

AT HOME IN CYBERSPACE: STAGING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SCENES

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By the beginning of the twenty-first century, scholars and critics from a range of disciplines had amply documented the autobiographical impulse in everyday life. Communicated “on the body, on the air, in music, in print, on video, at meetings,” as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson observe, personal narratives intrigue cross-sections of the population in the United States and around the world (*Getting a Life* 2). According to Smith and Watson, individuals of all kinds seem eager both to construct their own narratives and to learn about the life stories that other people tell (*Getting a Life* 3). Chronicles about “getting a life” disseminated via the traditional mass media contribute to cultural archives, as do autobiographical texts that have been considered “‘merely personal’ and extraliterary,” such as “diaries, letters, journals, memoirs, travel narratives, meditations, cookbooks, family histories, spiritual records, collages, art books, and others” (Smith and Watson, “Introduction” 38–39).

Hailed by Fredric Jameson as the dominant medium of postmodernism (201), video has also played an important role in reshaping autobiographical genres. This history encompasses productions made for network and cable television as well as for alternative venues, since makers often have chosen to work outside of commercial arenas, a practice that emerged during the 1970s when portable video equipment became available. Free to innovate and to identify their own audiences, independent media artists have experimented with autobiographical genres, and so have nonprofessional home users. Film and video scholar Michael Renov in 1989 identified a trend among media artists that still interests autobiographers. The examples he discusses in “The New Autobiography in Film and Video” share a common tendency both to represent historically positioned inscriptions of the self, and to research ways

that self-presentation may be adapted to moving-image forms (4–7). Autobiography, Renov asserts, “is the site of a vital creative initiative being undertaken by film- and videomakers around the world that is transforming the ways we think about and represent ourselves *for* ourselves and for others” (5). In an effort to blur boundaries between “high” and “low” video cultures, media arts critic Christine Tamblyn claimed several years later that, like autobiographical videos by independent media artists who use small-format technology, videos by nonprofessional consumers using camcorders open up “new spaces for cultural intervention” in everyday life. Tamblyn equates home video genres, such as diaries, family albums, letters, and travelogues, with work by women and men from “the video art canon” (13–14, 17, 27).¹

These video genres have counterparts not only in print-based texts, but also in Web-based productions, since the autobiographical impulse manifests itself in cyberspace, too. Professional and nonprofessional communicators alike construct personal home pages, online diaries, blogs, and generic hybrids that fuse elements of traditional and new media. Repertoires of Net art and e-literature contribute to the mix.² Designed to attract audiences online, sites explore novel ways to reconfigure boundaries between “private” and “public” social spheres, as well as between “high” and “low” cultures. Such experiments with autobiographical production thus complement the ongoing “democratization of video,” and reinforce Tamblyn’s notion that cultural intervention and innovative self-representation can occur almost anywhere (13–14). As a medium that for more and more users plays a key role in everyday life, the Web, like video, expedites the production of social space, while at the same time accommodating personal storytellers.³

Rather than focus on familiar modes of self-representation that the Web supports, this essay considers how a selection of generic hybrids opens up new arenas for staging autobiographical scenes differently. Produced by writers, Net artists, and media makers, *Family Portrait*, *Grandfather Gets a House*, *The Family Album Project*, *Home Maker*, and *Heard It in the Playground* are united by a common tendency to raise questions about the meaning, recollection, and locus of “home” in a digital age. Tapping into diverse repertoires, these Web sites transform personal home pages into “new spaces for cultural intervention” that merge “private” and “public” spheres (Tamblyn 13–14). Experiments with collaborative storytelling, hypermedia, and interactivity enrich the autobiographical performances, and engage visitors who stop by en route from one site to another. Based on my own excursions in cyberspace, I will conduct a guided tour of these virtual domains.

BACKGROUND

The Home Project, a Web site co-sponsored by the trAce Online Writing Centre in Nottingham, England, and New Perspectives Theatre Company, in Mansfield, was the starting point for my excursion.⁴ *The Home Project* is based on the premise that during times like the present, when frequent relocation is common, “the real power of Home is often defined more in our heads than by buildings, countries or landscapes. . . . So, Home can frequently be found more in memory than in geography or more in imagination than in reality.” A collective variant of the personal home page, *The Home Project* enables people from around the globe to articulate their sense of home. Five prompts evoke memories and personal reflections. Visitors are asked to comment on what “home” means to them, to describe the homes of their childhoods, and to contemplate where they belong now.⁵

The contributors’ thoughtful responses illustrate ways that “home” means different things to different people, thus supporting trAce’s efforts to build “a Home Page with a difference,” and drawing attention to the “real-and-imagined spaces of representation” that geographer Edward Soja identifies. Rather than offer universal truths or master narratives, *The Home Project* supports many views, embodying Jean-François Lyotard’s claim that “Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable” (xxv). *The Home Project*’s diversity extends to metaphoric uses which suggest that in cyberspace “home” can accommodate differences, too.

Moreover, as *The Home Project* implies, in the process of redefining “home on the web,” autobiographical site designers unsettle boundaries traditionally lying between “private” and “public” spheres,⁶ destabilizing that paradigm of “separate spheres” which architectural critic Jane Rendell describes as “an oppositional and an hierarchical system consisting of a dominant public male realm of production (the city) and a subordinate private female one of reproduction (the home)” (110–11). Instead of reinforcing such oppositions, or merely privileging the traditionally subordinate “private” sphere, *The Home Project* suggests that other spatial configurations are possible in cyberspace, thereby complementing city-focused Web projects, such as *The City Stories* and *Mr. Beller’s Neighborhood*,⁷ but also projects such as *The Cyber-Kitchen* (Loseby, *Cyber*), which invite people from around the world to rethink—and in this case, to use hypermedia to reinvent—the “private” sphere online.⁸ As both a forum in its own right for netizens to tell their personal stories, and as a force among public forums with a related focus, *The Home Project* encourages Web makers concerned with self-representation

and other forms of portraiture to consider notions of home in an expanded social, historical, and spatial context.⁹

Independent autobiographical Web sites further extend *The Home Project's* network of associations. Although many independent sites focus on home from the perspective of one narrator, the sites I will survey involve collaborative storytelling and a composite approach.¹⁰ Though a small sampling chosen from the thousands of amateur and professional Web sites documenting life stories online,¹¹ together *Family Portrait*, *Grandfather Gets a House*, *The Family Album Project*, *Home Maker*, and *Heard It in the Playground* broaden the discussion that trAce generates. Unlike *The Home Project* contributors, however, who respond to a series of questions, these independent autobiographers draw on a range of media to show, as well as tell, what they think of as home. From vantage points that their online excursions afford, they share their views of the past, present, and future—sometimes at once. The autobiographers ask “Where am I?” as well as “Who am I?” They imagine where they would like to belong.

Improvising on familiar theories and practices as they go along, these autobiographers compose personal narratives that neither print nor moving image media alone can deliver. As in *The Home Project*, the playhouses where their performances occur tend to function as “a theatre of recollection,” a concept that aptly describes the spaces in which autobiographical hybrids of all sorts appear and disappear on the Web.¹² Providing virtual domains online, these custom-designed theatres promote innovative approaches to self-representation for the casts of *Family Portrait*, *Grandfather Gets a House*, *The Family Album Project*, *Home Maker*, and *Heard It in the Playground*. As if inviting guests to visit their homes, studios, or workshops, the subjects of these autobiographies hold open house on the Web, with the stage set as much a part of their stories as the rehearsals and performances that unfold there.

Part of a complex mediascape, these home theatres have analogues in the material world. Commenting on a drama of another sort in progress since the mid-1990s, media arts critic Michael Nash describes a scenario that affects both online autobiographers and their audiences:

Yes, video art has become a historical footnote, but television is in its twilight, too. At the on-ramp of the information superhighway, the movie studios, TV networks, cable companies, telephone companies, computer companies, consumer electronics companies, and publishers are poised to converge into massive new systems of cultural distribution based on digital technologies emerging in this generation. When fully implemented, this will complete the century-long relocation of the dominant site of cultural experience from the “proscenium arch” to the “home.” (384)¹³

As Nash indicates here, for many residents, homes simply are not what they used to be. Whether in the material world or cyberspace, these venues spotlight new kinds of performances in everyday life.¹⁴ Although the concept of “home theatre” was first applied to television in its early days, the convergences that Nash describes open up possibilities for production, exhibition, and reception of a different kind.

