

SUPER TOYS LAST ALL SUMMER LONG

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Super Toys Last All Summer Long
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Abstract

Super Toys Last All Summer Long is an exhibition that investigates the negotiation of migrant cultural identity in the collective immigrant experience and, specifically, the operation of selfhood. Through the examination of hybridized identity and its mediation the exhibition considers the consequences of ‘involuntary’ displacement understood as the process of relocating from one source of culture to another. The exhibition seeks to highlight the associations attached to objects by immigrants and to make an assessment of culture in its material and psychological dimensions. Through the use of consumer products, technology and mementos I assemble a hybrid identity to relieve the psychological tension caused by my dualistic identity. The works in *Super Toys Last All Summer Long* are informed by my personal memories and experiences as an immigrant living in North America, and the exhibition investigates both the effects of displacement on individual memory, and the translation of those memories.

Key Words: negotiation, hybrid, culture, identity, immigrant, memory, translation, assemble, objects, installation

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Dedication

To my Father Rame (1964-2013)

my Mother, Zoje

my Sisters, Abetare and Lira

and all other immigrant families that seek a better future.

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Things are what we encounter, ideas are what we project

Leo Stein

Theory and Rationale

My thesis investigates hybrid identity and its negotiation. It considers the consequences of both willing and involuntarily displacement or the methods of relocating from what I see as one place to another. I use a self-reflexive ethnographic process to study the dual material cultures around me, as metaphoric and literal representations of cultural ideologies. This hybrid identity is negotiated through the assembling of objects as mnemonic couriers of loss, and memory. I use object assemblage as a methodology that translates memory, sentimental meaning, and cultures into methods of relieving pressures of acculturation. The object assemblages I have created offer different aspects of migrant identity as it pertains with everyday discomfort of trans-locality. The thesis work consists of mementoes and objects that carry memories of a changing time combined with consumer products to make a materially contradicting yet critical observation of the assimilation process for immigrants.

Research Questions:

My line of questioning proposes that identity can be curated and rendered tangibly and that the cultural artifacts of this autobiographical excursion can represent the influence of multiple cultures functioning together. I considered the means of how it was possible for me to be both Albanian and Canadian simultaneously. This lead me to examine the ways in which I present myself to others in society, and if those ways relieve the discomfort I have felt by living between cultures. I ask,

- I. Given that people assemble their identities, can objects help facilitate that sense of self?
- II. Does the hybridity of material cultures give relief to the negative effects as a result of displacement?
- I. Mnemonic devices are used to hold memories for people, can the same method of applying human conditions to objects be used towards identity formation?

Introduction

When I was about seven years old and living in northern Manitoba, my Father's sister brought over a costume that would define a large part of my identity in my later life. This was a traditional artefact worn by Albanian men but sized for a boy, appearing similar to the one in photographs I have seen that my Grandfather wore and his Grandfather before that. I remember the materials used in the costume felt odd, rough and itchy. My Mother explained that the fabric was made from sheep's wool. The material was alien to me since I had come to only know cotton and nylon. "This is who we are" I would be told, "this is normal" as a camera was pulled out and I was told to sit cross-legged traditionally "like grandpa" and to smile. I don't remember what became of the costume after the photo, I have not worn another since. A Western description of the alienness of the costume can be read in Edith Durham's anthropological study *High Albania*:

The costume increases the long, lean appearance. The tight trousers are worn very low—only just to the top of the pelvis—and the waistcoat exceedingly short, so that there is an interval of twelve or eighteen inches between the two which is tightly swathed in sashes and belts, sometimes three broad ones, one above the other, with spaces of shirt between. This gives an extraordinarily long-waisted look, as of having double the proper number of lumbar vertebrae. (Durham, 139)

I later found out as an adult that the costume I wore for the photograph was actually meant for a cousin of mine living in Florida, another seven-year-old boy. I realized that my aunt and Mother took advantage of an opportunity to psychologically imbed our Albanian culture into me in the form of a photo document. I question whether many Albanian boys or boys from different cultures scattered in the diaspora have had similar experiences. It is this form of 'programming' identity that I find mimics associations with the notion of the android found in Western pop culture. Following my thesis, I will describe how I use the android concept as a metaphor for establishing the idea of object/human connection.

In retrospect, my connection with the material culture from my 'homeland' and the power of photography as a mechanism to capture the past has created a basis for research into how objects can curate particular identities and establish one's sense of self, simultaneously considering the negotiation between multiple cultures as a result of North American assimilation.

My thesis investigates the negotiation of hybrid identity. It considers the consequences of both willing and involuntarily displacement as methods of relocating from one place to another. I use a self-reflexive ethnographic process to study the dual material cultures around me as metaphoric and literal representations of cultural ideologies. Hybrid identity is then negotiated through the assemblage of objects as mnemonic couriers of loss and memory. I use

object assemblage as a methodology that translates memory, sentimental meaning, and cultures into methods of relieving pressures of acculturation. The object assemblages I have created offer different examples of migrant identity as they pertain to the everyday discomfort of trans-locality. The thesis work consists of mementoes and objects that carry memories of a changing time, they are combined with consumer products to make a materially contradictory yet critical observation of the assimilation process for immigrants during assimilation.

I

*Supertoys Last All Summer Long*¹, a short story written by Brian Aldiss, first published in 1969, is set in an over-populated dystopian future. In this world, citizens must apply and wait for approval from the Ministry of Population in order to have children. The story focuses on a husband and wife, and their child, David. David as the protagonist, has a difficult time emotionally communicating with his Mother. Throughout the short story, David constantly wonders and questions his own existence as a real boy and the fact of what he experiences as the inauthenticity of his life. As the story advances the reader learns that David is an android, or, as he is known in the dystopian future, a *supertoy*. As a thinking, feeling machine David's position is caught between being a child to his parents and an entity that is always in a precarious position. Eventually, David's parents eventually get licensed to conceive a child. This plot development (occurring at the end of the story) leaves the reader to question David's possible fate and what might well be his replacement. While as a sentient android David is the product of programming, he also has the capacity of self-awareness. His identity is under-developed and contingent. As an animated, thinking object he is able to modify his social interactions and character. Similar to the circumstances of a displaced person who is beginning

¹ I adopt my thesis title directly from Brian Aldiss' short story, Although I separate 'super' and 'toy' to differentiate between my work and his.

to come to terms with their evolving sense of self, David's sense of disconnection from the world of his parents and the anxieties attending his future speak to the tensions between the character of dependence and inherited identity and the character of independence and self-fashioning. In his trans-locality, David wants to be acknowledged as a real child, yet it is his physical identity as a fabricated machine that prevents this from happening. Science fiction has long used androids as metaphors for examining how identity is or can be self-formed even with predetermined programming. I find the metaphor of the relationship between a given set of protocols – identity – and a coming into consciousness useful for my own thesis as it describes the ways in which I and other immigrant children are raised to be attached to a culture that is removed while existing in another.

