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### Dis-placing the world: Nomadic politics in Mona Hatoum's living cartographies of passages

Elena Tzelepis

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*Elena Tzelepis\**

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DIS-PLACING THE WORLD: NOMADIC POLITICS  
IN MONA HATOUM'S LIVING CARTOGRAPHIES  
OF PASSAGES

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ABSTRACT

*The present essay draws from contemporary art and particularly from the art of the diasporic artist Mona Hatoum. Hers is an art about a corporeal subjectivity attuned to a living cartography of passages between Palestine, Lebanon, and England. I explore her art work with intersecting cartographies and corporealities, by focusing on her artistic gestures of displacing established notions of "home" and the "world", in all their gendered implications. I try to unravel the ways in which Mona Hatoum keeps us on the alert for the hierarchies of false and abstract universalism, while, at the same time, keeps open the promise (and the question) for the potential subversiveness of "foreignness" and "belonging".*

*Keywords: Nomadic politics, postcolonial and feminist art, embodied political subjectivities*

1. INTRODUCTION

Mona Hatoum's avant-garde installations, performances, videos, and sculptures are marked by a bodily and sensible unconventionality, as well as an unsettling political engagement with questions of borders and boundaries, exile and belonging, displacement and emplacement. In this essay, I am looking into Hatoum's art in order to rethink modes of belonging and exile in relation to feminist political practice. I am particularly interested in the specific ways the artist enacts belonging not as a static site of comfort and territorial being or being-together, but rather

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\* Fellow in the Center for Advanced Study, Sofia.

as a deterritorialized and discomfoting performativity through which borders and bodies are displaced. I would like to argue that for Hatoum belonging does not invoke a spatial ontology of homely (re-)location but rather a mobile embodied materiality through which borders are constantly re-located, re-collected, and re-embodied. Hatoum's art-making occurs in transit and in creating new ways of relating, passing through, and moving on. It provides a wide-ranging perspective of a situated and interstitial body in performance, whereby a politics of location with no fixed points and no road-signs is intertwined with a politics of relationality with no centered identities. This is about a sensibility and subjectivity attuned to a living cartography of passages.

Hatoum was born in exile in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1952, of Palestinian parents who were forcibly dispossessed of their households and sources of livelihood when they fled to Lebanon as the Arab-Israeli war in 1948 was getting close to their home in Haifa. Growing up in Beirut, she was cast as the pariah, the Palestinian Arab and stateless exile with neither a Lebanese national identity card nor Palestinian citizenship documents but with a British passport due to her father's long period of employment as a civil servant, he was the director of customs, in Palestine under the British Mandate – all those who worked for the British government in Palestine were given the opportunity to become British Citizens as their Palestinian identity cards were no longer valid. She attended French school and so her childhood was immersed in two different languages, the Arabic lived and the French learned. She was exiled for a second time, when, as she was visiting London in her twenties, the Lebanese civil war erupted in 1975. Stranded in London, she would watch Lebanon being torn apart with her family members living in homes very close to the Green Line and abruptly finding each other on the opposite sides of the divide. Even though London was supposed to be a short visit for her, England eventually became a new homeland where the artist studied and still lives and works. Hatoum's nomadism of art-making is combined with her exilic and diasporic cartographies which Arabic language describes so precisely: *al manfa* for her exile and *al shitat* for her diasporic scattering.<sup>1</sup> And so drawing on the historical specificities that inform her art of mobility, I would like to ask here: does exile change the notion of topos/place or does it produce another place? Is exile a perennial non-place, an out-of-place, a utopian place, or does it actively

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1. For a discussion of the notions *al manfa* and *al shitat*, see Butler, 2012: 208.