Neither inherently utopian nor dystopian, home theatres on the Web allow autobiographers to challenge a tradition of Western autobiographical writing that in Caren Kaplan’s words “has participated in the literary construction of ‘home’; a process of generalizing the particular, fabricating a narrative space of familiarity, and crafting a narrative that links the individual to the universal” (130). When autobiographers devise alternatives to this tradition online, as they do in the collaborative sites I will discuss, they refashion the types of “out-law productions” that Kaplan studies. She applies this term to autobiographical narratives that break the law of genre by resisting individual authorship, and by renegotiating “the relationship between personal identity and the world, between personal and social history” (130).¹⁵ At the same time, the online autobiographers under consideration “create a community of readers in search of new ideas” (Nash 396).

REAL AND IMAGINED

Theories of spatiality offer signposts to those who produce and visit Web-based theatres of recollection. Soja bases his critical approach on a belief that the spatial dimension of life has great practical and political relevance. In *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, he encourages readers “to think differently about the meanings and significance of space and those related concepts that compose and comprise the inherent *spatiality of human life*: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography” (1). He hopes that by questioning conventional ways of thinking, readers will open up and expand their spatial and geographical imaginations. Instead of subordinating the spatiality of human life to historicity and sociality, as scholars typically have done, he proposes that spatiality be recognized as “a third existential dimension,” thus reinforcing the simultaneity and interrelatedness of the spatial, the historical, and the social. “Thirdspace,” the term he coins to designate this way of thinking, applies to writing a biography as much as it does to dealing with everyday life (1–3). In fact, Soja himself attempts to spatialize biography in his introduction to the life and work of the influential French “metaphilosopher” Henri Lefebvre, who advances the notion of a “triple dialectic” in

studies that link “the production of space, the making of history, and the composition of social relations in society” (6–7).

Thirdspace recognizes the three different kinds of space that Lefebvre postulates: “the *perceived* space of materialized Spatial Practice; the *conceived* space he defined as Representations of Space; and the *lived* Spaces of Representation.” Soja associates “perceived” space with a Firstspace focus on the “real,” and “conceived” space with a Secondspace focus on the “imagined.” These two perspectives represent the dual, either/or mode of traditional thinking about space that has informed the mainstream spatial imagination. According to Soja, the “lived” space of everyday life combines the “real” and the “imagined.” This Thirdspace perspective extends substantially the “scope, substance, and meaning” of the other perspectives. To accentuate the “real and imagined” foci of Thirdspace, Soja uses the phrase not only in his subtitle, but also in the explorations that his book documents (10–11; 65–68).¹⁶

For his point of departure, Soja turns to “The Aleph,” a short story by Jorge Luis Borges. “An Aleph is one of the points in space that contains all other points,” explains a character named Carlos Argentino Daneri, “the only place on earth where all places are . . .” (23). Located in the cellar of Daneri’s ancestral home in Buenos Aires, this “microcosm of the alchemists and Kabbalists” defies translation into words (25–26). Invited to witness the “limitless Aleph” for himself, the narrator, named “Borges,” strives to overcome the limits of language:

Really, what I want to do is impossible, for any listing of an endless series is doomed to be infinitesimal. In that single gigantic instant I saw millions of acts both delightful and awful; not one of them amazed me more than the fact that all of them occupied the same point in space, without overlapping or transparency. What my eyes beheld was simultaneous, but what I shall now write down will be successive, because language is successive. Nonetheless, I’ll try to recollect what I can. (26)¹⁷

Accepting the “invitation to exuberant adventure” that “The Aleph” extends, Soja combines its allegorical meditations on the complexities of space and time with Lefebvre’s views on the production of space. Echoing Borges’s language, Soja describes Thirdspace as “the space where all places are, capable of being seen from every angle, each standing clear”:

Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. . . . For Lefebvre (and for Borges), spatial knowledge, as

a means “to thread through the complexities of the modern world,” is achievable only through approximations, a constant search to move beyond (meta-) what is known. (56–57)

Connecting Lefebvre and Borges even more closely, Soja claims, “Lived social space, more than any other, is Lefebvre’s limitless Aleph, the space of all inclusive simultaneities, perils as well as possibilities: the space of radical openness, the space of social struggle” (68). Soja stresses the political underpinnings of these spaces of representation, or lived spaces, which demarcate strategic locations “from which to encompass, understand, and potentially transform all spaces simultaneously” (68). He regards lived spaces such as the home as potential “material-and-metaphorical meeting grounds for struggles over all forms of oppression” (69, 12).¹⁸ Contemporary thinkers who examine the politics of difference and identity with respect to these spaces open up additional pathways for exploring the struggles of everyday life (110+), calling into question, through theory and practice, the dualistic logic that informs notions of “private” and “public” spheres, and, relatedly, gendered configurations of space.¹⁹ Soja remains hopeful about Thirdspace’s prospects for cultural intervention because it “becomes not only the limitless Aleph but also what Lefebvre once called the city, a ‘possibilities machine’; or, recasting Proust, a madeleine for a *recherche des espaces perdus*, a remembrance-rethinking-recovery of spaces lost . . . or never sighted at all” (81). Indebted thus to Borges’s tale of the Aleph, Lefebvre’s theory of real-and-imagined space, and even Proust’s invocations of the past, the Thirdspatial imagination also resonates clearly in the autobiographical theatres of recollection previewed here.²⁰

By courtesy of the vantage points the autobiographers have set up, each virtual domain resembles both the Aleph itself and the cellar in which it is viewed. Designed with hypermedia features and configured for the Web, each “traveling Aleph” stages autobiographical scenes that document real-and-imagined spaces the subjects have chosen to represent as well as those they have not.²¹ On the Web, lived—and lost—spaces of representation are showcased for others to visit, twenty-four/seven, free of charge. As an experiment in collaborative storytelling, each theatre of recollection on this tour interconnects scenes from selected lives, and opens up portals to other Web sites that are hyperlinked, ad infinitum, like the “limitless Aleph” (Borges 26). Part of an ever-expanding global network, each virtual domain mirrors the larger network of which it is a part, contributing to a collective portrait of autobiographers in cyberspace. The Web sites that are brought together—*Family Portrait*, *Grandfather Gets a House*, *The Family Album Project*, *Home*

Maker, and *Heard It in the Playground*—suggest a range of possibilities for representing real-and-imagined spaces online. Brief glimpses into these traveling Alephs only hint at the delightful and awful acts recollected there.

VIRTUAL DOMAINS: A TOUR

FAMILY PORTRAIT²²

With its links to Borges's homeland, *Family Portrait* seems a fitting place to begin the tour. Framed as a family portrait of the matrilineal line in the displaced Partnoy family, this collaborative hypermedia project brings together for the first time the artistic and literary work of Raquel, Alicia, and Ruth, three generations of Argentinean women of Russian-Jewish descent. They use their creative gifts to grapple with the persecution that their ancestors faced in Russia during the early decades of the twentieth century, and that they faced in Argentina during the Dirty War of the late 1970s when more than 30,000 people “disappeared”—including Alicia. During her incarceration from 1977–1979, her eighteen-month-old daughter Ruth Irupé Sanabria stayed with Alicia's parents Raquel and Salomon Partnoy. Alicia and Ruth were exiled to the United States in 1979. Raquel and Salomon later joined them.

