

No Place Like Now, Now Like No Place

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My paper, titled, *No place like now, now like no place* presents a number of themes related to my PhD research and ongoing creative research into online identity and community. There are several works I will refer to in this paper:

- A screen projection work titled *Swipezone* presented at CUBE37 in Frankston in 2006;
- a web based work titled *swipe: airports, borders and fences*, published in 2007; and
- *Facebook fictions*, a new work that is currently in development.

These works explore in different ways how alienation affects perceptions of identity. The intention is to present a range of issues related to notions of loss of identity and displacement. There are many cases where the condition of social displacement may occur in terms of social relations. For instance, a change of residence and community can trigger feelings of isolation and lack of security in a previously affirmed sense of self.

Swipe — airports, borders and fences and Swipezone: CUBE 37

The aim of both these projects was to present a range of issues related to notions of loss of identity and displacement. The challenge is how does one articulate such a position without being merely descriptive? Although the images, text and video are largely autobiographical, the themes are directed at experiences that are universally human in nature. Are we all capable of feeling isolated? What are the catalysts for alienation? These are some of the questions at stake in this work.

A quote from Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection about the role of the exile* resonates for these projects:

AN EXILE WHO ASKS “WHERE?”

The one by whom the abject exists is thus a deject who places (himself), separates (himself), situates (himself),

and therefore strays instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing. Situationist in a sense, and not without laughter — since laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection. Necessarily dichotomous, somewhat Manichaeian, he divides, excludes, and without, properly speaking, wishing to know his abjections is not at all unaware of them. Often, moreover, he includes himself among them, thus casting within himself the scalpel that carries out his separations.

Instead of sounding himself as to his “being,” he does so concerning his place: “Where am I?” instead of “Who am I?” For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never one, nor homogeneous, nor totalizable, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic. A deviser of territories, languages, works, the deject never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines — for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject — constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh. A tireless builder, the deject is, in short, a stray. He is on a journey, during the night, the end of which keeps receding. He has a sense of the danger, of the loss that the pseudo-object attracting him represents for him, but he cannot help taking the risk at the very moment he sets himself apart. And the more he strays, the more he is saved.¹

This text and especially this quote articulates the challenge inherent in my research project. Kristeva succinctly articulates what is the antithesis of identity. Notions of identity are formulated around the individual locating proxy objects as a means of naming self and experience. In this analysis of the exile, we are confronted with the reality of or desire for a non-object and the implications of searching for something that is removed from view and knowledge.

What is the inherent difference between ‘where am I?’ and ‘who am I?’ How much importance is placed upon a sense of place when formulating a concept of identity? Perhaps the notion of ‘who am I?’ becomes more significant once there is a shift from an individual’s sense of home.

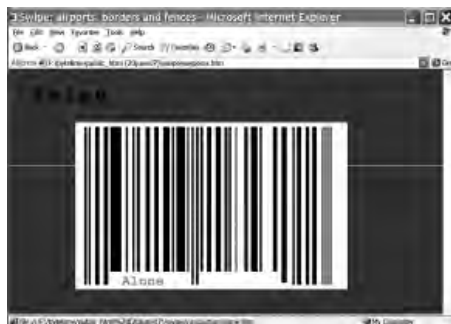


Swipezone CUBE37
Installation view from street

There are many relevant examples of individuals or groups who are socially excluded.

There are a range of medical subjects that have been considered outcasts — lepers, people with the plaque, aids suffers, to name a few. People suffering for mental illness have long been incarcerated and treated as sub-humans, as well as people with physical and intellectual disabilities. Of course, race and religion are other historical (and contemporary) examples where the ‘outcast’ identity is defined. Within the context of a contemporary ‘western society’, it is undoubtedly the Muslim identity that is considered abject.

Alienation is also a product of capitalism, according to Karl Marx. It arises because of the distance created between the worker and the product of their labour — as the worker has no claim on the object, even though it was made or created by them.



Swipe:airports, borders, fences
Front door screen shot of www.swipe.name

Keywords

Words are potentially more powerful than images, they have the capacity to evoke history and mythology and have the propensity to evoke strong emotions.

*Swipe — airports, borders and fences*² relies on a series of keywords that guide the web site user, with the intention of creating a sense of empathy and co-identification using the word. The keywords focus on feelings of displacement, of alienation and of loss of identity.³

These words and pages are also presented in a French Language version as an attempt to expand the readership of this work. The decision to provide a multilingual aspect to the website was motivated by a desire to not be trapped in an Anglo-centric world-view. Whilst I cannot escape the fact my background is European and I am identified as an ‘Anglo’ because of my Caucasian features and predominately English language skills, I would like to engage people outside of this matrix as readers and contributors to the work.

Facebook fictions

In *Facebook fictions*, I have created a fictitious identity in Facebook with the purpose of determining the capacity of this character to engage in the social networking environment provided by Facebook. My alter ego — Siana Milev, takes the name of my second life identity and she shares the birthplace of one of my favorite writers Anais Nin.

Siana also has a blog titled *fauxonomy*, which is a play on the term ‘folksonomy’ used to describe online social networking and tagging. ‘Faux’ in French means ‘not correct’ or ‘not right’. Seeing that this project is in the initial stages, it will be interesting to see what evolves over time.

I have also created a group in Facebook with the name of *Facebook fictions*. So far I have over 80 members and have started developing a blog and mindmap as a space for the members to contribute their own work about online social networking, identity and authenticity.⁴

1 <http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/wyrick/debclass/krist.htm>
(accessed 25 May 2003)

2 <http://www.swipe.name>

3 exile, void, beginning, mistaken, crossed, translate, dream, lost, imprisonment, separate, inferior, imagine, access, inherit, denied, loss, time, metro, waiting, family, normal, native tongue, passport, fence, past, border, airport, transit, boat, hospital, alone

4 <http://facebookfictions.blogspot.com/>