Radical Beauty for Troubled Times

Involuntary Displacement and the (Un)Making of Home

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ABSTRACT

Radical Beauty for Troubled Times: Involuntary Displacement and the (Un)Making of Home

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This thesis examines the relationship between forced dislocation and home beautification practices. It is the result of an interdisciplinary approach and an arts-based methodology. At the heart of this work lies a double-interrogation: how is the daily appreciation and manipulation of one's belongings crucial to the experience of creating home anew following forced dislocation and in what ways do these home beautification practices and the repetition of stylized narratives—and other personal and cultural stories of home and its loss—contribute to the perpetuation of violence in places where home is contested? Home's properties, associations, and manifestations (or lack-there-of) in the political, cultural, emotional, and embodied realms are investigated using a wide array of materials, including the presentation and analysis of a series of live art events that I convened within the tenure of this cycle of research-creation, historical community pageants, personal stories of home and its loss, as well as salient aspects of housing theory and trauma studies. This research-creation process leads towards the realisation that deliberate attention paid to the material and immaterial cultures of home may either help transform the traumas of displacement or create new ones. And that furthermore, the beautification of one's home interior and surroundings is heavily involved in the sense-making process of the (un)making of home.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF PREVIOUS PUBLICATIONS

Some of the ideas presented within this thesis have been reworked from articles that have gone to press during the tenure of this PhD research-creation. The following is a list of published titles in chronological order of publication:

- "Performing Solidarity: Jewish/Palestinian Alliance-building, Street Art Interventions, and the Power of Symbolic Encounters." *Humanist Perspectives* 169 (2009): 26-30. Print.

- "Close Proximity." *Performing Ethos* 1:1 (2010): 69-83. Print.

- "Performing Beauty, Practicing Home: Collaborative Live Art and the Transformation of Displacement." *Creative Arts in Interdisciplinary Practice: Inquiries for Hope and Change*. Ed. Cheryl McLean. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd. 2010. 419-436. Print.

- "Performing Aesthetics, Performing Politics: 'The Jewish Home Beautiful' and the Re-shaping of the Jewish Exile Narrative." *Crossings: Journal of Migration and Culture* 1.1 (2010): 37-51. Print.

- "The Sensuous is Political: Live Art Performance and the Palestinian Resistance Movement." *Somatic Engagement.* Ed. Petra Kuppers. Oakland and Philadelphia: Chain Links. 2011. 71-84.

- "Once a Russian, Always a Jew: (Auto)biographical Storytelling and the Legacy of Dislocation." *Storytelling, Self, Society* 8:1 (2012): 27-41. Print.

- "Co-Activating Beauty, Co-Narrating Home: Dialogic Live Art Performance and the Practice of Inclusiveness." *Creating Together: Participatory, Community-Based and Collaborative Arts Practices and Scholarship Across Canada*. Eds. Diane Conrad and Anita Sinner. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press. 2013, (forthcoming).

- "Drawn to Beauty: The Practice of House-Beautification as Homemaking Amongst the Forcibly Displaced." *Housing, Theory and Society* (2013), (forthcoming).

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GLOSSARY

Ashkenazi: Refers to the subset of Jews who settled in central Europe (Germany and France) in the early Medieval Period and subsequently migrated to Eastern Europe.

Bar Mitzvah: The Bar Mitzvah (literally, “Son of Commandment”) is the coming of age ritual for Jewish males celebrated on their thirteenth birthday.

Bdikat chametz: The final search for leavened foods—which are forbidden on Passover — takes place after nightfall on the evening before the holiday.

Borscht: A soup popular amongst Jews of Eastern and Central European heritage, which often has beetroots as the main ingredient.

Brit Milah: (literally, “The Covenant of Circumcision”) is a Jewish religious ritual usually performed on eight-day-old male infants.

Charaidi: The Jewish Ultra-Orthodox.

Chassidic: Pertaining to one or more Jewish religious movements, the lineages of which stems from the eighteenth century in Eastern Europe.

Chassidim: (plural for *Chassid*). Chassidim aspire to practice strict and joyful Jewish observance.

Galut: Exile (in Hebrew and Yiddish)

Hashem: (literally, “The Name”). Because God’s name is considered to be too holy for common use, the term Hashem is substituted.

Heimish: Yiddish for homey, down to earth, warm and friendly.

Kavana: (literally, intention). In Hebrew and Yiddish the term is often understood as the kind of mindset and direction of the heart that is to be cultivated in

all aspects of mundane and spiritual experience.

Kippah: A skullcap worn by orthodox male Jews at all times and by others for prayer and rituals.

Kashrut: The set of Jewish dietary laws.

Kosher: Food that is acceptable according to Jewish dietary laws. In common parlance, the term is also used to refer to anything that is “fit” or “proper”.

Levaya: Hebrew for funeral, the levaya process includes honoring the deceased by participating actively in the burial.

Lubavitchers: Chassidic Jews so called for the town in Russia (Lubavitsh) where, during the eighteenth century, their movement began. Lubavitchers participate in the Chabad movement, a worldwide network aimed at promoting religious worship among Jews.

Mashgiach: (literally, “male supervisor”), the Hebrew and Yiddish term refers to the on-site supervisor and inspector responsible for ensuring the *kashrut* status of a kosher establishment.

Matzah: The unleavened bread is traditionally eaten by Jews during the weeklong Passover holiday, when eating leavened foodstuffs is forbidden according to Jewish religious law.

Mohel: The Rabbi who performs ritual circumcisions (plural, mohelim).

(Al) Nakbah: Arabic for The Catastrophe—the transfer of British colonial rule in Palestine to Israel's occupation of Palestinian land as Israel became a state in 1948 resulting in forced expulsion, ethnic cleansing, and massacres in Palestinian villages.

Pesach: The Hebrew equivalent of Passover.

Shabbat/Shabbos: (literally, “rest” or “cessation”), the Hebrew and Yiddish terms for the Jewish Sabbath

Shavuot (also spelled *Shabuot*): The Festival of Weeks. According to tradition this holiday, which comes seven weeks after Passover, commemorates the giving of the Torah to the Israelites assembled at Mount Sinai, although the association between Shavuot and the giving of the Torah is not made explicit anywhere in Biblical texts.

Shiva: (literally, “seven”), is the weeklong mourning period in Judaism for first-degree relatives.

Shoah: (literally, “calamity”), commonly refers to “The Holocaust.”

Sukkot: Feast of Booths. Sukkot, along with Pesach and Shavuot, is one of the three biblically mandated festivals, and thus is associated with the ancient tradition of making a holiday pilgrimage to the Jerusalem Temple. Before the holiday, a temporary sukkah (booth) is constructed according to strict regulations. During the week-long holiday, meals are eaten inside the sukkah, which is intended as a reminder of the fragile dwellings in which the Israelites dwelt during their 40 years of travel in the desert after the exodus from slavery in Egypt as told in the Bible. Weather permitting; some people also sleep in the sukkah.

Tallis: The Yiddish term for prayer shawl. In Hebrew the word is *tallit*.

Tetya: Russian for “aunt”.

Tu Bishvat: Also called the New Year of the Trees, Tu Bishvat has come to be

associated with the Jewish National Fund's annual tree planting campaign.

Yeshiva: (literally, "sitting"), refers to the Jewish educational institution dedicated to the study of the scriptures and religious life in general.

Yom tovim: (literally, "good days"), refers to the religious Jewish festivals of Biblical origin during which all work is prohibited.

ABBREVIATIONS

APRAF: Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation.

CJA: Combined Jewish Appeal is the fundraising arm of the Montreal Federation CJA, which was founded in 1941. Federation CJA is one of 157 North American Jewish federations, a member organization of the Jewish Federations of Canada and of The Jewish Federations of North America.

IDF: Israel Defense Forces are the conscript military forces consisting of ground air and navy forces, which all answer to a single General Staff who, in turn, reports to the Israeli Defense Minister.

IJV: Founded in 2008, Independent Jewish Voices is a Canadian national human rights organization whose mandate is to promote a just resolution to the dispute in Israel and Palestine through the application of international law and respect for the human rights of all parties.

ILA: The Israel Land Administration is responsible for managing and leasing Israeli public land, which constitutes over 90% of the land in the country and includes land that is either property of the state, the Jewish National Fund or the Development Authority.

JNF: Jewish National Fund is a quasi-governmental, non-profit organization, which was founded in 1901 at the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel with the aim of acquiring land as part of the

greater scheme for the colonization of Palestine. By 2007, the JNF owned 13% of the total land in Israel/Palestine, which is purchasable or available for lease only to Jews, except under certain specific circumstances (and only as of 2007). JNF has been active in land reclamation projects such as afforestation, water conservation, and land development for Jewish use. This forestation and reclaiming of land is part of the historical and ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

MOF (Israeli) Minister of Finance

NKVD: The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs was the public and secret police organization of the Soviet Union.

RPF The Rwandan Patriotic Front

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the relationship between forced dislocation and home beautification practices. It is the result of an interdisciplinary approach and an arts-based methodology. At the heart of this work lies a double-interrogation: how is the daily appreciation and manipulation of one's belongings crucial to the experience of creating home anew following forced dislocation and in what ways do these home beautification practices contribute to the perpetuation of violence in places where home is contested?

The research-creation process which led to this thesis involved a wide array of material, including a series of live art events that I convened within the past several years, the analysis of historical community pageants, personal stories of home and its loss, as well as salient aspects of housing theory and trauma studies. This process shaped and addressed a series of questions about home's properties, associations, and manifestations (or lack-there-of) in the political, cultural, emotional, and embodied realms. Once displaced, what role does home beautification play in the complex process of making home anew? How do the stories we tell *about* home and its loss, influence our experiences *of* home and its (un)making? How does the beautiful home become a vector of violence perpetuating fixed identity reflexes stemming from the need to survive? And finally, how can the study of day-to-day acts of house-beautification expand our understanding of the stratagems for remaking home in this time of increasing domicide and mounting political and environmental refugeeism?

The relationship between the personalization of home interiors and individual identity and, more generally, the meaning of home within a variety of disciplines (including sociology, psychology, architecture and philosophy), has been the subject of a great deal of research. This focus on home interior personalization has resulted in the development of a number of core concepts and hypotheses regarding the distinction between home and house, as well as the relationships between home and place attachment, home and memory, home and gender, and home and journeying (Altman and Werner 1985; Seamon and Mugerauer 1985; Altman and Low 1992; Cooper Marcus 1992; Arias 1993; Benjamin 1995; Hay 1998; Said 2000; Cross 2001; Easthope 2004; Mallett 2004; Ureta 2007; Kyle and Chick 2007). My efforts to situate the aesthetics of homemaking as integral to the experience of refugees, exiles, and other homeless populations necessarily draw upon this earlier research.

This articulation of the radical relationship between home-beautification practices, personal narratives and resettlement also draws upon my own experience of having to re-establish my household after an arson attack which completely destroyed our living space, along with all the objects that helped to constitute “home” for my family and me. Other personal experiences of dislocation, as well as those of my forebears who were part of the transatlantic refugee movement associated with 20th century European anti-Semitism (in Poland and Russia), have also served as an impetus for this inquiry. The combination of my personal and familial experience, an arts-based methodology involving dialogical performance, and on-going critical reflection has led me to

appreciate just how much the beautification of one's home interior and surroundings is heavily involved in the sense-making process.[1]

"Third Realm Beauty" and "Migratory Aesthetics"

The ideas presented in this thesis borrow from art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto's conceptual framework of "Third Realm beauty," which implicates deliberative attention to, appreciation of, and manipulation involving material objects. Third Realm beauty is "the kind of beauty something possesses only because it was *caused* to possess it through actions whose purpose it is to *beautify*" (Danto 2003, 68: italics in original). Beautification may be undertaken on a grand scale, such as during urban renewal, but it is also the stuff of everyday life: the washing up, the sweeping of a floor, the deliberate placement of a useful thing or decorative item, all can be seen as acts of beautification. And,

[1] Educator Morwenna Griffiths closely examines the question of "research and the self" and points to many of the problematics associated with subjectivity in research including partiality, generalizability, and bias. Addressing each in turn, Griffiths argues that arts-based research is trustworthy and transferable. Moreover, she takes the position "that it is impossible to research any human context disinterestedly." Griffiths suggests: "Researchers not only take political and ethical stances, but, being human beings, they also inhabit them and are not fully aware of them. Only when political and moral positions are acknowledged or exhibited can strategies be found to enable the outcomes to be judged rigorous or otherwise. Such strategies do not entail that it is better to be an outsider than a participant researcher" (2011, 182). Two key strategies that Griffith suggests are conducive to revealing just how much "all research is affected by the selves (relationships, circumstances, perspectives and reactions) of the researcher" are reflective practice and reflexivity. "Roughly, 'reflective practice' attaches more to the relational self embedded in time and place, and as becoming what it is not yet. "Reflexivity' attaches more to the relational, embodied self in a specific social and political context: to his or her individual perspectives and positionality" (184). Griffiths' theoretical stance is closely aligned with how I have approached this cycle of research-creation from the start. Methodologically, the live art events that I have initiated are both dialogical and iterative. Moreover, by revealing my political and moral positions, I open this work up to both critical engagement and assessment.

as sociologist Sebastian Ureta points out, activities associated with house-beautification can serve "as a platform to 'materialize' many of the social processes of change" (2007, 316). It is in this context that I propose that, for the forcibly displaced, the manipulation of household belongings—especially when coupled with an appreciation for their extant stories and affective associations—is a particularly active site of the material, affective, and ideological identity reconstruction necessary to the re-establishment of a sense of home following reluctant resettlement.

Intersecting Third Realm beauty is another concept that supports this thesis. Advanced by cultural theorist and video artist Mieke Bal, "migratory aesthetics" refers to the cultural transformations resulting from migration. While not specifically focused on *forced* migration, Bal's project examines the various material and immaterial palimpsests that emerge and define the "now-common state of hybridity" in the "mixed societies that have emerged as the result of migration" (2011, unpaged). Migratory aesthetics locates the work of home beautification processes within a larger cultural practice that is crucial not only for nurturing the capacity to feel at home again after the loss of stable housing, but also, for the concomitant readjustments of personal identity, social purpose and historical agency.

Although unknown to me at the start of this five-year study, I have come to recognize the relevance of both concepts in understanding the role of aesthetics in the dwelling-journey cycle.[1] Environmental behavioural specialist David Seamon writes:

> The relationship between dwelling and journey is dialectical and identifies the need for both stability and change in people's dealings with places and environments. […] On one hand, the emigrants must become free of their old world yet use it as a groundstone for creating a new place of dwelling. On the other hand, they must let the new world speak and determine itself. If they impose their expectations on that world, forcing it to be something it is not, their reestablishment of dwelling will ultimately be inauthentic, and reconciliation of memory and expectation, old and new, will not be successful. (1985, 228)

Third Realm beauty is the specific category of beauty most relevant for the exploration of home's material cultural within this iterative, and often conflictual, conciliation process. Migratory aesthetics, as a concept, articulates the process by which displaced persons re-establish an authentic sense of dwelling. The concept is vital to this thesis not only in situating how Third Realm beauty and personal narrative manifest and matter for the forcibly displaced; it is also instrumental for making sense of the specific art-based methodology I have engaged and the content that I have brought into play within the series of dialogical events central to this cycle of research-creation.

Art historian and cultural theorist Griselda Pollock offers a set of questions and answers about migratory aesthetics, which I have found useful within the framework of this study into the radical meanings and associations connected

with Third Realm beauty amongst the involuntarily displaced.[2] Amongst these are is the following call and response:

> Does migratory aesthetics suggest an aesthetic dimension to the social and cultural experience of migration? Yes. Does it suggest that aesthetics, as ways of living and making sense of the world, migrate? Yes. Does it suggest migration involves an aesthetic of being and transformation of self? Yes. Does it imply a re-evaluation of an often negative, paranoid and anxiety-ridden response to incoming 'others' by exploring both what migration feels like from within and how societies are animated—painfully as well as creatively—by the challenge of differences we should celebrate rather than fear or resist? Yes. (2006: unpaged)

These are not only aesthetic and political questions; they are also, or perhaps I should say first and foremost, ethical ones. They point to conditions that permit individuals and communities to overcome the physical and emotional legacies of traumas related to homelessness. They evoke the kinds of relationships necessary in order to come to terms with the tension associated with ruptured connections to familiar people, places and things.

Migratory aesthetics combines "the aesthetics of difference and otherness that can either be [experienced as] foreign, alien, invasive, or embraced as […] necessary, invigorating and productive" (Pollock 2006, unpaged). As the Jewish philosopher, writer and journalist Vilem Flusser reminds us: "The migrant does

not become free by denying his lost home, but by overcoming it" (2002, 95). Adaptation to new housing situations following an unwelcome move necessitates coming to terms with more than the physical dislocation. The reconstruction of home in the aftermath of forced displacement is often necessarily accompanied by the reconstruction of self and one's relationships to place, family, community and culture.

This thesis proposes that making one's intimate surroundings more physically attractive and emotionally satisfying is more than a matter of surface adornment and the loss of familiar possessions is more than a material loss. "A man's belongings are an extension of his personality; to be deprived of them is to diminish, in his own estimation, his worth as a human being" (Tuan 1974, 99). Housing, as *home*, is as much a material, locational, and place-based experience as it is a series of emotional attachments, sensorial encounters and storied recollections. Discontinuity in "place attachment" (Altman and Low 1992; Cooper Marcus 1992; Cross 2001; Kyle and Chick 2007; Cesarani, Kushner and Shain 2009) involves a rupture not only of the environment, materiality and affectivity of home, but also of the "subtle but powerful blending of place, object and feeling [that] is so complex, so personal, that is unlikely [to] ever be fully explained" (Cooper Marcus 1992, 111). Both Third Realm beauty and migratory aesthetics are as concerned with this very personal uncertain experience of home, as with the larger socio-economic, cultural and political backgrounds and foregrounds from, and within, which the personal relationship to house and home is shaped.

Housing *as home* is simultaneously a physical, place-based experience and a matter of emotional attachments, sensorial memoried experience and storied reasoning. Marita Eastmond, a social anthropologist and professor at the Nordic School of Public Health in the area of migration and health provides a framework to understand how these processes are accessed and activated through beautification of one's living environment. Eastmond delineates three overlapping (and sometimes contesting) experiences:

> *Life as lived*, the flow of events that touch on a person's life; *life as* experienced, how the person perceives and ascribes meaning to what happens, drawing on previous experience and cultural repertoires; and *life as told*, how experience is framed and articulated in a particular context and to a particular audience. (2007, 249: italics in original)

Third Realm beauty and migratory aesthetics operate in all three frameworks. Material and immaterial effects associated with homemaking connect the household to the flow of life in the present moment. How these effects are appreciated is also indicative of the meanings of home shaped by the entirety of an individual's housing experience, even as they become the focus of (new) stories told about home.

* * *

Vincent is a Rwandan genocide survivor who sought refuge in Montreal in 2009. I met Vincent last year during the *Songs of Mourning, Songs of Life* project, which

I initiated in 2008 upon my return from a month-long visit to Rwanda.[3] During the project, First Peoples living in Montreal and members of the Wemotaci Atikamekw community came together with members of the Rwandan diaspora community in Montreal to learn about each other's experiences of colonialization and genocide. The aim was to create a music-dance performance addressing the personal and cultural impact of these experiences in both Canada and Rwanda. The role of arts and culture in the healing and reconciliation processes was both a central theme and a dynamic vector for the development of the project.

In the week following the May 10, 2012 performance at the Maison de la Culture Frontenac, which featured two Aboriginal drumming groups as well as Vincent and his troupe, I found out that the Canadian Federal court had just denied Vincent's refugee application. Ever since, I have been cooperating with Vincent and others to find ways of staving off his deportation back to Rwanda, where his life would be in grave danger from the men who killed his mother and siblings (in 1994) and his father (in 2005).[2] Alexis, a Canadian immigration consultant, is amongst the group of people working pro bono on this effort. In a June 2012 conversation, he told me: "As refugees we lose our sense of beauty and when that happens we lose our sense of everything, of life itself." If the corollary of Alexis' perception is true, that a recovery of a sense of beauty reveals or aids in the recovery of an engagement with life, then clearly the aesthetics of homemaking, as a most immediately available arena of personal action, cannot be dismissed as "merely" decorative or superficial.

[2] Vincent will be reintroduced in Chapter Six, as the events surrounding the death of his father are, tragically, all too pertinent to the study of how Third Realm beauty can also be closely aligned with the violence of home's destruction.

"While transformation and change are part of the refugee experience, not all change is perceived as loss or defined as problematic or unwelcome by all individuals involved. Nor are refugees necessarily helpless victims, but rather likely to be people with agency and voice" (Eastmond 2007, 253). For individuals that experience the kind of total breakdown that Alexis describes as for those who do not feel themselves without agency and voice, I contend that the beautification of one's home involves the physical habitat as much as it affects interpersonal connectivity, individual values and cultural belief systems.

By attending to the sensible—that is, the cognitive/perceptual "which registers genuine sensuous qualities such as colours, sounds, tastes and smells" and the emotional/sensation "which evaluates the sensuous data on a scale between desire and aversion" (Welsch 1996, 9)—we can more fully understand the conditions for successfully recreating home for the involuntarily dislocated. Indeed, my research indicates that such a practice is not just incidental; it is radically important in the lives of involuntarily dislocated people.[4] The engagement with everyday aesthetics and personal narrative in the aftermath of involuntary migration is not limited to the practical, nor is it simply a technique for remaking home. In itself, it is indicative and expressive of a readiness to make home anew.

From the Personal to the Political: An Overview of the Chapters

In Chapters One and Two, I present the forces that have led me to this inquiry amongst which are several personal and familial traumatic experiences of involuntary dislocation and the ways in which I have transformed these traumas through performance art practice. In these early chapters I also explore the Orthodox Jewish worldview I grew up with and expound on the key Judaic teachings that have shaped my thinking about storytelling, beauty and healing.

Having established the link between my life experience, artistic practice, the intersubjectivity of personal narrative, and the ethics of public disclosure in the first two chapters, in Chapter Three I turn my attention to the performativity of dialogical aesthetics. Reading one of my early live art performances, *Holding Ground* (2003) within a broader analysis of Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Touch Sanitation—Handshake Ritual* (1978-1980) and Adrian Piper's *My Calling (Card) #1 (for Dinners and Cocktail Parties)* (1986-1990), I delve into the theory supporting such dialogic encounters and discuss the contributions this form of artistic practice has made over the years to the project of cultural democracy.

The material in Chapter Four focuses on the ways in which the sensuous is political. Considering the implications of embodied performance practice as resistance in the context of Israel/Palestine, I introduce two live art events I initiated in collaboration with artist Tali Goodfriend and cultural practitioner Louise Lachapelle, as well as works created by three contemporary Palestinian women artists: Mona Hatoum, Emily Jacir and Raeda Saadeh.

Continuing to explore the ways in which the space of dialogic possibility is expanded through gesture and story is the focus of the next chapter. Two dialogical series of live art events situated at the heart of this cycle of research-creation—*Why Should We Cry? Lamentations in a Winter Garden* and *homeBody*—are considered relative to their methodological efficacy in activating (public) conversation about home and homelessness.

Given Third Realm beauty's productivity and performativity, it is perhaps not surprising that the beautification of home has all too often been implicated as a vector or target of violence. Chapter Six navigates this terrain in reference to instances in which the beauty of home becomes sullied through (deliberate) acts of vandalism and desecration.

Chapters Seven and Eight are linked by the question of how the Jewish cultural focus on home and its beautification—as exemplified in the *The Jewish Home Beautiful* community pageant from the early 20th century onward—can either result in the perpetuation of fixed identity reflexes stemming from the need to survive displacement or contribute to creating the conditions for justice and peaceful coexistence. While the history of *The Jewish Home Beautiful* is detailed in Chapter Seven, in Chapter Eight I present *The Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* series of live art dialogical performances, which I convened between June 2010 and October 2011.

CHAPTER ONE: SENSE-MAKING AMONGST STRANGERS

Growing up in Queens, New York during the 1960s, I was exposed to little outside the framework of Jewish orthodoxy. While the radio dial in the kitchen was often tuned to mainstream news programs, and there was the occasional visit to secular cultural institutions such as Radio City Music Hall and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Chassidic* religious observance formed the core of existence from which all personal experience was determined and measured. Community development, and even civic participation, was informed and guided by the singular question: "Is this good for the Jews?" On occasion, this question had a powerful subtext: "Is this good for the kind of Jews 'we' are?"

Born in shadow of the *Shoah*, the stories about home that were repeatedly told within the culture of my youth emphasized the six million Jews who were systematically murdered under the Nazi regime; the stories also included references to the familial losses incurred during the Polish pogroms and forced exiles of the Soviet Gulag era. Several of these tales implicated members of my own family whom I have met; others involved people were dead and buried before I was born.[3]

Throughout this compendium of narratives, a clear and untroubled line was drawn between the acts of genocide perpetrated against the Jews and the

[3] Storyteller and Jewish story scholar Peninnah Schram writes: "Because it has remained an integral part of Jewish religion and society, storytelling in Jewish life continues to be an ongoing, effective way of transmitting a cultural heritage and thereby of sharing the values of a people." Furthermore, she suggests that "the voice of the teller, along with the stories themselves, create an atmosphere to bind together the members of families through the generations" (1984, 33 and 34). Steeped, as I was growing up, in the Jewish oral tradition, which included everything from folklore to religious teachings and riddles, it is perhaps not surprising that my creative praxis is so thoroughly engaged with story and storytelling.

necessity to establish a Jewish state in the Biblical homeland of the ancient Hebrews. This association was repeated ever-so-frequently at home, made explicit in curricula of the pro-Zionist elementary and high school Yeshivas I attended, and implicit at Bar Ilan University, where I studied for a year in the early 1980s. [5] The stories situated home as place-based, religiously motivated, communally invested and politically entrenched. They spoke as much to the experience of being at home as they did to the experience of persecution and exile. And as vivid as they were, they left out quite a lot. There was no mention of the majority non-Jewish inhabitants of Israel/Palestine; the Palestinian villages that were destroyed in order to make room for Jewish immigration; and the systemic inequalities between Jews and Palestinians in almost every sector of social, cultural, economic, and political life.

All that was shared with me about the *Chassidic* Jewish experience of home was not just passed down orally or taught in the texts. Throughout my childhood, I haptically felt the experiences that shaped these stories, as internalized state-sponsored oppression—passed on through the generations—resulted in severe and prolonged physical and psychological abuse.

Some years ago I came across a Jewish maxim about how in healing oneself, one heals the seven generations to come and the seven generations that have come before. While I could appreciate how my own personal healing process could affect the lives of my children and, therefore by extension, the lives of future generations, it took me some time to recognize how my healing could affect the seven generations that came before me. What I have come to

understand in this process is that as I heal, I can begin to shift the narratives that have served to help my family and me to survive.

So afraid of relinquishing old thought patterns and belief systems that seemed so central and vital to my core identity, I tried to circumvent this process for as long as I could. Physical dis-ease forced me to reassess my avoidance techniques: I realized that the survival narratives no longer were viable and I needed to let go and evolve new tellings. Art, through its symbolic/real life creative force, provides me with the means to deal with the anxiety that arises when I confront the mess of emotional, physical, spiritual, and political implications related to the abuse and, by extension, to the lineage of unstable homes and the stories told about them that have been bequeathed to me.

As an artist-scholar, I have worked to recreate a sense of home for myself in light of these experiences and the subsequent unrelated assaults on my dwelling spaces. Amongst these adult experiences was the arson attack carried out by a pyromaniac who had been active in Montreal's southwest borough in the months leading up to the fire that completely destroyed the fifth-floor loft space where I lived and worked. The blaze killed my family's beloved animals and birds and burned all the worldly possessions we had accumulated, save the clothing on our backs.

Rear view of the building that was home to me and my family during the height of the blaze, November 9, 1995. Photo Credit: Linda St-Pierre

S(us)taining

One day short of the six-month anniversary of the fire, I sat on Notre Dame Street in front of the ruins of the burnt-out building that used to be my home, peeling beetroots down to nothing, barefoot, in a white dress.

Sitting directly in front of the ruined building at the start of the six-hour performance *s(us)taining* on 8 May 1996 before I was instructed by city officials to relocate myself off to the side. Photo credit: Mario Bélisle

Several days before taking to the street, I dreamt of my Russian grandmother's hands stained from the *borscht* she made for Passover every year. The prompt of that image inspired me to enact my personal dislocation as a live art event. A steady stream of friends and strangers ended up accompanying me; they participated in shaping the performance by bearing witness and by contributing their own stories and gestures. The discrepancy between what used to be my domestic interior and the street, and between my grandmother's beet peeling and my 80-pound beet-peeling performance, became a productive personal and public site of and for mourning, creativity and connectivity. Having been forced to relocate further west along the street and behind the barrier installed by the city workers, I continued the beet-peeling process until dark.

Photo credit: Mario Bélisle

Photo credits this page: Mario Bélisle

My creative praxis has taught me that the more specific I can get in selecting and exploring the core elements that affect me and which motivate any given artwork, the more people can meet and complete the work with their own experiences. Acknowledging and exposing my vulnerabilities relative to home and community, and paying attention to the call to beauty that I've felt in times of violent upheaval in my world, invites a context—that is at once both imaginary and real—within which others can create meaning in their own lives in the face of forced dislocation, even as their experiences are so clearly different from my own.

A woman whom I did not know, bending low under a full load of grocery bags, made her way slowly across the street and stopped directly in front of me. Without so much as a hello, she said, "I don't know what it is that you are doing, but let me tell you, I understand it." "But you know," she continued, "it doesn't matter how fast you peel those beets, or for how long, you cannot go faster than time." Another stranger came by and said: "If you want those beets to really bleed, they would need to be cooked." And with that, she scooped up as many beets as she could carry. About an hour later she returned with a pot full of cooked beets, which, as she said, were indeed more effective in giving up their colour, staining my hands and dress deep red.

One woman, whom I did know, stopped by in the middle of the afternoon with a flowering branch. She offered me the branch saying that it was "a bit of nature to add to the culture of my mourning process." She went on to tell me that it was the first time that flowers were appearing on the tree, which she had planted in her back yard years before to mark the death of her infant son.

Photo credit: Mario Bélisle

Tikkun Olam and the Public Value of Beauty

Writing about the public value of beauty, Sustainability development specialist Sandra B. Lubarsky (2011, unpaged) states: “Beauty has been treated as a purely subjective value, as nothing more than personal opinion. Repeatedly, we have overridden our experience of the world as a place of beauty and denied our longing for it. But if we cannot speak of beauty except as a matter of opinion, how are we to evaluate some of the most tragic experiences of the contemporary world?”[6] While Lubarsky focuses her attention on strip-mining and similar large-scale acts of ecosystemic destruction, her inquiry into the vitality of beauty for healing the loss of home (both individual and planetary) is relevant to other, more

personal, experiences as well.

Furthermore—and particularly important to my reflections about Third Realm beauty and migratory aesthetics in the aftermath of involuntary displacement—Lubarsky links beauty's value to Judaic teachings: "Beauty is fundamental to the practice of *tikkun olam*, to the effort to restore and care for the world" (2011, unpaged). Indeed, beauty is central to key Judaic texts including Solomon's *Song of Songs* and Isaiah's prophecy, in which the following is averred: "Appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give them beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy for mourning" (61:3). While the *Book of Proverbs* cautions about not relying on physical appearance to judge a women's character: "Charm is deceptive and beauty is fleeting" (30-31), according to Jewish theology, beauty and its appreciation is more often associated with its capacity to support healing on a personal and collective level and, more broadly, to life well-lived. Hebrew and Yiddish speakers, whether religiously observant or not, understand beauty to be endowed with multiple associations and states: beauty functions as an adjective, a noun and a verb; beauty is a location as well as the will and determination to persevere—always in relation with others, and, ideally, mediated by loving-kindness and strength. Accordingly, beauty is therefore ethically engaged, materially conscious and spiritually charged.

To get a sense of just how profoundly beauty is linked to *tikkun olam* and to daily life, it is helpful to be familiar with at least some of the many terms in Hebrew that describe different aspects of beauty's power. *Hadar*, for example, is linked to "the indomitable power of life, the determination to live on despite all

difficulties, the affirmation of victory of life over death, the drive for eternity" (Shmidman 1998, unpaged). Furthermore, *hadar* is associated with the kind of beauty "that is not lost, that endures forever" (Najman 2010, 2). *Tiferet* designates the beauty that "mediates between kindness (*chesed*) and strength (*gevurah*)" (Leiberman 2000, unpaged), while *chanan* refers to "not just the appearance of beauty but the action, a place of warmth, love, friendship, community and sustenance" (Benner 2007, 141). Central to this emphasis on linking homemaking and Third Realm beauty within the Jewish tradition are the following two precepts: *hadrat kodesh* is the teaching that refers to the beauty of holiness, while *hidur mitzvah* is the associated with the charge of making every object—and every deed performed—as beautiful as possible, thus linking values, material culture and action.

I remember a young student who came up to me after I had just finished an artist's talk in a first-year contemporary art survey course at Concordia University nearly 10 years ago. I had been showing images of my work, including documentation from *s(us)taining*, and spoke about my longing for beauty as a way to heal my own wounds and connect with others. I had referred to my Jewish identity only incidentally (for example, mentioning my Russian grandmother's borscht-stained hands). So I was quite surprised by the leap this student made effectively bridging my comments about beauty, the artwork I presented and my Jewish identity: "Although you might not immediately associate me with being Jewish on account of all my tats and piercings, I grew up going to Hebrew school. Your work is all about *mitzvah*. No, wait. Your work *is mitzvah*." This

comment has continued to resonate ever since and may well be one of the primary impetuses and encouragements to actively seek out ways to link my art practice, inquiry into home beautification and Jewish identity.

Activating this student's comment deliberately within a research-creation methodology aimed at invigorating *tikkun olam* goes beyond traditional quantitative, and even qualitative methodologies. Live art performance, as research and as creation, has the potential to engage the entire sensate, feeling, thinking body in a co-creative, co-investigation of the conditions that are of concern to all who participate. When live art events are deliberately organized to remove the divide between the artist and audience so that everyone present has the potential to becomes a co-creator, the possibility for collective sensemaking is enhanced as is the potential for powerful emotional connections to be made amongst strangers. This was certainly the case with *s(us)taining* and the more recent live art events.

Sensemaking is a complex and multi-dimensional social activity that includes introspection, retrospection, interpretation and discernment (Weick 1998). It is a particularly important aspect of dialogic art encounters because while it is context-specific, it can also be transferable to other situations. Indeed what emerges in the live art dialogic process is simultaneously experienced both in the symbolic realm and in/as real life. The choice to embrace an arts-based methodology—and more specifically dialogical live art performance—in which the roles and responsibilities of each participating member are in constant flux, is consistent with the actual complexities of home, Third Realm beauty and

migratory aesthetics. Moreover, as participation in the rewriting of personal and cultural narratives is enacted, the possibility of political agency also increases. Engaging with and coming to terms with challenging ideas, difficult questions and unquiet emotions within the performance space make it more likely that individuals activate their agency within other public realms.

Baz Kershaw (2007, 86-87), drawing on Victor Turner's notion of *communitas* as "the foundation of community cohesiveness" draws out one possible way in which this transference occurs:

> The paradox of rule-breaking-within-rule-keeping is crucial to the efficacy of performance in its contribution to the formation of (ideological) communities. It is when this paradox is operating at its most acute—when a riot of anger or ecstasy could break out, but does not—that performance achieves its greatest potential for long-term efficacy. For the 'possible worlds' encountered in the performance are carried back by the audience into the 'real' socio-political world in ways, which may influence subsequent action. […] To the extent that the audience is part of a community, then the networks of the community will change, however infinitesimally, in response to changes in the audience members.

