologies, we can find ourselves shifting and replacing one world with another, finding ourselves in a space that has qualities of both, existing in liminality.

In an attempt to explore this specific stage, I will use Victor Turner's work on liminality. By exploring his ideas of the liminal, I will discuss them in relation to the electronic media, migration and my own experience.

⁴ Cavell, 54.

⁵ R. Babe, (2000, January 1), “Foundations of Canadian Communication Thought,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* [Online], 25 (1).

⁶ Cavell, 54.

⁷ Cavell, 55.

The term liminality is derived from the Latin “limen,” meaning “threshold,” the sill of a doorway that must be crossed when entering a building. I find the word “threshold” more suitable than the word “border” in my research, as for me it carries a sense of mystery and magic. It works as an invitation to another, previously unknown space or world, and it connects rather than separates. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term first appeared in the field of psychology in 1884, but the broader introduction of the idea is found in the field of anthropology in 1909, in Arnold Van Gennep's work *Les rites de passage*. The terms “liminal” and “liminality” gained popularity and usage in other fields through the writings of Victor Turner in the 1960s, although his research was primarily based on studies of rituals focused on the Ndembu tribes of Zambia.

According to Turner, liminality is marked by three phases: separation, margin (or “limen”) and aggregation. The initiate (neophyte) is first detached from the social status that he/she possesses, then inducted into the liminal period of transition, and finally given his/her new status and reassimilated into society.⁸ Turner's focus was on the second stage, the transitional or liminal, which is characterized by ambiguity, openness and indeterminacy. At this stage “transitional beings are particularly polluting, since they are neither one thing or another; or may be both; or neither here or there... and are at the very least ‘betwixt and between’ all the recognized fixed points in space-time of structural classification.”⁹ Going through the process of removal of status and identity, transitional beings are treated as outsiders, “structurally 'invisible'...they have physical but not social 'reality,’”¹⁰ but while

⁸ Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), 94.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

separated from the group, they are in a privileged state, through which they will have the opportunity to change who they are in relationship to society and to themselves.

Writing about symbolic action in human society, Turner expands the concept of liminality: “As well as the betwixt-and-between state of liminality there is the state of outsiderhood, referring to the condition of being either permanently and by ascription set outside the structural arrangements of a given social system, or being situationally or temporarily set apart, or voluntarily setting oneself apart from the behavior of status-occupying, role-playing members of that system.”¹¹ With the implication of any change of place, status or identity, liminality is frequently connected with migration, where, as Ahponen Pirkkoliisa argues, “crossing geographical borders always means facing the mental boundaries. It is a test of the possibilities to maintain a stable identity - or to become another.”¹² Pirkkoliisa quotes Iain Chambers’s *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*: “Transported some way into this border country, I look into a potentially further space: the possibility of another place, another world, another future.”¹³ This statement opens a field of endless possibilities, of the world that is different in a positive way from the one that we know. Through personal experience I have come to consider traveling in terms of (re)visiting imaginary worlds based on a person's memory or dreams, and in terms of experiencing the virtual today, which is inevitably mediated through technology.

¹¹ Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974), 232-233.

¹² Pirkkoliisa Ahponen, “Cross the Border, Confront Boundaries: Problems of Habituality, Marginality, and Liminality”, in *Alienation, Ethnicity, and Postmodernism*, ed. Felix Geyer (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996), 177.

¹³ Iain Chambers, quoted in Ahponen, 177.

Before I continue the discussion of the relationship between liminality and the virtual, I will explore selected definitions of the virtual, including the one in which I am most interested, which is connected to technology and everyday life.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “virtual” appears as an adjective and a noun, and is defined as follows: “That is so in essence or effect, although not formally or actually; admitting of being called by the name so far as the effect or result is concerned.” The origin of the term is the Latin word “virtus” which has possessed throughout history different kinds of meanings: “a quality of persons, chastity (especially on the part of women), the seven virtues opposed to the seven deadly sins, an armed force, diligence, an act of superhuman or divine power, a miracle, flourishing state or condition, energy, manliness, courage, etc.” (OED). The way that we use the word “virtual” today, is drastically removed from its root. As Rob Shields explains in his book *The Virtual*, it is used “as a proper noun - 'The Virtual' - a place, a space, a whole world of graphical objects and animated personae which populate fictional, ritual and digital domains as representatives of actual persons and things.”¹⁴ In *In Search of Lost Time (À la recherche du temps perdu)* published in France between 1913 and 1927,¹⁵ Marcel Proust described dreams, memories and the past as “Being real without being actual and ideal without being abstract.” This idea has provided an important historical model for the use of the term today,¹⁶ and is the one that I will be referring to as “the virtual” in this paper. Moments from Proust's past, once awakened and reanimated in the present through a noise, a scent or a touch become “extra-

¹⁴ Rob Shields, *The Virtual* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), xv.

¹⁵ The title *In Search of Lost Time* has gained in popularity since D.J. Enright's 1992 revision of the classic translation of C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, but it is also widely referred to by its original English title *Remembrance of Things Past*. <http://www.tempsperdu.com/bbp.html>

¹⁶ Shields 13.

temporal”¹⁷; he had experienced them “at the present moment and at the same time in the context of a distant moment,” which made him doubtful of whether he was in the past or in the present. He felt as if he was finding himself in a medium in which he could “enjoy the essence of things, that is to say: outside time.”¹⁸ The recalled moments from his past were real, as they had once been part of his life and his experience. At the same time, by being “recalled,” they could be actual only somewhere else, whether in the past or in some other dimension, and ideal, as they stand for the quality of the specific moments that distinguish them from pure abstraction. The small crack of light beneath the doors made the same impression on me; it has recalled the past in a very vivid way and therefore real to me. Nevertheless, the perceived crack of light is not actual to me; it is actual somewhere else, where the memories associated with it are, in my memory, and in my imagination.

Proust writes about scent, noise, touch, etc, but knowing that television was not commercially available until the 1930’s, one might wonder if that would have changed the nature of his memories? Can images that derive from electronic media and which are shared world wide become a part of our life and our experience in the same way? How does Proust’s definition of the virtual relate to our understanding of the virtual today, and to the virtual via technology? In the following paragraphs, I will look at Margaret Morse’s experience of virtual reality in relationship to everyday reality. Her impassioned explanation of crossing the threshold between two realities will help to draw a parallel with my experiences here in Canada and to understand the crack of light under the door.

Morse’s first visit to a demonstration of the virtual reality at the VPL Labs in California (“Virtual Seattle”) was very attractive to her even if, according to her, it was not a

¹⁷ Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin

convincing imitation of the physical Seattle.¹⁹ The attraction came from the impression that the landscape was responsive to her and that she was performing in that world. The ability to fly virtually gave her a sense of weightlessness and superpowers that she had imagined in childhood and had read about in myths and comic books.²⁰

I was fascinated with being both *in* the picture and having *control* over it. That is, though I was virtually inside the scene or story-world inside in cyberspace, I also enjoyed the choice-making privileges about the order, direction, and the pace of what happened next. So, my role lay somewhere between that of the character inside the virtual environment and a narrator outside the virtual space. Furthermore, I could hear the voice of a controller/programmer/author leaking into my world from further “outside” while others nearby could see my fly-through of “Seattle” on a monitor. I could chase a whale or follow restaurant sounds to the Space Needle landmark, whatever took my fancy, and when I got tired of it, I could tell the operator at the computer, “Give me another world!”²¹

According to Margaret Morse “the virtual environments can signify ‘liminal’ spaces, sacred places of social and personal transformation like the cave or sweat lodge, if only by reason of their virtuality – neither imaginary nor real, animate but neither living nor dead, a subjunctive realm of externalized imagination wherein events happen in effect, but not actually.”²² It seems that participants, both in rituals and virtual environments behave similarly and have similar experiences as they “take on specific ‘usernames’ or identities, and many surreptitiously engage in activities they might not otherwise consider.”²³ In rituals, in a transitional, liminal place, neophytes are given new names, they are usually disguised or

(London: Chatto & Windus, 1981), 904.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Margaret Morse, *Virtualities: Television, Media Art, and Cyberculture*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 181.

²⁰ Ibid, 182.

²¹ Ibid, 183.

²² Ibid, 180.

²³ Shields, 13.

hidden and they are considered neither male or female, having no rank, status or property.²⁴ In cyberspace, every participation is followed with some changes regarding our identity. Some authors see those changes as giving away some part of ourselves.²⁵ However, I would argue that at the same time it can be read as a playful act in which we enjoy taking on different roles in order to join the virtual community.

If we look at the identity of people who participate in rituals, at the identity of people who are in transition, or at those who participate in virtual reality, the changes that they undergo and the experiences that they have are considerably alike, if not the same. Writing about identity in cyberspace, Morse discusses speculations about the identity of a subject who is immersed in virtual reality by writing that identity in this case does not split; on the contrary “the multiple aspects of 'personhood' and 'agency' in the landscape of cyberspace, like the 'second self' in the computer, are part of a long-term cultural trend (of which television is the greatest exponent so far) in which more and more of the task of enculturation that produces subjects out of human beings has been delegated to machines.”²⁶ I find both the ideas of the liminal and of the virtual equally important in my present situation as somebody who lives temporarily in a country that used to exist only in my imagination (“the virtual”), but which is now my new everyday reality. On the other hand, my “former reality,” the country in which I was born and grew up, has taken the place of the virtual. Contacts that I have with my family and friends are computer - mediated. We can “meet and see each other” only in cyberspace, but that does not make those contacts less real

²⁴ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977) 95.