In my experience and that of other displaced people, it is the origins that prevent full or complete assimilation. The fact of movement from a place of origin and the resettlement in a new place forces a negotiation between identities.

I relate with David, the android, because his of complicated sense of self, as an immigrant having to negotiate between identities, I feel that the circumstances of my Albanian identity were forcibly nourished with the morals and ethics of Kosovo, a forgotten land. While my North American home was a controlled environment of transported and remembered Albanian culture, the

Western (or North American) culture I was experiencing outside my home was further complicating my identity. Indeed, the duality of my life resulted in the distancing of myself from the identity my parents wanted for me even though I was immersed in their emotional and affectual world. Like my parents, immigrant parents associate with a single cultural identity and try to curate their children in the same singularity without considering the effects of possible experiences on the child by living in a multicultural environment. I have learned to translate my dual identities into a hybrid that keeps my obligation towards the folkloric culture in which I was steeped and the western and modernizing culture I to which I ascribed. For instance, when visiting my Albanian Grandmother who lives in Toronto and who has never adapted to life away from Kosovo, I am constantly aware that I am not presenting my full self to her. The interchangeability of my persona is due to the fact that I have learned to express and translate myself into the fully Albanian man my Grandmother believes me to be. Sociologist Erving Goffman expresses this perfectly with the notion of the mask, “this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be.” He continues, “[i]n the end, our conception of our role becomes second nature and an integral part of our personality. We come into the world as individuals, achieve character, and become persons” (Goffman, 19,20)

In addressing identity; I focus on *cultural hybridization*, what cultural theorists Kalra, Kaur, and Hutnyk define as “a mix of cultures, here and

there...the mix of old and new, of different styles, the pastiche of elements that reaffirms the old.” The authors call this mixing of practices, being systems and cognitive modes, “the panacea for uncertain times”, and suggest how, “in conditions of diasporic hybridization, without the certainty of the nation-state or class-identity for comfort, we may usefully and chaotically affirm promiscuity at every turn.” (Kalra, Kaur, Hutnyk, 88)

I use the concept of cultural hybridization as a possibility for the assembly of multiple identities during acculturation. In this theory, or what Kalra, Kaur, and Hutnyk describe as the ‘uncertainty, promiscuity and pastiche’ that define this state contextualizes Western globalization. The hybrid is composed of one identity as the parental culture of birth, that is social of the place. The other identity is formed Western and North American culture during occasional assimilation.

In consequence of my early life as an immigrant to Canada, my early childhood experiences as an Albanian born in Kosovo have been largely if not completely forgotten. I lived the years of my early childhood vicariously through my parents’ trauma; it is this second-hand experience of dislocation with which I resonate most. *Their* physical dislocation is *my* psychic dislocation. The stories of a world of rituals, sharp attitudes and things left a desire and need in my psyche to re-experience my forgotten past. The process of dislocation does not

end with relocation. The process continues in the new place solidifying culture and home. For many dislocated peoples there exists a strong sense of a need to recreate the home left behind. Historian Svetlana Boym identified this psychic work as “a desire to inhibit exile, to build a home away from home.” (Boym, 499) In viewing my own history as a displaced person, I understand how I was raised in a simulated cultural environment occasioned by my parents’ forced exile and the fact that they instilled their mental anguish and homesickness in me as best they could. Much like the arguably dystopian future which David the android inhabits, I have come to understand my inner bifurcated world as a transcendent fact of migrant identity.

Many immigrants fear the loss of their culture due to relocation. However, Zofia Rosinska argues that the legitimacy of cultural identity comes from lifestyle and not physical space. “It is the *group or lifestyle* that fix [the immigrant] identity and not a particular geographical region or physical setting.” (Rosnska, 31) My parents fashioned a dominant home culture defined by food, objects and stories of our past. This prescription of Albanian Kosovar life served at reliving the trauma of their past. In his 2015 text, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal discusses how the vulnerability of one’s personal history can operate as a source of personal comfort. “Even painful memories remain essential emotional history,” he writes “constructing a coherent self-narrative is widely

held crucial to personal integrity and psychic well-being” (Lowenthal, 94) I have no real memories of my parents’ experiences. The pain I feel arises through the personal narrative of my parents’ construction. This construction came from the cultural circumstances that formed my parents’ ideologies. I have long used that ideology as an agent in the negotiation of my North American life.

Cultural origins are unavoidably part of identity formation, whether we choose to position ourselves in such identities is up to the individual. It is only at the point of questioning their sense of self in society, that one may begin to position or change their identity. Cultural Theorist Stuart Hall discusses the notion of identity origin in his 1990 text, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* as:

Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'. (Hall, 226)

I am culturally different from my parents. My psychic position exists in-between cultures, mediating between their past and my future. During what I call our Canadianization, my parents were always warned by family that we, as children, were going to lose our culture, something that we were always reminded of. I, however, felt I was gaining another one. I had to learn to negotiate two identities: the history my parents preserved in me, and my experience of growing up in North America. I did this primarily through social activities and watching television, from which I learned English. Television

became a mechanism for strengthening my North American identity, and giving me, like other immigrant children, myriad examples of what North American life looked like.

It was my name, what Eva Hoffman describes as an “identification tag, that primarily set me apart from my peers. Referring to language, Hoffman offers that, “identification tags are disembodied signs pointing to objects that happen to be my sister and myself.” (Hoffman, 32) It was at this point in my childhood, as a five-year-old, that I recognized I was entrenched in the process of acculturation, despite not having a name for this process itself. In my research, I found that Identity can be malleable, but that it is only considered upon the reflection of self. Recollections of memories provide much insight into the formation of identity and sense of self.

Memory is intimate; it cannot be directly shared, rather, it is recompiled with personal idiosyncronicity and is presented and revealed through the intimate fragments we share with each other. Historian Svetlana Boym uses the term “Diasporic Intimacy” as a way of sharing migrant narratives: “Diasporic intimacy is possible” Boym writes, “only when one masters a certain imperfect aesthetics of survival and learns to inhabit exile. Diasporic intimacy is an affectionate farewell to the Motherland. It has an accent—in both languages, foreign and native.” (524) The affectionate farewell mentioned by Boym is the

beginning of negotiating hybrid character, and the subsequent acknowledgement of the impossibility of return. Knowing that the past cannot be undone and that the place of origin will likely remain impossibly distant, the immigrant has little choice but to exist in a type of trans-local limbo or to surrender to the acculturation process. This remaking of selfhood needs to be embraced in order to find a foothold into the society of arrival and to gain acceptance.