In collaboration with the three women, German media artist Agricola de Cologne edits, directs, and produces an online family portrait that interweaves Raquel's paintings and essays with Alicia's prose and Ruth's poetry.²³ To add an aural dimension, Alicia reads one of her own poems aloud, and Agricola de Cologne reads one of Ruth's. On all but one screen in the main section, a painting by Raquel appears next to a text written by a family member. When the originals are in Spanish, English translations are used. A cityscape of Bahia Blanca, Argentina, the Partnoy family hometown, provides the home page background (Agricola de Cologne, “Re: follow-up). Superimposed on the cityscape are the women's names, which when selected, reveal their photographs. A sidebar menu and a menorah, serving as a navigational icon, offset the composition. Associated with Jewish worship, this icon reinforces connections between the immigration of the women, who escaped political persecution in Argentina, and the immigration of their ancestors, who fled religious persecution in Russia more than sixty years earlier, a parallel that raises questions about the meaning of home and belonging when relocation becomes the family tradition.²⁴

Realizing that *Family Portrait* explores concerns that other Webs also address, Agricola de Cologne added the site to the NewMediaArtProject-Network that he started on 1 January 2000, an outgrowth of another of his

online projects, *A Virtual Memorial*. He notes that in particular the New-MediaArtProjectNetwork shares spatial perspectives that complement those of *Family Portrait* and other views of lives online:

This project represents, on one hand, a gigantic art project which can be compared with the Universe and its galaxy systems, always changing and expanding. On the other hand, it represents the framework of the network and communication between the sites, participants and collaborating individuals, institutions of different kinds and the active user. To him/her this art working is addressed, network as artworking. (“Artistic Statement”)

GRANDFATHER GETS A HOUSE

Like *Family Portrait*, *Grandfather Gets a House* practices a form of “artworking” that brings various networks into relation. This hypermedia project by the Canadian interdisciplinary artist Elizabeth Fischer is included in *Situ: The Diary of Displacement*, an online exhibition that she curated for the Western Front Society in Vancouver. Combining epistolary, diaristic, fictional, and documentary modes, *Grandfather* raises questions about home on multiple fronts. Fischer archives email notes that she and sixteen “Net-active writers and artists” posted on an email list called “fishbreath.”²⁵ In this correspondence, and in the various metamorphoses that the writing undergoes, Fischer entwines her own stories of displacement as an immigrant from Hungary, with the stories of an impoverished, nearly homeless Gypsy family that she meets while traveling through Transylvania, the Hungarian region of Romania. Ostensibly searching for the man who saved her father’s life during World War II, Fischer makes a detour that alters the futures of Mihaly and Melinda Gabor, their nine children, and Gyula Bacsı, the grandfather who ultimately gets a house.

In her life and in her art, Fischer tries to make public the substandard living conditions imposed on “a much-maligned and marginalized people” living in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the twenty-first century (“Navigation”). During crucial points in her journey, members of the email list offer advice and camaraderie via cyberspace, causing change in the real world and playing a role in how Fischer’s creative project evolves.

Word spreads through other channels, too. On 4 February 2002, for example, Juliet O’Keefe writes in her blog “Eclogues” that *Situ* “uses the medium to model questions of moving through space, flaneur-like, and to explore ideas of belonging, displacement, and poverty.” In passing along information gleaned from other blogs, O’Keefe’s commentary thus expands the scope of *Situ* and its projects, including *Grandfather*, placing the work within a broad, interlinked network.

THE FAMILY ALBUM PROJECT

Part of a collective effort to honor “the memory of dislocation and transition” experienced by persons of Japanese ancestry in the United States and Canada who were interned during World War II, *The Family Album Project* encourages viewers to look to the past, act in the present, and think about the future (Hayashi, *Family*). In March and April of 1996, Masumi Hayashi, a photographer and a professor at Cleveland State University, curated *Family Album*, a Cleveland State University Art Gallery exhibition of personal photographs that document the daily lives of internees at American and Canadian relocation camps where persons of Japanese descent were held in the early 1940s. *Family Album* now occupies a gallery space online, where it is coupled with the exhibition “American Concentration Camps,” which features “the body of panoramic photo collages that Professor Hayashi has created from her visits to all of the Japanese-American internment camp sites” (Hayashi, “Introduction”).

Survivors and their relatives, whom Hayashi met at various conferences and reunions, contributed photographs to *Family Album*. Along with a small sampling of photographs by professionals and media organizations, photographs from the personal archives of seven internees are displayed in the collective family album that Hayashi has framed critically and historically for viewers on the Web—testaments to the injustices imposed on these people. Hayashi writes an informative introduction to the project, and on each internee’s own Web page in *Family Album* supplies brief comments regarding the photographs themselves, adding the types of captions and explanatory notes one would expect to find in a book of remembrances. Below a photograph from the collection of Archie Miyatake, for example, Hayashi writes, “A son and soldier of the 442nd visiting his parents at Manzanar Concentration Camp” (“Toyo”). Other features on the site further layer the exhibition. Although only one audio interview, “Dwelling on the Positive,” is linked directly to *Family Album*, the gallery of the adjoining exhibition offers several Shockwave interviews with former internees. “Discussion Pages” allow viewers to express their thoughts, ask questions, and share their experiences. Copies of official documents expose key governmental policies, while links to related sites introduce a thought-provoking network (“Bibliography and Links”).

By following the link to the Japanese American National Museum, for instance, one discovers multimedia exhibitions that offer an expanded view of life in the relocation camps from the perspectives of internees. One exhibition, “The Life and Work of George Hoshida: A Japanese American’s Journey,” honors “an incarcerated artist who documented camp life with pencil

and brushwork in a series of notebooks he kept between 1942 and 1945.” “Dear Miss Breed: Letters From Camp” makes available letters that young Japanese American internees wrote to Clara Breed, the children’s librarian at the San Diego Public Library, who served as “a lifeline to the outside world who comforted internees during their time of need.” The museum’s site also includes QuickTime home movies and oral histories. Such links support *Family Album* in its “remembrance-rethinking-recovery of spaces lost” (Soja 81).

HOME MAKER

While some people lose their homes and face exile, homelessness, or internment, other people find themselves confined to their homes. With a housebound older population in mind, British digital artist Jeanie Finlay asks, “What makes a house a home? How does this change if you cannot leave? Does a home have a memory?” (“Tea,” screen 2). Assisted by Peoplexpress, Derbyshire County Council Social Services, and the Year of the Artist fund, Finlay developed *Home Maker* to answer the questions she posed.²⁶ Through new media technologies like QuickTime VR panoramas, *Home Maker* allows four housebound seniors to tell their stories in innovative ways, a novelty for these residents of South Derbyshire, an area with many isolated or rural sections and almost no public access to digital technologies and the Internet. Virtual guests navigate domestic environments and get acquainted with Florrie, Roy, Betty, and Lilian. Selected hot spots, detected through trial and error or by highlighting a button on the control panel, offer additional options. Clicking on a window, for instance, or a door in any room leads to someone else’s home. Within each home, several additional hot spots activate short video clips in which the residents share anecdotes about the selected objects or images. Clicking on the faces of the “home makers” activates videos in which the speakers introduce themselves and reflect on their living conditions. Except for the introductory videos, which bear the names of the respective speakers, each clip has a distinctive title. Adopting a direct address style, Florrie, Roy, Betty, and Lilian anticipate questions from visitors to their homes in cyberspace. For these guests and for posterity, the four hosts provide insights into Finlay’s questions about home.

HEARD IT IN THE PLAYGROUND

Further exploring her concerns with how personal space informs memory, Finlay also works with senior citizens in *Heard It in the Playground*, another of her several collaborative Web projects. Whereas *Home Maker* uncovers what goes on inside the home, *Playground* documents what goes on outside. Made in collaboration with Sally Goldsmith, of the musical organization

Firebird Trust, Finlay here works with ten older residents of Cherry Willingham Village, most of whom live in flats at Le Grand Luce Court, an affiliation of Anchor Housing Trust Sheltered Housing. In this project, however, the focus is not exclusively on the elderly population. A core group of ten elementary school students also join the cast. These seven, eight, and nine year olds are from Mr. Gerry Walker's class at Cherry Willingham Primary School, near Lincoln. During initial and concluding sessions, more than twenty other children from Mr. Walker's class participate as well (Finlay and Goldsmith, People screen).

