

This thesis is submitted for the degree:

Doctor of Philosophy in Communications

Creative Production (246AA)

University of Canberra

El Iskandariya – Alexandria
(a novel)

*Mapping; a set of co-ordinates for
navigating El Iskandariya – Alexandria*
(an exegesis)

by

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Abstract

This work is composed of two parts, a novel and an exegesis. The novel, *El Iskandariya – Alexandria*, tells the story of an encounter between two women who meet by chance in the Paris of 1989, each dealing with her own isolation. The exegesis, *Mapping: a set of co-ordinates for navigating El Iskandariya*, lays out the ground from which the novel is written through a set of short fragments/essays whose overall structure is defined by the novel itself. A series of artworks, in the form of three installations, accompany the work as annotations and further explore the question of the nature of 'home', which develops into an investigation about 'seeing'. The artworks are discussed in the exegesis under the title *Maps and Annotations*. Two accompanying videos explore and document aspects of the installations and their relationship to the written work.

Each part of this work has its own function in exploring the nature of 'home'. The novel as fiction is an experiment that traces the journey of the central character forced to look into herself in order to understand her own isolation. The artworks explore the phenomenological experience of being in real space and the way that negative, empty space can contain meaning. The texts, which accompanied the writing of the novel are not simply research, but become part of the artworks and in that moment represent an aspect of 'home'. This capacity that they hold is expanded to form a corollary – the concept of 'relocated spaces'. Finally the exegesis seeks to provide a map that brings it all together.

Of the things which characterise this project, the most important is the use of visual parameters. This includes the influence of paintings by Monet and Bonnard and the use of the visual poetic in the writing and the art. The project began formally with an interest in the relationship between image and text, between art and writing, and with the underlying question – what is it possible to say in one form but not in another?

In the end it is about exploring the limits of communication when trying to convey states of being and the nature of embodied experience. The unwritten question is how do we understand one another, how do we create empathy when the words we have are not enough? In this instance the visual image, either written or made manifest, becomes the boundary rider.

Acknowledgements

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And finally my parents, Gilbert Grech and Renée Zacaropoulos: I would like to thank them for their courage in the face of a new world, for their curiosity and love of ideas. And in an odd sort of way, for their melancholic Alexandrian genes.

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Printed Documents:

Novel: *El Iskandariya – Alexandria*

Exegesis: *Mapping: a set of co-ordinates with
which to navigate the novel,
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Novel: *El Iskandariya – Alexandria*

Exegesis: *Mapping: a set of co-ordinates with
which to navigate the novel,
El Iskandariya – Alexandria*
(all artworks in colour)

List of Images from Exegesis (in colour)

Video: *Maps and Annotations 1* (interview)
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