²⁵ See the official website of the artist, <http://rebeccaallen.com/v2/work/pop.text.php?view=longDesc&ID=40>

²⁶ Margaret Morse, “Nature Morte: Landscape and Narrative in Virtual Environments” in *Immersed in Technology: Art and Virtual Environments*, eds. Mary Anne Moser and Douglas MacLeod (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), 199.

to me, or maybe it does? Although I am aware of a long tradition of artists whose works deal with the experience of being in exile, I cannot identify myself with them completely for many reasons. In the present day, people travel more often, more conveniently and faster than in the past, and even more importantly, they are surrounded by communication technologies. Because of electronic communication via e-mail, computer mediated phone calls, web cameras, etc, the feeling of being somewhere else is different, and the notion of distance appears as very ambiguous: I am physically here, but also very vividly “present and active” somewhere else. All these events intervene with everyday reality, and make my reality multiple.

I am interested in how we experience the transition from one world to another, when the imaginary world becomes the real one, and in that case, what happens with the previous one: do they switch places or become present at the same time? If in rituals, after the period of transition, participants gain new status and become reassimilated into society, does the same pattern apply in migration and in virtual reality? In a situation of changed perception, how does our identity change: do we stay the same, become “another,” or a hybrid? Arjun Appadurai writes about global culture in the transnational world and is interested in media and migration and their “joint effect on the *work of imagination* as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity.”²⁷ He stresses that “electronic media decisively change the wider field of mass media and other traditional media,”²⁸ which furthermore affects the field of mass mediation and brings changes in the way identity and imagined worlds are constructed. Since the forms of electronic media are widespread and present in our everyday life through

²⁷ Arjun Appadurai, “Here and Now” in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3.

²⁸ Ibid.

cinema, television, computers and telephones, he suggests that they also “provide resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project.”²⁹

He looks at migration, caused by many different reasons through human history, as a basis from which a permanent traffic of ideas of peoplehood and selfhood emerges and creates imagined communities. Referring to Marshall McLuhan's idea of the world as a “global village” he also reminds us of Joshua Meyrowitz's remark about the contradiction in this statement, that the main feature of the media is creation of “communities with 'no sense of place.’”³⁰ Appadurai looks at the world we live in as at once encouraging rootlessness, alienation, distance between individuals and groups and at the same time, open to fantasies and forms of proximity that come from electronic media. Victor Turner writes about communities in liminality, calling them “communitas” which he defines as “the state of oneness and total unity that neophytes living outside the norms and fixed categories of a social system share during liminal periods.”³¹ We could say that “communitas” parallels on-line communities in which people participate through websites for social networking, forums, blogs, on-line video games, etc, sharing the same space and interests regardless of social status, age, sex, or race. As in rituals, “certain physical and cultural features are often represented as disproportionately large or small... or incongruous forms may be created from components of familiar, culturally defined 'reality.’”³² Liminalities are encouraged, as Turner emphasizes, to ponder: “for when elements are withdrawn from their usual settings and recombined in totally unique configurations, such as monsters and dragons, those exposed to

²⁹ Appadurai, “Here and Now,”4.

³⁰ Joshua Meyrowitz quoted in Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” in *Modernity at Large*, 29.

³¹ Barbara Myerhoff, “Rites of Passage: Process and Paradox” in *Celebration, Studies in Festivity and Ritual*, ed. Victor Turner (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), 117.

them are startled into thinking anew about persons, objects, relationships, social roles, and features of their environment hitherto taken for granted.”³³

Appadurai states that media and migration are changing the new global cultural economy in such a way that it “has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models.”³⁴ To explore this disjuncture, he proposes to look at five dimensions (landscapes)³⁵ of global cultural flows and to see how they relate to each other. He sees them as “the building blocks of what... I would like to call *imagined worlds*, that is, the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe.”³⁶ He writes that through one of the landscapes, “mediascapes,” people can experience the media themselves as a complex and interconnected content of print, celluloid, electronic screens, billboards etc. That complexity derives from the observation that “the lines between the realistic and the fictional landscapes they [audiences] see are blurred, so that the farther away these audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects, particularly if assessed by the criteria of some other perspective, some other imagined world.”³⁷

Morse, writing about cyberspace says that, “at one time, travel through a landscape was both a practice and a metaphor that served to constitute the self... but the very notions of landscape and narrative, not to mention the activity of travel, have become problematic in

³² Victor Turner and Edith Turner, “Religious Celebrations” in *Celebration, Studies in Festivity and Ritual*, 205.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” in *Modernity at Large*, 32.

³⁵ Ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes. Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference,” 25.

cyberspace”³⁸ because “the user need not leave the spot to be 'there.’”³⁹ In the present day, in which people travel and change places more often and more conveniently, watch the same channels, and have access to the Internet almost everywhere, the information gathered from the outside world becomes a very important and relevant part of our identity. Cavell quotes David Summers, who stresses that “these inversions – of the public and the personal, of the conscious and the unconscious, of the real and the simulated – are themselves part of a much more fundamental shift in which technology has superseded 'nature' (and mediation has replaced presence), such that our very beings have been turned inside-out (because media are *extensions* of our bodies) and extruded into an 'environment' which is at once ourselves and utterly 'other': a prosthetic environment which appears foreign to us-even though it is us- because it is now outside us.”⁴⁰

The “new environment” in which we live today, is a complex, multidimensional space - our space, full of passages, predictable and unpredictable turns, fantastic events, in which we all participate daily, although the scale of them varies, as well as their transparency. Cavell writes that one of the characteristics of the ritual, “is to 'make strange' the everyday, thereby reminding us that the everyday is not as certain as we might think it to be,”⁴¹ which creates a “magical” space in which we as humans are privileged to live.

Barbara Myernoff explains the continued importance of rites of passage:

There is every reason to believe that rites of passage are as important now as they have always been, for our social and psychological well-being. Indeed, given the fragmented, confusing, complex, and disorderly nature of modern experience, perhaps they are more important: to orient and

³⁶ Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference,” 35.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Morse, “Nature Morte,” 193.

³⁹ Morse, “Nature Morte,” 198.

⁴⁰ David Summers quoted in Cavell, 39.

⁴¹ Cavell, 55.

motivate us in the predictable and unique life crisis that present themselves. But now we are left to devise for ourselves the myths, rituals, and symbols needed to endow life with clarity and significance; we do so alone, often in ignorance and always in uncertainty. Our needs have not changed, though the gods, demons, heroes, and spirits that once animated our ceremonies have fallen into disuse.⁴²

I agree that rituals and ceremonies have great importance in our lives at different stages. However, I would argue that the gods, demons, heroes, and spirits have not fallen into disuse. On the contrary, they are everywhere around us, although some of them might look a little bit different and may come from places that we are not accustomed to; they can be interwoven with another myth or spirit, or the same, but seen from another perspective, etc. As Shields reminds us, children believe in fairies, while adolescents and adults deny their existence, but on the other hand, they idolize screen characters,⁴³ and I would add, many other digital characters – avatars, that exist only in cyberspace. While none of those three types may exist physically, they are nonetheless important for our social and psychological well-being.

In the second Chapter, I continue to explore the complex relationship of “here” and “there” by discussing Salman Rushdie's critical analysis of the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, as it is closely related to one part of my art work that addresses the idea of home. Keeping in mind the previous discussion on mediated reality, rituals, and the great importance that technology plays in our lives, I will examine questions that consider home in present day: where/what is home, where does the myth about home reside, how far we do have to go to reach it, and how is home seen through displacement. In order to answer those questions, I will continue my examination of the liminal and the virtual, with emphasis on dreams,

⁴² Myernoff, 129.

⁴³ Shields, 40.

imaginary worlds, and thresholds. I will also address the video works of Mona Hatoum in which she explores displacement.

CHAPTER TWO: HOME AND DISPLACEMENT

Shortly upon my arrival in Canada, the concept of “home” became a part of every conversation. Certainly, questions about one’s home are inevitable when conversing with anyone who comes from somewhere else, and even more so if that “somewhere else” is geographically remote and politically changing. The more the word “home” has echoed in my ears, traveling back and forth in my mind, the more everything that I was doing and that I had done previously acquired a new perspective, before I had the time to become aware of all the changes that had happened to me. Overnight, I had gained the prefix “international,” as a student and an artist. This new experience led me to explore the ideas of home, threshold, and displacement, things that I would never have thought about if I had not come here – or at least not in the same way.

My arrival in Canada was not the result of a forced departure; I came here after many years of wanting to see North America, where all the images and stories of the “west” with which I grew up seemed to originate. I also came here to acquire a higher education, and as an artist, to look for new experiences. Despite the fact that I come from Eastern Europe, a politically very active part of the world, my arrival was not an escape. It was a desire to get to know the other, and in so doing, perhaps also to learn more about myself.

As I became interested in the idea of home and being “in between,” the movie *The Wizard of Oz* from 1939 became very important to my research. The movie is an international cultural object, and is a part of my childhood memory, in Serbia. It is filled with metaphors, but those that interest me in particular are those that consider themes of home, threshold, rites of passage, and dreams, along with the symbolic meaning of the famous ruby shoes and the movie's leitmotif, “There's no place like home.” Critical analyses of the movie

that I had the opportunity to hear and to read until now, originated mostly from seminars that I had attended in Belgrade organized for students at The Museum of Contemporary Art. Those analyses, as well as many others found in different publications written by theorists from Serbia and the Balkans, were infected by concerns with “The East” and “The West,” specifically communism (e.g. the Wicked Witch's guards are dressed up as Soviet soldiers, etc.). However, Salman Rushdie's critical analysis of the movie, which the British Film Institute published in 1992 as part of their “Film Classics series,” comes closer to my understanding of home, of leaving, of looking at another world and the movie. Therefore, in this chapter I will discuss Rushdie's ideas of home and liminality in relation to my own experience. I will also explore how the home is seen in displacement, in contemporary lifestyles (in the West and developing countries) in which electronic media and electronic devices are increasingly becoming a part of our everyday life. Through electronic media we can share the same imagery and communicate in real time with everyone in the world who has access. This affects our experience of distance and brings different worlds closer.