Visitors accessing the home page of this site discover right away that they are in for a multimedia treat. With the laughter and singing of children as background, a window pops up that displays a QuickTime VR panorama of a playground where girls and boys enjoy recess. Smaller than the panorama used in *Home Maker*, and free of hot spots, this screen can be navigated by mouse or by using designated keys to zoom in and out. This initial encounter with *Playground* sets the stage for an intergenerational project that "took children's experience and older people's memories of games and 'playing out' in the playground and street as a starting point for creative work—storytelling through oral testimony, collecting and sharing games, singing, songwriting, rhythm work, sound recording and photography" (Finlay and Goldsmith, Home screen).

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC

As discrete portals in cyberspace, interlinked with various networks as well as with one another, the sites on this tour hint at how an interdisciplinary cast of writers, Net artists, and media makers is transforming autobiographical genres with the help of the Internet. Part of the latest communications revolution and the social systems that support it, the Internet provides the means for a vast range of autobiographical texts to infiltrate, and ultimately to change, the composition of the public sphere. Like the personal home page, with which they share certain features, these sites also call into question the binaristic logic that divides social space into two oppositional realms. Concerned about the ramifications of such divisions, social anthropologist Shirley Ardener emphasizes how notions of boundaries inform the ways that humans perceive and pattern their social worlds, and give shape to social life: "Societies have generated their own rules, culturally determined, for making boundaries on the ground, and have divided the social into spheres, levels and territories with invisible fences and platforms to be scaled by abstract ladders and crossed by intangible bridges with as much trepidation or exultation as on a plank over a raging torrent" (11–12).

Scholars of cyberculture such as Daniel Chandler and Jay David Bolter have argued that issues related to the changing makeup of the “public” sphere are closely tied to the construction of identity online through personal home pages.²⁷ Chandler and Bolter approach the study of cyberculture from vantage points that were common during the mid-to-late-1990s—or what David Silver calls the second and third stages of cyberculture studies.²⁸ Chandler argues that makers of personal home pages focus on the unspoken question “Who Am I?” Since, however, they post their responses in a public space, the personal becomes public. And yet, as Chandler further explains, the public also becomes personal, as makers practice *bricolage* by refashioning material appropriated from elsewhere on the Web. Focusing on academics, students, and other individuals who concentrate on a combination of professional and personal interests, Chandler notes that the hypermedia productions they create often include still and moving images, sound, links to favorite sites, and prompts such as guest books and email addresses that encourage visitors to leave feedback.

Like Chandler, Bolter sees the personal home page as a forum for the construction of identity. Moreover, since personal home pages are distinct from commercial Web sites, the personal home page provides a way for individual users to “talk back” as producers, rather than to remain passive consumers:

there are hundreds of thousands of personal sites on the Web, and these sites have the same status as the biggest and the most elaborately funded commercial sites: all are reachable by typing a URL (Uniform Resource Locator) or Web address into a browser. Individuals and small groups who could never afford to buy time on commercial television or to publish their own magazine can project their identity on the Web. (“Identity” 20)

Bolter also emphasizes how home pages challenge conventional boundaries between private and public spheres, since the individuals and small groups who make home pages represent personal matters so freely. Personal home pages thus “remediate” precedents in other media, including the professional resume and portfolio, the personal essay, and the intimate autobiographical sketch and family album.²⁹ And with precedents in close-circuit surveillance cameras and live television broadcasts, Bolter argues, personal Webcams push even further the personal home page’s efforts to redefine and project identity (“Identity” 21–22).

Often focused on dorm rooms, apartments, and homes, Webcams profoundly subvert distinctions between private and public spheres, a phenomenon that has intrigued artists as well as scholars. Net artist Tina LaPorta, for example, has explored Webcams in her now archived *Voyeur_Web*, a project

that the Whitney Museum of American Art commissioned as a “gate page” for its Artport, a portal to Net art and digital arts. Linked to live Webcams during July 2001, *Voyeur_Web* used the floor plan of a house as a navigational device “to call attention to the interplay between the public and private spheres, which appear to become less and less demarcated on-line.”

This blurring of boundaries between private and public calls into question the culturally defined notions of what each sphere represents, particularly in relation to gender. According to Rendell, the paradigm of the “separate spheres” not only divides city from home, public from private, production from reproduction, and men from women, but also misrepresents the range of activities that urban dwellers actually experience, in this way further perpetuating myths regarding sex, gender, and space (103). As she explains how space is found, used, occupied, and transformed during the course of everyday activities, Rendell also notes that theorists and practitioners who have critiqued the ideology of separate spheres have suggested alternative, non-binaristic ways to think about relations between space and gender (103–105). Although Rendell herself does not analyze cyberspace, she raises issues relevant to the reconfigurations of private and public spheres that autobiographical Webs explore singularly and collectively.

Mary McLeod broadens Rendell’s perspective, while at the same time suggesting how the autobiographical sites chosen for this survey relate to contemporary debates. Concerned with how difference is represented in studies of “other” spaces—what Michel Foucault calls heterotopias—McLeod notes that such studies tend to exclude the spatial arenas that women, children, the elderly, and minorities occupy: “lived” spaces such as the home and workplace, shopping centers, and arenas that support everyday leisure, e.g., playgrounds, parks, sporting fields, restaurants, cafes, and “messy, in-between urban spaces.” McLeod stresses how spaces representing everyday life “have been provinces where women have found not only oppression but also some degree of comfort, security, autonomy, and even freedom” (186–87). These “other” spaces, frequented by women, children, the elderly, and minorities, warrant examination too.

In their manifold explorations of real-and-imagined spaces, the selected Web sites extend McLeod’s inquiry to new frontiers. At the same time, the sites recognize what cultural theorist Linda Hutcheon calls the “ex-centric,” a term that accentuates the heterogeneous composition of culture, and that replaces a model based on hierarchical binary oppositions of otherness with an approach that embraces differences, and emphasizes the local and regional (*Poetics* 12). Her assessment of postmodern fiction could as easily apply to the selected Web sites: “we now get the histories (in the plural) of the losers

as well as the winners, of the regional (and colonial) as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the much sung few, and I might add, of women as well as men" (*Politics* 66).

A closer look reveals how these sites open up spaces for cultural intervention based on a non-binaristic logic of spatiality as well as of character, thus accommodating the sometimes "ex-centric" identities that autobiographers document online. As the autobiographical scenes staged in these theatres of recollection mimic Borges's inclusive Aleph, they bring into relation lived spaces of representation that unsettle oppositional, hierarchical models, and acknowledge differences.

VIRTUAL DOMAINS: A RETURN

FAMILY PORTRAIT

Family Portrait restages visual and written texts that, for the most part, already circulate publicly. By developing themes that Raquel, Alicia, and Ruth have addressed in other forums, this online theatre of recollection heightens the personal connections among its intergenerational cast of displaced Argentinean women joined together not only by family ties, but also by politically instigated traditions of relocation.

In an introductory essay called "The Silent Witness," Raquel, the mother of Alicia and grandmother of Ruth, situates herself and her family historically and politically while at the same time providing background on her activities as an artist who has exhibited her work throughout Argentina and the United States:

If I look back I can see that all of the series I have painted reflect both my heritage and my own experiences. My mother also gave me the family album [in addition to the family samovar, a precious artifact from Russia]. All those photographs told me stories, stories about generations that come and generations that go. They spoke of life, exile, and death. ("Main Part," screen 1)³⁰

Next to Raquel's comments appears "The Past and the Present," the first of many paintings in the digital exhibition that unfolds as readers navigate from screen to screen. In the conclusion of her essay, a few screens later, Raquel comments, "As a daughter of immigrants I feel deeply connected to my roots but I also feel close to those who suffer repression and injustice. Luckily, the samovar is still home to remind me about my grandparents' experience and my own. When this Silent Witness resides with my descendants, it will help them never to forget" ("Main Part," screen 3).³¹ Her painting "The Samovar" accompanies these concluding remarks.



Bearing witness: Ruth Irupé Sanabria, Raquel Partnoy, and Alicia Partnoy raise questions about the meaning of home and belonging when relocation becomes the family tradition. (Published with the express permission of the right holder Wilfried Agricola de Cologne, copyright © 2001. All rights reserved.)