Kershaw proposes that socio-political change is inevitable in the cultural encounter, how much more effectual in live art dialogic encounters when there is no "audience" per se. The more active individuals are in shaping the

performance, the greater the potential for this transference to be enacted. This interactive dynamic is particularly significant to reading the live art events under discussion within this study because it affirms the complexities that each participant brings to the work and the ways in which such encounters are counter-hegemonic. Along these lines, Petra Kuppers points out that the "(relatively) open outcome" of such collective creative endeavours "maybe within a thematic field opened up by the facilitator, but full of space and times for people to create their own expressive material" (2007, 4). According to Kuppers, the invitation to practise such communal performance "facilitates creative expression of a diverse group of people, for aims of self-expression and political change" (3). For Kuppers, clearly interpersonal connections are the ground from which political agency arises. Susan Chandler Haedicke and Tobin Nellhaus echo this assertion and state that "participatory performance techniques […] blur the boundaries between actor and spectator in order to maximize the participants' agency" (2001, 3). Amongst the processes I have found that can lead to such participant/participatory agency is the sharing of story and gesture as these implicate multiple layers of witnessing.

Being witnessed by strangers has a particularly significant effect as the shared vulnerability does not have to be maintained in person beyond the incidental encounter. As is evident for me following both the beet peeling performance and the encounter with the student who spoke about my artwork as *mitzvah*, the moments of fleeting vulnerabilities can be a powerful *tikkun* and have a sustained healing impact long after the shared live experience.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE WILL TO DENY HORRIBLE EVENTS AND THE NECESSITY TO PROCLAIM THEM ALOUD

While the 1995 displacement by fire triggered a healing process that for me reached far back into past generations of cultural and political oppression within my family, it was through actively engaging the creative process that I could risk becoming present. Several years before the arson attack, I came across a call for participation in a book project aimed at linking women and their fathers through written and visual exchanges. I can still remember gagging—literally—at the thought of contributing to such a collection. I soon came to realize that such an intense visceral reaction to the call for daughter-father collaborations meant that it was time for me to focus my attention on the relationship I had with my own father. By that time, I had been working on the links between trauma and memory as an interdisciplinary artist and community activist for more than a decade. I resolved to creatively explore ways in which to move beyond the past and repair the rift that had been caused not only by vast ideological and religious differences between my father and myself, but also by the history of his violence toward me and my subsequent fear, which was still so resonant.[4]

So in June 1997, two years after the arson attack, I invited my father to participate in *Public Art as Social Intervention: But Now I Have to Speak*, an

[4] According to paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott, "Cultural experience begins with creative living first manifest in play" (2005, 135). The "abolition of objective time" that happens through symbolic play factors into the efficacy of live art performance, thus allowing the mature person to connect with one's childhood and, if necessary, "reactivate former pain" in order for healing to occur (Runco 1998, 172).

international symposium on violence against women that I initiated and co-directed with Loren Lerner and PK Langshaw at Concordia University. During one of the keynote events, in a room full of more than 700 people, I played a audiotape that my father had recorded for specifically for this event in which he stated: “Recalling, thinking back, it’s very painful for me to imagine the pain that you went through, that each time that I raised my hand or a strap it put in a lasting cut, a mark on your flesh and soul. I hear the voices: ‘Daddy no more! Daddy, please!’ I want to ask forgiveness.”

For many of the people in that downtown Montreal auditorium, this apology apparently served as a proxy for the one that they yearned for themselves.[5] During the question-and-answer period, or in private after the event, male and female audience members alike came up to me and said: “This is the apology that I would never hear from my own father . . . uncle . . . teacher . . . and it will do, I can move on now and heal the past.” I too felt that something significant shifted for me in hearing my father’s apology and knowing the time and care he took to prepare the recording. My father’s willingness to take up my invitation and respond in such a performative way contributed a great deal to the process of repairing our relationship and restoring the possibility for me to feel at home in my body, in my relationships with others and within the physical places I currently inhabit.

“As a victim,” my father stated at the start of his apology, “I’m sure I knew

[5] Awareness of the practice of proxy apology was very much in the air at the time as the South African Truth and Reconciliation Process was underway and questions about what constitutes an effective healing apology were being debated in academic circles and the mainstream media. Amongst the factors most frequently referred to were the following: acknowledgment and accountability for the wrongdoing, truth-telling and public remorse.

no other way how to bring up my children in their formative years." Hearing him describe himself as a victim and taking responsibility for the years of abuse in such a public way, I could for the first time become curious about his childhood experiences and the forces that shaped his behaviour as an adult. Inspired in part by the oral tradition and ritual practices inherent within the Jewish life cycle, I began to delve deeper into the relationship between trauma and memory and investigate how artistic contexts can create an inviting and safe interpersonal field within which to imagine new possibilities.

Now, almost 20 years after I came across the call for participation in the daughter-father publication, I feel ready and willing to respond. This writing is evidence of several long journeys. I have had to come a long way, as has my father. His travels from Poltava, Ukraine, where he was born, to Beit Shemesh, Israel, where he now lives comprise one through-line of this story; the paths we have taken separately and together toward healing make up another.

The process of healing is not simply one of catharsis but rather the integration of traumatic memory in/as ordinary memory (Herman 1992; Van der Kolk and Van der Hart 1995; Caruth 1995 and 1996). Deliberately setting the stage for storytelling creates an environment conducive to accessing the past so that it can be more fully assimilated and thus less likely to trigger unresolved emotions in the now. Bringing this process into the public sphere anchors the healing while offering the possibility to connect with others in meaningful and potentially life-altering ways, just as my father's proxy apology did during the *Public Art as Social Intervention* symposium.

Each performance event that I have created over the years was deliberately enacted as a public art practice so as to provide a "holding ground" for honouring familiar stories and allowing for the emergence of new ones. Often the difference between the reinforcement of the trauma and its transformation/absorption is the quality and constancy of this caring space: the telling—and often repeated tellings—of one's story has to take place, sometimes over extended periods of time, in the presence of a caring witness (Felman and Laub 1992).

Amongst the familial stories about loss and forced dislocation that were not shared with me during my childhood included what my father experienced during his formative years growing up in Soviet Russia. The legacy of these experiences and the stories, perhaps especially because they were kept hidden, affected my own life as they became embedded in my psyche, a part of my own story, despite my not having been present during their unfolding.

Thirteen years after my father's public apology, he and I both sensed that we were finally ready to call out and care for the untold stories. Setting aside a two-week period during the summer of 2010, we completed nearly 20 hours of audio recording. For two or three hours a day, my father traced his family's multiple displacements in the period leading up to and after the Second World War, as Russian Jews intent on upholding their orthodox religious practices and participating actively in *Lubavitcher Chassidic* life. I asked the occasional question, but most of the time it was he who chose the topic and the segment of his life he wanted to focus on during any given recording session.

As psychiatrist Judith Herman argues, the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the necessity to proclaim them aloud is one of the central dialectics of psychological trauma (in Strozier and Flynn 1996). As previously mentioned, while talking about one's traumatic experiences can be quite affirming, the experience can also often leave both the teller and the listener feeling quite vulnerable.

By the time we embarked on this storytelling and story listening, my father and I had developed enough trust in each other to allow ourselves to openly talk about what had been eclipsed up until then by old survival strategies. Despite the fact that the process was not always easy, by the time we completed the recordings our capacity to affirm the tenderness of our love for each other had been strengthened enormously.

> My name is Avrom Neumark. My name in Russian is Abrasha, although at home they called me Avremel. I was born August 10, 1932, in Poltava, Ukraine, and when I was an infant my parents moved to Kutaisi in Georgia, Soviet Russia. The reason we moved is because it was much easier to live as a Jew. We had a chance to observe our faith. We had three synagogues. We kept the Shabbat and Jewish holidays as the people in the free world.
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> […]
>
> We had a nice theatre, parks. I used to love to swim in our river. We used to get dressed our best and go to the movies. It was a lot of propaganda,

which I didn't mind to watch. Let's not forget, we, thanks God, did not live in Siberia. We used to go summer to the country. We would spend a month in different resort places. Sometimes we went to Suchumi and Borjomi. But everything was in danger. People lived from day to day hoping that tomorrow would be a day that we could survive; even in Georgia, life was tolerable, but constantly the eyes of the NKVD were always on us. My mother, she was petrified from police and even to the day before she passed away in Canada, when she would see a policeman, she would shiver.

[…]

It was just a week or so before Pesach. There was a new head of the police and he was a Russian Jew. I don't know exactly how it came to his attention that my father refused to work on Shabbat. […] He was told that he has to keep the factory open on Shabbat. So my father and together with my mother and some of the workers were told by my parents that they were going to do the following, which was a very big risk: they took one of the important machines and they went in reverse which broke practically all the needles. And of course the machine was not capable to work. When the inspectors came and they found that people are not working I don't know if my mother or my father said: "Look there was an accident and the machine went the wrong way and the needles all broken; we are waiting for the mechanic to come and take out all the needles and put in new needles." Somebody within the people that worked for my

father in the factory must have tell the inspectors that he suspect that this was a sabotage.

And my father was arrested and he was taken in and somebody was put in the factory to supervise and my father was send away for three years. Everything goes fast there: there is no court hearing. There was a saying in Russia: “Give us the people, cases we will find, accusations we will find.” He was sent to the prison near Baku. And lo and behold, thanks God, that the chief of the jail happened to be from Kutaisi and he knew my father and my father broke out in crying.

Oh! Before he went to jail to Baku, they forced his beard to be shaven. That was a part of the punishment because they knew that to wear a beard was part of the religion.

So my father recognized the chief of police in the jail near Baku, but the other guy did not because he didn’t have the beard. So my father spoke to him, identified himself and told him. And so finally he recognized my father as well. He says: “Don’t worry you will be Pesach home.”

[…]

At the night when we had to do *bdikat chametz* came a knock on the door. We all froze and my mother asked: “Who is there?” And she heard my father’s voice. And when she opened the door, she saw a strange man because she did not recognize him without a beard. And she says: “Who are you? Get out! My husband is not here.” And he started telling in Yiddish: “Listen, listen to me. I’m Moshe, I’m Moshe.” Finally, she almost

> fainted, and he told the story that two days before Pesach . . . and the chief of the jail, because he had the rank of a Polkovnik, which means like a Colonel, and he took his private driver, chauffeur, and told him that he has to drive straight to Kutaisi to bring Moisay Neumark home. So he ended up to be in jail for about less than two weeks. Only because Hashem did a miracle the person recognized, otherwise I don't think we would ever see our father back.

Because so many of my father's early experiences required him to develop and practice survival strategies, much in the same way that my early experiences forced me to develop and practice my own, I intend to highlight just how important a role storytelling can play in letting go of the coping mechanisms that are no longer necessary, or worse, have become detrimental to living a healthy life. Unfortunately, I can only too well identify with the confusion and the contradictions that my father experienced in trying to make sense of what was acceptable within the public sphere and what was or was not acceptable within the private domain. The story of the differences in moral standards between what was done vis-à-vis the state and what was not tolerated within the factory helped me to make sense of what at home always seemed to me to be a set of arbitrary rules and inexplicable codes of behaviour that one simply had to accept without really understanding.

As I listened to my father recall his experiences, I realized that I was deeply troubled by, and yet admiring of, the strength of his belief in Judaism. I

found myself thinking that for him being a Jew was both an act of faith and a process of affirming that faith in even the most mundane of daily gestures. He was not alone; this unshakable belief was common amongst his extended family. For example, I remember visiting my great-uncle Nanos and his wife, *tetya* Rosa, with my father just before my great-aunt died in the mid-1990s. We went to their home not far from the old Botanical Zoo in Jerusalem. Uncle Nanos was a large man but frail and hunched over; his legs could barely hold the weight of his sizeable body. He apologized for sitting down so soon after we arrived and explained that the severe cold of the gulag and the beatings he had received in captivity had permanently affected his circulation, and as a result, he was in constant pain. Sitting for him was less painful he explained, at least somewhat, than standing.

After completing the tape recordings with my father, I managed to find a copy of Uncle Nanos's memoirs translated into English from the original Hebrew manuscript. In *Subbota: My Twenty Years in Soviet Prisons*, published under his pseudonym Avraham Netzach, Uncle Nanos writes: "I found work as a bookkeeper even in Siberia. I continued to wear my beard and my *peyos*, the sideburns, which may not be shaven off completely according to Jewish law, and I didn't work on Shabbos. What the NKVD did not understand was that it was only Shabbos and religious observance that sustained my existence." As with my father's telling, Uncle Nanos's autobiography pitted the oppressive regime against faith and religious practice. Furthermore, both my father and my uncle drew an unbroken connection between their yearning for freedom and their

lifetime affirmation of the devotion to Jerusalem in their daily prayers.

In the course of the interviews, my father recalled how he listened clandestinely to the Israeli National Anthem while still in Kutaisi, years before the May 1948 declaration of Palestine's independence from British colonial rule and the establishment of the State of Israel. This information was startling to me. The anecdote revealed just how prevalent were his early Zionist yearnings for settling in what was then called Jewish Palestine. The yearnings explain a lot about the choices my father has made throughout his life and about the Zionist teachings that were so prevalent during my youth. Hearing this story has enabled me to understand more clearly why it has been so difficult to dialogue with father about my concerns for what I see as Israeli oppression of the Palestinian people, a situation that I feel compelled to address in my artistic practice, community involvement and public engagement.

The dual, ideological constructions of self and place as written in the twentieth century by Jews trying to make sense of and come to terms with the anxiety about, and concrete threats of, anti-Semitism in Europe and growing concern around Jewish assimilation into North American culture are evident in my father's telling. He seemed inclined to structure his narrative to focus on displacement and home. And throughout, he linked his Jewish identity with the vision and actualization of home in the Promised Land. Indeed, throughout my father's narrative, as with Uncle Nanos's story, the emphasis was on how Israel was the answer for Orthodox Jews who face great threat from without the Jewish community and sometimes even from within.

In Georgia, the Communists really did not oppress, as we know; yes the government controlled, but you could bribe the officials and if people went to jail most of the times they were let go because the officials were given money. The problem was that there were *Ashkenazi* Jews or Russian Jews who came to Georgia. They were kind of our nemesis because either they were jealous of the Georgian Jews or they thought that they are superior and as a result they caused trouble to the Georgian Jewish Community in Kutaisi. They were always trying to inform on the Jewish people.

[…]

It was just after *Bar Mitzvah*; it was the end of '44 going on '45: Kutaisi became a dangerous place for the *Yeshiva*; they moved to Gori for a short while but then we found out that in Uzbekistan, cities such as Samarqand or Tashkent, there is a Jewish religious life going on. So, there were six boys, four older ones, they were in the twenties, I was about 13 going on 14. We traveled all the way from Kutaisi to Samarqand. Can you imagine? This is the war going on. And the parents let us go. First my father did take us to Baku. My father made arrangements for a boat that crosses the Caspian Sea and we went on the Sea, which was a ride for about a day or something and he was instrumental to buy us tickets from the other side of the Caspian Sea.

I don't remember the name of the city, maybe Derbent, because

those things were not important to us. The most important thing was to watch out of strange people and people should not start up with us and try to befriend us and so on because we had no protection whatsoever. I don't know if we had proper passports and then we boarded the train that went all the way to Samarqand. I don't remember too much of the trip itself. Somehow we managed to have food. The train was packed with Russian wounded soldiers or soldiers that ended their service and they were going home to deeper Russia.

Finally we came to Samarqand. We were brought to some *Lubavitch* families because this was all under the auspices of the *Lubavitcher Chassidim*. And I stayed in Samarqand for about two months. In Tashkent, there was a *yeshiva* for younger kids; that's where I came to learn. In Tashkent, my uncle and my aunt were very nice to me. I had a nice bed. I had good food. And I almost lived there like I would be living at home.

By that time the war ended, and my parents had decided together with a few other *Lubavitcher* families that this probably was the best opportunity to get out of Russia. My mother and my father decided that they're leaving and so did my two uncles and my aunt, whose husband was killed three days after he was sent to the front. So my father had a problem he would not leave Kutaisi going towards Kiev and from there try to go to Limburg because I was not in Kutaisi. And he had to be careful to not show that he was getting ready to leave, because even the Jews

would inform to the NKVD. During that time also, I didn't know, but my youngest sister was stricken with polio.

Dialogic processes and creative products almost inevitably invite an awareness of interdependence and reinforce the mutuality of identities. For example, I remember feeling so upset when, during one recording session, my father talked about how even with all the physical and emotional pain he had caused me in my childhood, he would like to be given at least some credit for my achievements. Despite the intensity of my inner child's kicking and screaming, I knew that this was necessary for the healing to be completed. As his daughter, an artist and an activist, I can soothe myself in the process of forgiveness, and become stronger for it, when I see how much I resemble him when I take to the street in protest of the Israeli government oppression of Palestinians, just as he took to the streets in protest of the Russian suppression of Jewish cultural life.

It was not obvious or easy to write these lines any more that it is to leave in certain anecdotes in which my father reveals experiences that were difficult for me to hear. I feel exposed in those moments, and yet I have come to recognize just how important they are to understanding the forces that shaped my father's life view and, by extension, my own.

I was, for example, outraged when I heard the story of his Aunt Tzilia and cousin Vovka for the first time during one of the taping sessions. My father and I ended up arguing as I accused him and his mother of what I thought was unacceptable behaviour and he continued to justify what they had done in the

name of their religious beliefs.

> When the war broke out, my Aunt Tzilia lived in Rostov… matter of fact, all my father's brother and three sisters lived in Rostov; another sister lived I think in Kermanchu. They were lucky they escaped and of course they come to Kutaisi. And my father and my mother helped them a lot with places to live; first for them to stay in our house . . . *Tetya* Tzilia, she came with her two children, a girl and a boy, his name was officially Vovka. She was a Communist; she was the black sheep in the family. She always was a rebel even when she was young and . . . she didn't even make a *Brit Milah* for Vovka. . . . A major goal of my mother was that in our family, the Neumark/Lipsker family, there is no one without *Brit Milah*. And it was impossible; she wouldn't allow to make a *Brit Milah*. It happened to be that she got sick, I think with breast cancer, and she needed to see a specialist. My father took her from Kutaisi to Tblisi and I think she underwent a breast operation or some other kind of procedure. And while she was away, I explained to Vovka that I have circumcised and he is not and he liked what's going on in our family about *Shabbos*, *yom tovim*, and so on… because to meals and so on, even *tetya* Tzilia used to come.
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> While she was in Tblisi they made arrangements with the *mohel*, we had two *mohelim*, of course they used to do *brisim*; some, especially the Georgian Jews, used to do that very openly, very festive; not so much the Russian Jews because it was against the Communist system to have

circumcision. Meantime my mother and I talked to the boy, that if you want to be like Avremel we will do a procedure. He didn't mind. And he was a boy; we were 12, before *Bar Mitzvah*.

Two o'clock in the morning Vovka is up, I am up, the *mohel* asks in Yiddish or in Russian 'Where is the little kid?' And he stands up and says: "*etahyah*" (it's me). The *mohel*, not so much the doctor, but the *moh*el grabbed his satchel and he tries running out of the house. He says: 'I'm not doing this. I'm not! I don't want to risk my life, my family life.' And my mother stood in the door and she says: "You'll not get out of here. You won't get out. You have to do it!" He was also a *Lubavitcher Chassid*. So they did the operation. The doctor was there. Things went well. But on the second or third day after the operation she comes back.

I don't know how she found out. This is a mystery: we still don't know. In Russian, she starts screaming: "I am going to turn you into the NKVD." And "I want to see my kid." We were only afraid that she would turn around and rush to the police. But she came to see Vovka. While she was in the house my mother got hold of her. She says: "Listen Tzilia, you come from the Naimark's." She wouldn't listen. "This is my child; you had not right to do it." My mother said to her: "Tzilia, are you going to destroy the whole family? You want that we really all rot in Siberia?"

My parents really saved all my uncles and Aunt Tzilia; brought them over. They knew the Germans are coming. She was indebted to our parents for in a way saving her with the children. We didn't need

> permission. The child did not have circumcision. To us in our family was not an acceptable fact, period! There is no questions, no discussion. My mother did not need to explain. It was done because that's the way they lived, that's the way they had to do it, and I'm really very proud.

I wonder how different my own life would be if I could hold even a fraction of the belief that my father has sustained all his life, but I cannot and I do not, not only because I see contradictions and false constructions within the orthodoxy, but also because of the ways that the religion has served to justify behaviours I simply cannot accept.

When, in reading an earlier draft of this writing to my father, I came to this segment and made the connection between the state-sponsored violence he experienced in his youth, the violence of this episode, and the violence he perpetrated in the home I grew up in. He said: "Do you really need to put that in? Haven't you mentioned enough about that?" I responded by saying that in this particular passage I was making a link between the dynamics of power in the public and private spheres, something that I had not done quite so clearly up until then, and, furthermore, it seemed necessary to draw out just how decisive a marker the violence that I grew up with was and still is for me. I went on to point out how he had repeatedly affirmed the significance of the Jewish religion and his faith, affirmations that I was careful to retain, despite and perhaps especially because of the centrality of these repetitions for him in his life and in how he went about shaping his narrative.

This exchange between us provided me the means to assert that I wish I did not feel compelled to have the issue of the victim-to-perpetrator cycle so central to my creative practice and community activism. My father, to his credit, was able to hear this and accept the validity and pertinence of my choice.

When pressed into the service of healing, private and public cultural transmissions, such as my father's storytelling and this writing, provide us with the means to accept the complexities, even the contradictions, of behaviour emergent from a traumatized self. Such tellings also lessen the emotional intensity around the incomprehensible so as to create the conditions to heal. These expressions fulfill the dual function of highlighting a particular moment in time and acting as a catalyst for change.[7] Because these transmissions are by their very nature part of a social engagement, they participate actively in the struggle to become aware of, integrate, and transform the powerful emotions associated with the wounds of the past and their intergenerational after-effects.

It is useful here to consider how Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart (1995, 178) refer to Pierre Janet's observation of the differences between "traumatic memory," and "ordinary" or "narrative memory":

> [Dr. Pierre] Janet suggested to his patient Justine, who was traumatized at the age of 17 by the sight of horrendous nude corpses of victims of a cholera epidemic, to visualize these corpses with clothes on. […] One contemporary therapist of a Holocaust survivor had the patient imagine a flower growing in the assignment place in Auschwitz—an image that gave

> him tremendous comfort. […] Memory is everything. Once flexibility is introduced, the traumatic memory starts losing its power over current experiences.

Most relevant to this study is the nature of the almost helpless and seemingly endless repetition of the traumatic memory prior to its integration. Moreover, it is pertinent to consider the length of time a memory takes to recount depending on whether it has been integrated or not as ordinary memory. Also fitting to this study of the relationship between trauma and public storytelling is the solitary nature of traumatic memory versus the social component of ordinary memory in the narrative form.

Storytelling, much like other co-creative endeavours such as live art practice, empowers the participants to be active agents in the construction and communication of meaning. Deliberately choosing to shift the focus from the trauma to the agency inherent in its creative telling is evidence of both resilience and its reinforcement. Once the stories we tell ourselves about (the loss of) home begins to change, our relationship to and with home is transformed.

Yet this process of bringing flexibility into old narratives is not without its problematics. The question of a story's truth-telling function versus its identity function involves looking at social accountability, affect, and the performance of "normalcy" (Eakin 2001, 120). Linking the disclosure of the personal to the question of risk, noted life-writing scholar Paul John Eakin claims that "while our lives are increasingly on display in public, the ethics of presenting such

revelations remains largely unexamined." Furthermore, he asks: "What is the good of life writing, and how, exactly can it do harm" (2004, 1)? Both the question of what good could come of sharing this narrative and the question of what possible harm could come of it were debated within my family before, during and after the recordings were completed. As this was not the first time I have worked with difficult family material, discussing the various ramifications of this project, however unsettling, was a familiar process for us all.

What was unfamiliar and rather surprising was how, in hearing about the happy times my father experienced as a child, I could find a way to connect to what was wholesome in my childhood. Recently I found out that one of the side effects of long-term stress is the suppression of good memories.[8]

In her investigation into how adults shape their housing experiences to create home-like conditions, design psychologist Toby Israel cites Cobb as she explores the relationship between early development and the sense of place that often motivates adult choices related to home, however unconsciously. The time when a child is between five and twelve is a time when "the child […] is poised […] halfway between inner and outer worlds" (Israel 2003, 6). According to Israel and Cobb, our nonverbal, childhood experience of place retains a poetic, creative power that acts upon our choices of how we live as adults. This seems to be true even if the childhood memories are inaccessible.

I cannot help but wonder for example how my father's childhood experiences of nature, which he recalled in great detail during the recording sessions, were replayed in his choice to take my siblings and me to the

mountains every summer when we were small. While there was much pleasure associated with living in such close proximity with nature, there was also great anxiety at being so close to his rage. It is comforting to me that both my father and I can now more readily access and share what was positive in each our early days on account of the intersubjective storytelling experience we shared.

Craig Howes, director of the Center for Biographical Research at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, writes about the ways in which the line between autobiography and biography is drawn, maintained, and in some cases erased in the recent discourse about personal narratives. He cites Smith and Watson and others as he explores the ethical dilemmas inherent in constructing (inter)subjectivities and suggests that the bifurcation between autobiography and biography has aesthetic and ethical ramifications. "Only writers exercising full control over their materials can be trusted, because as anyone familiar with biographies—or criminal trials—knows, reordering facts can make them serve a variety of ends that often have nothing to do with establishing the truth" (2004, 250). It was significant to have my father actively participate in the process of shaping this material not only because of the ethical ramifications but also because of the enormous healing capacity in this performative dialogic process and cultural production. This entire process has made it possible for me to have a greater appreciation of the restorative force of nature separate from the hauntings of my childhood.

By sharing his own appreciation for the beauty of nature, my father invited me to think differently about the facts of my youth and shape a more coherent

truth about the complexity of his life and his efforts to be a good father, despite—and perhaps even more-so on account of—the surges of violence. I have come to see these early visits to the countryside as my father's way of getting beyond the state-sponsored violence that he experienced in his own childhood and which found its way into the intimate spaces of my youth.

> Post-war in Russia was a *somatocha*, a disorientation of the highest level; it was a turmoil, a total turmoil. My father risked his life and he again followed the same route as I did. He had a ticket for me to come back. My uncle helped my father to obtain necessary documents and tickets to go back. My father stayed in Tashkent two or three days. And we traveled back to Kutaisi.
>
> When I came to Kutaisi this time, my parents were already not living in the house because planning to escape Russia they had to get to another neighbourhood where they wouldn't be known that much and my parents already made arrangements to travel to Kiev. Again, my parents did have money and we traveled by a truck from Kutaisi to a city called Rioni. People thought that we are refugees.
>
> We came to Tblisi where my father had some contacts and we took a train that went through Rostov. I don't remember if we stopped in Rostov and we got off; my father maybe wanted to go to the cemetery to visit his parents' graves, or maybe there was just talk about it. I can't really remember. And two of our sisters died because of dysentaria [sic]; they

could not be saved. Each one was very young, not even a year or so. There was no *levaya*.

Now we are traveling through Rostov… we came to Kiev. All along we had to really watch out every step. My father and mother were very daring, very risk taking and so was my uncle and my aunt. And this was the only opportunity to get out of Russia, not because of economical needs but because we knew in the free world we would be able to live full religious life. Not always I understood exactly the details; we just followed from one city to another.

I had not heard these stories before the recording session and I was immediately struck by how difficult all the experiences must have been for my father, his parents and his younger siblings. As I listened to the recordings, choosing what to edit out and what to highlight in this text, I found myself checking facts and finding out about historical events I knew nothing about. I had a map open before me and traced the route my father and his family took as they left Georgia through Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Germany, France, and beyond. Then, as now, I am amazed at the daring and ingenuity necessary to undertake such a perilous trek.

I suppose that the extent of the silence surrounding these experiences is in direct correlation to how traumatic they were felt to be and how afraid my father was to reveal his vulnerability. The trust that has been growing between us made it possible to shift things for him to want to share his stories with me and

for me to want to hear them. This trust, which has emerged from the commitment to healing and the confidence we both have in the creative process, has also made it possible for us to agree to make these stories public.

Just as I was finishing off transcribing my father's words from the audio files, I happened to hear a re-broadcast of Eleanor Wachtel's December 27, 2009, interview with Azar Nafisi, author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (2003) and *Things I've been Silent About: Memories of a Prodigal Daughter* (2008) on the CBC program "Writers and Company." I was fascinated by the echoes between how I had opted to build my narrative by weaving together three aspects of my life experience—the personal, the creative and the activist—and the way in which Wachtel and Nafisi addressed these three elements during the interview.

What also got my attention was how Nafisi spoke about waiting until after her parents had died to write about them. Unlike Nafisi, I felt driven to complete this work during my father's lifetime. This was important to me because of the ethical commitment I made years ago when I began working with my family's experiences. Moreover, I knew that by including my parents in this process, healing would not only be possible for us personally, but also that the work would potentially serve as a proxy, much like my father's public apology did years before during the Concordia University event.

Speaking about the *militzia* and the numerous raids on his family's house and factory was not easy for my father, but it seemed to do him well to have me listen and for him to know that I could hear how fraught with danger his own

childhood was. Often my father would pause and take a deep breath as he did when he began to speak of what happened with the Sabbath candles one Friday evening. Unlike many of the other stories that were told to me for the first time during the audio recording sessions, I had heard this story once before following an encounter the two of us had during an earlier live art event.

The Art of Conversation

I was one of several artists selected to participate in a temporary public art exhibit hosted by the City of Montreal to mark the millennium shift. Rather than create a large-scale photographic or sculptural installation, my project, which I called *The Art of Conversation*, was performance and story based.

After setting up my living room furniture on corner of Frontenac and Ontario streets every Tuesday between 12:00 noon and 4:00 PM for the duration of ten weeks during the summer of 2000, I engaged with passers-by in conversations about home, memory, choice making, domestic abuse, political terror, exile and comfort, amongst many other things.

The City of Montreal chose this location for *The Art of Conversation*. I subsequently worked out an arrangement with the Maison de la Culture Frontenac for the storage of the furniture when it was not in use, since their loading dock and storage unit was just around the corner.

Appearing in this image are my son (seated on the ground reading a book), my daughter (standing facing the camera), my father (seated at the far end of the large sofa), and mother (seated next to my father, under the blue umbrella). Photo credits this page: Devora Neumark

My father joined the sitting one Tuesday and was visibly upset and uncomfortable throughout. When I asked him a few days later what it was that disturbed him, he told me of how sitting on the couch in the middle of the street had triggered a long-forgotten memory.

While living in Kutaisi he was the one in the family responsible for closing the curtains before his mother would *bench licht*, before she would light the Sabbath candles. Sitting in the living room space I had temporarily created outdoors, he recalled how one Friday night he had forgotten to close the curtains. A Jewish neighbour spotted the lit candles and promptly denounced his family, forcing an eviction that left them no access to their belongings for several months. This is what was making him so uncomfortable.

He had long carried the fear, guilt, shame and anger from this incident without being aware of how it had influenced our home as I was growing up. Indeed, every time my mother would prepare to light the Sabbath candles, my father's stress level would rise, making the greeting of the Sabbath a particularly anxiety-ridden ritual.

The question I posed to my father about his unease during his visit to the living room I had created on the street corner had triggered a recollection of this memory. The story told then, and again more recently as if for the first time during the audio recording sessions in my parent's house, increased my awareness of the long shadows cast when traumatic experience is passed from one generation to the next. The conjunction of the personal and the political as played out in the dramas of my immediate ancestors and my own life is as

central to this auto/biography as is the healing process.

> In the midst of dislocations and relocations, personal and collective storytelling can become one way in which people claim new identities and assert their participation in the public sphere. It can also become a way of maintaining communal identification in the face of loss and cultural degradation. [**…**] In all cases, storytelling functions as a crucial element in establishing new identities of longing (directed toward the past) and belonging (directed toward the future). (Schaffer and Smith 2004, 19)

Not only do Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith articulate the important connection between the personal and the collective, but they also implicate the passage of time as central to the aesthetics and politics of telling stories about displacement.

I shared with my father all that I had written in response to his tellings. I could not imagine doing otherwise, however much it has not been an easy process. The most important thing, my father says before I hang up the phone after reading this entire text to him, is that we are family. I am taken by how liberating this truth telling has been for the both of us.

On the dining room wall in the Beit Shemesh house where my parents now live, just by the chair in which my father sat during each of the recording sessions, hangs a monoprint. I created this image from a photograph I had taken of my father's shadow as he stood by the Wailing Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem when I was still a teen. This same print was hung in a similar position

for the more than 20 years my parents lived on Montreal's West Island.

Several years before my parents moved to Israel, I asked my father why he had hung this work in such a prominent place. He confessed to how challenged he felt by the image, how each time he sat at the dining room table for Sabbath meals and holiday celebrations, or while teaching one boy or another their *Bar Mitzvah* chapters, he had to confront the image of his shadow side. My father went on to tell me how he had, on more than one occasion, felt pressed to remove the image. Each time however, he recommitted to keep it in place thinking, that if he could sit with it long enough, he would be able to emerge from the darkness we all remembered, each in our own way. He explained that he was determined to stop living in the shadow he created by his acts of violence.

Back in 1997, as part of the apology he recorded for the Keynote event, my father said, "I always try to atone for those years that should have never happened." Indeed he has committed himself to this process. I appreciate his courage and his affirmation of the power of story and creativity. Once a Russian, always a Jew, my father has lived out his ideological dream and made home in the land of his Biblical forefathers and mothers. He has settled down and found a certain peace. He is active in his local community, takes care of his health, and enjoys gathering the family around for festivals and celebrations. After recording all he wanted to say, my father mused: "Having told you all these stories I realize that after all, I have had a good life, and despite being 80, I'm not so old." The telling process permitted my father to make sense of his experience in a way that reconciled him with the past and opened a new vista towards the future.

The Truth of a Memory

Despite having been invited into the process, my mother chose not to speak about her own childhood at the time of the initial recording session with my father. Nevertheless, this exchange was clearly significant for her: almost two years later, she gathered the family together and told us the stories of the different items she possessed that were of particular significance to her. She started by saying that she wanted us to know the stories behind the objects she was to bequeath to us upon her passing.

Talking about a tattered and stained 100-year old embroidered cloth used for the ritual meal during the holiday of Passover that was brought over from Poland, my mother acknowledged that it could not be used on account of how moth-eaten and raggedy it was: “And yet to us it is a thing of beauty because of who made it. To think that so long ago my grandmother put so much work into this thing, all the beading and the embroidery. Just appreciating what went in to it makes me feel very emotional.” For my mother the no-longer-functional object is still a prized possession on account of its affective value. My mother’s story of this heirloom transported us all into her field of memories, as surely as the object itself was transported from the “home country” so many years before.

For several hours, my mother spoke lovingly about one item after another. In her own way, she was exploring and expressing the ways in which she came to feel at home through the care and appreciation of these special things, however tattered, cracked, or broken.

In a more recent conversation, my mother spoke about her early childhood recollections and thus providing a wonderful example of the power that (even the idea of) the care and manipulation of objects has to evoke and, in a way, tame traumatic memory. My mother talked about economics: “Everyone wants beauty, but not everyone can afford the best. We learned to ‘make do’ with what we had.” She continued:

> Even if it is old and whatever, you make it mean something to you, you know? In my parents’ house growing up we had one bed for three girls since my parents couldn’t afford more. In the winter the one who slept in the middle was the luckiest because she was the warmest as there was no heat in the house and living in Montreal it was very cold in the winter. It was a very cozy feeling as a matter of fact. Our mother used to warm our pyjamas on the oven door and we used to get into them and jump right into bed. Neither my father nor mother ever complained to us even though I could imagine that life in Poland was much more luxurious; it was likely much easier living on the farm at least until the Bolsheviks came. Then they had to hide in the haystacks in the barn and survived having pitchforks poked into the stacks.