Starting from the influence that the movie had on him in becoming a writer, Rushdie unwraps the movie, scene by scene, and offers a new perspective on it. To experience “the other world,” Dorothy Gale, the leading character in the movie, needs to first be transported from one world (Kansas) to another (Oz). Kansas is recorded in black and white, with minimalistic set design. The viewer sees only vertical (telegraph poles) and horizontal lines (fences), and the background that is actually an oil painting. Everything is reinforced to depict as Rushdie notes, extreme poverty and emptiness, which make Kansas look “unreal.” Her “journey” from the home in Kansas to the wonderful Technicolor world of Oz, is caused by a tornado. The detachment is symbolically represented through sequences that involve

windows and doors - according to Rushdie seven in total. When the house lands, Dorothy opens the last door that separates her from the new world which she is about to enter, the movie reaches the moment of colour, and the new stage for her clearly begins. Her “passage” parallels the rites of passage that Victor Turner writes about in *The Forest of Symbols*, as she passes through exactly three stages: at first she is symbolically detached from the earlier period, then, during the second, intervening, liminal period, she is in a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past, in which she is in possession of magical powers, and in the third phase the passage is consummated.⁴⁴ Dorothy’s “journey” begins with a tornado that announces her entrance into another world and separation from the previous one. The second, liminal stage is her sojourn in Oz to which she has brought something from the past - her dog Toto, but in which she has gained attributes that she has not possessed before, (including heroine status for saving the Munchkins from the Wicked Witch of the East). She helps others to overcome their deepest fears and to fulfill their dreams, and she is the carrier of the magic ruby shoes. After fulfilling new tasks in Oz by leading others to their miracles, she uses the power of the magic ruby shoes to take her back to the world from which she came, right to the same spot-in her bed. However, her “return” is not an awakening from a dream as her Aunt and Uncle claim; the imagined world was a real place to her. In Oz, she was treated as she wanted to be in Kansas, as an adult person and because of that, her experience in Oz was valuable regardless of where it occurred.

The moving house, the crossing of thresholds, idealizations of another place “Where troubles melt like lemon drops...” (from the song “Over the Rainbow”) all speak of the human dream of going places, of leaving, of a “there” that is better than “here.” This is

⁴⁴ Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 94.

reinforced by many details such as the grayness of a geometrically organized Kansas compared to the excessively coloured world of Oz, where spirals and spheres are perfect and luminous. Yet as Rushdie notes, the movie's leitmotif points toward the idea of home, of returning home. This tension, between home and away, leaves us feeling guilty for having the idea that somewhere else could offer something that we do not possess already. For Rushdie, the movie is actually “about the joys of going away, of leaving the grayness and entering the color.”⁴⁵ When Dorothy comes back to Kansas, her house does not re-gain color as happens in the movie *Pleasantville* (1998). Everything is exactly the same as it was when she left; she is again only a child who nobody believes when she tells them that she was not dreaming, that her experience in Oz was real. By comparing Dorothy’s sojourn in Oz and her life in Kansas (before and after Oz), Rushdie concludes: “So Oz finally 'became' home; the imagined world became the actual world, as it does for us all...”⁴⁶ He says that once we leave our childhood place and start life on our own, we realize that the home that we know can never be the same to us, as we are not the same anymore. The leaving is not understood exclusively as going away in a physical sense; more importantly, it can happen in our imagination just like in Dorothy’s case.

“...we understand that the real secret of the ruby slippers is not 'there's no place like home', but rather that there is no longer any such place as home: except, of course, for the home we make, or the homes that are made for us, in Oz: which is anywhere, and everywhere, except the place from which we began”.⁴⁷

Rushdie highlights the difference between the home as a place where we are born and grew up, and the home(s) that we make for ourselves, “armed only with what we have and [what

⁴⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 57.

we] are.”⁴⁸ We can find those places everywhere in the world, but also in our imaginations and they can be real homes as long as we want them to be.

Even when Dorothy returns to Kansas, Oz is still real to her, which we notice when she strives to persuade others that Oz was “A real, truly live place!”⁴⁹ Today, we might not need a weather hazard such as tornado to transport us, as did Dorothy, to somewhere else, but the idea of leaving and experiencing other worlds is often a part of our personal development as human beings. This does not necessarily have to mean leaving in a physical sense. Other, virtual means of traveling are also important and may be fundamental for our personal development.

The idea of entering another world, in this case Oz, has a lot in common with virtual worlds, which are, with today's technological achievements, within our grasp. Dorothy's experiences in Oz resemble experiences that we have in cyberspace, and with virtual reality (VR). During Margaret Morse's first visit to a demonstration of virtual reality in California, she was finally able to experience something, via new technology that she had been dreaming about since her childhood – to have a superpower, as Dorothy had in Oz. Morse's experience in cyberspace was real to her, as Oz was to Dorothy. Like Morse, Dorothy ended up physically in the same place, where she began, but the events in which she took part and which she initiated were real, responsive to her, and have changed her.

Another similarity between Oz and the experience of virtual reality is Dorothy's change in status, what she was in Kansas and how she was represented in Oz. She moved from being a helpless child in Kansas, to the opposite – a leader, a heroine, a respected and

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

important person in Oz. This is similar to on-line avatars, visual representations that people create in virtual worlds which usually differ from the image of them in real life. Our current forms of “traveling” by looking at the screen, either television or cinema, or by navigating the Internet via a browser, do not appear as spectacular as a tornado. On the contrary, these are mundane acts for many people today, but from some other historical period, it might look different. Nonetheless, our experience of being “there,” on the other side, is not less real to us. It can make impressions on us with real consequences that are sometimes bigger and more important than anything else. Describing her excitement about being in cyberspace, navigating through the virtual Seattle, Morse writes: “The allure of this cyberscape was the impression that it was responsive to me, as if my gaze itself were creating (or performing) this world and that I was to some extent enunciating it according to my own desire ...Best of all, I had a sense of the weightlessness and superpower that I had imagined in childhood and had read about in myths and comic books, but had never before experienced, not even in my dreams.”⁵⁰ For Morse, technology had the “magic power” to “transport” her into another world, but also back into her childhood, when she dreamed about that superpower. Dorothy’s transportation was different but no less magical. Her “magic power” was her imagination that enabled her to visit the wonderful world of Oz, and to have experiences that go beyond dreaming, becoming part of her “real” life, as she is now truly a different person.

If the tornado functions as a portal to transfer Dorothy into another world, then the ruby slippers function as a teleport device for going home, wherever that is. She is using the magic power of the shoes to take her home by clicking her heels together three times and saying her wish out loud. This moment is replayed in science fiction movies and in television

⁴⁹ Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz* (London: British Film Institute 1992), 30.

series, for example, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987) where characters only need to touch the broach to be teleported to another place, regardless of the time period. They are usually teleported to another planet, but in special cases they can travel into the past in order to interfere with certain decisions that are decisive for the future and benefit society. It is always for a short period of time and they always come back. In *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, or in *Oz*, it is interesting that both devices, the broach and the ruby shoes, are very feminine objects, fashion accessories, and they do magical things, such as transporting those who have them through space and time.

In my video *Device*, (Fig.2.1. and Fig.2.2.), I focus on the moment from the movie when Dorothy is about to go home by using the magic power of the shoes. My shoes are multiple, each pair resembling the ruby slippers, through their colour or glitter. In playing with different types of shoes, from children's to adult's, accompanied by the appropriate walk, I am attempting to explore the human desire to return home, although I am not offering the image of the other place. By repeating the act of clicking the heels together three times and by changing the shoes' styles (so they represent different ages and activities), I am addressing an impossible act, a desire to achieve something that she did: to go home. My performance in the video in comparison to Dorothy's is imperfect. Although I am drawing on that magic moment, my shoes are not as shiny as hers are, my attempts are clumsy, full of mistakes, playful and humorous to some extent but persistent. Despite the practice and repetition, my attempts are still unsuccessful, a constant failure. The shoes mark the black surface, each performance leaves a trace.

⁵⁰ Ibid.



Fig.2.1: Slavica Panic, *Device*, (2008), video still.



Fig.2.2: Slavica Panic, *Device*, (2008), video still.

The projection of the video is small in scale; it corresponds to the actual size of my feet. The audio is based only on sounds which derive from different types of shoes. The sounds varies from a very sharp and clear, through more delicate and soft, and even slightly disturbing (a creaking sounds), etc. The video has a companion piece, *Place* (Fig.2.3. and Fig.2.4), which is silent and large in scale, occupying an entire wall in the gallery. The sentence “There is no place like home” is repeatedly written in red glitter in the form of a spiral. Each repetition plays with the words of the familiar sentence, dismantling its structure by rearranging the text and adding blank fields. So, instead of “There is no place like home,” the viewer sees “There _____ no ___ like _____,” then, “___ is no ___ like home,” “There is _____ place like __,” etc. The length of gaps between the words varies indicating other possible interpretations. As the spiral spins faster, what the viewer takes from the fragments is “There is no place like home,” taken from *The Wizard of Oz*. With gradual changes in speed and the camera’s movement zooming in/out, the viewer becomes immersed in the work while trying to read and fill in the gaps between the words. The text goes from out to in like a vortex, and the moving spiral creates a dizzying sensation like a tornado. Like the crack of light under the door triggering memories associated with *film noir* movies, the memories associated with this piece are tied to media images (*The Wizard of Oz*) and they provoke meanings that go beyond mere perception.