*Mona Hatoum, Present Tense, soap and glass beads installation, Anadiel Gallery, Jerusalem 1996 (4.5 x 241 x 299 cm), courtesy: White Cube, London, and Anadiel Gallery, Jerusalem.*



*Mona Hatoum, Present Tense, detail, soap and glass beads installation, Anadiel Gallery, Jerusalem 1996 (4.5 x 241 x 299 cm), courtesy: White Cube, London, and Anadiel Gallery, Jerusalem.*

participate in an ontology of place? Is there an exile that unsettles the metaphysics of place? And perhaps more significantly: to what extent is this kind of reflection affected by the struggle of those without a place of their own?

Hatoum visited Palestine for the first time in 1996 during an artist residency in Anadiel gallery, a deteriorating space which was previously used as a book binding business in a working-class neighborhood in the northwestern old part of Jerusalem. In that gallery, she created the floor installation “Present Tense”, a grid composed of 2,200 squared soap bars from the infamous Nablus factory which, while it was still in operation during Hatoum’s residence, was ultimately shut down by Israeli forces. Into the transient underlying structure of this local olive oil soap produced by traditional Palestinian methods, she outlined, with minute red glass beads, the borders of the disjointed and isolated zones carved out by the historic Palestine and intended to be the future Palestinian state according to the 1993 Oslo accords. As the historicity of the Palestinian dispossession is constantly being disavowed, Hatoum intervenes with a “home-made” map whose mnemonic scent evokes Palestine’s history and culture. As spatialized relations of power are played out at the expense of Palestine’s human geography, she seeks, as she characteristically said in a conversation with a viewer during her exhibition at the gallery, to wash up her hands of this matter with this soap. The title “Present Tense”, but also the very materiality of the installation, addresses the ambivalence of both a state of tension and suspense and action in the present time. What grammar of belonging might be produced, then, by an ongoing disavowal of rights of belonging? What sense of temporality is enacted in this context of spectral belonging and unbelonging? In Judith Butler’s words: “[...] [The] disenfranchisement of rights of belonging to *Palestine* is not overcome by the achievement of rights and citizenship for Palestinians elsewhere. It persists, haunting that new sense of belonging; remaining unaddressed as a global injustice, both historic and contemporary, that is, an ongoing catastrophe” (2012: 213).

## 2. NOMADIC SUBJECTIVITIES AND THEIR POLITICAL PROMISE

In her theorization of the nomadic subject, the feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti understands the nomadic subject as a non-unitary subject of contradictory belongings and multiple becomings, but also one which is historically and geopolitically situated and embodied. New nomadic be-

comings are enabled when identities are detached from a place. Hybrid, heterogeneous and multilayered, nomadic subjects resist normalizing divisions between “center” and “periphery.” They are self-reflexive and “not parasitic upon a process of metaphorization of ‘others’” (Braidotti, 2011: 11). Instead they challenge hegemonic subject formations from within. For Braidotti, nomadic subjectivity addresses the need to destabilize the dominant subject positions of the “center” as the emblematic site of all fantasies of origination. The self-reflexivity and agency of nomadic subjects is not akin to an individual activity, but rather an interactive and intersecting collective process based on social interrelations and mutual exposure.

Judith Butler’s theorization of gender performativity and transformative agency might also enable us here to capture the potentiality of such nomadic subjectivity to interrupt the normative standards of belonging. According to this rendition of gender performativity, all subjectivity is compulsively involved in acts of “approximating” idealized social norms. Subjects are interpellated by these subjectivating phantasmatic ideals as they try reflexively to appropriate them and respond to their demanding call; being also the constitutors, subjects incorporate and bring into being the “sedimented norms” that discursively form them. If incorporation is to be understood as an incomplete and unattainable materialization of the phantasmatic ideals of belonging, can we think of the body as the medium of the spectral finitude and futurity of the performative? Hatoum’s work raises the question of how we might rethink and re-activate gender performativity from the position of the postcolonial. In this perspective, questions of race, diasporic culture, mobility, exile, and ethics of affiliation intersect configurations of gender, sexuality, and social alliances.

