

*Did they have to be quiet?  
Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a  
Wit(h)nessing Lens*

Marijke de Jong

2023



Figure 1. *Making Challah and Lighting Shabbat Candles*, 2023, video still composite from, *Did they have to be quiet? Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens*. three-channel HD video, 9mins 13sec

Exegesis in support of practice-based Thesis  
Master of Visual Arts  
Auckland University of Technology

## **ABSTRACT**

This practice-led master's project explores intergenerational Holocaust trauma in relation to mothering. This investigation is situated within my personal matrilineal family story of mothering and being mothered with a history of Holocaust trauma. This project comes to fruition through photographic, filmic and sonic methods. The methodologies of this research prioritise an ethos of care by focusing on reparative relations which are underpinned by current somatic trauma scholarship. The ethical nature of my research focuses not only on the original trauma rupture of the Holocaust but the traces of trauma that reside in the maternal bodies of my lineage. The artworks of this project present a chorus of voices that traverse time, generations, cultures, and places anchored through a reassertion of the maternal gaze in the form of witnessing through a camera's lens. This research explores how a camera, as a third party, can play the role of a witness and listener that can bring new awareness and knowledge of the impact of Holocaust trauma on mothering. The project aims to interrupt generational patterns of trauma between the mother-child dyad. I privilege trauma recovery and mothers' welfare as a universal social need that can impact all aspects of wellbeing in societies.

# **CONTENTS**

2 **Abstract**

4 **Dedication**

5 **Attestation of Authorship**

6 **List of figures**

8 **Acknowledgements**

11 **Introduction**

17 **Chapter One: The Entangled Maternal**

17 1.1 Ancestral Conversations

21 1.2 The Present is Presence

24 **Chapter Two: The Sounds of Silence and the Art of Listening**

24 2.1 Listening

27 2.2 Speech Acts

32 **Chapter Three: Pintele Yid- A Little Spark of Jewishness**

32 3.1 Ritual

38 3.2 The Bath

41 3.3 The Painting

43 **Conclusion: Tikkun Olam- Repairing the World**

46 **Installation and Exhibition**

54 **Bibliography**

MADE IN NEW ZEALAND BY COLLINS OLYMPIC  
TO OPEN SLIT HERE

PAR AVION  
AEROGRAMME

AFFIX  
STAMP  
HERE

I dedicate this body of work to  
the Mother(s) and the  
Dutch painting that survived

Second fold here

APPROVED BY NEW ZEALAND POST, AUTHORITY No. 1004

IF ANYTHING IS ENCLOSED, THIS FORM WILL BE SURCHARGED  
AT THE INTERNATIONAL AIR MAIL LETTER RATE

With my deepest love and reverence
Marÿke

SENDER'S NAME & ADDRESS

First fold here

## **ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the Acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

07 / May 2023

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Marijke de Jong, video still composite from <i>Did they have to be quiet? Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens</i> , 2023, three-channel HD video, 9mins 13sec	1
2. Marijke de Jong, <i>A Painting that Lives On</i> , 2023, multiple exposure digital image	11
3. Marijke de Jong, <i>Aerogrammes– Mothering Documents</i> , 2021, four digital images	17
4. Marijke de Jong, <i>Feeding the ancestors; Challah in the Aerogramme</i> , 2021, displayed in studio, digital print overlaid with Risograph print	22
5. Marijke de Jong, two screen shots from <i>Becoming a Jewish Mother</i> , 2023, one-channel HD video	24
6. Marijke de Jong, video still from <i>Becoming a Jewish Mother</i> , 2023 One-channel HD video	25
7. Clare Fleming, <i>The momentary triumph of aggression over tenderness</i> , 2019, installation view	
8. Alex Monteith, still image from <i>Chapter and Verse</i> , 2005	31
9. Alain Resnais, <i>Grasslands and barbed wire</i> , still image from <i>Night and Fog</i> , 1956	31
10. Marijke de Jong, <i>Our first Shabbat</i> , 2022, multiple exposure digital image	32
11. Marijke de Jong, <i>Braiding Challah for the first time</i> , 2022, four digital images	34
12. Marijke de Jong, <i>Our first Shabbat II</i> , (photographed by authors child) 2022, four digital images	35
13. Marijke de Jong, four video stills from <i>Lighting the Shabbat Candles</i> , 2023	36
14. Marijke de Jong, video still from <i>Mikvah Bathing</i> , 2022	38
15. Marijke de Jong, <i>Circling the Drain</i> , 2021, i-phone image underwater	39
16. Marijke de Jong, <i>A Witnesser and Bridge</i> , 2023, composite digital image	41
17. Marijke de Jong, video still from <i>Lighting the Shabbat Candles</i> , 2023	43
18. Marijke de Jong, <i>The Dutch Painting in Changing Light</i> , 2023, three video still's from <i>Did they have to be quiet? Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens</i> , three-channel HD video, 9mins 13sec	46

