

Displacing Identity and Privacy

An Analysis of Jenny Marketou's "Translocal: Camp in my Tent"

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The kind of art production that requires the artist to move from place to place to produce her work can be associated with site specificity and the actual geography where the work materializes rather than the nationality of the artist. These are the conditions under which I perceive myself as an artist of the diaspora.¹

-Jenny Marketou

In this paper, I present an analysis of Jenny Marketou's *Translocal: Camp in my Tent* (1996 – 2001). Born in Athens in 1954 and now living in New York, Marketou has exhibited and lectured internationally since 1988 and has traveled extensively. *Translocal* is somewhat of a summary of Marketou's travel experiences. Between 1996 and 2001, this migratory art project took place in Polk County, Florida (US), New York City (US), Mexico City (Mexico), Rotterdam (Netherlands), Jerusalem (Israel), Ramallah (Palestine), Snag Harbor, Staten Island, New York (US), New London, Connecticut (US), Düsseldorf (Germany), Nicosia (Cyprus), Bialystok (Poland) and Tijuana (Mexico).²

Translocal consists of two parts: a performance aspect, or a public intervention as Marketou prefers to call it, and an installation. In the intervention, Marketou set up her tent in public spaces in the cities mentioned above (Figure 1); following this, the installation was mounted in a museum setting (Figure 2). Visitors to the museum were invited to camp in the tent in the presence of two monitors: one displayed scenes from her previous interventions in other cities, while the other showed images from a surveillance camera placed outside of the museum.³

¹ Angela Dimitrakaki, "Flying Spy Potatoes and Hacktivism: Angela Dimitrakaki interviews Jenny Marketou," *N. Paradoxa: International Feminist Art Journal*, 14 (2004): 19.

² Kim, Nyunny, "Jenny Marketou," *Artist Web Page*, 1999. March 3, 2005. <<http://www.jennymarketou.com>>.

³ *Ibid*, 1999.



Figure 1. Jenny Marketou. *Translocal: Camp in my Tent*.
Public Intervention in Piazza Garibaldi, Mexico City (Mexico).
Film Stills. 1997.

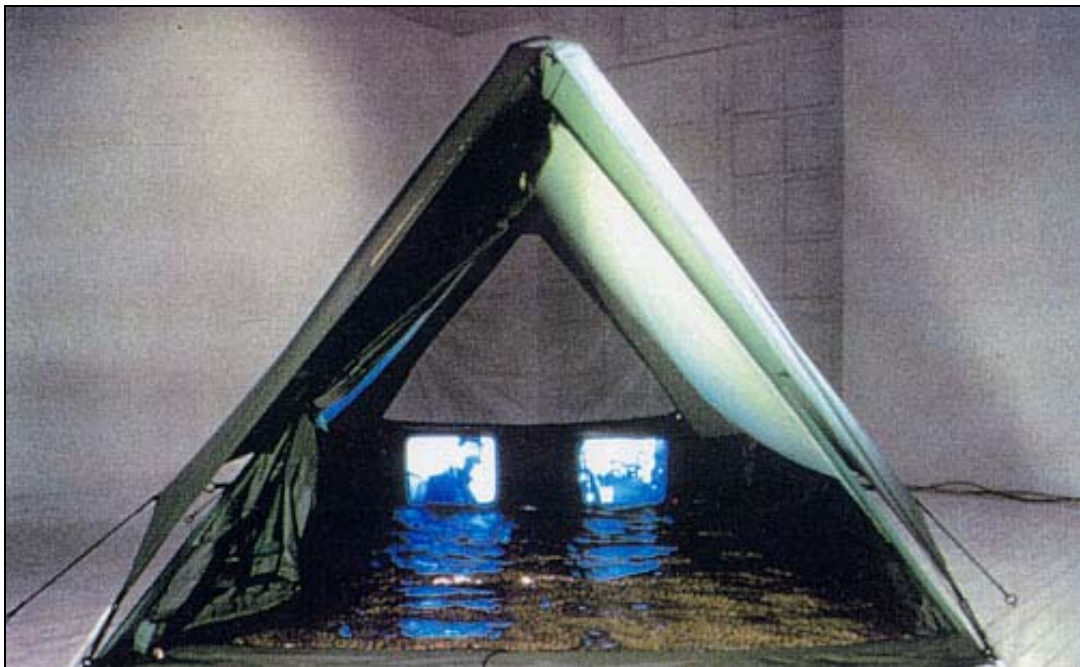


Figure 2. Jenny Marketou. *Translocal: Camp in my Tent*.
Installation at ART& IDEA, Mexico City (Mexico). 1997.