I find it is the reflection on experiences that help shape identity as opposed to the recollection of a past that may be fogged with emotional bias. In *Super Toys Last All Summer Long*, David does not possess any memories. He is programmed and responds to situations. David's condition of not having a past resonates deeply with me: I do not have any memories of my life in Kosovo. All of my mental images and my sense of old world things – memories of that place, as it were – are second hand. My understanding of Kosovo, of the wars and the experiences of my family were given to me. In many way, my Kosovar identity is the product of the transfer to me of my parents' first hand experiences.



FIGURE 1 PHOTOGRAPH OF QENDRIM HOTI (AGE 7) IN FOLKLORIC ALBANIAN COSTUME, 1997

In order to affirm my Albanian identity, my parents would take my family to Kosovo every few years during the summer. These experiences were meant to affirm the Albanian culture my parents were nurturing in me in Canada, and to acquaint me with the place of my ancestors. In his 1999 text, *Mementos as Transitional Objects in Human Displacement*, David Parkin suggests that when discussing the role of future identity, “in whatever remains to hand of impersonal physical, mental and bodily bricolage: to invest emotionally, in other words, in accessible objects, ideas and dreams rather than in the living people around one.” (Parkin, 308) It is with this suggestion by Parkin that I discuss the notion of the subject inscribed in material culture, and what this entails for memories and

identity. Objects become involuntarily associated with memories and sometimes even people. For immigrants, objects are often reminders of their past and history- tangible eulogies of a past that need to be remembered because to immigrants, the loss of memory becomes a loss of self. Rosinska also acknowledges this study. Remembering, then,” she writes, “does not presume loss, and although it typically refers to the past, the past cannot be perceived as a loss.” Rosinska continues:

How to comprehend memory so that it contains the experience of loss? How to comprehend it in order to understand how it plays the role of an art form with respect to the feeling of loss? First of all, memory would need to be construed as mnemonic experience, and temporal construct (Rosinska, 38)

During our family trips to Kosovo, I encountered an opposing ideology to the one I had come to know in Canada. Everyday objects were different in Kosovo—the food and brands were different, the air, too, had a different smell. In effect, I experienced culture shock. I later came to understand; I was solidifying the memories I should have had having been born there. I finally obtained memories of the landscape, the people, and their folklore. These memories solidified what culture my parents coded in me, but also further divided my Canadian Identity. “Memory of self” writes Lowenthal, “is crucial for our sense of identity: knowing that we *were* confirms that we *are*. Personal continuity depends wholly on memory.” (Lowenthal, 324) Realizing that I had to create memories of Albanian life became evidence of my two separate identities.

Memory is an inherent quality of understanding origin. As an exile it is very specific to living a relocated life. As Nergis Canefe explains, “Experiences of refugees indicate that diaspora, or exile leads to a particular and highly political genre of remembrance of personal, communal, and national histories.”

(Canefe, 157)

My received, implanted memories of prewar and postwar Kosovo are national histories, where I began to notice small changes with each visit back—Kosovo was modernizing. The material culture was losing its distinctive folkloric qualities that had been untouched by Westernization (as much because of the history of Yugoslavia as the relative isolation of Kosovo in that federation). I remember distinctly the rapidity of material change: the small wooden stools made by my uncle were happily – eagerly - replaced for plastic stools adorned with Disney princesses. The modernization in Kosovo represented the replacement of a local culture of history and depth by an ersatz dollar store aesthetic and a fondness for the televised lifestyles of middle North America in the 2000s.

The transplanted Albanian material culture that defined our Canadian home was all that was saved after the destruction of my grandparents’ homes in Kosovo. My parents instilled the importance of preservation of these materials as documents of past and identity. Boym discusses the compulsiveness of preserving things by immigrants as, “the recovery of objects from garbage, no

longer a practical need at all, turns into a ritual rescue of the past”. (Boym, 517) I would sometimes be dressed in folkloric costume for photographs, in hopes that I would be reminded of my ancestry when I became an adult. The hand crafted garments were alien to me; I had never seen them in stores or on television. I was merely masquerading as a bygone Albanian boy with a felt cap, despite the realities of being lower-middle class, suburban and Canadian (Fig.1).

To preserve is to learn about the past by being able to relive it through media. What dictates the human need for preservation, is re-experiencing the past as we move further into the future. By looking at objects and photos, it is in the ability of being able to revisit the past as a means of locating my current identity in the present.

I found that understanding notions of identity was made easier through a consideration of physical objects. In thinking about my life, I realize that I was able beneficially to differentiate Albanian material culture with North American material culture and to make assumptions about the implications of each. The objects that my parents brought with them – handmade things such as doilies, woolen socks, wood carvings – are representations of lost life and evidence of a past. These everyday objects were, by virtue of their exile, turned into treasures and hallowed mementoes.

In Canada, our everyday Western products were made from plastics and production molds. They were simple things like dish racks, compact cameras,

and shoe horns. In the 2001 text *Death, Memory, and Material Culture*, authors Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey discuss materiality in regard to relieving stresses of dislocation, “The tensions, ambiguities and contradictions integral to material environments that have undergone a form of ‘trauma’ or dislocation, can be worked out through further interactions with material objects in social practice.” (Hallam, Hockey, 103)

Objects—whether human made or found in the natural world—serve as mnemonic devices because they hold and trigger memory. They are inscribed with specific associations and meaning. Accordingly, objects are reminders of the past to be able to cope with the present, they are memories that have been physically trapped in time. For displaced people, David Parkin suggests that, “while art, artifacts and ritual objects are conventionally located in predictable contexts of use [...] items taken under pressure and in crisis set up contexts less of use and more in selective remembering, forgetting and envisioning.” (Parkin, 304) In my home, the objects that were the most valuable were sentimental ones, it was the objects from Kosovo that mattered. The objects that my parents brought over from Kosovo were meant to help mediate their previous life with their new, and foreign, one. Photos, rugs, doilies, and coffee sets. These objects mean more to me than they did for my parents ever since I began collecting them. I do not see them as practical objects, I see them as tangible embodiments – *aides de memoires* – of my identity.

Boym defines immigrant homes as disordered museums of memory, “In the immigrant’s homes we notice the aesthetic desire to make everyday existence beautiful and memorable. This is a peculiar aesthetic practice that transforms kitschy souvenirs into safe logs of memory, yet does not allow for a centralized nostalgic narrative.” (Boym, 523) What I noticed during my acculturation was the integration of Western products existing together with objects of Albanian heritage. As an eight-year-old child I would want to purchase and consume products I saw on television and in advertisements. I remember, for instance introducing peanut butter to my family, a very strange and unfamiliar thing at first, but a food that would become a regular part of our family grocery shopping.

