

Arts, Writings and Women ‘Crossing’ in Istanbul

Annalisa Piccirillo and Viola Sarnelli

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After a Bachelor Degree in “Media Studies” in Bologna (2005) and a Master’s Degree in “Intercultural Communication” in Naples (2009), Viola Sarnelli earned a Phd in “Cultural and Postcolonial Studies” at “L’Orientale” University, Naples (2013), with a thesis on the news channel Al Jazeera English. As a journalist and independent researcher, Viola collaborated with several local and national newspapers and magazines, and is co-author of collective books of reportages and interviews (*Napoli a piena voce*, Bruno Mondadori, 2012; *Corpi in trappola. Vite e storie tra i rifiuti*, Editori Riuniti University Press, 2011; *Medioevo Napoletano, L’Ancora del Mediterraneo*, 2008). Today, Viola carries out her research work in Scotland and has recently concluded a residency as Battura Post-doc Fellow at the University of Mostaganem, Algeria (Erasmus Mundus Programme).

Abstract

This contribution presents the “Exile Writing workshop”, a collaborative project that took place in Istanbul in September 2011 on the 17th *International Symposium of Electronic Arts – ISEA*.

We introduce the aims and aspirations informing this collective work, carried out by a group of PhD and MA students from the Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”, under the supervision of Prof. Silvana Carotenuto, together with women, artists and scholars coming from different backgrounds and countries. The main output of the workshop was a series of artistic ‘gestures’ – videos, photos and digital works – interrogating issues of female exile and displacement, now collected and displayed on a website. Each piece of work is a personal act of storytelling, which provides another way to narrate the poetics of exile. This collaborative encounter between different women and their arts, in the city of Istanbul, has been interpreted through the ‘crossing’ trope, a movement and a gesture, which seems to ‘materialize’ the critical understanding of the multiple ways in which postcolonial, political and poetical practices might emerge and intertwine.

Exile, immigration and the crossing of boundaries are experiences that can ... provide us with new narrative forms or ... other ways of telling.
Edward W. Said, *Representing the Colonized* (1989)

This essay wants to narrate the experience of a global collaboration set up by a group of women in Istanbul. Coming from all over the world, these women met for the first time in a strategic space of intersection where flows of people, stories and bodies converge; a historical cross-road whose social transformations became more evident in the frame of contemporary postmodern capitalism. At the centre of the collaborative work, there was the issue of ‘exile’ – the hidden and often painful effect of global flows – that was debated and negotiated through the lens of women’s ability of representing and transforming this condition in creative acts of displacement. With their desire of sharing, with their artistic visions and their ‘gestures’ of writing, this group of women ‘crossed’ the city of Istanbul.

The collaboration began in 2011, in occasion of the 17th *International Symposium on Electronic Art – ISEA*, when Professor Silvana Carotenuto (University of Naples “L’Orientale”) led a workshop entitled “Exile Writing. Arts and Technologies of Women”. We were fully involved in the project as PhD students, together with three MA students: Claudia Meoli, Monica Calignano and Federica Caporaso.¹ Other women joined the group: Di Ball,

¹ In this essay, we use the pronoun “we” to underline our position as members of this collective project. From this perspective, we try to interpret the intentions of all the participants, to whom we express our gratitude. At the time we are

art performer and 'Beauty Geek' from Sydney, as she introduced herself to us; the young Australian-Philippine choreographer and video-maker Melissa Ramos; the Turkish-Armenian dancer Talin Buyukkurkciyan; the artist and curator Penelope Boyer from Texas; Liz Solo, a Canadian musician, Second Life designer and activist; and Nela Milic, a Serbian political activist and PhD candidate at Goldsmiths University of London. We all came from different backgrounds, countries, and disciplines. However, once we started working, a miraculous "circle of looks" began to take shape.² We soon realized that the "Exile Writing workshop" would have been more than an academic event. In the process of this 'global collaboration' we explored the gender-critical issues concerning exile, and tried to materialise the practical gestures of postcolonial theory – our critical and creative common ground – by discussing, writing, and 'crossing' all the possible "other ways of telling" the conditions of dislocation.³

Some of us had experienced exile, some of us have only heard about it, but in Istanbul we were all living a privileged state of 'detachment' from our home countries. By questioning this personal/collective experience of temporary displacement, we lived and crossed the city of Istanbul. The 'crossing' movement became a practice of work to know each other, a strategy of invention for a language to share, a creative and material gesture driven by the desire to find a space of imagination apt to explain why – by quoting E. Said – "the exile has been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture".⁴ How can the unspeakable feelings of a woman in exile be translated into poetic and visual acts? What does the experience of exile produce in terms of memories, of matters, of technologies and political gestures? These were some of our questions and doubts, which moved our intellectual curiosity – as scholars, as students, as artists, but above all as women.