My paper is divided into two sections. In the first section, I analyze Marketou's exploration of identity through *Translocal*. This leads to a discussion of nomadism and home – twin factors that influence Marketou's perception of self. In the second section, I examine the manner in which Marketou uses the spaces of the city and the museum. I also discuss the surveillance aspect of the work and comment on the illusion of freedom and privacy that people experience in both public and private spaces. Through this analysis, I demonstrate the manner in which Marketou's ideas about identity, displacement, space and surveillance effect her use of public and private space, and discuss the implications of this in a selection of the cities where *Translocal* took place.

Nomadic Identities/Nomadic Homes

Throughout her life, Marketou has enjoyed traveling from one country to the next, be it for her studies, job opportunities, exhibitions, or simply life experiences. Between 1994 and 1996, she spent much time in the Negev Desert in Israel with the nomadic Bedouin tribe. Her experience with the Bedouins led her to create a migratory project that questions identity, nomadism and home.⁴ In "Home and Identity," Madan Sarup states that our identity is in a constant state of becoming. He argues that identity is transformed by "the journey."⁵ For Marketou, this description can be taken quite literally, as her travels strongly influenced the many changes that her identity has experienced.

Through the interventionist aspect of *Translocal*, Marketou allowed observers' imaginations the freedom to create their own ideas concerning her identity. Anna Novakov suggests that artists who create public art have the capacity to create "narratives through the insertion of the personal body into the surrounding urban body."⁶ The cultural differences in the "urban bodies" where *Translocal* took place are quite significant, and indicate various approaches to understanding identity. In New York City, for example, Marketou chose Central Park as the location for her

⁴ Jenny Marketou (artist), in discussion with the author, March 22, 2005.

⁵ Madan Sarup, "Home and Identity," *Travelers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, eds, George Robertson et al. (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 98.

⁶ Anna Novakov, "Introduction: Locating the Private in the Public," *Veiled Histories: The Body, Place and Public Art*, ed. Anna Novakov (New York: Critical Press, 1997), 4.



Figure 3. Jenny Marketou. *Translocal: Camp in my Tent.*
Public Intervention in Central Park, New York City (US). Film Stills, 1999.



Figure 4. Jenny Marketou. *Translocal: Camp in my Tent.*
Public Intervention in the Central Market Square, Ramallah (Palestine).
Film Stills, 1998.

performance (Figure 3). Once she had finished setting up her tent, police officers on horseback obliged her to take it down immediately. They informed her that it is against the law to set up dwellings in public space. She was therefore caught in an illegal act and seen as a potential threat.⁷

Marketou was aware that her gender would potentially influence the manner in which people interpreted her use of space. In Ramallah, men began to crowd around Marketou as she was setting up her tent in the Central Market Square – they thought that she was a prostitute (Figure 4). The cultural implications of a single woman setting up a tent in a public setting led these men to this conclusion. Finally, in Mexico City Marketou chose

to set up her tent in Piazza Zokola, a square that is associated with political demonstrations (Figure 5). People passing by believed that Marketou was a political activist of some kind. All of these projections and assumptions not only represent how other people interpreted Marketou's identity at first glance, but also made her question the manner in which her identity transforms and is challenged by the many different cultures that she has experienced through her nomadic lifestyle. As she told me in a phone conversation, "identity is always changing and cannot be defined by one thing."⁸

The challenge of identifying the self is further complicated by Marketou's nomadic lifestyle. Trinh T. Minh-ha argues that travelers have two selves: one that physically moves from place to place, and another that goes on a different, inner journey of constant negotiation between home and away-from-home.⁹ Marketou describes her tent as a metaphor for her home, which she brings with her wherever she goes, as well as "an extension of self."¹⁰ Thus, in this context, her tent can be seen as her other self. This idea is most clearly represented in Marketou's intervention in Connecticut, which took place near the harbor by the river (Figure 6). It was a cold and windy day, and Marketou

⁷ Jenny Marketou (artist), in discussion with the author, March 22, 2005.

⁸ Ibid, March 22, 2005.

⁹ Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Other Than Myself/My Other Self," *Travelers' Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, eds, George Robertson et al. (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 9.

¹⁰ Jenny Marketou (artist), in discussion with the author, March 22, 2005.



Figure 5. Jenny Marketou. *Translocal: Camp in my Tent*.
Public Intervention in Piazza Zocola, Mexico City (Mexico). Film Stills, 1997.