This was the first time I had heard about the attacks on my grandfather’s house. If not for the *matzah* cover, I likely would never have heard about the experience in the haystacks. And yet, the story of the haystacks was so resounding even in

its having been silenced all these years.

Hearing about the haystacks helped me to fill in the many large gaps in the family narrative. Indeed, I knew little about my grandfather's life in Poland until after he died. It was only during the *shiva*, that I heard about how he had been sent into the forest with his baby sister to avoid being caught in a pogrom rumoured to be unleashed upon his village. His sister's cries attracted the attention of the roving militia who shot her dead while in my grandfather's arms.

In my mother's telling, she traveled from the idea of everyone wanting beauty, to "making do," to old things, to making meaning, to childhood memories of cozy homemaking, to the image of her father in a haystack threatened by pitchforks, in one leap, all stimulated by my questions about the meaning of caring for the things of home. If we read her words as spoken, we end at trauma; but embedded in her memory is the forward motion of a history in which trauma was overcome and home remade, there is pain but it is not paralyzing. And the whole is a stream of memory attached to the objects she associates most with the experience of being at home.

In their highly influential work, life-writing experts Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explore how stories emerge at the nexus of memory and history. They invite their readers to consider the personal and political motivations of the individuals who author these narratives as well as those who circulate them. They ask about the implications of such motivations on the changing shape of history and personal identities, of those involved in the writing and distribution of the life stories and those who end up bearing witness to them in the form of

books, audio recordings and other cultural transmissions.[6]

Like so many Jews of my generation whose parents were caught up in the madness of mid-twentieth century Europe, I have spent the bulk of my life trying to cope with the legacy of violence, both personally and by contributing to violence-reduction projects within the Jewish community and as a member of Palestinian solidarity groups. Whether shared with strangers or intimates, I have come to understand that stories not only help construct one's individual identity but also draw on personal memories to shape collective histories, however much the past recollections are already tainted, borrowed and merged with others' stories, experiences and memories. "The truth of the memory is intimately related to how it is deployed and to the emotional and social meanings that are evoked in the telling and retelling of it" (Haaken 1998, 41). Co-emergent storytelling remembers the past as much as it shapes the future within the domestic interior and the public sphere.

[6] Another strategy for reading life narratives that Smith and Watson propose is to examine who is the audience. As is the case with any other creative work, this storytelling's first addressees were those most intimately involved: my parents and I were our own first witnesses. Yet, as previously mentioned, from the onset we knew that we were creating this project for at least two other audiences. My family members now have access to the recordings, while I have worked with this material here and elsewhere in an attempt to engage critically in the cultural conversation about the ethics of storytelling, healing, and the performativity of disclosure. See also my earlier texts: "Giving Voice: Storytelling, Interdisciplinarity and Healing" (2000) and "Home is Where the Walls Speak in Familiar Ways: Listening to the Demands of Ethics and Witness in Community Performance" (2007).

CHAPTER THREE: THE PERFORMATIVITY OF DIALOGIC AESTHETICS

Life stories shared within the framework of symbolic encounters can also have a tangible effect in the corporeal world, which might not otherwise be possible. Simply confronting/telling the truth is sometimes too challenging. What the symbolic framework affords is an entry to the "bones of situation," which "implies coming upon an actual situation from outside, intuitively and spontaneously, rather than from within the event through more the usual processes of deliberation and logic" (Benson 2010, 154-155). Shifting perception and creating meaning in such an indirect, yet powerful, way does not negate the truth; it gets under its skin and makes it more apparent.

The use of symbolic language is however never neutral, as Haedicke and Nellhaus affirm: "Intervention, location, and agency, all revolving around asymmetrical relations of power, authority, and involvement, circumscribe the politics that determine the nature of the work" (2001, 14). Furthermore, the question of what will follow from the sharing of story and gesture is integral to the shift in scale, or move along the continuum between personal, communal and public spheres. Haedicke and Nellhaus caution: "Just recovering repressed stories, which certainly may feel good to those finally given the opportunity to speak, does little to change the established power dynamic" (5). Assuming that the artist strives to be present with compassion and in solidarity with each person who chooses to get involved in the live art events they convene, even with the

best of intentions, they must also always be aware that what they invite may be challenging, if not downright difficult, for others.

If my creative praxis over the years has led me to trust the process of extending my intimately lived experience into the symbolic realm, it has also demanded attention to the ethical implications of shifting between the personal, the communal and the public sphere. I can never take for granted that the impulse to share my own experience and story will not eclipse the experiences and stories of others. I must also acknowledge that, as the initiator of the live art exchange, I am more likely to be prepared to both tell and to hear personal stories than the individuals who join me in the dialogic space. Moreover, I know that my own past experiences, at least to some extent, will determine how I available I am to bearing witness to the experiences and narratives others have to tell.

In “What is Performance Art, Anyway?” Lynne M. Constantine and Suzanne Scott (2002) state:

> Performance art is more interested in opening a subject than in closing it. There is little assumption that a conflict, if raised, can or even should be resolved. The actor is no longer playing a character but enacting an action, not interpreting a script but exploring what happens to her/him and to observers when the action occurs. The distinction between audience and participant shrinks; often the performance-space encompasses and even wholly subsumes the observation-space. (unpaged)

Sometimes during a live art event, when the capacity for presence is exercised and active listening occurs, I have found that it is possible to have a sense of resolution to the creative and personal tension during the event itself. In such instances, presence can be likened to wholeness of being, and, listening to that, which "involves the entire body, the body, that is, of felt experience" (Levin 1989, 22). When this happens, everyone involved returns to his or her life altered, at least to some extent. This is particularly so when individuals (myself included) risk to show their vulnerability. While my own stories and the stories of others are rooted in lived experience, when shared within the context of a live art performance such as *Holding Ground*, they can, and often do, also take on a powerfully symbolic significance.

Holding Ground

Holding Ground was one of several gestures enacted over the course of several hours on the evening of 7 November 2003 as part of an event called *Prescriptions.* The event was sponsored by the Quebec City-based non-profit Folie Culture, whose mandate is to promote mental health by "organizing events involving unusual avenues of research while encouraging reflection on painful social issues" (as indicated on their website). The idea was to invite artists to "reflect on the idea of prescription and to initiate an intervention in a loop which

repeated itself" over the course of the evening and in which the public could take part.[9] The individuals who attended this event at the Salle Multi de Méduse, had the choice of participating in a number of different activities intended to invite a sense of wellness, amongst which was being held by me. Over the course of the evening, I literally embraced strangers, holding them for as long as they wanted in the manner in which they wanted to be held.

I have chosen to document this work in words only, as I felt strongly the need to avoid photographic intervention despite the public nature of the event in order to honour the intimacy of the process. The relational dynamic, and even the event itself, would have been changed with a camera present.[10] The choice to write about this event was not obvious, as much of what I experienced lives in the place where words do not form easily: this articulation has taken many years to surface.[11]

The idea for *Holding Ground* emerged during the mass eviction process from the 10 Ontario building, which was one of the most vibrant creative communities in Montreal for more than 20 years. Having lived and worked for seven years in the loft space that I moved into shortly after the fire, I, along with all the other tenants, conceded defeat in the face of gentrification and began looking around for another place to call home.

Dealing with this particular dislocation triggered a resurgence of emotional residue from previous displacements as well as multiple flashbacks from the abuse I suffered as a child. It was during this time, in moments of acute, even desperate, awareness of my own need for being held, I had an odd reverie while

lying on my acupuncturist's treatment table: I imagined offering to hold people in a position that would feel comforting when anxiety threatened to overtake them. In the dark of the dimmed clinical setting, and with the needles still in me, I played with this fantasy, and quickly concluded how unlikely it would be for me to find an appropriate context to perform such an act of love, and thus intentionally engaging with individual healing as part of a critical contemporary art practice and (as) *Tikkun Olam*.

Prior to placing the needles, Suzanne Harvey and I talked about the conditions for working through unresolved trauma. She reminded me of how powerful a role creative practice that resonates on a deep emotional level has played for me in the past. Yet what I had envisioned this time around seemed so utterly unfeasible. Under what circumstances could I invite holding (with) strangers, *as live art performance*?

I returned home still wondering about how to create a context for this work only to find a voice message from Céline Marcotte, Managing Director of Folie Culture telling me about a performance event that, at the time, was in the early planning stage. She mentioned that the event was to be called "Prescriptions" and that it would aim at destabilizing medical, social and artistic regulations and coming up with a new approach to "prescribing" health. Laughing out loud, I returned Céline's call and explained to how synchronistic the timing of the invitation felt.

Having known fear, having felt it deep into my bones, I know how long it lingers and how easily it can be triggered in situations that do not seemingly

present any immediate, or even obvious, threat. On the evening of the performance event, while bringing awareness to my breath, I sat in stillness preparing myself to be open to whatever experiences would arise. Using numerous pillows and assorted decorative fabrics, I set up as cosy a home-like setting as I could within the warehouse-like interior of space chosen for this event. As I installed myself in the 10' x 10' cubical that was delineated by plastic sheeting hung from the high ceilings in the Méduse cultural complex, I kept in mind the importance of creating as intimate a space as possible while keeping in mind the intrusions from the artists' gestures. Amongst the other prescriptions included the crashing of china dishes from Sylvie Cotton's corner, and the ubiquitous heavy odour of onion soup, cooked up by Karen Spencer that permeated the entire venue.

The sheer number of people who answered my invitation, and the quality of the encounters within which participants allowed themselves to feel consoled, clearly indicated to me just how prevalent is the need for connection and contact. Those who accepted to be held also held me and reinforced in me the capacity to be present with another's fear and my own.

One woman, older than me by some years, requested that I hold her on my lap while rocking back and forth. A man lay prone on the floor and asked to be guided verbally into a state of relaxation. Another said, after I had embraced him without speaking for some time, that because he had been held he no longer felt the need to break plates.

Then there was the woman who stopped by as most everyone had already begun gathering to leave. She told me how she thought of approaching me all evening but had not found the courage to do so. I asked her what position she wanted to be held in. Together we positioned the pillows so that she was lying on her stomach with her head to one side. Arranging her comfort through the placement of the few objects I had brought with me for the occasion was an important part of the process with each person with whom I interacted that night, but perhaps especially for this particular woman who actively took part in this preparation. Together we took great care in getting everything as comfy as possible under the circumstances. Once she felt settled, I took her head in my hands, as was requested of me.

After staying like this silently for some time she began to weep: with tears streaming down her face she told me how her child was dying and how, in her sadness and dread of what was to come, she had closed her heart. She explained that she had not been able to cry since hearing the hopeless prognosis, nor was she able to connect emotionally with her son however much she longed to. She said that the symbolic framework of *Holding Ground* offered the chance to connect with her emotions in a way that nothing else had, including therapy. She continued to weep. I continued to hold her.

It was late: the technicians were beginning to undo the transparent plastic "walls." She left not long after the technicians were finished striking the installation. Before she left however she suggesting to herself, as much as to me,

that things might be different now for her in relation (to what was happening) with her son. I do not know her name and I have never seen her since.

Afterwards, I cried for three days straight. In the space between my need and the people who asked to be held, including this particular woman, a powerful bond was created that still resonates for me whenever I think of this event.

* * *

To situate *Holding Ground*, and the subsequent dialogic performances that I initiated within this cycle of research-creation (which I write about in subsequent chapters) within the larger artistic, intellectual, cultural and political context out of which my own praxis has emerged, I will present two influential early performance art projects: Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Touch Sanitation–Handshake Ritual* (1979-1980) and Adrian Piper's *My Calling (Card) #1 (for Dinners and Cocktail Parties)* (1986-1990). For Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Adrian Piper, the politicization of the "private" sphere has been of paramount importance; moreover, the inherent interdisciplinary nature of their engagement has been key to both their ethics and aesthetics. Indeed, in order to appreciate the broad ramifications of these two projects, the connection between political agency (the individual and collective participation in the public sphere), and an integrative approach to the construction of knowledge and problem-solving (Freire 2000), which troubles and bridges what are often seen as disparate social systems (Luhmann 2000) cannot be underestimated.

Touch Sanitation—Handshake Ritual

Between mid-1978 and mid-1980, Mierle Laderman Ukeles shook hands with more than 8,500 New York City Department of Sanitation workers in all 59 sanitation districts. During each encounter, she expressed her gratitude for the work they did in "keeping New York City alive" (Ronald Feldman Fine Arts 1984, unpaged). In order to complete *Touch Sanitation—Handshake Ritual*, Laderman Ukeles crisscrossed the city, taking on day and/or night shifts, so as to meet with, listen to and record the experiences of the sanmen.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles performing her "handshake ritual" with workers of New York City Department of Sanitation. Photo credit: Feldman Gallery.

At the end of the performance project, Laderman Ukeles was made Honorary Deputy Commissioner of Sanitation and also Honorary Teamster Member of

Local 831, United Sanitationmen's Association. This transition between the role of artist/unsalaried artist-in-residence for the New York City Department of Sanitation (beginning in 1976) and city official/union member effectively points to the "success" of Laderman Ukeles' activism. The appreciative comments offered to her by the sanmen point to her particular dialogic aesthetics at work (Jackson 2011) and concomitant civic engagement.

"There can be no shortcut to the democratization of artistic production or circulation," asserts Homi K. Bhabha (1998, 40). He continues:

> Democracy depends, to a great degree, on a culture of public belief that takes seriously the proposition that questions of value and knowledge are as deeply linked to the matter of cultural practice and public policy as the issues of morality and action are wedded to the concept of "good" citizenship. (40)

Mierles Laderman Ukeles' *Touch Sanitation—Handshake Ritual* is a particularly apt example of this premise not only on account of her long-term commitment to recognizing each and every sanman's humanity; her persistent exploration of what "good citizenship" means has brought Laderman Ukeles face to face with the imperative to be creative in the blurred boundaries between art and life (Kaprow 2003).

Laderman Ukeles' project is as complex as it was long in the making. Certain elements of *Handshake Ritual*[12] were clearly meant to be disruptive of

the public's perceptions and prejudices about how the garbage that is created is treated and disposed of. Other elements were deliberate in their aim to elicit a greater recognition of the existing state of affairs within the NYC metropolis relative to labour relations and job status.

While not engaging directly with *Touch Sanitation—Handshake Ritual*, a great deal of polemic attention has been paid to staking out positions along the continuum between affirming or subverting the socio-political status quo and the difference between a consensual collectivism and one of dissensus. For example an abundance of theory has addressed Nicolas Bourriaud's "esthétique relationnelle" (relational aesthetics), a practice most often associated with a "convivial" rapport (Bourriaud 2002, 30). Claire Bishop (2004) for example, offers a critical counter-argument about the necessity for antagonism, while Miwon Kwon (2002), who agrees with Bourriaud about how the very future of democracy is at stake, cautions that if art is part of an individual or collective healing process then it runs the risk of lessening the chances that systemic change will be made by the political class, thus reaffirming the social inequality and even condoning it to some extent.

Cultural theorist Grant Kester also alerts us to the dangers of what he calls "dialogical determinism" that is: "the naïve belief that all social conflicts can be resolved through the utopian power of free and open exchange" (2004, 182). Despite "having spent some time developing a critical framework around dialogical experience," Kester is "also aware of its potential limitations, especially in projects that involve forms of class- or race-based political resistance" (182).

He reminds us that because not all "conflicts are the result of a failure among a given set of interlocutors to fully 'understand' or empathize with each other" dialogue may not be a solution: "In many cases social conflicts are the result of a very clear understanding of material, economic and political differences" (182). In such circumstances, suggests Kester, choices are made to maintain differences out of conviction that one is somehow more superior, or deserving of superiority, than others (183). These attitudes of superiority and inferiority play a large role in the public's attitude towards garbage and the people who collect, transport and sort it all, as Laderman Ukeles found out in carrying out her project.

More recently, Amelia Jones argued against assuming that all community performance is "inherently" or "inevitably" radical and resistant or that dialogical co-emergent art events are *necessarily* political. Citing Melanie Gilligan and Sven Lütticken, Jones advances the notion that while "performance can activate the potential to disturb the static and apolitical (or anti-political and commodified) nature of conventional modernist aesthetics no mode of creation or interactivity is inherently outside systems of commodification" (2010, 9-10), including live art. Jones particularly points to what Nicolas Bourriaud and "other purveyors of relational aesthetics" have ignored, and why:

> Bourriaud cannot accommodate earlier activist and/or feminist performance work because *it has already been written out of history* because it is not codifiable in the reified terms the art market and art

> history require in order to construct neat systems of value. (2010, 10: italics in original)

By suggesting that what is also ignored by relational aesthetics is "the politics implied by the reciprocal and situational" (Jones 2010, 11), the link between feminism, reciprocity, and the performativity of context-specificity as potentially available to sensory-laden activist live art is forged. Laderman Ukeles' pushing against the drudgery of "private" housekeeping by intervening in the public sphere and transforming the tediousness of domesticity and the discomfort, if not disgust, with waste through empathetic witnessing and compassionate activism, is but one example of this unity between life, art and political agency.

My Calling (Card) #1 (for Dinners and Cocktail Parties)

Taking a page from Jan Cohen-Cruz's general introduction to her edited volume *Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology*, in which Cohen-Cruz identifies what she calls the "pervasive pattern" in "the persistence of street performance in periods of social flux—either leading up to, during or just after a shift in the status quo" (1998, 6), Art historian Blake Stimsom and artist-author Gregory Sholette (2007, 13) declare:

> If we look back historically, collectives tend to emerge during periods of crisis, in moments of social upheaval and political uncertainty within

> society. Such crises often force reappraisals of conditions of production, re-evaluation of the nature of artistic work, and a reconfiguration of the position of the artist in relation to economic, social and political institutions.

Cohen-Cruz's contention that: "When one needs most to disturb the peace, street performance creates visions of what society might be, and arguments against what it is" (1998, 6) is an appropriate introduction to the work of African American artist and analytical philosopher Adrian Piper. While many of Piper's deliberately disturbing performances did take place literally in the streets, others were performed in locations most often associated with art in the Euro-American tradition such as the museum and gallery. Still others, including *My Calling (Card) #1 (for Dinners and Cocktail Parties)*, assumed the very same publicness despite taking place in "private" settings such as around the dinner table and during social gatherings.

As arts writer and critic Patricia C. Phillips so succinctly affirms: "Art is 'public' based not on *where* it is, but on what it *does*" (1995, 286: italics in original). Indeed, *My Calling (Card) #1 (for Dinners and Cocktail Parties)* was one of the most provocative amongst the performative interventions that Adrian Piper "negotiated" in the space activated between the private and public. It was within this work, perhaps more than any other that she dealt so overtly with the issue of racism and the still-lingering legacy of slavery in the United States. This community performance got triggered when Piper found herself confronted by a racist remark within "exclusively white company at a dinner or cocktail party, in

which those present do not realize I am black" (1999, 219). Piper's dialogical (re)act(ion) was to present a calling card with the following printed text:

> Dear Friend,
>
> I am black.
>
> I am sure you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark. In the past, I have attempted to alert white people to my racial identity in advance. Unfortunately, this invariably caused them to react to me as pushy, manipulative, or socially inappropriate. Therefore my policy is to assume that white people do not make these remarks, even when they believe there are no black people present, and to distribute this card when they do.
>
> I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me.
>
> Sincerely yours,
>
> Adrian Margaret Smith Piper (1999, 135)

Piper's exploration of identity politics and the boundaries of in/exclusion through the use of the calling card convention explicitly situates this work within a cultural history of social exchange and implicitly examines the ways in which art can interrogate and shift accepted norms of behaviour and ways of thinking. While this specific example of dialogical art can be considered somewhat problematic in that the work is not consensually agreed upon by all who end up

participating—that is, Piper did not a priori advertise that she was going to intervene in such a confrontational manner in a context that expects politesse—I believe that the "freedom" of speech, which was assumed by the person(s) making/responding to the racist comment comes with a social responsibility and accountability that Piper's work calls out, even as she calls out the breech of politesse that might otherwise have gone unnoticed or even unquestionably assumed to be part of the acceptable code of conduct.

Such symbolically powerful interventions, emergent from profoundly personal experiences implicate creative risk-taking and invite the emergence of new schemas for co-existence while expanding the range of political dissent and activism. While writing about the history of feminism, autobiography and performance, Professor of Contemporary Performance at the University of Glasgow, Deirdre Heddon asserts: "The radical feminist act was not only the publicizing of the personal but also the insistence that the personal was never only personal since it was always structural and relational. […] The politics of the personal is that the personal is *not* singularly about me" (2008, 161: italics in original). Live art's performativity inevitably invites an awareness of interdependence and reinforces the mutuality of identities.[7] The private, in this case, is not considered by Piper to be entirely private, as the public discourse of

[7] Cultural theorist Jeanie Forte writes: "Women performance artists show an intrinsic understanding of culture and signification apparently reached solely through their own feminist consciousness-raising and political acumen; manifesting the metaphor most central to feminism, that 'the personal is political,' these performers have used the condition of their own lives to deconstruct the system they find oppressive" (1988, 219). While I take issue with such an essentialist assumption of women's innate or natural critical capacities, I identify strongly with Forte's observation that women's performance art is made particularly compelling by its emergence from "personal experience and emotional material" (1988, 221) and especially so when that experience and material is offered up to critique oppression.

racism and the collective history of the oppression of Blacks in the USA seep into intimate encounters.

This deliberate conflation between the private and the public, as well as the personal and the political, is certainly the case when Piper then extends the intimate encounter experienced in the cocktail or dinner party into the cultural arena. She does this by organizing subsequent live events in which she invites "a larger audience into self-reflective participatory critique of a one-on-one interpersonal performance" (according to Piper's website). In Piper's *Calling Card* series, as with some of her other performative dialogic interventions, the response of the people with whom she interacts is a key material element in the work (Pollard 2005, unpaged; Kester 2004). Piper documents these encounters and works with them as primary material for making new opportunities for dialogical exchange. One such example is the video compilation she created by splicing together the documentation of the "meta-performance" held at the Randolph Street Gallery in Chicago in 1987 (which took *My Calling (Card) #1 (for Dinners and Cocktail Parties* as "the object of critique"), with a second "meta-performance" at the Studio Museum in Harlem, which took the Randolph Street Gallery meta-performance as the focal point for the difficult and challenging dialogue which then ensued (as described in the text accompanying the video online as part of the web-based component of the Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation [APRAF]).

The following explanation accompanies the video compilation that was created from this amalgam (both of which are presented on the APRAF website):

"In that performance I suggest that whoever watches the tape edited from these two meta-performances will be participating in a third level of self-conscious meta-performance, taking the combined tape itself as the object of critique. The level of audience engagement in both venues was very high and the discussion quite heated." What is clear from the video documentation is that while the initial trigger event and Piper's response to it may have been experienced amongst only a small number of people, the performance is intended for, speaks to, and necessitates a wider participatory implication as the economic, political, cultural, historical and social forces of racism cannot be adequately addressed and overcome only through an awakening of individual consciousness.[8]

Dialogic projects such as Laderman Ukeles' *Touch Sanitation—Handshake Ritual* and Piper's *My Calling (Card) #1 (for Dinners and Cocktail Parties)* can provide participants/collaborators/co-creators (and the wider critical audience who come across the work through its documentation), with the means to think beyond the conditions that gave rise to the situation deemed unacceptable. Such projects can fulfill the dual function of highlighting a particular contextual conjuncture as well as acting as a catalyst for change. Cultural contributions lived in the liminal space between life and art, between the symbolically real and the really real, which are deliberate in their commitment to

[8] Explaining why he writes so extensively about Piper's art and philosophical explorations, Kester states: "Her analysis of the complex mechanisms of projection, rationalization, and denial that structure our experience of otherness provides a particularly important resource for artists working on dialogical projects that involve collaborations across boundaries of racial, cultural, or class difference" (2004, 81).

communication are especially vital to inspire people to think together beyond ignorance, politesse and conflict.

Dialogical Aesthetics

The capacity for art to imagine "what if" scenarios in response to the experience of quotidian life (which is already always infused with the civic problematics of the day) often results in powerfully real impacts as Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Adrian Piper. This is not only a cultural project; it is a political one. "The real must be fictionalized in order to be thought. […] Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct 'fictions', that is to say *material* rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done" (Rancière 2006, 38-39: italics in original). This is perhaps especially the case with dialogic aesthetics.

For Kester, this process it is decidedly performative. Indeed, Kester defines the difference between "conventional" aesthetic experience and a dialogical aesthetic as follows:

> In conventional aesthetic experience, the subject is prepared to participate in dialogue through an essentially individual and physical experience of 'liking'. It is only after passing through the process of aesthetic perception that one's capacity for discursive interaction is enhanced (i.e., one's sensory encounter with the work of art makes one more open-minded or

> receptive in future social interactions). In a dialogical aesthetic, on the other hand, subjectivity is formed *through* discourse and intersubjective exchange itself. Discourse is not simply a tool to be used to communicate an a priori 'content' with other already formed subjects but is itself intended to model subjectivity. (2004, 112: italics in original)

The performativity of dialogical aesthetics comports effectively with politically engaged art practices such as Laderman Ukeles and Piper's. I appreciate the importance that Kester places on modeling, which aligns with my proposal about creating "what if" scenarios, however the radical intention of discourse within such projects isn't limited to modeling. What is truly radical within such projects is the equality that extends to exploration and, on occasion, to the art of thinking/feeling/doing together in unique co-emergent moments of context-specific experience.

French philosopher Jacques Rancière, in conversation with French-American philosopher and cultural critic Gabriel Rockhill, addresses this question of equality. What he postulates is quite relevant to understanding the implications of dialogical art in general, and the work I have initiated within this study in particular: "Equality is what I have called a presupposition. It is not, let it be understood, a founding ontological principle but a condition that only functions when it is put into action" (2006, 52). It is this coming into being of equality that is perhaps of greatest significance to the performativity of the dialogue and the dissolution of the sharp distinction between the artist, the audience and even the

artwork itself. The practice that this form of co-emergent art offers to people who choose to participate can be read within the symbolic arena of the live art experience and transferred to the political arena where decisions are taken impacting a whole range of socio-political and economic dynamics from government policy to individual consumer choice.

"Consequently" continues Rancière "politics is not based on equality in the sense that others try to base it on some general human predisposition such as language or fear. Equality is actually the condition required for being able to think politics" (2006, 52). While in this particular interview Rancière doesn't refer to the ideas of others with whom he identifies as relevant to his line of thinking, elsewhere he cites J. C. Friedrich Von Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. In doing so he attempts to flesh out the parameters of where politics and the aesthetics of participation meet. Rancière highlights the centrality of "political distribution," that is "the division between those who act and those who are acted upon" or, more specifically, the "aesthetic" state, which "aims at breaking down—with an idea of art—an idea of society based on the opposition between those who think and decide and those who are doomed to material tasks" (2006, 44). Power is indeed one of challenges within co-creative performance (Cohen-Cruz 1998; Haedicke and Nellhaus 2001; Kuppers 2007). The roles that individuals play within a dialogical aesthetic need to be examined in light of the horizontality that is so critical in Friere's conceptualization of *praxis*, which he defines as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (2000, 36).

Holding Ground (and the series of dialogical performances that I have initiated within this cycle of research-creation), as with *Touch Sanitation—Handshake Ritual* and *My Calling (Card) #1 (for Dinners and Cocktail Parties)*, does not shy away from considering how the world can be transformed through reflection and action, even to the point of embracing difficult conversations and welcoming tender emotional encounters. These cultural contributions purposefully complexify the categories of art, politics and (individual and collective) healing because they recognize that "creative democracy" (Dewey 1939) is a project that pervades all manners of encounter and is resonant in all aspects of daily life (whether recognized as such, or not).

While Laderman Ukeles and Piper initiated the co-creative projects; the works that came to be could not have emerged without each and every agreeable *and* disagreeable contribution from everyone involved. This is similar to the way *Holding Ground* unfolded. Within such projects, creative conflict is inevitable; one can even say that the conflict is a sign of change. Consensus doesn't preclude sharp divisions in opinion; participation does not automatically reveal and/or result in political agency. Cultural democracy is after all quite different than the democratization of culture, as Baz Kershaw reminds us.

Citing Owen Kelly (author of *Community, Art, and the State: Storming the Citadels*), Kershaw suggests that the "democratisation of culture is a hegemonic procedure that aims to cheat the mass of people of their right to create culture, and that conspires to hold them in thrall to their own uncreative subjugation" (1992, 184). Rather than assume a paternalistic posture imposing (certain types

of) culture, cultural democracy begins with the assumption that even "ordinary" people are more than capable of shaping their own creative explorations and expressions. This radical shift in the approach to collaborative practice recognizes that the contributions of each and every person will affect the politics, ethics and aesthetics of the artwork. Dialogical art isn't a project of bringing culture to the masses; it is an interdisciplinary engagement and creative experimentation in which "the people participate in and even control cultural production and distribution" (Haedicke and Nellhaus 2001, 14), whose vibrancy is most felt at the nexus between politics and the symbolic.

Working with his students to explore playwright David Mamet's model for action-based aesthetics and educator Jim Mienczakowski's ethnodrama framework, author and communications scholar Norman Denzin suggests that: "Meaning is lodged in performativity […]. Each performance event becomes an occasion for the imagination of a world where things can be different, a radical utopian space where a politics of hope can be experienced" (2003, 41). Accentuating the symbolic, even when enacting ordinary gestures, is a deliberate strategy to support the development of "compassionate intelligence" as a cultural goal (Cobb 1998, 107). Each handshake extended by Laderman Ukeles, each calling card proffered by Piper, each gestured offered and accepted within the *Holding Ground* space, impacted social space (both interpersonal and political), albeit through an intimate dialogic exchange with one person at a time.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE SENSUOUS IS POLITICAL

I still remember the flight to Montreal from Ben Gurion International Airport in the fall of 1984: seated to my right was a Jewish man wearing a crocheted *kippah*, and on my left, a Palestinian from East Jerusalem. I was leaving Israel because I had experienced a profound sense of deception after seeing levels of discrimination and oppression against Palestinians that I could not accept. The Zionist ideal that I had grown up with no longer made sense. The gap between what I had learned as a child and what I witnessed living in Jerusalem was simply too great. I quit my job and relinquished the lease on my apartment. I was returning to Montreal, aware how Quebec itself was marked by a history and a culture of two solitudes.

Taking advantage of the situation on the plane to see if I could glean any understanding that had hitherto escaped me, I addressed the men sitting on either side of me. I asked them both the following question: “Could you please tell me what you learned at home and in school about the way in which Israel as a State was formed, and why it came to be?” To be clear: I was asking for what they knew to be factual information, not their opinions or interpretations of what happened or why.

For the remainder of the flight I listened as my fellow passengers recounted the histories they were taught. To say that the three of us were confounded by the differences in the factual details would be a gross

understatement. As we went over events from the past, it became obvious just how differently the “truth” had been constructed.

As each of the men recounted their versions of what they had been taught, the inevitability of the clash between the two peoples became increasingly apparent. So did the likelihood of things getting a whole lot worse before they would get better. I could feel a mounting dread as I envisioned the continued impact of these vastly different narratives.

Although I didn’t know it at the time of my enrolment in the Humanities PhD program, I have come to understand that my motivation for pursuing my doctoral studies was, in large part, linked to my experiences in Israel/Palestine and the intimate dialogic exchange on the plane years ago. As I write, I find myself considering the link between this cycle of research-creation with the question that was ever-so prominent growing up: “Is this good for the Jews?” Driven to figure out what to personally make of this question, I see now that the work I initiated over the past years has been a way to shape the kind of Jew I am, and want to be.

And How Shall Our Hands Meet?

In the summer of 2006 as the invasion of Lebanon by Israeli forces was unfolding, former US Secretary of State, Colin Powell was invited to Montreal to speak during a fundraising dinner in support of the Jewish National Fund and in favour

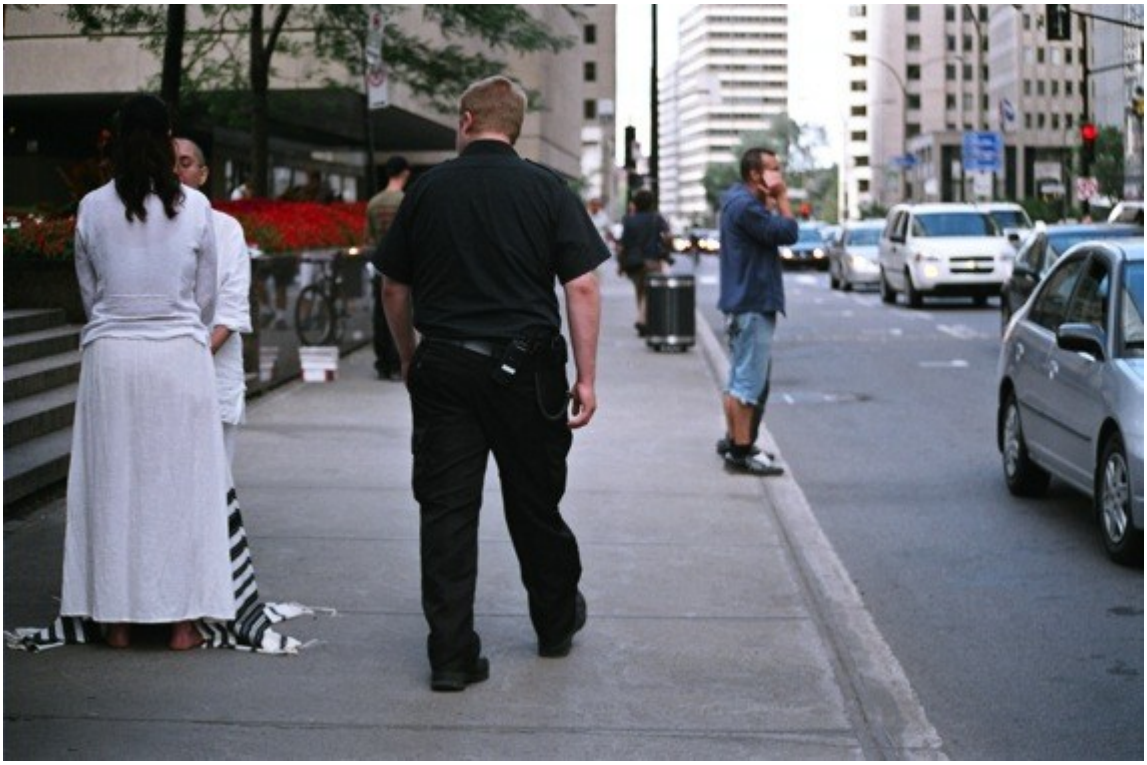
of stronger international support of Israel. Amidst the hundreds of demonstrators protesting Powell's visit and the Israeli-invasion, artist Tali Goodfriend and I stood on the street in front of the entrance to the Queen Elizabeth Hotel (where the talk was taking place), bathing each others' hands with Lebanese olive oil in a performance called *And How Shall Our Hands Meet?* For three hours, barefoot and wearing all white, Tali and I continued this gesture in silence until the crowd began to disperse. Louise Lachapelle mediated the contact with the passers-by and took photos of the live art event.[9]

As previously mentioned, the presence of a camera inevitably alters live art performance. The changes that occur, which may make it more or less likely for people to interact (depending on their personal comfort level with being photographed), have to be weighed against what having a photographer around can make possible. Tali and I opted to have the performance documented for three reasons: Firstly, we recognized the legitimacy inscribed in the act of public photography that offered us a sense of both protection and agency within what was a rather confrontational context. Secondly, knowing that Louise was documenting the event allowed Tali and me to be present with each other, the gesture, the situation, and (the energy of) the crowd. Finally, the photographs are now in circulation, extending the act of performing solidarity with the intention of contributing to ending the conditions of apartheid in Israel/Palestine.