The "Exile Writing workshop" took place over four days in and around the Sabancı Üniversitesi, at the Karakoy Communication

writing and remembering this experience, all the students from "L'Orientale" have completed their studies, while all the other women involved in the project keep following their paths in their own countries. After Istanbul, we are always in touch, with the promise to meet again, someday, somewhere.

² Minh-ha Trinh T., *Framer Framed*, Routledge, New York, 1992, p. 105.

³ Edward W. Said, "Representing the Colonized, Anthropology's Interlocutors", *Critical Inquiry*, 15, Winter 1989, p. 225.

⁴ Edward W. Said, *Reflexion on Exile and Other Essays*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2000, p. 173.

Center in Istanbul. On the first three days, we watched films related to exile, we spoke about exiled and non-exiled female artists experimenting in photography, video art, blogs and choreography. Among others, we discussed works by Shirin Neshat, Newsha Tavakolian, Deepa Mehta, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Reha Erdem, Riverbend and Isabel Rocamora. These artists, and their different forms of 'writing', showed us the ability that women have to re-inscribe their experiences of survival away from home, language and community – on the virtual page, on paper, on the screen or on stage.

The novel *The Castle of the Crossed Destinies* by Italo Calvino (1973) inspired the structure of the workshop. We were fascinated by the idea of the encounter of travellers who, after passing through a forest, were inexplicably unable to speak, and finally found a way to tell each other their stories via the tarots, putting one card after another, and building up a narration. We adapted Calvino's story to ours: we envisioned the city of Istanbul as the imagined 'castle' where, by a very big chance, we all came together and got connected by our arts and writings. Istanbul, with all its multi-layered contradictions, became the place to contemplate questions of strangeness, mobility, stillness, fluidity, translation – and exile; the city was the place where our different 'destinies' crossed, and, thus, where we had to find new gestures of 'story-telling'.

On the first day, we picked two tarot cards, which would have inspired our travelling experience in Istanbul. Only one of us, the Canadian artist Liz Solo was actually able to read the tarots. With her expertise, she guided us in their multiple meanings. We wandered in the squares of the city, we drifted through the busy spice markets and we found peace in the mosques, trying to shape the suggestions coming from the cards. We brought along our cameras, tablets, smartphones, to capture our visions into videos, pictures, sounds and images. From this raw assemblage of digital materials, we started to build, and give matter to, our own stories. Each of us chose a technology of writing to express the poetics of exile; finally, we all cooperated to create visual works to be shared and presented on a website. The traces and the practices of our collective project in Istanbul are now collected on the "Exile Writing website", a virtual space designed by all of us, and actually realized and launched on line by Melissa Ramos in December 2011.⁵ It has been built as if the visitor is experiencing

⁵ The original website's contents and works are also available at the following link under the format of a Prezi presentation:
<<http://prezi.com/cmvo6hv6za-j/tarot-cards-exile-writing-workshop/>> (02/14).

a reading card session: she/he is presented by a tableau of tarots; each card hosts a link to a piece of work, and, when it turns, it ‘unveils’ a singular and personal artistic act of ‘storytelling’.⁶



Fig. 1 “Exile Writing” Workshop group, Exile Writing website, Home, 2011, webpage, courtesy of Melissa Ramos.
http://www.melissaramos.com.au/exile_writing/istanbul_exile_writing.html
 (03/14)

⁶ Exile Writing website’ homepage:
http://www.melissaramos.com.au/exile_writing/istanbul_exile_writing.html
 (02/14).