Figure 6. Jenny Marketou. *Translocal: Camp in my Tent*.
Public Intervention near the Harbor in New London, Connecticut (US).
Film Stills, 1998.

struggled to keep the tarps under control. Finally, she gave in to the wind. She crawled inside the tent and allowed the wind to take over. She said that “the wind was blowing through the tent, through me,” and at that moment, she felt completely at one with her little green tent.¹¹

Marketou was interested in exploring the notions of displacement and home, or homelessness, through *Translocal*. By traveling with her tent, she challenged the typical assumption that home is a stable and stationary entity because her home was permanent yet transportable. However displaced Marketou may have felt in any of the cities where this intervention took place, she felt safe and secure once she went through the ritual of setting up her home and crawling into that familiar space.¹² Diana Nemiroff asserts that instability, movement and homelessness force us to question feelings of belonging and rootedness.¹³ Although the idea of being rooted is so often used to describe an important aspect of human comfort, travel is the norm for many people. Ulf Hannerz further supports this fact by stating that “although we may like the ‘roots’ metaphor, what humans actually have are feet, and so that certainty of staying in a place is false.”¹⁴ The real question of feeling comfortable and stable is ultimately based on the choices that people have. An exiled person who literally has nothing but a tent and an artist who exiles herself for a project clearly have very different choices available to them.

Despite the fact that Marketou chooses to travel and adopt new cultures under safe circumstances, she never feels that she belongs. Though born in Greece, she does not feel that her Greek roots completely define her – nor does she consider New York, where she has been living for twenty-two years, to be her home at all times. Still, she takes a positive approach to her nomadic lifestyle.¹⁵ She states that “living between two cultures, no matter what they are, makes one feel enriched, empowered, and privileged as a

¹¹ Ibid, March 22, 2005.

¹² Jenny Marketou (artist), in discussion with the author, February 21, 2005.

¹³ Diana Nemiroff, “Crossings.” *Crossings*, ed. Diana Nemiroff (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada. 7 August - 1 November 1998), 39.

¹⁴ Ulf Hannerz, “Where We Are and Who We Want To Be,” *The Postnational Self: Belonging and Identity*, eds Ulf Hedetoff and Mette Hjort (Public Works, 10. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 219.

¹⁵ Jenny Marketou (artist), in discussion with the author, March 22, 2005.

human being,”¹⁶ and further, “I see my unhomeiness and inbetweenness as a privilege.”¹⁷ In “Reflections on Exile,” Edward Said rejects the romanticism that surrounds the idea of exile, but nonetheless, acknowledges that “seeing the entire world as a foreign land makes possible originality of vision. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions.”¹⁸ This awareness allows for a richness of experience and understanding about different cultures and ways of living. Again, it is important to acknowledge the kind of exile that this notion applies to. It would be simplistic and hasty to assume that one who has been forced into exile is fortunate to experience different cultures first hand as a primary aspect of their exile.

Marketou has had close encounters with people from around the globe through this project. Due to the fact that she allows them into the personal space of her tent – her home and herself – people feel quite close to her. This inter-personal closeness is often expressed through recounted memories. In the market place in Ramallah, for example, one of the few women who stopped to talk to Marketou described her own experience living in a tent in a refugee camp, and how happy she was to now have a *real* home.¹⁹

I had the opportunity to similarly bear witness to peoples’ thoughts about tents during the recreation of *Translocal* for a presentation. I set up my own tent in a room next to the seminar room where my presentation would take place (Figure 7). In the tent were two monitors – one showing Marketou’s footage of her interventions in different cities, and another that was connected to a surveillance camera that I had placed in the seminar room where I gave my presentation. My colleagues immediately began to share their experiences of tents with me. One colleague associated tents with a sense of complete freedom and recalled long camping trips that she took as a young adult. Another was reminded of leading canoe camping trips as a summer job. A third colleague had never experienced the space of a tent prior to my version of Marketou’s *Translocal*. This project

¹⁶ Brian Valerio, ed. *Modern Odysseys: Greek American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, (New York: Queen’s Museum of Art, 6 October, 1999 – 30 January, 2000), 64.

¹⁷ Dimitrakaki, “Flying Spy Potatoes,” 18.

¹⁸ Edward Said, “Reflections on Exile,” *Out there: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, eds Russell Fergusen et al. (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, Mass; London, England: The MIT Press, 1990), 366.

¹⁹ Jenny Marketou (artist), in discussion with the author, March 22, 2005.



Figure 7. The author's version of Jenny Marketou's *Translocal: Camp in my Tent*. Installation at Concordia University, Montreal (Canada). 2005.

encouraged communication and the sharing of memories— especially once people shared the private space of Marketou's tent with her, and of my tent with me.