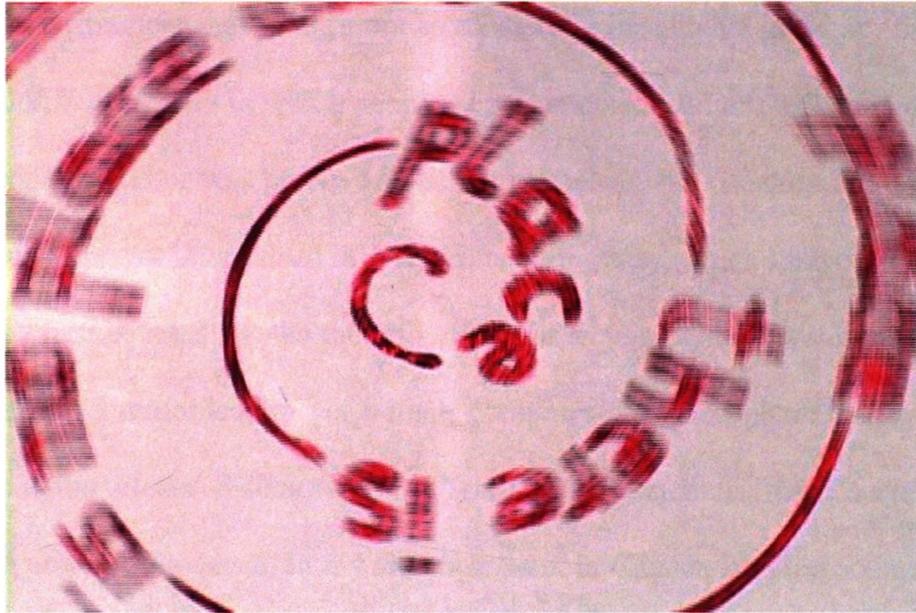


Fig.2.3. Slavica Panic, *Place* (2008), video stills.

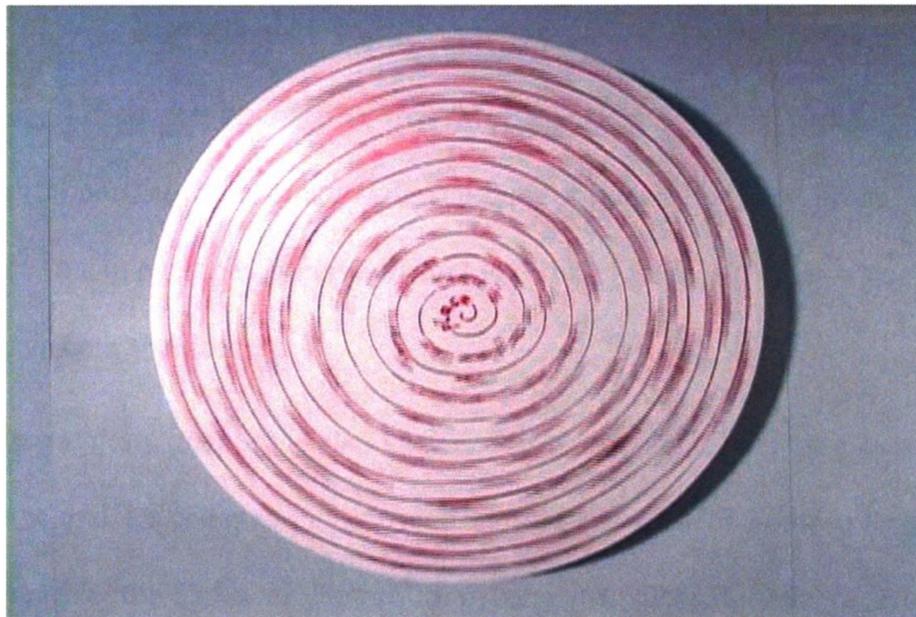


Fig.2.4. Slavica Panic, *Place* (2008), video stills.

As I said at the beginning of this chapter, the idea of home became very important to me, especially in the situation of being displaced. Displacement often describes the experiences of other artists whose works deal with exile or migration, which is different from my experience here in Canada. Despite experiencing similar challenges in integrating

into a new environment that is different from the one in which I grew up, facing language barriers and different ways in which people communicate, I did not feel isolated or distanced from everything I had or was before I came. Nevertheless, the situation did create a space in which past and present intertwined in a very interesting way, which I have been exploring.

In the first chapter, I noted the importance of technological developments in everyday communication (communication via e-mail, computer mediated phone calls, web cameras, etc.), in bringing closer distant worlds. Technologies such as these have considerably changed the notion of distance. In my situation here, in Canada keeping active contacts with my family and friends back in Serbia, I can say that I am physically here, but at the same time, I am present and active there too. Also, many events from my past appear in the present and interact with my daily reality. This creates many different levels of reality. For these reasons, I find the connection that Morse makes between technology, home and memory very important for my own understanding of home. For her, “home” can now exist in cyberspace, meaning it has become virtual and therefore easily accessible, transportable, and it is everywhere she goes.

Morse suggests memory is also virtual. She writes about her house as serving as both an entry point and an orientation, she realizes that the idea of home over the years has become more like the “idea of 'home' in cyberspace, deterritorialized, lifted out of its locale.”⁵¹ She spends her time at home in front of the television, radio, computer, and on the telephone. Her profession is tied to travel, which in the end, makes her a nomad. The experiences of media and technology help her to define what home is to her, by making parallels with ideas of cyberspace. If the home is deterritorialized, then she can carry the idea

of home with herself wherever she happens to be. To explain that, she uses the example of image of fruits in the market, that triggers her memories from childhood. Whenever she sees fruit in the market regardless of the time of the year and the place, the image that she recalls is always the same: her childhood memory of fruit that gleams in jars in the darkness of the her grandmother's cellar.⁵² By being able to reanimate the image of the fruit over and over again, Morse inscribes the idea of “home” into a new environment. For Morse, home and memory exist across the threshold of here/there, now/then. Some images from the past get lifted out of their locale and I would add, stay in a “space” that is somewhere in between the present and the past, accessible for recollection.

To further discuss displacement and how it relates to my experience, I chose the video work of Mona Hatoum, *Measures of Distance* (1988), (Fig.2.5.). Before I address analyses of the work itself, I will discuss her background and how it has informed her artistic work. Mona Hatoum was born into a Palestinian family in Beirut, Lebanon in 1952, and during a visit to London in 1975, civil war broke out in Lebanon and she was forced into exile. Today, she lives in London and Berlin. She started her career as a performance and video artist in the 1980s and a decade later, she became more interested in installations, often large scale, as well as sculpture, photography and works on paper. Drawing on her own experience, her works explore themes of confinement, displacement and exile and she considers herself a trans-national artist, a nomad, “a definition she has adopted by default rather than by choice.”⁵³ Jessica Morgan, in her essay “The Poetics of Uncovering” reminds us that Hatoum's personal experiences have greatly affected her work, but that approaching

⁵¹ Margaret Morse, “Home: Smell, Taste, Posture, Gleam” in *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, ed. Hamid Naficy (New York: Routledge, 1999), 72.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 73.

her as an “exile” who suffers “from some existential homelessness would be both misleading and reductive,”⁵⁴ because her work is inseparable from the artistic training that she received in London (England), and the cultural scene that she was part of in the 1980s, meaning she cannot be seen as “genuinely native.”⁵⁵ Morgan quotes Homi Bhabha's ideas on national identity from his essay “The World and the Home”:

...perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees – those border and frontier conditions – may be the terrains of World Literature. The center of such a study would neither be the “sovereignty” of national cultures, nor the “universalism” of human culture, but a focus on those “freak displacements” ...that have been caused within cultural lives of [colonial and] postcolonial societies.⁵⁶

Bhabha proposes that these “freak displacements,” happen in border conditions and produce merged identities, although, I would argue that the same experience exists outside such extreme conditions. Certainly, in the past, many foreign ideas came through colonization and wars, but in the present, we are familiar with other cultures through a variety of media, through which we may learn about others and ourselves, adopt their ideas and make them ours.

⁵³ Edward W. Said, and Sheena Wafstaff. *Mona Hatoum: The Entire World as a Foreign Land* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 2000), 41.

⁵⁴ Jessica Morgan, “The Poetics of Uncovering: Mona Hatoum In and Out of Perspective” in *Mona Hatoum*, (Chicago, Illinois: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997), 9.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Homi Bhabha, quoted in *Mona Hatoum*, (Chicago, Illinois: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997), 10.



Fig.2.5. Mona Hatoum, *Measures of Distance* (1988), video still.