Women Crossing the City. Women Crossing Life

By a very big chance these people came together and got
connected by tarot cards.
Each one had the wisdom and will to follow the cards but also do
what they wished to do.
(The Exile Writing website – Home)

In spite of their differences in style, language and technology, all the stories resulting from the workshop can be read along a common thread: the crossing movement – the exile – of an imagined woman who lives in several spaces and elements – from water to earth – searching for a place to be. She passes through a set of corporeal and linguistic transformations and achievements; she learns to deal with obstacles, conflicting forces and stereotypes; she abandons herself to the chaotic strangeness of sounds and finds relief dwelling into others 'fluid' spaces of existence and agency. This journey ideally starts with the photo-story of Federica Caporaso, inspired by the cards *The Death* and *The Strength*; she tells about Zoe, a little child whose name recalls the famous Byzantine Empress. Being brought up by the Mermaids, Zoe experiences the passage from the sea to the land, from the fluidity of the primary element to the chaotic social dimension of the city. In Federica's words, Zoe "becomes a woman by undergoing a process of growth which starts with the exploration and the gaining of awareness of her own body".⁷ The end of her quest is in the discovery of the 'written' word, as a space of agency: "She opened a book and begun to read. She was learning fast ... a tear of happiness dropped on the book: she finally found her way back home".

In the process of discovering their identity, women also have to find a space of transition where to set themselves in the conflicting hierarchy of gender relations. In the video by Melissa Ramos, this conflict is set 'in-between' water and sky, on the background of the Bosphorus. The tarots *The World* and *The Pope* were translated by Melissa into symbolic gestures; as she explains: "In my work I utilised the childhood game, thumb wrestle, as the visual language to explore concepts of gender, power, greed... At first, it appears to be a playful game, but moments after, the battle morphs into an aggressive and fierce display". The curved

⁷ All the participants' quotations are taken from the "Exile Writing website".
<http://www.melissaramos.com.au/exile_writing/istanbul_exile_writing.html>
(02/14).

perspective of her camera depicts an 'in between' place in the world, the resourcefulness of the city of Istanbul that crosses the horizon between East and West.

The resistance to gender hierarchies acquires a more political and collective connotation in the work by Nela Milic. From a series of photographs, she took during a demonstration carried out by a group of women in Istanbul, Nela interpreted the card *The Lover* in relation to the Turkish women's political struggle and, from the witnessing of this, she wrote: "In the midst of the struggle between military and the government, they raise children. ... Women occupy spaces of culture, education ... but during their execution in public, the male domination overtakes their effort. The women fight for justice – the improvement of legal systems, the respect of minorities... Men often do not see and do not approve of their actions".

Another possible way of 'crossing' and 'living' contrasts is, in the vision of Monica Calignano, the temporary balance that a woman can reach through dance, and more specifically through the rotating movement that allows to keep together, like a vortex, some conflicting forces. The cards *The Wheel of Fortune* and *The Empress* inspired Monica's video. The main character of her video-story is Zoe, referring again to the Byzantine Empress, but also to one of the Greek words for 'life': *zoe* and *bios*. Taking inspiration from these words, Monica affirms: "I like to think of them as two sides of the same coin, two lovers, two principles that cannot do without one another". Zoe, after losing her other half, becomes "a woman in exile: from herself, from her country, from her most intimate self. Only the dance, a loose dance, can help her to find a way home".

The dancing movement returns in the corporeal writing of Talin Buyukkurkciyan's choreography. In her work, the Armenian dancer captures on the video the ephemerality of her art – and there, in exile on the screen, her dance 'survives'. Through the technology of her body, Talin offers powerful images representing female stereotypes of perfection: a woman, a dancer, must be perfect according to the predominant canon of beauty – the symbolic visual order of *The Emperor*, Talin's tarot. In her video, she combines the dancing phrases with images of mannequins taken from the shops of Istanbul; by 'putting on' and 'dancing with' the bust of a dummy, Talin absorbs, and finally reacts against, the fixity of stereotypes depicting women as homologated figures.

In reverse to Talin's movement, Penelope Boyer interpreted her card, *The Hermit*, as a figure who stays still, motionless, while the

stream of the people moves around and aside him: “Cab drivers, market merchants, transit workers, waiters, cashiers, soldiers, officers ... Always there”. This lack of movement suggests the existence of identities suspended in time and space, living into another dimension, waiting for a solution or meditating on their position in the world.

