

***An investigation into psycho-  
geographic liminality in selected  
contemporary South African artworks***

by

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I, Magdel Suzette Fourie, hereby declare that ***An investigation into psycho-geographic liminality in contemporary South African artworks*** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



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Magdel S. Fourie  
31 August 2011

## **Abstract**

The global society of today is characterised by global communications, expansive networks and uninterrupted movement of information and people. This study sets out to investigate psycho-geographic liminality, understood as a state of perpetual movement, through the work of selected contemporary South African artists. This liminality is situated between an identity denoted on one hand by fragmentation and fluid change, as a result of transitivity, and on the other hand by a sense of place, which sets up two psychological states, namely displacement and belonging. Transitivity is explored in relation to conditions of post-colonisation, immigration, emigration and telecommunications within the context of globalisation and is considered in direct contrast to the concept of place as a physical house, suburb, city or country where one feels 'at home,' denoting a sense of belonging. Through the investigation of relevant theories in sociology, anthropology and philosophy this study proposes that we are in perpetual transit, being at home everywhere and yet nowhere, therefore requiring a new understanding of belonging rooted in a continual flow.

**Keywords: Liminality, liminal, transitivity, psycho-geographical, belonging, displacement, colonisation, immigration, emigration, globalisation, telecommunication, place, home, nomad, transit**

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## Chapter one: Introduction

*“... place-bound identities have become more rather than less important in a world of diminishing spatial barriers to exchange, movement and communication.”(Harvey [sa]:4)*

People today are continually on the move, presented with multiple possibilities of where to work and where to live, possibilities that stretch seamlessly across national and international borders. This is particularly apparent when compared with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where profession and address were largely determined by birth, marital status or inheritance and thus in most cases were not matters of choice, but were predetermined. Society was structured accordingly, and individuals were defined by these parameters; identity was forged within a very rigid structure or, rather, a rigid structure prescribed identity, as it was often not a matter of choice. Zigmunt Bauman has noted the multiple possibilities influencing identity formation today and argues that since the eighteenth century the solidity of social structures has moved, the “signposts” of what traditionally defined a large part of individual identity formation (Bauman 2004:51).

Identity has always been tied to place: where you work, where you live, a specific city, suburb or house. Over the past century, however, views of identity have changed and fluidity in the psychological and geographical boundaries of identity are commonplace: “A cohesive, firmly riveted and solidly constructed identity would be a burden, a constraint, a limitation on the freedom to choose ... [I]t would be a recipe for *inflexibility*”, which is frowned upon by “virtually all genuine or putative authorities of the day” (Bauman 2004:53). As a result, people can today be described as nomads, originally denoting a group of hunter-gatherer



type people who habitually travelled or shifted abode, but now referring to a subject whose “movement is based on perpetual displacement” (Kaplan 1996:66); in other words, an individual who travels with no singular sense of belonging to one place or nation.

Yet amidst the fragmentation, Okwui Enwezor (Zaya 1999:296) states that “we crave to attach ourselves to something, some moment, a location, an event; we crave an anchor.” And so the result is a tug of war: on one hand there is the nomad identity, informed and facilitated by effortless global transportation systems and the increased interaction and dependence of individuals on virtual platforms since the World Wide Web paved the road for effortless long distance communication - identity denoted by **fragmentation and fluid change**. On the other hand, there is the urge for stability and some sense of fixed structure from which to define ones’ self - identity defined by **a sense of place**. Between these two desires lies a blurry gap containing a bit of both, which can be described by the term “liminal”. This liminal state consists of a psychological awareness in relation to geographical orientation and emotions associated therewith, which can be described as feelings of longing and disconnectedness due to the lack of a specific geographical place with which an individual’s identity is associated – perhaps a city, house or country. This state of liminality is what I refer to as **psycho-geographic liminality**<sup>1</sup> and is the core research focus of this study. Such psycho-geographic liminality is investigated in the context of contemporary art production and South Africa in particular. In addition, fragmentation and change are explored as concepts in the context of a sense of place so as to explore the nature and dimensions of the psycho-geographic in-between.

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<sup>1</sup>Liminality has come to be appropriated by many fields and applied in different contexts in humanities, namely music, drama and literature. All denote some sense of betwixt and in-between. For this study liminality is also utilized for its connotation with the in-between but refers to a specific psycho-geographic in-between explained further on in the study.

## 1.1 Background to the study

In the context of South Africa, white emigration has become an active reality, reshaping societies not only in a social but also in an economic sense (the so-called 'brain drain'). The tendency for young people, especially white young people, to take a gap year or to search for a brighter future overseas is done with the knowledge that perhaps the year will result in permanent residence, resulting in most South African families having family members in other countries. This South African reality, the product of particular social conditions and patterns of behaviour, an echo of the phenomenon of individuals leaving the country either voluntarily or as a result of forced exile during the Apartheid years. As a result, South African identity has been characterised in an ongoing way and in various forms by a nomadic sociological condition and liminality.

Theoretically these tendencies have been addressed in two ways. Firstly, there is the political and economic view, marked by voluntary or forced exile from a hostile environment. Many writers such as Breyten Breytenbach and Sue Williams have dealt with these issues, especially in regard to the issues of Apartheid, post-Apartheid, exile and race in the South African socio-political context. Secondly, from a sociological point of view, thorough and well-documented research on global<sup>2</sup> migration and diasporas exists, evident in studies of the Jewish Diaspora and Asian migration for example. However, not much has been published on the current South African situation where residents have migrated due to the economic realities of affirmative action and violence (to name a few) within South African societies.

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<sup>2</sup>Globalisation is a well-known term encountered mainly in the financial world, describing the tendency for transnational companies and corporations to dominate local and national economies, but since the 1990s the term has been appropriated to encompass not only economics but also the influence of cross-cultural development (Hausman & Tavin:2004). The term 'globalisation' has now been grouped with terms like 'transnationalism' and 'multiculturalism' to describe diasporas and the global village.

The global phenomenon of emigration and its manifestation in the artworks of selected artists warrants an investigation and posits that there is a need for research on emigration culture in the twenty-first century from a South African perspective. The notion of the human need for belonging will be postulated as an assumption in this study since it constitutes a universal necessity for human beings. In contemporary South African art, identity is a contested subject often intertwined with either the injustices of the past and apartheid, or post-apartheid issues. Only a few artists, such as Willem Boshoff, Mikail Subotzky and Patric Waterhouse<sup>3</sup>, have recently addressed the issues of identity and belonging in relation to emigration<sup>4</sup>, immigration<sup>5</sup> and diaspora without highlighting aspects of race. It should be noted, however, that the theoretically vantage point of the study is not whiteness or 'South African-ness', but more specifically the search for belonging in an unfixed, fluid global village as experienced by all and as reflected by selected South African artists.

## 1.2 Aims of the study

This study aims to investigate and explore visual depictions of liminality in the work of selected South African artists with regard to the notions of longing and belonging in the context of transitivity, more specifically globalisation, colonisation, immigration and emigration and their relation to a sense of place. Taking an existential approach, the study combines theory and philosophy in examining the ways in which the selected artists deal with the uncomfortable present, suggested to be liquid and liminal.

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<sup>3</sup>These artists took part in an exhibition in 2010, dealing with issues of belonging and home (Buys 2010:14).

<sup>4</sup> The act of *leaving* your home country for another country.

<sup>5</sup> The act of coming into a foreign country in order to live permanently there.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem/ research question**

The global village or society is characterised by fast moving technologies and communication networks creating a dynamic and fluid entity, yet there is a need for a sense of belonging, for something structured and solid (Bauman 2000:8). All over the world people are faced with the options to either just flow in an undefined state to wherever the network of connections takes them leading a life based on touch-and-go relations or to be grounded in one place. The majority of people have a psychological urge to connect to a specific geographical place or home which cannot be provided for by the space created through globalisation. As such, individuals find themselves in an in-between place. The result is that many individuals cannot relate fully to either 'just flowing' or to be stationary and grounded, creating dualities as well as an undefined in-between position.

This human condition of drifting between dualities is investigated in the selected artists' work dealing with the themes of immigration, communication, identity and belonging, and their work is used as a platform to suggest different aspects of psycho-geographic liminality. For example, Leora Farber voices the search for belonging felt by many white South Africans due to always being associated with colonialism and therefore seen as not belonging in Africa. Such work reflects a position of being divided by a past where one does not belong anymore, as well as facing an unwelcome future (perhaps forming part of the reason some South Africans have left the country). Jenna Burchell's work deals with belonging on a personal level, reflecting on relatives having left for political or social reasons and being left behind; resulting in a fragmented sense of home. She comments on the manner in which technology is suggested as a replacement to counteract this fragmentation of a sense of belonging. One aspect of my own work also deals with the frustration of communication via telecommunications being presented as a substitute for face to face relationships, and the way it seems to rather disconnect than connect me with my family overseas (Cf. Chapter Two).

Travel, movement and maps are underlying themes linking the work of Berni Searle and Usha Seejarim, who both work with video as an artform. Searle focuses on the liminal as experienced by immigrants between Africa and Spain and Seejarim has made videos dealing with being in continual transit between Johannesburg and Lenasia. Rina Stutzer combines this notion of being in continual transit with our global times using the concept of the caravan as a metaphor, informed by social theory grounded in social behaviour and longing in the globalised world. My own work picks up on these themes of travel and movement, firstly through representations of home (and words associated with belonging) depicted as maps and something to be 'navigated' in order to belong. Secondly, my depiction of the theme of belonging is continued in the making of temporal vessels presented as floating and mobile, voicing the predicament of being stuck in a dualism of longing to belong whilst that belonging is always either suspended or just an utopian dream in the future - a type of floating in a liminal present.

#### **1.4 Literature review**

This study entails qualitative research that inter-relates various fields of study, such as philosophy, anthropology, sociology, architecture and the visual arts, in the investigation of liminal space and its related aspects of transitivity and the concept of place. The research is literature-, as well as practice-based with a specific focus on visual practice.

A seminal theorist for this study is British anthropologist Victor Turner who argues that liminal space entails that which falls in-between the various well-defined stages of tribal life, as described by his predecessor, Arnold van Gennep (Turner 1982:24). Turner's investigations of African tribes deal with in-between

stages, such as initiation and marriage, rites of passage or transitions, all of which comprise three elements: a before-state, an in-between state and an after-state or reintegration, experiencing a transition from which the individual returns changed necessarily (Barrie 1998:3). His publications, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (1982) and *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967) contributed in a large extent to this study with *Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes Among the Ndembu of Zambia* (1968), and *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969) contributing in a lesser degree.

Karl Jaspers, a German philosopher of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, also gives recognition to an in-between which he terms a “boundary situation” (Craig 1998:80, Jaspers 1970:178). Jaspers is concerned with what falls in-between an individual’s existence (*Sein*) and transcendence to an ideal state (Oslo 1979:xx). The process involves a continual becoming from who the individual is to who s/he is becoming (Schilpp 1957:xix). This state of continual becoming is called *Existenz*. Guilt, death and suffering are amongst the situations which Jaspers classifies as making up a boundary which do not pertain to this study. Rather his description of the boundary situation being characterised as always being ‘in’ situations will be explored (Jaspers 1970:178). Jaspers goes on to describe that boundary situations entail indefinable dimensions of experience, which cannot be considered or evaluated apart from the “lived” situation. Therefore, Jaspers proposes that it is of no use to plan and calculate how one will overcome boundary situations, but rather suggests overcoming them by “*becoming the Existenz we potentially are*” (Jaspers 1970:179).