[9] Tali, Louise and I carefully negotiated our positioning on the street with Place Ville Marie's security force as soon as we arrived so that we would not have to deal with the threat of being asked to leave.

Tali grew up in the Arava desert in Israel and currently calls Montreal home. Her experience as a child of war and, later on, the personal loss of a brother in a Palestinian suicide bus bombing, sparked the deep need to understand and effect change. Like me, Tali has been creatively exploring the process of mourning and the affirmation of wellness in the face of cultural oppressions and related traumas. The shared healing gesture during the three-hour protest organized by Tadamon! and other Palestinian solidarity grass-roots collectives connected our involvements with peace efforts in the Middle East.

The beauty of the experience was not without its suffering. The pleasure of the prolonged skin contact, of our hands touching and the green gold viscosity of the oil, matched the back pain and exhaustion arising from hours of exposure to the asphalt and the energy of the crowd screaming for the justice they desired.



Nearing the end of the demonstration, Tali and I filled up ten small glass bottles with the oil that we warmed and energized through our continuous contact and offered these freely to people who had been part of the demonstration in one way or another. We explained that although the Lebanese oil, gifted to us by a Lebanese shopkeeper on St. Laurence Boulevard, was of edible grade, it should not be used for cooking (given our handling of it during the performance).

People's reactions fell into one of several categories: many were troubled and seemed to try to make sense of what they were seeing without attempting to

make contact verbally; some spoke with Louise who was able to give a sense of the context and intention motivating this work; still others looked away or didn't appear to notice what was happening.[10] What was particularly noticeable was the curiosity that children expressed toward what we did. Some youngsters gathered around and stayed for quite a while as their parents were milling about.

A number of individuals expressed their discomfort and confusion about the intervention. One woman for example, was quite upset that she could not tell from our gesture how we were positioning ourselves in the generally polarized debate. She repeatedly, and with increasing intensity, asked: "Whose side are you on?"

Unlike the almost certain reactive clarity of political rhetoric, the symbolic realm—as activated within this live art performance—is challenging and nuanced. The openness is deliberate; it is a necessary element, if the work is to be successful in inviting critical reflection and opening creative dialogue.

When live art performances are organized in a way that everyone present can contribute to co-creating the event, the potential for aesthetic experience to bridge the gap between disparate political and ideological positions is increased. Fostering somatic awareness and emotional connectivity improves the chances of this happening. The kind of "genuine conversation" that can emerge from dialogic performance (Conquergood 1985, 5) however, can never be taken for

[10] Amongst the framing devices that we used to was the *tallis* that draped the makeshift table upon which we put the bowl of oil. On the one hand the traditional prayer shawl served to identify Tali and me as Jews. On the other hand, given that women do not wear the *tallis* within Jewish Orthodoxy, and in all branches of Judaism, the *tallis* is rarely, if at all, used as a decorative item, its presence and specific use was deliberately odd, if not provocative. The *tallis* that we used is my own; it happens to be the same kind of *tallis* that my father uses.

granted or even expected. Amongst the challenges, beyond the personal risk-taking—is whether the encounter will be successful aesthetically, as a work of art. One danger with intentionally activist projects is that focus of the event becomes too narrow and didactic.

> The dream of a suitable political work of art is in fact the dream of disrupting the relationship between the visible, the sayable (sic), and the thinkable without having to use the terms of a message as a vehicle. It is the dream of an art that would transmit meanings in the form of a rupture with the very logic of meaningful situations. As a matter of fact, political art cannot work in the simple form of a meaningful spectacle that would lead to an "awareness" of the state of the world. Suitable political art would ensure, at one and the same time, the production of a double effect: the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification. In fact, this ideal effect is always the object of a negotiation between opposites, between the readability of the message that threatens to destroy the sensible form of art and the radical uncanniness that threatens to destroy all political meaning. (Rancière 2004, 63)

The tension that Rancière speaks of is not prescriptive or predictable. While some of the responsibility for creating and maintaining the nuances that permit each individual to complete the work, according to her or his own experience, is

held by the professional artist convening the event, each person present, contributes to shaping what is possible. Rancière's creative conflict needs to be considered anew with each event, especially given what is at stake for the individuals involved and for the cultural project of challenging the status quo.

Uprooted

One year later, in mid-June 2007, Tali Goodfriend and I once again took to the streets, this time in association with a coalition of protestors denouncing Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian land. For several hours, walking in front of a marching crowd of about 1000 people, we carried an uprooted olive tree through the streets of Montreal. The demonstration began in Dorchester Square (across the street from where the Israeli embassy was at the time). The route of the walk took us east, along St. Catherine Street, and ended in front of the Federal government offices in the Complexe Guy-Favreau.

The longer we walked, the more the tree's roots dried out and the more intense the flower-scent grew. Not being able to procure a Mediterranean olive tree, Tali and I purchased a Russian olive tree, which was the closest thing we could find in the local Montreal nurseries. The thorny branches cut deep into our flesh. As we walked and our backs and arms began to feel the fatigue, the tree seemed heavier and heavier. When we got to Guy-Favreau, several women spontaneously came to help us.

Both images were taken on Saturday, June 9, 2007. Photo credits this page: Louise Lachapelle

Janice Arnold, Staff Reporter for the *Canadian Jewish News*, covered the event. In addition to mentioning all the political appointees who "marched against Israel," Arnold singled out the artistic interventions:

> Walking in front of the marchers were artists Devora Neumark and Tali Goodfriend, dressed in black and their faces veiled, who carried an uprooted Russian olive tree, symbolizing, they said, the displacement of Palestinians. The marchers stopped in front of Place des Arts to set up a mock roadblock. Three people in army uniforms forced three others wrapped in Palestinian flags face down onto the pavement.

The mock roadblock set up in front of Place des Arts is visible behind Tali and me.
Photo credit: Louise Lachapelle

After the march, Tali and I (along with help from friends and strangers who happened to pass by) planted the tree in Dorchester Square. Despite an initial period of shock, the tree took well to its new home. Some anonymous person even came by and placed a tree stake support system to help it grow straight. The tree survived its first winter and bloomed again in the spring. It was removed the following autumn when major renovations to the park began.

* * *

As I did with *Holding Ground* above, I will now situate these live art events within a broader (art) historical context. Amongst the performance works that have inspired me the most, which have been created by Palestinian artists responding to the Israeli occupation are Mona Hatoum's *Them and Us… and Other Divisions* (1984), Emily Jacir's *Where We Come From* (2001-2003), and Raeda Saadeh's *Crossroads* (2003).

Them and Us… and Other Divisions

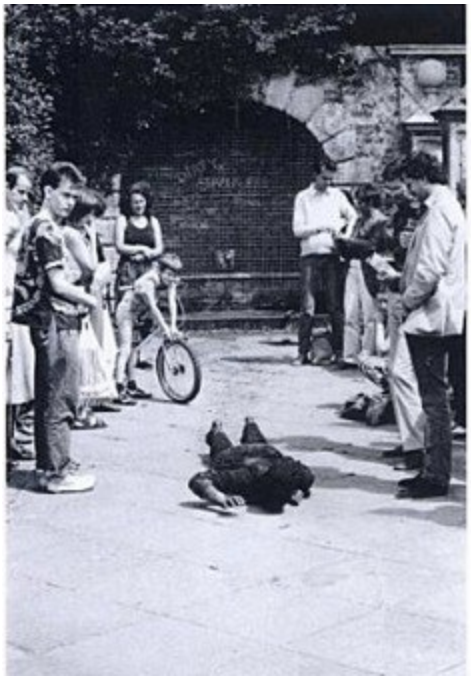
Originally from the Galilee region, Mona Hatoum's parents were forced to flee their home along with most of Haifa's Arab population in April 1948, when armed Jewish combatants began their attacks. Born in Beirut, she, along with the rest of her family, was denied Lebanese citizenship. "As a result, the feeling of not quite belonging to the society in which she lived ingrained itself into her existence early on" (Ohlin 2008, unpaged). *Them and Us . . . and Other Divisions* is as much a

visceral reminder of Hatoum's personal diaspora and struggle as it is a call for co-existence amongst nations and peoples of different origins. I wrote the following poetic verse in response to documentation of this work, when considering how the sensuous is political.[13]

concrete surface sore against uncushioned flesh
muscles straining to recall a once fluid movement
dormant horizontal ambulation
painful dislocation
crawling in public

Mona Hatoum's *Them and Us… And Other Divisions* was performed amidst a noonday crowd of bemused on-lookers in London, England. Prone and masked for the duration of the event, Hatoum's crawl "protested against the dangers of racism and questioned deep-rooted assumptions about the very categories that divide people into 'them and us'" (Ankori 2006, 127). The gesture's physical demands and sensual immediacy are what make this work still so resonant nearly thirty years after it was first performed. The radical political cogency of such a work is not bound by the date of its enactment however much the live experience cannot be repeated exactly or even conveyed accurately through image and analysis. Any still, or even video, image of the work is already a reading, which fixes the moment(s) and distils it from the felt experience of the artist and onlookers. And yet, something of this event continues to resonate beyond the actual lived experience. The memory/history of this work is recalled

and activated within the larger discussion of resistance. Art historian Gannit Ankori writes: “In her early performances Hatoum embodied the two major stereotypical roles that the West attributes to Palestinians: the role of ‘terrorist’ and the role of ‘victim’. In this work, Ankori argues, “Hatoum portrayed the threatening ‘other’ only to undermine her alleged aggression and expose her actual vulnerability” (2006, 126). This work is as cogent aesthetically as it continues to be inextricably bound to the political process of undoing projections of the other as enemy.



The images of Mona Hatoum’s 1984 “Them and Us… And Other Divisions” live performance as they appear on p. 127 of Gannit Ankori’s book, *Palestinian Art.*

Where We Come From

In her two-year project *Where We Come From* (2001-2003), Emily Jacir used her US passport to access zones within Israel and the Occupied Territories. During this time she responded to requests related to family and to home that were proposed to her by internally displaced and exiled Palestinians. In response to this work, I wrote:

gestures of longing and (not) belonging conjured up by
others
conflating *them* and *me*
'If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine,
what would it be?'
whose memory resides in *my* body
distances still unbreached

Ordinary actions, memorial deeds, physical interactions with people, places and things whose access is denied were doubly embodied. Commissioned by the Al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, this work would no longer be possible as Palestinians with foreign passports are no longer permitted access to Gaza. Access is increasingly impossible for Palestinian holders of foreign passports and internal travel documents even within the West Bank.

To complete this work, Jacir first traveled across Palestine carrying out the wishes of the project participants and photographing her activities. The resulting images were then subsequently exhibited along with documentation of the

original requests. The traumatic dislocations of Jacir's project participants were thus differently established in time and place. Their past and their home(land)s came into presence through Jacir's proxy; yet the inaccessibility of once familiar scents, textures, sights and sounds was made all the more evident.

Go to my mother's grave in Jerusalem on her birthday and put flowers and pray.

I need permission to go to Jerusalem. On the occasion of my mother's birthday, I was denied an entry permit.

- Munir
Born in Jerusalem, living in Bethlehem
Palestinian Passport and West Bank I.D.
Father and Mother from Jerusalem
(both exiled in 1948)

Notes: When I reached the grave of his mother, I was surprised to see a circle of tourists surrounding a grave nearby. It was the grave of Oskar Schindler…buried next to a woman whose son living a few kilometers away is forbidden paying his respects without a permit. There were many graves that had smashed crosses and sculptures of the Virgin Mary destroyed. The caretaker of the cemetary told me that Jewish extremists had raided the cemetary and desecrated many of the graves. He showed me the ones he fixed.

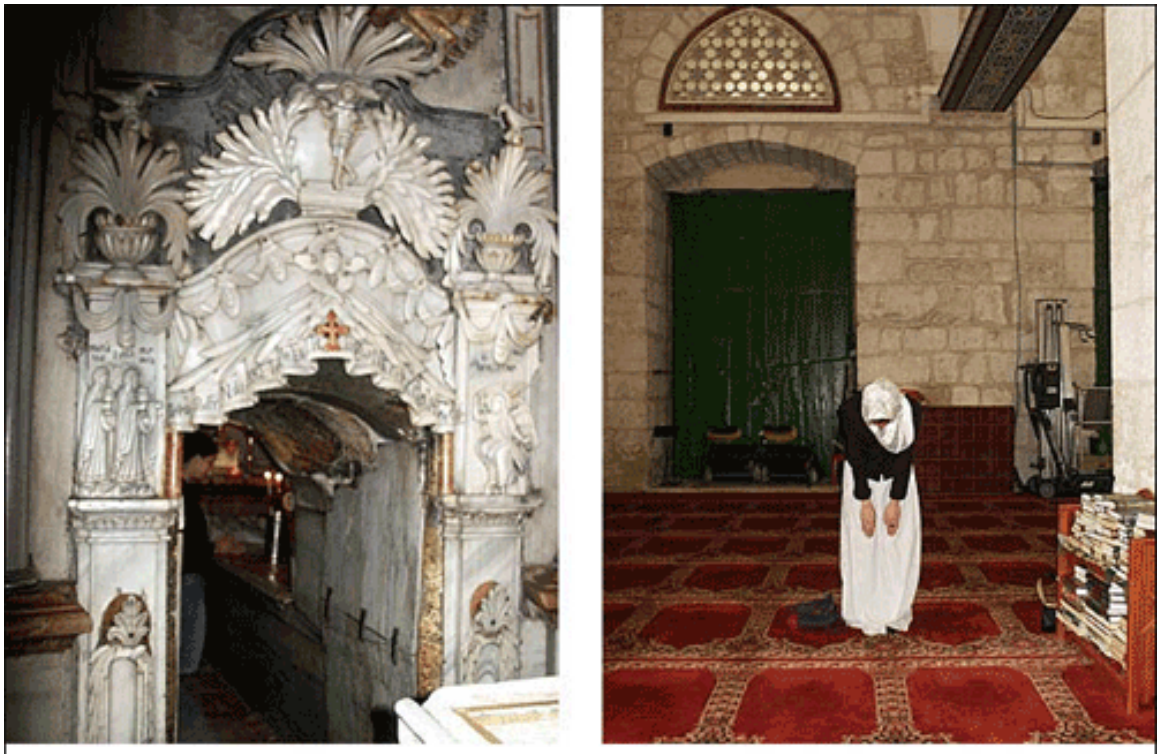
زوري قبر والدتي يوم عيد ميلادها و صلي و ضعي الورود على قبرها.

كنت بحاجة لتصريح للذهاب إلى القدس في يوم عيد ميلاد و الدتي، و لكن تم رفض منحي التصريح.

- منير
من مواليد بيت لحم، و يعيش في بيت لحم
جواز سفر فلسطيني/هوية ضفة غربية
الأب و الأم من القدس
(نفيا عام ١٩٤٨)

ملاحظات: عندما وصلت قبر والدته فوجئت برؤية مجموعة من السياح يحيطون بقبر قريب. كان ذلك قبر أوسكار شندلر، الرجل الذي يرقد الان بجوار السيدة التي لا يستطيع ولدها المجيء لزيارتها بدون الحصول على تصريح. لقد وجدت العديد من الصلبان و تماثيل السيدة مريم العذراء محطمة. قال لي حارس المقبرة إن مجموعة من اليهود المتعصبين هاجموا المقبرة والحقوا الدمار بالعديد من القبور. لقد أراني الحارس الصلبان و التماثيل التي أعادها إلى مواضعها

Where We Come From—Munir, October 2001-2003. Photos and text: Emily Jacir



Go to Jerusalem and light a candle on the grave of Christ in the Holy Sepulcher Church and then go to al-Aqsa Mosque and pray to God to ease the pressure and help those who are needy in both places.

I have been denied entry into Palestine since 1991.

- Ghassan
Born in Gaza City, living in Amman
Jordanian Passport and Gaza I.D. card
Father from Lid and Mother from Jerusalem
(both exiled in 1948)

إذهبي إلى القدس لإضاءة شمعة على قبر المسيح في كنيسة القيامة، ثم إذهبي إلى المسجد الأقصى وصلي إلى الله، كي يخفف المعاناة و يساعد هؤلاء المحتاجين في كلا المكانين.

لقد منعت من الدخول إلى فلسطين منذ ١٩٩١.

- غسان
من مواليد مدينة غزة، و يعيش في عمان
جواز سفر أردني و هوية غزّة
الأب من اللد و الأم من القدس
(نفيا عام ١٩٤٨)

Where We Come From—Ghassan, October 2001-2003. Photos and text: Emily Jacir

Jacir's performance of (symbolic) nearness was also a performance of (practical) distance. In the space between Jacir and the Palestinian exiles that shared with her their wishes, which were subsequently realized in their country of origin, is both the yearning to relinquish the longing for home and the challenge of doing so under occupation. In this work, as in Mona Hatoum's *Them and Us*, it is the stranger's burden to activate the political through intimate encounters.

Currently living in New York and Ramallah, Emily Jacir is deliberately vague about where she was born. In a February 2009 interview with The New York Times reporter Michael Wise, she went as far as answering 'no comment' when asked about her place of birth. In "trying to heal the wounds suffered by her grandparents' generation" (Ankori 2006, 217), Jacir's artwork addresses the legacy of displacement and the tensions inherent in a life of exile. Live art performances such as this one, which implicate story, gesture, and sometimes objects, are one of many cultural expressions bearing witness to the dislocation of the Palestinian people and of women's resistance to the occupation.

Crossroads

Evidence of both the oppression experienced by Palestinians and their refusal to submit continues to accumulate as human rights groups and artists alike bring experience and imagination together in shaping new narratives of home under occupation. Amongst the more frequently told stories is about the decision to stay

or to leave, a decision most often made under duress (Khalidi 1992, 2004; Azoulay 2010; al-Azza 2012).

The momentous choice is forever interrupted and suspended in Raeda Saadeh's (2003) self-portrait, *Crossroads*. With suitcase at her side and house door ajar, Saadeh stands glaring at the camera in front of her home, one foot encased in a cement block. Writing a poetic interpretation of this image brought me closer to the physical and affective state I imagine Saadeh to have inhabited, and indeed continue to inhabit as the psychological trauma of forced displacement does not dissipate immediately upon departure.

lodged at the threshold
no leaving / entering
Palestinian woman
stuck yet defiant
concrete sharpness against bone and skin

Wherever Saadeh might be heading is elusive. This uncertainty is made ever more pressing, eclipsed as it is by the experience of immobility. And yet . . . the immobility is crafted as a moment of art and, as such, paradoxically points to the agency of this artist and by extension all those whose movements are suppressed. It is these encounters between the political and the sensual and between the real and the symbolically real that attest to the performativity of art in the struggle for personal and collective empowerment.

Crossroads, Cibachrome print (2003). Photo credit: Raeda Saadeh

Raeda Saadeh was born in Umm Al-Fahem, a Palestinian urban centre located within a short distance of the Israeli port city of Haifa. She was educated at the Jerusalem-based Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design and currently teaches there in the Department of Fine Arts. Her life as a Palestinian in Jerusalem “is

one of several states of occupation and contradiction: a concrete wall, fences, checkpoints, curfews, stone barriers and also a home, a language and cultural and social expectations" (Cestar undated, 37). In these interstitial spaces of life and performance, the potential for resistance is reinforced even as certainty is replaced by "what if?" Pediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott's "'potential space"—the creative possibility located between external and internal realities and "between the individual and the environment" (2005, 135)—is a useful conceptual framework here. This liminal space as defined by Winnicott helps us to understand and appreciate what's at stake in the space between history and memory as shaped by migratory aesthetics.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE JOURNEY DWELLING CYCLE AND THE ETHICS / AESTHETICS OF INCLUSIVENESS

Communications scholar Norman Denzin suggests that rather than continue to practise art for art's sake "the current historical moment requires morally informed performance and art-based disciplines that will help people recover meaning in the face of senseless, brutal violence" (2003: 7). Two collaborative live art projects that I initiated within this research-creation cycle—*Why Should We Cry? Lamentations in a Winter Garden* (2008) and *homeBody* (2009)—can be read as responses to the current moment in which senseless, brutal violence impacts the experience of home. Overlapping personal and political zones of experience these collaborative performance art events inquire into the ways in which interdependence reinforces the mutuality of identities and thus support the recovery of meaning.[14]

Why Should We Cry? Lamentations in a Winter Garden

Beginning with the fall equinox and ending on the winter solstice 2008, Ottawa-based artist Deborah Margo and I invited individuals with experience of displacement to publicly share their culturally-specific mourning songs and personal contemplations about migration, home, and beauty. Hosted by the DARE-DARE artist-run centre, which supports innovative research-creation

projects and critical inquiry, these gatherings (held in Cabot Square Park at the corner of Atwater and Sainte-Catherine Streets in downtown Montreal) explored the processes for coping with the loss that often accompanies the disruption of home. We emphasized the power of collective public singing and shared storytelling to influence "psychological wellbeing" and "social reconstruction" (Unwin, Kenny and Davis 2002; Zelizer 2003; Stein 2004; Urbain 2008). We affirmed a central role for lamentation songs, vocal explorations of mourning, and the sharing of narratives related to the (un)making of home. Our intention was to leave open the possibility for people to explore and name for themselves how the terms *beauty* and *home* make sense given their own experiences of displacement (lived personally or handed down from previous generations).[11]

Welcoming the fall equinox, our first lesson was enthusiastically led by Pierre Junior Lefevre. Junior generously shared his experiences of living in Haiti, where he worked as a policeman, and his first weeks in Canada living in detention after seeking refugee status. Junior decided to teach us *Wi mwen se Haitien…* in Creole. Unfamiliar to the rest of the group, he patiently helped us to form these "new" words with frequent translations into French so that we could know their meaning. Through song, we were transported to Haiti and to the realities of the poverty and homelessness, so familiar to Junior. Photo credits: Jean-Pierre Caissie

[11] Quebec's Bouchard-Taylor Commission was an important socio-political motivation and context for this work. Deborah and I deliberately invited a process that questioned the very framework of the binary "us" and "them" that underpinned the "reasonable accommodation" debate. Another inspiration for me personally was Erin Manning's *Ephemeral Territories: Representing Nation, Home, and Identity* (2003), in which she explores the social, political and cultural problematics of being at home in Canada.

The familiarity Deborah and I had with the Jewish chronicles of displacement including *The Book of Lamentations* was a common starting point. Nevertheless, we did not enter into this project assuming an a priori or unchanging definition of beauty and home, nor did we assume a homogenous potential for beauty in the personal and communal healing process. While affirming a central role for lamentation songs, vocal explorations of mourning, and the sharing of narratives related to the (un)making of home, our intention was to leave open the possibility for people to explore and name for themselves how the terms *beauty* and *home* makes sense given their own experiences of displacement (lived personally or handed down from previous generations). Even so, Deborah—the daughter of Holocaust survivors—and I did not hide our own experiences of familial deracination. Our relationship to the subject, and by extension to each of the other participants in the project, was overtly proximate. We were perceived as insiders, familiar with the dynamics of dislocation and cognizant of the ways in which the construction of narratives matter both personally and politically.

During each *Lamentations* event, Deborah and I invited four different communication procedures aimed at establishing the conditions within which people could bear witness to their own and others' experiences. Improvisational vowel toning warm-up exercises and the more formally structured teaching/learning and listening/singing of songs in different native and immigrant languages, which the participants spoke and taught (including Creole, Spanish, Latvian, Mandarin, Anishinabek, and Inuktitut). These were complemented by stories shared in the talking circle and informal conversation over hot drinks, fruit,

and sweet snacks. In addition to accounts of the impacts from colonial occupation of Turtle Island, the Acadian deportation, the Shoah, the Nakbah and the partition of India, people referred to their forced migrations from Haiti, Mexico, Lebanon, Latvia, China, Chile, Peru, Poland, and Algeria.

The group dynamic changed each time a new person joined or someone left—in many ways echoing the social dynamics within the communities of origin and the communities displaced individuals attempt to become part of. The difficulty to find individuals willing to take on the role of teacher and the uncertainty of their showing up speak volumes about the precarity of recent refugees and immigrants. Those who did return, and there were several that came multiple times, spoke of how vital an experience it was for them. Several women, who quickly became regulars, ended up bringing a large drawing they made together after having been inspired by the project.

Three members of the Community Mission MILE-END brought this gift with them when they arrived for the session on 19 October 2008 after having participated in the previous session. Photo credit: Devora Neumark


On 2 November 2008, after doing our voice warm-ups outside, we settled in for the lesson within the DARE-DARE trailer. We took our time to become familiar with the history of Jasmine's family in Latvia and her personal association with the song she chose to teach us. We learned the song and felt the sounds of a new language in our mouths. The conversation then turned to the question of nation states, borders and the Canadian government immigration policy. Photo credits: Jean-Pierre Caissie

Although we had determined certain parameters for the project, Deborah and I deliberately left the structure flexible and loose trusting that other participants would take ownership of the process if they felt comfortable to do so. While we initially shared the facilitation between us, it didn't take long before others offered to lead the warm-up sessions, distribute food, videotape the proceedings, and play instruments to accompany the teachers/learners in song, etc. People assumed these responsibilities spontaneously and autonomously, extending and altering the process—and even the structure—of the *Lamentations* project. It became apparent that the emergence of this voluntary responsibility, shared amongst the group members, served to make the group more cohesive and coherent. For some, this participation was not incidental to the process of exercising leadership, especially amongst those who were grieving the loss of home. As these individuals assumed a place for themselves within the group

equal to that of Deborah's and my own and felt that their contributions were useful and appreciated, they shared more of their personal experience and felt increasingly at ease.

Photo credit: Devora Neumark

Photo credit: Jean Pierre Caissie

By 23 November 2008, Cabot Square's trees were leafless and the cold was settling in. It was time to move indoors and so we decided to try out the Atwater Metro station's entry at Atwater and St. Catherine Street. When we arrived we discovered many of the park's inhabitants keeping warm, including members of the Inuit community we have had the chance to meet since the summer when we started visiting DARE-DARE in its new location. Emilie Monnet, who had agreed to teach this time, is of Anishinabek descent. At her invitation, Odaya member Lisa Gagne of Saulteaux descent and Moe Clark, a young Métis singer-song writer originally from Calgary brought their hand drums and joined the group.[15]

After we had completed our session, an elderly woman who lived in the park and whom we had met on several occasions, picked up Emilie's drum and began to strum and sing. There were several tense moments as Emilie

considered how best to respond to this spontaneous act since according to tradition, the drum, given its sacred status, cannot be handled by anyone under the influence of alcohol and it was clear that this woman had had a drink or two not long before. In the end, Emilie chose to not interfere. Afterward, Emilie continued to question whether she made the right decision to respect the relationship with this woman, rather than follow the cultural custom and practice.

When we arrived the following Sunday, we found no signs of Cabot Square's Inuit community, who had participated so actively the week before. In their place, two police officers sat in their parked car on the winter grass, close to DARE-DARE's trailer. When asked, they told us that they were keeping away "undesirable traffic." It was clear that the police thought they were doing us a favour. We repeatedly explained to them that we did not need their protection and that, in fact, we would prefer that everyone would be able to participate. Our efforts were in vain; the cops stayed close by the entire session.

With a great deal of frustration about the situation, we turned our attention to Jing, who had attended a previous lesson several weeks earlier. Jing had graciously accepted our invitation to teach us a Chinese song and had asked her 13-year old daughter Fan Qi, to accompany her on keyboard. With the support of her French teacher, Christine, Jing had prepared a song sheet in advance (complete with the Mandarin text, pinyin phonetic translation, and a French translation). This particular lesson was quite challenging. We were fortunate that Jing was a focused and gentle teacher. As this was the first time a Chinese language was being broken down for most of us syllable by syllable, we needed

lots of practice to become familiar with new meters of speech and unfamiliar pronunciations. At first a slow process, a momentum gathered allowing for a sense of accomplishment as we sang together for the last time.[12]

All photos this page: Jean-Pierre Caissie

[12] Other singing instructors included Diego, who on 5 October volunteered one day to teach us Luz Casal's song "Piensa en mi." Diego provided a nuanced reading of this Mexican classic by questioning the high drama often associated with love and challenging the tendency towards victimhood. He spoke of his own experiences of being on the receiving end of violence and hatred, which led him to flee his birth country and about the power inherent in affirming even this most difficult of experience as a connective life process. Lysette, who had never sung on her own in public before, joined us her two children on 19 October. She taught us two songs in Spanish (José López Alavés' Canción Mixteca and La Martiniana by Andrés Henestrosa). In the last half-hour of this session, Pierrot, who self-identified as a "vagabond" played a number of tunes on the guitar he had brought with him With no fixed address, and no worldly possessions save his acoustic guitar and songbook, Pierrot travels throughout Quebec, seeking out places where he can exchange a song for a meal or a place to stay the night.

All photos this page: Jean-Pierre Caissie

The dynamic involvement, rather than passive spectatorship, of each of the individuals involved which created a sense of commonality also reinforced the singularity of each person's contribution. Gradually it became obvious how important these relational dynamics were to the mourning process on the one hand and, on the other, to the experience of a more robust sense of belonging. Over time, a sense of compassionate, non-judgmental responsiveness developed amongst the participating individuals as we each gave voice in speech and song about the challenges related to moving from place to place.

> Music is often seen to unite us, and also to promote our self-awareness and self-esteem, mutual tolerance, sense of spirituality, intercultural understanding, ability to cooperate, healing—to name but a few. Above all, there is a recurrent conjecture that music can enable people, somehow, to "get inside" each other's minds, feel each other's suffering and recognize each other's shared humanity—that is, in common understanding, to have *empathy* for each other. (Laurence 2008, 14)

As we shifted from one communication process to another it became obvious how much the music (both the wordless harmonics that resulted from the vowel warm-up explorations and the lamentation songs themselves) was integral to the experience of consolation that was shared amongst the participants. Moreover, the process of teaching/learning, the sharing of personal narratives, and the casual exchanges over tea and snacks provided a diversity of potential opportunities for empathic exchange. Each one of these opportunities served to reinforce the positive aspects of what was shared and explored in the other. As such, while music was what ostensibly brought people together, what seems to have strengthened the affective bonds between individuals of such differing ages, cultural and linguistic heritages, educational backgrounds and experiences with migration was the combination of song and the public articulations of traumatic experiences intimately recollected amongst relative strangers. Although at times awkward and even disjointed, the transitions between the warm-up exercises, talking circle, formal singing lessons and informal conversations, could be understood as mirroring the halting and less-than-fluid process involved in the passage between displacement and making home anew.

Seamon proposes a spiral-like figure to chart out the different stages of the journey to dwelling cycle.

The seven-stage process, as drawn by Seamon, appears his 1985 essay "Reconciling Old and New Worlds" (229). Of particular interest is the significance Seamon gives first to the sense of place (midway between the third stage, journey and arrival, and the fourth, settling) and only later to the establishment of social connections (midway between the fifth stage, becoming at home, and the sixth, coming together). From what I know of my family's experience in Canada, these two nodes were actually inversed; the connection to people came before the identification land. Only in association with Israel, did land precede community connections, and even there, the sense of identification with the Jewish community was a primary factor in settling and becoming at home.

Seamon cautions us to not read this diagram as a description of fixed and discrete processes:

> Ultimately, the stages of the dwelling—journey process, especially after arrival, are not separate in time but overlap. Settling, for example, continues into the stages of becoming at home and coming together, just as the latter may continue into the stage of creating community or happen even as the person begins to settle. In short, the dwelling—journey process is fluid and experientially does not show the precision that the spiral at first suggests. (1985: 240)

The stories shared during the different *Lamentation* gatherings echo Seamon's notion of overlapping between stages. Indeed, for most participants, the dwelling—journey cycle continued to impact their lives in complex ways long after they became "settled" in their new home. Several participants described feeling challenged by the pressures they felt (from others and internally) to "get over it" and "move on" especially since they could not imagine the mourning over home's loss to end.

Oliver Sacks suggests that people can borrow from the flow of music to bring flow into their own experience when they are otherwise incapable of doing so.[16] The rhythms of music can liberate movement physically and emotionally especially as music is associated with parts of the brain that are responsible for activating procedural and emotional memory as distinct from knowledge or event memory that so often is disrupted as a result of traumatic experience. Further, as Sacks has found through the use of magnetic resonance imaging of brain activity, music has a wider distribution than verbal language (Hargreaves and North 1999; Konecni, Brown, and Wanic 2007). With the music opening the flow of emotion, it can help us move past the numbness to bring mourning into an active state so that the grief can first be recognized for what it is and subsequently be processed and integrated to allow for a renewed connection with and celebration of life.

A certain solace was possible because of the strength in numbers, especially as destabilizing current local and world affairs impacted many of the participants directly. Protests in Barriere Lake (located four hours north of

Montreal) aimed at holding the Quebec and Canadian governments responsible for honouring the groundbreaking agreements signed in 1991 giving members of the Algonquin First Nation joint management of their traditional territory and acknowledging their traditional government and the Israeli “Operation Hot Winter” military campaign in Gaza for example, led us to discuss the ongoing colonial oppression of the people’s indigenous to Turtle Island and Palestine. A denied immigration application for the wife of one of the *Lamentations* participants raised questions about Canadian Federal immigration policies.

On a more personal level, individuals who participated in the *Lamentations* project affirmed that making home anew (materially, spiritually and emotionally) was a complicated affair. Language was mentioned as a particularly challenging locus of transition. Differences in food also figured prominently in the discussions about the journey—dwelling cycle.

With significant input from the project participants who wanted to mark the winter solstice event in a special way, Deborah and I designed a sound installation that we temporarily installed in the park. In lieu of a live singing session, excerpts from all the different audio recordings accumulated from the beginning of the project could be heard simultaneously from the listening posts we set up around the park. Burlap bags containing miniature MP-3 players were hung on selected trees.

Despite a major snowstorm, Deborah and I decided to go ahead with the solstice event. Photo credit: Jean-Pierre Caissie

Andrew Harder, sound technician for the *Lamentations* project with the burlap bags containing the MP-3 players prior to their installation in the park.

Walking through the park, it was possible to hear one or more of the audio tracks, depending on one's position. Photo credits this page: Devora Neumark

We lit a fire in a metal fire pit purchased for the occasion (with prior permission from the City of Montreal and Montreal's fire department). Pakuluk, one of the Inuit park dwellers who had been so present during the session in the Atwater metro, and who had been watching us from a distance ever since, helped get the fire going. Emile Monnet and Lisa Gagné showed up with their hand drums. Photo credits this page: Erwin Neumark

While preparing the fire, Pakuluk talked with me about the importance of hearing the sounds of the hand drum and the songs of Native cultures sung by indigenous people together with individuals of varying other origins back during the session in the Atwater metro station. He said that for once, he and his friends felt they no longer had to feel ashamed of being themselves. As the evening wore on, Pakuluk brought more and more of his friends to join the celebration. This time, the cops stayed at the perimeter of the park and didn't interfere directly with the goings on.

Another participant marked the closing event by creating a drawing in the snow with dried leaves that he brought with him for the occasion, thus closing the circle between the fall equinox and the winter solstice.

This photograph was taken as Diego was preparing his snow/leaves drawing during the *Lamentations* closing event. Photo credit: Jean-Pierre Caissie

homeBody

In the days and weeks following the final *Lamentations* event, I was inspired to continue exploring beauty, home, and the power of participatory public art. In the context of Concordia University's Faculty of Fine Arts' launch of two art research spaces in February 2009, and in collaboration with Montreal-based artists Reena Almoneda Chang, Meena Murugesan and Emilie Monnet, I endeavoured to create a framework within which a self-selecting group of mostly strangers could open the possibility of further investigations into notions of home and beauty.[17] Having worked with Reena, Meena and Emilie individually on other projects and knowing of their interest in this subject, I invited them to join me in this research-creation process.

Reena Almoneda Chang is a movement artist and educator who draws from her performance and community work on the transformation of grief due to forced displacement through dance and the creation of contemporary ritual.