Another suspended figure – one suspended into a linguistic limbo – was met by Annalisa Piccirillo on the Galata bridge in the embodiment of the ‘Birdman’, an *Istanbullu* oldman speaking a non-human language. Interpreting *The Fool* card, she sees in the linguistic madness of the ‘birdman’ the vital and subversive power of interacting with ‘real’ life. In this game of crossing voices and visions, the words by Antonin Artaud are here recalled: “for a madman is also a man whom society did not want to hear and whom it wanted to prevent from uttering certain intolerable truths”.⁸ The impossibility to give voice to perceptions and feelings in a shared language leads to envisioning the barrier of incommunicability, in the same way as it is represented by the biblical anathema of the Babel Tower.

Following the vision of this biblical Tower, Claudia Meoli associated the cards *The Tower* and *The Judgement* with the minarets and their calls for prayer – two elements that also imply an encounter with an unknown language for all the foreigners; as she explains: “The inability of understanding ... the frighteningly fascinating feeling of being in the middle of the unknown makes you wish to delve deep into it, but in the mean time you also long for seeing your home again”. Istanbul’s minarets and Galata Tower, thus, become the images of a contemporary Babel Tower; in her short video, Claudia combines the pictures of minarets with several voices which ‘cross’ – while repeating and re-performing it in different languages – the same sentence: “I can’t find my way home”.

Within this acoustic dimension of intertwined languages and voices, the sound of the call for prayer also suggests a movement, a force of attraction for the believers that carries the promise of a relief from everyday struggles. This is the vision of movement that inspired Annalisa for interpreting *The Chariot* card. In her words: “The overwhelming voice of the müezzín was the motor for a desired movement of peace... Listening to it, I reached the Blue Mosque. Here I had my moment of peace, a rest from the external

⁸ Antonin Artaud, “Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society”, in Susan Sontag (ed.), *Selected Writings*, Berkeley CA, University of California Press, 1976, p. 33.

chaos, a stationary moment during my journey – all that I wanted in that very moment”.

Beside these temporary moments of peace, along the female journey into the ‘exile’, the chance to solve the conflicting oppositions passes through a more deep transformation. The ‘magic’ element, which has such an important role in the tarots, can be ‘translated’ as the ability to change a state or a perspective: it can produce a playful re-combination of the available elements. Viola Sarnelli combined the cards *The Magician* and *The Stars*, which depict the extra-ordinary, extra-human faculties, in her short video. In her view, “the Magician is a player and a jester, able to break the rules, to move between bodies and spaces, to open new paths and possibilities”. The two famous Turkish characters, Karagöz and Hacivat, the shadow puppets that in the video are suspended on a Bosphorus view, embody this playful and charming attitude. While *The Stars* – inspiring lights suggesting different levels of knowledge and consciousness – can be encountered under several shapes in a city such as Istanbul, where “female, enlightened celestial bodies, material or immaterial, durable or ephemeral”.

Walking in the district of Balat, and looking for an image that could translate *The Hanging Man* card, Penelope caught by chance in her camera a little girl and her dog. The girl appeared to her as Theodora, the Empress who, after an adventurous life, became the wife of Justinian and ruled as one of the founders of the Byzantine Empire. Unaware of the camera, the girl plays with her dog; while walking around, in Penelope’s vision her “mannerisms echo the silent film era as much as they do a regal period of the past”.

Theodora – and even more Zoe – with their evocative names, lives and identities, retrace and recall the end of this tale of female crossed destinies. As a conclusion to the workshop, Silvana Carotenuto realized a video and a written text, related to her cards: *The Popess* and *The Devil*. In her story, the visual works and the pieces of writing created by all of us are merged into a single narration: the story of Zoe – the woman, the Empress, the prisoner, the powerful ‘life’, whose final strength is to wish for new directions of action-to come after the end of our collective experience.

Placed in-between the Devil and the Popess, blissed by the banishment of the *Pharmakon*, writing would come to her/to us, from the water onto the surface – it would inscribe women’s gathering around the goddess of Justice; it would feel other women’s art and creativity, their thankful hands of invention - it would write their nightmares and dreams in spider webs, textiles, weaving and texting the cruelty of the world and, together, its

militant witnessing: occupations of spaces of culture, birthing, improvements of common justice - fights/pride, battles! It would then follow the dance of the silhouette of chance, the choreography of women; it would perform the life of Zoë: life.