Similar to Turner, Jaspers suggests a liminality or liminal state by means of setting up a before “self”, an indefinable in-between of continual becoming “self” and a transcendent state “self” (if it can be reached). Jaspers states further that

when we discuss boundary situations, we are not doing so as *Existenz*. We discuss them as possible *Existenz* (liminal “self”), ready for the leap, but not yet leaping (Jaspers 1970:181). This “leaping” is that crucial step needed to embrace transcendence. According to Jaspers (1970:181), when faced with a boundary situation, one is required to take the leap a few times before getting to *Existenz* from which one still has to leap into transcendence, implying a continual process of leaping into the unknown (Cf. Chapter Three). In this study I focus on two aspects of Jaspers boundary situation, namely: the continuous nature of situations and the constant leaping towards a final state (*Existenz* and transcendence) without necessarily fully reaching it.

Linking with the notion of being in a world of situations are the ideas of the Situationists and more specifically one of the founders, Guy Debord’s<sup>6</sup> notion of psycho-geographic space. The concept of psycho-geographical liminality is connected to Guy Debord’s understanding of psycho-geographical space. Debord describes psycho-geographical research as the “study of the exact laws and precise effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, acting directly on the affective department of individuals“ (Debord 1957:96), thus highlighting that “specific events of the geographical environment” have a direct link with the “emotions and behaviours” of individuals (Wollen 1999:30). Accordingly, this study investigates the specific events of emigration and a society becoming more and more global geographically, in relation to the emotions and behaviours pertaining to longing, loss and belonging as experienced by an individual. Even though Debord and the Situationists went on to be known for their political explorations (Wollen 1999:29) it falls outside of the focus area of this paper and thus will not be explored.

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<sup>6</sup> Guy Debord(1931-94) is a French writer, theorist and filmmaker who, together with a group of artists, formed the Situationist International in 1957.

In terms of the investigation of liminality as the tension between modern times (globalisation) and the search for belonging in relation to place, the writings of Zygmunt Bauman are critically relevant. Bauman is a British sociologist of Polish descent who was a professor at the University of Leeds from 1971 until 1990. His research focuses on a range of topics from social stratification and the labour movement, to more recent investigations into the nature of modernity (Zygmunt Bauman [sa]). Three of his books, *Liquid Modernity* (2000), *Identity* (2004) and *Liquid Times: Living in an age of uncertainty* (2007), formed the foundation of this research. What differentiates Bauman from other writers on globalisation is his sociological viewpoint, which places emphasis on the effects of globalisation on individuals as well as society as a whole. By default, his writing also addresses related terms such as multiculturalism, transnationalism and diaspora.

### **1.5 Theoretical approach of the study**

The concept of liminal space is investigated from an existential point of view, relating how individuals perceive themselves as existing in specific places of meaning and the psychological impact of not being able to be ‘there’ and ‘here’ simultaneously.

Existentialism is the name given to the branch of philosophy which is concerned with the meaning of human existence and the freedom and creative response to life by individuals. The central feature of Existentialism is that it is concerned with the way in which human beings relate to the world. Existentialism proposes that human beings cannot be understood as “fixed properties” or “atomic subjects primarily interacting with a world of objects”, as understood conceptually by ancient and modern thought; instead it proposes new ways of thought (Crowell 2004). Much philosophy examines external objects and the minds that comprehend them as though the two were separable; the mind just observing the world in a detached way. Existentialism, by contrast, starts from the basis of the



self as involved, as engaged with the world. Humans seek to understand things in order to deal with them, live among them, and find the meaning and significance of life among them (Lacey 1990:103). The need for this methodology seems apparent as the effect that globalism has on the individual and thus their perception of identity is being investigated. The individual cannot be viewed as a separate independent being, unaffected by its surroundings.

## **1.6 Creative work**

The artists selected for investigation in this study have been divided into two main groups, related to the two chapters: those dealing with identity in relation to presence, absence and communication, and those dealing with place and transit. The artworks investigated with regard to presence and belonging are Farber's *Dis-Location/Re-Location* (2005-) and Burchell's *Family Portrait* (2007) and her *Rambler* (2008) which looks at communication. Searle's *Home and Away* (2003) and Seejarim's video work *Eight to Four* (2001) respectively voice the longing for belonging in relation to transit and place.

My own creative work will be presented and investigated as it deals with aspects of the effects of globalisation in relation to both communication (Chapter Two) and a search for place in continual transit (Chapter Three).

## **1.7 Research methodology**

The methodology employed in this study is literature- as well as practice-based a with specific focus on visual practice. Therefore, selected theoretical sources and artworks are analysed and interpreted in terms of the theme of liminality and philosophies and theories on globalisation and belonging. The specific artists were chosen because their work reflects my own personal experiences of

displacement due to my brother living in Hong Kong and my father in New Zealand, on account of work. This investigation was fuelled by conversations with people who similarly also have relatives overseas, realising that there are many commonalities in each person's quest to define belonging and their sense of loss.

The bulk of the theoretical information was sourced from various libraries in conjunction with the Internet, and the artists' works were seen either on their relevant exhibitions (and so catalogues sourced) or obtained in catalogues at the Johannesburg Art Gallery's library.

### **1.8 A preliminary outline of chapters**

In the second chapter, psycho-geographic liminality is explored as a state of longing for belonging; absence and presence resulting from fragmentation; and fluid change in relation to transitivity. This will be explored through three aspects of transitivity, namely immigration, emigration and technology denoting communication by way of the investigation of the art works of Farber, Burchell and myself.

The third chapter examines psycho-geographic liminality as a state of continual transit, examining place (a specific geographical position) as binary to transitivity and doing so by way of an investigation of the artworks of Searle, Seejarim Stutzer and myself, and the presentation of place and transit.

## Chapter Two: Disconnection and the search for belonging

*“The Idea of ‘identity’ was born out of the crisis of belonging.”*

Zygmunt Bauman (2004:20)

South Africa has had a turbulent socio-political history entailing three centuries of colonisation, as well as enforced social and racial segregation under apartheid, both of which induced habitual nomadic activities such as migration, immigration and emigration. In this chapter, notions such as immigration, emigration and diaspora will be investigated, departing from a colonial history and moving towards the effects of globalisation today. The notions of belonging and communication are considered as core aspects of these scenarios resulting in psycho-geographic liminality.

As established in chapter one, psycho-geographic liminality can be described as a condition of desire, need and belonging, tied to a specific place and time. This condition is brought about by the characteristics of our globalised world, explained as fluid and continually on the move between zones. The concept of belonging cannot be explored without also mentioning its binary concept, namely displacement. This chapter will argue that neither of the aforementioned are fixed elements, but that society resides in the liminal space between the two. In addition, the concept of absence and presence in relation to longing and belonging is considered.

## 2.1 Liminality and a search for belonging in Leora Farber's *Dis-location/Re-location*

In terms of the investigation of the notions belonging and displacement, the work of Leora Farber can be contextualised in terms of liminality and specifically the characteristic of belonging. Farber, a second generation Jewish immigrant currently living in Johannesburg, South Africa, grounds her work in postcolonial discourse and especially the aspects of immigration and alienation, relating these aspects to her own personal history of “displacement from a society caught in the throes of reconstruction and redress” (Farber 2009:1). Her 2005-2009 travelling exhibition *Dis-location/Re-location* sets the stage for an investigation of liminal space through the exploration of the concepts of belonging and alienation as a result of a generational uprooting and re-grounding (Venn 2010:326). Throughout her exhibition, Farber refers directly or indirectly to three women: Bertha Marks (Figure 1), Victorian Jewish wife of Sammy Marks; Freda Farber, the mother of the artist, a first-generation Jewish immigrant; and Leora Farber, the artist, a second-generation Jewish immigrant (Farber [sa]:[sp]).



Figure 1:Portrait of Bertha Marks, 1906.  
Photograph.  
Sammy Marks Museum, Pretoria.  
(Law-Viljoen [sa]:1).

Even though their reasons for being in South Africa are different, the feelings of alienation and longing of these three women are suggested to be similar. Whilst Farber mentions her mother, the focus of the exhibition is primarily on two protagonists, Bertha Marks as colonial figure, and the artist herself, embodying a post-colonial persona (Farber 2009:1). Farber sets up a comparison between herself and Marks, questioning whether there is a parallel that can be drawn between their identities in terms of a sense of dislocation in current South African post-apartheid and post-colonial identity. This exploration is achieved through visual and theoretical presentations, comparing the colonial circumstances and persona of Marks with Farber's personal experience of hybridity (Farber [sa]:[sp]). Through the comparison of the two personae it will be demonstrated that a state of psycho-geographic liminality exists between their feelings of belonging and displacement.

In van Gennep's seminal book *The Rites of Passage*, (1960), liminality is explored in terms of ceremonies associated with *rites de passage* (Van Gennep 1960: vii), a collective noun describing types of "life crises" experienced by an individual (e.g. birth, marriage, initiation etc.). Jasper's boundary situations can also be seen as "life crises" consisting of struggle, suffering and death (Jaspers 1970:184). Jaspers (1970:183,184) continues to say, "In every situation, the constraint allows for the possibility of an uncertain future. The unrest in this boundary situation is that what is up to me lies still ahead; my freedom in it is to assume given facts, to make them my own as if they had been my will." Looking at the order and content of tribal ceremonies, Van Gennep saw the similarity that within each ceremony there is a stage during which the subject undergoes a change, and thus cannot be labelled (eg. From being a girl to a woman, a woman to a wife, boy to a man etc.). He subsequently divided the ceremony into three phases: separation, transition and reaggregation/ incorporation (Van Gennep 1960:vii).

Turner - of seminal importance in the development of the term 'the liminal' - grounds his theories in Van Gennep's postulations and elaborates on these phases (Turner 1982:24) by explaining them as follows: The first phase, separation, is a clear demarcation of space and time, a demarcation from a previous, defined social status. The second phase is the transitional phase, the phase associated with the margin or *limen* (meaning "threshold" in Latin). This is a period where ritual subjects pass through an area of ambiguity, a kind of "social limbo" (Turner 1982:24). It is important to note that this phase contains fragments (even if limited they are sometimes of critical importance) from either the preceding or subsequent social or culturally profane states (Turner 1982:24). The last stage, reaggregation or incorporation, is marked by symbolic actions showing the return of the ritual subjects into their new, well-defined position in society (Turner 1982:24).

Taking a closer look at the second phase, Turner (1982:26) proposes aspects intrinsic to defining this phase. The liminal phase often involves physical separation from society, where individuals are stripped of their identities, clothes and names, amongst other attributes, resulting in a blurring and merging of distinctions between individuals. In some rituals, the participants are smeared with earth (white mud in the Xhosa tradition), thus blurring the lines between animal and human (Turner 1982:26). In many societies concrete distinction (ie. between man and animal, or between persons etc.) are blurred to such an extent that the liminal subjects are seen as symbolically invisible (Turner 1967:110). As Turner (1982:26) argues, "(T)hus the ritual subjects ... undergo a '*levelling*' process, in which signs of their pre-liminal status are destroyed."