Displaced immigrants have been usually displaced for political or economic reasons. According to the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), that number was the highest ever with 59 million in 2014. The abundant consumer culture of the capitalist West might sometimes seem overwhelming for people accustomed to the poverty of a totalitarian state. Boym holds that the constant introduction to change reminds emigrants of their exile. “The American culture of the disposable object was most unfamiliar to them” Boym writes, “it embodied their desires and fears: consumerist luxury, on the one hand, and a sense of transience, a perpetual whirlpool of change that

reminded them acutely of their exile, on the other.” (Boym, 522) The Western normalcy to disposability is due to the prosperity from historical economic and colonial imbalance. Something colonized countries such as Kosovo do not have.

Homi Bhabha, in speaking of culture and space notes, "Cultural discourse is a separate space, a space of separation—less than one and double—which has been systematically denied by both colonialists and nationalists who have sought authority in the authenticity of origins." (Bhabha,171) In de-contextualizing Bhabha’s notion, this denial in my case is by the colonialists (Western globalization) and the nationalists (Albanian culture) that have made it difficult for me to negotiate a hybridized space to which I have full agency over.

We locate ourselves in the present through the objects we own, they illustrate our hybridized and complex selves by presenting our identity to others. To create a space where my selfhood remained intact that I could negotiate my identities comfortably within I wove what I have termed a hybridized security blanket out of the two competing material cultures, something that would contextualize the multiple and simultaneous material cultures of my homes where the influences of Western globalization simultaneously infuse with traditional Albanian folkloric culture². The following chapter outlines my

² It is important to note that objects are of utter importance in the constitution of selfhood. Objects are associated with feelings of safety, histories, and memories. With postmodern strategies of assemblage, we can merge historical

methodology, as it discusses and engages with object assemblage as it pertains to hybridizing identity through objects.

references with the present to create a critical perspective of identity. To merge this history with the present—assimilated culture through object assemblage creates a future relieved of uneasy feelings of acculturation.

I guess cyborgs like myself have a tendency to be paranoid about our origins.

Major Motoko Kusanagi

Man is an individual only because of his intangible memory. But memory cannot be defined, yet it defines mankind.

The Puppet Master³

³ Ghost in the shell, 1995. Directed by Mamoru Oshii

II

My art practice and my work considers methods for confronting how migration and acculturation affect identity, through objects. As a relief from the everyday challenges of violence, labor, and religion, object assemblages illuminates the identity of individuals who have similarly experienced the difficulties of trans-locality.

I spend much of my life trying to negotiate what I can only describe as a feeling of being in between two places. When in Kosovo, my birthplace and the land of my forbears, I can assume an identity that is genetically legitimate but my face as an outsider is unknown associatively within the community. However, what can be described as my psychic trans-locality, is defined by my constant effort to make sense of what I feel. It is these feelings that inform my practice and the work I do with the methodology I employ. My methodology is a representation of my investigations in selfhood, ancestral memory, and the performance of the everyday.

My research is based on my considered collections of objects and photographs I call my archive. As resources to making artwork, I use objects to help facilitate the notion of identity, since identity, like objects, can be assembled from pieces or fragments. Julia Creet uses Zofia Rosinka's words; "the archive provides the *Pharmakon*, both the poison (a substitute for memory) and the possible cure (as an aid to remembering)." (Creet, 28) In using object

assemblage, I have purposefully and carefully combined elements to create a *Pharmakon*, the poison and cure together.

My 'archive' is the material documentation of my everyday life. This archive is comprised of photographs, video cassettes, film negatives and mementoes—cherished objects that represent memories, people, and history. I use it to inform my artistic practice by providing examination of material culture and history of my hybridized identity. I have since appointed this archive as documentation to be used as research material.

A large portion of this archive is the photographs and videos my Father took while we were growing up in Canada, and during the trips we took to visit Kosovo and Europe. (Fig. 2) There are also visual documentation of the aftermath of war in Kosovo, as my parents took a trip alone in 1999.

Cultural theorist and artist Yvonne Singer acknowledges the importance of photo albums when she writes, "Family albums are built in the present to document, preserve, and impart private histories and their events, such as births, weddings, graduations, family gatherings, and birthdays, as a public representation." She continues, "They present an unofficial history of a family or a group, often focused on happy events, while death, violence, and sex are not recorded. The family album has power as nostalgia and often as an idealized representation of a time, place, and people. No one ages and no one dies." (Singer, 264)



FIGURE 2 FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS IN SUITCASE, 2017

It is important to note that preserving these albums also preserve my life, and the lives of my parents. It is written in the Albanian customary law (*Kanun*) that the eldest child must care for their parents. I believe I am fulfilling my duty by preserving their histories through my art practice.

Together with my reliance on family photo albums, the images in my work are a means of making sense of my culture. I use social media resources such as Instagram to acquire and categorize my interests in other fields, such as popular culture and graphic design. This led me to visual paradoxical possibilities in assembling my Albanian identity with Western objects. My Instagram screenshots are a collection of images circulating online that shape and categorize my research interests. The collection is separated into three categories: Art, Design, and Reference. These images are culled from the 1012 accounts that I follow. My research is embedded into the every day, similar to my family albums, I feel the need to save them due to the threat that they are irrecoverable from the affluence of online images.

Images for displaced people are one of the most important possessions during emigration. Speaking with family, a shared nightmare is the complete loss of photographs, because to lose that collection is to lose memories. Parkin writes about the psychological weight of images in memory: “The photo of the

loved one may be all there is of him or her and testifies to their memory for as long as it exists and can be seen,” he writes “but, being vulnerable also to the threat of total dispossession, can be the occasion of compounded grief at the visible irrecoverability both of the loved one and his or her image.” (Parkin, 316)

For some immigrant families, their small archives are the only evidence of previous cultural identity. My self-reflexive methodology is used to locate my family history of migration.

My use of images and memories is evident in the work KULLA, 2017.