Alicia Partnoy has published a well-known memoir, *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival*, and a collection of poetry about her experiences as a “disappeared” in Argentina.³² The introduction to her poetry collection, *Revenge of the Apple=Venganza de la Manzana*, has been included in *Family Portrait*. When visitors to the Web site access the first screen of text from *Revenge of the Apple*, Raquel’s painting “Blindfolded” appears, and an oral performance begins. In Spanish, with music in the background, Alicia reads aloud her poem “Testimonio.” The onscreen English text reads: “In a prison cell in South America, a woman is trying to remember every single poem she has ever written. . . . The woman is a ‘disappeared’. No one, except for the military authorities who kidnapped her from her home, knows her whereabouts. The year is 1977” (“Main Part,” screen 4). When her status changes to that of a political prisoner, she is allowed to see her family. She discovers that her young daughter still is alive (“Main Part,” screen 6).

After her exile to the United States, Alicia vows to become a bridge: “Extended between cultures, between experiences, she will help other Latin American women reach this shore with their own stories” (“Main Part,”

screen 10). This text is paired with her mother's painting "The Disappeared." The voices of Latin American refugees whom Alicia has met in the United States travel with her:

Their voices, like mine, gather the voice of their peoples. They, like me, are the fruits tossed out of their crates. Ours is the revenge of the apple: to come back after years of fermentation, our cider mixed with that of other survivors, to overpower with our sweetness the strength of the executioner who has cast us away, as rotten fruits, condemned to die in isolation. ("Main Part," screen 13)

On this screen appears the painting "Rebirth: From the Broken Wires."

Ruth contributes three poems that reflect on war and injustice. In "Twenty" and "Preface," she looks back on her parents' captivity as well as on her own personal experiences during the Dirty War ("Main Part," screens 14–15). In the third poem, "Song to the Mothers #2," she pays tribute to women who fight against tyranny ("Main Part," screen 16). A painting by Raquel complements each poem. When audiences access "Preface," they engage not only with Ruth's text and Raquel's "Still Landscape," but also with Agricola de Cologne's voice-over reading of the poem.

Besides portraying three courageous woman who have fought against political oppression and survived together in exile, *Family Portrait* supports the efforts of Raquel, Alicia, and Ruth to bear witness to injustice through art and literature. By interweaving their impressions and stories for audiences on the Web, *Family Portrait* provides another passageway in which people "[e]xtended between cultures" may reach one another.

GRANDFATHER GETS A HOUSE

Also designed to involve viewers in dialogues about timely issues, as well as to prompt interactive reading, *Grandfather* exhibits for the first time in a "public" forum "private" documents that contemplate the politics and sociology of habitat. Although the title gives away the ending, *Grandfather* involves more than following a plot line. In fact, depending on how readers navigate the site, multiple stories unfold. The home page, which features a photograph of "Grandfather" in the courtyard of his residence on Revolutie Street, offers several navigational routes: "oneway" links to edited email postings; "twoway" links to diaristic stories based on the email; "allway" links to a map of Transylvania that connects designated towns with related email; and the title itself, superimposed over the photograph of Gyula Bacsí, links to a hypertextual introduction, and ultimately to "The Children of Revolutie Street." Each route includes links to the other routes and to selected passages in them.



Charting new territory: Presented with several interlinked narratives based on archived email that Elizabeth Fischer and her correspondents exchanged, online visitors discover how Grandfather and his extended family acquired a home both in cyberspace and in Transylvania (copyright © Elizabeth Fischer, www.fishbreath.net).

Before, during, between, and after her two trips to Romania, Fischer carried on a lively email correspondence with the members of “fishbreath.” *Grandfather* includes edited and unedited postings from this email list. The candid, informal writing is composed in the shorthand fashion so common with email—an aesthetic that the edited, albeit unproofed, versions preserve. The menu to which “oneway” leads highlights excerpts from several of the edited messages. The correspondence itself is divided into two parts. “The Children of Revolutie Street” covers email dealing with Fischer’s first trip and her return, a period that dates from 29 July 2000, to 12 December 2000. “Grandfather Gets a House” covers her return visit to Romania and its aftermath, a period that begins 14 December 2000, and ends 28 July 2001. By clicking on a date that the menu highlights, readers may access the entire letter.

The first entry, for example, is subtitled “wanting to go.” Sent on 29 July 2000, this message discusses a grant Fischer has received to do a Web-based art project. Her own family history, with its ties to Hungary, sets her agenda:

i am thinking of going to hungary . . . i got this here grant to do a thing . . . just in time too, seeing as i was on the brink of serious starvation. . . .

. . . junkmail i thought but luckily i looked before pitching and so then i gave a little (discreet) screamette, yowza, and rightaway took several friends out to dinner . . . and now i am thinking i might go to transylvania to do the thing i have been wanting to do for ages.

From here readers may select the “next” arrow and continue through the edited letters that Fischer sent and received, or return to the previous menu and select another highlighted letter, or access another part of the site. In addition to the options presented on the home page, links to “children” and “families” lead to photographs of the children, their parents, and Grandfather. Another option, “archive,” takes readers to the unedited email correspondence. These letters chronicle Fischer’s shift in focus as she gets to know and eventually comes to help the Gabor family and Grandfather. She buys the children toys, clothes, and books; she arranges for them to develop reading and writing skills; and after returning home to Canada, she continues to provide financial assistance.

The roles that “fishbreath” list members play as collaborators become especially clear following a frantic note about the Gabors’ impending eviction, which Fischer writes shortly after her first trip. The letter is dated 20 November 2000:

the family in Romania . . . you know, the one with the 9 kids that i help . . . is about the [sic] be evicted from their place. as crappy as it is, at least it is a place to live. they are not the only ones to be evicted, the other 4 families that live in the courtyard are also to be evicted. they all got cheated into signing a crooked lease, last summer. . . . they had been living there since communist times, the grandfather has lived there for 25 yrs. so when communist property reverted to private property, laws were put in place to prevent exactly what is happening to them. . . .

. . . probably, they will try to force them into some kind of shelter. which, there, is horror. in shelters there, you are allowed to sleep, then you are put out on the street early in the morning, then you can come have soup at noon, then you are put out on the street until nightfall. and of course, anything you own would be stolen by then. this is what it would be like in the shelter. and winter is coming, winters are harsh there. this family with 9 children, essentially would be living on the street, in the middle of the winter. and the other thing, of course, is that the shelter is located out of town, probably in some gypsy ghetto.

if this is what happens to them, they are lost. the children will no longer be able to go to the teacher i had arranged for them every Saturday. . . . they would no longer be able to get the food i had arranged for them. they would be lost. homeless.

what should we do, what should we do.

Housed in a section of the letters subtitled “At Home,” Fischer’s message reveals the marked contrast between her sense of being “at home,” both in the real world and in cyberspace, and the Gabors’ notions of home. And yet, through her virtual associations, she coordinates a rescue effort that pays off. In response to Fischer’s request, several members of “fishbreath” offer to send money. With their encouragement, she returns to Romania to deal with the situation—“And so it came to pass that Grandfather Got a House.”

Readers interested in examining what Fischer describes as the unedited, unformatted email correspondence on which the edited letters and the diaristic stories are based are granted access to the “fishbreath mailing list archive,” which contains 259 raw email messages related to Fischer’s trips. According to her, this archive preserves all the letters, and includes information that other versions of the correspondence do not. Searchable by date, author, thread, and subject, the archive’s first entry is dated 9 July 1998, and the last is dated 11 August 2001. A reading of the threads, for instance, unravels a story that both complements the rest of the Web site and stands on its own as an epistolary narrative.³³ As background for the edited letters that are interwoven with other elements of the site, and for the diaristic stories that contribute to that weave, these unedited emails make public the personal repertoire on which Fischer draws.³⁴

THE FAMILY ALBUM PROJECT

Family Album brings to cyberspace a different kind of personal repertoire. By assembling photographic remembrances that already have been exhibited together, this Web gallery infuses an existing archive with new energy, continuing the discussion that Hayashi, as curator, initiated offline in the mid-1990s. Refashioned for the Web, where personal home pages proliferate and family scenes of all sorts fill computer screens, Hayashi’s online exhibition reminds habitués of cyberspace that for some politically targeted populations, self-representation in either private or public spheres has been a criminal act. Visitors to *Family Album* soon learn that many of the archived photographs were taken at considerable risk. As Hayashi explains, “With the camp regulations on contraband this idea of the family photograph had become illegal at most camps. This repression of the camera and the family

photograph helped keep and maintain this family secret of internment life and created a caste of shame and guilt on this passage” (*Family*).