### 2.1.1 Colonialisation and immigration

Turner further elaborates on Van Gennepe's theories by combining them with his own interest in theatre<sup>7</sup> in the analysis of what he called "social dramas," also described as "dramas of living". Turner deduced four phases by which to study these dramas, namely "breach, crisis, redress and *either* reintegration *or* recognition of schism" (Turner 1980:149). An example of such human drama played out when Marks came from Europe in 1886 to honour what was an arranged marriage to the Jewish entrepreneur Sammy Marks (Law-Viljoen [sa]:1) and must have constituted a traumatic experience for her. Her life, as described by Farber, was tightly knit with strong "[h]ierarchical Victorian conventions of class, language, race and gender differences." This resulted in an isolated life fuelled by the colonial idea of avoiding those of different race, belief, class or language, viewed as the "other" (Farber [sa]:[sp]).

Marks's life before South Africa was probably shaped by and associated with a family from a vibrant European city with strong English traditions, brick houses, streets, neighbourhoods and social clubs. To her these elements defined what it meant to belong and to have a sense of place. After leaving behind all that she knew, she made her way to the southern tip of Africa. Marks would have arrived by ship to a South African shore after which she had to make her way inland. What she was likely to face after making the trip from the Cape to the then Transvaal, in less than established streets, was a dwelling in the middle of the veld<sup>8</sup> some distance away from Pretoria, which she then had to call home (Law-Viljoen [sa]:3). There was no correlation with her previous ideas of what it meant to belong. The elaborate house, which now remains as a museum outside of Pretoria, was built only six years after Marks's arrival. Marks's feelings of isolation, loneliness, displacement and uprooted-ness can be assumed (Farber

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<sup>7</sup>Turner grew up with exposure to theater due to his mother being an actress and founding member of the Scottish National Theater (Turner 1982:7).

<sup>8</sup>A South African term referring to grassland.

[sa]:[sp]). Considering her history on a purely geographical level, she found herself in a liminal space, described by Turner as the in-between state and viewed as a 'life crisis' or a boundary situation by Jaspers (Barrie 1998:3).

Marks was physically removed from where she previously lived, her social structure and familiar surroundings. Her identity as a single lady changed to that of a wife, resulting in a change of name. The Pretoria she found herself in was a colonised city which did have English rituals to which Marks could relate, providing some remnants of a familiar structure. But the familiar was vastly overpowered by the new, requiring redefining of whom she was, and her role in the new environment. It is in this context that Farber places herself in order to comment on the correlation between the colonial and post-colonial.

Farber takes on the persona of Marks in a performance piece, *A room of her own*<sup>9</sup>(2006), using Marks's boudoir for the setting (Farber [sa]:[sp]). The use of the boudoir as a setting is significant because of the personal nature of a boudoir, being a private space rather than another room in the house. Owing to its personal and private nature, a boudoir usually reflects who the people are that occupy that space, their taste, habits etc., leaving the inhabitant vulnerable to observation, making it a strong signifier of belonging. It is in this recreated space that Farber explores belonging and the impact of immigration.

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<sup>9</sup>The title given to the central performance piece *A Room of her own* makes reference to Virginia Woolf's essay *A room of one's own* (1929) where Woolf states the importance of a woman having a room of her own. E.M Foster's *A Room with a view* (1908), the novel *The Awakening* (1899) by Kate Chopin as well as *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1899), a short story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, are all influential in dealing with narratives of liberation and transformation (Farber [sa]:[sp]). Farber uses the concept of the room as a stage where the colonial and post-colonial meet, using the room as signifier of "a traditional, private space which offers a form of psychological, intellectual, emotional and cultural liberation" (Farber[sa]:[sp]).



Farber recreated the room in a stage-like setting. The backdrop is a door that seems to be leading out onto a porch overlooking a rose garden. The rest of the backdrop is a replica of the wall paper, carpet and wooden floors closely resembling the original room exactly (Farber 2006:5)(Figure 2). Farber sits in character on a chair just off centre on the stage with a sewing table next to her. When looking at the space, the audience is aware of viewing a specific personal space, as if time paused for a moment, viewing the same English rose wall paper that Marks especially chose almost a century ago, reflecting a sense of who she was. Farber, through acting as Marks, opens this place into a space for public viewing.



Figure 2: Leora Farber, *A room of her own*, 2005 - 2006.  
Performance still.  
(Law-Viljoen [sa]:[sp])

The artist is seen in an off-white corset and what seems to be a petticoat, sitting on the chair sewing. As the performance proceeds it becomes obvious that Farber is not sewing her petticoat but rather she is sewing aloe leaves into the skin of her thigh (Figure 3). Extending the absurdity, the viewer becomes aware that the rose wall paper is not just two-dimensional, but consists of three-dimensional wax roses joined to the wall. During the performance the wax begins

to melt and the wallpaper starts disintegrating, with Farber showing no sign of anything being amiss. Farber fills the stage with conflicting dualisms: structure and anti-structure, fixity and movement, stagnation and metamorphosis (Venn 2010:326). Turner (1967:99) states that the presence of such dualisms presented simultaneously “characterise the peculiar unity of the liminal: that which is neither this nor that, and yet is both”. The result is a feeling of restlessness and turmoil.



Figure 3: Leora Farber. *A room of her own: Generation*, 2006 - 2007.  
Archival pigment printing on soft textured fine art paper 315g, 100 x 133.2cm.  
(Law-Viljoen [sa]:2).

Turner extended his concept of liminality by borrowing a term from Brian Sutton-Smith namely “anti-structure” and started to draw correlations between liminality and the concept of structure and anti-structure (Turner 1982:28). Through this application Turner defined structure as being that which proceeds and succeeds the anti-structure (the liminal or in-between stage); the indefinable liminal where normative rules do not apply (Turner 1982:28). Applying the concept of anti-structure to modern society, Turner sees a correlation between the concept of the liminal and the concept of leisure and “play” (Moore & Myerhoff 1977:39). Both of these actions are seen as liminal; they are a “break” with the norm of “work”, that which is structured and enforced on us by society. The concept of

choice is raised, since even though there might be order and structure in “leisure” and “play” (for instance in a sport, with all of its rules), it is assumed the activity is done by choice<sup>10</sup> and not because it is the norm classifying it as anti-structure (Moore & Myerhoff 1977:42). The activity of needle work, which Faber presents, can be classified as a leisure activity done in a lady’s spare time. In so doing, Faber not only relates to Turner’s notion of leisure, but also enforces the characteristic play between structure and anti-structure found within the liminal.

The dualistic tension between structure and anti-structure is set up through physical changes to the room as well as her body during the course of the performance. At the onset of the performance, everything seems ordered, familiar and safe. The wall paper is beautiful and recognisable as something fitting for a colonial home, the chair and carpet neatly placed and the sun even seems to be shining outside; but then it starts transforming into a collapse of structure as the performance proceeds. The wallpaper which is a ‘solid’ entity starts melting away; leaving wax trails on the once perfectly controlled borderline between the two patterns on the wall. Robyn Sassen (2007) describes the roses to be “... like lumps of bloody flesh, they dismantle themselves and crash to the ground.” This metaphor of flesh enhances the feeling of the event being very personal, carrying connotations of privacy and intimacy. In addition it adds to the feeling of uncertainty and confusion as the transformation of the old makes way for something new. The loss of structure is emphasised through Farber’s clothes and actions. The artist presents herself in what is associated with undergarments in Mark’s time; for a woman to present herself attires as such in public was unheard of and definitely frowned upon in the social structure. The artist’s appearance in undergarments implies a symbolic removal of the exterior or top layer: the past being stripped away with only the present remaining.

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<sup>10</sup>Turner (1982:55) goes on to differentiate between the liminal and the liminoid, “the *liminoid* is more like a commodity- indeed, often *is* a commodity, which one selects and pays for- than the *liminal*, which elicits loyalty and is bound up with one’s membership or desired membership in some highly corporate group”. For this study I find this differentiation unnecessary due to the extent of the application of the common characteristics found in both concepts encompassing liminality.

### 2.1.2 Belonging and displacement

Turner (1982:24) notes that the in-between liminal stage contains fragments of the preceding or subsequent social states. Turner (1982:24, 26) describes these fragments to be “crucial” but few, due to the liminal being a state where the subject is described as dying in their former status in life, and being born again into the next stage following the liminal. This involves a process of ridding themselves of signs of the previous state and/or changing themselves to prepare for the new role or state which they will embody when finished. This defines the liminal as a process, rather than clean cut sections unrelated to the previous or subsequent stages (Turner 1967:101).

Throughout the performance, Farber makes reference to the past through placing herself in Marks’ room, with its distinctive (period appropriate or colonial) rose wallpaper and wearing clothes of the era. No reference is made to the future; there is no dress waiting to be put on again, or glue implying that the roses will be stuck back onto the wall. This places Farber firmly in the present, surrounded by anti-structure and chaos. Farber takes on the persona of Marks in order to explore the concept of immigration and belonging by using Marks as the link to symbolise her own European roots. The notion of hybridity and grafting is used as a physical activity verbalising the psychological process the two personas had to endure in defining their identity and coping with the sense of displacement. As previously mentioned, Jaspers suggests that the “unrest of the boundary situation” lies in acting like the “given facts” of the situation were actually your own will (Jaspers 1970:184). Faber relates to this in her willing act of grafting her body with Africa, acting as if this unnatural act of sewing into her skin is her own idea.

The concept of grafting is fitting in this context due to the involvement of two different species having elements removed or displaced, undergoing a process of being joined together to make a new species. This joining process can be compared to the liminal; dying of the old species, and subsequent combination to start a new species. The purpose of grafting is “to cultivate new orders, through actions of cutting, severing, transplanting and attaching different species to and from each other.” (Farber [sa]:[sp]). Grafting implies a melting together, in combination with the concept of hybridity resulting in the creation of a new species (Farber [sa]:[sp]). When mentioning hybridity in the context of post-colonial thought, it can be understood as a derogatory term used to describe ‘mixed-breeds’ or children from miscegenation (Meredith 1998:2). This study does not use the aforementioned definition, but rather intends ‘hybridity’ in the same sense as the theorist, Homi K Bhabha’s concept of hybridity or “Third Space”, as described in *The Location of Culture* (1994):

[W]e find ourselves in the 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. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the beyond: an exploratory, restless movement ...here and there, on all sides ... hither and thither, back and forth. (Bhabha 1994:2)

In a post-colonial context, the “Third Space” refers more specifically to a process whereby the “colonial governing authority undertakes to translate the identity of the colonised (the *Other*) within a singular universal framework but then fails, producing something familiar but new” (Meredith 1998:2). What remains is a liminal space of translating and negotiating. Farber applies this concept in two ways; firstly, through exploring her own post-colonial identity and secondly, through physically creating new species through combination of aloe and rose, and aloe and skin.

As previously mentioned, Farber uses the persona of Marks, placing herself in the colonial setting to symbolise her European roots. Farber questions her personal orientation and direction in trying to define her identity and sense of belonging. She achieves this through the use of the Victorian dress in combination with the modern boyish hairstyle, the African hide and aloe tying Farber to the here and now and setting up a sense of belonging to Africa (Farber 2009:11). The effect is a conflicting sense of belonging illuminating an either/or situation giving rise to a sense of displacement. Instead of staying at home doing needle work, Farber positions herself in the landscape and the garden, venturing 'outside' and deliberately grafting the aloe (representing Africa) into herself almost as an act of trying to deny her colonial belonging. In this way she forges a new sense of belonging onto herself which becomes a desperate act of dealing with her African environment.