Digital Storytelling in Exiles

We were women in a foreign land
 yet not in exile
 we came by choice
 but spoke of those who had no choice.
 (Di Ball, "The temperance and The Moon")

Di Ball and Liz Solo materialized their visual storytelling into a fluid space; here, the poetics of the female displacement was conveyed both through the natural element of water and the digital language, where bodies, identities and stereotypes are re-materialized in the virtual realm – another possible space of exile. Di Ball depicts the female gesture of 'crossing' the city of Istanbul, with all its coloured identities and different languages, as a floating act of translation. In the video of the Australian artist, entitled *Temperance and the Moon in exile*, the viewer is invited to follow her corporal displacement in the water; her body and voice are suspended underwater, in this liquid dimension she explores the condition of being exiled in antigravity.⁹ Di plays and dances with a veil – a coloured scarf bought in Kapalıçarşı, Istanbul's Grand Bazaar. The light texture of the fabric symbolically intertwines with the power of the female 'difference' Di met and 'crossed' in Istanbul. In these words, she clarifies her choice:

Today we talked for a little while, sharing with each other our cards and how we all might illustrate these. For me the exciting thing is that we are all from such different backgrounds and disciplines that the responses are rich and varied and beautiful. Like a wondrous Turkish carpet! Sometimes we are worried about how to weave the many colours into something cohesive, I am one who trusts in the process and I believe that when we come together we will find a device ... a loom of sorts. The idea of passing through a veil to another place, a place of creativity or madness introduces the possibility of using a type of fabric in the water. I decide to try this. I buy a silk scarf at the bazaar.

⁹ Di Ball, *Temperance and the moon in exile*, 2011, courtesy of the artist.
 <http://www.melissaramos.com.au/exile_writing/Temperance_Moon.html>
 (03/14).

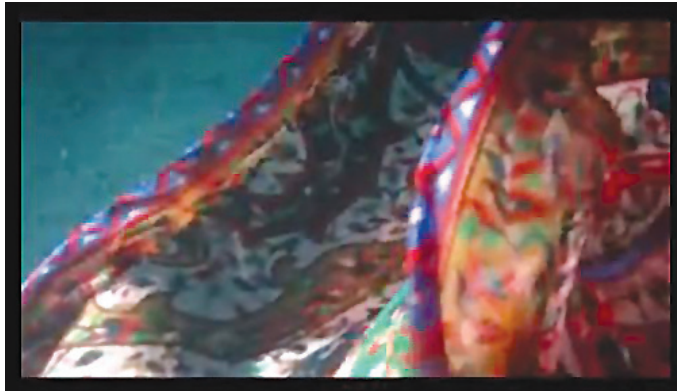


Fig. 2 Di Ball,
*Temperance and the
moon in exile*, 2011,
video still, courtesy of
Di Ball.
<[http://www.
melissaramos.com.
au/exile_writing/
Temperance_Moon.
html](http://www.melissaramos.com.au/exile_writing/Temperance_Moon.html)> (03/14)

While she dances with the veil, Di sings and speaks in a language whose meaning is 'lost in translation'. She uses the statistical machine-translation service, provided by Google Inc., as a special guide to convert the symbolism of her cards *The Temperance* and *The Moon* from English into Turkish. Di exploits the automatic tool, with all its limitations, to measure her linguistic and cultural alterity, and to ideally overcome the impossible condition of being exiled from a foreign language. For Di, the Turkish language always escapes – as the floating silk scarf slips away inside the immateriality of water. Again, the artist's voice describes the technical and creative process of her 'digital' storytelling:

Another important idea that is recurring both in my cards, the workshop presentations, and also my time as OTHER in Istanbul leads me to the idea of lost in translation. Language is often the difference between feeling a part of something or being isolated. Meanings can be lost, conversation limited. I will emphasize this notion of lost in translation, and I will let GOOGLE be my guide.

By creating another language, Di challenges the premises of translation itself; indeed, from a postcolonial perspective, translation was at the heart of the colonial encounter, and throughout history, it has always been used to establish and perpetuate the superiority of some cultures over others.¹⁰ Di's awareness of the unequal power relations involved in the transfer of texts 'a-cross' languages, puts her work in the position to re-think translation and its 'technology' of mediation. Moreover, her political/poetical linguistic gesture can be perceived as the pursuit of a feminine style, which is also a pursuit of a meaning without mediation, free from all constraints of translation. This idealizing movement recalls Hélène Cixous's

¹⁰ See Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (eds.), *Postcolonial Translation*, Routledge, London, 1999.