Reena Almoneda Chang during the *homeBody* opening sequence.
Photo credit: Geneviève Fortin

Meena Murugesan, of Tamil descent, self-identifies as an Indo-contemporary dancer, documentary filmmaker and community arts educator committed to working towards personal and social transformation.

Meena Murugesan placing stones during the *homeBody* opening sequence.
Photo credit: Geneviève Fortin

Emilie Monnet (as mentioned in the preceding chapter) is of Anishinabek heritage and a member of the Odaya singing/drumming troupe.

Emilie Monnet during the *homeBody* opening sequence.
Photo credit: Geneviève Fortin

We sent out word inviting others to share choreographed and improvised movements, storytelling and song in the *matralab*.[18] As with the *Lamentations* project, the importance of bearing public witness in *homeBody* was crucial to the work's aesthetics and ethic. "History cannot be held privately. No one person 'owns' a story. Any one story is embedded in layers of remembering and storytelling. Remembering is necessarily a public act whose politics are bound up with the refusal to be isolated, insulated, inoculated against both complicity with and contest over claims to ownership" (Pollock 2005, 5). With each telling, memories become dislodged both for the teller and for those listening. Reena Almoneda Chang suggested (in an email to me, dated 15 April 2009):

> This type of inquiry more accurately reflects the "real" world, which is not a controlled environment. The inquiry is not only the domain of the researcher, but of others participating in the experience. Inquiry becomes a group process, and therefore more multi-dimensional, drawing from a larger pool of experience and perspective. That it is performative or live means that the inquiry benefits from the heightening of creative tension/flow and energy that comes with performance, therefore opening more windows in the senses through which we can understand and process information and different multiple realities.

Speaking about the overlapping story process and its multi-effect for all involved, Emilie Monnet, shared the following thoughts with me:

> In the collective story, there are so many layers to home and by sharing, they all resonated with me. I felt the suffering and pain from everyone's story about where one is at home in the body, in the land, etc. There is baggage from everyone, suffering within each person and that made the story collective. I could relate to this and felt that it connected us: I felt a kinship with everyone. (7 April 2009)

Having created a safe-enough environment within which the professional artists and self-selecting guest participants could risk publically engaging in reflective practice meant that each person's contribution became resonant in some way for the others in attendance.

Writing about performance, German theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte affirms: "Aesthetic experience and liminal experience ultimately coincide due to the workings and effects of the autopoietic feedback loop. The liminal situation is not only a result of the experience of elusiveness, generated by the permanent, reciprocal transitions between subject and object positions. Rather, every turn the feedback loop takes must also be seen as a transition and hence as a liminal situation" (2004. 177). As is evident in the following excerpt from the verbatim of my April 7, 2009 conversation with Émilie, there is a strong correlation between interactivity and precarity:

> For me the participative aspect was new: it felt like I was stepping out of my comfort zone. Although in the *Why Should We Cry? Lamentations in the Winter Garden* project that I took part in on two occasions there was that aspect, I felt in *homeBody* this component was more present. The wall was safe, the wall was strong, something that I could take my strength from. I was also aware of the impact that the wall had on people. The experience became more communal more accessible and collective when we stepped away from the wall and changed the format to a circle. I felt more vulnerable and I think that is good.

On the first evening we had oriented the room so that much of the activity took place against the far wall of the *matralab*'s black-box theatre space. People mostly sat facing the wall as if it were a stage. During the second and third *homeBody* sessions we rearranged the setting and worked entirely within a circle format switching between one large inclusive and two concentric circles.

Moving from the wall to the circle was a provocative shift for Meena as well as can be inferred from her email dated April 14, 2009: "I think it's really the sharing aspect that I found the most challenging and altering." In response to a question about what new learning had occurred during the *homeBody* events that I posed to all three women in the weeks after the event, Reena wrote:

> Doing this project I discovered another way of sharing my dance with the public that is not 'performance' based in the Western concert tradition, but rather in which movement and the way of being in the body is less formal, less focused on projecting outwards towards an audience and also less insular because of the desire to interact with others in a spontaneous manner.

This more fluid exchange process led Reena to learn new things about other cultures and the seemingly generalized acceptance of ghosts in her own Filipina/Chinese culture (as she mentioned during *homeBody* and confirmed in an email exchange dated April 15, 2009).

Likewise, the following exchange between *homeBody* participants and myself points to the performativity of bearing witness and being witnessed by others. Marilou began this exchange during the event by speaking about being thrown into a body of water without her consent:

> It was so dangerous be home in that body that I had to pull myself out of myself, dislodge myself from my body, or at least my mind as I usually know it, and in that state I could live in my body in a completely different way that was about being there, really being there with the fish. That was the biggest struggle because it was so unfamiliar and in no time I would swallow more water and they had to pull me out. But I was very happy because I had a glimpse of what it was like to step outside of one frame of

> consciousness. It was then that I realized that I didn't have only one state of consciousness or one frame of reference but that I could actually embody more than myself: that I could step out of my way and get into the fish. (17 February 2009, verbatim)

Not long after, I received an email from another participant named Janet, in which she about how to get in touch with "the Asian woman who was at one with the fish."[19] I immediately wrote back to Janet:

> […] Taking note of your interest in getting in touch with the woman who was at one with the fish, I sent off an email to her indicating that you would be happy to be in contact with her and provided her with your email address so that she could get in touch with you directly. (21 February 2009)

Marilou wrote back to me shortly thereafter:

> Indeed, it was in the telling of the story that I recognized my oneness with the fish. Back in the ocean, it was both happenstance and my survival. But now, I take great delight in knowing that I can be remembered as "the woman who was (at) one with the fish." (22 February 2009)

What is particularly significant about this exchange is that the discovery and understanding of experience extended beyond the actual framework of the event. The connection forged within the short time continued through an email exchange that was evidently significant to both Janet and Marilou, albeit for different reasons.

Marilou speaking during the homeBody event on 17 February 2009.
Photo credit: Geneviève Fortin

The risk to speak of one's traumatic experiences can seem somewhat easier in the company of others who are also willing to disclose personal information and reveal themselves emotionally (Schutz 1964; Stein 2004; Laurence 2008). "When group members validate each other's stories and songs of past sorrow, it resembles the witness's role in a testimony" affirms postcolonial literary specialist Kimberly Wedeven Segall (2005, 138). In part the possibility of opening one's

heart within the context of art projects such as *Why Should We Cry? Lamentations in a Winter Garden* and *homeBody* is present because the people who bear witness to the sorrow and the hope are in fact mostly strangers.

The stranger factor worked in the following two ways: knowing that others who would not ordinarily be present in one's life carried one's story lightened the burden of disclosure. The burden of the witness was also lightened. Furthermore, sharing one's experience in public amongst a circle of strangers provided participants with the sense of being part of something larger than ourselves and thus lent legitimacy to one's experience within a greater socio-cultural and political process of meaning-making. As with *Holding Ground* and *Lamentations*, the risks taken during *homeBody* in sharing one's life experience in public was possible because the memories, feelings, and thoughts that arise during such projects are able to be given attention in symbolic form thus easing the risk of disclosure, even towards oneself.

Writing of the need to release strong feelings related to cycles of violence through the practices of rituals, songs, public storytelling, and funeral laments in Africa and the Middle East, Wedeven Segall states: "Cultural performances incorporate these emotions into a larger narrative in an artistically-bound controlled form, which can work toward social healing" (2005, 139). Not all of the *Lamentations* and *homeBody* participants had as immediate and intense experiences of violence than what Wedevan Segall recounts. Nevertheless, the fact that these projects were framed as artistic events, seemed to have provided a sense of safety that contained and channelled the oft-times strong emotions

arising as we shared songs and difficult stories. In addition to the activation of individual potential creativity, what emerged from the temporary collective served for some as a new schema of healthy co-existence in the face of their need to re-establish a sense of self and place within Canada (whether indigenous to Turtle Island or not).

Eastmond (2007. 254) finds that displacement "often does entail a radical break with familiar conditions of everyday life and requires the re-negotiation of self in relation to new contexts." And beyond tracing the history of how material culture has been recognized as a key component of self-actualization, anthropologist Pauline Garvey proposes that "banal routines located in the home are fundamental in understanding the relationship between domesticity and self-identity." Garvey emphasizes "transience over permanence, insignificance over investment." She also suggests several other key elements in the beautifying process, including spatial and material order and placement and attention to the social and material routines of house maintenance and decoration (50-53). Citing Giddens, Garvey asserts that the coherence of self-identity is "achieved through continuous revision" (56). I find it useful to overlay both Eastmond's and Garvey's assertions: becoming familiar anew is a process that requires repetitive actions and purposeful activity.

This is certainly true for Meena Murugesan, who spoke to me following the *homeBody* series about gardening, cooking, cleaning, and the process of hanging decorative fabrics on the walls of her apartment:

> I move every year so home is not related to any particular geographical place. Home is more in the gestures. […] I think that for cultures such as mine that have lived through colonization and displacement there does have to be a certain kind of resilience and beauty making. The *beauty making* is definitely, definitely, definitely, definitely linked to establishing a sense of home.

For individuals whose sense of coherence has been interrupted, the recurring, and sometimes cyclic, attention to and reorganization of objects in one's home is particularly meaningful and productive in the process of not only making anew a consistent (sense of) home but also making a consistent (sense of) self. The crux of beauty-making's significance is *in the making*: the processual nature of beautification can affect the way in which forcibly displaced individuals relate to the loss of their ideological homes and operate within the material culture of the built environment.

While not referring directly to Third Realm beauty, philosopher Kathleen Marie Higgins' arguments linking beauty and political activism are quite relevant to this study. Higgins suggests that rather than consider beauty "at odds with political activism because it is not a directly practical response to the world," politically motivated movements have "much to gain from beauty." Furthermore, she suggests that while "it may be insensitive, at times, to luxuriate in aesthetic comfort while human misery abounds […] the mesmerizing impact of beauty may, even in miserable conditions, rekindle our sensitivity. […] The condition of

contemplating beauty is essential to the total economy of political engagement" (283). Higgins goes on to identify five core concepts relative to beauty and political engagement to do with the how beauty impacts our human capacity to recognize and develop moral insight; teaches us to be mindful of nuance; and plays on our willingness to confront our own worst fears.

In articulating her second concept Higgins states: "our political commitments are suspect if they cannot survive confrontation with beauty" (283). Furthermore she claims that: "If one's political commitments are not themselves submitted to reflective reconsideration, they may come to function as fixed ideas, guiding action, but unresponsive to changing circumstances" (283). Here Higgins points to, but stops short of, asserting what I think may be (Third Realm) beauty's greatest potential, that is the lesson about ephemerality and indeterminacy that beauty offers especially at this particular threshold of ecological crisis and multiple populations transposition (mammalian, fish and flora, etc.) currently being experienced worldwide.

Weighing in about the need to re-define the notion of beauty, Janet Wolff proposes: "If aesthetics can be re-thought as the debate about value after the loss of certainty—a 'groundless aesthetic'—then the return to beauty has a different look" (2006, 154). Exploring the concepts and experiences of Third Realm beauty and home as conditional, contingent and context-determined is in keeping with the theoretical underpinnings of migratory aesthetics. Such is the ethic and aesthetic of both *Lamentations and homeBody*. Moreover, the live art events carried out within this cycle of research-creation including *Lamentations*

and *homeBody* (as well as *The Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* series presented below) affirm that the radical significance of sharing personal stories in public is that the practice of personal narration becomes a culturally and politically cogent way of (re-)writing and (re-)reading the history of colonialization and settling.

CHAPTER SIX: THIRD REALM BEAUTY AS A (DELIBERATE) VECTOR OF VIOLENCE

Both beauty and home are categories that are constructed by cultural norms and individual values. They delineate the boundaries of belonging and by extension, mark the limits of their opposites: ugly and alien/alienation (Cvetkovich 2003; Nuttall 2006; Kaplan 2007). Figuring out how a sense of home in the aftermath of forced displacement can be achieved without an accompanying homelessness for others is something that continues to preoccupy me. Thirty years have passed since I first noticed how the cycle of violence is perpetuated through historical constructions and cultural transmission. I am as concerned as ever about the psychological and social mechanisms that lead trauma victims to become perpetrators of violence.

Storytelling and the cultivation of Third Realm beauty can, on the one hand, strengthen intracultural alliances; on the other hand, such practices can, and often do, increase (and serve to justify) retaliatory behaviours. My analysis of how story and Third Realm beauty function in the process of making of home anew in the aftermath of forced displacement would not be complete without at least a brief overview of how both story and Third Realm beauty—while vital in sustaining communities—are also be used to perpetuate fixed identity reflexes stemming from the need to survive displacement and other personal and communal assaults.

> If aesthetics are a starting point to ethical citizenship, it is worth remembering that starting points do not necessarily lead to their destinations and that the path from aesthetic perception to democratic sensibility is not always a straight one. Even when links between aesthetics and justice seem secure and predictable, subjects whose emotions and instincts are quickened by beauty, often fail to arrive at their moral destinations, their ethical baggage misplaced and their capacity for civil obedience lost along the way. (Castronovo 2007, 28-29)

Russ Castronovo is an English professor and author of many works dealing with aesthetics and race. In one of his seminal works about aesthetics and democracy, he cautions against assuming a universal standard for beauty and reminds us of the power inherent in the attempts to assert any such one. While not focused on the specific case of Third Realm beauty, Castronovo's cautionary analysis can be appropriately adapted to this study. "Not *sensus communis* but *sensus conflictionis*: aesthetics are a battleground in which judgment incites violence" (2007, 54: italics in original). Indeed, all too often Third Realm beauty becomes a vector or target of violence. In so doing it collapses all distinction between the private and the public and permits, condones and encourages political, religious, economic and social ideologies to be activated as weapons in the cultural realm. Aesthetic ideologies emergent in and through this process, in turn, permit, condone and encourage individual and collective behaviours that would otherwise not be tolerated within the domestic sphere and civil society.

Writing about how “people who have experienced displacement as a result of war use theatre and performance as part of an effort to continue to survive, rebuild their worlds and resist violence” Thompson, Hughes and Balfour suggest that “these practices provide a means of (re)creating cultural identity in a new context, asserting identity based on ‘traditional’ or home identity and a space from which to observe and comment on radical social disruptions” (2009, 78). They continue:

> With the destruction of the specific locality and network that previously made such activities meaningful, cultural practices risk becoming deadened, fixed forms. They may also generate archetypes, images and symbols upon which hopes of return can be pinned and imagined. These practices sometimes express a simultaneous yearning for what is lost and what is not yet real, as well as a performative act that makes one’s identity visibly material and more rooted in the impermanent new context. (82)

In such cases, aesthetics is exploited as weapon (intentionally or not) and thus incites a new cycle of wounding. “*Doing with* as opposed to *done to*” (Castronovo 2007, 113: italics in original): the difference between recognizing beauty’s force and asserting the force of beauty.

> It is easy to see how beauty too can be ‘borrowed to lend’ ideological positions a certain aura. Beauty’s search for purpose is, therefore,

> comparable to pain's search for objects. […] If pain searches for objects – and in being attached to them serves to give them 'realness' – can beauty, in searching for purpose, be similarly attached to both noble and vile intentions?" The history of the aesthetics of Nazism, as well my experience of performances in more contemporary war zones, suggests that the answer would be an unequivocal "yes." (Thompson 2009, 147)

Tragically, the Nazi era was not the only, and most recent, instance in which Third Realm beauty and story became vectors of violence. The imposition of fixed values and standards is crucial to keep in mind as we consider what's at stake at the nexus between individual activation and appreciation of both Third Realm beauty and narrative in the face of home's loss.

Castronovo's study of the ways in which story and beauty enacted racialized hatred and oppression of African Americans is a powerful indictment of white cultural supremacy (2006 and 2007). Keeping Castronovo's analysis in mind, I will focus on two other instances in which one group's desire for home and security ended up creating homelessness and torment in another. The legacy of colonialism in both Israel/Palestine and Rwanda includes the many ways in which aesthetic ideology and fixed cultural narratives continue to play important roles in the victim to perpetrator dynamic.

As during the Nazi regime, in both Israel/Palestine and Rwanda, the displaced, dispossessed, disinherited and annihilated are considered less than human. Therefore, whatever violence is enacted upon them is not considered

acts against humanity. In order for this degradation to happen, mechanisms activated collectively, within the public sphere, and individually, within the personal psyche, have to be engaged so as to construct the other as inhuman. Writing about the way that shame is implicated in the high frequency of victims who end up becoming abusers, clinical psychologist Carl Goldberg suggests: "the rage and violence that victims of shame display are desperate messages to try to convince themselves, as well as others, that they are not as unprotected and powerless as they experience themselves to be. Consequently, fierce reactions to being shamed and not recognizing its effect can cause a vicious cycle of uncontrollable emotion" (1991, 70). All too frequently, individual and collective shame in the aftermath of violence "from domestic abuse to political terror" (Herman 1992) is a primary trigger for the perpetration of violence.[13] "Shame always relates to others—it marks one site in which we have been by formed by the look and the presence of others" (Shotwell 2007, 128). I contend that construction of ideological narratives provides the rationale for the deliberate activation of Third Realm beauty as a vector for assault.

Although a full analysis of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and the Rwandan genocide are beyond the scope of this thesis, working with several examples characteristic to the history and current events playing out in Israel/Palestine and Rwanda, I aim to demonstrate the role of story and Third Realm beautification

[13] Given the intersubjective nature of shame, it can also be used a deliberate anti-racist strategy as Carleton University Professor Alexis Shotwell points out in discussing Adrian Piper's *My Calling (Card)*. Shame can create "spaces for alterities that may suddenly redelineate the margins of the self." In such cases, rather than act to dehumanize, "the feeling of shame indicates a particular view of the other in question: that other is viewed as capable of shaming, hence of being seen and being seen as a person" (2007, 135).

processes acted as motivation, justification and normalization of these shame reactions, which would otherwise be unconscionable.

“Death to Arabs” Scrawled on the Wall

The violation of home, perpetrated by Israeli soldiers during the 2008-2009-winter invasion of Gaza, as documented in the photograph taken by an Associated Press reporter is one example. Aware of how graffiti has been used by Israelis to mark territory and proclaim hatred toward Arabs (as discussed below in my analysis of *The Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* series of live art events, which I initiated within this cycle of research-creation), I was immediately drawn to understanding the circumstances behind this particular image. The desecration of the Palestinian house can be read both as a marker of occupation and a deliberate attempt to render ugly what is obviously a carefully tended and beautified home. Here in addition to the words “Death to Arabs” scrawled on the interior wall of a Palestinian home, the Hebrew graffiti self-identifies the IDF’s Givati Brigade occupiers of this Palestinian house in Gaza during the Israeli “Operation Cast Lead”. The date (6 January 2009) marks the third day of the ground offensive.

This image of the graffiti scrawled on the interior of a Palestinian house in Gaza during "Operation Cast Lead" was posted on Y Net News.com, 30 January 2009. Photo credit: AP

One news report stated: "Alongside the operational activities, army commanders stressed to their soldiers how important it was to protect the Palestinian property, and instructed them to refrain from unnecessarily damaging civilian infrastructures" (Greenberg 2009, unpaged). Perhaps not surprisingly, soldiers felt entitled to desecrate the walls of the home they squatted during the military offensive given the subtle and overt cultures of gentrification, appropriation and occupation of housing that began even before the declaration of the State of Israel.

According to the same news report, "the Israeli Defense Forces is still searching for the soldiers who scrawled 'Death to Arabs' inscriptions on wall in

Gaza's Zeitoun neighborhood" (Greenberg 2009, unpaged). To this day, there has been no public announcement about the results of this internal army search.

This photograph documents a specific and blatant instance of asserting public territorial "rights" through the violation of the domestic interior of what was obviously a carefully constructed sense of Third Realm beauty. Other instances of the ruin of Palestinian homes as an outcome of Jewish homemaking also exist. Of the many examples I could unfortunately draw upon, I will focus attention on the creation of Canada Park (located in the West Bank) and the landscaping of Highway 6, as they are exemplary of how the application of "political aesthetics" (Sartwell 2010) implicating Third Realm beauty—concomitant with the continued promulgation of the Zionist narrative—has become an all too effective avenue for the perpetration of violence.[14]

Canada Park

The Jewish National Fund (JNF) is a quasi-governmental, non-profit organization, which was founded in 1901 at the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel with the aim of acquiring land as part of the greater scheme for the colonization of Palestine. The program of land reclamation and forestation continues even

[14] Two other examples of the (un)making of home that are beyond the scope of this document are: the process of establishing Israeli settler outposts, which links to the Hebrew term for beauty (*chanan*) that refers to "place of warmth, love, friendship, community and sustenance" particularly in association with temporary encampments and ancient nomadic tent circles (Benner 2007: 141); and the Israeli practice of Palestinian house demolition in East Jerusalem, Gaza and all along the Security Barrier.

today. By 2007, the JNF owned 13% of the total land in Israel/Palestine, which is purchasable or available for lease only to Jews, except under certain specific circumstances (and only as of 2007).[20] JNF has been active in land reclamation projects such as afforestation, water conservation, and land development for Jewish use.

This forestation and reclaiming of land is part of the historical and ongoing conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. For example, Canada Park, located in the West Bank, was established by the Canadian branch of the JNF following the 1967 (Six-Day) War and intended to serve as a picnic area for Israelis coming from Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Taking advantage of its charitable tax status, JNF Canada raised $15 million in order to build Canada Park (under the leadership of Bernard Bloomfield of Montreal, then President of JNF Canada). The park was built on top of four Palestinian villages: Dayr Ayyub, destroyed in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war as well as Amwas, Yalu and Beit Nuba whose residents were forcibly expelled during the 1967 (Six-Day) War.

While it would be comprehensible for people to see “natural” beauty when visiting the park, I classify the park as an instance of Third Realm beauty—“the domain, in brief, of *beautification*” (Danto 2003, 68: italics in original)—at least by the standards set by the Park’s designers, donors and visitors whose notion of the beatification of Israel includes seeding North American conifers (that require vast water resources to keep alive).

The Jewish National Fund welcomes visitors in Hebrew only. None of the tens of signs at the park mention the existence of the Palestinian villages that existed in the area of the park until 1967. Photo credit: Zochrot.

Canadian support for this project was not only a matter of individual tax-deductible donations; former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker affirmed Canadian national backing by officially opening the park in 1975. Given the significance of the infrastructure relative to Third Realm beauty, it is important to point out that the road leading to the Park (located west of Jerusalem and slightly to the north of Highway 1, which runs between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv) was named for John Diefenbaker and remains so even today.[15]

[15] This is particularly troubling in light of how Hitler regarded the highways he had constructed as "aesthetic monuments" as detailed by historian Frederic Spotts: "Their divided roadways, generous width, superb engineering, environmental sensitivity, harmony with the countryside, tasteful landscaping, cloverleaf entries and exits, sleek bridges and overpasses, Modernist service stations, restaurants and rest facilities were in advance of road systems anywhere else and presented a model for the world" (2002, 386).

The "Separation Barrier"

In 2005 an Israeli activist working for Palestinian justice took me on a driving tour of the Israeli West Bank separation barrier, which when completed, will be approximately 700 kilometers long. We retraced our route again in 2008 on both sides of the barrier so that I see for myself what changes were wrought in the intervening years. I wanted to see how the Wall was impacting the lives of both Jewish Israelis and Palestinian Arabs.[16] For example, on the Palestinian side, I noticed how the 9-meters high concrete wall literally dissected Palestinian houses in half or reduced them to rubble in several places as it wended its way through villages and towns in a seemingly random path.

In fact the route of the separation barrier is not all that random: the barrier sometimes runs along or near the 1949 Jordanian-Israeli armistice line—popularly known as the "Green Line", but is diverges in many places by anywhere from 200 meters to as much as 20 kilometers to allow for the inclusion on the Israeli side of settlements and water sources (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2011, 24). With most of the barrier set in the West Bank, many Palestinian towns and individual Palestinian houses are nearly, if not entirely, encircled by it. Along with the demolition of the houses themselves is the wanton obliteration of the objects and things contained therein. Often, people are given very short notice before the bulldozers arrive.

[16] Israelis often call the separation barrier the "anti-terrorist" fence, while Palestinians refer to it as the "racial segregation" wall.

A Palestinian girl fleeing with some of her family's belongings during a March 2012 demolition in the village Jiftlik, within the Jericho Governorate in the West Bank. Photo credit: Jordan Valley Solidarity.

In addition to the forced displacement that has occurred as a result of barrier's construction, Palestinians are also left homeless "as a result of home demolitions that have taken place to construct apartheid roads" (Ma'an 2008, 43). Driving along Highway 6—another of the "apartheid roads" with restricted access to Palestinians—my guide pointed out the way in which the concrete barrier around the cities of Tulkarem and Qalqilia is landscaped so as to appear a benign "sound barrier" completely with drip-irrigated plants, trees, grass and bushes.

In some stretches the Wall is so well camouflaged with greenery that it was next to impossible to know of its presence, even if actively looking out for signs of its existence. Could this be a benign intervention within the realm of Third Realm beauty applied to embellishing the Israeli landscape? While it would be comforting to think this is so, the policies and practices of the occupying

forces in Israel/Palestine compel us to see it for what it is: the use of Third Realm beauty as a (deliberate) vector for violence.

"The Israelis seek to naturalize the Wall; the Palestinians refuse to beautify it, which would imply its acceptance. For the Israelis, it is another form of 'double vision' in which they see only the Israeli national political imaginary in which no Palestinians are present. For Palestinians, the Wall is covered with messages and calls to solidarity" (Apel 2012, 207). Hiding the Wall behind highway landscaping devices is part of the deliberate obfuscation of the reality that Palestinians have been living with since the construction of the Wall began. With the security barrier nine-meters high in places, Israelis could easily be(come) oblivious to the destruction and loss.

The Problematics of Aestheticizing the Wall

Less invisibilizing, but still contentious, are the attempts by internationals to call attention to the Wall by painting murals along the surfaces accessible to Palestinian inhabitants still living along its path. In at least one instance the intention has been to soften the impact of the barrier's presence for the children of the Aamer family, whose house is surrounded on all four sides by one form of the barrier or another, effectively cutting it off from the nearby Palestinian village of Mas'ha.

Hani Aamer, father of six, lives with his wife Munira. The Wall facing the house was built in 2003. Abutting the back of the house is the Israeli settlement Elqana. Photo credit: Richard Wainwright


Hani Aamer unlocking the gate he and his family has to use to enter his property. The door must be locked at all times except when exiting or entering the property. Only the Israeli army officials had a key when the gate was first installed; now the Aamer's are responsible for locking themselves in and out. Photo credit: Richard Wainwright

Over two consecutive years (2004-2005) Susan Greene and other members of the Californian-based non-profit “Break the Silence Mural and Arts Project” along with Aamer family members and friends, painted an outdoor mural on the interior of the Wall facing the front door of the Aamer house. To this day, the mural remains unfinished, since permission could not be obtained from the Israeli military police to complete it. When I visited the Aamer family in 2005, Hani, Munira and their children took pains to describe all the ways in which their relationship to “home” has been disrupted. They, however, also spoke about their acts of resistance. One such act was to take the leftover paint, which was to have been used to complete the mural, to cover the walls on the inside of their house.

The Wall directly in front of the Aamer house with the still-unfinished mural. Photo credit: Break the Silence Mural and Arts Project

In an email exchange with Susan Green (27 February 2013), I found out that the Aamers have requested that she help them paint over the mural. Susan writes:

> In 2011, I returned to visit the Aamers. […] I asked Hani and Munira about the faded mural and offered to return to touch it up. They both said no- they no longer wanted the mural. I was surprised and asked them to tell me what they were thinking. They said that their feelings had changed and now they see the mural as an attempt to make something horrible into something beautiful. They wanted to paint the wall white and invite people to write poetry on the wall. On my last day in Palestine I went back to see the Aamers. I brought many gallons of white paint. Hani and Munira went out into the blazing sun and together painted over the mural their kids had painted six years earlier.

Photo credit: Susan Greene

On a larger scale are the Bansky murals, which have garnered much international attention over the years. Many Palestinians with whom I have spoken are conflicted by the efforts to aestheticize the barrier in such a way. On the one hand, they recognize that international attention is necessary to bolster their struggle; the highly reproducible images make it easier to communicate the fact of their occupation. On the other hand, there is a great deal of concern that the murals neutralize the wall's oppressive presence, as the Aamer's recent decision to paint over the mural indicates.

One of the Bansky images in the Bethlehem area can be seen in sharp relief of piles of rubble and garbage. Photo credit: Islam Hourani

The shaming process that leads people and their institutions in Israel to perpetuate violence by destroying the efforts of others who expend great effort and energy to beautify their home environments is as personal as it is bound up in the politics of colonialism. The colonial effect however, is not only evident in Israel/ Palestine. Indeed, the destruction of Aboriginal homes in Australia and Canada is increasingly being taken up as a key policy debate in both these countries. Rwanda too has seen its share of instances in which the vector of violence has been the deliberate destruction of Third Realm beauty.

Another Wall, Another Hateful Message: This Time in Blood

While preparing to complete Canada's Citizenship and Immigration Pre-removal Risk Assessment, in the hopes of overturning the court's negative decision relative to his application for refugee status, Vincent, an indigenous Twa (who I first mentioned in the introduction to this thesis), shared the following details with me about his life leading up to his arrival in Montreal:

> In April 1994 my father and I managed to survive the Interahamwe that murdered my mother, brother and two sisters by hiding amongst the trees within a nearby forest. The killing took place close enough for my father and me to hear my family's cries as they were hacked to death with machetes. We remained hidden amongst the trees until we saw the 11 members of this killing team leave at which point we made our way to the bodies that were left in pieces. We had no choice but to leave their bodies and make our way to the mountains where we survived for four months hiding during the day and eating what we could find in our night-time forays. When the RPF took control of Nyanza my father and I, along with 18 other people who had also found ways to survive, were taken to the Bugesera Refugee Camp, south of Kigali. My father and I remained in the refugee camp for three months before returning to Nyanza where we were able to find a place to live in the local primary school, which had been reclaimed for housing purposes. After seven months my father managed

to rebuild a small traditional rural house for him and me to live in. It was in this house, which my father built with his bare hands, that he was murdered in 2005 just after giving testimony in the local Gacaca proceedings against two of the eleven Interahamwe team members.

My father's body was in pieces strewn on the ground; his head had been severed from his body and hacked into two pieces. The killers had chopped off my father's feet and nailed each one individually on either side of the entrance to the house. Despite the damage to my father's body I could still recognize him because the two parts of his head were face up and I could see, even despite all the blood, his distinct features including his eyes, which were still open. I also recognized him on account of the clothing that he wore, which I was familiar with. His two arms had been also chopped off from his torso and left on either side.

The letters that were formed from my father's blood were at least 6" high and the words were written on the wall opposite the main entrance to the house: “Vincent Nsengiyumva Niwowe utahiwe gupfa kandi aho uzajya hose tuzagushaka tukubone kuko urwanda ni rutoya.”[17] Passing through the door where his feet had been nailed, I could both see the other pieces of his body and the writing at the same time.[18]

[17] A rough translation of this phrase in English reads as follows: “Vincent Nsengiyumva you are the next to be killed, wherever you go again, we will be able to seek and find you because Rwanda is small.”

[18] The horrors of these offenses have, understandably, left their mark in every aspect of Vincent’s life. His memories as a two-time genocide survivor keep him up most nights. Coming to terms with the multiple traumas have also forged Vincent’s drive to perform as a means of accessing wellness and activating greater communal harmony. At the time of this writing, Vincent’s status in Canada is still uncertain. If the Appeal on Humanitarian and Compassionate Grounds is

The murder of Vincent's father and the post-mortem defilement of his body cannot be disentangled from the desecration of the home that Vincent's father had created painstakingly by hand. The material manifestation of home that was so hard to come by after the first wave of killings in 1994 became the very site of carnage not even ten years later.[21]

The destruction of the domestic sphere (both in terms of family and home) was a key systemic public strategy of annihilation during the genocide and in the retaliation attacks following testimony in the Gacaca process. Indeed, the number of offenses committed against property during the genocide necessitated a special classification within the Gacaca proceedings. While not considered as grave as the acts defined within the other three categories, which encompass the organization of killings as well as causing death or serious bodily harm including rape, the fact that such a category of offenses were recognized within the framework of the Gacaca process, attests to the frequency of destruction wrought deliberately in places that were considered materially beautiful.

"The power of the aesthetic to influence, and sometimes determine, our attitudes and actions has actually been recognized and utilized throughout history and among different traditions" (Saito 2007, 55). As is evident in the examples presented above, communal inclusions and cohesiveness that manifest in the activation of Third Realm beauty, which can promote trust and inspire reciprocity, can also—and all too often do—result in exclusions by inadvertent omission or overt discrimination, bigotry, and shocking violence.

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denied or the Pre-Removal Risk Assessment is negatively evaluated, a stay of deportation to Rwanda will be difficult, if not impossible for Vincent to obtain.

CHAPTER SEVEN: *THE JEWISH HOME BEAUTIFUL*

The intractability of colonialism impacts everything from territorial boundaries and the treatment of indigenous populations to the distribution of wealth and (relative) stability amongst established social relations. The process by which colonization happens, and is resisted, has been the subject of much historical and theoretical review and generally beyond the scope of this writing. In order to contextualize the final series of live art events, that I initiated within this cycle of research-creation however, I will draw attention to the ways in which the creation of the cultural narrative about the beautiful Jewish home contributed to the *Unsichtbarmachung* (rendering invisible)[19] of the colonial effect in Palestine, even in the face of political defiance and artistic challenge (as referred to above in Chapter Four).

Indeed, resistance to Jewish occupation in Palestine began well before the State of Israel was founded. Even then women were particularly active despite restrictions associated with gender roles. "In struggling to protect their villages and stay on the land, women participated in the rural armed campaign as supporters, though some did take up arms. A few fought and died, like Fatmeh Ghazzal, killed in battle June 26, 1936 in Wadi Azzam. She is the first known Palestinian woman killed in combat" (Peteet 1991, 55).

[19] This term is widely used in German discourses related to the making invisible of the contributions and existence of Jews during the Nazi era and of women in patriarchal society. I am using this term because there seems to be no established equivalent term in English language academic discourse.

At the very same historical moment, two Jewish women in North America drafted a script for a theatrical production that ended up helping to construct a powerful communal identity and bi-national concept of home for Ashkenazi Jews in North America and (what was then called) Jewish Palestine.[22]

Betty D. Greenberg and Althea O.Silverman wrote the Jewish Home Beautiful in the 1930s as a response to anxiety about anti-Semitism in Europe and growing concern about Jewish assimilation (Braunstein and Joselit 1990; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). The performance consisted of multiple holiday table settings and foods, traditional songs, and scripted readings. It was presented as the closing event in the Temple of Religion at the 1939-1940 New York World's Fair. This elaborate centre-stage event was set deliberately within the overarching "World of Tomorrow" theme of the Fair—evidently intended to establish the beautiful Jewish home as an important metaphor for modern Jewish identity in North America and beyond. The project united women from the three most prominent Jewish denominational women's organizations—National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, National Women's League, and the Women's Branch of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations (Schwartz 2006, 73)—a significant alliance considering the cooperation that this entailed, unusual at that time, and since.[23]

The 1939 *Official Souvenir Book: New York World's Fair* provides a brief description of the building that housed the *Jewish Home Beautiful*:

> The Temple of Religion is a practical demonstration to the world that America is not only maintaining her invaluable religious liberties, but is also projecting them into her future life. Neither the building nor the ground is consecrated, nor are religious services held here. Endorsed by prominent clerical and lay religious leaders, the Temple serves as a rallying point for all groups to the perpetuation of this fundamental American ideal. (Unpaged) [24]

In addition to this general information about the Temple of Religion, The *Official Guide Book* to the New York World's Fair provides slightly more detail about the fundraising efforts to get the building built and about the structure and interior decoration. Within this companion publication we learn that to "defray the cost of erecting the edifice, funds were solicited throughout the country by the United States Temple of Religion, Inc." (Monaghan 1939, 99). The 50,000 square-foot site upon which the Temple was built was donated by the Fair Corporation. The *Official Guide Book* helps us imagine the setting:

> By way of passage between the administrative offices and a section devoted to the ministers and lay representatives of the three great Faiths, you enter a landscaped retreat, where a fountain leaps above beds of bright-coloured flowers. A special feature of the structure is a cathedral-like porch on which religious pageants and dramas are held. Programs designed to express the value of spiritual things are presented in an

> auditorium which seats 1200 people. […] On the structure's upper façade, which rises to a height of 66 feet, are the words—'For All Who Worship God and Prize Religious Freedom.' This is the basic *motif* of the exhibit. (100: italics in original)

Architecture is never neutral; the built form is both evidence of, and operates on, socio-political and cultural processes. While not (made) sacred, the grounds of liberty relative to religious practice(s) were carefully prepared. Architectural features were intentionally designed to include the masses in the public performance of faith. However, for many of the over one thousand people who were present, *The Jewish Home Beautiful* performance was likely more than an affirmation of religious freedom; it was a declaration of cultural identity and, by extension, a matter of survival.