In the photographs accompanying the performance, as seen in *Aloerosa: Veldscape* (2005-2007) (Figure 4), the figure seems determinedly heading toward something hidden from the picture plane into a new horizon. In a physical sense, Farber is removing herself geographically from the English house and taking a journey into 'Africa'. Displacing herself in order to belong:

One could say that for Farber the body becomes the script or template for the telling of migrant dislocation and the cultivation of new life, but it is not any body; it is the white, female body of a Jewish settler, living her displacement in the in-betweenness of an elsewhere which is at once new home and homely. (Venn 2010:331)



Figure 4: Leora Farber, *Aloerosa: Veldscape*, 2005-2007.  
Archival pigment printing on soft textured fine art paper 315g, 86.65 x 120cm.  
(Law-Viljoen [sa]:[sp]).

Now the question arises, does Farber fit into this new Africa? The use and emphasis of skin is not coincidental when mentioning South African history and belonging in the same sentence. Looking back at a history of apartheid, the act of transforming her skin is relevant due to skin being such a topical issue in South African history. The very whiteness of Farber's skin already classifies her as part of the colonial history, and as belonging to those whom were not here from the beginning. Yet, because she was born here she is classified as South African, thus turning her identity in flux. She does not belong to England anymore, nor does she totally fit in now, so the sewing could reflect a psychological act of grafting or hybridisation in an attempt to fit in with her geographical surroundings.

Furthermore, Farber, together with the South African fashion and design team Strangelove, comprising Carlo Gibson and Ziemek Pater, approached hybridity and grafting from its botanical origins by designing and casting physical aloe-rose hybrid species (from wax, plastic, candle gel and plant material). Farber and her team took characteristics from the English rose and of Aloe plants to create new hybrids whilst retaining some of the old, recognisable characteristics. In his exploration of the liminal, Turner (1982:27) relates the grafting process to

“playing” with the familiar elements and de-familiarising them to form something new. Turner (1982:28) quotes Brian Sutton-Smith, who highlights the importance of liminal states, since as Sutton-Smith puts it, “(they are) the source of new cultures”; settings in which new models, symbols and paradigms arise as the “seed beds of cultural activity”. These new species suggest, in a visual form, the symbolic merging which immigrants undergo: not being recognisable roses anymore, neither being fully Aloe. They have become something new.

The new hybridised state of being can result in identity ‘difficulties’ in terms of notions of belonging. For both Farber and Marks, their new ‘homes’ have become South Africa and not Europe anymore. Marks had to re-evaluate her understanding of herself and her new identity as being a colonial-European living in Africa, not ‘purely’ European anymore. When visiting Europe she will be seen as being from Africa, with her home and belongings there, and when in South Africa she will clearly stand out as being from Europe. She did not belong comfortably on either continent, her sense of belonging had to be found in the liminal space between her feelings of displacement and belonging wherever she went.

Even though Farber grew up in South Africa, her European and Jewish roots still played a major role in forming her identity, as Farber([sa]:[sp]) explains:

My sense of ambivalence is characterised by a sense of psychological dislocation, coupled with a need to re-locate myself within this new environment in ways that permit personal integrity. This entails a re-evaluation of both personal and collective naturalised western and Eurocentric values, morals, ideologies and beliefs, embedded in South Africa’s colonial past and within my consciousness.



She continues (2009:7),

My sense of displacement in post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa is characterised by a sense of psychological *dislocation*, coupled with a need to relocate myself within this rapidly transforming environment.

Similar to Marks, Farber finds her sense of belonging in the liminal space amidst her feelings of displacement from both continents. The manner in which these two women went about creating this sense of belonging differs; Marks enforced her old framework onto the new while Farber suggests a hybrid of both worlds. Both Marks and Farber are confronted with redefining what belonging means. Marks struggled with homesickness and fitting in: "... Zwartkoppies<sup>11</sup> remained a place of emotional, intellectual and physical restriction and isolation from her family and 'home'" (Mendelsohn cited in Farber 2009:6). Her means of coping with liminal displacement was through recreating her idea of 'home' (in the physical sense) by importing her English house and roses as she remembered them, in an attempt to hold onto her European roots, resisting integration with South Africa.

In *Dis-Location/Re-Location* (2005-) as a series of works, a narrative forms in the photographs that suggest Farber's journey of transition. The depiction of Farber's physical displacement in *A room of her own*, 2005 - 2006 (Figure 3) starts inside Marks's boudoir; continues in *Aloerosa: Induction*, 2004 - 2007 (Figure 5) where Farber has moved outdoors but is still surrounded by the cultivated roses; and in *Aloerosa: Veldscape*, 2005 - 2007 (Figure 4) Farber walks into the veld leaving any structural sign of Europe behind.

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<sup>11</sup> The name of the farm on which Marks lived.



Figure 5: Leora Farber, *Aloerosa: Induction*, 2004-2007.  
Archival pigment printing on soft textured fine art paper 315g, 65 x 65cm.  
(Law-Viljoen [sa]:[sp]).

Figure 3 presents Farber as sewing aloe leaves into her skin inside the house, crediting her European roots and sense of belonging. The photographs then develop to where she is photographed outside in the landscape: at first just inside the garden but later in the surrounding veld (Figure 4 and Figure 5). The presence of aloe signifies Farber's identity transformation of 'Africanisation', which increases as the photos progress until the aloe starts taking over. The "English rose seems to be infested with the presence of thorny, indigenous aloes - they grow into her veins, along her arms, they even seem to go for the jugular and grow out of her throat. But do they conquer her?" (Sassen 2007). Throughout the majority of the photos the reference to Europe remains with her dress or corset being present. Even in the photos where the dress is not present and only her arm is presented with the aloe growing from it, her skin's whiteness is emphasised, symbolising her European heritage. The result is a state of having both and yet none; being in-between.

Farber seems to have been born into this state of psycho-geographical liminality. The fact that she was born in South Africa does not alter her psychological and emotional experience of belonging elsewhere. In *Aloerosa: Supplantation* (2006 - 2007) (Figure 6) only the corset (made from cow hide) remains in the picture plane, lying abandoned in the veld among rocks and some aloes. The first deduction is that Farber had discarded her clothing, heading forward. The corset's strings are now loose; rather than signifying destruction, this signifies the abandonment of restrictions, a return to nature; nude and free as a reminder of Eve. Farber leaves her European roots to embrace her new South African identity. Leaving only physical objects to remain, showing that there was once a colonial history which Africa has come to redefine and make its own (signified by the corset made from cow hide), but the body is gone. The absence of the body can be equated with Turner's description of the subject in the liminal being "invisible" structurally if not physically (Turner 1967:95).



Figure 6: Leora Farber, *Aloerosa: Supplantation*, 2006-7.  
Archival pigment printing on soft textured fine art paper 315g, 52 x 70cm.  
(Law-Viljoen [sa]:[sp]).

Turner describes this invisibility as being linked to the lack of ability to define the liminal subject, “as members of society, most of us see only what we expect to see, and what we expect to see is what we are conditioned to see when we have learned the definitions and classification of our culture”(Turner 1967:95). He goes on to explain this statement at the hand of a novice in a puberty rite. Secular society does not know how to define a subject that is not-boy-not-man, “if it can be said to be anything” and thus excludes this being regarding the being as invisible. Similarly, Faber can be seen as being invisible, because she has now transformed herself into an unknown hybrid which is not recognised by society. As a result, initiates are “secluded, partially or completely” from societies, “well ordered” cultural states and statuses. Bauman (2004:93) argues that in our current “liquid modern” global society, it is the fear of exclusion and being rejected, fear of being left alone with out company, which haunts society the most. This fear is fuelled by “forces of globalization” (Bauman 2004:93):

They change beyond recognition, and without warning, the familiar land-scapes and cityscapes where the anchors of our durable and reliable security used to be cast. They reshuffle people and play havoc with their social identities. They may transform us, from one day to another, into homeless vagabonds with no fixed address or identity.

Identity seems to have become an entity to be put on and taken off, ready to be replaced with the next identity. Bauman (2004:53) refers to a perspective philosopher of culture, Beata Fraydryczak, who notes that this “hero of modernity’ could not be a collector, since what counted for him was just the ‘here and now’, fleeting moment.” He continues to say that, “If he did collect something,- his collectables were sensations, excitements, *Erlebnisse*<sup>12</sup>. And sensations are by their nature as frail and short-lived, as volatile as the situations that triggered them.” This notion Bauman describes as a “strategy of *carpe diem*”

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<sup>12</sup>Experiences.

which comes as a reaction to a world “emptied of values pretending to be lasting” (Bauman 2004:53).

These acts of grafting and ‘shedding’ raise questions as to whether Farber has found belonging in a liminal state of dual-identity, and whether she was able to find a sense of belonging in South Africa. This condition of displacement and liminality relates to today’s reality of a global village and its metaphors of immigrancy and nomadism that can be viewed as describing the “(post)modern condition” of “being rootless, of living between worlds, between a lost past and a non-integrated present” (Nel 2007:235). The availability of advanced transport systems, in comparison to what Marks had in the 1800s, as well as accessible electronic communication makes it easier to connect to what is classified as ‘home’ and ‘away’. Subsequently, the prospect of multiple identities and multiple localities becomes possible, allowing people the luxury not to having to merge with their new culture on the one hand, or on the other, being able to form new ways of staying connected, integrating the here and there (Cohen & Kennedy 2007:521, Kwon 2002:158).

## **2.2 Liminality in spaces of technology and communication**

Thus far, this study has focused on those who have left; the emigrant (either physically or psychologically), their place of origin and having to form new identities elsewhere. The remainder of the chapter will focus on two artists who remained in their country of origin; whilst their families have emigrated. The psychological result is very similar in that the people and objects which constituted their understanding of belonging are displaced, leaving them in an in-between. On a geographical level, the artists are not necessarily displaced, but psychologically and emotionally their feelings correlate with the experience of immigration. These experiences and emotions regarding longing and belonging

are investigated in correlation with technology (telecommunications and the internet) looking at the effect communication systems have on displacement and a sense of belonging.

Jenna Burchell, a young South African artist, depicts the effects of emigration in her work *Family Portrait*, 2007 (Figure 7), an installation comprising two colonial style chairs with extended legs holding an old black telephone each. Against the wall behind them, in a gold frame, is another black telephone. In front of this scenario hangs a large golden frame literally framing the scene. In small black letters on the floor is written an invite for the viewer to step inside (Figure 8), through the frame and into the framed scene. The viewer's motion activates the phones to start ringing randomly. As soon as one picks up a phone, another one rings. What one hears are voices saying "Hello? Can you hear me?" and similar phrases ranging in tonal voice from sadness to frustration.

The scene reminds one of a family portrait where one can imagine two older people sitting next to each other with a picture of a child against the wall behind them; yet in this scene no specific person is present, only a phone in each place. Usually the two figures in front would be assumed to be 'present' at home, with the child/ person in the photograph being the one referred to as being absent, or in such portraits, gone to study or work. Now only a phone remains. Burchell highlights a resultant effect of globalisation: time-space compression.