Hatoum’s work provides a suitable occasion for rethinking the disjunctive temporalities at the heart of performative agency as responsiveness to the persistent eventualities of normative emplacement and displacement. As a figure of exile, whose topos of performative engagement is simultaneously within and against the power and knowledge apparatuses that produce the division of “east” and “west,” Hatoum has been moving across countries and languages, semiotic systems and cultural signs. She has lived, in Edward Said’s words, a “nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal [life]; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it then its unsettling force erupts anew” (2002: 149). To be extra-territorial, multi-local, and culturally heterogeneous also means that she has experienced the most

violent history and political conflicts intruding in the intimate quarters of her life. For wanderers like her the borders between home and the world are blurred; their psychic agonies are interconnected to wretched social realities and world politics. These in-between, indeterminate, affective spaces of here and there, of past and present, of difference and identity, of unsettledness and reclamation, allow for modes of living across temporal and spatial distance and in close proximity with alterity. It is in these interstices that nomadic subjectivities with transformative agency emerge, producing other spaces of signifying, commemorating, and contesting. And “it is in the emergence of the interstices -the overlap and displacement of domains of difference- that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural values are negotiated” (Bhabha, 1994: 2, original italics). Hatoum’s art provides representations for the nomadic subjects in their shared but



*Mona Hatoum, Keffieh, 1993-1999, human hair on cotton fabric (120 x 120 cm), photo: Agostino Osio, courtesy: Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice.*

also conflictual processes of reimagining the community, thus resonating with Homi Bhabha’s questioning about the incommensurable meanings at the heart of community claims related to shared histories of dispossession: “How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings, priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual, and even incommensurable?” (1994: 2).

In her work entitled “Keffieh” (1993-1999), made of cotton fabric and human hair, Hatoum (mis)appropriates the

disembodied modernist grid of representation, in order to create her own version of Keffieh, the scarf that, usually worn by men, has become the symbol of the Palestinian struggle for freedom. Significantly, she started working on the piece the year that the Oslo accords were signed. More specifically, for the purposes of that work, she had the traditional fish-net pattern on the cloth embroidered with women's black hair. The hair sticks out from the border-frame of the Keffieh. The artist thus manages to weave a tactile piece that is "an abject and precarious web of human tissue" (Mansoor, 2010: 49). As weaving is typically considered a feminine practice in the conventional division of labor, weaving women's hair in a Keffieh adds a dissonant voice, or an inappropriate enunciative site, to the unifying discourse of the struggle of freedom and its gendered strategies of representation. Of bodily fiber and out of its body, the uncontrollable materiality of hair trespasses and breaks the architectonics of the male resistance symbol. Women have been deprived from political action and the public space of the struggle for the Palestinian state yet to come. If the keffieh's border is intruded or broken, then what kinds of spaces are opened up for feminist agency?

In contaminating the maleness of "Keffieh" with fragments of female hair, I would like to suggest, Hatoum does not merely create an opposition between patriarchy and subjugated womanhood. The victim's discourse that focuses on objectification reinscribes the sexual politics it seeks to undermine by establishing an illusory antithesis of desiring male subjectivity and desired (or, undesired) female objectivity. Subject and object are not to be theorized as antithetical structures, however, but rather as positions reciprocally immersed, determined by heteronomous power relations that include class, race, gender, and sexuality. A fruitful way to confront the implications of the division between subject and object for capturing materialities that matter would be through provoking the question of the abject –neither subject nor object. Drawing on anthropologist Mary Douglas's groundbreaking analysis of purity and defilement,<sup>2</sup> Kristeva delineates in her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* the abject as the remnant of materiality that calls into question the borders and limits demanded by the symbolic as that which establishes a threatening precariousness and ambiguity in the subject's constitution of self and identity. "We may call it a border; abjection is

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2. In her book *Purity and danger: An analysis of the concept of pollution and taboo*, 1966, New York, NY, Routledge Classics.