Nevertheless, through various means, some internees managed to document life in the camps. Three of the internees from the American relocation camps—Toyo Miyatake at Manzanar, Hideharu Fukuyama at Gila River, and James Yonemura at Heart Mountain—are all identified as official camp photographers. Other internees operated in more clandestine ways. Grace Akiya, June Utako Morioka, and Eva Hashiguichi at Heart Mountain, and Tokuye Sato at Topaz, are all identified as amateur photographers, who despite the official ban, managed to sneak their box cameras into the camps. Camp visitors also took pictures, which internees like Tayeko Nomura at Granada saved. Two Canadian internees—Midge Ayakawa at Lemon Creek and Irene Tsuyuki at Tashme—collected photographs that either they or other internees took (*Family*).

As a collective display of remembrances that make the personal political,³⁵ *Family Album* represents a situation in which culturally determined territorial boundaries reveal the inappropriateness of the dichotomous “private” vs. “public” model. A wedding photograph of Grace and Ed Akiya, for example, on initial inspection looks quite typical, but as Hayashi explains, both the wedding and the subsequent photograph hardly were typical at all:

She married Ed Akiya when Heart Mountain first opened up as a camp and they had to be married by the justice of the peace in Cody, Wyoming, the nearest town. They went to town under guard in a guard truck for their weeding [sic] and stopped at a 5 & 10 store to pick up presents for some of their friends in the camp. Friends made the paper flowers she had on her dress. She made her wedding dress. Camp photographer, James Yonemura, took their wedding picture with a crate to sit on and the bare wooden floor of the barracks, and a sheet hung up for the backdrop. (“Grace”)

The collection of Tayeko and Emory Namuro [also spelled Nomura] features photographs that various internees took with a box camera at the Granada Relocation Camp in Colorado. In one photograph, a young woman leans against a barbed wire fence. According to Hayashi, this type of pose was common in camp photographs, which internees frequently exchanged with one another to remember the friends they made. This particular photograph is addressed to someone and signed (“Tayeko”).

Lani Sanjek, the daughter of June Utako Morioka, shares photographs that her mother took while interned at the Heart Mountain Relocation Camp. Hayashi claims that when Sanjek showed her the family album, “it made me realize that families saved photos of this time period and shared

them with their children. Although most of the photographs are of family and friends, there seem to be some that create exceptional irony” (“June”). Regarding two of the selections that appear on June Morioka’s page, Hayashi remarks: “This is the father/daughter portrait in front of the guard tower of the camp. Many other photographers show the barbed wire fence [sic] or the guard tower as part of the portrait.” And “This is little Lani Morioka dressed for the walk to the group showers.”

As the pages of *Family Album* reveal, the internees have no “home sweet home” on which to look back. Yet the photographs are more than reminders of displacement and detention. For family and friends, as well as for history, the photographs also document celebratory, ritualistic, and sorrowful moments that unfolded largely beyond the purview of the camp guards. In most cases taken illicitly and preserved in family albums, the photographs were often well-kept secrets until Hayashi assembled them for public viewing, part of a collective exhibition contributing to a global discussion about the meaning, recollection, and locus of home.

HOME MAKER

In *Home Maker*, Finlay situates Florrie, Roy, Betty, and Lilian, the elderly British subjects who have opened their homes to her, in navigable panoramas of their living rooms.³⁶ Part oral history, part documentary, *Home Maker* builds on the relationships that Finlay established with her subjects. “I visited each person around 8 times, chatting, drinking a lot of tea, taking photos and eventually taking video,” she recalls; “As I got to know them they relaxed in front of the camera and opened up more about themselves.”³⁷ Finlay came to incorporate video into the project when she “realised that the stories I was told each week as I made the panoramas were giving me a complete history of each person. Objects in the room would be referred to as part of these stories, like illustrations or props setting the scene” (“Re: Home Maker”). As settings for videotaped stories that the inhabitants tell, the four private residences are interlinked to give visitors the impression they are exploring a single large house with multiple—albeit highly personalized—rooms, adding a collective dimension to the apparently independent portrayals of these four individuals.

Viewing the homes in a panoramic sweep, zooming in on details, zooming out for longer shots, and cutting back to previous scenes all enhance the sense of being there with Florrie, Roy, Betty, and Lilian. Roy, for example, sits comfortably on an easy chair in his living room, flanked by a densely filled bookcase and a cluttered desk in what looks like a work area. (No computer is in sight here, or in any of the other homes.) Zooming in on the bookcase

creates a sensation similar to that of walking toward it, as if one soon could reach out and grab a book from the shelf, as Roy might do. Panning to the desk and zooming in and out adds to the sense of exploring Roy's world. The motion from long shot to close shot simulates the act of sitting down at the desk, as though having a chance to discover firsthand the workspace that Roy treasures. In a video clip entitled "A Historical Book," Roy elaborates on his relation to this space. Curious guests can activate this clip by clicking on either the papers that cover the top of the desk or the books sitting on the shelf above. In the clip, Roy presents himself as a writer of a children's book, which he already has finished, and a historical novel, which preoccupies him at the time.

The television figures prominently in Lilian's home. Accorded the status of a hot spot, it activates a video clip aptly entitled "TV." As Lilian has explained in other videotaped segments of her oral history, she recently lost her husband of sixty-five years and now lives alone. Getting out of the house only three times a week, Lilian confesses that TV has become her life. She especially likes the soaps, and as she talks, the camera cuts to the television in her living room. Wedding scenes from a soap opera fill the screen. Lilian remembers her own marriage in a video clip called "My Husband," which is activated by three framed photographs of the couple—two on the wall, one under the other, and the third on a small table below. The arrangement resembles a shrine. Lilian talks about the death of her husband in 2000, and reminisces about the good life they shared together, conveying how much she misses him. While she talks, the video zooms in on the photographs (offering clearer images than the zoom on the control panel allows). Before going to bed every night and after awakening every morning, Lilian speaks with her husband while looking at the photographs—a ritual she finds comforting. By inviting guests into such an intimate theatre of recollection, Lilian exposes virtual travelers to "other" spaces that tend to get overlooked in the material world as well as online. At the same time, she tells stories that are particularly relevant to the target audience of people over sixty-five who require assistance to leave their homes.³⁸

HEARD IT IN THE PLAYGROUND

In *Playground*, Finlay and her colleague Sally Goldsmith earned the trust of the older participants, most of whom lived in sheltered housing, and of the school children.³⁹ A musician and storyteller, Goldsmith worked with both groups separately and together in a series of informal sessions held over ten weeks in March, April, and May 2000. In the senior sessions, "memories of 'playing out' were shared and recorded, singing games sung, diablo, cats

cradle and skipping tried once more!” Sessions with the school children involved audiovisual recording, songwriting, voice and rhythm work, photography, and playground interviews with other children. Finlay introduced both groups to the possibilities of new technology and the Internet, often pairing an older person and a child to encourage dialogue and to break down ageist stereotypes. Finlay also suggested how to collect materials for the Web site she was creating to display the group’s explorations of memory and play. In July of 2000, participants attended a special event for the launch of *Playground* (“Project,” “Aims,” “What We Did”).