Figure 7: Jenna Burchell, *Family Portrait*, 2007.  
Installation, dimensions variable.  
(Family portrait [sa]).

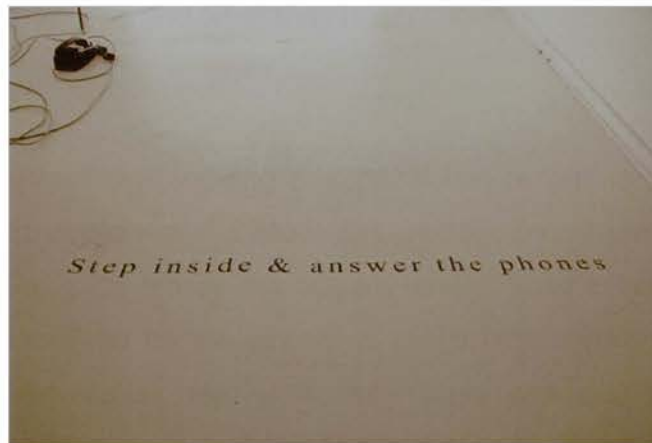


Figure 8: Jenna Burchell, *Family Portrait* (detail), 2007.  
Installation, dimensions variable.  
(Family portrait [sa]).

"Time-Space compression", as the theorist Doreen Massey ([sa]:59) defines, "is a term which refers to movement and communication across space. It is a phenomenon which implies the geographical stretching-out of social relations and to our experience of all this." Technology plays a central role in time-space

compression. According to Michael Featherstone (1995:115), a leading theorist on globalisation, people are now relying on advanced means of communication to overcome time-space separation. In her artist's statement, Burchell ('Family portrait' [sa]:[sp]) explains that *Family portrait* entails a portrait of her own family, as well as a metaphor for other families experiencing diaspora in South Africa, owing to the present political and economic climate. She remained in South Africa while her parents went abroad.

The phones are activated when a viewer steps into the space. First just one phone rings, but as soon as one is picked up another starts ringing. If more than one viewer enters the portrait, the second viewer can pick up the second phone that rings, expecting to be able to communicate with the first person, but there is only a static 'hello? hello?'. The second person can see the first and yet feels detached because they cannot communicate. A space is created between them, an awareness of a 'there' and being 'here', an inaccessibility, leaving the viewer in-between what they see and what they hear.

Standing outside the frame viewing this interaction results in a different portrait being painted; frustration and dislocation, miscommunication and confusion, strangers filling the gaps left by the absent family. Their relationship with each other is now symbolised by the phone, a piece of technology. Technology is substituting the figures in the work, seemingly reducing the geographical distance, connecting people but evidently replacing them. This leaves the spectator in-between in a liminal; connecting, yet not connecting, a condition that Maureen de Jager (1999:113) describes as "relentless instability". De Jager (1999:113) argues that this is a primary condition which individuals face in South Africa today and the world over. Through the chairs (Figures 9 a & b) being propped up on wooden sticks, Burchell not only reinforces the notion of instability, but she also renders the chairs inappropriate for seating: dysfunctional



and useless. Burchell suggests that telecommunications and cyberspace has the ability to connect people and the promise of real, stable communication, but only results in static lines, a pseudo-reality making the individual feel even more disconnected, reaching to the next phone in hope of a clear connection. “Such moments of apparent fixity are both illusory and temporary” (De Jager 1999:113). As soon as the call is finished the caller is left in one place but wants to be in another.



Figure 9a & b: Jenna Burchell, *Family Portrait* (detail), 2007.  
Installation, dimensions variable.  
(Family portrait [sa]).

Burchell depicts a need and desire to connect with her family who are not with her. There is a longing for what existed before the family was split - feelings of belonging and an understanding of home. The telephone is a symbolic means to reconnect to those feelings, with the promise of bringing the family together. As demonstrated, this promise seems to disappoint, leaving the person in an in-

between space. The *here* with which they are left, is not the same as when their family was present, and yet they are not *there* where the family is either.

Due to the disruptive influence of factors like Diaspora, colonization and the present reality of globalization in large parts of the world, individuals and societies have had to undergo transitions, not only between continents and cultural communities but also in the personal sphere of family groups or relations. In these transitions they have felt and still feel the need to 'connect' somewhere to something and someone in order to belong (Wenzel 2007:45).

In a later piece, *Rambler*, 2009 (Figure 10), Burchell continues engaging with the dilemma of failed communication and absence versus presence. *Rambler* consists of a canvas covered with what seems to be a vine creeping up and over it. Upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that the vine is made of wires with small speakers and recording devices sprouting sporadically like flowers (Figure 11 a & b).



Figure 10: Jenna Burchell, *Rambler*, 2009.  
Installation, 150cm x 100cm.  
(‘Rambler’ [sa]).

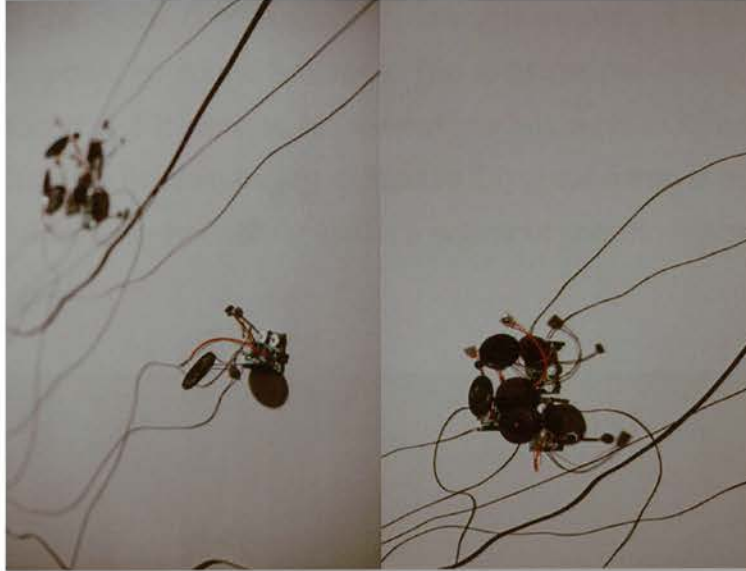


Figure 11a & b: Jenna Burchell, *Rambler* (detail), 2009.  
Installation, 150cm x 100cm.  
(‘Rambler’ [sa]).

The viewer is encouraged to record something by speaking through the tiny flower-like microphones, which will then be played over and over until a subsequent recording is made. Each ‘flower’ then rambles on, resulting in a cacophony of incongruent dialogue until someone else records something new and adds to the sound. Similar to *Family portrait*, the recording devices promise a connection with someone else, but only result in people literally talking over each other and past each other. The voice recordings become an in-between, not being the actual person speaking nor reaching the person the message is intended for. Communication is rendered useless and dysfunctional, and the individual is lost in the liminal cacophony of words resulting from a flow of nonsensical sound. There is no means of tracking what sound belongs to which person, displacing the meaning.

In one of my own works, *Binary (de)form(ed)*, 2009 (Figure 12), an installation, 268 brass bells are suspended to make up the form of a large bell that disintegrates to one end. Each bell is weighed down by its own clapper, but it has been removed from the inside of the bell and hangs at a lower level (Figure 13).

When viewing the piece one expects to hear the sounds of the little bells but when touching a bell, no sound emerges. The only manner in which the bell can still make a sound is if it were to hit against the bell next to it, but because the string from which the bell is hanging is fixed to the ground that is also impossible. The work remains mute- not able to make a sound or communicate.



Figure 12: Magdel Fourie, *Binary (de)form(ed)* 2009.  
268 brass bells, fishing gut and transparent tape, dimensions variable.  
Photograph by the author.

The title of the work was derived from the musical term 'binary form' describing the phenomenon of a home key relating to the closest next key and the closest base key relating back to the home key. For me, this is symbolic of having family overseas and having the urge to return 'home' to my father in New Zealand, and yet South Africa is home. I express my continuous position of displacement wanting to return to somewhere but continuously finding myself displaced and (de) 'form'(ed), rather than 'form'(ed). South Africa is not where my father is, and yet New Zealand is a country foreign to me. The concept of belonging for me consists of a combination between South Africa as 'home' and my father who is not here. Therefore, a new understanding of home is required, incorporating the

distance together with the psychological connotations my father plays in its construction, leaving me in-between.



Figure 13: Magdel Fourie, *Binary (de)form(ed)* (detail) 2009.  
268 brass bells, fishing gut and transparent tape, dimensions variable.  
Photograph by the author.

The gap between the clapper and the bell also reflects the struggle for meaningful communication: everything is in place for such communication but the gap is sometimes still just too big to transmit clear sound, in the literal sense as well as metaphorically. On a larger scale, through the new communication technologies, many systems (such as *Facebook*, *Skype* and *Twitter*) are in place but, as similarly depicted in Burchell's work, this does not eliminate the feeling of being displaced. Coming closer to *Binary (de)form(ed)* one notices that the objects are disconnected in their apparent connectedness: the bells cannot make a sound (Figure 14) and the bigger bell is disintegrating, as if bursting apart (Figure 15). Due to the scale of the work, the image of the bell reminds the viewer of a church bell ready for chiming. Time is implied, enforcing the concept of time-space compression, and underlining the idea of continuity and movement. The idea of movement versus the static bells creates a sense of unrest. This flux

voices the psychological liminal space of constant movement between longing to be connected and being disconnected.



Figure 14: Magde IFourie, *Binary (de)form(ed)*(detail),2009.  
268 brass bells, fishing gut and transparent tape, dimensions variable.  
Photograph by the author.



Figure 15: Magdel Fourie, *Binary (de)form(ed)*, 2009.  
268 brass bells, fishing gut and transparent tape, dimensions variable.  
Photograph by the author.

Turner (1982:47) describes this sense of belonging as an “intuition” of unity named “*communitas*”, stating:

The great difficulty is to keep this intuition alive- regular drugging won't do it, repeated sexual union won't do it, constant immersion in literature won't do it, initiation seclusion must sooner or later come to an end. We thus encounter the paradox the *experience* of *communitas* becomes the *memory* of *communitas* itself in striving to replicate itself historically...

Similarly, Burchell and I have experienced a sense of “*communitas*” when we were with our families, and each time we make contact there is a longing for such a unity. And as the *experience* of *communitas* becomes less and less we are more dependent on the *memory* of *communitas*. This results in an increased longing for belonging, as well as frustration for not being able to reach *communitas* - leaving us in the liminal.

*Binary (de)form(ed)* reflects the state of disconnectedness caused by migration. Theoretically, each bell is still connected to their clapper and all the bells are connected in forming a bigger image. From a distance, the gut that reflects light reminds one of a network of wires and, together with the reflection of the golden bells, look very alluring and hopeful. The gut denotes a connectedness which Duval attributes to transnational identities residing between homelands and diasporic communities or immigrants (2007:90). He argues that a transnational is described as an individual that maintains “significant networks” between the “current place of residence and its place of origin” (Duval 2004:91). Even though neither Burchell nor I have emigrated, I would like to suggest that our feelings are similar on at least a psychological level to an immigrant.