above all ambiguity”, writes Kristeva (1984: 9). Neither subject nor object, neither inside nor outside the body, the abject is the terrifying and contaminating “matter out of place” that is jettisoned out of the boundaries of the symbolic order; it is quintessentially rendered “Other” and cannot be assimilated. It is extended beyond what is conventionally possible and thinkable. It is disavowed and expelled from social rationality, discharged as excrement, and declared to be a non-object of desire. The abject “fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened it rejects” (1982: 1). To put it differently, the boundary-constituting taboo that Kristeva calls abjection attests to the construction of the culturally intelligible speaking subject through expulsion and repulsion. To return to “Keffieh”: women are constitutively the ideological boundary of the national body politic; their exclusion is needed for the formation of the public political sphere of desiring and active male subjects. In representing the female body as abject, Hatoum calls for a relation to women and their struggles as that which remains other but also as that which is to come in ways unanticipated and inappropriable.

In a different but related vein, Hatoum’s uncanny textility in “Keffieh” resonates with the cultural performance of Muslim women’s veiling, a multilayered practice complexly associated with sexuality and social status. Hatoum accentuates sexual difference as particularized and localized. “Women” are not a universal and homogeneous category of anatomy and shared oppression, but, instead they are situated within a historical and geopolitical context. Importantly, Keffieh’s corporeality, alludes to a difference or dissonance in culture and power, which introduces a caesura into the discursive space of belonging and its gendered modalities of authorization. “Keffieh” comments thus on the transformation of female veiling into a typical mode of Western orientalist phantasmizing of Middle East as seductive and dangerously mysterious, in its supposedly non-secular and non-modern essence. Further, it unsettles western rhetorics of veiling that work to signify Muslim women as perennially victimized and in need of compassion and salvage.

In this work, however, the sign fails to represent its referent as the latter is performatively rendered with tensions, contradictions, and, ultimately, with what Said calls the “irreconcilables” in Hatoum’s art, namely crossings and contradictions of ethnic and gender politics. Furthermore, bodily hair ambiguously implies the dismemberment of human bodies in the Nazi concentration and death camps, when hair

removed from dead bodies would be used as fabric material in textile factories. Hatoum's corporeal and affective grid of Keffieh testifies that human suffering is not a-historical, but rather that the history of suffering constitutively includes the suffering of the other too. As Said writes on Hatoum's art of displacement:

The point is that the past cannot be entirely recuperated from so much power arrayed against it on the other side: it can only be restated in the form of an object without a conclusion, or a final place, transformed by choice and conscious effort into something simultaneously different, ordinary, and irreducibly other and the same, taking place together: an object that offers neither rest nor respite (2000: 17).

### 3. AMBIGUOUS BELONGINGS: THE MICROPOLITICS OF THE BODY (NOT) AT-HOME

As in Braidotti's exploration of a "nomadic" aesthetics, the question of style is inextricably linked with the question of the political: the nomadic artist destabilizes commonsensical meanings, translates between different cultural realities, and deconstructs hegemonic formations of



*Mona Hatoum, Mobile Home II, 2006, installation with furniture, household objects, suitcases, galvanized steel barriers, electric motors and pulley system (119 x 220 x 600 cm), photo: Jens Ziehe, courtesy: White Cube, London.*