emphasis on bodily communication. The French-Algerian writer urges women to return to a condition before the moment of exclusion, that is, before language started to be conceived as translation – at a time when women communicated with nature via bodily immediacy: “We have been taught a language that speaks from above, from afar, ... that speaks to us in advance. We have been taught, a language that translates everything in itself, understands nothing except in translation ... listens only to its grammar, and we separated from the things under its orders.”¹¹

The video ends when Di’s voice, speaking from above, softly utters a poetical invitation by singing the famous lines of *Walk a mile in my shoes* (Joe South, 1969): “just walk a mile in my shoes. Before you abuse, criticize and accuse. Then walk a mile in my shoes...”. Di’s antigravity veil dance seems to capture the poetic suspension of meanings, stereotypes and differences that we all confronted in Istanbul. This ‘aquatic’ vision, in its technological simplicity, displays the shared desire of a ‘pause’, the complex wish of a temporary exile in which women abandon themselves, free-flowing in their languages and differences.

From the antigravity of the water to the fluidity of the virtual space – here Liz Solo set her digital storytelling inspired to the *The Justice* card. The Canadian performance artist and activist, working in and on virtual spaces, realized a video shoot in Second Life: a brief but universal story on friendship, diversity and (in)justice.¹² Liz has always been interested in reconfiguring the questions of justice and civil rights in virtual spaces, also by taking part to groups like “The Third Faction”, intervening in online games in order to ask for power that is more decisional for the players.¹³ The video she realized after the “Exile Writing workshop” investigates the topic of justice in cyberspace from a more private perspective, based on her personal experiences, and she says:

I have worked with many artists all over the world via Second Life. Some of these artists are from countries experiencing wartime, civil unrest, violent political regimes. I have met artists from Iraq and had the opportunity to talk and work with them. Events happening in the world are no longer something I am reading about in the news. They become very immediate.¹⁴

¹¹ Hélène Cixous, *Illa*, Des femmes, Paris, 1980, p. 137.

¹² Liz Solo, *Justice*, 2011, courtesy of the author
<http://www.melissaramos.com.au/exile_writing/justice.html> (03/14).

¹³ See <www.thirdfaction.org> (06/11).

¹⁴ This and the following quotations are taken from: Liz Solo, private interview with Viola Sarnelli, 10th June 2012.

Even in a post-11th September climate of suspicion and new-orientalist discourses, the use of online games and virtual platforms such as *Second Life*, as Liz points out, can enable a direct ‘encounter’ of players and avatars, who, in the outside world, are divided by cultural and geographical boundaries.¹⁵ There is no need for intermediation, as the two involved parts already share a common space, a “third space” ruled by *Second Life*’s graphic and dimensional settings.¹⁶ In this sense, in Liz’s work the digital space is a fluid environment, where differences can be translated in the common language of a shared technology. Lucy appears as a Western young woman, even if with a pair of fairy wings, while Marwa is presented as a young orthodox Muslim woman, wearing the *niqab*, the black veil leaving her eyes out. We do not know much about these women; we are directly introduced into their garden, created as the ideal space for their friendship. Inside the garden, their interaction only has to follow the codes and habits of *Second Life*: the women have tea together, express their emotions within the same net-language, and even have in common the date of their ‘rezday’, that is, their avatars’ birthday. This language, although essential, is enough to put each of them in the “Other’s shoes” – as claimed by Di Ball. Sharing a third space, the two women are both “up-rooted”, to borrow from Julia Kristeva who, in *Strangers to Ourselves*, argues that “those who have never lost the slightest root seem to you unable to understand any word liable to temper their point of view”.¹⁷

Liz explains her clear intention to emphasize the similarities between the two characters while downplaying their differences: “I wanted to show a genuine connection between two women, where they enjoy either other’s company and play, and where hopefully by the end of the video the *niqab* – which is just a construction of objects in a virtual space – is not what the viewer sees”. Although the story is set into a virtual realm of equality, the veil depicts the actual materialization of an alterity, and yet it does not have an immediate connection with the non-digital world. We ignore where the woman in the *niqab* is from – she could be anywhere in the world, including Canada or the United States, if it was not for the reference to a dangerous external world, as it appears in the dialogue in the video – we can easily think of the war in Iraq or

¹⁵ Tiziana Terranova, “Futurepublic - On Information Warfare, Bio-racism and Hegemony as Noopolitics”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 24, 2007.

¹⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London&New York NY, 1994.

¹⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, Columbia University Press, New York NY, 1991, p. 17.