FIGURE 3 PHOTOGRAPH OF MY MATERNAL GRANDFATHER, ILAZ, 1996

KULLA is a modified video game environment commonly known as a map⁴ that I created in the online multiplayer first person shooter video game *Counter Strike*. The game was created, perhaps coincidentally, just after the war in Kosovo in 1999. With over '25 million players, it is the most popular war game in the world'. (Makuch, web) The game is a simple military style simulation that can host custom online servers of maps (a closed world level) in which up to 30 players can enter the server and choose to play as terrorist or counter-terrorist. In most cases, the teams virtually kill each other until the last one standing from either side wins the match. Nergis Canefe describes a new kind of space for the diasporic. I use the virtual space of the video game as an even newer kind of space that bridges the diaspora and cultural origin. Canefe writes, "Current interdisciplinary work on the former subject suggests that the diaspora constitutes a new kind of space, a 'third space', a place that is not a place, a mode of existence that acts as a bridge between the national. The local, and the transnational." (p.157)

My custom 'Counter Strike' map – KULLA – serves as a time line-based analysis and critique of the changes in Kosovo caused by Westernization during three time periods: before, during and after war. As a virtual artwork, the furnishing of the environment is based on family photographs that have served to document my memories. Due to war and conflict, Kosovar Albanians have a

⁴ not to be confused with cartography

long tradition of defensive practicality in the design of their homes and land; *Kullë* is an Albanian term for the fortified tower buildings dating to the Ottoman period, which housed family clans during battle. The virtual environment that I have created is centered around a seven-floor *Kullë* on a square piece of land that is closed off by a concrete brick wall. The player can begin the match as a counter-terrorist on the roof of the building, or as a “Balkan” terrorist on the ground. Each team must go through the building to encounter their respective enemy. I used video footage my Father recorded on our family visit to Kosovo in 1996 as the visual reference material for fabricating virtually my grandparents’ living room. (fig. 4) While the video played, I would pause, screenshot details, and take notes of the objects and fabric patterns in the video. While memories have a tendency to be fickle over time, having access to an image repository of the past has been crucial for my investigation of the cultural identity of an irretrievable time. Players will be faced with specific decor and furnishing starting from pre-war folkloric Albanian material culture to that of war-torn Kosovo, and then to post-war Kosovo. As the levels ascend, so changes the increments of the objects and furnishings presenting evidence of westernization.



FIGURE 4 SCREEN SHOT FROM KULLA, 2017

In an article found on widewalls.ch, *Contemporary Assemblage—The Art of Found Objects*, critic and commentator Natalie Paunic defines assemblage as follows, “Assemblage is both the process and the product of art-making, referring to an act of putting various fragments together, in order to compose a piece. Ever since the term was introduced, it had a slightly disheveled, messy or grungy feel to it, since the process often involved the use of discarded objects, found objects, remnants or scraps.” Paunic goes on to note that, “The ability to anticipate a composition made out of seemingly redundant or incompatible elements seems like a precious talent, which is not really grungy at all.” She explains that these random objects come together harmoniously to

create a coherent composite image while simultaneously being meaningless individually. Moreover, she states how “this essence of assemblages is reminiscent of syntax relations, analogous to syllables, words and sentences, which comes as a good opportunity to consider why assemblage is a term often used in linguistics as well.” Going further to define assemblage, Paunic notes that in the realm of linguistics, “an assemblage is *built primarily and explicitly from existing texts to solve a writing or communication problem in a new context.*”

The non-virtual portion of my work is comprised of consumer and personal mementoes as sentimental, nostalgic, and inherited objects. The inherited objects belonged to my Father: he had a knack for collecting small items and many tools since he was a mechanic by trade. The materials I collect for my art practice are not part of my considered archive, but a separate, studio-based collection. While not an archive in the traditional sense, where the preservation of documents is about historical memory and its study, my archive of things is for the production of art. The archive is varied and extensive. I own wood working tools, plastic tools, camera tools, and so on. As an artist, my material interests are wider than my Fathers. It is the experimentation with these materials that inform my art practice in assemblage. The traditional tools are only a fragment of the paradoxical possibilities of assemblage, in a postmodern

sense, assemblage is like a perfect and harmonious working machine made from ironic, boring, and contradictory parts.



FIGURE 5 ACCIDENTAL SCULPTURE IN RED AND BLACK, 2017

Similar to androids and ‘supertoys’ my works are an amalgamation of identities imposed onto materials that are free or have predetermined associations. They are created by me so as to amuse myself in making sense of who I am. The work, unlike an android, cannot speak for itself. It is the play with representation and adaptation that gives the work its meaning. My work is unable to confront me like an android and ask about its existence, or seek other existential knowledge. These super toys are a way to categorize the elements of my dualistic cultures that I have had difficulties in presenting to others. I have mediated my genetic Albanian culture with my North American experiences as an inner struggle. For others to see my dualism as stable and not binary, I find it suitable to express a representation of me through the objects that I own.

An example of object assemblage in my work is my piece *ACCIDENTAL SCULPTURE IN RED AND BLACK*. (Fig. 5) I inherited a number of my Father’s objects with little space for them, his tool box was towering awkwardly in our apartment living room, where I kept looking over at the big red box while watching TV, wondering if the structure of the toolbox drawer could potentially hold our TV, my curiosity led me to merge the TV with the toolbox. With this action of assemblage, my Father’s towering toolbox became a portrait of the working class rituals of coming home after work and relaxing. Most days after work, my Father would sit in his chair and watch television. This work represents the immigrant working class life of labor and leisure and was created a vehicle to

honor the stories of my family's immigration and life in Canada. Boym underlines the immigrant home as a museum of objects that reflect their experiences, "an émigré proverb "My home is my castle" doesn't quite work. "my home is my museum" would be more appropriate." (521)

Although my family's TV stand is a bright red mechanics toolbox, it is the practicality and efficiency of working within my given limitations that the looming awkwardness of such a physically large sentimental object has subsided. The sentimentality attached to the toolbox, plays a major role as an icon of my familial experiences. *ACCIDENTAL SCULPTURE IN RED AND BLACK* employs the most important method in object assemblage: expanding the function of objects outside their intended design in addition to reworking the associations given to objects. As scholarship has demonstrated, immigrants find difficulty in assembling multiple cultural identities. Jim Frideres notes,

At a more theoretical level, immigrants have two choices. First, they may physically and socially remain within the confines of a boundary community that is congruent with their multiple identities when entering Canada. Alternatively, they can remove themselves (both physically and socially), as much as possible, from previous identities and remain apart of the boundaried community. (Frideres, 11)

Object assemblage – an arguably narrative artistic strategy – has a long history. From the early paper assemblages of Kurt Schwitters through the logic-bending work of Man Ray to Rauchenberg's "Combines" and, more recently, Jessica Stockholder's colorful and plastic-favoring compositions of dollar and

hardware store merchandise, assemblage turns on the reconfiguring of objects into autonomous works of art. And here the making of work is the methodology. For integral in this system of art production lie ideological, intellectual and aesthetic strategies for changing objects into new forms through their being gathered and conglomerated both physically and symbolically. As Diane Waldman notes, assemblage is “the process of joining two-and three dimensional organic or refabricated materials that project out from the surface plane” (Waldman, 8) In a discussion of the *objet trouvé* The Oxford Dictionary of Art notes how artists including, for example, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, applied the techniques of assemblage in their work as a means “of commenting on the relationship between reality, representation, and illusion.” (Gale, web)