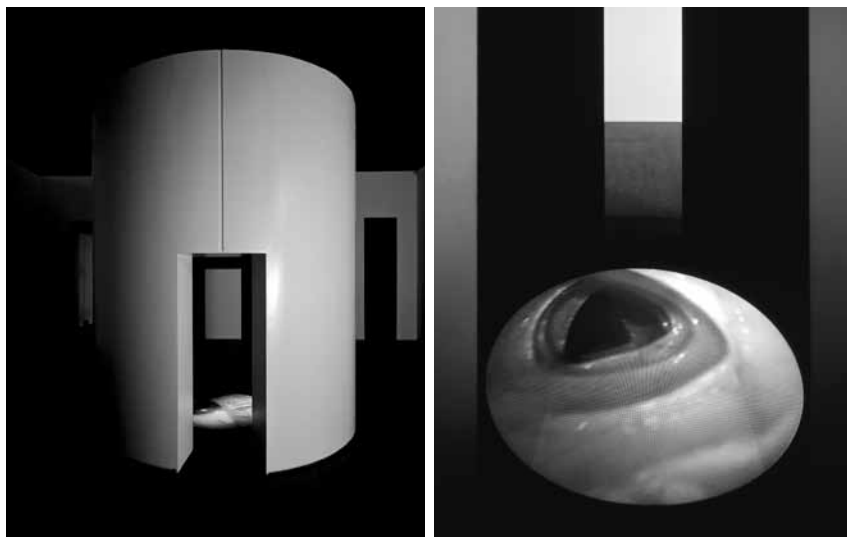
fixed identity and representation (Braidotti, 2011: 43-44). Hatoum's biographical and artistic itinerary incorporates a nomadic topos of art-making that persistently stretches and crosses the borders of what is possibly artistic and what is artistically possible. Her art invites us to a universe of fluidity across different spaces, borderlands as well as artistic genres and media. This is why, significantly, Hatoum travels to create her site-specific installations. Working with bodily material and waste, kitchen utensils, bedroom furniture, barbed wire, sandbags, brass, soap, maps, calligraphy, Muslim prayer mats, embroidery, Arabic folk lanterns, and digitalized genres of contemporary media, to name only some of her prototype material, she re-invents the familiar and familial. By mixing traditional Arabic symbols with technology, she blurs tradition with modernity, but she also creates alternative narratives, "both historically mediated and digitally manipulated" (Bhabha, 2006: 31), for Middle East and Africa, areas that have been stereotypically associated with religion fundamentalism or secular autocratic regimes.

In Hatoum's installation "Mobile Home II" (2006), a motorized force moves back and forth, slowly and incessantly via a pulley system. Suitcases but also a table and a chair, a bedroll, clothespins that bob up and down, hanging laundry, a child's truck with dollhouse furniture and an inflatable toy globe - all are attached to invisible wire clotheslines between the top and bottom of two parallel massive street barriers, which ambiguously signal controlled national borders. The familial setting seems abruptly abandoned. The dinner table and the chair drift apart referring to a sudden interruption and coercive travelling. Haunted and spectral, the domestic objects record the moment of dispossession; they are elusive signifiers of some other times, some past uses, some disrupted human lives. Working with combinations of actuality and suggested presence, Hatoum presents the technological process as what animates, what brings life back, and she ultimately puts forth a connection with technologies of survival. When "the self is forever uprooted, dislocated and negated, embodying absence is not merely related to the praxis of art, it is an act of survival" (Ankori, 2003: 75). The ready-mades travel within impenetrable barricades in a restless fort-da. These solid and strong borders and barricades cannot be crossed. They do not allow flows and passages, instead they repel and deny access. Wendy Brown has aptly described the contemporary kinds of borders, the new imposing walls of nation-state sovereignties built around the world, in terms of "scenes of awe, rather than efficacy, and force rather than right" (2010: 104). For Brown,

these mammoth walls, visual signifiers of overwhelming human power and state capacity likened to divinity, subdue the individual subjects. In our globalized times, where social identities are deterritorialized and the nation-states are weakened, simultaneously the waning nation-states strengthen their social control and increase their biopolitical surveillance over territories and identities (Brown, 2010: 104). Hatoum's artistic representation of national borders resonates with mediums of state control and colonial subjugation which affect the grounds of home and endanger domesticity. Home emerges as a distrustful and threatening place.