Bhabha gives the example of literary works, drawing on Goethe's suggestion “that the possibility of a world literature arises from the cultural confusion wrought by terrible wars and mutual conflicts. Nations ‘could not return to their settled and independent life again without noticing that they had learned many foreign ideas and ways, which they had unconsciously adopted, and come to feel here and there previously unrecognized spiritual and intellectual needs.’”⁵⁷ According to Bhabha, this provides “the narrative with a double-edge... a difference “within”... And the inscription of this border existence inhabits a stillness of time and a strangeness of framing that creates the discursive “image” at the crossroads of history and literature, bridging the home and the world.”⁵⁸ This is where

⁵⁷ Goethe quoted in Homi Bhabha “The World and the Home,” *Social Text*, Third World and Post-Colonial Issues. No. 31/32, (1992), 141-153.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Hatoum's work is located. In the itinerary for Hatoum's monograph, Guy Brett writes: "Rather than referring to another reality somewhere else, the work grasped reality 'here and now', thereby allowing the spectator to become conscious, perhaps in a deeper, more internal way, of the experience of others. Fruitful contradictions between the real and imaginary become the very means of insight the artist uses."⁵⁹

In Hatoum's video *Measures of Distance* (1988), we are exposed to a multitude of measuring "tools" that reveal the narrative, layer by layer. We can hear the author, Hatoum, reading and translating her mother's letters from Arab into English, while we are watching letters written in Arabic that are superimposed onto photographs of her mother's body, functioning as another skin. We are told her personal stories. Her relationship with her mother and father is interrupted by the bombing of the main post office in Beirut, which cut off all communication.

The video is made in exile, in the place that is "somewhere else." Since Hatoum was not able to communicate with her family (due to bombing), she had to envisage the communication by reading aloud her mothers' letters. The viewer sees only the photographs of her mother's naked body, but the majority of the work relies on the viewer to imagine her story. Through the medium of video, she brings together two remote places, two time periods (of writing and reading the letters), two different kinds of realities, two different experiences – of mother and daughter. By using the video she establishes connection and bridges the space between her home country and her new country of residence, by making the one space, the virtual space in which everything can exist simultaneously; past and present, here and there, then and now. I would say that this conversation is real, like those

⁵⁹ "Guy Brett's Itinerary" in *Mona Hatoum*, Guy Brett and Catherine de Zegher, (London : Phaidon Press,

that we have through telephone or via email communication. Moreover, it resembles today's computer mediated phone calls with web cameras in which the quality and the speed of transmitted materials depends on speed of the Internet connection. Because of that, both video and audio are usually delayed by several seconds in which images often times appear as still images and a conversation is usually followed with pauses in which one side is waiting the other side to reestablish the connection.

Brett stresses that Hatoum's work has always been placed between dualities, but there is no separation of self and other, of the brain from the body, beauty from revulsion, art work from reality, etc.⁶⁰ Further on, he proposes 'the metaphor of place' "...because it can operate simultaneously in several different registers, in both life and art" and "it is always accompanied by its opposite: displacement."⁶¹

Hatoum measures distances/oppositions or differences between home and exile, in a way that creates a "complex narrative which interweaves private and public, individual and collective experience." Edward Said, who wrote about Hatoum's work in relation to exile, describes his own exile from Palestine as a 'kind of doubleness' in which "instead of looking at an experience as a single unitary thing, it's always got at least two aspects: the aspect of the person who is looking at it and has always seen it, looking at it now and seeing it now, and then as you are looking at it now you can remember what it would have been like to look at something similar in that other place from which you came."⁶²

In *Measures of Distance*, Hatoum offers multiple perspectives on her exile: her experience, her mother's, levels of mediation. Mediation becomes a character that both

1997.), 35-36.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 34.

⁶¹ Ibid.

informs and veils the story. Through her mother's letters we are informed about the exile in her family, that they were forced to leave their home country when she was a child. So, before Hatoum came to London and stayed there because of civil war in Lebanon and was forced into exile, the experience of exile was not foreign to her; it was already inscribed in her, although from one perspective, from Beirut and through stories that she had heard from her family. The new situation in London, and the art school in which she had enrolled, had opened up a new perspective for looking at exile, although it was still inseparable from her previous experience in Beirut, when she viewed things from the opposite side. This way of looking at exile, from the past into the present, and vice versa, constantly re-shapes her experience.

I find this aspect of looking at exile close to my experience here, although the nature of my sojourn is different than Hatoum's. The concept of communication that she explores in her works, the metaphor of place, the past-present relationship, plays important part in my everyday life here too, and in the works that I have made while being here. By coming to Canada, I became aware of the elasticity of the past, in the way that is open for revision, for reinscription, and of its ability to shift with the present, which makes the reality complex and challenging to define.

Said writes that the experience of exile is not something that can be simply transmitted to someone who has not had it, nor can it be straightforward or one-sided, even for the person who experienced it. In looking back at it, the person adds to the complexity of circumstances that made that experience possible, but at the same time, the complexity of circumstances enables that person to look back at it, so to distance oneself from it. In this

⁶² Rosemary Betterton, "Identities, Memories, Desires." in *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 190.

way, one might evoke this experience in the present moment, as something that is happening right now, right here, both in a psychological and physical sense. Further on, Said explains how a person who did not share a certain experience might relate to it: observing someone's experience might trigger the imagination by projecting oneself into such a situation, but only in an environment that one finds familiar. Therefore, the only way that one might relate to an unknown experience is to inscribe the unfamiliar situation in a familiar environment.

The experiences of exile parallels my experiences here, and can also be applied to many other experiences in which people change the place they live, for many different reasons. Hatoum uses video as a medium to communicate her exile, revealing the story layer by layer, just as the letters and images are replacing each other. She sets up correspondences among mother and daughter, family stories, representation of woman, feminism, the political situation in her country, etc. The video communicates her story in many different registers and therefore it offers more inputs to a viewer's imagination to help find a way to relate to her experience. Through the personal story, she addresses an extremely difficult situation in her family without showing images of war; instead, she chooses a mother-daughter narrative. Through the analyses of her video, and through multiple levels of looking at displacement that she offers to the viewer, I would say that displacement is not foreign to people today. It is present in a myriad of narratives that exists everywhere around us; in those that we get through media, in stories from somebody that we know, in those that we transmit from our travels, or in those that are made in our dreams. As it is discussed in this chapter, we can no longer think about our existence in terms of sovereignty of national cultures, as we are not exposed only to one culture and to one type of experience. Merged identities, "freak displacements," require a new perspective of looking at existence.

Following Bhabha's thoughts on the experience of being in exile, I would agree with his suggestions that in the beginning of the new century we need to think about our existence in terms of "beyond," "which is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past..."⁶³ Being in the "beyond" is not for him only inhabiting an intervening space; he sees that space as a revisionary time in which one can "reinscribe our human, historic commonality; *to touch the future on its hither side.*"⁶⁴ According to him, we are in a moment of transit "where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion."⁶⁵ He says that we need to think beyond narratives of ordinary subjectivities, and to focus on moments or processes that occur in the articulation of cultural differences. Only in that way can we benefit from being in those spaces in-between and develop innovative approaches to defining ourselves and our society as well. Through this process, the past is not simply recalled. It is rather seen in an active state, renewing itself constantly and interrupting the present in an innovative way, in which "The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living."⁶⁶

Bhabha's concept of "beyond," or "in-between" is something that characterizes our existence today, which also brings a sense of disorientation and disturbance of direction. During my sojourn here, I became interested in defining the specificity of the space in which I have found myself. The more that I was working on my research on my new environment and my new reality, the more I was becoming aware of the complexity of the situation that brought me here in the first place. A constant shifting between my past and present, European and Canadian/North American culture, the real and the imagined, has led to a

⁶³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 1.

⁶⁴ Bhabha, 7.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

questioning of reality itself and of my identity, too. I could not have imagined how much of North American culture I already had inscribed in myself, even if it was obtained through media such as cinema, music, television, press and the Internet. In this light, I would say that my experiences here are media experiences in a form of ritual. To explain that, I will refer to McLuhan's ideas quoted in Cavell's essay "Dreaming awake," in which he argues that mass media are equally structured by myth and ritual.⁶⁷ The participants are informed through media, and more importantly, involved in its content. Cavell expands his idea stating that if involvement is one of the myths of the global village, then displacement is the other. If through involvement "one (symbolically) lives through (symbolic) events, then in a television ritual that event has been powerfully displaced and so has the self that experiences the event."⁶⁸ Another theorist who discusses media and society in relation to ritual is James Carey. He offers two views of communication: transmission and rituals. The transmission or transportation view is formed from a metaphor of geography or transportation. In the center of this idea of communication is the transmission of signals or messages over distance for the purpose of control.⁶⁹ However, the ritual view in which I am interested, "conceives communication as a process through which a shared culture is created, modified, and transformed."⁷⁰ He continues:

A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but the maintenance of society in time (even if some find this maintenance characterized by domination and therefore illegitimate); not the act of imparting information or influence but the creation, representation, and celebration of shared even if illusory beliefs. If a transmission view of communication centers on the extension of messages across geography for purposes of control, a ritual view centers

⁶⁷ Marshall McLuhan quoted by Cavell in *Ritual Economics*, 42.

⁶⁸ Cavell, 51.

⁶⁹ James W Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 42.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

on the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality.⁷¹

Media experiences are a form of ritual which involves us in rites of passage. Every time we are exposed to media content, either via television, or the Internet, or through cinema, we “leave” our everyday, mundane life, get involved in media content, and then return to the mundane. Participation in media events allows us to share the experiences with others, to become a part of a larger group, and to change who we are. Whenever we get involved in media content we find ourselves in the virtual space of media, in liminality, “dreaming awake.”⁷²

The previously discussed ideas about liminality, Oz, the virtual, displacement in Hatoum’s work, Bhabha’s thoughts on exile and national identity, all address in-between spaces, crossroads, doubleness, in which past and present, space and time, the real and the virtual cross each other in innovative and unexpected ways in which our identity is challenged and formed. In the non-Western societies about which Turner writes, rites of passage in which participants undergo challenges and transitions are perhaps the most visible, but they exist today in our culture too, The experiences that we get through media are our contemporary rituals, and are equally important, as Myernoff says, in helping us orient in a complex, and confusing modern life. Through the rituals that participants undergo they have the opportunity to change who they are in relationship to society and to themselves, and I would add that those changes do not happen exclusively within the society in which we are born. They can happen anywhere we happen to be, and in our imaginations, too. In Dorothy’s case, she has passed all three stages that have changed her without her leaving in a physical sense. Hatoum addresses home and exile by creating narratives that interweave two

⁷¹ Carey, 43.

different worlds, two different experiences. In the present day, with technological developments, where the notion of distance and travel has changed, we have even more worlds and experiences to explore and to inscribe in ourselves.