The early object assemblages produced in the 1920’s and 30’s are of particular a methodical and conceptual significance. Duchamp’s ready-mades and the works born from the Dada movement for example, the Bottle Rack, 1914, and Roaul Hausmann’s Mechanical Head (The spirit of our age), 1920, speak to an awareness on the part of artists about the power of using everyday human-made materials in the work of social critique through art making. In considering the aesthetic properties and possibilities of mass-produced goods and their transformation about the ability of artists to make meaning through the

gathering and conglomeration of extant things into art. The aged wood, brass and tin of the Dada era reflected the assemblage of the time. Although this work is symbolic in its meaning and use of assemblage, a historical work that is closer to my notion of assemblage is Man Ray's *Cadeau*, 1921 the artist has taken everyday objects: an iron, thumb tacks and uses assemblage to construct a domestically paradoxically hybrid non usable object. The type of examples above, continued into Rauschenburg's *Monogram* of 1959, which employed a different form of assemblage using found street junk that were not sentimentally linked to the artist. In 1961 with the exhibition at MoMA titled: *The Art of Assemblage*, assemblage had transcended into a modern form of art making. Historian, William C. Seitz acknowledges this in the classic *The Art of Assemblage* exhibition catalogue (1961),

Every work of art is an incarnation: an investment of matter with spirit. The term 'assemblage' has been singled out with this duality in mind, to denote not only a specific technical procedure and form used in the literary and musical as well as the plastic arts, but also a complex of attitudes and ideas. Just as the introduction of oil painting in 15th century Flanders and Italy paralleled a new desire to reproduce the appearance of the visible world, collage and related modes of construction manifest a predisposition that is characteristically modern. (Seitz, 1)

Although assemblage has been seen as both progressive and modernist and postmodernist at particular points in time, it is, arguably the blatant use of all types of materials and the attending openness of possibility. As Waldman argues, assemblage, along with collage and art from found objects, "expanded

the language of art, allowing for greater formal diversity and an increased expressive range.” (Waldman, 8) In following the historical time line of object assemblage, I think that the practice of Jessica Stockholder deserves special attention. With Stockholder assemblage is effectively echoing the current state of late capitalist culture: wry darkness masked in whimsy. The banal domestic products Stockholder uses in her work are in large part, the consequences of Chinese hyper production. The colorful plastic buckets, bins, caps, and plungers are all from the same family of products that hide underneath sinks and in the jam-packed cupboards of North American homes.⁵

A contemporary artist that uses assemblage to merge a specific culture and technology is Tom Sachs with his body of work *Tea Ceremony*. Shown at the Noguchi Museum in Queens, New York, the work uses traditional Japanese tea equipage that was assembled with commercially available objects such as electric drills, knives, etc. As the Noguchi Museum website states, “Sachs has also produced a complete alternative material culture of Tea—from bowls and ladles, scroll paintings and vases, to a motorized tea whisk, a shot clock, and an electronic brazier.”⁶ It is Sach’s paradoxical combination of technology and traditional Japanese material culture that I find expands the existing material

⁵ Although I tend to use similar colorful plastics in my work, there is a lack of specific cultural discourse in Stockholders *assemblage inspiration* series, 2014, as well as any references towards technology, which is in fact the major force of current Western cultural production.

⁶ <http://www.noguchi.org/programs/exhibitions/tom-sachs-tea-ceremony>

cultural discourse. Although, since Sachs does not culturally identify as Japanese, I take issue with Sachs' cultural appropriation which makes the work seem closer to a cheap anthropological exercise in merging technology with old ritualistic practices. The modernization of culture is always fraught, so it must be refigured by the individual.

The discomfort occasioned by my dual identities finds a metaphorical antidote in the process of my object assemblage. As a method to solidify who I am as an autonomous being, I create my object assemblages as elegiac portraits of this hybrid identity. My object assemblages are literal and direct. They are composites of varying objects that hold appropriate function and narrative separately yet together to become elevated into a larger statement. By appropriating my dual cultures, I physically and symbolically synchronize them together to give logic to the identity I choose to live as. It is the process of learning to negotiate or what Srdja Pavlovic claims as, "learning how to bear the fact that you left your homeland; learning how to forget and forgive; learning about a different cultural code, different logic, and a new way of life; learning how to be flexible" (Pavlovic, 47) In my art practice, I have found that in terms of prescribing identity, objects are more flexible than people. Therefore, in experimenting with shaping objects symbolically, we can shape ourselves. I refer to the objects that I have used in this thesis as mementos. They are objects that

hold specific sentimental meaning or memories of a particular place or person. There are different variables that are considered when combining mementos, but I tend to look for different uses of objects than their intended design purpose. I have prescribed myself a system of methods that I use to organize my research and making process.

Object assemblage is only one dimension of my art practice. Another method is what I see as the dual acts of translation and transformation; or the making of works that change existing objects (actual; and representative) into new ones. Translation falls as a method inside the system of object assemblage methodology. I have translated the meanings of objects to fit a new, different form that is used critically; this allows me to assemble the newly defined objects into a single work that stands as one.

SAJJADA, 2017, is a four-tier laser cut plastic three-dimensional representation of an Islamic prayer rug. Conventionally, the prayer rug is an intricately woven rectangular piece of fabric used as a ritualistic device to pray for Muslims, always pointing east towards Mecca, the rug is meant as a barrier from the ground to keep clean while praying, so as to safeguard ones' *wudu* or washing ritual.

There are a number of practiced religions in Kosovo, but the dominant one is Sunni Islam. We were not religiously devoted in my household. The Quran and Sajjada my parents kept, were materially symbolic to our culture, instead of

practical religious reasons. I digitally traced over a small novelty prayer rug I acquired during my trip to Kosovo in 2015. This tracing exercise resulted in four separate pattern planes – into individual and separate layers – that were then laser-cut from 1/8th sheets of glowing fluorescent acrylic. The parts that were cut out of the acrylic were the positive pattern, leaving the negative space of the rectangle intact. The 25x43 inch sheets are combined using clear acrylic rods in different areas to create a whole piece, that keeps each colored layer separated. When seen from above, the layers complete the original pattern in negative as space. The missing/negative space in the acrylic that demonstrates the pattern represents the missing details of a religion that uses symbolism and a loose belief structure in a culture that accepts it but does not represent itself by it. I took the responsibility as to finally make a clear stance in my religious identity. Theorist Ihab Hassan describes the deconstruction of belief structures as a method to reconstructing the truth. “Thus, from the ‘death of god’ to the ‘death of the author’ and the ‘death of the Father,’ from the derision of authority to revision of the curriculum, we decanonize culture, demystify knowledge, deconstruct the languages of power, desire, deceit.” (Hassan, 505)

Intended, always, to exist as a secularized object, I made sure during conceptualization and fabrication of SAJJADA (Fig.8) that it cannot be used for prayer. Since each layer is separated four inches apart vertically, the practical use of the rug has shifted into a dissection of a religious meaning through an

impractical dimension. In practiced Islam, prayer rugs are not supposed to be shared, therefore others may not pray on them. Nilofaar Haeri describes this as, “the sajjadeh is personal, like an item of clothing. (Haeri,16) My work demands the same delicateness and seriousness of such a ritual object; in such a way that it demands space and care but does not function for its original intent, much like my childhood perception of a typical *Sajjada*.