What becomes crucially suggestive about "Mobile Home II" is that movement, contrary to conventional understandings and representations, occurs within the layered grounds of home and not in the allegedly "free flow" across borders. The domestic environment is not stable and spatially fixed, but fluid, uncharted, and continuously shifting territory (Ahmed et al, 2003). Belonging, which is associated with the private sphere, location and communal ties, involves for the artist a concurrent non-belonging. As this "mobile home" is perpetually in the making, home and belonging do no longer have an essential meaning prior to such making, but rather become the performative occasion for asking the question what counts as home and belonging. An electric hamming seems to disabuse the spectators of the sensory immediacy of the visual and works to complicate any notion of immediate, obvious and commonplace belonging (Khana 2009, 123). There is nothing direct and commonplace about belonging, which becomes rather a complicated process of reconfiguring place as commonplace. Committed to this performative eventuality of reconfiguring place, Hatoum's installations become occasions where household objects do not realize their usual domestic function; rather they contest their original uses and domestic settings, they become de-formed and even harmful. In her "Homebound" installation (2000), mundane kitchen utensils and implements glow and buzz as they are infused by fluctuating electricity. As they are attached by wire, their "arterial and venous blood" (Wagstaff, 2000: 31), they form a vibrating body. Beds and cribs are presented to their skeletal and grotesque remains. In her "Doormat" installation of stainless steel and nickel-plated pins glued on canvas (2006), a home entrance doormat is woven, surprisingly, by pins. Its ironic "welcome" message undermines conventional declarations of hospitality, presenting instead its rough and dangerous materiality. Domestic space is constitutively discomforting and not only so at the site of explicit and immediate dispossession.

What kinds of homely and unhomely corporealities are then brought forward in living enactments of displacement and emplacement? The body in Hatoum's work seems to have lost its homely modalities of embodiment, but as it seeks to reground itself in new diasporic intimacies, it opens up to the possibilities of mutual vulnerability and precariousness. Thus, belonging becomes a matter of intimate and precarious embodied relationality. In "Corps étranger" (1994), as the viewers enter a white cylindrical wooden shell, they direct their sight down to a circular video screen grafted on the floor. They find themselves watching an endoscopic medical camera persistently moving through intimate details of bodily interiors and orifices. Fragmented and scattered on the floor, this is in fact the artist's own body, in physical discomfort, susceptible and trespassed by the other as either the foreign object of camera, the medical intervention, or the viewers' gazes. This radical openness to the other implies the question: What is this other that crosses our borders and unsettles our horizon of embodied knowledge and self-control? Distressingly enlarged are skin folds, mucous membranes, hair, teeth, and eye pupils. Sounds of breathing and heart beating accompanying this video stress an audio materiality of life. Body is represented as a site, a place with visible, audible and palpable qualities.



*Mona Hatoum, Corps étranger, 1994, Video installation with cylindrical wooden structure, video projector, video player, amplifier and four speakers (350 x 300 x 300 cm), photo: Philippe Migeat, courtesy: Centre Pompidou, Paris.*

This is a scene that echoes the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, for whom the body is an open space that is more spacious than spatial; it is a place, a place of existence. As it is equated with the multiple eventualities of the skin, which is variously folded, refolded, unfolded, invaginated, exogastrulated, orificed, evasive, invaded, stretched, relaxed, excited, and distressed, the body makes room for existence (2008: 15). Similarly, the skin becomes for Hatoum “the place for an event of existence” (Nancy, 2008: 15). It bespeaks the corporeal eventness of performativity – an awkward materiality that eludes any programmatic figuration or calculable materialization, and opens up to a certain disposition of the self towards the other. The corporeal subject is enacted as fundamentally social in its sensual openness, vulnerability and physical interrelation to the other. Incorporating the other, the subject opens up –and gives room- to the radical contingency of engagement where the other is not reduced to the proper logic of possession. In the contrary, the other seems to have a knowledge of her own and reveal us in new, intimate and unforeseeable ways. It is suggestive, in that respect, that the endoscopic camera and medical science know and expose, in the most intimate details, the artist’s own body.