⁷² Cavell, 55.

CHAPTER THREE: FICTION VERSUS REALITY

The thesis has thus far discussed displacement in the work of Mona Hatoum, and in the writings of Homi Bhabha and Edward Said. I will now look at the work of another artist, who addresses displacement in a different but striking way. In this Chapter, I will explore the video works of Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist, in which she plays with gender and uses materials and ideas from different mass media in order to construct an imaginary, dream-like world.

In *Modernity at large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Arjun Appadurai offers a discussion of what he calls “the work of imagination” that can help us understand Rist’s work. Appadurai suggests that, “there has been a shift in recent decades, building on technological changes over the past century or so, in which imagination has become a collective, social fact. This development, in turn, is the basis of the plurality of imagined worlds.”⁷³ He reminds us that imagination has broken out of the special space of art, myth and ritual and “has now become a part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people in many societies.”⁷⁴ This change has its precedents in the past, in the great revolutions, cargo cults, and messianic movements, led by specially endowed individuals, who were responsible for “injecting the imagination where it does not belong.”⁷⁵ Their visions, implemented into social life of ordinary people, became a part of everyday life and in turn, it made it possible for them to imagine life somewhere else, outside the place where they were born. With the electronic media that we have today, the realm of mediation has been altered and expanded. Through electronic media, different kinds of content from all around the

⁷³ Appadurai, “Here and Now,” 5.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

world, become easily accessible. As a consequence, this has changed the meaning of the “everyday.” Appadurai sees media as:

resources for experiments with self-making in all sorts of societies, for all sorts of persons. They allow scripts for possible lives to be imbricated with the glamour of film stars and fantastic film plots and yet also to be tied to the plausibility of news shows, documentaries, and other black-and-white forms of telemediation and printed texts.⁷⁵

Today, instead of meeting charismatic individuals “in person,” we experience them on screen. Although they are mediated presences, their variety is greater, and the contents that they transfer are equally relevant for our experiences. As a result of their variety, we have also the opportunity to choose among what is offered.

Unlike Mona Hatoum’s experience of being in exile, or my own experience as an international art student living in another country, Rist’s work is not defined by those kinds of experiences. However, even if she has not lived outside her country in a similar way, she has been exposed to four different cultures her entire life, owing to the fact that she is from Switzerland, a multilingual country that has four national languages. By being surrounded with different languages (cultures) from an early age, she grew up sharing the imagined space in which these cultures coexist. It had helped her later in her works to portray a space that is somewhere else, both in her imagination, and, to a large extent, in ours too. I would say that many people in the world share elements of her dreams since the materials of which her videos are composed, are derived from mass media, another “collective social fact.” Her works are fantastical and surreal, as she connects those materials in an unexpected way, and uses them to imagine plots to help her find her identity as a woman artist in society. Rist’s work is tied to imagination, understood in Appadurai’s sense, as a social fact, a shared

⁷⁵ Ibid, 3-4.

experience, that she further uses to address gender. As it is noted in the publication for The Museum of Modern Art in 1999, her imagery invites many interpretations, since her resources are “as rich and varied as fairy tales, feminism, contemporary culture, and her own imagination,”⁷⁶ which together create seductive, colour-saturated, kaleidoscopic projections. It continues: “Fiction-versus-reality is an important theme for Rist, in whose work an odd combination of nightmare and magic prevails over the logic of common sense.”⁷⁷ I find this duality, “fiction versus reality” very provocative and important for my thesis, and I will explore it by using two examples of her video installations: *Ever is Over All* (1997), and *Sip My Ocean* (1996), and one of my installation works, *The Endless Passages* (2008).

For a better understanding of her work, it is important to note Rist’s interest and involvement with popular music. Her work is often noted for being influenced by music videos,⁷⁸ and she has created stage-sets for bands. In 1988, she had performed and recorded with the band “Les Reines Prochaines,” whose members are five women. Her name is also significant to her work since her first name is a fusion of her given name, Charlotte, with Astrid Lindgren's 1950 storybook character, Pippi Longstocking. The book series was adapted for a film and television series shown in many countries becoming accessible to a larger audience and forming a part of childhood memories for many people, from many nations, including myself. Looking at the adventurous character with the unique hair style, many children dreamt of having Pippi’s superpower. On books and video covers she is often described as having the strength of Superman, or ten policemen. She possesses superhuman physical powers and in the movies, she can be seen pulling bars out of a jail window,

⁷⁶ Harriet Schoenholz Bee and Cassander Heliczer, eds. *MOMA Highlight: 350 Works from the Museum of Modern Art, New York*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004), 366.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

throwing pirates across a room, or lifting up a horse or a car. Rzakiewicz, while describing the character of Pippi, gives an important insight into the character of Rist and her works shown at an exhibition in Montreal:

While her actions sometimes seem dangerous and silly, they usually carry a great deal of wisdom and generosity, and she is easily prepared for heroic gestures that demand extraordinary reactions. But sometimes she gets carried away and is just plain naughty. It's this aspect that makes her even more unpredictable and precludes any superhero construct for others to relinquish their own decision making capacities to. Pippi acts as the subconscious released and restored to plain sight, running amok with her fire-red braids sticking out at right angles to her head.⁷⁹

Like Pippi Longstocking, Rist's work has a quality of a dream, a fairytale, of fantasy and naive childish optimism. Rist states: "What we [artists] offer are dreams and distanced reflection in a concentrated temporal and sensual form. I can tolerate living like this, bordering on schizophrenia."⁸⁰ Living on the border of two "realities," she explores what we know about the reality, but also what is our place in a society and how our identity is structured in it. By doing so, she offers a world in which everything is possible: smashing an automobile's windows during daylight in front of a policewoman, a flower made of steel, kitchen utensils as natural parts of an underwater world, etc. By creating such an extraordinary world that addresses women in many situations, she is able to question everything that we know either about woman's position in society or about objects that relate to her. Mangini writes that Rist:

must transgress gender in order to create from a stance that is not dominated by the controlling patriarchal system... The woman artist must therefore see both as subject and object, a splitting that allows her to view the system of patriarchy with a critical eye and simultaneously to envision

⁷⁸ Joan Rzakiewicz, "I am a birch tree": Pipilotti Rist (Monitor blossoms) (exhibition). *Etc.* *Montreal*. 52 (Dec-Feb 2000): 44-9.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Richard Julin and Tessa Praun, eds. *Pipilotti Rist Congratulations!* (Baden, Switzerland: Lars Müller Publishers, 2007), 23.

a new concept of woman as the subject of representation. It is this double-
vision that drives the work of Swiss video-installation artist Pipilotti Rist.
81 82

The transgression of gender roles places Rist in-between, in liminality, which gives her the freedom to explore both sides and the opportunity to change who she (woman) is in relationship to society and to herself. To discuss these ideas and the influence of media in creating our sense of reality, I will look at Rist's video installation *Ever is Over All* (1997).

Ever is Over All (1997) (Fig.3.1.), is a video installation in which two projections on adjacent walls are accompanied by a melancholic melody; on the right we can see a large, bright, red long-stemmed flower, shot in close-up, and on the left, in medium and long shots, we can see a larger field and the actor who is carrying that flower – a young, smiling woman. The video installation appears to be a modern day fable, representing a beautiful woman wandering down the street, swinging a large flower, that to our surprise, she uses to strike parked automobiles and, to her delight, shatters their windows. The flower turns out not to be soft, but hard. During the act of vandalism, which she enacts joyfully, she is not alone; a policewoman appears from behind and instead of arresting her, approves of her behavior with a friendly salute. Two projections are accompanied by two soundtracks whose speeds are manipulated according to the projections. The projection with the flower is set to a heavy and low sound, while the adjacent one, with the leading character, is accompanied by light and melodic sound.

⁸¹ Elizabeth Mangini, "Pipilotti's Pickle: Making Meaning from the Feminine Position Author(s)," *A Journal of Performance and Art*, Vol. 23, No. 2, (May, 2001), 1-9.

⁸² Edward Said describes his exile in terms of "doubleness," of looking at experience from two aspects.