## 2.3.Closing

In this chapter disconnection and the search for belonging have been posited as key concepts of a psycho-geographic state of liminality. For Bertha Marks, the need to ‘connect’ manifested in her attempts to recreate Europe in her new African reality. Yet Zwartkoppies still left her in isolation from her home and family, resulting in a liminal state of longing and belonging (Farber 2009:6). Relating to Marks’ feelings of displacement, Farber depicts her own feelings of liminality experienced at the current moment by drawing a dualism between Africa and Europe. In contrast to Marks, Farber actively engages with the idea of grafting herself with the aloe of Africa, making a conscious effort to integrate. Whether her attempt to belong is successful or not is uncertain, leaving the viewer in an undecided liminal space. “For a migrant or transnational, liminality ... suggests a spatial and temporal condition whereby nothing is stable and everything is constantly in flux” (Van Dyk 2005:10).

Similarly, in the work of Burchell and myself there is not a clear-cut sense of *there* and *here*, or even a clear connection between the two places. What seems to remain is a constant process of flux; neither fully connected nor fully disconnected. Telecommunication maintains transnational bonds but fails to establish a clear sense of belonging due to interruptions and ineffective systems, which lead to experiences and emotions of displacement and physical distance. In Farber’s work the same idea of flux is communicated, because even though she does make Africa part of herself, the process of comparing herself with Marks still voices a state of uneasiness and a search for belonging.

Chapter three investigates the notions of home and place in relation to immigrancy and those influenced by displacement.



## Chapter Three: Place and belonging

*A sense of place is “the geographical component of the psychological need to belong somewhere, one antidote to a prevailing alienation.”*

(Lippard 1997:7)

In the global village, meaningful social connections and relations have become spread out across beyond borders and nations reaching across the globe. As such, the concept of place and home has become a fluid idea that finds its meaning between temporality and a specific space occupied (Duval 2004:96). This applies in lesser or greater degrees to citizens, tourists and immigrants moving around, defining and re-defining place and the concept of place. A commonality seems to be found in place being personified space (Harvey [sa]:5), a viewpoint that is appropriated in this study, where place is interpreted as personal space in which an individual feels at home and has a sense of belonging. In this sense place, as a concept, is situated in opposition to the effects of globalisation, which seems to create more and more spaces without place, referred to by Featherstone (1995:102) as “simulated environments” or “no place spaces”. These “no place spaces” result in a sense of ‘placelessness’ and a nomadic feeling of not belonging in one place.

Harvey ([sa]:17) suggests that place construction is a continuous interplay between experience, perception and imagination and concludes that, similar to space and time, places should be read and understood as social constructs (Harvey [sa]:25). What distinguishes a place from just being a space (Harvey [sa]:25) is the result of different aspects, such as attachment to the landscape, people or memories of that specific space. Even though a place can be a public

space, it becomes a place due to a personal, subjective or private experience within that space. Robert Coles (in Relph 1976:38) stresses the need for a place, linking it to the necessity for roots: “[It is] utterly part of our nature to want roots, to need roots, to struggle for roots, for a sense of belonging; for some place that is recognised as *mine*, as *yours*, as *ours*” (Relph 1976:38) .

In defining place physically, according to Harvey ([sa]:4), three main criteria can be identified: The first refers to the inherent qualities of place known to us by words such as location, locality, neighbourhood, region, territory and milieu; a second category of criteria describes more specific site such as province, city, town or village; and thirdly, there are those descriptions of place whose connotations are closely linked to each other, making them almost indistinguishable, such as nation, community, home and landscape. Having mentioned these *physical* places it is important to note that ‘place’ also has strong *metaphysical* connotations within these more concrete definitions. The perceptions of place translate these into psychological understanding of knowing places and defining our identities accordingly (Harvey [sa]:4).

This chapter investigates psycho-geographic liminality in relation to the symptoms of globalisation, namely migration and continual transit, and its relation to place. Place-bound identities and the resulting problems are examined by examining the notion of belonging in relation to place and placelessness through artworks depicting the liminal as a journey.

### 3.1 In-between place: immigration

In Berni Searle's<sup>13</sup> works, *Home and away*, 2003 (Figures 16, 17 and 18), and *Waiting*, 2003 (Figures 19 and 20), the idea of place-bound identity is deconstructed and the notion of place acquires a meaning of liminality and a fluid identity. In 2003, Searle was commissioned to do a video piece for the Spanish government leading to the making of *Home and away* which comments on the migration from North Africa to Spain (Berni Searle 2003:45). The work depicts Searle floating in the sea wearing a black top and a double layered red and white flowing skirt (Figure 16 & 17). The camera follows the movement of the sea as Searle's body hovers in what seems to be nowhere. The voice-over accompanying the visuals is Searle's voice repeatedly reciting the conjugated verb forms, *to fear, to leave, to love* in Spanish (Berni Searle 2003:48). After a while, one is able to see land in the distance (Figure 18). It is unclear which shore one can see, being only aware of the hope that there is a shore and a new future, whilst simultaneously being aware of the endless floating still awaiting before reaching it.



Figure 16: Berni Searle, *Home and Away*, 2003.  
Video still  
NMAC Montenmedio Arte Contemporaneo, Vejer, Spain.  
(Berni Searle 2003:46).

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<sup>13</sup>Berni Searle is a South African based artist working mostly with video.



Figure 17: Berni Searle, *Home and Away*, 2003.  
Video still.  
INMAC Montenmedio Arte Contemporaneo, Vejer, Spain.  
(Berni Searle 2003:46).



Figure 18: Berni Searle, *Home and Away*, 2003.  
Video still.  
INMAC Montenmedio Arte Contemporaneo, Vejer, Spain.  
(Berni Searle 2003:46).

Searle submerges herself in the water surrendering her movement to its flow, which adds to her state of in-betweenness. Water, a fluid element, represents the transitional liminal phase (liquid) between a solid and a gas. The tides and currents of the 'liquid' sea turn it into an entity that exists in continuous flow of change and moving through seasonal or moon cycles, making it an essentially liminal place. Similarly, Bauman (in Urry 2007:33) equates our times with that of liquidity: "There is a shift from modernity as heavy and solid to one that is light and liquid, where speed of movement of people, money, images and information is paramount." Such fluidity is captured in the video stills, *Waiting #2* and *Waiting*

#3, 2003, (Figures 19 and 20) in the flow of Searle's skirt resembling the curves of a wave.



Figure 19: Berni Searle, *Waiting #2*, 2003.  
Lithograph on BFK Rivers watercolour paper, 660 x 50 mm.  
Photo credit Gaëtane Hermans.  
(Waiting series 2003 [sa]).



Figure 20: Berni Searle, *Waiting #3*, 2003.  
Lithograph on BFK Rivers watercolour paper, 660 x 505 mm.  
Photo-credit Gaëtane Hermans.  
(Waiting series 2003 [sa]).

Considering the elements of the sea, as well as Searle embodying the passage towards Spain, one is aware of the presentation being part of a journey with a destination, yet Searle does not offer a conclusion. She leaves the viewer in a

continuous loop of images of the floatation between two places, where the journey in the vast ocean seems like an endless passage, deeming the destination unreachable. There is a sense of uncertainty enhanced by the view of a shore because the immigrant does not know what waits, underscored by the soundtrack. Through this work, Searle visually represents the psycho-geographic space of the immigrant who finds themselves geographically and psychologically between two places - in a transitional phase, a 'no place'.

Geographically, Searle floats in the sea that is the liminal boundary between Africa and Spain. On a psychological level, the journey in the in-between no place serves as a space of redefining identity described in Turner's transitional phase (Turner 1982:26). Turner (1969:95) describes the "threshold people" or "liminal *personae*" as "persons who elude or slip through the network of classification that normally locate states and positions in cultural space." They are stripped of their clothes and belongings, thus removing their individual identities and likening them to being invisible; "[I]t is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew ..." (Turner 1969:95). Similarly, immigrants from North Africa embark into overcrowded boats and attempt to reach Spain's shore safely and undetected (Fraerman 2006:[sp]). Travelling without permits or legitimate visas, they are rendered 'nameless' by leaving their old identities behind in the hope of a better life and a new identity in Spain (Fraerman 2006:[sp]). But while they are crossing the water, they are in an in-between zone, having left their identity behind and without having the guarantee of a new identity. Psychologically, the immigrants also find themselves in a liminal state between the hope of a new beginning and the fear of being caught and sent back, or even of dying<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> In a report released by Spanish police in 2005 between one thousand two hundred and one thousand seven hundred illegal immigrants die annually while trying to cross between Africa and Spain (Fraerman 2006:[sp]).

It becomes a matter of being suspended between destination and the place of origin (Zaya 1999:296). In this liminal space the immigrant has not arrived at a new fixed identity announcing the end of the liminal phase, but rather drifts within the flow of the ocean. When reaching the shore the immigrants are not guaranteed of ridding themselves of the feelings of placelessness and a lack of belonging. For many immigrants the feelings of alienation never leave, both from the new adopted country as well as the country of origin, as if being in a “perpetual transit” and unable to secure a place that can be called their own (Zaya 1999:296). The immigrants remain in the liminal, since they will never be truly Spanish, being from Africa. In the same breath they would also not be able to return to their home country unchanged, making reintegration difficult, leaving the feeling of belonging just out of reach.

Karl Jaspers picks up on the notion of being in a continual boundary state with his description of boundary situations. He (Jaspers 1970:177) defines situations as a “*sense-related reality*” as being neither made up exclusively of psychological nor physical laws, but rather both at once. Turner (1982:24) characterises the liminal as a state that is followed by a subsequent state, implying that the liminal comes to an end necessarily. In turn, Jaspers emphasises the continual state of boundary situations in life, which he (1970:178) argues consists of situations that one can “never get out of one (situation) without *entering into another*”. When the ‘self’ experiences a boundary situation, it attempts to leap to *Existenz* and transcendence in order to become a transcendent ‘self’ to overcome the situation (Jaspers 1970:181). This process requires multiple leapings before reaching *Existenz* from which more leaping occurs before transcendence is attained, *if* at all (Jaspers 1970:181). By implication *Existenz* and transcendence are like a horizon towards which the leap takes place, just to discover another horizon when reaching the first like the waves in Searle’s video.

In a study conducted on the mental well-being of immigrants in Canada, a Polish immigrant to Canada stated the following (Maiter, Ochocka & Simich [sa]:7):

The whole process of going through culture shock, which has no time limits, is as if you have to forget who you were and create yourself all over again. And once you think you've got your feet on the ground, there comes a new 'out of this earth' experience that will shake your reality. Going through a culture shock is a never-ending story. It is a source of enormous stress. The damaging part is that it is prolonged.

The Polish immigrant voiced the necessity of continually "leaping", a process that entails continual adaptation and feelings of despondency: always remaining in the liminal. Searle relates to the permanency of the state of liminality in a number of ways. Firstly through exhibiting photographic stills from the video, which become like frozen moments in time and eternalise the state of being stuck in a single moment (Figures 16, 17, 18). Secondly, this notion is enhanced through the looping of the video, making transit the only reality, the only state of being. Thirdly, the soundtrack of the video reflects the psychological experience in relation to the geographical position not only of floating between the new and the old, but also being between different cultures and languages.