Space and Surveillance

The sharing and negotiation of space is an important aspect of *Translocal*. Marketou questions the boundaries between public and private spaces through her intervention in the outdoor environment of the city, as well as her installation in the indoor setting of the museum. Underlying the notion of space is Marketou's adamant conviction that the categorization of public or private space as such is necessarily informed by humans' actions in the space.²⁰ Without human intervention, space is just space, and does not

²⁰ Jenny Marketou (artist), in discussion with the author, February 21, 2005.

have any public or private connotation or dimension. Geographer Doreen Massey shares this view, and argues that when entering into a dialogue about space, we should not discuss the manner in which it is used, but rather the manner in which it has been socially created.²¹

Marketou contributed significantly to the creation of public space in the cities where *Translocal* took place. In each city, Marketou chose a specific area where “public place has cultural memory.”²² For example, one of Marketou’s interventions in Rotterdam took place in Keilweg, a red light district that is charged with the memory of its reputation (Figure 8). As she was setting up her tent, she was attacked by pimps who thought that she was an independent prostitute. The police interceded and not only allowed her to set up her tent on their security boat, but also helped her with the poles and tarps.²³ Marketou’s experience with the police and public space in Rotterdam was very different from that already mentioned, in New York. In both cases, however, Marketou’s intervention was limited due to others’ perceptions of what the type of space that she was attempting to claim already represented. Nonetheless, Marketou considers these interventions to be successful. She was testing the boundaries of public spaces in the urban environment and whatever reaction (or lack of reaction) that she got was therefore interesting and important to her, as it revealed people’s thoughts on the space that she was occupying.²⁴

The use, or creation of public space by one person necessarily influences the access that other people have to that space. Jason Patton states that “by appropriating an area of a public place, a person temporarily excludes others from using that particular place.”²⁵ While such an interpretation can clearly be seen in the reaction of the police in Central Park and the pimps in Keilweg, Marketou’s ambitions were quite different. She wanted to invite people into both the public space that she was occupying, and the private space

²¹ Doreen Massey, “The Spaces of Community,” *Annotations: Mixed Belongings and Unspecified Destinations*, ed. Niko Papastergiadis (London: Institute of the International Visual Arts, 1996), 33.

²² Nyunny, “Jenny Marketou,” 1999.

²³ --- “Narratives of Home and Displacement,” (Smith Associates, August 1997), 7, Jenny Marketou Collection, file 4.

²⁴ Jenny Marketou (artist), in discussion with the author, March 22, 2005.

²⁵ Jason Patton, “Protecting Privacy in Public? Surveillance Technology and the Value of Public Places,” *Ethics and Information Technology*, 2. 3 (2000): 183.



Figure 8. Jenny Marketou. *Translocal: Camp in my Tent*.
Public Intervention on Police Boat, Rotterdam (Netherlands). Film Stills, 1996.

of her tent. Of course, when Marketou claimed her space, she was placing herself in a position of authority by deciding how the space was to be used (which, as exemplified by her experiences in Central Park and Keilweg, was not always possible).

The installation aspect of Marketou's project takes a different approach to the use of space. Marketou set up the private space of her tent inside of the museum walls. The outdoor public space was then incorporated inside the tent with the images that were projected on the screens – both the intervention aspect of the project, and images from a surveillance camera placed outside of the museum. Through an audio system, urban sounds permeated the normally quiet and peaceful environment of the tent and the museum.²⁶

²⁶ Jenny Marketou (artist), in discussion with the author, February 21, 2005.

Not only were regular visitors welcome to enter into the space of the tent, but people were encouraged to reserve a spot ahead of time as part of the installation. This allowed them to claim Marketou's tent as their own for a set amount of time during which they read, napped, or just walked around the campsite in the museum.²⁷ Though this may appear to be relaxing, the experience was more layered than this due to the fact that the campers were bombarded by images and sounds of the city while in the tent.

When *Translocal* was exhibited in the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam, Tim and Albert Jan Van De Griend were given permission to spend the night camping out in the tent – an act that was not allowed in the other cities where *Translocal* took place (Figure 9). They commented on how strange it was to camp in a museum, but what really struck them was the fact that they could watch people outside, who were unaware that they were being observed.²⁸ The little enclosed private space of the tent placed the campers in a position of power that gave them an all-seeing eye on the outdoor public space. Undermining this power trip, of course, is the fact that the campers were also being watched by visitors, who were at liberty to observe them observing the outside world.