FIGURE 6 SAJJADA, 2017



FIGURE 7 POWER! 2017



FIGURE 8 ENEMY OR ALLY, 2017

My artistic practice uses various collected materials which are both materially tangible and digital to investigate the physical and psychological properties and limitations for assemblage. To achieve a successful alternate function, the assembled objects must physically and ideologically interconnect. Historian, Laurence Gourievidis, uses a quote by G.J. Ashworth describing heritage as the following, “it is ‘doing’ and ‘making’ rather than ‘being’ and reflects present concerns, anxieties and ideals...when ‘pluralizing pasts’”. (Ashwoth, 2) Here Ashworth addresses the physical actions necessary in order to understand and define a ‘plural’ cultural identity. Those actions typically involve the use of tools to make, since tools are objects of creation and progression. The relevance of tools in migrant culture stem from the involved labor in their social class. Similar to my work, *ACCIDENTAL SCULPTURE IN RED AND BLACK*, (Fig.5) the analysis in practicality towards objects can give them a usefulness that can also be benefited by symbolic meaning as well.

Albanian culture slowly developed through a long history of violence based on their customary laws (*Kanun*). Weapons have served as the tools for these laws which have been followed for the past 500 years. In my artwork *POWER! 2017* (Fig.9) I use the symbolic properties of a pistol, which for me, have always been associated with a deep personal masculine power that entitled the holder with heavy feelings of burden and ethical responsibility. I remember when I was an adolescent I felt that power from a small pistol I found in an old leather bag in

my grandparents' home in Kosovo. Being born as a male in my culture means an obligatory sentence of heavy social responsibility and the safeguarding of family honor. The first round I fired from that found firearm made me question both my conception of the fun I had with toy guns as a child and the hyper-masculinity imposed on me by my Father and Mother as the male heir in my family.

The pistol, as a concealed everyday object, symbolizes the sacrificial commitments of honor and the performative obligations of being an immigrant man in an adopted, familiar and pleasant land not of my ancestry. In Kosovar Albanian culture, the violence of war has remained interiorly in regular occurrence of self-government, blood feuds, as well as forms of celebration. In Edith Durham's anthropological account titled *High Albania*, she describes the bond between Albanian men and their rifles.

He had enjoyed the *festa* vastly, and fired off his whole belt of cartridges—forty. This is all that most men possess. They buy caps and powder, cast their own bullets, and perpetually refill their empty cartridge-cases. The ease with which a Martini cartridge is filled is the main reason of that weapon's popularity. (Durham,51-52)

Power! is assembled from the following components: a metal airsoft pistol, a black translucent backpack, a portable battery charger, an and iPad. The pistol hangs down from the black translucent backpack, which carries the iPad that is being charged by the battery implemented in the pistol's handle. The iPad screen shows a found video titled "Albanian picnic" where a group of men are sitting outside in a field firing their guns in celebration with music. This video as

soft depiction of one cultural aspect of how some cultures use firearms to convey delight and celebration. The pistol charges the video playing iPad in such a way that the video and pistol combat each other between the symbolism of power and weapons.

Here, the weapon as a tool, transcends social classes to become elevated into a new form of power, knowledge. These invocations of power and guilt accompany the work as a transformative object the function of which has changed from a symbol of death to a symbol for life. There still remains a defensive paranoia similar to other cultures that have been changed by war. The properties of the pistol as power supply for the iPad demand that the tool to be used a communication device as opposed to a weapon for solving socio-cultural problems.

The martial culture of Kosovo has a long and bloody history, continuing since the end of the Balkans war in 1999 with war and human rights regulations changing with the technology and weapons advancements that were employed in the Kosovo war. It became the first war that did not lose ground troops due to the use of airstrikes and precision missile technology. The physical and psychological separation between the strikers and their targets left NATO questions on the future of moral and ethical warfare in the digital age. Michael Ignatieff writes, "In virtual war, citizens are not only divested of their power to give consent. They are also demobilized. We now wage wars and few notice or

care. War no longer demands the type of physical involvement or moral attention it required over the past two centuries.” (Ignatieff, 184) Each war is a playground to test new weapons developments that often find civilians caught in the crossfire. The high-tech precision ends up falling short due to human error. As a result, incidents such as the mistaken 14 April 1999 bombing of a refugee column on Gjakova road – incidentally, my place of birth – on are painful and tragic reminders of the fallibility of ostensible fool-proof technology. Airstrikes, either from drones or aircraft, rely on computers and cameras to seek out targets and destroy them. Cameras to capture reconnaissance footage in order to distinguish between enemy to ally but despite this, airstrikes are still prone to collateral damage due to difficulties in correctly identifying who the enemy is, based on their physical appearance in photographs.

My work, ENEMY OR ALLY, 2017 (Fig. 10) ponders the advances in military equipment. It is comprised of a commercially available drone and a manipulated photographic print showing a picnic featuring a self-portrait where I am dressed in a variety of ways. Here I present myself as a fragmented person. I use different hats and head-coverings to define my three entwined identities through which I negotiate my life: North American, Muslim, and Albanian. The work comments on the difficulty and challenging aspects of defining one’s sense of self between cultural identities and circumstances in which the result amalgamation is seen by others. The drone’s camera is used to implement the

notion of surveillance in the manner in which the photograph is taken, also related, is the notion of self-surveillance in the way I present fragments of my identity. Goffman states that, "Since fronts [presentation of self] tend to be selected, not created, we may expect trouble to arise when those who perform a given task are forced to select a suitable front for themselves from among several quite dissimilar ones." (Goffman, 28) Here, the different fronts that are chosen by the individual may create consequences by which society sees them, either as an ally or an enemy to their hive cultural ideology. The work considers the possibilities developing independent states will take to consider themselves contemporary or current by western standards and to use drone technology as a means to implement their cultural ideology on citizens living there or in the diaspora. This work is an analysis of how nationalistic ideologies critique the loss of culture during the sociocultural modernization.

In the work, the drone that has been covered with vinyl adorned with Albanian military patterns and cultural motifs. The drone itself is used in the creation of the image but also as a means of carrying the photograph in the gallery as a hovering example of military technologies being used to target different cultures.