*Mona Hatoum, Measures of Distance, 1988, colour video with sound (duration: 15 minutes), courtesy White Cube, London.*

The theme of bodily exposure and its ambiguous un-homeliness emerges also in her 15-minute video work “Measures of Distance” (1988), where the artist shows slides of her mother taking a shower, as she simultaneously superimposes on them letters in handwritten calligraphic Arabic exchanged between her mother and herself, during the period of civil war in Lebanon, while the artist was exiled in London. Hatoum uses the Arabic language as a veil for a woman’s body making a reference to the veiled women of Arabia. Through this gesture, she rewrites the gendered and sexualized alterity of “the East,” bringing out, to borrow Bhabha’s words, “the nearness of difference, the intimacy of difference that can exist within any culture” (Bhabha, McCarthy, and Sikander, 2001: 171).<sup>3</sup>

The interplay of textuality and corporeality (and, in particular, the forces and the vulnerabilities of eventuality erupting from this interplay) compels a rethinking of the mutual dependence –albeit not mutual reduction– between language and the body. The writing, as it is inscribed on the mother’s exposed and vulnerable body, acts as an ambiguous border of simultaneous intimacy and alienation between the two women. The (m) other’s body is veiled and mystified, turned into a text of misfired communication. It emerges as a spatio-temporal threshold, a border space of partaking with, and partitioning from. Hatoum claims here a body in anticipation and beyond anticipation, an undetermined and indissoluble body, and, eventually, an unending longing for another whose distance is measured by the incommensurable intricacies of bodily sensibility.

Synchronically, in the ambient acoustic background of the video work, the artist is both conversing with her mother in Arabic and translating her mother’s letters in English. In the midst of this polyphony and polyglossia, a confusing and non-semantic sound landscape is produced. Confusion also arises as who is the writer or the recipient of the letters; Hatoum doubles the author when she reads her mother’s letters and we, the viewers, become recipients too. Looking and hearing, as well as reading and writing, are replayed as sites of identification and disavowal in colonial discourses. Placed in between the racializing forces of voyeur-

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3. Drawing from a genealogy of race discourse, from W.E.B. Du Bois to W.J.T. Mitchell, whereby race is discussed as a veil, a screen, to see through human otherness, I would like to suggest that in Hatoum’s “Measures of Distance” the veiled body of her Arab mother functions as the conceptual filter to experience racial alterity. Its double layering, a textual and corporeal one, also activates W.E.B. Du Bois concept of “second sight” into racist experiences of racial difference (2007).

ism and surveillance, a dialectics so crucial to the colonial cultural text, Hatoum's mother describes how her husband -the artist's father- was angered when he discovered about her naked body being exposed for the purposes of the filming. In her own words, he felt that she had taken from him something that belonged exclusively to him. Engaging with the visual and auditory imaginaries of colonial power, Hatoum traces back her life in Lebanon to only reinvent its moral and sensible inscriptions. Above all, she captures and estranges the fictions of fantasy and desire, including the properness of family values and gender hierarchies, as they are translated into the conventional boundaries between private and public, and as they are encompassed in the question what can be exposed publically and what is to remain hidden from sight in the gendered and sexualized anatomy of colonial discourse.

In all, then: Hatoum's aesthetics is fundamentally political. As a nomadic artist as well as an artist of the nomadic, she destabilizes the symbolic primacy of official meanings, translates between different cultural imaginaries, and moves beyond the hegemonic formation of fixed identities and "common/places." If freedom is not only the capacity to escape power but also and especially the capacity to subjugate no one, then artistic freedom can exist only outside the official classifications of what is proper and accustomed. Hatoum remains a stranger *within* her own art, as she retraces, and ultimately displaces and re-possesses, its laws, its limits, as well as its hospitality. And it is this perpetual interplay of estrangement and familiarity that she rediscovers and relates to the world, a world that is not in place and thus is always already to be recreated.

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