Clearly, the *Jewish Home Beautiful* touched a collective nerve: one year after the World's Fair performance, the script for this pageant was codified and printed by The National Women's League of the United Synagogue of America. The publication, replete with prescriptive descriptions of festival observance and rituals as well as recipes associated with the food items included in the elaborate table settings, made multiple references to the oppressions experienced by Jews over the ages and the centrality of both beauty and faith to come to terms with these experiences.

As we gaze upon the beauty of this scene, and listen to well-known and beloved melodies, may our minds dwell upon the deeper and more permanent significance of that which is here enacted. We shall then better understand what enabled Israel to weather the pitiless blasts of the storms of the past. We shall then realize that no matter what the circumstances may be, we can make Judaism a thing of joy and beauty for ourselves and for our children. (Greenberg and Silverman 1941, 18)

[…]

In every generation have there arisen those who would destroy us, but the Holy One, blessed be He, hath delivered us from their hands. (Greenberg and Silverman 1941, 27)

The original *Jewish Home Beautiful* Shavuot table as presented in Betty Greenberg and Althea Silverman's 1941 publication (p. 33).

Throughout subsequent decades, wide distributions of this book led to community performances in the United States and Canada. One such production, coordinated in 1946 by the Sisterhood of Temple Israel in Hollywood, California, ended with the Program Chair, Susi Oppenheimer, explaining the purpose of the event: “It is we who can perpetuate the miracle of Jewish survival by so transforming our homes that to our children Judaism means a religion and a way of life that hold joy and beauty” (National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods 1946, 2). Other presentations of the *Jewish Home Beautiful* include the 1945 performance hosted by the Miriam Auxiliary of Ohev Shalom Congregation in Newark, New Jersey; the 1949 production organized by the Mount Zion Women’s Sisterhood in St. Paul, Minnesota; and the one in the early 1940s hosted by the Women’s League in Saint John, New Brunswick.

The *Jewish Home Beautiful* Shabbat dinner table as presented by the Mt. Zion’s Women’s Sisterhood in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1949. (Left to right, Mrs. Max Whitefield, Mrs. Joseph Stein, Mrs. Allen Firestone.) Photo credit: Steinfeldt Photography Collection of the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest

The staying power of the *Jewish Home Beautiful* can be understood, at least in part, on account of how it functioned as a way of taking stock of individual and collective identity(ies) and projecting different, more "desirable" ones. David Cesarani, Tony Kushner and Milton Shain focus on this idea of Jews imagining geographies and communities:

> In modern times the sense of self is not just inscribed upon and engraved by place as an immediately experienced location, a locality. People learn to imagine geographies, to imagine communities that dwell within far-flung boundaries, and to develop a sense of belonging to a place that is an abstract concept, a set of fabricated meanings mapped onto an actual landscape. In times of upheaval these meanings may change fundamentally. (2009, 3)

I propose that not only was the first half of the 20th century, when the *Jewish Home Beautiful* first appeared, a time of upheaval; learning to imagine geographies and communities locally and across the globe was also a matter of staying alive, a process inscribed within culture, but also linked to economics and matters of the state.

To fully comprehend the significance of the *Jewish Home Beautiful*, I think it is necessary to appreciate just how collective community performances were viewed during the first half of the 20th century. In 1917, for example, Louise Burliegh wrote about social art (in the form of masques and pageants) as a

means of nurturing the imagination and the civic participation of recent arrivals from elsewhere.

When Paul Greenhalgh traced the growing political involvement of women through their participation in World's Fairs he argued that: "International exhibitions were one of the first and most effective cultural arenas in which women expressed their misgivings with established patriarchy" (1988, 174). The performance of the *Jewish Home Beautiful* at the New York World's Fair went even further as it was integrated into a non-gender specific venue, thus not being relegated to traditional women's realms. While throughout the rest of 1939-1940 World's Fair the domestic experience of the American housewife was paired with an emphasis on the role of woman-as-sex-object (Greenhalgh 1988), the *Jewish Home Beautiful* was different in that it linked domesticity with spiritual affirmation and cultural agency.[20]

Referring to "the politics of pageantry", Stephen J. Whitfield asks: "How does a weak and often despised minority petition the public for a redress of grievances?' He points to theatricality by way of response, suggesting that American Jews took up the practice of community spectacle in order 'to inspire moral support from the general community" (1996, 221). Whitfield identifies an often-deliberate link drawn between aesthetics and politics when performed through community drama.

[20] According to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the absence of a dedicated exhibition space for women in the New York World's Fair was intentional in order "to achieve here what women had failed to do elsewhere, namely, to integrate women into all the principal categories of the fair" (1998, 126). The problem was that once again women's agency was made invisible and diminished.

We have other, more recent, resources with which to examine this drama. Jan Cohen-Cruz, for example, shows how pageants have been "a tool accessible to people with little other access to power" (2005, 19) and, referring also to the research of feminist historians Cynthia Patterson and Bari J. Watkins, to the ways in which they contribute to the struggle for women's rights and equal power from the very early years of the 20th century. Because of its ability to "reflect numerous ideologies" (Cohen-Cruz 2005, 21), pageantry was particularly well suited to projecting a vision of the beautiful Jewish at a crucial time of transition.

Erika Fischer-Lichte articulates the relationship between popular community theatrical productions with nationalist aspirations as they relate to the Zionist cause. Many of the same themes found in the pageants that Fischer-Lichte analyzes are also found in the *Jewish Home Beautiful*, albeit expressed in more subtle ways. The holiday of Hanukkah for example that was the focal point of *Israel Reborn*—performed on the December 25, 1932 at the Chicago stadium in front of a reported 25,000 spectators—is featured as one of the table settings in *The Jewish Home Beautiful*. While both draw attention to the military victory of the Maccabees and celebrate the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple after its defilement, *Israel Reborn* purposely activated feelings of self-liberation and self-redemption without the help of God (Fischer-Lichte 2005, 161) while the *Jewish Home Beautiful* accentuated how "the miracle of the little cruse of oil lasting for eight days is the miracle of the little Jewish nation which outlived all its powerful enemies" (Greenberg and Silverman 1941, 24). Curiously enough, although Meyer Weisgal's *Israel Reborn* was by all accounts a major success (and has

been the subject of considerable academic study), it was only performed once; community groups such as Congregation Ahavas Chesed in Mobile, Alabama, have produced *The Jewish Home Beautiful* as recently as March 2009.[25]

Images from the 2009 *Jewish Home Beautiful* (Hanukkah table) hosted by the Ahavas Chesed Sisterhood in Mobile, Alabama Photo credit: Congregation Ahavas Chesed

The absence of direct reference to *The Jewish Home Beautiful* in Fischer-Lichte's study is not unusual, but somewhat surprising. Atay Citron, for example, also omits any mention of *The Jewish Home Beautiful* in his 1989 doctoral dissertation "Pageantry and Theatre in the Service of Jewish Nationalism in the US 1933-46".[26] Has the *Jewish Home Beautiful* been so easily dismissed because of its overtly domestic focus? Amongst the scholars who have written about the *Jewish Home Beautiful* only Jenna Weissman Joselit (1990; 1994; 1997; 2003) and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1990; 2003) have sustained significant interest in it.[27] Even in the non-academic realm, *The Jewish Home Beautiful* received only occasional attention. One mention is found in the history of the prominent Montreal Congregation Shaar Hashomayim written by Rabbi Shuchat:

> The Women's Auxiliary probably reached the high point in its achievements during this period. The presidency of Myrtle (Mrs. Edward) Solomon was dynamic and creative. The auxiliary presented 'The Jewish Home Beautiful' in a fashion rarely duplicated elsewhere. This program, which became very popular in synagogues throughout North America, was reproduced time and again in Shaar Hashomayim and elsewhere in Montreal, but never as elaborately as described in the Shaar *Bulletin* of the time. (2000, 126)

The names of the “ladies responsible for the preparations” as well as others who were involved as commentator, musical director, chorus participants—a veritable who’s who of the community leaders at the time. Rabbi Shuchat also refers to the public address given by Dr. Abramowitz: “As long as the Jewish home remained a sanctuary of beauty, the Jewish people would survive” (128) and mentions that a number of the objects used in the table settings were on loan from community members who had brought them from Europe when they migrated.

Despite the non-inclusion of the *Jewish Home Beautiful* in scholarly texts and historical chronologies, the frameworks provided by those who do focus on community spectacles and identity construction are nonetheless relevant here as they help contextualize the aesthetics, politics and ethics of the *Jewish Home Beautiful* and link it to both the project of Jewish Nationalism in the United States and the ideological projection of a Jewish home(land) in Palestine. “Among Jews, the frequent response to any threat to a diaspora homeland is either to merely imagine or actually construct a homeland in Israel” (Kaplan 2007, 89). The *Jewish Home Beautiful* pageant as first performed was very much a product of its time, and, nearly one hundred years later, it continues to shape the experience of domesticity and cultural identity in North America and Israel/Palestine while affirming the spiritual dimension of aesthetics within the Jewish traditions and ritual practices.

* * *

With its emphasis on the quotidian practice of beauty, early productions of the *Jewish Home Beautiful* evoked familiarity at a time when everything and

everyone may have seemed strange. Beauty as experienced at/as home through public, yet intimate, spectacle likely spoke volumes about—and to—the dislocated individuals, the communities they left behind, and those into which were trying to integrate.

It could be said that while the *Jewish Home Beautiful* was performing migratory aesthetics long before the term was coined, such a designation permits us a more accessible entry into understanding how the concepts of beauty and home are interlinked within Judaism and how together they act as markers of (uprooted) identity. As mentioned above, beauty can be found in the earliest Jewish spiritual and philosophical texts, where it is invoked as necessary for live and key in the struggle for survival. Home has also been an important concept in the Jewish Diaspora, most often posited in opposition to the state of *galut*. "The concept galut has always had both a *political* dimension—the perils of statelessness, the disabilities of the alien—and a *metaphysical* dimension: a function of our brief sojourn as human beings on God's earth" (Eisen 1986, xviii: italics in original). Throughout his extensive reading of the *galut* experience, Eisen highlights the well-known and oft-repeated trope of the *Wandering Jew*.

Belonging, for the (contemporary) Jew is linked not only with religious belief but also with the processes of memory and individualization as a People. It is connected to the act of homemaking and the tension between maintaining a sense of separateness from the local culture(s) and assimilation (Bammer 1994; Bennett 2005, 2007; Durrant and Lord 2007).

> The Jewish home, with its memories as historic and venerable, continues practically unchanged in spirit, even in our American atmosphere. Its principles as potent as ever. Now, the American Israelite does not wish to be differentiated from his brother of another creed in all that pertains to citizenship […]. Yet his home is certainly unique. (Isaacs 1907, 857)[21]

Eisen and Isaacs are not alone: when it comes to the issue of home, Judaism has a long history of thriving on the tension between fitting in and alienation.[28]

In 1903 the influential *Jewish Daily Forward* exhorted Jewish immigrants in New York City's Lower East Side to learn and practice secular domestic codes including such seemingly banal gestures as how to eat one's soup and how far to reach for something across the table (Braunstein and Joselit 1990, 21). By 1941 (the same year that the *Jewish Home Beautiful* publication went to press), Hyman E. Goldin was extolling and reinforcing the long-held belief that to be Jewish is to be different in the *Jewish Woman and Her Home*: "The home of the Jew must bear a distinctive character" (1941, 71). Understanding the tension between these oppositional pulls relative to beauty and home helps us see how effectively the *Jewish Home Beautiful* pageant and publication acted to define the

[21] Isaacs continues: "What qualities give it indefinable power? What formative influences are enshrined under its roof to make it one of the chief factors in the Jew's preservation? What subtle magic, even to-day (sic) with so many disintegrating tendencies, invests it with such strength and permanence? […] Need it be surprising, then, if the Jewish home stands for such vital factors [as religion, historical consciousness of the Jewish people, and the unities of family life] that its influence should be so unmistakably reflected in the status of the Jew—in his character, aims, acquirements, ideals? If in the past that home was a preservative, nourishing and shielding the most beautiful virtues, and furnishing examples of domestic peace and purity in ages when courts were dissolute and people were given over to coarse amusements and degrading superstitions, is it to be wondered at that its influence proves so salutary in our era? […] It is more than a mere dwelling, a place to eat and sleep which is often regarded as a synonym for home—it is school, altar, shrine" (1907, 857-861).

notions of beauty and of home for several generations of Jews in North America, and beyond.[29]

When practicing home is also made public, as with the pageant, the emotional resonance is even stronger. Family members as well as strangers become involved in bearing witness to efforts made for (not) belonging as individuals and communities within the larger body politic.

To fully understanding the connections between the aesthetic and political intentions behind the *Jewish Home Beautiful* it is important to keep in mind the historical moment when it first appeared—the forced displacements of Jewish in the *Shoah* and the simultaneous manoeuvrings leading up to the *Nakbah* (as mentioned above). It was also a time when, as noted previously, the issue of assimilation was very much a concern in North America. The following passage from the (1941) *Jewish Home Beautiful* publication attests to this moment:

> Jewish mothers of today have not lost their desire to introduce beautiful pageantry into their homes. But they have turned to foreign sources for their inspiration. The attractive settings offered by our large department stores and women's magazines for Valentine's Day, Hollowe'en (sic), Christmas, and other non-Jewish festive days have won the hearts of many of our women who either through lack of knowledge or of imagination have failed to explore the possibilities of their own traditions. […] It lies within the power of every Jewish woman […] to transform whatever habitation she may occupy into a *Jewish Home Beautiful*. (14)

It is precisely because Jewish women were (made to be) responsible for the home—its aesthetic and/as its role in the inculcation of values for future generations—that domesticity was so charged (Braunstein and Joselit 1990, 23). The *Jewish Home Beautiful* included the following assertions:

> Living as a Jewess is more than a matter of faith, knowledge or observance. To live as a Jewess, a woman must have something of the artist in her. She must have an appreciation for things beautiful and desire to create those beautiful things herself. (1941, 13)
>
> […]
>
> The pageant […] is not presented as a museum piece, as something to admire and then to forget, or merely to recall in conversation. Its purpose is rather to urge every mother in Israel to assume her role as artist, and on every festival, Sabbath and holiday, to make her home and her family table a thing of beauty as precious and as elevating as anything painted on canvas or chiseled in stone. […] It lies within the power of every Jewish woman […] to transform whatever habitation she may occupy into a *Jewish Home Beautiful.* (1941, 14)

The *Jewish Home Beautiful* asserted this dual role of women within the domestic and public spheres because there was so much at stake. This intersection was not without Jewish historical antecedents. Jewish women had participated in the

Religious Parliament of a previous World's Fair held in Chicago in 1893. From April 1895 through August 1899, they had also published an English-language newspaper, *The American Jewess*, which "offered the first sustained critique, by Jewish women, of gender inequities in Jewish worship and communal life."[30] While this newspaper was relatively short-lived, it was instrumental in representing and proposing a new Jewish identity for women—one that unapologetically united religious observance with American national pride and led, at least in part, to the founding of the Women's League in 1918, the organization that eventually published the printed version of the *Jewish Home Beautiful* in 1941.

Other grassroots Jewish women's community groups initiated at around the same time include Pioneer Women (the Labor Zionist women's organization); the Women's American ORT (the Russian acronym for the Distribution of Artisanal and Agricultural Skills), and Amit, "the largest religious Zionist organization in the United States [which] supports religious technical education schools in Israel as well as children's homes and youth villages" (Prell 2007, 306). The following passage from the *Jewish Home Beautiful* attests clearly to the links that were being drawn between establishing home in North America and Jewish settlement Palestine:

> The sixth day of Sivan occurring at the end of May or the beginning of June, ushers in the Festival of Shabuot in the season of fragrant blossoms and budding greens. In Biblical days the agricultural aspects of this

> Festival were expressed by the elaborate ceremony of offering the first fruits of the harvest before the altar in the Temple. In modern Palestine, this significance of the holiday is again prominent. Haifa is the goal of the pilgrimage, and all the colonies of the Emek bring the first fruits of their harvest as a gift to the Jewish National Fund. (1941, 32)

Staking out their positions within the home and the public arena, the authors, performers and audience members of the *Jewish Home Beautiful* did so at a time when there were three main interwoven strands of danger and fear: 1) the systematic state-sponsored extermination of Jews by Nazi Germany, its allies and collaborators; 2) undesirable acculturation within North America at least in the minds of a significant percentage of the Jewish leadership at the time; 3) opposition to the Zionist vision for a Jewish Palestine (on the part of the British and the local Arab population, amongst others). Reading the pageant against this backdrop underscores the very political nature of the community drama within the domestic and public spheres. It also opens the possibility of identifying how (international) economics were entangled not only associated with local consumerism but also through the fundraising efforts of the communities who produced the event and donated proceedings to support the imperialist and nationalist colonizing agendas of building a Jewish Palestine/Israel—which continue even today.

My analysis of the enduring significance of the *Jewish Home Beautiful* would not be complete if it did not also address the issue of collective creative

process and examine how co-creativity and co-performativity function on multiple levels. Note the following passage from the *Jewish Home Beautiful* production specifications: “The tables for the *Jewish Home Beautiful* are arranged so as to be visible from every point in the auditorium. They should be elevated if possible. The audience is seated in a semi-circle so that all tables may be seen” (1941, 67). Clearly, the pageant authors made conscious staging choices to enable a sense of inclusiveness and participation even in the vast hall of the Temple of Religion amongst the 1200 or so audience members. Louise Burliegh, whose ideas were most likely well known at the time, noted that: “The pageant is the most flexible form of dramatic expression. […] Because of its peculiarly adaptable nature, the pageant has manifested more than any other phenomena the desire of the community for unity and expression” ([1917] 2009, 28). As previously mentioned, she also emphasized the political intentions of pageantry and linked emotional impact, activity and participatory citizenship.

The experiences of displacement affect not only the dislocated people, but also the host communities, who also often turn to theatre. And theatre can be used as a conscious tool by the host community faced with absorbing new groups. In these performances “immigrants were the object, not the subject, the agents, of these performances, which sought to mold them into seemingly uncritical citizens” (Cohen-Cruz 2005, 18). But this dynamic is turned on its head when the immigrants themselves perform old and new identities positioning themselves as both *them, and us* and combine theatre and ritual, as was the case with the *Jewish Home Beautiful*.

It is this link between the arts and ritual that Cohen-Cruz writes about when she asserts that: “Community-based performance is on one end of the popular theater continuum, at which the ‘audience-as-community’ is maximally involved in the creative process” (2005, 84). In addition, she points out how deep learning that results from activating both the “right and left poles of the brain […]—that is, the intellectual side through reason, logic, words, and ideas, and the sensory side through the sounds, sights, and smell of performance—[…] is useful for relatively benign educational purposes such as impressing a group’s cultural codes on neophytes, as well as for malign goals like brainwashing” (2005, 18).

Mieke Bal goes even further than Cohen-Cruz when she links performance with memory and performativity with presence (2002, 176) both of which are crucial to the project of establishing home after displacement—through amongst other things the palimpsest nature of meanings attributed to objects, rituals, songs, recipes, etc. “The performance as such is endowed with performative power because the viewer, struck by that power, is compelled to perform through and with the performers. This artificial, contrived performativity that compels participation in the performance is the source of a renewed authenticity, put forward as beautiful in a culture replete with false claims to an authenticity based on myths of origin and tired of beauty’’ (2002, 208). Though not writing about the *Jewish Home Beautiful* pageant, Bal might have well been, so close she is to the dynamics of performance and performativity for both the actors and spectators in this particular community drama.

The interconnectedness between aesthetics and politics is never very far from the (ongoing) entangled socio-cultural project of articulating home(land). In order for a new dynamic to emerge in the Middle East, it is necessary to first understand how profoundly the Jewish home(land) narrative has been shaped by affective, sensorial, and memory-laden performances such as the *Jewish Home Beautiful*. “Art in Jewish life became the charge of the Jewish woman, and her home became the place to exhibit her artistry. The world of tomorrow would include not only a Jewish homeland in Palestine, but also a Jewish home right in the heart of suburban America” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 128) or rather, in terms of the priorities set at the time, “the world of tomorrow” would include not only a Jewish home in the heart of suburban America, but also a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This was emphasized by the physical location of the Jewish Palestine Pavilion right next to the Temple of Religion on the Flushing Meadow Park grounds. According to the New York World’s Fair Official Guide Book, The Jewish Palestine Pavilion contained:

> Various displays [that] portray the work accomplished by Jewish settlers in the Holy Land—the reclamation of swamps, the irrigation of desert wastes, and the cultivation of farmlands. Other exhibits are devoted to historical subjects, the school system in Palestine, and the revival of the ancient Hebrew tongue. Here is told the story of the battle against endemic disease. Examples of arts and crafts are displaced. A series of dioramas depicts “The Holy Land of Yesterday and Tomorrow.” Because of its

> significance as an answer to the charge of unproductiveness leveled against the Jew, the Palestine Exhibit has received the united support of the Jews of America, from whom funds for the project were raised by popular subscription. (1939, 136)

Clearly, the Palestine Exhibit, like the fundraising performances of the *Jewish Home Beautiful* in later years, was an explicit nation-building endeavour.[22] This dynamic was equally at play for people who convened the 2009 *Jewish Home Beautiful* event at the Ahavas Chesed congregation in Mobile, Alabama.

I had a chance to speak to eight of the organizers during a visit to their community in spring 2010; two of which are converts to Judaism. Each has had extreme experiences of displacement: Toshja lost her home during the 2005 Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans; Wei was a young child during the Chinese cultural revolution and has clear memories of her family's loss of home and forced relocation. These dislocations are quite significant relative to the *Jewish Home Beautiful* theme of affirming home in the face of displacement; both women made mention of their needing to establish the conditions for home and the importance of their participation in the *Jewish Home Beautiful* events in Mobile in light of their personal histories (despite the fact that the loss of home in these two cases had nothing to do with the cultural oppression of Jews). Indeed, Toshja, who at the time of the interview was the President of the Ahavas Chesed Sisterhood, told me that she converted to Judaism following Katrina and after she

[22] The performance of *The Jewish Home Beautiful* pageant hosted by the Sisterhood of the Adath Israel Synagogue in Montreal was linked to an appeal for the Youth Aliyah movement, as reported in the 24 February 1950 edition of the *Canadian Jewish Review*.

had participated in the 2009 *Jewish Home Beautiful* event. The sense of home that was created by the themed table settings and stories was so welcoming to her that she decided then and there to begin the conversion process and bring her daughter up as Jewish.

Rita Whitlock, the Past President of the synagogue's Sisterhood, explained that strengthening the community's internal ties was one goal; welcoming non-Jews was another. Indeed, for the organizers of this event, educating the non-Jewish population of Mobile, Alabama about Judaism and persuading them to support Israel were two key objectives. Rita went on to speak of the connection between the Jewish community in Mobile and Israel: "If the non-Jews who participate in the local *Jewish Home Beautiful* event have a good feeling about Jews, they will look upon what is happening in Israel with a more open view towards being pro-Israel."

Following in the footsteps of the *Jewish Home Beautiful* original publication, the Sisterhood of the Ahavas Chesed congregation created a cookbook that includes many of the recipes used for the table decorations during the *Jewish Home Beautiful* events at the synagogue. Unlike the original production of the *Jewish Home Beautiful* pageant, the events at the Ahavas Chesed synagogue were not scripted and performed as a theatrical piece; the synagogue's community hall was decorated by collaborative teams of women (usually consisting of two women per team, but sometimes more) who had agreed to each present one of the different holiday tables. The women were charged with bringing their "finest" in tableware and holiday items from their

individual homes and preparing their designated table. The collaborative teams prepared and or purchased all the food items, which had to be certified as Kosher and made in a kosher kitchen. The women were then each responsible for greeting the people who came through the community hall and presenting their holiday table, answering questions if and as they were addressed to them.

Community members and the visiting public frequently raised questions about the "authenticity" of what was on display. What is "authentically" Jewish food was a question posed in relation to the Chinese noodles that were incorporated into the Sabbath table display organized by Wei. What are "authentically" Jewish interpretations of holiday rituals was disputed by some, including one community member and *Jewish Home Beautiful* participant who complained to me about the lack of depth and general knowledge about Judaism and the "beauty of its rituals" exhibited in some of the display tables set up by certain members of the congregation.

Whatever the specific interpretations that are suggested and disputed relative to the performance of the beautiful Jewish home, it is clear that the Jewish Diasporic experience has been transformed into something more settled, in part, due to the performativity of cultural constructions such as the *Jewish Home Beautiful*. The pageant (in all its iterations from 1940 onward) can be read as an example of migratory aesthetics in which the stories of home, as well as the meanings associated with home's objects, morph over time, even as they maintain and reinforce certain aspects of the personal, social, and political values and ideologies. The authors of the *Jewish Home Beautiful* would likely be very

pleased with the influence their work has had across great distances of time and place in inspiring Jewish women "to transform whatever habitation she may occupy into a *Jewish Home Beautiful"* (1941, 14). And while the (ongoing) transformation of habitation is not in and of itself problematic, occupation, as a socio-political and economic extension of home making in the increasingly globalized world is.

The late Edward Said's appeal to stop imaginations of home that are divorced from the actual reality of the people who inhabit the place in question is still resonant today, perhaps more so in light of the ongoing hostilities in Israel/Palestine and the fact that there are currently more than four and a half million Palestinian refugees within Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories alone.[31] The total number of displaced Palestinians is even greater if one considers the worldwide dispersion: *Le diplomatique* (undated webpage, retrieved 2010) estimated that in 1998 the Palestinian Diaspora included over eight million people. Despite the political and cultural resistance by Palestinians and their supporters around the world, the domicide affecting Palestinians continues to escalate. The Jewish "home beautiful" is not so beautiful after all; a new cultural script is achingly necessary.

CHAPTER EIGHT: *THE JEWISH HOME BEAUTIFUL—REVISITED*

Examining the *Jewish Home Beautiful* as closely as I have has broadened my understanding of the gap in narratives I noted on the plane back in 1984, while speaking with the gentlemen on either side of me. It wasn't just the history that was recounted so differently in the Jewish and Palestinian text books and schools; cultural transmissions such as Greenberg and Silverman's community play are as, if not more, effective in constructing national identity.

The *Jewish Home Beautiful* for example, influenced generations of Jews who came to believe that the beautiful Jewish home was simultaneously to be created, inhabited and maintained in North America and in Israel/Palestine. In addition to the pageant's script made available to Jewish congregations across the United States and Canada, the publication provided easy access to a compendium of holiday recipes that united Jewish households across time and distance.

In response to finding out about the influential *Jewish Home Beautiful* pageant and its staying power, I began to think about developing alternative narratives to trouble the ones exemplified by the original dramatic version. Such a project, which I felt necessary in light of the forced dislocation of the Palestinian people, necessitated an art form different from that which had been associated with the *Jewish Home Beautiful* because I believe how we tell the stories *about* home, influence our experiences *of* home. Aware of just how much method and content are interconnected, my aim was to implicate a performance

strategy that would ”destabilize the apparently stable order, to show the ideological seams that hold it together” (Nigro 1994, 141). Cultural projects such as the original *Jewish Home Beautiful* pageant—like the iterations that have been coordinated by the many different Jewish sisterhoods over the years—have tended to highlight the threats to the Jewish community associated with anti-Semitism.

I initiated three different critical re-enactments between June 2010 and October 2011: *The Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited I* (2 June 2010); *The Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited II* (23 January 2011); and *Home Beautiful—Inviting the Ancestors* (22 October 2011). [32] Together these events attracted nearly 100 participants. All three interactive performances were set within contexts shaped by the historical fact of the establishment of the State of Israel and concomitant oppression of the Palestinians, the role that has been attributed to the beautification of home as an integral part of the survival of the Jewish people, and an active critical engagement with the Jewish cultural affirmation of home(land) as exemplified in the multiple iterations of the theatrical production entitled *Jewish Home Beautiful* in the United States and Canada from the 1940s onward. In keeping with the original ethos of *Jewish Home Beautiful*, each of the “revisited” events was scheduled to coincide with a Jewish holiday celebration (the first with *Shavuot*, the second with *Tu Bishvat*, and the third with *Sukkot*) and an appropriate festive stage-setting created. In addition, each event had a specific “home” theme linked closely to the selected holidays: the first was

associated with the symbolic sense of home, the second with the ecology of home, and the third with the built environment of home.

Given the current socio-political conditions in Israel/Palestine and the prevailing political will in support of Israel in Canada and elsewhere internationally, the project of envisioning a Palestinian "home beautiful" equal to what the *Jewish Home Beautiful* achieved requires much imagination and creativity on the part of Palestinians and Jews. While instigating a deliberate engagement with the personal and socio-political dimensions of domicide, the events also deliberately encouraged the imagining of something different.[23] Thus the planning, enactment and follow-up stages of these co-activations of beauty and co-narrations of home, had to take into account not only the aesthetic experience, but the political stakes and ethical implications as well.[33]

> Art practice that seeks completion through its participants is a form of dialogue in which the conditions of art's emergence correspond to the formation of the subject, that is, fundamentally relational. This is an ethical practice whose very condition is contingent on a participation in the construction of meaning and renewal of value that invents the possibility of recognition of both difference and commonality between each other. (Adapted from Merewether 2003)

[23] Adrian Piper calls attention to "our capacity to envision what is possible in addition to what is actual" (1991, 726). I believe that such a belief that "we can imagine not only what actually exists […] but also what might have existed in the present or past, or might someday exist in the future" (1991, 726), explains the risks Piper has taken in performances such as *My Calling (Card) #1 (for Dinners and Cocktail Parties)* (1986-1990), discussed above.

As noted above, dialogic live art performance invites an inclusive sense of community, which is nurtured through the very acts of perception (visual, tactile, locomotory, auditory, etc.) and sensual experience. Furthermore, the enactment of individual and shared gestures, the social bonds that are (however temporarily) forged with strangers and the critical thinking inherent in making sense of one's involvement call upon each participant to recognize their personal agency in shaping the collective experience.

Designing the *Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* series, as a dialogic performance was strategic. Aside from the pre-determined elements, which served to set the pace, create the ambience, and invite certain activities (such as polishing tarnished silver and sharing personal stories of home and displacement), all the events were unscripted and open-ended. What emerged was specific to the individual participants and the unique configurations of individuals that attended each particular event. Because of their dialogic nature, each of the events provided an occasion for participants to speak freely about their personal experience with displacement and homemaking. Discussions, which focused on the current and historical socio-political contexts, within which these individuals' stories emerge, dovetailed the co-emergent sensemaking process that unfolded as the events unfolded.

Following each of these performances, I invited participants to speak with me about their experience. Involvement in these follow-up conversations was voluntary; there was no obligation on the part of attendees to respond to my

request to be interviewed. Within a month after each event, I contacted those who had indicated interest and availability and convened the interviews.

In total, 18 people accepted my invitation. During each of the individual interviews, I introduced a series of three open-ended questions. I began by inquiring about the individual's personal/familial experience with forced displacement. I then asked each person to speak about home and then about the role of the house beautification process in establishing a sense of home. The remainder of the conversation was unstructured and largely self-directed by the interviewee. While I asked an occasional question each person shared their stories, as they wished, for as long as they wanted. The people who volunteered to meet with me were highly motivated and had much to say. Inevitably, our conversations lasted several hours.[24]

The self-selection process inherent in both the choice to attend the events and the choice to enter into a follow-up conversation enabled participants to gauge for themselves the importance and significance of speaking about home, beauty and displacement. Those who chose to engage with me in these post-performance dialogues spoke at length about their experiences of displacement and the role that home beautification practices played in their becoming home (again). They also offered comments about the actual events themselves.

These situated learning and knowledge-creation sites provided me with a renewed appreciation for the process of home beautification. Working with audio

[24] In addition to the 18 people from *Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* series who accepted the invitation for a follow-up conversation after the events, another eight people from the *Lamentations* and *homeBody* series also agreed to speak with me. The style of open-ended questions and unstructured process that I used during the *Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* interviews was also used on these earlier occasions.

and video recordings of the live art events and the follow-up conversations, I identified commonalities and differences amongst the many stories and experiences that were shared with me. It was during this analysis that the relationship between simple acts of home-beautification and the willingness to re-create home in a new environment became evident. In fact, as was made abundantly clear throughout this cycle of research-creation, Third Realm beauty is not only related to the capacity to feel at home again after the loss of stable housing but also (when and as necessary) to the concomitant readjustments of personal identity, social purpose and historical agency.

Kester, emphasizing "the process of performative interaction," points to a shift towards a durational rather than instantaneous concept of aesthetic experience—"transitions" which taken together "set the stage for an interactive, collaborative art practice, informed by conceptual art but located in cultural contexts associated with activism and policy formulation" (2004, 10 and 14). Engaging collaborators and audience participants as co-creators of the events and affirming the centrality of dialogue is a way to encourage a multiplicity of overlapping, and even contesting narratives. Such participation in the flesh shifted the "politics of identity" to a "politics of invitation, a politics of community" (Taylor and Villegas 1994, 15), which perturbed the traditional distinctions between artist, audience and artwork and made it possible for unscripted unique contributions to be made by many of the people in attendance.

Over and above the sense of self-interested identity that is created individually and within a group of people who find commonality amongst

themselves, the politics of community demands a plurality—which may not always result in consensus. A politics of invitation and of community involves a critical engagement with the dynamics of control and the exercise of power. Cultural productions such as the *Jewish Home Beautiful* and *The Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* series create a "holding ground" in which these dynamics can be considered, played out and practiced.

The Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited I

People entered the main gallery space that had been transformed to resemble a formal dining room through careful attention to the lighting and the placement of furniture rented especially for this occasion—amongst which was a table large enough to seat twenty, set with only several tarnished silver items, silver polish and cleaning cloths in the far corner away from the entrance to the space. Each person was individually greeted and invited to make her or himself comfortable around the table or along one of the two walls of the gallery, where additional chairs had been set up.[34]

Everyone was invited to take part in the polishing of the tarnished silver if they so wished. Polishing the silver was one of several framing devices introduced intentionally to stimulate conversation about the practice(s) and privilege(s) of home, homeland, and homemaking. The gesture's allusion to designations of class and labour was deliberate. About a dozen men and women

took up the invitation and as they completed the polishing, they rinsed the items in the large pot of hot water set aside for this purpose and dried them with the clean burlap cloths, which were prepared in advance.

Photo credit: Geneviève Fortin

As people took up the silver polishing, one woman, who was seated at the end of the table closest to the buffet, unexpectedly began telling the biblical story of Ruth—her namesake, as it turns out, and Naomi, a tale that is associated with the celebration of *Shavuot*. The Ruth that was telling the story while polishing a rather blackened fork explained that while she wasn't Jewish, she was given the name Ruth to honour the memory of someone important to her mother and thus set the tone for personal narratives to be shared.