Arranged according to thirteen different types of games—such as imaginative play, rings and dances, physical games, rhymes and chants, and play in places—the site reflects the multimedia focus that Finlay and Goldsmith encouraged. Both seniors and students contributed to screens like “Physical Games,” which displays a long column of their transcribed comments, photographs, a QuickTime video, and a Flash animation—the two latter features illustrating the handstand. All the screens combine written text with other media, and sometimes audio is used as well, as in the screen devoted to “Rhymes and Chants,” which records the participants’ renditions of “What’s the Time” and “Election Day Chant.”



Playing side by side across generations: a multimedia treat for audiences of all ages, this virtual celebration of play and playgrounds brings together the reminiscences of senior citizens and the timely anecdotes of school children to document what goes on outside the home (*Heard It in the Playground*, copyright © Jeanie Finlay and Sally Goldsmith, A Firebird Trust Project, <http://www.firebirdtrust.org.uk>).

As they recount their memories of play, the elder participants invoke scenes of home and of other spaces that nurtured their young spirits. Recognizing that “the world is a very different place to that of 70 or even 30 years ago,” Finlay and Goldsmith observe:

People’s attitudes to their gardens, changes in housing including the demise of the terrace and back alleys and the advent of the flat and open plan gardens, the increase in traffic, the fear of the ‘stranger’ . . . and fear of bullying, have all constrained childrens’ ‘playing out.’ These changes were something the older people commented on thoughtfully. They were sad that children today were not able to experience the freedom to roam that many of them had had as children. (“Play”)

Not surprisingly, the younger participants focus more on the present than the past, documenting the sites of their playful activities probably without even knowing that they are creating personal and cultural archives that they and others may look back on someday. In any case, aided by digital technologies of the early twenty-first century, the two generations work together to open up a space online where they can play side by side.

IMPROVISATIONS

Playing up the autobiographical tangents of those “traveling Alephs” with which they have been compared, these highlighted theatres of recollection showcase traces of selected lives. The multilayered performances work through recollections of diverse casts, while allowing for audience participation. As online visitors learn their ways around these virtual domains, they cannot take in everything at once, and so are encouraged to make choices about where to look, what to read, when to listen, how long to stay, and which links to follow. While discovering how to be active players, visitors thus explore dimensions of cyberspace that the autobiographers have learned to call home.

Like the spaces of representation, or lived spaces, that Soja posits, these virtual domains capture from the narrators’ perspectives “the space of all inclusive simultaneities, perils as well as possibilities: the space of radical openness, the space of social struggle.” Moreover, these lived spaces also demarcate strategic locations “from which to encompass, understand, and potentially transform all [real-and-imagined] spaces simultaneously” (68). As in the Thirdspace that Soja describes, and in the Aleph to which he refers, everything comes together in these lived spaces, so that hierarchical binary oppositions dissolve (56). In addition to merging “private” and “public” spheres, the theatres of recollection on this tour replace binaristic notions of

otherness with approaches that embrace differences.⁴⁰ Accordingly, these sites not only acknowledge differing notions of home; in their own ways, they accentuate the heterogeneous composition of culture, and provide forums for culturally diverse casts of characters to tell their life stories. Reminiscent of autobiographers who use traditional media to “rewrite home,” the performers in these online ensembles renegotiate “the relationship between personal identity and the world, between personal and social history” (Kaplan 130).

Factual and fictional versions of autobiographical genres contribute to the cultural repertoires on which the online autobiographers draw, while the general mediascape of which they are a part informs their efforts. In addition to reworking autobiographical genres typically associated with traditional media, such as the family portrait, personal essay, epistolary narrative, diary, family album, video documentary, and oral history, these generic hybrids incorporate elements of Web-based genres, especially the personal home page.

With the help of the Web, the autobiographers overcome some of the limitations that linear media impose, faring better than Soja when he attempts to describe Thirdspace:

This all-inclusive simultaneity opens up endless worlds to explore and, at the same time, presents daunting challenges. Any attempt to capture this all-encompassing space in words and texts, for example, invokes an immediate sense of impossibility, a despair that the sequentiality of language and writing, of the narrative form and history-telling, can never do more than scratch the surface of Thirdspace’s extraordinary simultaneities. (57)

Imagining new possibilities, the autobiographers experiment with networked approaches to self-representation that involve hypermedia and interactive schemas. Their collaborative productions demonstrate that autobiographical performances with a Thirdspace focus are now playing at theatres of recollection online. As improvisational acts that open up new spaces for cultural intervention, *Family Portrait*, *Grandfather Gets a House*, *The Family Album Project*, *Home Maker*, and *Heard It in the Playground* challenge audiences to stage autobiographical scenes of their own in cyberspace, improvising in ways they might not have considered before.

NOTES

1. While concentrating on generic analogues in video art, Tambllyn also discusses wills, pornography, and recordings of special occasions, natural disasters, and police brutality (14), as well as broadcasts on *America’s Funniest Home Videos*, and submissions to Sony’s *Visions of the U.S.* home video contest.

2. Fourkas and Dodge review cyberspace from a variety of theoretical perspectives. For an overview of autobiographical Web genres, see Sorapure, "Web Autobiography" and "Autobiographical Writing on the Web." Mortensen and Walker examine blogs; "Rhizome.org" provides an introduction to Net art on a global scale; the Electronic Literature Organization Web site includes a directory of creative texts, and documentation of a "State of the Arts" symposium that it organized in April 2002; Eastgate Systems closely monitors developments in hypertext writing.
3. Careful to avoid a deterministic view of technology, Tamblyn concedes that although "the democratization of video" has made some advances since the idea was promulgated in the late 1960s, utopian dreams are far from realized. She does claim that because video interfaces with everyday life on so many key levels, the medium functions as "a primary tool in the production of social space" (13–14).
4. East Midlands Arts initially funded and monitored the project, which trAce developed in collaboration with New Perspectives (Thomas).
5. For complementary approaches to the concept of home on the trAce Web site, see "Migrating Memories," and McDonald. One of the links on McDonald's home page leads to the "Webring of Imaginary Countries," maintained by Martin de Zoete, a member of the Dutch Geo Fiction Association, whose home page provides additional information.
6. For further discussion of "home on the web," see Miller. Chandler and Bolter also emphasize how personal home pages are changing notions of "private" and "public" spheres.
7. *City Stories* has affiliated sites for various cities around the world, including Miami, Boston, Seattle, San Francisco, Ottawa, Dublin, Amsterdam, and Rome. *Mr. Beller's Neighborhood* "uses the external, familiar landscape of New York City as a way of organizing the wildly internal, often unfamiliar emotional landscapes of the city dweller."
8. The goal of *The Cyber-Kitchen* is to build "a collaborative net installation with its starting point in the cyber-domestic aesthetic" (Loseby, *Cyber*). British independent Net artist Jess Loseby hopes the site will minimize what she calls "translocal schizophrenia," a condition resulting from "a duality between the artists' 'real' lives and their 'virtual' locality and artworks." Loseby writes that "In reality I would like artists to build their entire home, object by object," also noting that she has been "pleasantly surprised though by the amount of male engagement in what I feared might be seen as a 'female site'" (Interview).
9. For discussions of virtual architecture, see Jakobsson and Skog, and Novak.
10. For sites that address "home" from the vantage points of single narrators, see Garcia, Palmer, and Zervos.
11. The *Open Directory* lists 10,292 "personal homepages"; a search on the *Yahoo! Directory* lists 28,502 "personal home pages"; and *WebRing* lists 401 "personal home pages," but the rings themselves vary in size, ranging from one member to hundreds.
12. Sue Thomas, Director of the trAce Online Writing Centre, applied the phrase "theatre of recollection" to *The Home Project* to "evoke the spirit of the site."