The Dutch artist and theorist, Mieke Bal (Bal, Crewe & Spitzer 1999:249), draws a comparison between video and migration. Bal ([sa]:[sp]) describes video as "the medium of time" where images move in time at a set pace, as well as often integrate different time frames into the time frame of a single piece. Similarly, migration is not only a reality of our time, but also an experience of duality. Bal ([sa]:[sp]) describes migration as, "[T]he time of haste and waiting, the time of movement and stagnation; the time of memory and of an unsettling, provisional present, with its pleasures and its violence." In Nathani Lüneburg's stop-frame video-animation *Dreaming of home*, 2008, (Figure 21) she attempts to map personal dreams whilst on an exchange visit to Melbourne, Australia.



The medium of stop-frame video-animation portrays time on multiple levels: time as taken to draw and record the images; time as unfolding in the piece; and time as experienced by the audience. Lüneburg's portrayal of feelings of longing and her memories of home contain a duality of "memory and of an unsettling, provisional present" (Bal [sa]:[sp]). She longs for domesticity represented by pets at home, now transformed into new shapes (Figure 21) which then morph into unsettling frightening images (Figure 22) while the figure lies asleep. The resulting effect is the presentation of a liminal drifting being between worlds, countries, and time.



Figure 21: Nathani Lüneburg. *Dreaming of Home*, 2008.  
Video still from stop-frame video-animation.  
(Fried Contemporary ...2011).



Figure 22: Nathani Lüneburg. *Dreaming of Home*, 2008.  
Video still from stop-frame video-animation.  
(Fried Contemporary ...2011).

The notion of time and temporality is depicted in my own work mostly through the use of shadows, drawing on the fleetingness and intangibility of shadows to denote time and being between entities. Four of my pieces, *Place* (Figure 23), *Tie*, *Stay* and *Move* (Figure 24) (2010), are based on the concept of maps. They consist of inter-linked words reminiscent of a diagram of the London Underground or bus routes. The works are visual representations of a thesaurus exploring the key words pertaining to psycho-geographic liminality: place (a concept of home, and belonging), tie (tie down, tie together, what ties together?), move (constant moving, fluidity) and stay (stationary, in one place, belonging versus stagnation).

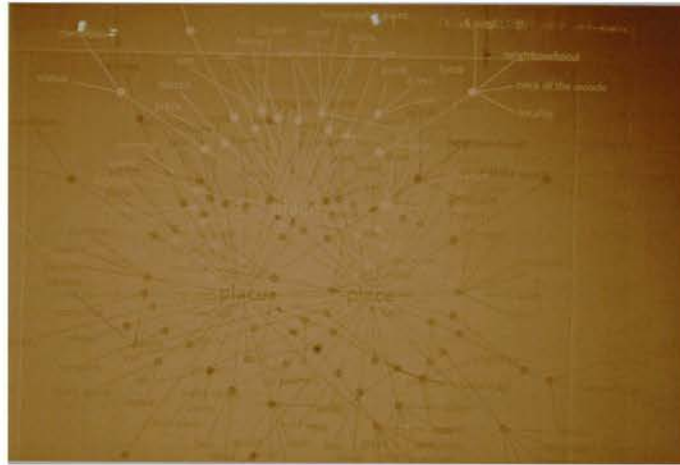


Figure 23: Magdel Fourie, *Place*, 2010.  
Perspex, 2 m x 1,5 m.  
Photograph by the author.



Figure 24: Magdel Fourie, *Move*, 2010.  
Perspex, 2m x 1,5 m.  
Photograph by the author.

The 'maps' are printed in white on large (2m x 1,5m) Perspex sheets and suspended away from the wall, which has resulted in the words melding with the white of the wall, leaving only the overlapping shadows created through multiple light sources (Figure 25). The interconnecting lines and dots cross, making new connections and erasing others, reminding one of telecommunication networks and the pathways of airplanes and highways, reflecting the restlessness and mobile attributes of today's society (Richard & Wilson 2004:3). Relating to the

notion of the immigrant, these lines evoke transnationalism as suggested by Duval (2004:91), acting as an in-between state where diasporic communities still maintain links with their community of origin and their current community. Maintaining meaningful relations with multiple homes, in turn, means that the immigrant's concept of place and belonging does not reside in one place but rather becomes a fluid movement in-between. Through the use of shadow in these works the 'stability' of place is questioned and the shadows form an intangible map presented as a "simulated environment" (Featherstone 1995:102). The words and constructs are elusive, their presence ephemeral and fleeting.



Figure 25: Magdel Fourie, *Place* (detail), 2010.  
Perspex, 2m x 1,5 m.  
Photograph by author.

### 3.2 In-between place: transit

The condition of continual transit does not only apply to immigrants, but is a sign of our times in our cities and across the globe as travellers commute on highways and airlines between countries. In a video piece '*Eight to Four*', 2001 (Figure 26, 27 and 28), South African artist Usha Seejarim explores the ephemeral quality of travel through documenting her daily commute along the same route between Lenasia, where she lives, and her work in Johannesburg. In

the work, the surrounding landscape keeps changing with the only constant being the shadows of the car the artist is travelling in. The viewer can see the transition from the peri-urban areas with veld and grass (Figure 26) to the concrete suburban area with houses (Figures 27, 28). When the video is looped the journey keeps on repeating itself as one monotonous never-ending transit.



Figure 26: Usha Seejarim, *Eight to Four*, 2001.  
Video still.  
(Usha Seejarim [sa]).

Similar to Searle's work, Seejarim's video works question place and placelessness. Her 'home' is in Lenasia and her work is in Johannesburg<sup>15</sup>. Since 1994 and the change of government, citizens are not restricted in terms of movement and settlement any longer, but Seejarim remained in Lenasia by choice. According to Relph (1976:38), "to have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one's own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular." For Seejarim, this kind of order has been created at home as well as in the city. She has a firm position in terms of what she does and who she is in Johannesburg, grounding her as much there as in

<sup>15</sup> Lenasia is a settlement outside Johannesburg to where Indian South Africans were moved in the apartheid years as part of segregation.

Lenasia. Instead of juxtaposing these two places through her representation, Seejarim records the journey in-between the two places; that which links the two, the 'no place space' (Featherstone 1995:102). In addition the images fade in over each other as the film proceeds (Figure 27), creating new places which do not really exist.



Figure 27: Usha Seejarim, *Eight to Four*, 2001.  
Video still.  
(Usha Seejarim [sa]).



Figure 28: Usha Seejarim, *Eight to Ffour*, 2001.  
Video still.  
(Usha Seejarim [sa]).

Seejarim undertakes this journey on a daily basis and has become familiar with it, seeing it change and 'grow'. This sense of familiarity or "personified space", as suggested by Harvey ([sa]:5), can cause this space of placelessness to become a space of place and belonging. The blurred quality of the video capturing the movement of the vehicle reminds one of mug shots or videos taken whilst on holiday as a tourist passing by. This notion transforms the placeless road into a place of significance. This transformation from a placeless space, with no meaning to a place correlates with the Situationists' idea of psycho-geography. Considering Jaspers's notion of situations being psychological and physical, a direct correlation can be drawn to the Situationist Debord's understanding of situations due to the psychological importance of a geographical/physical space. Debord (1957:96) states that "our central purpose is the construction of situations, that is, the concrete construction of temporary settings of life and their transformation into a higher, passionate nature". In contrast to Jaspers's boundary situations, Debord suggests that we need to create situations and not just deal with the situations we are 'dealt' so to speak, which Debord calls *dérive*. *Dérive* can be literally translated as meaning "drifting", described as a "technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances" involving "playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects..." (Debord [sa]:[sp]). In *eight to four* (2001) Seejarim creates a *dérive* through the recording of her "drifting" to and from Lenasia, since she experiences a sense of purposefulness in both Lenasia and Johannesburg. In this manner she derives meaning from the specific geographical journey she takes everyday. This transforms the non-space not usually associated with longing into a place denoting belonging, and therefore with a sense of meaningful liminality.

Similarly, my own work *Displaced demarcations*, 2010, (Figure 29), plays with the ideas of belonging and displacement, but turns it into an integrated state of uncertainty. The work consists of a central nest shape made of strips of cement

bags, which are suspended in such a way that they look scattered and dispersed. Strips circle the middle nest as if opening it up. A projection of a visual thesaurus representation of the word “home” in changing formations is projected on top of the scattered nest. The result is an image forming on the opposite wall showing the visual thesaurus interjected and disrupted by the shadows of the scattered strips of nest.

The thesaurus is reminiscent of a map with different names (words) being linked with lines. When viewed from the front, the words project in part on and over the nest implying that ‘home’ is symbolised by the nest. But ‘home’ is presented as in a state of disintegration. On one level the map simulates a web holding the pieces together. Each piece might have a different word (or destination) projected on it, but they all are connected to the same root word home. In contrast, when looking at the image cast on the wall, the picture is quite different. On the wall the map defining home is interrupted by dark shadows - blank entities of missing information. As time passes the formation of the map changes creating different words and thus the illusion of movement. These disconnected empty shapes, in combination with the moving map, communicate a sense of disconnectedness and of a home being displaced and scattered. Yet the displacement is paused; the nest does not fully disintegrate as time passes. It suspends the meaning between being connected and dis-connected and the sense of being both at home and homeless.





Figure 29: Magdel Fourie, *Displaced demarcations*, 2010.  
Cement bags, fishing gut, flour, video projection, dimensions variable.  
Photograph by the author.

The title of the work adds to this notion with the contradicting words “displaced demarcations”, where “displaced” has connotations of being lost, misplaced, out of place and removed from ‘usual’ place, while the word “demarcation” has a connotation of precision, a boundary, a specific place or a limit or margin. Together the inflections of meanings describe a boundary being moved and home being re-defined. With this image continually changing, the work leaves the viewer in-between, never being able to outline exactly where and what home is. In both Seejarim’s and my own work, belonging and displacement are set up through fleeting and changing imagery. The only constant in both are the shadows: the shadow of the car in Seejarim’s work and the shadow of the disintegrating nest in my work become communalities and a constant in such depiction.

The artist Rina Stutzer addresses the concept of transit, not so much from the viewpoint of the journey as an entity, but as the vessel that executes the journey as the in-between process. Stutzer’s work *Promises of nomadic thought VIII*

(*dyptich*), 2011, (Figure 30) consists of a photograph and a patina painting of caravans, each of which embodies a home on wheels, a mobile vessel transporting the concept of home.

Through the use of patina on copper the works connote transit, since the patina interacts with the environment and changes the colour of the images as time passes (Rina Stutzer [sa]: [sp]). Selected areas have been treated with wax, thus slowing the process of colouring in those areas. This medium together with the subject matter is used to render the ever changing nature of our society and “the constant state of flux [that] requires adaptation, compromise and negotiation” (Rina Stutzer [sa]: [sp]).

It is now the smaller, the lighter, the more portable that signifies improvement and ‘progress’. Travelling light, rather than holding tightly to things deemed attractive for their reliability and solidity- that is, for their heavy weight, substantiality and unyielding power of resistance- is now the asset of power (Bauman 2000:13).



Figure 30: Rina Stutzer, *Promises of nomadic thought VIII* (diptych), 2011.  
Copper Sheet, patina, aluminium sheet, UV ink print, 500X 340X 40 mm.  
Photograph by the author.