Ruth telling the story of how she got her name and recounting the Biblical story of Ruth and Naomi. Also visible in these photographs are Sandeep Bhagwati and Stephen Trepanier. Photo credits this page: Geneviève Fortin

Along the wall behind the people seated at the main table was a buffet set up with the cheesecake and strawberries. Photo credit: Geneviève Fortin

A second element that acted simultaneously to invoke the themes and pace of the evening was a slow dissolve larger-than-life video projection, which set the stage to transition between the appearance of a comfortable interior Jewish home setting (exemplified by damask wallpaper) and a disquiet outdoor landscape (as depicted by the photographic image of two graffiti-covered closed-up Palestinian shops in Hebron). As the image changed, so did the activities: from polishing and rinsing the silver items, we went on to set the table before sharing a meal of cheesecake and strawberries accompanied by wine and sparkling water.

Photo credits this page: Geneviève Fortin

As the wallpaper faded, the doors of the Palestinian shops became apparent; soon after the graffiti began to appear. The Star of David took shape followed closely by the scrawl in Hebrew *mavet l'aravim* (literally: "death to Arabs"), which is what was also written on the wall of the Palestinian house in Gaza as discussed above.[35] The latter message may need no explanation but it is important to understand the symbolic revisionism behind the use of the Star of David in this context. While during the Nazi era, the Star of David was painted in yellow and black on thousands of Jewish-run businesses as part of a nationwide boycott, in Hebron the Star of David was drawn by the Israeli Jewish settlers to lay claim to the very buildings that housed the Palestinian shops.[36]

Photo credit: Geneviève Fortin

The dialogue came to focus on the changing background being projected through the video transition. The reaction to the graffiti was palpable; even for those who did not know what the writing meant—and before it was translated by one of the people sitting around the table who happened to be able to read Hebrew—there was a sense of implicit understanding that something quite counter to beautiful was now present in the room.

Photo credit: Geneviève Fortin

In a follow-up conversation, Diana, a second-generation Holocaust survivor and close collaborator on *The Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* series project (who had not seen the image prior to the event), told me:

> You know at first when I saw the words, and I thought that, that looks, that could have been Germany in the 1930s; just replace the word “Arabs” by “Jews”. So that is sort of horrifying to think that and I don’t like to think

> that. I would rather believe that there are not Jews who do that or that they are few and far between.

Lisa Ndejuru, a Montrealer of Rwandan heritage, spoke up just after the transition from the domestic interior to the outdoor Hebron setting:

> For me, the Jewish Home Beautiful, the beauty of this setting, allows me to sit and talk about these things that otherwise [sentence left unfinished]. For me, the glasses and the plates are signs of civility, that allow for difficult conversation to take place because there's no resolution about this, but at least you can hold tension like this. And the beauty for me means safety enough to even go there, 'cause otherwise I don't.

As is evident in both Diana and Lisa's statements, each person brought their own personal experiences, values, assumptions and questions to *The Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* series (and other events within the *Radical Beauty for Troubled Times* cycle of research-creation). They acted upon these to co-create what ultimately emerged in the live art dialogical encounters. An emphasis on procedure is crucial for understanding and appreciating home beautification practice. As my mother experienced it, cleaning or polishing even cracked and broken furnishings could be more rewarding than simply plunking down a fancy expensive item bought on credit or paid for in cash, if care and attention were brought to these processes. Her sense that the value of the "thing" is connected

to the meaning and care given to it resonates with Diana's comments, which she shared in our conversation following the first *Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* event. It was obvious that her reaction to the ornately laid table was visceral and negative:

> When I saw the table, I looked at it and I thought like, "Whose idea of beauty is this?" First of all, I didn't even find it beautiful. It's not my aesthetic; I never even aspire to it and I also never knew that. Nobody ever had that kind of fancy stuff. You know we had nice things you know that we had gotten, but not that kind, not that, like we never had real silver or cut glass crystal, nor do I really like that. My aesthetic would be a little different; it almost made me uncomfortable.

Diana offered the following explanation of her sense of beauty:

> I actually liked the polishing; that was my favourite part because it gave me something to do and it was about preparing space and creating space and I feel that beauty requires that kind of thought and taking the time the time to create space. I also feel that about my spiritual practice that I have to create sacred space and that could be just something that you do in your mind or it could be physical. I often find that it's good to do the physical and then in your mind, that the physical helps with the preparation of setting a *kavana*. Without the *kavana* it feels empty to me.

> That could even relate to my feeling of beauty as well. To me beauty is about having a *kavana* also; it's about intentionally putting things in your space or disposing them in a way that is trying to create a sense of cosiness or something; a sense of comfort.

Diana, like my mother, has clearly found a way to imbue her homemaking with purpose and meaning. Rather than experiencing housekeeping as the drudgery of chores, or associating it with unending repetition, after years of sweeping a place clean and other mindful aesthetically-charged beautification practices we can, if we are lucky, come to recognize the space in which we dwell as home, even as we become more ourselves in the process. By conditioning our individual and cultural capacity to take care of what is "out of place" in our daily handling of so-called ordinary objects, or by co-activating artful manifestations of imaginary and real worlds, we become aware of the qualities we want to cultivate as we make ourselves at home.

Citing David Harvey, Hazel Easthope (2004, 132) summarizes the definition of "dwelling" as "the capacity to achieve a spiritual unity between humans and things"; and, citing Martin Heidegger and Edward S. Casey, she situates place and dwelling as the cumulative effect of what individuals construct cognitively and emotionally "through repeated encounters and complex associations." Such a performative attachment to place *as home* is particularly necessary for individuals whose sense of dwelling has been ruptured by violence. For Diana, repeated aesthetic encounters with material objects and things have

built a repertoire of associations laden with a complex assortment of emotions, memories and stories.

After participating in the *Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited*, Vera, a Jewish woman whose early life was irrevocably marked by the *Shoah*, spoke about the polishing upon being asked about the conditions that made it possible for people to make themselves vulnerable enough to share their personal experiences:

> Interestingly enough I think in part it has to do with how long it took us to get there and I was frustrated by that to some degree; its like when are we going to get down to talking about the real issues, you know and then you think, no you can't – you can't just jump in and begin to talk about the really heavy stuff because we are strangers; we have to polish silver together before (Vera laughs) before whatever, or, or, eat a fruit together or something before we are able to let down some of those, that guard and so just having the time to scope out the room, who's in the room? Who is sitting where? Who is saying what? Even when we are not talking about the central issue it's a transitional space that allows us to trust enough to begin. So I guess because we had done that, the space didn't feel quite as dangerous and we were able to take some risks that we would ordinarily not have. I think also the purpose, you know the intention to share and to think about these issues you know we were given an opportunity and why waste it?

Vera and I continued to speak; I asked her about her experience of displacement. She answered:

> To look at me, to listen to me you would never know; there is nothing that says I'm a foreigner in any way. I don't even have an accent; some people who came at my age do and that attests to my desire to assimilate when I arrived, you know. I succeeded. But nonetheless I think in terms of identity work, I still identify myself as a foreigner, as a refugee. It is an important chunk of my identity, to see myself in that way I think in part because it was an experience that was very deep and so it really is connected to who I am even though I have been here for 40-odd years or whatever—its been more than that: 50-odd years, its still important. […] As for feeling at home, I don't know; I'm still working; I mean I think it has a lot to do with identity and who you are. So you try and get some solidity to that identity.

I then asked, "At what point for you did beauty become important?" After a long silence, she said:

> It's a good question. Cause like we came here and I don't think it was right at the beginning. I think maybe it is connected to survival. […] What I wanted more than anything else was to make my living space my own,

> whatever that meant and so I still do this. […] The idea of practicing home is important and I think it has to do with paying attention.

Linked to both affective states and performative value, beautification, then, is a necessary procedural enactment for Vera, who carries the legacy of forced dislocation personally lived, as much as it is for Diana, who experience the lingering effects and "postmemories" (Hirsch 1999) bequeathed to her by her parents and grandparents.

The ability to embark on beautification, however, is not a given. Whether one's originary pre-displaced home is recalled from actual lived experience or created through the recollections mediated by an imaginative investment (Hirsch 1997, 22) of the stories and images "remembered" by second, third, (and plus)-generation displaced persons, it seems that the role of beauty, for people whose sense of home has been ruptured or destroyed, only becomes apparent when the most acute risks, threats and perils associated with the direct experience of having to move are no longer felt.

As Vera and I continued to talk, I asked her when beauty began to play a part in her family's resettlement process. She answered haltingly as she thought and spoke simultaneously:

> At what point does the realization come that maybe it is not temporary? I think that certain others things must kick in at that time and I am not sure that the beautifying instinct would come in then... I think that that's when

> you begin to mourn; you begin to mourn when you begin to realize that it may be permanent. And I think that if you are heavily into the beginning of the mourning process you are too angry to create beauty perhaps.

Recalling my mother's "you make it mean something to you," Diana's "it's about intentionally putting things in your space […], Meena's "*beauty making* is definitely, definitely, definitely linked to establishing a sense of home," and Vera's own "what I wanted more than anything else was to make my living space my own" it is clearly possible to get from mourning and anger to home (anew) through the performance of home beautification. The process of getting from to the other implies an act of volition.

While beauty may not be necessary for sheer survival in the aftermath of forced dislocation, it may be crucial to feeling alive. Danto avows: "Beauty is an option for art and not a necessary condition. But it is not an option for life. It is a necessary condition for life as we would want to live it" ("2003 160). Choosing to embrace Third Realm beauty is perhaps one of the most telling signs of one's capacity to determine the course of one's life after the trauma of displacement. Indeed, following forced displacement, choice making—and acting on the belief that one's choices matter—are decisive elements in making the transition from victim to survivor: they are both a sign and a means of building resilience and practicing home.

Powerful emotions were felt, memories were stirred up and shared, ideas were challenged and new connections were forged in the planning and

implementation of the events as well as in the follow-up conversations that I had with many of the participants. Hourig, a woman whose life has been indelibly marked by the legacy of the Armenian genocide, shared the following reflections about the live art experience:

> I was surprised at my own reaction. As soon as I saw the writing on the shop, without even yet hearing what the words were, my whole body seemed to react. I was shaking all over. When the words were translated, I felt a shortness of breath and the tears just burst out. I wanted to rush out of the room and cry out, wail almost. At the same time I was kind of shocked I was having that reaction. And while I worked hard to control myself, I was also trying to understand why I had such a visceral and emotional reaction. The only thing that made any semblance of sense was flashbacks of memory of when I was twelve and witnessed incidents of incomprehensible hatred and violence on the very street where we lived in Beirut. The Christian militiamen were 'celebrating' victory over the nearby Palestinian refugee camp of Tel el-Zaatar where numerous women and children were slaughtered. The women and children on our street were all out on their balconies, chanting happily and rejoicing, while a few militiamen were busy tying up a body to their pickup truck by its feet and dragging it in the streets. Ordinary people, our neighbours, people we saw everyday, said hello to, exchanged pleasantries with, were out in droves

cheering the scene. It was madness. It was hatred. It was a mad, grotesque hatred.

[…]

The other emotion the image on the wall triggered was the very, very real, I could almost smell it, the sense of helplessness that I, that we, used to feel, trapped in the mad violence around us. The tangible memories of those times were so vivid all of a sudden. That feeling that you really count nothing as a human being, that a bullet literally costs more than your life. That feeling that while bombs and shells are exploding, while man has turned against man, while you have run out of synonyms for murder and for madness, while you don't know where to hide anymore, people elsewhere are having a very ordinary day, are going to work and to school, are having bad hair days, are setting tables, are going grocery shopping, are engaged in the most mundane of everyday rituals, exacerbated that rageful (sic) helplessness even more. And it all came rushing back to me in a split second, seeing that writing on the wall. […] It was such a poetic, you know, way of that coming out of the beautiful pattern on the wall. […] All of a sudden it was my childhood, having seen storefronts like that. […] I kind of dwelled in that time-space, I could even smell it; I could even see the colours, the textures, it was like all of a sudden I know this, this is a place of where I come from in a way; part of a place where I've thought of as home, or was partly home.

Hourig's emotional reaction, which triggered such vivid childhood memories, resulted in an experience of inhabiting multiple narrative spaces simultaneous to her involvement with the people in the FoFA Gallery during the first *Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited event.*

Meena (who was one of my collaborators in *homeBody*, discussed above) summarized her experience as follows:

> We began analyzing the situation; we weren't there just as passive participants. I feel like I experienced something a little bit deeper in terms of why there is this need of holding on to one's culture because of past trauma and [also] the need to create beauty. It affirmed the idea that community and community making can equally be a beautiful holistic thing but it can equally be a very violent and just bad thing. […] You have to be in a certain place to be able to choose to participate. […] There was definitely risk-taking in this event.

In part, the risk-taking has to do with the transposing of memories in the now. Recollections of mobile possessions or memories of long ago events are often enough to project oneself into a hybrid psychological environment, especially when these (material or memorized) items are merged and combined with new objects and experiences. Often, in situations of forced displacement, there is not a lot of time to decide what to take and what to leave. Citing anthropologist David Parkin, consumer behaviours and material cultural studies scholar Jean-

Sebastien Marcoux (2001) addresses the “role played by mobile possessions in securing memory in location” while affirming the “importance of the things that refuges forced to flight, sometimes from the threat of death, choose to bring with them. And how they use these objects to reobjectify themselves in a new environment” (69-70). “The things that people take with them, those ‘aide-mémoires’, help preserve a constancy and continuity. Going further, we could also say that memory may be constituted in motion through the displacement of objects. Bringing things with oneself, then, is to make the choice of remembering” (73). While some displaced persons do indeed manage to bring assorted items with them, others either do not have that option or choose to start afresh by leaving everything behind.

Sheila’s father relocated from Turkey to Montreal in the early 1950s. His parents followed him within the decade. Following *The Jewish Home Beautiful-Revisited I,* Sheila spoke lovingly of the home that she has built with her husband and of the myriad ways in which their physical space is permeated with beauty:

> The beauties of nature in many forms, natural and humanly modified, surround me. Indoors, I have chosen to have an uncluttered space where everything visible has a story that provides the beauty of continuity even if the item itself has no intrinsic beauty of its own.

While there are several items brought over from Turkey during her grandparents’ move and others still purchased more recently during subsequent trips back to

her father's birth country on display, most of the furnishings in Sheila's house are locally sourced or handmade. "Home beautiful," for Sheila, is inscribed in a sense of continuity as iterated through the objects and things accumulated from here and there over the generations, as well as the stories told about these items. It is perhaps especially when the old and the new objects—as well as their extant stories and affective associations—blend in the resettled households that the process of identification is most robust.

With the "original" items functioning symbolically and/or concretely as a metonymy for the home that is no longer and serving as the skeleton around which the new home is reinvented (Marcoux 2001, 74), the newly acquired objects and things serve to extend and shift the experience of, and associations with, the former so that the present home can indeed be experienced in the present. Whether the actual objects would have been or are currently deemed to have material beauty, the aesthetics of the memoried and memorialized items come in play as a locus for emotional and sensorial meaning making. The bodily experience of beautification of one's home as manifested in acts of cleaning and decoration (Hecht 2001, 134) migrates and morphs as the old and new merge in the everyday attention that one pays to home.

The Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited II

Each event also morphed, with one giving rise to the next, as people's comments led to changes in form and intention. For example, the choice of venue for the

second event was directly related to a conversation that I had with one of the first *Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* participants as the initial event was coming to a close. This gentleman (who expressly requested to not be identified and who was silent all evening) came up to me and said that while he did not regret participating in the event he totally disagreed with me. I asked him why he didn't express his differing views openly during the event especially given the multiple invitations I had made throughout the evening for everyone to contribute actively to the dialogue even if it meant that contentious and potentially conflictual ideas and experiences would arise. He responded by saying that if I were to hold the next event within the Montreal Federation Combined Jewish Appeal (CJA) building-complex then he would feel safer to speak out and share his opinion. It was this reply, in part, that played on my decision to book the CJA Gelber Conference Centre for the second *Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* event.

The Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited II was held one week after *Tu Bishvat*. Photo credit: Geneviève Fortin

At the heart of this live art event was a reflection about each participant's relationship, both physical and symbolic, to the orchards, groves and forests in Israel/Palestine. While we celebrated the New Year for Trees and marked the Middle-Eastern season wherein the earliest-blossoms emerge from their winter sleep to begin a new fruit-bearing cycle, we also considered the choices made about which trees are being planted where and whose are being cut down (and by whom).

In addition to being served some traditional foods associated with *Tu Bishvat*, participants in the event were immersed in an audio environment, which was created specifically for this event and performed live by Chantal Laplante. [37]

The audio environment included sounds of birds in flight, the uprooting of trees, footsteps crunching leaves and branches, filtered voices singing ancient Jewish chants, Palestinian Oud music, and a recitation of the October 2010 Yesh Din report on 97 separate incidents of vandalism of Palestinians' trees in the Occupied Territories. Photo credit: Geneviève Fortin

During this second *Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* event, the gestures and dialogue unfolded somewhat differently than the first. While small clusters of individuals formed as people arrived, the large circle of chairs provided a visual and material cue, which effectively invited participants to sit and open the conversation so that everyone would be included. The dialogue opened to include critical reflections about individual and collective responsibility for Canadian policy on the Middle East, personal narratives related to the loss of home, poetic offerings evoking gratitude for the food shared, and ideas about how to support Palestinian farmers in their struggle to keep their crops and trees safe from Israeli settlers intent on destroying their ties to the land and their livelihoods.

Pictured here is Hannah Lecousy at the start of the event. During the story circle, Hannah talked about how she was more present to the full taste of the almonds after the ritual Sonia Zylberberg facilitated than when she first ate some upon her arrival. Photo credit: Geneviève Fortin

As described above, Chantale Laplante accompanied this settling-in by performing the score, which she and I had worked out in advance with the participation of Diana Yaros. After I welcomed everyone and provided a minimal introduction to the holiday of *Tu-Bishvat*, I spoke about the ways in which the greening of Israel were problematic. I explained how non-indigenous species of evergreen trees were being planted to shape the landscape according to North American standards of beauty in nature. And I presented information about the destruction of Palestinian olive groves and other fruit orchards as evidenced in the Yesh Din report (that was integrated in the audio environment).

Investigation of tree vandalization incidents, 2005-2010

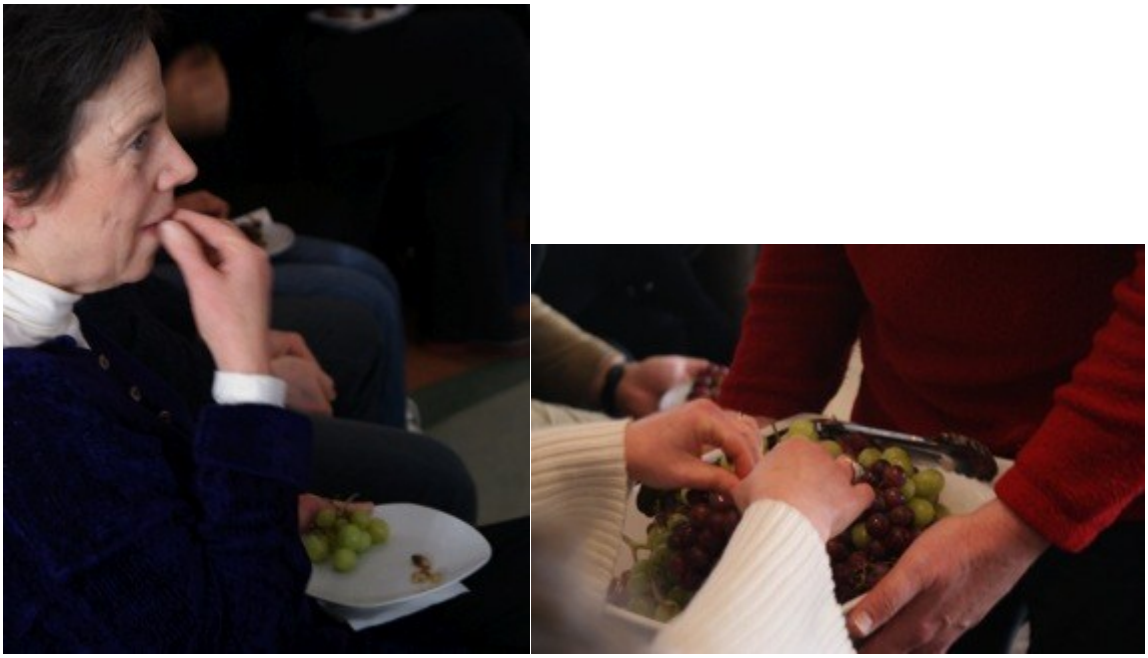
Of the 97 investigation files into vandalization of Palestinian trees that Yesh Din has been monitoring:

- Not a single indictment was filed following any of these investigations.
- 84 investigation files closed. Of those:
  - 72 investigation files were closed on grounds of "unknown perpetrator."
  - 12 were closed on grounds of insufficient evidence to prosecute.
- 12 are still under investigation
- The investigation of one incident ended and the file were transferred to the prosecutor's review to decide its result: whether to close it or file an indictment.

Table: Yesh Din monitoring of investigation files into the vandalization of trees 2005-2010

	Yesh Din file no.	Date of incident or discovery	Location	Incident details	Police investigation status
1	2218/10	September 20, 2010	Hebron	45 vines vandalized	Under investigation
2	2206/10	August 31, 2010	Burin	17 olive trees cut down	Under investigation
3	2190/10	July 29, 2010	Umm al-Kheir	2 almond trees were cut down and 300 tomatoes and okra seedlings were uprooted	File closed on grounds of "unknown "perpetrator
4	2170/10	May 27, 2010	Kaft Thulth	8 olive saplings uprooted	File closed on grounds of "unknown "perpetrator

The list of tree vandalization incidents begins with the most recent accounts that have been indexed in the Yesh Din report, as seen here from page two of the 13-page report.



Following my introduction, Sonia Zylberberg facilitated a participatory food tasting ritual in honour of the birthday of the trees. Seen here is Deena Roskies, past--President of the Montreal Dialogue Circle. Photo credits: Geneviève Fortin

People then began speaking about their own experiences of the holiday and affirmed the importance of dissensus and dissidence within the local Jewish community building-complex. The choice of venue ended up being particularly significant even though the gentleman who had initially suggested it decided not to attend (despite having been sent two personalized invitations). Many of the people who did participate were members of the Montreal chapter of Independent Jewish Voices (IJV); a group that was banned from meeting at the Gelber Conference Centre since May 2009 on account of the political position it takes relative to Israeli policies which impact the Palestinians. For these individuals, as for myself, being able to "feel free to express their views on any issue of public concern without incurring accusations of disloyalty" (as stated in the IJV mission) within the CJA headquarters was paramount.

I booked the Gelber Centre's rooms as an individual without implicating IJV in any official way. Instead, I relied on my reputation within the Montreal Jewish community to negotiate the rental agreement. Yet even though I counted on having sufficient personal and cultural capital—on account of my past implication as the Vice-President of the Board of Montreal's only kosher shelter for abused women (1997-2001) and as the artist commissioned (in 2000) to design the four floor marble mosaics permanently installed along the Gelber Centre's main hallway—until the event was over, I remained concerned that the booking would be cancelled and that we would be asked to leave. Indeed, there was a pivotal moment when the Gelber Centre's *mashgeach* overheard some conversation about the event just as the first participants were beginning to arrive: I had to intervene quickly and in a most polite way in order to convince him that everything was "kosher" and that we were indeed holding a Tu Bishvat celebration as indicated in the rental agreement, which he had access to.

The IJV membership came together "in the belief that the broad spectrum of opinion among the Jewish population of this country is not reflected by those institutions which claim authority to represent the Jewish community as a whole." I was committed to making a space for an alternative voice and, in so doing, resisted the very institution whose authority as the arbiter of official Montreal Jewish culture and socio-political and economic action is more or less hegemonic. Despite the uncertainty, I was determined to go ahead with the plan since I felt strongly that the cultural work in this "revisited" series implicates more than just attempting to shift the dominant Zionist narrative, however challenging that is as

a goal. I therefore hosted the event as a private individual without any IJV support, knowing that I was not contravening the CJA ban on IJV events.

Amongst the people in attendance who were not members of IJV was Sandeep, a world-renown musician, composer and educator who was born in India and grew up in Germany.[38] Well aware of the power of aesthetics and the dangers associated with the Nazi ideological construction of *heimat*—the love and attachment to homeland, which resulted in a rejection of anything and anyone foreign—Sandeep repeated something that he had also shared during the first *Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* event, which he also attended:

> We are living in the time of global warming, which means that large parts of the planet will become uninhabitable for human beings and we'll see, perhaps not in our generation, but perhaps in our children's or grandchildren's, huge migrations of people, huge pressure to migrate, and if you continue to haggle over land you are going to just create violence to no end. I don't understand this land issue; being un-landed myself, I don't get land ownership; I don't understand it. [I think that] you have to be linked to something else, more anchored in our relationship to each other than in a relationship to any soil.

In time of estrangement and alienation "home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing

reality, frontiers of difference. One confronts and accepts dispersal and fragmentation as part of the constructions of a new world order that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become" (Hooks 1990, 148). In finding out who we are, and who we might become in the aftermath of forced displacement, it is particularly useful to acknowledge that the impressions left by (migratory) aesthetics linger even though the experiences of Third Realm beauty and the sharing of personal narrative may only be fleeting. This lingering effect, as it turns out, is surprisingly robust; influencing the ways that home is shaped in the physical, affective, political and social realms over long periods of time.

Taking a page from the JNF strategy book about fundraising for tree planting endeavours, at the end of the event an olive tree-planting certificate was available for a small donation, with the proceedings going to Zatoun, a fair-trade, organic Palestinian olive oil producing collective. Andrea Summers, the Zatoun representative, is seated behind the table collecting donations and providing people with their olive tree-planting certificates. The green box was our equivalent of the familiar JNF "Blue Box". Photo credits: Geneviève Fortin.

Home Beautiful—Inviting the Ancestors

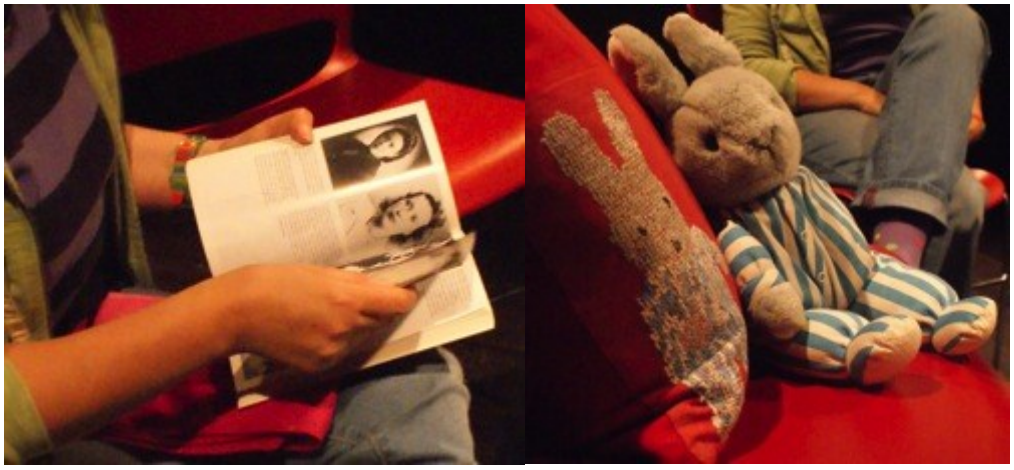
Nine months after the second *Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* event, four women—Jewish, Muslim and Christian—joined me to share personal stories of their experience with the Holocaust and the Nakbah.[39] In this third *Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* event, the dialogue that emerged between these four women and myself during the event began prior to it and has continued ever since (albeit sporadically).

The five of us sat together for three hours and spoke of our individual and collective experiences of loss and resilience as Jews and Palestinians. We shared the stories of significant personal objects, which paid homage to particular ancestors whose experience with home and beauty we wanted to honour. The Jewish holiday of *Sukkot* provided us with a perfect opportunity to gives thanks for the harvest and acknowledge the experience of our elders while keeping in mind the plight of displaced persons still living in provisional dwellings such as refugee camps.

A short video documentary of the several members of the Palestinian diaspora living in Montreal authored by Rula, family photographs, embroidered handiwork and other cloth items, and ceramics, focused our attention as we talked and ate together. We left asking ourselves how to continue the conversation amongst us and how to get to a safe-enough conversational place where we could reveal and care for the hidden and unspoken injustices that shapes each our worldviews and experiences of home.

The idea for the shift in vision for this final performance emerged in conversation with Diana, Sonia, Rana and Rula after the second *Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* event (which was attended by Diana, Sonia and Rana).

Rula's video, *Once Upon a Country*, provided some personal and historical accounts of Palestinians living in Montreal. Photo credit: Geneviève Fortin



Sonia brought her mother's memoir, *Tell No One Who You Are: The Hidden Childhood of Regine Miller* and "Daisy," who she introduced as follows: "I started bringing Daisy with me because I had trouble sleeping anywhere except my own home, so it was a way to bring my home with me." Photo credits: Geneviève Fortin

Rana brought the Palestinian embroidered cloth, Diana brought the framed photograph and a cymbal that she used as she sang a song she wrote about the biblical figure, Miriam. I brought the ceramic bowl and pomegranates, as well as the glass water pitcher, which was my paternal grandmother's. Photo credits this page: Geneviève Fortin

While there had been some community consultation prior to the first two *Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* events, this third event was almost entirely planned together. Not all the suggestions made by individual members of the group however were enacted. For example, one proposal was to find a way to create something together during the event. Initially, we had thought that we would have three two-hour sessions within the week of Sukkot. Due to time constraints with everyone's schedules, this became impossible. It seemed improbable that we would be able to accomplish everything in one session so we opted for sharing the stories associated with the objects we each brought for the occasion.

Another instance in which the experience of one event determined the organization of the next can be seen in the shift in focus and intention between the first two events and the third one. Whereas *Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited I* and *II* were critical enactments aimed at countering certain aspects of the cultural legacy of the original *Jewish Home Beautiful* theatrical pageant related to the implicit support of the colonization of Palestine, the third event was shaped in such a way as to reinforce the vision of inclusionary community. This shift was highlighted by the change in event title: no longer identified as the "Jewish" Home Beautiful; the emphasis for the participants (including myself) was on what in each of our histories made us particularly attuned to the aesthetics of home and home-making.

Rana shared the following depiction of an image whose physical presence in her home reaches beyond the material:

> There is a painting that my Dad has behind his desk in his office; it's a picture of a Palestinian man. I think he is a farmer by the way he is dressed; he's barefoot. And he is carrying the earth. It's like a big globe and in the centre of it you see famous mosque in Jerusalem, the dome. And he is carrying it on his shoulder. You can see the weight. Just by the expression on his face you can see that it's a very heavy weight. Every time I look at the painting; it's always there though I rarely notice it; I feel like that. I don't know; maybe because I am of Palestinian origin, but I feel a big weight.

As is evident in Rana's description, this painting is not just a prized family possession displayed in a prominent and personally significant place within the house; it is profoundly inscribed in the cultural and political narrative of home and homelessness. "It is the material culture within our home that appears as both our appropriation of the larger world and often as the representation of that world within our private domain" (Miller 2001, 1). For Rana, speaking about the painting became an opportunity to communicate her personal experience within the public forum of the live art event and speak to the larger issue of Palestinian displacement.

House-beautification gestures, as do coherent narratives, (re)locate the displaced individual at the centre of her/his experience.

> Working through, or remastering, traumatic memory (in the case of human-inflicted trauma) involves a shift from being the object or medium of someone else's (the perpetrator's) speech (or other expressive behavior) to being the subject of one's own. The act of bearing witness to the trauma facilitates this shift, not only by transforming traumatic memory into a coherent narrative that can be integrated into the survivor's sense of self and view of the world, but also by reintegrating the survivor into a community and re-establishing connections essential to selfhood" (Brison 1999, 39).

We were able, even in the short time we had, to re-establish some of the connections to selfhood through the medium of the stories of people and places we associated with the objects and things in our home environments. The narrative/witnessing is so integrally enmeshed, in the sensemaking and memory re-entrenchment, with material culture present in the daily lives of these individuals that it would be hard, if at all possible, to tease apart the story from the objects and things that speak of and to the experience being narrated.

In a follow-up conversation to *Home Beautiful—Inviting the Ancestors*, Rula said, "On the concept of home and beauty, you really have to take the time and effort to appreciate it and think about it and get connected to it." She spoke of how wary she was of "investing" in aesthetic appreciation and in making efforts to endow her home with beauty, thinking that her housing situation was only temporary, even though the originary displacement occurred decades previously.

She acknowledged just how much the Nakbah shaped her experience of home:

> For years, I experienced the trickle down effect of the loss of home from previous generations and, as a result, I don't have a place of special meaning. It is only now that I'm starting to invest in the concepts of home and beauty because before I tended to devalue these, just in case they would disappear. Even gardening: I have only recently come to appreciate those little aspects of the original home, the story, beauty in the food and in relation to the efforts of getting the olives.

Although her sense of displacement has not left Rula, she has begun to find a way and reasons to overcome her resistance and invest in home:

> My husband places a huge emphasis on making our home beautiful. He survived the war in Lebanon. People who have lived that kind of trauma need what beauty offers. It creates stability. It is not a superficial thing; I think it is a real internal need for him, even if he can't articulate why. Before it used to annoy me and now I am trying to find common projects of beautifying our home and give it meaning now that I'm readier to deal with the questions of stability and identity. What makes it possible for me now is the desire to pass it on to the next generation especially knowing that our parents will not be around forever and our kids will blame us for not passing it all along. Beauty requires that you invest yourself in creating it,

> appreciating it and passing it along to the next generation. It provides a framework to express your home and make you feel safe and comfortable.

Rula's movement from rejection to investment is informative: Resistance to beauty, and processes for overcoming such resistance, are factors that must be taken into when considering aesthetic engagement with making home anew in the aftermath of forced dislocation.

As Rula's experience illustrates, a choice for aesthetic practice can help us to understand that the real betrayal lies not in the letting go, but in the incapacity or unwillingness to transform the trauma of displacement into a life-affirming embrace of renewed inhabiting, with all the vulnerability and responsibility inherent in such growth. To some extent, appreciating beauty means that one has accepted that one is entitled to pleasure and is not threatened by the fear of betraying the experience of home's loss through the process of making one's home anew.

Implicit in Rula's description is that the ramifications of allowing oneself to savour beauty can be even greater, they can actually touch on one's sense of a right to existence. This is made explicit in Diana's eloquent self-reflection:

> Beauty is an opportunity to have a sense of being entitled to exist. The word *entitled* is very important to me because I never felt entitled. […] Beauty is attention to detail, a detail that has a meaning in it. […] I mean I think our home is maybe a place where most of us hope to have a certain

> sense of control and when that is taken away from us, you know? I do remember as a child not feeling like I had a right to be there. We had no place that was ours. It wasn't about ownership cause we never did own […]. I sort of remember this feeling of never being able to quite relax. And that stayed with me. Beauty now feels like quite a privilege, you know?

Clearly Diana's sense of "beauty in the making" has been acquired through steadfast attention to the material world as much as to her inner sense of home. This steadfastness has, in turn, fed and re-enforced her inner sense of self.