13. For studies of how new technologies are changing lived spaces in the real world, see Venkatesh, Kruse, and Shih, and Venkatesh, Stolzoff, Shih, and Mazumdar.
14. These reconfigurations of “home” continue a process that television instigated in the 1950s. “But more than just offering family fun,” media scholar Lynn Spigel explains, “these new home theaters provided postwar Americans with a way to mediate relations between public and private spheres. By turning one’s home into a theater, it was possible to make outside spaces part of a safe and predictable experience. In other words, the theatricalization of the home allowed people to draw a line between the public and the private sphere—or, in more theatrical terms, a line between the proscenium space where the spectacle took place and the reception space in which the audience observed the scene” (198–99).
15. “The limits of Western literary structures are abundantly obvious in the powerful elisions, co-optations, and experiments that constitute cultural margins,” Kaplan writes, elaborating on Jacques Derrida’s essay “The Law of Genre”: “As counterlaw, or *out-law*, such productions often break most obvious rules of genre. Locating out-law genres enables a deconstruction of the ‘master’ genres, revealing the power dynamics embedded in literary production, distribution, and reception” (119). She later adds, “Staying alive—cultural and personal survival—fuels the narrative engines of out-law genres” (132).
16. In a note, Soja states that “Many cultural geographers, in particular, have persistently attempted to separate the concepts of place and space to give place greater concreteness, immediacy, and cultural affect, while space is deemed to be abstract, distanced, ethereal. As Lefebvre’s work demonstrates, this is an unnecessary and misleading separation/distinction that reduces the meaningfulness of both space and place” (40 n.18).
17. In a supplemental commentary, Borges states, “What eternity is to time, the Aleph is to space. In eternity, all time—past, present, and future—coexists simultaneously. In the Aleph, the sum total of the spatial universe is to be found in a tiny shining sphere barely over an inch across” (263).
18. Soja makes this remark about cultural critic bell hooks’s *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*.
19. In addition to Lefebvre, Soja identifies Michel Foucault, bell hooks, Gillian Rose, Gloria Anzaldúa, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Edward Said as critics who explore spatial perspectives in ways that resonate with Thirdspace views.
20. For another consideration of spatiality and home, see Bachelard.
21. George Landow argues that hypertext documents—and by extension, cybertexts—become traveling Alephs, because each provides vantage points from which one can see everything else, but that “Unlike Jorge Luis Borges’s Aleph, one does not have to view it from a single site, neither does one have to sprawl in a cellar resting one’s head on a canvas sack” (37). In a postscript to Borges’s story, the narrator wonders whether the Aleph he witnessed was true or false (30), an ambiguity related to the blurring of fact and fiction often accompanying autobiographical texts.
22. Access to *Family Portrait* through the NewMediaArtProjectNetwork’s home page (<<http://www.nmartproject.net/start1.htm>>) highlights the networked context in which *Family Portrait* is situated, although a direct route also is available (<<http://www.nmartproject.net/partnoy/portrait.htm>>).

23. To produce *Family Portrait*, Agricola de Cologne held intensive discussions with Raquel, Alicia, and Ruth, who made available to him the writing, paintings, and photographs that appear. As the title of the opening screen which leads to the home page indicates, *Family Portrait* is the first of an online series he is curating called "Art, Memory and Politics," which was also the title of a 2001 Goucher College art exhibition that featured Raquel Partnoy's work. The exhibition catalogue, edited by Elisabeth Cohn, informed the construction of *Family Portrait* (Agricola de Cologne, "Re: Family Portrait" and "Re: follow-up"; Alicia Partnoy, "Re: Review of web site"). For information on Agricola de Cologne himself, see "Agricola TV" and "Home Page," which leads to "Biography" and "Artistic Statement."
24. Once past the opening screen, "Entrance," with its Bahia Blanca cityscape and photographs of Raquel, Alicia, and Ruth, *Family Portrait* has three main parts, each involving several screens. I will identify the screen numbers when possible; the various parts of the site do not have separate URLs. In the first principal section, the "Prologue," Raquel includes three excerpts from an unpublished essay titled "Surviving Genocide": "Antisemitism" (five screens), "Argentina and the Nazis" (three screens), and "Repression in Argentina" (three screens). "Main Part," *Family Portrait*'s longest section, fills sixteen screens with text by Raquel (screens 1–3), Alicia (screens 4–13), and Ruth (14–16), and paintings by Raquel. The final section, "Epilogue," also contains screens for "Artists' Biographies," and "Credits."
25. To protect the privacy of its members, the real name of the email list has been changed to "fishbreath," only first names have been used in postings, and authentic email addresses have been omitted (Fischer, "Re: follow-up"). For list members, see Fischer, "Contributors." For help on using the site, see Fischer, "Navigation."
26. *Home Maker* grew out of *T3: Tea-Toast-Technology: New Arts with Older People*, another project that Finlay worked on with senior citizens in collaboration with Peoplexpress, a professional community arts organization. Established in 1990, its mission is to work "with groups of people living in South Derbyshire to devise, plan and undertake arts projects which are appropriate to local needs" (Finlay, "Tea"—Peoplexpress screen). While *Home Maker* offers portrayals of four individuals who contributed to a hypermedia production that Finlay made about them, *T3* focused on work that the participants themselves made (Finlay, "Re: Home Maker"). Over a three-year period, *T3* taught older people in South Derbyshire to use computers creatively, as participants crafted digital images that reflected their ideas of love. The results appear in an online art gallery (Finlay, "Exhibition"). For background on South Derbyshire, see Finlay "Tea"—Where screen. For background on Finlay's other digital projects, see her personal Web site, Ruby Digital Arts and Design.
27. For additional background on the personal home page, see Döring.
28. Silver identifies three stages of cyberculture study as of 2000. The first stage, which he calls "popular cyberculture," emerged in the early 1990s in descriptive articles in American newspapers and magazines by wired journalists. The second stage, cyberculture studies, rests upon the "twin pillars" of virtual communities and online identities. The third stage, critical cyberculture studies, had arrived by the late 1990s, when scholars expanded their views to encompass four interdependent foci: contextualizing online interactions, discoursing cyberspace, online access and barriers, and digital design.

29. Bolter elaborates on his theory of “remediation” in *Writing Space*. See also Bolter and Grusin.
30. Raquel addresses related issues on her own Web site, “A Multicultural Art Project: Keeping Memory Alive, Surviving Genocide.” She writes that “Through this page we not only want visitors around the world to know about two of the cruelest episodes of our history, the Nazi holocaust and the genocide committed [sic] by the military dictatorship in Argentina, but want also to ask them to cooperate with this project by sending us links on these subjects with: images, photographs, poems or testimonies, to create a multi cultural Web site against repression, discrimination and genocide.” In addition to her own moving testimonies, the site displays several paintings from her “Surviving Genocide” series. The writing appears in both English and Spanish.
31. Similarly, in “A Survivor’s Story,” Mina Cohen writes, “As the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, I have felt molded by that event in every aspect of my life. I am an artist dedicating my current work to my mother. The stories are hers, as told to me in a first person voice and sometimes in a third person voice.”
32. See also her edited collection *You Can’t Drown the Fire*.
33. For an annotated bibliography of email narratives, see Walker.
34. Yet, as Fischer points out, even these archived email messages are taken out of context and altered, since she extracted them from the email list at large, changed information to protect the privacy of the list members, renamed the actual list, and deleted surnames and email addresses. Reflecting on the metamorphoses of these letters, she asks “but how real is something admittedly contextually edited—the archive—and then edited even further—the emails—and then rewritten—the stories.” She concludes, “the whole thing teeters between documentary and fiction. where does one draw the line. is there a line to be drawn.” (“Re: follow-up”; punctuation appears as it does in the email.)
35. For a discussion, from a feminist perspective, of the concept “the personal is political,” see Landes (1).
36. Photographs of the four subjects appear on the home page, which provides access to the panoramas and the embedded videos. The first home leads to the others. Neither the panoramas, the videos, nor the site’s subsections have separate URLs.
37. See the “About” screen of *Home Maker*. For other attempts to introduce senior populations to new media, see Heeter, and “Internet.”
38. Finlay identifies the target audience for *Home Maker* in the “Who” section of “Tea.”
39. For group photographs of the participants, see the “People” section.
40. On approaches to difference in postmodern culture, see Hutcheon, *Poetics* 12. See also Soja’s discussion of the postmodern feminist critique of spatiality, in which he identifies “a shift from an *equality* to a *difference* model, and along with it a shift from an emphasis on material spatial forms to a more real-and-imagined urban spatiality” (110).

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