Stutzer picks up on this notion in her work *Die opbou van afbreek* (the building up of breaking down), 2011,(Figure 31) in which she rebuilt a caravan in the shape of Africa. The caravan is much smaller in size than a real-life version, compact almost. The symbol of Africa on wheels can be seen to make reference to Africa being a place in transit or of nomadic people, relating the work to the notion of migration. Through using the caravan in the South African context it evokes sentiment through the reference to (especially white) South Africans, who used to make use of caravans to go on holiday in remote and rural areas. Many South Africans have now emigrated and have become part of the nomadic culture of the world. *Die opbou van afbreek* is a three dimensional embodiment of the concept of a movable vessel; a home-on-wheels, belonging-in-transit. Bauman (in Jacobsen & Marshmann 2008:33) contrasts this notion of belonging-in-transit by comparing the caravan/camping site with that of our liquid society. The caravan becomes a symbol of the individual. Coming and going as it pleases in the solitude of its individualism. The result is an increased feeling of insecurity, lack of belonging and placelessness.



Figure 31: Rina Stutzer, *Die opbou van afbreek* (the building up of breaking down), 2011.  
Installation, dimensions variable.  
Courtesy of the artist.

The notion of movement and placelessness is continued in my own work, *Distance measured*, 2010 (Figures 32, 33). The work consists of nest shapes, similar to *Displaced demarcations*, that resemble cocoons made from cement bags stretched over a wire structure, resulting in organic shapes that appear to have been abandoned by some creature. The cocoons are suspended in a line formation as if in the process of migrating. On the floor Perspex rectangles have been joined to form a hyphenated line over which these cocoons hover and criss-cross.

The dashed line on the floor reminds one of a demarcation on a map indicating the borders of a territory. Van Dyk (2005:27) sees a dashed line as joined hyphens and the hyphen as a symbol that can be equated with the liminal and “undecided in-between”. She describes the hyphen as a transitional break from one entity to another, a space of transit embodying a time and space of “neither and either or the hybrid” (Van Dyk 2005:27). Returning to the dashed line, Van Dyk suggests its multiple uses as follows:

In technical drawings a dashed line indicates what is invisible, what is hidden behind the visible. Also, a dashed line on a document functions as a border, indicating where to separate, tear or cut. This...resonates with the postmodern transitional paradigm...between two separate geographies, sociographies and cultural identities. (Van Dyk 2005:27, 28)

The dashed line simultaneously comes to represent connection and separation, longing and belonging.



Figure 32: Magdel Fourie, *Distance measured* (detail), 2010.  
Installation, dimensions variable.  
Photographed by the author.



Figure 33: Magdel Fourie, *Distance measured* (detail), 2010.  
installation, dimensions variable.  
Photographed by the author.

The cocoons are made out of cement bags denoting building materials and connect to the concept of cities and progress, which adds to the feeling of an expanding global society. Furthermore, a cement bag is the vessel between the cement powder and a constructed structure deemed by many as very sturdy. The bags are now empty and void, fragile even, seen as waste displaced from their

original function. The cocoons are made to represent a psycho-geographic liminality of home: vessels on the move, suspended, empty, fragile yet sturdy. When considering the material, cement bags are not usually described as homely, rather reminiscent of a house not yet occupied or the fine cement dust that is unwelcome when extending or renovating a house. On a physical level, cement dust is something that dries up water and leaves skin dry, or is considered hazardous if inhaled. This leaves the viewer in a psychological in-between; the association of nesting, cocoons and being welcome compared to the caution and repulsion due to it being dirty and hazardous.

### 3.3 Closing

Through the investigation of the afore-mentioned artists' work, it can be concluded that contemporary societies are characterised by constant change, time-space compression and non-place liminal spaces. Yet the question arises:

Why is it that for so many of the academics who write about time-space compression, who are in relative control of their new mobility and means of communication, who jet off to (or from) Los Angeles to give a paper on it, does it generate such feelings of insecurity? Harvey (1989), for instance, constantly writes of vulnerability, insecurity and the unsettling impact of time-space compression. (Massey [sa]:63)

It seems that amidst the instability of contemporary societies, people are in desperate need of anchoring and to reside in a 'place', understood in Massey's ([sa]:63) words as a source of "stability and unproblematic identity." In global societies, tension seems to be created between finding and preserving a sense of identity, community and 'home', versus the dilemmas inherent in functioning in a globalised economy (Hauseman & Tavin 2004:48).

As shown by the artists, notions of belonging and community, as well as the concept of home have moved from being linear concepts to being seen as a continual process and an “experience of liminality” (Van Dyk 2005:10). Home as a single stationary place has been replaced by the psycho-geographic liminal as a state where an uncertain, fluid midway is found containing both place and placelessness, belonging and displacement. Featherstone (1995:102) argues that “what does seem clear is that it is not helpful to regard the global and the local as dichotomies separated in space or time; it would seem that the process of globalisation and localization are inextricably bound together in the current phase.” If place is a construct based on personal experiences and memory, then it is correct to maintain that our sense of place or placelessness depends on the experience or position in the process individuals find themselves in. After a phone call to the place of origin, the liminal leans over more to placelessness, but after taking part in a new found ritual in the new location, the liminal can gravitate more towards a sense of place.

## Chapter Four: Conclusion

*"I am rooted, but I flow."*

(Woolf 1978:69)

This study set out to investigate psycho-geographic liminality, a state of perpetual movement, found between an identity denoted by fragmentation and fluid change, as a result of transitivity, and identity defined by a sense of place, setting up two psychological states namely belonging and displacement. The research focus continues to be a current topic in art practice and research, exemplified in the theme of the 2011 Venice Biennale, "ILLUMInations", which referenced both light and enlightenment, but also, according to director Bice Curiger, presented "gestures that explore notions of the collective, yet also speak of fragmentary identity, of temporary alliances ..." (Curiger 2011). Curiger posed five questions to the selected artists, two of which were "how many nations do you feel inside yourself?" and "where do you feel at home?" (54<sup>th</sup> International...2011). These questions resonate with the search for belonging and exploration of what defines home, place and belonging discussed in this study. The question is not asked, 'what is your nationality'? It is assumed that in the global context there could be multiple nationalities involved and shared histories.

In Chapter Two of this mini-dissertation the work of Farber was problematised in terms of the notions of belonging by relating her current situation of a second generation white Jewish female in South Africa, to that of the colonial settler Marks. Farber does not lend concrete resolutions to her current state of alienation, but suggests grafting as a means to create a form of hybrid species that can adapt to Africa, but whether this will suffice and result in a sense of



belonging is not guaranteed. The viewer is left in a liminal space relating to experiences common to many in the global village, especially to the psycho-geographic state which Burchell and myself, for example, find ourselves in. For us the liminal is not brought about because we emigrated to a different country, but rather because we have family members in other countries. The artworks discussed deal not so much with the act of immigration, but rather with the role of technology in the liminal in-between places.

Telecommunication and the internet are presented as surrogate realities that maintain to uphold a sense of belonging with loved ones across the globe. Both the works of Burchell and myself suggest that technology simulates belonging but delivers disconnectedness, literally and psychologically leaving one to hover between feelings of belonging and displacement, which were further explored in relation to place in Chapter Three. In that chapter the work of Searle, who looks specifically at the immigrant's concept of place, and concludes that a perpetual transit between nations leaves the immigrant between place and placelessness, was investigated. In my own work I pick up on the notion of place versus placelessness through shadow maps relating the notion of the immigrant/emigrant to our global village and modern day nomads, criss-crossing the globe and questioning the in-betweenness of geographies. A specific manifestation of this kind of in-between liminality is transit. Seejarim's work relates to transit on a personal level depicting the road she daily travels between her home in Lenasia and work in Johannesburg. Through filming the journey and exhibiting it, the placelessness usually denoted by a journey between places is turned into a place itself, questioning the dichotomies of place and placelessness, belonging and displacement. In turn, Stutzer's work comments on the vessels used to navigate the liminal in-between presented to us in rapidly changing times.

Throughout this study, dichotomies have been set up, questioned and challenged, and the various artists' works have illustrated that experiences of longing and belonging are neither fixed on one side or on the other; not a *either/or* but rather a *both*; they indicate positions hovering between, creating dualisms, with the liminal containing bits of both sides, suggested as a process of continual flux (Van Dyk 2005:10). This state of continual flux was addressed at the end of Chapter Three with regard to my own work that presents the concept of cocoons or vessels in transit, denoting metaphorical forms of psychological representations of belonging being in continued displacement. As suggested by Van Dyk (2005:35),

Perhaps we need to 'master' more gracefully the art of being in suspension and become trapeze artists on the suspended hyphen in the transit space of our lives, always in motion from one to the other, always changing, always in the moment.

Bauman (2004:30) suggests that identity could be viewed as "a light cloak ready to be taken off at any time" (seen in the context of belonging in Chapter Two). Perhaps this suggestion can be applied to feelings of belonging and place as well; taking on the psychological sense of belonging in a specific place as that place presents itself, reacting to the moment, not referring back to the past or the future: when subsequently departing, leaving that cloak behind and dressing yourself under a new cloak in a different place, learning to recreate a sense of place with as little as possible, travelling light. There is a sense in which this sounds very appealing, but I am cautioned by this notions' correlation with what Bauman (2004:31) calls "cloakroom communities". Virtual realities as found in *SIM City* and even to a lesser extent in *Facebook* allow for such cloakroom communities to form: a space in which you can adopt an identity and seemingly have real relations "patched together for the duration of the spectacle" and then "promptly dismantle again" once the spectators leave (Bauman 2004:31). What I disagree with is the disregard for 'real' face to face relationships and 'real' places

due to the sense of belonging that such interactions provide, in comparison to the empty promise of the virtual counterparts or cloakroom communities.

In Chapter Three, Jaspers idea was explored that it is of no help to plan and calculate how we can overcome the boundary, the only meaningful thing seems to be “*becoming the Existenz we potentially are: we become ourselves by entering with open eyes into the boundary situation*” (Jaspers 1970:179). Similarly, Nel (2007:224) was mentioned in Chapter Two, as suggesting the importance of the threshold as a passage from one state to the next; a process of meaning resulting in psycho-geographic liminality becoming a current state of being.

South Africa houses many different culture/cultural groups and nationalities; some having been established here centuries ago and some using it as a temporary stop-over or hide-out from the social and political situation in their own countries. South Africans are suggested to find themselves in a psycho-geographic liminal state, either due to having family and children overseas, or just feeling unwelcome due to crime and the current political situation. Yet, many still stay in the country embracing/ or enduring the flux and uncertainty, learning to cope and recreating areas, activities or objects, in order to embrace a new created sense of belonging before continuing in the flow of transitivity.

Thus Bauman’s (2004:14) view that “one can even begin to feel everywhere *chez soi* ‘at home’” rings true, since home can now be defined - as suggested by Curiger - as a global community, but at a price. The price to be paid knowingly “with open eyes” as Jaspers (1970:179) suggests, is to accept that nowhere will one be fully and truly at home (Bauman 2004:14). Concluding that it is not a case of just one vessel afloat in the river but of many different vessels, and that

without necessarily touching a shore creates moments of belonging and displacement whilst remaining rooted, not to a stationary point but in continual flow of perpetual transitivity.

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