Afghanistan. This danger becomes more tangible at the end of the video, when Marwa disappears. In this respect, as Liz recognizes, virtual space is far from being a panacea: “If someone disappears off the grid there is not much one can do about it”. Still, this graphic construct can be a powerful device in its ability to mobilize and transform, performatively, ideas and categories of the everyday; as better stated by Gloria Anzaldúa: “An image is a bridge between evoked emotions and conscious knowledge; words are the cables that hold up the bridge. Images are more direct, more immediate than words, and closer to the unconscious.”¹⁸

Fig. 3 Liz Solo, *Justice*, 2011, video still, courtesy of Liz Solo. <http://www.melissaramos.com.au/exile_writing/justice.html> (03/14)



After Istanbul and elsewhere

After Istanbul, the virtual images of our work keep on travelling in exile on the web, towards other ways of storytelling. In May 2012, the immediacy of our visions – as pointed out by Anzaldúa – crossed the ‘borders’ of Istanbul, when the American curator Penelope Boyer presented the “Exile Writing website” at the “Mundo Zurdo Exhibition” sponsored by the Society for Gloria Anzaldúa and entitled *Transformations: Entre Cuerpo* (17-19th May 2012, S. Antonio, New Mexico). After the exhibition, Penelope wrote this message to all of us: “Dear Girls, we made a splash Thursday night at the Gloria Anzaldúa Exhibition! I’ve made a small slapped-together video to pretend you were there. Di’s marvellous video work shared a laptop console with our Exile Writing website ... someone was standing staring at our screen which was great! *Besos y abrazos*.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La frontera*, Aunt Lute Books, San Francisco CA, 1987, p. 149.

¹⁹ E-mail exchange between Penelope Boyer and the workshop participants, 19th May 2012. See the video at <<http://vimeo.com/42435612>> (03/14).

The exile has been the main source of aesthetical and theoretical inspiration also for the curatorial work of Silvana Carotenuto and Wanda Balzano, accomplished for *Anglistica Journal*, in a special issue entitled *Writing Exile: Women, the Arts, and Technologies*.²⁰ This volume collects critical writings and creative voices, political gestures and visual practices of women who display new technologies of narrating the exile. Along the path of the “Exile Writing workshop”, the issue is designed around different sections: poetic language, technologies of crossings, collaborations, exposures, events and reviews. The section devoted to ‘visual practices’ includes a new video by Melissa Ramos, entitled *Traverse*.²¹ Melissa’s work is another poetic gesture activated ‘after’ Istanbul and ‘elsewhere’. Knowing the pains and pleasures of being exiled since her childhood, the Australian-Philippine artist underlines how her participation to the ISEA Workshop in Istanbul has strongly inspired her:

The ‘Exile Writing’ workshop inspired me to reveal contemporary expressions on Exile within the private & public realms. The participants and workshop conductors were very inspiring, and it has inspired me to proceed with my current projects to reflect on personal themes about diaspora, post colonialism and an on going conceptual exploration on “in-between”. My current project specifically explores more on a personal journey as an artist, and chosen life as a nomadic, blurring the lines of identity.²²

In *Traverse*, the camera’s gaze follows a woman; she walks through places that could be familiar or not, here or elsewhere; she crosses and transits into a world of unlimited reproductions, where the destiny of a subject is constituted by a permanent exile:

The walking choreography is a metaphoric gesture for longing and desire. The camera takes on the character as a surveillance machine. Watching the woman as she wanders an unknown city. The walking gesture reflects on my personal diaspora, and political global movement/crossing borders due to warfare and the economic effects of capitalism.²³

The poetical acts of ‘crossing’, that goes along the walking ‘gesture’ of this choreographic video-work, carries the readers and the audience of this paper to Istanbul – a place we left two years

²⁰ See *Anglistica* 17 (1), <<http://www.anglistica.unior.it/>> (01/13).

²¹ Melissa Ramos, *Traverse*, video, 2012.

²² Melissa Ramos, private interview with Annalisa Piccirillo, 12th May 2012.

²³ *Ibid.*

ago, still materialized into our memories as a lively and chaotic city. Today, our thoughts go in that city and to all the women who are fighting against the authoritarian governance and resisting against the violent transformation of their beloved city. To all the women and men of Istanbul protesting at Taksim's Gezi Park, we walk alongside you.