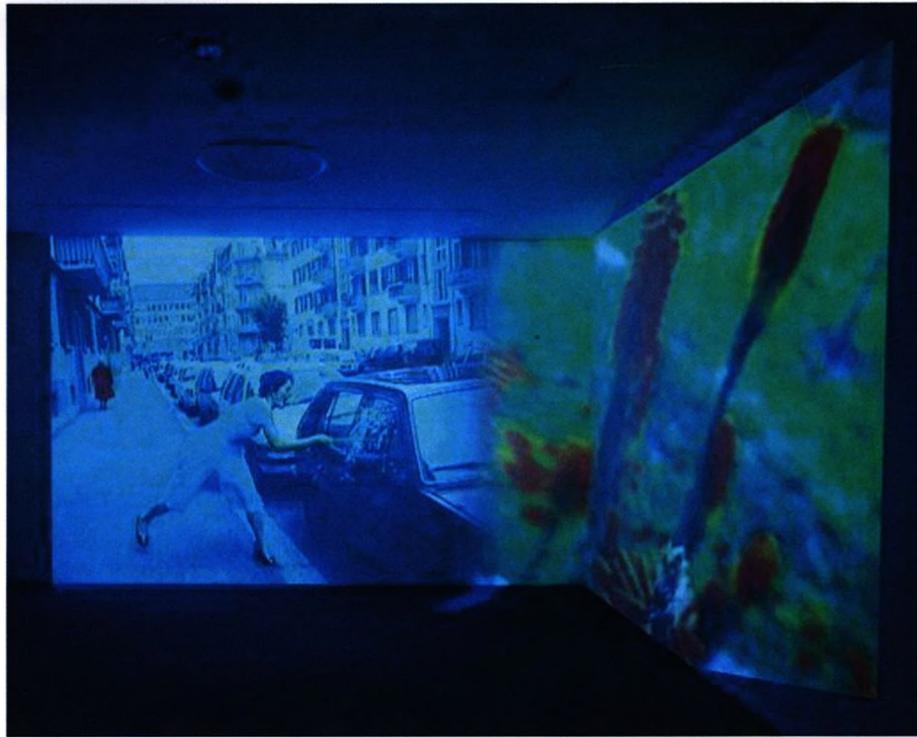


Fig.3.1. Pipilotti Rist, *Ever is Over All*, (1997), installation view.

The main actress is dressed in a blue dress and red shoes, which resemble Dorothy Gale's costume from the movie *The Wizard of Oz*. The shoes that Dorothy has in the movie are everything but ordinary: they are magic, they fulfill wishes, and they are a traveling device. Whenever the ruby slippers appear outside of "Oz," either in another movie or in a different medium, they instantly invoke a *mise en scène* for magic things to happen, encouraging the expectation of a dreamlike sequence or an impossible act. The third object that completes "the magic apparel" is the magic wand, or in Rist's video, the red long-stemmed flower. Having in mind the imagery borrowed from *The Wizard of Oz*, what we expect is reversed in Rist's video: the meek Dorothy character appears as a vandal, and the red flower is not a soft, fragrant plant, but a hard metal object used for shattering automobile windows. The behavior of Rist's actor is approved by authority itself, which in the world that we live in is impossible. However, it is not accidental that authority is represented as a *policewoman*; her approval appears as a silent and secret agreement between the two women.

Writing about Rist's work, Elizabeth Mangini looks at a woman's transgression in terms of the carnivalesque. She draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's idea that "the carnival marks the temporary lapse of rationality and order, which includes freedom from traditional symbolic systems,"⁸³ and accordingly, gives Rist's character a temporary license for subversion. It also parallels rites of passage, in which neophytes are ambiguous and in possession of magical powers, and during which they take on different personalities,⁸⁴ etc. Expanding her thoughts on the carnivalesque, Mangini emphasizes that "the manipulation of the speed of the soundtrack and the projection leave the viewer slightly disoriented, off balance...extending the carnivalesque to real space."⁸⁵

Rist's actor, though dressed up as Dorothy, does not reflect innocence. On the contrary, she is older and is a very violent woman. In this way we have a confusion of traditional concepts of gender: we do not expect this type of behavior from a woman, and even less so from a girl, such as Dorothy. Nevertheless, innocence and violence are common in rituals, and usually go together. In many tribes, when participants pass from childhood to adulthood, they undergo special challenges that might be seen as violent in our society, but for tribal members, they are a set of regular norms that someone has to fulfill in order to enter the world of adulthood.

In Rist's installation, we notice constant overlapping of the imaginary and the real. On one side, we have an ambiguous character performing an unusual act, with the flower, a symbol of woman, of peace, now serving as a tool for destruction. On the other side, we are offered grey buildings, an ordinary street, and a police officer appearing from afar. Yet this double-vision is accompanied by two soundtracks, as Mangini notices: "The layering and

⁸³ Mangini, 1-9.

⁸⁴ Turner, *The forest of Symbols*, 94.

interplay of these two soundtracks underscores the opposing but interpenetrating doubled projection.”⁸⁶ She continues that at the moment when the police officer surveys the damaged automobiles, we expect that the dream is about to end, but to our surprise, the police officer is not an ordinary officer, but a woman, wearing red lipstick, who smiles, approves of the behavior and leaves the scene. By leaving Rist’s actor unpunished for the destructive behavior, as we expect to happen in a society that we live in, Rist delays the end of the dream. She leaves us, the viewer, caught in her imaginary world, wondering about its rules. The projection on the wall extends the space of the dream, due to which, “The viewer is visually and physically enveloped in Rist’s transgression.”⁸⁷ Mangini suggests that central to the success of *Ever is Over All* is “the inability to draw clear boundaries, to separate dream from reality. Both technically and ideologically, this incapacity to distinguish the real from simulation is at the core of Rist’s subversion.”⁸⁸ Here again we encounter the liminal in mediated form.

Another of Rist’s work that I would like to examine in this chapter is the video installation *Sip My Ocean* (1996), (Fig 3.2), which presents an exquisite “aquatic paradise.” This eight-minute-long, single-channel video is recorded almost entirely underwater. Besides the bodies of two swimmers, jellyfish and other marine life, there is a sequence of blue sky. The flow of the clouds is manipulated with computer software and sped up, which is a type of scene usually used in movies for story-telling, to announce time passing. Rist incorporates small household objects usually associated with a woman: a teapot, a grater, a plastic heart, an orange toy mobile home and “other brightly colored domestic objects which gently sink

⁸⁵ Mangini, 1-9.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

to the bottom of the sea without stirring a wave, introducing references to the domestic environment, which reappear in a number of Rist's works.”⁸⁹



Fig.3.2. Pipilotti Rist, *Sip My Ocean*, (1996), installation view.

As Eleanor Heartney writes, *Sip my Ocean* “offers a fish-eye view of a fantasy world, full of seaweed gardens, coral reefs, schools of exotic fish. A mermaid-like woman drifts by, household objects sink into the sea, and a soundtrack plays a love song written by Chris Isaak and performed by Rist.”⁹⁰ The projection comprises two identical images at right angles from a single source which converge in the room’s corner. One of the images is flipped and creates a mirror image, which according to John B. Ravenal:

makes the corner function as a hinge between the projections, a stable juncture from which the imagery appears to radiate and behind which it seems to disappear, producing doubling and mutating forms that further

⁸⁹ Rzakiewicz, 44-9.

⁹⁰ Eleanor Heartney, “Video Installation and the Poetics of Time” in *Outer and Inner Space, Pipilotti Rist, Shirin Neshat, Jane&Louis Nelson, and the History of Video Art*, ed. John B. Ravenal (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2002), 19-20.

distort and disorient. The entire piece plays in a continuous cycle with no real beginning or end, although the song repeats twice before the imagery begins a new cycle.⁹¹

The projected kaleidoscopic images activate the wall of the gallery space in an unusual way and pose the question, where do the images lead to? The animated wall resembles the hinged door of some secret passage that has just opened up in front of the viewer, and the only way of entering into the space behind the wall is through Rist's video. In that way the viewer is physically in the gallery, but mentally may move somewhere else. The viewer becomes part of Rist's work, and the "transportation" is enabled not only through Rist's imagery, it is also reinforced with the specific way of projecting the work that immerses the viewer, producing a feeling of suspended time. The environmental scale of the work, the mirror images that disappear in the corner of the gallery, extreme close-ups of the swimmers in the video, the familiar music that changes towards the end of the video, "create a multi-sensory environment that is intended to wrap around the viewer and make him or her, in some way, part of the action."⁹²

The projection is accompanied by Rist's interpretation of Chris Isaak's ballad "Wicked Game". In contrast to Isaak's dreamy and seductive ballad, Rist's is more child-like, a screaming and slightly disturbing version. John Ravenal notices that "Isaak's song "Wicked Game" is a stylized and laconic expression of heartbreak. Rist plays up this emotional contrast. Her deliciously feminine vocals, accompanied by a truly elastic slide guitar, create a lulling, hypnotic effect for much of the song. The voice of rage that breaks through the sweet veneer toward the song's end comes as a shock."⁹³ He sees Rist's interpretation as a liberating force of gender. This is a woman's (re)interpretation of a love

⁹¹ Ravenal, *Outer & Inner Space*, 30.

⁹² Heartney, 18.

song, perhaps representing her side, her experience of love. The opposite of Issak's calm, controlled version, Rist's is filled with emotions, with a voice that ranges from gentle and feminine, toward angry and childish shrieking, emotions without control. Throughout the video, what is offered to the viewer is a woman as a subject. This is the position that she uses in most of her works to address the feminine. But, as in *Ever is Over All*, she works to transgress gender, because "She cannot merely appropriate the male position for her own, nor can she reject the other entirely, since the first underscores her own lack and the latter is essentializing."⁹⁴

Besides the song, she uses visual elements from Isaak's music video for "Wicked Game." The story-telling moment represented by the flow of clouds is present in both videos, both include scenes recorded by water (and underwater in Rist's video), even some of the camera angles are the same, as well as the close-ups of the woman in a bikini. However, Rist's video is color saturated, compared to Isaak's black and white and the leading person is a woman, Rist. Rist takes on the role of a singer, a pop star, she interprets Issak's video to create a version from her own perspective. By using the position of a woman as a subject, she is not just displacing the male artist, but also the male gaze. She positions herself outside the norms that the patriarchal system proposes. Her videos are rites of passage in which she is allowed to become whoever she wants and need to be, in order to define her position in society. Her new position can be understood in terms of "beyond," as Bhabha suggests when discussing the experience of being in exile. Rist's displacement is not caused by changes in a physical sense, nor is part of a dream as in Dorothy's case; the power of her imagination lies in her ability to use materials, images from mass media with which

⁹³ Ravenal, *Outer & Inner Space*, 30.