We routinely demand perfection from the technology that surrounds us – our mobile phones, computers and cars. Why not war?

Michael Ignatieff



FIGURE 9 HASAN LOVES TIME, 2017

Similar to most refugees and people of exile, I own very few heirlooms that are tangible remnants of my paternal family history. This fact becomes even more difficult when one considers the loss of cultural and material traditions in the process of western assimilation. My paternal Great-Grandfather Hasan died before my Grandfather was born. Accordingly, little information exists about his life. My Grandfather, also named Hasan, died when my Father was an adolescent. It is known that on the death of his Father he was entrusted with the family tools so as to provide for his family. Included in his inheritance were such farm and other implements as a scythe, an axe, and a wagon wrench. These were not precious objects per se but their value came from their utility and the meaning attached to them by the owners. Their familial importance came from their use and that when used they contributed to the wellbeing of the family. The axe head and wrench are what remain, they were passed on to me after my Father died, but as I have never witnessed the objects in use, it has been through the few stories shared to me by my late Father and Grandmother I have come to an understanding of our familial legacy and the culture of manual labor apparent in the role of men in my family.

In the work, *HASAN LOVES TIME*, 2017 (Fig.11) I felt obliged to determine a system of preservation for the cultural objects that I have inherited. As an artist, I also saw the potential in those objects as the material basis for making artwork. I specifically chose to use the axe head because I saw an advantage in

the exhibition that could provide a way to materially visit my families past. In transforming the material culture of my family and presenting them in new and unexpected ways, I am reflecting on the legacy of my family's immigration from Kosovo to North America.

As a family heirloom, the axe head questions the object as a device that carries the narrative of our cultural identity and tradition where a division of labor is apparent in developing countries between lower and higher class families. It is the paternal figure that has a physical job to provide for the family while the maternal figures care for the children at home. This held true for both my Grandfather Hasan and Time, my Grandmother.

I decided to collaborate with my Grandmother (the women I visit regularly and perform my Albanian self) to bake a long piece of bread that would serve as the handle for my Grandfather's axe. My Grandmother, who has never adopted the western culture, or merged it with her Albanian one, revisited the physical culture she once exercised long ago. The perception of distance to her homeland changed once we revisited her past through baking bread. As the home caretaker, my Grandmother used to bake bread for seven of her children and numerous grandchildren. Because of her age now, she does not cook therefore her physical connection to her culture as diminished, yet she still lives inside a cultural bubble. The practice of baking bread again was a return to her previous identity as san Albanian-Kosovar woman, an identity she thought she

still carried while living in Canada.

The obvious absurdity behind the use of an ephemeral object such as bread to be merged with a durable material such as steel is an illogical and paradoxical approach to a tool that was once used for providing for hungry mouths. My Grandfather Hasan is the only one of our family members that never experienced involuntary displacement. Stories of his life have anchored my cultural history and my complicated connection to my family's geographic place of origin. Therefore, the process of having my Grandmother bake the bread one last time helps her psychologically and physically revisit the culture she left behind but lives with daily.

The exhibition installation for *Super Toys Last All Summer Long* is curated in such a way that the space becomes a phantasm: a domestic environment simulation that seeks to evoke the past and its denizens. Since the artworks use objects of domesticity in their creation, I found it appropriate to contextualize the pieces in an environment that ties the physical with the virtual world my modified video game artwork, *KULLA*. The works are installed on structures that physically resemble as tables and counters and a carpet. Each plinth or display surface is devoid of any distinct visual characteristics of such standard materials such as granite or wood. This decision resembles the 'untextured' objects of the

3D virtual world and function as visually quiet – indeed, absent supports for the work.

Rendered as all white, the display objects bleed into the background and help contextualize the artwork in familiar domestic settings. David Batchelor determines the color white as a problem of the west. He states, “This generalized whiteness forms a backdrop to the narrative, a bleached screen which is pierced and torn, time and again” he goes on to describe white things, “white teeth, white hair, white bones, white collars, white marble, white ivory, white fog – always carry with them an uncanny sense of coldness, inertia and death.” (Batchelor, 13)⁷

⁷ I find it important to marry the domestic setting with the notion of death as it represents the letting singular structure of identity die to uphold a hybrid. The all white structures are not art. They are separate from the hybrid object assemblages as methods of display to further re-contextualize the space they are shown in.

III

EPILOGUE

Through *Super Toys Last All Summer Long*, my research examines challenges faced by displaced immigrants in resettlement and the resumption of life in a new place and also considers the objects that identify them as who they are. In considering the consequences of involuntary displacement, I employ a self-reflexive ethnographic process to study dual material cultures around me. Through the creation of objects as mnemonic devices of loss and memory, assemblage, sculpture, and the moving image reflect and question migrant cultural history and consumer culture. In analyzing the fictional tale of the android boy David, I challenge my own uncertainties surrounding identity. Within *Super Toys Last All Summer Long*, I negotiate the difficulties around how migration and acculturation affect identity through objects.

New Conclusions

The complexity of character and identity within the explorations of *Super Toys Last All Summer Long*, I have come to understand better my own identity in its dualistic form. Through experimentation and practice, I have learned and identified a number of key factors that contribute to the creation of identity and how to construct one's own identity; regardless of any preexisting cultures. I

have found my research to benefit my own pressures of negotiating my identity as a displaced Kosovar-Albanian living in North America, as it gave me the vocabulary I desperately needed as a youth to understand my sense of self. My research in the field of material culture studies has carved an intensely laborious path that I find exciting to investigate in my practice further. I believe this work will continue my considerations of how identities are perceived by others in occupied spaces. I see the advancement in understanding my own identities as crucial to the development of my art practice and future research.

Future Trajectories

In the process of planning my exhibition, I was faced with a number of issues. I had planned to install my exhibition inside an OCAD University owned condo on Richmond Street West. It was logical for my work to be in an apartment or condo because my thesis project is concerned with the limitations experienced by dislocation and the process of acculturation experienced by immigrants in the West. For this reason, it would have been thought-provoking to host my object assemblages in a space that limits the creative control of my installation—such as a fully furnished apartment or condo. The limitations of the space would have provided a new way of thinking about art objects in an everyday context. Viewers would also have to physically seek out the work and discover for themselves if the artwork relieved pressures of assimilation. In the

future I do plan to exercise this idea. I see this being exercised through outlets such as hosting my own apartment and sharing it on Airbnb as a live-in art installation. In this situation, I imagine renters (viewers) can experience essential everyday objects as hybrids they must use while living there. I believe it would be beneficial to my future research to use the comments and ratings of Airbnb to find out what the renters thoughts were towards their experiences. This would expand my research on the topics of material culture and hybridized identities, and serve as the basis for future works.

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Appendix A: Kulla, 2017



