> Active involvement with one's physical environment is as an important element in reestablishing place as a sense of psychological security and interpersonal familiarity. The need to clean the new apartment into which one has just moved or to change actively in some way a house which one has just bought are obvious indications of this fact. Yet in how many environments today are people without a role in building, repairing, improving or cleaning their environment and what part would increase in such responsibilities have in strengthening a sense of place? […] Active human effort in relation to the physical environment is an integral step in a successful completion of the dwelling process. (Seamon 1985, 240)

Implicit in Seamon's theoretical proposal is that aesthetics is co-active with dwelling and, moreover, necessary for individuals whose (sense of) home has

been destroyed. For people whose quotidian routines have been disrupted as a consequence of their home's destruction, aesthetically-charged repetitive gestures such as cleaning, dusting, sewing, washing dishes, bed making, and folding laundry are as vitally necessary as more public activities that may appear more important.

Undertaking the gestures of beautification, of homemaking, means overcoming resistance and making choices. The correlation between when home's loss is felt most acutely and the readiness to pursue beauty is most evident in the mourning process. Making sense of experience and moving through grief calls for and necessitates repose; a repose that is more than simply inactivity or relaxation, a repose that is an active resting and a *settling* at home—even, and perhaps especially when, feeling homeless. Beauty, after all, can make us more aware of what has been lost (Armstrong 2004; Thompson 2009; Thompson, Hughes and Balfour 2009). While aesthetic experience might be beneficial, it can also reveal the ruptures of displacement. Reclaiming the power over the experience of displacement is possible through an engagement with practical and symbolic beautification activities, however such gestures are not without their risk. Reclaiming power also, as Rula so poignantly expressed, indicates the acceptance of a new future. The psychological distances that must be travelled are impressive.

Experimenting with inclusivity within the live art dialogic framework isn't merely an aesthetic experience; people (including myself) were changed by these encounters. After all choosing to tell a different story matters. While the

original *Jewish Home Beautiful* called forth a strengthening of the Jewish home(land) in the "Promised Land," the Jewish Home Beautiful—*Revisited* deliberately challenges the Zionist narrative of building a home in a "land without a People for a People without a land."

After participating in the second and third events as one of the videographers, Melissa, a young woman who recently moved from South America to Montreal, shared with me how these performances "fostered human connections by opening safe spaces in which the participants could interact with each other." Speaking about how difficult it had been for her to find a way to connect to what was happening in Israel/Palestine, Melissa said: "These experiences seemed to permeate me and allowed me to eventually really be there and not feel like an outsider looking in, but rather able to relate to the people affected by the Palestinian/Israeli conflict on both sides by feeling closer and more intimately affected."

Dialogic live art events, such as the *Jewish Home Beautiful—Revisited* series, can signal a personal, cultural and/or political reframing of the exigencies of home and beauty within an increasingly precarious, changeable, and uncertain world. Yet, the dialogic process does have its limits. Not only must we remain vigilant to not exclude those we disagree with, we must be willing to sit with the awkwardness that often arises when we are faced with a conflict of opinion. Dialogic performance, in which co-reflexivity and co-creativity are deliberately interconnected, calls upon each participant to sit with their discomfort long enough to hear and acknowledge one another.

In retrospect, the causal links between Israeli occupation and Palestinian homelessness were not fully expressed and critically addressed. While attempts to respond to the "need for public spaces in which others can criticize our narrative and tell their own stories" (Stone-Mediatore 2003, 5) were made in the planning of this event, as it turns out, the conditions were not quite fully achieved. For example, in an email exchange with me several months after the event, Rana explained what was missing for her:

> It would be helpful and satisfying if we could share a lot more emotion, heartache, disappointment and anger about the unsaid displacement, the torture, the imprisonment, the unjust taking of land and homes and farms and crops and childhoods and livelihoods that has been, and continues to be, the experience of the vast majority of Palestinians. In order for us to create a mutual, rather than parallel, exploration of suffering, and by extension, of the role of beauty and the loss of home, I would need to feel that the Jew understands that the Palestinian suffering is created and caused by Jews (and others) who defend the establishment of Israel in its current form i.e. as an occupying and military power that violates the human rights of indigenous Palestinians.

Diana also shared with me her thoughts about what might be worthwhile in future events and linked her comments to the idea of making something together, which we ended up not doing:

> More and more I think about doing rather than talking. I wonder about projects that bring together people and where we are also creating something. What would happen then? What would the conversations be about? What would the relationships be like? The reflections? The shifting? Could this happen on a larger scale?

It is unfortunate that we couldn't experiment with making something together. Likely this would be a fruitful path to explore in the future; as such a process would reinforce the cultural hybridity that is so core to migratory aesthetics and, in many ways, to the experience of Jews over the past millennia.

CONCLUSION

Trauma "undoes the self by breaking the on going narrative, severing the connections among remembered past, lived present, and anticipated future" and "reveals the ways in which one's ability to feel at home in the world is as much a physical as an epistemological accomplishment" (Brison 1999, 41 and 44). Focusing on the ways in which the traumas associated with involuntary migration are aestheticized to make them more palatable reveals that Third Realm beauty is core to the experience of dwelling.

Philosopher Wolfgang Welsch (1996, 16) asserts that aesthetics are "fundamental in our knowledge and our reality"; If reality, as he asserts (following in the constructivist philosophical vein), "is not independent of cognition, a fixed given quantity, but the object of a construction" sensuous knowledge is of vital importance, perhaps a deciding factor, in the capacity to construct home anew in the physical realm, in association with the social, affective, and political worlds we each inhabit.[40] The reciprocal relationship between the personal and the socio-political is critical to keep in mind when considering "housing pathways" (Clapham 2002; 2009) of the forcibly displaced. This relationship between the personal and the socio-political, which plays itself out in the routes they follow to create housing for themselves, matters not only because of the staggering numbers of individuals currently living as refugees, internally displaced peoples and exiles, but also because of the inherent challenges facing these populations

as they attempt to settle into new housing and, often, new places, communities and cultures.

The beautification of home is a site of exchange where the aesthetics of memory and the aesthetics of present experience act upon one another. Here engagement with the material world is covalent with the realms of reminiscence, imagination and creativity. As feminist author, academic and social activist bell hooks (sics) reminds us: "oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subject, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story" (1989, 43). For many, not only storytelling, but also physical attention to the handling, care and placement of material household goods imbues the passage of time with a sense of renewed continuity and purpose. It creates a new narrative.

The sensorial connection lived viscerally and made sense of culturally, is a vital locus of identity reconstruction and of recreating, coming and being at home. Brison points to the necessity of interpersonal relations as crucial to trauma recovery, which includes being "able to regain control over traumatic memories […], recover a sense of control over her environment (within reasonable limits), and be re-connected with humanity" (1999, 45), I propose that the care and manipulation of home's objects and things is also vital. Direct involvement with the senses in both affective and physical ways is therefore doubly performative for forcibly displaced individuals. On the one hand, aesthetic connections act upon what is recalled from previous home experiences (including those passed

on through family stories and other cultural transmissions) and, on the other, they shape the experience of home, as well as the (new) stories of home, in the now.

More than thirty years ago, Yi-Fu Tuan proposed that, “to be forcibly evicted from one’s home and neighbourhood is to be stripped of a sheathing, which in its familiarity protects the human being from the bewilderments of the outside world” (1974, 99). What I’ve observed throughout my investigations is that this disorientation can be alleviated by attention to making the physically unfamiliar in one’s new housing environment more familiar. This familiarizing implicates the actual objects and things (such as furniture, dishes, linen, decorative items and books), their placement within the house, the patterns of their use and the stories that emerge over time.

These processes not only provide the means and mechanisms of regaining control over one’s environment (within reasonable limits), they also aid in the integration of memory and the re-establishment of ties with humanity by supporting the mourning process. “It is as though beauty works as a catalyst, transforming raw grief into a tranquil sadness, helping the tears to flow and, at the same time, one might say, putting […] loss into a certain philosophical perspective” (Danto 2003, 111). There is something quite comforting in homemaking gestures since these help create a sense of order and the consistent environment so necessary in the aftermath of traumas associated with displacement (Gurwitch and Messenbaugh 2005, 30). “The valuation of order and cleanliness goes a lot further than its mere aesthetic value” (Ureta 2007, 329). For Ureta’s subjects, “order is beauty, but at the same time it is a sign of

normality" and (citing Giddens), he concludes that besides beauty, cleanliness and order of things at home represent a source of "ontological security" (329). It would seem that Third Realm beauty might be useful here. After all, insofar "as beauty involves pleasure, that is, a state which, by definition, we would seek to continue in, it would appear that there is an interest, and hence a potential for action, at least associated with beauty" (Kirwan 1999, 74). However much the precariousness of home is felt by the forcibly displaced, a certain sense of predictability and control can be found by engaging with Third Realm Beauty.

The choice to engage in home-beautification, however, is not self-evident. The very promise of pleasure may be what impedes one's readiness to embrace beauty: "Because taking pleasure in something depends upon our frame of mind we may, without realizing that we are doing so, resist pleasure because we reject the mood it comports with" (Armstrong 2004, 55). A willingness not to cling to the past can seem like a profound act of individual and cultural betrayal. At another level, abandoning the stance that one's new home is temporary is also fraught. It means accepting the original loss, as well as letting go of a disruptive but comfortable-through-familiarity positioning of oneself.

Architect and co-founder of the field of Environment-Behavior Studies Amos Rapoport, writing about home environments, states: "It seems characteristic […] that *they are chosen*. One could almost argue that *if they are not chosen they are not home.* An imposed setting is unlikely to be a home environment, although it may *become* one" (1985, 256: italics in original).[41] Aesthetic engagement is amongst the processes and activities that most tends to

increase the chances of this *becoming*: the appreciation and cultivation of the beautiful co-habits with the work of transitioning from journey to dwelling.

When we are experiencing the chaos of disorder and destruction, when we do not feel capable of exerting any control over the conditions of (our) home, a retreat to a scale of intimacy can comfort us and offer us choice-making options, however humble in scale. The practice of creating an appropriate equilibrium between chaos and order can satisfy us through routine appreciation for and attention to beauty. Furthermore, by appreciating the "less-than-perfect" furnishings, unfamiliar objects and settings in which we often dwell after forced dislocation, we can learn to embrace the impermanent, the transient, the insufficient, the imperfect and even the accidental, thus bringing ourselves to give meaning to our lives. In the aftermath of forced displacement, the search for and activation of beauty in the everyday flow of life is, for some, not only a part of the system of coping mechanisms and sense-making processes needed to come to terms with loss and to embrace the present and future, it is a powerful affirmation of survival and an engagement with life.

> To be at home in the world is an expression of attachment observed in all living beings and the specifically human need to create a world of shared meaningful experiences. Recent history has been a history of lost homes and lost nations. […] Home becomes an inner psychological dimension not dependent on geographic location. We may understand it as a capacity of the psyche to offer a fixed point of reference to which we may

return so that we may assimilate new experiences without loss of identity. (Hill 1996, 575)

For individuals in the process of relocating home and self (including those whose experience of displacement has been inherited) the somatic, affective and social pathways afforded by the material care of home's objects and things are as integral to the process of dwelling as they are interdependent and interperformative. Over time, active engagement with Third Realm beauty alleviates and mitigates the loss of home and encourages the making of home anew. Yet understanding and appreciating aesthetics in relation to home's loss is a complex matter. It entails an exploration of the deliberate and unintentional "pragmatic and symbolic" (Shusterman 2000) negotiation of materiality and an attention to the details of placement, process and relationships in the ordinary occurrence of daily life. In addition to exploring aesthetic materiality, philosopher Yuriko Saito gives attention to the "aesthetics of ambience." Both are pertinent to the effort of fleshing out how and why even ordinary experiences of beauty matter so much to individuals whose (sense of) home has been damaged or destroyed. Saito suggests that "an equally significant part of our everyday aesthetic life is the appreciation directed toward an ambience, atmosphere, or mood surrounding a certain experience, comprised of many ingredients" (2007, 119). While such activities and ambiences can be seen as basic to anyone's subsistence, they are indispensible aesthetic experiences for those that inhabit the crossroads between remembering what was lost and taking up residence

anew. After all, aesthetic experience spreads attention across all facets of the interconnected whole that is dwelling. “Seeing beauty isn’t [only] a matter of looking at one thing intently; it is a matter of looking at a lot of different things together” (Armstrong 2004, 39). Active appreciation and cultivation of home beautification can reinforce old ways of knowing; they can also invite new possibilities of becoming “more alert and responsive” (Armstrong 2004, 45), thus enabling a more fully recognized interrelatedness of material and immaterial processes of making a house feel like a home. Like all significant learning, this takes practice.

While focused particularly on art, Richard Hickman’s (2010) assertions about the multifold intelligences implicated in aesthetic experience are useful here as they detail the ways in which repeated and sustained attentiveness to aesthetics stimulate neural, experiential and reflective aptitudes, which are all necessary for the complex tasks of shaping the conditions for home. The effects of exposure to aesthetic experience, as outlined by Hickman, include refinement of expression, imagination, intuition and empathy, as well as an increased likelihood of creative experimentation. These skills in turn help ensure that human “society remains dynamic and is able to confront and tackle new problems as they arise” (57). Imagination, suggests Hickman, involves the kind of thinking that “is not simply fantasy or the conjuring up of mental images of things not experienced, but the actual construction of new realities” (113). In a time of housing upheaval these faculties can be adapted by the individual and the community to reconcile memory and expectations; to mourn; to adjust to new

places, people and possibly languages; and to make connections from the proximate experience of the here-and-now.

By extrapolating from Elliot Eisner's (2002) list of lessons the arts teach, which focuses on the importance of repeated and prolonged exposure to aesthetic experience in the education of children, it is possible to get an even more nuanced understanding of the ways in which aesthetic experience within the home functions in the lives of displaced individuals. Aesthetic experience, according to Eisner, can help people to realize that complex forms of problem solving are seldom static but change with circumstance and opportunity; to think with and through material; and to learn to say what cannot be said and thus expand their range of feeling and experience (70-92). In short, aesthetic practice, which, says Eisner, "traffics in subtleties," can invite displaced persons to live more fluidly and responsively within their new environments. Even small acts of beautification can be very satisfying. The deliberate appreciation of beauty is therefore, oddly, a rather useful and straightforward way to develop situated knowledge and tease out the indirect attitudinal and gestural dexterity and ingenuity necessary for the complex and life-long process of recreating home; a process that is very often psychologically challenging, physically arduous, financially burdensome, culturally disorienting and politically charged.

Sensory knowledge can become new mental knowledge, just as new thoughts can reshape the sense people make of their feelings as they come to terms with loss. There are ways of knowing, perceiving and problem-solving embodied in our physical being that are accessible and made manifest perhaps

only through aesthetic experience, which, as Hickman (2010, 56) suggests, makes us more likely to be sensitive to our environment and the beauty that inhabits us, independent of the geographical location in which we find ourselves.

The relationships between one place and another and between the past and present are complicated by many factors including whether what is being transposed and recalled is an experience of trauma. “New experiences can only be understood in light of prior schemas. The particular internal and external conditions prevailing at the time that an event takes places will affect what prior meaning schemes are activated” (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart 440). While some displaced persons have access to pre-dislocation schemas of home that they rely on to create home anew, in many instances the trauma of the involuntary move(s) represents a rupture that renders these schemas (and their associated memories) inaccessible.

Yet, posttraumatic growth is possible (see for example: Caruth 1991; Herman 1992; Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004). One can gain an “increased appreciation for life in general, and many smaller aspects of it,” and one can learn to identify “new possibilities for one’s life or the possibility of taking a new and different path in life” (Tedeschi and Calhoun 2004, 6). But these things are very hard to in the abstract while suffering the effects of trauma. The care and attention to one’s material belongings can play an important role here. These are activities that tend to take place on a small manageable scale, they can be repetitive and predictable, and they can subtly stimulate an aesthetic moment. With time and repetition, aesthetic experience “can provide a context which

facilitates or cultivates a range of positive thinking dispositions" enabling the possibility of imagining new connections and relationships in one's new abode (Hickman 2010, 37). Beginning with simple actions, attention to the home's objects offers an opportunity for exploring and adapting to uncertainty, not only by bringing us back to what is affectively familiar but also by creating new notions of normalcy and shaping new narratives of home.

Understood in this way, the practice of beauty in the realm of home-making is not just a radical engagement with the appearance of things. It is a wholly interconnected examination, experimentation and exploration of being, being in relation *with*, and becoming. bell hooks writes:

> As artist and critic, I find compelling a radical aesthetic that seeks to uncover and restore links between art and revolutionary politics […]. I remain passionately committed to an aesthetic that focuses on the purpose and function of beauty, of artistry in everyday life, especially the lives of poor people, one that seeks to explore and celebrate the connection between our capacity to engage in critical resistance and our ability to experience pleasure and beauty. (1990, 111)

"Migratory" Third Realm beauty can be affirmed as *radical* precisely because of the entanglement between the personal, social, economic and political implications of aesthetics. Radical beauty for troubled times is as bound up with critical resistance to systemic inequities as it is with the need for reflective

practice, which according to Tom Wessels—a leading environmental educator and ecological activist—is what allows for the transmutation of knowledge into understanding. Wessels suggests that the mastery of factual information can only be truly useful if integrated as a total body and emotional experience through contemplation, storytelling, art, spiritual practice and the active appreciation of beauty.[42]

Some forty years ago, British visual anthropologist and social scientist Gregory Bateson suggested that the loss of aesthetic wisdom has brought humanity to the brink of unhoming ourselves on earth. “Mere purposive rationality unaided by such phenomena as art, religion, dream, and the like, is necessarily pathogenic and destructive of life” (1972, 146). More recently, author Noel G. Charlton writing about the connections Bateson made between mind, beauty and inhabiting, stated:

> Because our interactions with our surrounding have (until recent times) been constant, they have been consigned to primary process operation and so we no longer have the *conscious* capacity to deal with environment wisely. Our habits of relating with our world are no longer appropriate for its rapidly changing condition. We have no direct access to primary process. Conscious process is inadequate in our rapidly changing ecology so we create more environmental damage whenever we attempt to correct our actions. However, artistic engagement, active involvement in the creation and appreciation of beauty, provides a route into primary process

> whereby the buried wisdom, the otherwise inaccessible responsiveness, can be accessed and utilized. (2008, 107)

While Hooks unequivocally reads beauty's significance through the lens of challenging the economic, cultural, political and social status quo, Wessels, Bateson and Charlton are no less assertive about beauty's rather considerable role when it comes to the question of home.

When all is functioning well within the body, between self and other, and in relation to objects and place, we barely, if at all, take notice of our experience. Often it is only when there is some kind of assault on any one of these loci of home, do we fully appreciate the effective working dynamics of the systemic whole. Peter King suggests: "When we are living our lives and pursuing our interests we, as it were, take our housing with us. It forms the basis upon which we can act, and this is the very reason why we are able to ignore it and take it for granted." Furthermore, he states: "Dwelling is both a physical and an ontological condition whereby we feel secure, stable and complacent" (2005, 65 and 67). While I can now understand King's assertion to be describing a quality of wellness in feeling at home with oneself, in one's house, and in one's place in the world, for the majority of my life this capacity to "ignore home and take it for granted" has not been possible.

Indeed, while not all experiences of forced displacement are experienced as traumatic, the majority of the individuals who collaborated with me over the years did at one point or another in the planning, implementation or post-

performance reflection process, self-identify as trauma victims. Several recognized that as children caught up in the upheaval of moving—or subject to the world of stories and memories their parents created—they did not have the capacity, skills, and support that would have been necessary to integrate their experiences into the flow of ordinary experience. “The undoing of the self in trauma involves a radical disruption of memory, a severing of past from present and, typically, an inability to envision a future. And yet trauma survivors often eventually find ways to reconstruct themselves and carry on with reconfigured lives” (Brison 39). For these individuals who have had to carry the unresolved and resulting dissonant effects into adulthood, the trauma of displacement became a productive site of identity formation.

In her compelling reflections about the counter movement to the state of depression that seemed to prevail in the aftermath of 9/11 amongst a certain group of scholars, cultural theorist Ann Cvetkovich states: “The goal is to depathologize negative affects so that they can be seen as a possible resource for political action rather than as its antithesis. This is not, however, to suggest that depression is thereby converted into a positive experience; it retains its associations with inertia and despair, if not apathy and indifference, but these affects become sites of publicity and community formation” (2007, 460). Cvetkovich’s affirmation of the productivity of even the most difficult of emotions and states of mind is most useful as it anchors the understanding and appreciation of how the traumas associated with the loss of home can be, given the appropriate conditions, experienced as constructive.

Past recollections and new memories unite to (in)form the (already) transforming autobiography of self and/at home. Perhaps this is particularly so because “home and homelessness” are “essentially ideological constructs, involving compounds of cognitive and emotive meaning, and embracing within their meaning complex and variable distinctions between ideality [sic] and reality” (Somerville 1992, 537). While the sense-making process linking the past, present and future of one’s housing experience is personally and intimately enacted within the domestic sphere, philosopher Mark Kingwell suggests: “In the Third Realm, beauty is always political because it addresses, in some manner, how to live” (2006, 218). Rather than a fixed and stable set of associations Third Realm (migratory) beauty can be understood as contextual, conditional and changing as home itself and, as such, has the potential to heal and to wound.

I have highlighted the role of everyday aesthetics and the stories told about home focusing mostly amongst second and third generation-displaced individuals. Additional research would need to be carried out in order to ascertain the relevance of such activity amongst populations in more acute stages of housing crises. There are unfortunately several instances in which this inquiry might be activated including amongst the Haitian survivors of the 2010 earthquake and the Japanese communities who have lived through the magnitude 9.0 earthquake, the tsunami, and the Fukushima nuclear emergency in 2011. Moreover, with intensifying strife in so many places around the world, the need to identify viable approaches to help in the home resettlement process within the first generation is crucial to mitigate the long-term lingering impacts

amongst the children and grandchildren of the victims of home's loss and halt the cycle of violence stemming from associating home with territory and dominion. Evidence from this five-year research-creation project indicates that aesthetics need to be considered a vital force in this age of mass global migration on account of its radical efficiency for healing and for harm.

However challenging and disruptive, there is much to be gained psychologically, socially, environmentally and politically from recognizing the precarity of home. Intentionally engaging Third Realm beauty readies us to feel at home in the world despite the increasing challenges of housing instability, habitat destruction and the ruptures in relationships that often accompany these experiences. Despite the imperfections of one's housing situation in the aftermath of forced dislocation, in order to connect anew with a sense of place, I maintain that it is necessary to confront the displacement and integrate it as a meaningful part of one's home experience.

The denial of—and resistance to—the hybridities of identity tends to emerge most virulently when the stakes are felt to be highest: immediately prior to, or just after, forced displacement. At such moments, the contemporary cultural affinity with the nostalgic, wounded or absent home reaffirms victimhood, thus narrowing the possibilities for overcoming the loss of home. I suspect that the more that home is embraced as provisional, the less likely it will be that Third Realm Beauty will be used as a vector of violence, although further research would be necessary to confirm this hypothesis. What I have found to be true is that traumas associated with displacement can be healed through an active

appreciation and engagement with Third Realm beauty and the sharing of personal narrative in the presence of caring attentive witnesses.

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[1] I want to thank Alice Ming Wai Jim for introducing me to the concept "migratory aesthetics" during (the fall 2009) "Global Art Histories" graduate seminar at Concordia University.

[2] To better understand the context of Pollock's questions, see her postscript to the 2006 exhibition entitled *Migratory Aesthetics*—a two-part, two-site international collaboration between the University of Amsterdam and the University of Leeds.

[3] The *Songs of Mourning, Songs of Life* project was developed independently of this PhD research-creation.

[4] For a closer examination of the categories and classifications of displacement (e.g. refugees, exiles and the homeless), see Safran 1991, Bakewell 2008, and Van Hear 2011.

[5] Bar-Ilan's Zionist mission is stated very clearly on their webpage: "At Bar-Ilan we are not satisfied with merely being another great research university. We see our mission as something far more challenging and historic. We build character and leadership for Israel and the Jewish nation, based on the belief in the centrality of Israel to the Jewish world as its national homeland."

[6] Sandra B. Lubarsky is currently the Director of the Sustainable Development Program at Appalachian State University. She in the process of writing a book about the role of beauty in thinking about sustainability, which she believes has "gone underappreciated."

[7] See also my essay "Between Terror and Belief" (2001) in which I expound on the dynamic process of healing through the public exhibition of art.

[8] Psychologist Sylvain Savard shared this information with me as I prepared the Training and Exchange Program for the artists involved in *Agir par l'imaginaire*. This three-year pilot project, which was not carried out within the framework of my PhD study, was co-directed by Aleksandra Zajko of the Société Elizabeth Fry du Québec and myself. The collaboration between professional artists and 49 incarcerated women in four Montreal-area prison facilities that explored the link between incarceration and poverty resulted in the May-June 2011 exhibition *AGIR: The Art of Women in Prison* at the Eastern Bloc.

[9] *Prescriptions* was curated by Denis Simard. Pierre Beaudoin, Sylvie Cotton, Patrice Duchesne, Steeve Lebrasseur, Hélène Matte, David Michaud, Karen Spencer, Christine St-Maur and Benoît Woo were the other invited artists.

[10] See also my essay "Im/possible Representations" commissioned for the September 2000 issue of *Liberté* entitled "*Cette photo que je n'ai pas faite*" in which I write about the choice to invite photographic documentation.

[11] Nearly seven years after the event, and only after I had begun my doctoral studies, I began to work with these experiences critically as a way to explore the notion of “close proximity” within live art performance.

[12] *Handshake Ritual* was only one of several dimensions to *Touch Sanitation*, a project that also included a subsequent two-pronged exhibition at the Ronald Feldman gallery and the NYC Department of Sanitation, Marine Transfer Station.

[13] In her review of Petra Kuppers’ edited volume *Somatic Engagement* (in which appeared an earlier version of this chapter), disability design specialist Mallory Kay Nelson writes: “In connecting the body to poetry, Devora Neumark's piece "The Sensuous is Political: Live Art Performance and the Palestinian Resistance Movement," pulls words into a reflection of the actual body experience. In response to the 2006 invasion of Lebanon and events surrounding that invasion, Neumark and Tali Goodfriend "marked our protest by bathing each others' hands repeatedly with Lebanese olive oil in a three hour silent durational performance called *And How Shall Our Hands Meet*?" (81) This piece is a cascade of art in the face of violence, color images, evoked poetry in motion; in between the poems and the description of "Hatoum's Crawl" and "diaspora," the body of writing jars one out of a sense of belonging. The structures of the poems within the essay provide a sense of disconnection, a person living in diaspora. It becomes a reading experience that cannot be verbalized.” It is important to me that the work is experienced somatically and that it circulates through a variety of different cultural channels.

[14] Other dialogical events undertaken within this cycle of research-creation not written about in this thesis include *Of Blood, Marrow, and Bone. Bearing Witness: Stories of Survival, Loss and Not Belonging.* Convened in collaboration with Lisa Ndejuru and Pauline Ngirumpatse, this story sharing performance brought together survivors from the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the 1970s Cambodian Killing Fields, the *Shoah*, as well as members of the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation. In addition to sharing some of my personal experiences, I spent the evening stirring a huge pot of boiling chicken soup. At the end of the story sharing, each person was offered a bowl as we continued more informal conversations amongst us. Speaking to the challenges of transforming trauma and making home anew, Pauline, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide herself, stated with a quiet and yet determined voice: “I have reached the point where I want to live, not just survive.”

Another live art event I was involved with during the tenure of this PhD was initiated in response to the to the triple catastrophe that hit Japan in March 2011, which resulted in the death and displacement of several hundred thousand people. Sponsored by Concordia University’s matralab and hexagram in association with the Society for Arts and Technology (SAT), 手向け *TAMUKE Offrandes pour le Japon / Offerings for Japan* (2011) was a seven-hour artistic vigil, which I helped coordinate.

[15] Odaya is a group of women singers and drummers originating from diverse Indigenous communities from across Canada. Both Emilie Monnet and Lisa

Gagné are founding members of the group. Formed in January 2007, Odaya continues to perform across the country and internationally.

[16] In his 17 February 2008 CBC radio interview with *Writers and Company*-host Eleanor Wachtel.

[17] The two research labs are: Canada Research Chair in Inter-X Art Practice and Theory, Sandeep Bhagwati's *matralab* and Canada Research Chair in New Media Arts, Sha Xin Wei's *Topological Media Lab*.

[18] The Topological Media Lab hosted a related open seminar, timed to coincide with the *homeBody* events.

[19] The email from Janet Lumb was initially sent to Reena, Meena and Émilie on February 20, 2009. Meena then forwarded it to me.

[20] In an unprecedented legal challenge against the Israel Lands Administration (ILA), the JNF and the Israeli Minister of Finance (MOF), Adalah, an independent human rights organization and legal center defending the rights of Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories, demanded "the cancellation of an ILA policy and a regulation promulgated by the MOF, permitting the marketing and allocation of JNF lands through bids open only to Jews" (Adalah, unpaged).

[21] Vincent not only authorized my use of this material within this thesis; he requested that his story be told in full as he recounted it to me, hence the length of the quote.

[22] I had no knowledge of the *Jewish Home Beautiful* community pageant and book until my second year in the PhD program. While I had clearly defined the subject of my research-creation from the start, coming across the publication provided me with a most relevant object that permitted a sustained and profound creative and analytical exploration.

[23] Subsequent performances of *The Jewish Home Beautiful* community play have been, for the most part, produced by individual congregations; this is not all that surprising given how the different Jewish religious denominations tend to disagree on a wide variety of issues including the roles and responsibilities of women within Jewish domestic and communal life.

[24] Here, as elsewhere in this chapter, when I refer to historical material that is no longer widely circulated or easily available, I have taken the liberty of quoting the original source at length. I have also decided to include rather extensive citations from the 1941 edition of *The Jewish Home Beautiful* in order to provide as accurate a reading of this publication as possible.

[25] See for example "Mobile Synagogue Presents Jewish Home Beautiful" written by Sally Ericson and the photographic gallery of the performance uploaded to the Ahavas Chesed web portal.

[26] Atay Citron is currently the Chair of Theatre Department at the University of Haifa.

[27] See also Grunberger; Schwartz; Shuchat; Stolow; and Zollman.

[28] For a comprehensive analysis of how Judaism and U.S. identity reinforced each other see Jonathan D. Sarna's 1998 article "The Cult of Synthesis in American Jewish Culture."

[29] See also Joseph Sachs' 1937 publication, *Beauty and the Jews.*

[30] As stated on the University of Michigan Digital Library Collection's splash page for the Jewish Women's Archive.

[31] According to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. See for example the 17 February 2010 statement released by the UNRWA Commissioner, General Filippo Grandi.

[32] Collaborating with me in the planning, implementation and documentation of these events were: Rana Alrabi, Geneviève Fortin, Andrew Harder, Asma Khan, Nika Khanjani, Vera Kisfalvi, Louise Lachapelle, Chantale Laplante, Melissa Morris, Lisa Ndejuru, Rula Odeh, Daniel Rodriguez, Max Stein, Diana Yaros and Sonia Zylberberg. While Sonia, Diana and Geneviève were involved in all three events, the others contributed to one or two events only as the parameters of the live art performances shifted and the ideas for the series continued to develop.

[33] Given that these events were a central component of my SSHRC-funded PhD research/creation project, university compliance protocols were followed (i.e. Summary Protocol Forms were submitted to Concordia University's Office of Research – Research Ethics and Compliance Unit for review and approval by the Human Research Ethics Committee for each event and informed consent forms were signed by all who participated). Appropriate protocols were also followed for the follow-up conversations.

[34] With the participation of: Hoda Adra, Daniella Ansiovini, Amelie Ares, Shahrzad Arshadi, Hourig Attarian, Brett Bergmann, Sandeep Bhagwati, Ruth Boomer, Michaela Chandler, Cassandre Chatonnier, Sheila Eskenazi, Bina Freiwald, David Gates, Daniel Gies, Adrian Gorea, Andrew Harder (sound technician), Todd Harrop, Alexadra Hoffman, Alexandre Huot, Nadia Ionta, Alice Ming Wai Jim, Asma Kahn (video technician), Nika Khanjani (video technician), Vera Kisfalvi (community consultant), Louise Lachapelle (creative consultant), Chantale Laplante, Ericka Leblonc, Fernando Leppe, Julie Malo-Sauvé, Pamela Markus, Hollie McGowan, Émilie Monnet, Jake Moore, Marilyn Mosovic, Meena Murugesan, Lisa Ndejuru (community consultant), Léa Neumark-Gaudet, Denise Olivares, Emily Paige, Vanessa Penna, Julie-Chantale St.-Jean, Stephanie Schwartz, Dorothy Stern, Martha Stiegman, Ann Tanner-McDonald, Matthieu Tremblay, Stephen Trepanier, Anna Trowbridge, Diana Yaros (community consultant), Aleksandra Zajko, Sonia Zylberberg (ritual specialist), and others.

[35] Louise Lachapelle and I took the photograph of the graffiti-covered shop doors in Hebron during a research trip in the winter of 2005.

[36] Michael Ratner (in his January 9, 2010 *Mondoweiss: The War of Ideas in the Middle East* post titled "History and Hebron"), juxtaposed a photo of a Nazi soldier standing next to a shop window with a Jewish star painted overtop the glass and a photo of a Jewish star spray painted in black on a Palestinian shop in Hebron. Under the diptych appears the following blurb: "Of course in Germany the stars were placed to discourage if not end commerce to a Jewish shop; in Hebron they are placed to assert the closing of a Palestinian store

and its "ownership" by the Jews of Hebron. In both cases the stars are painted by the oppressors." I only came across Ratner's post in December 2012, when I was in the process of revising this thesis. It is not surprising to me that the connection between the oppressive use of the symbol of Jewish identity in Nazi Germany and Palestine would be picked up and worked with as the proliferation of markings on Palestinian shops such as the one documented in the 2005 photograph taken by Louise Lachapelle and myself became impossible to ignore for activists and scholars taking interest in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

[37] With the participation of: Rana Alrabi, Elaine Arshinoff, Sandeep Bhagwati, Marilyn Bronstein, Danielle Generaux, Kevin Gould, Andrew Harder (sound technician), Louise Houle, Alice Ming Wai Jim, Karen Tennenhouse, Vera Kisfalvi (community consultant), Caroline Kunzle, Chantale Laplante (composition/sound environment), Hannah Lecousy, Lesley Levy (community consultant), Emanuel Lowi, Mirka Monet, Melissa Morris, Lisa Ndejuru (community consultant), Léa Neumark-Gaudet, Fabienne Presentey, Estelle Rabkin, Yakov Rabkin, Andrew Rayfeld, Daniel Rodriguez, Deena Roskies, Robert Silverman, Andrea Summers (Zatoun representative), Abraham Weizfeld, S. Weizfeld, Diana Yaros (community consultant), Sami Zaidalkilani, Sonia Zylberberg (ritual specialist), and others.

[38] Sandeep Bhagwati is my Primary Ph.D. Thesis Advisor.

[39] In collaboration with: Rana Alrabi, Rula Odeh, Sonia Zylberberg and Diana Yaros. This event was held in the matrabox.

[40] See also Jacobs and Manzi 2000; Jacobs, Kemeny and Manzi 2004; as well as Clapham 2002 and 2009 for an overview of social constructionism as it pertains to housing theory.

[41] Another instance of displacement that is bound up with the perception of choice is when the elderly can no longer continue to live in their familial home. I was a team member of a multi-year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada-funded project titled *Aging in Place* (directed by Nancy Guberman). Between 2008-2011—through the use of semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation—we explored seniors' conceptions and experiences of home as they reached the point of needing to relocate to an assisted-living environment. Amongst the most salient findings of this study was the decisive role that (the perception of) choice played in the smooth transition to new living arrangements and the mitigation of social exclusion that had been feared prior to the move by selecting particular objects that held special meaning to be placed in the new housing environment.

[42] Professor Wessles spoke of this during his keynote address at the inaugural Communicating Science symposium hosted by Antioch University New England (October 2012), which I was fortunate enough to attend.

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