⁹⁴ Mangini, 1-9.

most of us are familiar, but in an innovative way. By doing so, she is re-inscribing her gender into another space, which places her not only in-between, but “beyond,” in an imaginary place where she can be what she is, a woman artist.

After having discussed images and stories derived from mass and electronic media, the influence and role that they have in Rist’s works, my experience of Western culture, and the imagery and stories built around it, I will conclude this chapter with a discussion of Appadurai’s thoughts on mediation and migration. As I have noted in the previous chapter, my experience in Canada has been strongly influenced and shaped by my memories of the mediated West, and because of that, my experience of displacement is not what I had anticipated. Instead, it has opened up questions regarding reality and fiction, memories and dreams, and I have found myself in a situation in which space and time overlap involuntarily. Calling attention to mediation, Appadurai states that the experience of mass migration has marked human history for a long time, but the difference today is that it is now “juxtaposed with the rapid flow of mass-mediated images, scripts, and sensations,” and so creates “a new order of instability in the production of modern subjectivities.”⁹⁵ To describe the relationship between mass mediated events and migratory audiences he writes:

Thus, to put it summarily, electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present not as technically new forces but as ones that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of imagination. Together, they create specific irregularities because both viewers and images are in simultaneous circulation. Neither images nor viewers fit into circuits or audiences that are easily bound within local, national, or regional spaces. In this sense, both persons and images often meet unpredictably, outside the certainties of home and the cordon sanitaire of local and national media effects.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Appadurai, “Here and There,” 4.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Drawing on Appadurai's thoughts on "specific irregularities," or, as Bhabha suggests, "freak displacements," merged identities seem to characterize modern subjectivities. However, as I have mentioned in the second chapter, modern subjectivities also exist outside such extreme conditions as exile. I have found this in Rist's work. Rist's "migration" cannot be understood in a purely physical sense. However, she is a migrant too, a displaced person, insofar as she is a female artist who wants to create meaning outside the symbolic order that patriarchal society has set up for women. To achieve that, she has to transgress gender in her videos, which becomes a ritual for her and therefore places her into liminality. In her videos she uses a story-telling moment, either referring to Dorothy and Oz, or to a singer who remembers his/her love. By the end of the videos, she has introduced an unexpected turn: the Dorothy look-alike actor turns into a vandal, and the gentle and feminine voice from a love song turns into angry, childish shrieking. She changes the symbolic order, and creates a position for herself in it by following the same set of actions each time.

Drawing on fantasy/reality discussion in Rist's work, I will now discuss one of my installation works, *The Endless Passages* (Fig 3.3 and Fig. 3.4). The installation consists of approximately eighty handmade doors, 21cmx8cm each. Painted in white, they are arranged into the symbol for infinity, representing the constant transition from one space to another. In the center of the installation are two sources of light, suspended from the ceiling and almost touching the floor. The light passes through the gaps beneath the doors and through their hinges, and casts shadows in different sizes. Since the light sources are not fixed in place they move slightly, causing the sizes of the shadows to vary; they overlap each other and create a somewhat disturbing environment. The doors lead to nowhere and the focus is

on mental passages. The infinity shape suggests the constant transitions, rites of passage that we undergo throughout our lives, that lead us to be in-between, in liminality.

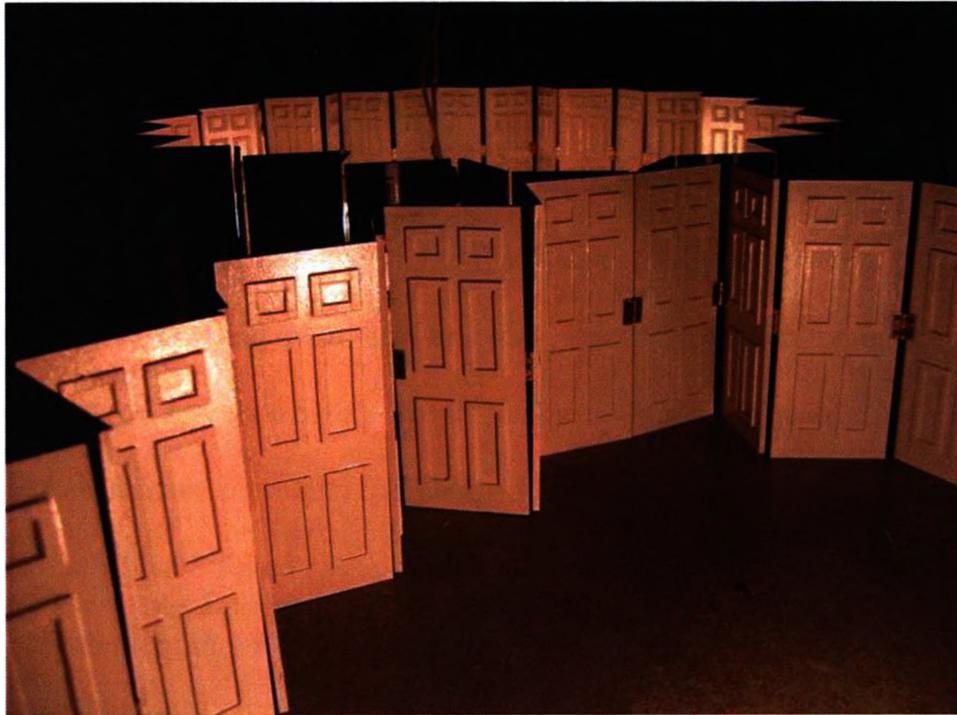


Fig.3.3. Slavica Panic, *The Endless Passages*, (2008), installation view.



Fig.3.4. Slavica Panic, *The Endless Passages*, (2008), installation view.

The atmosphere that the miniature doors create by casting disproportional, gigantic shadows is close to a dream, and perhaps to a nightmare, depending on the experience that is on the other side of the door; sometimes, the passage will be pleasant but it can be frightening, too. The illuminated gaps beneath the doors refer back to the *film noir* allusions in my video, *Here and There*. In both works, the illuminated threshold appears as a very active and powerful spot (in both the physical and symbolic senses) where we encounter the past and the present, here and there, now and then, etc, and of experiencing the unknown. In *The Endless Passages* there are eighty thresholds but an infinity of possibilities . . .

The research on liminality has helped me to understand the complexity of the situation in which I have found myself and to become aware of a larger field of mediation and cultural interaction, in which we are borrowing others' stories and dreams, building new ones for someone else, and living our lives somewhere in-between. Sometimes, we can even be fortunate or brave enough to touch and feel the dream itself, which will open another door for us to discover, another mystery to live.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the research for this thesis project, I have examined different concepts which share an interest in being in-between, liminal, inhabiting a place in which opposed ideas coexist and overlap each other in innovative ways. As a consequence, this changes notions of the “everyday,” so everyday events and objects appear as new yet oddly familiar, and provokes questions regarding reality itself.

During my sojourn here in Canada, I became aware that the movies that I watched as a child were an important part of my experience, of my memories, and therefore, as Appadurai suggests, of my identity. The (re)appearance of some images and scenes from the movies in my everyday life here have created a space characterized by ambiguity, and has prompted the research on my media-saturated world. Since I could not treat these images/events as simple forms of physical reality, I looked to the exploration of the virtual as a way of understanding my experiences. By looking into memories understood as virtual, but also into experiences of the technologically-created virtual, I was finally able to understand my new environment and to make sense of my new reality.

The real and the virtual coexist and constitute each other in liminality, which is frequently connected with transformation or migration, and so with my displacement, too. Media and migration, according to Cavell, create a multidimensional and “magical” space in which we as humans are privileged to live. The circulation of both viewers and images create specific irregularities in which identity is constructed. Here, the experiences of media can be understood as forms of contemporary rituals, that help us orient ourselves in the complex world in which we live. Perhaps even more so, they help us understand ourselves, by learning about new realities, and in turn, by reconnecting us with our pasts.

The thesis also discusses displacement and its relationship to the concept of “home,” in which media now play an important role, through both representations and mediated experiences of home. I have found that new technologies, especially the Internet, provide new types of communication (via email, web cameras and computer – mediated phone calls) that considerably change our notions of distance, and so also affect the concept of home. Through constant mediated contacts with people and our reality “there,” we cannot think of distance now as it was addressed for example in Mona Hatoum’s video *Measures of Distance*; today, we are experiencing the merging of many different concepts at many different levels, bridging the world and home in new ways, as Bhabha suggests. From one side, this fusion can be appealing and challenging to explore, but from the other side it is also a source of confusion and disorientation which demands new approaches, such as rituals, to help us orient ourselves to this new type of reality.

With the electronic media that we have today, the realm of mediation has been altered and expanded. As a result, different kinds of content from all around the world become easily accessible and important resources for experiments with self-making (Appadurai). In this light, imagination becomes a social fact, a shared experience, which many artists use today to address specific issues. Pipilotti Rist uses it to address gender, to imagine plots to help her find her identity as a woman artist in a patriarchal society, which then becomes forms of ritual for her and therefore places her into liminality.

Finally, I would like to say that my sojourn here has changed me in a way that I could never possibly have imagined I had the opportunity to learn about others, but since every displacement is a process with multiple perspectives and various ways of looking at it, I learned also about myself. I immensely enjoyed the experience of having dreams coming to

life in every possible detail. Those experiences in turn have influenced my practice greatly, and have opened up new perspectives for me, which as an artist I always look forward to finding.

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