It would be impossible to enter into a discussion about surveillance without referring to the concept of the Panopticon and incarceration. The Panopticon, designed by Jeremy Bentham, is a twelve-sided polygon that has a tower from which a guard can watch inmates. The inmates cannot see inside this structure, and therefore have no way of knowing whether they are being watched or not. Thus, while the guard in the tower can see everything without ever being seen, the inmates can never see, but can potentially always be seen. The aim is to make inmates feel that they may be watched at all times, thereby ensuring that they always behave according to the set rules and regulations.²⁹ Furthermore, the guard himself can also be under a watchful eye at one time or another, by a surprise visit from an inspector or another guard. Along these lines, Michel

²⁷ Nyunny, "Jenny Marketou," 1999.

²⁸ Albert-Jan and Tim Van de Griend, *Letter to Jenny Marketou*, September 2, 1996.

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 200 - 203.



Figure 9. Jenny Marketou. *Translocal: Camp in my Tent.*
Installation at the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam
(Netherlands). 1996.

Foucault states that the design of this system “provide(s) an apparatus for supervising its own mechanism.”³⁰ Foucault argues that the ultimate purpose of the Panopticon is:

to induce in the inmate a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effect, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; [...] in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.³¹

Foucault describes the Panopticon as the ultimate symbol of power and control in that it is based on enforced self-control and discipline with each inmate acting as his or her own guard.³²

³⁰ *Ibid*, 204.

³¹ *Ibid*, 201.

³² *Ibid*, 203.

A contemporary, yet contradictory view on surveillance can be seen in a project by Jennifer Ringley that began in 1996. At the time, Ringley was a twenty-one year old student living in an American college dormitory. She installed a web-camera in her room, allowing web-surfers access to a constant video feed of images. In the essay “Jenni’s Room: Exhibitionism and Solitude,” Victor Burgin analyses some of the controversy created by this new age project based on the fact that Jenni did not censor her actions. Everything that she did in her room was available for anyone to watch. Burgin states that a common reaction to this project was to label Jenni as an exhibitionist. He goes on to argue, following Freud, that “exhibitionism derives from voyeurism,” and that what was interesting about Jenni’s case was that she showed “no interest in seeing those by whom she was being seen.”³³ The JenniCam represents a reverse Panopticon where the surveillance camera is in the private space of the tower and all eyes are welcome at all times. Jenni never knew who was watching, nor when, but she was constantly aware of the possibility that she was being observed.

Marketou’s commentary on surveillance offers another perspective. Her project demonstrates that privacy in public space is not protected. Those outside of the private space of Bentham’s tower, like the people walking along the street outside of the museums where *Translocal* was being exhibited, and like my colleagues in the seminar room where my presentation was being given, were all under the watchful eye of someone in a more private space – the guard in the tower, the campers in Marketou’s tent which was in the museum, or other colleagues in my tent which was in the residing room. Marketou’s work goes further than this to show that privacy in private space is not necessarily protected either. The guard and the campers – both in Marketou’s tent and my own – were also being watched by other people, just as Jenni was being watched in her room. Marketou’s work demonstrates that the concept of privacy is displaced entirely – and even erased – as people can potentially be seen at any time, and in any space, be it public or private.

³³ Victor Burgin, “Jenni’s Room: Exhibitionism and Solitude,” *CTRL [SPACE]: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother*, eds Thomas Y. Levin et al. (Karlsruhe, Germany: ZKM Center for Art and Media; Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2002), 229.

Conclusion

Through *Translocal: Camp in my Tent*, Marketou takes us on a voyage through the self in space and time. This journey allows us to experience Marketou's personal and subjective investigations of notions that we all experience to a certain extent: we all have different understandings of home, of our own identity as well as that of others, of the experiences that form these interpretations, and of the manners in which the space that we occupy is created and used. *Translocal* created a link between identity and space in terms of how people perceived Marketou (and how she perceived herself) according to her use of space. A threat, a prostitute, a political activist, and an artist are just a few examples of the multiple personas that people projected onto Marketou based on the same set of actions. The surveillance aspect of this work introduces yet another angle to her project by asserting that we could all be under the watchful eye of someone or other. In both public and private spaces, our actions may be watched. Marketou questions the level to which we are aware of this, and how it affects our identity. As previously mentioned, identities are malleable – they change and expand. They can be packed up and moved, just like a home. Through *Translocal: Camp in my Tent*, Marketou has succeeded in cramming both home and a sense of self into a little green bag held together by a draw string: a transportable home and a rootless self, open to whatever surprises the journey has to offer.

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