<b>19.</b> Marijke de Jong, <i>Challah bread and hummus</i> , exhibition opening of,.....	47
<i>Did they have to be quiet? Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens</i> , St Paul ST Gallery, Auckland, 2023, digital image	
<b>20.</b> Marijke de Jong, Installation view #1 of, <i>Did they have to be quiet?</i> .....	49
<i>Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens</i> , St Paul ST Gallery, Auckland, 2023, digital image	
<b>21.</b> Marijke de Jong, Installation view #2 of, <i>Did they have to be quiet?</i> .....	49
<i>Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens</i> , St Paul ST Gallery, Auckland, 2023, digital image	
<b>22.</b> Marijke de Jong, Installation view #3 of, <i>Did they have to be quiet?</i> .....	50
<i>Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens</i> , St Paul ST Gallery, Auckland, 2023, digital image	
<b>23.</b> Marijke de Jong, Installation view #4 of, <i>Did they have to be quiet?</i> .....	50
<i>Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens</i> , St Paul ST Gallery, Auckland, 2023, digital image	
<b>24.</b> Marijke de Jong, Installation view #5 of, <i>Did they have to be quiet?</i> .....	51
<i>Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens</i> , St Paul ST Gallery, Auckland, 2023, digital image	
<b>25.</b> Marijke de Jong, Installation view #6 of, <i>Did they have to be quiet?</i> .....	51
<i>Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens</i> , St Paul ST Gallery, Auckland, 2023, digital image	
<b>26.</b> Marijke de Jong, Exhibition information, <i>Abstract Aerogramme</i> ,.....	52
St Paul ST Gallery, Auckland, 2023, digital image	
<b>27.</b> Marijke de Jong, six video still's from <i>Did they have to be quiet?</i> .....	53
<i>Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens</i> , 2023, three-channel HD video, 9mins 13sec	

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Looking back on my project and my relationship with the camera, I remember how it began through the generosity of my maternal family members. Growing up in New Zealand in an immigrant family, our only maternal family was my late great-uncle Bob Ephraim (my grandmother's older brother) and his family. Bob was an avid photographer. When I was a teenager, he gave me my first camera and other photography and darkroom equipment. When my other great-uncle Rudy Ephraim, who was also a photographer, would visit New Zealand from the Netherlands, he would give me photography lessons on composition and how to construct a narrative through the camera. When reading letters that my mother wrote to my grandmother during my childhood, I discovered that my grandmother was helping fund my art subjects at school, including my photography classes and equipment. My mother facilitated all of these occurrences, finding ways to support my creative nature, and recognised that it was essential for me to use my creative force. I hope this project can return the generational generosity of their support for my creative life.

Thank you, Mum, for always recognising and illuminating the artist you saw in me; I had to grow into this identity to claim it fully. Thank you for all the mothering you have done despite your difficult past - you have always been there to celebrate who and what you see in me.

My supervisors, Fiona Amundsen and Ingrid Boberg, have been the academic midwives to assist birthing this project.

When I first visited AUT to investigate if it was the right institute for me to undertake my Masters of Visual Arts (MVA), Fiona Amundsen met with me to introduce the MVA programme and its facilities on campus. She asked me to tell her about my idea for my master's project. She named what I wanted to do from my ensuing ramblings: radically reposition trauma and mothering through the lens, giving me the language I needed to springboard from. Fiona is why I chose AUT. Fiona's understanding of my project created a sense of safety in the academic realm I had not encountered before, which held me throughout my master's journey. As our relationship as supervisor and student

deepened, she continued to create safety for me through her professionalism, precision, care and phenomenal skill as an artist and supervisor (not to mention brilliant anecdotalist). Thank you, Fiona. I know it's overly said, but I truly could not have done this without you. I will always be deeply grateful for what you have contributed to what has been much greater than a master's project for my family and me.

From the beginning of my master's journey Ingrid Boberg and I connected in ways of thinking about the 'more-than-human'. Ingrid gave me one of the greatest compliments of my life, which was that I had a beautiful mind. In so many moments of doubt, her words gave me buoyancy. She also welcomed the many panicked phone calls when writing about my project overwhelmed me, triggering PTSD. Ingrid's compassion and understanding helped me move through these moments, which propelled me forward. Ingrid, I thank you for the 'positive affective relations' we encountered on so many levels that aided me deeper into ways of thinking and being, not only for this project but for my life. I will be forever grateful for your maternal gaze upon me while undertaking my MVA.

Monique Redmond, who steers the ship of the MVA programme, has created an incredible culture in the department which filters through to all areas, particularly felt as a student. Mon, thank you for always being a source of strength, clarity and support in the background for me.

My dear sister Ciska de Jong, and my friend Dane Scott, both spent many hours helping me edit the video footage and audio recordings of this project as I was still learning the software. Thank you for your patience, creative contributions and kindness.

Ingrid Dubbelt, my proof-reader was an incredible asset to the writing and editing of this exegesis. Ingrid was endlessly flexible in working with me in my own timing and pace. Ingrid, thank you for your deep sensitivity to the subject matters of this project, and therefore me.

I believe a vital and sacred element of wellbeing for a mother is being cocooned within a community of other women and mothers. I am fortunate enough to be surrounded by a

group of such women who have championed me throughout my academic art life and in my mothering journey. It hasn't been easy, and there have been many moments of doubt, heartache, unwellness and challenge. There are too many of you to mention, but you have all contributed in countless ways through your individual greatness to each step of my journey as I reach the finishing line of this academic marathon. My gratitude is overflowing, your love and support heal me, and I am unbelievably blessed to call you all a sister and friend.

To my children, you are my legacy, and my art and artfulness is my legacy to you. I adore you both and feel deeply privileged to be your mama. I am braver, stronger, and heartier because of you. You gave me the courage to face my inner shadows and enter the unknown. May this project be a lighthouse for you of our Jewish heritage and a touchstone for the future. I love you.

## INTRODUCTION



Figure 2: *A Painting that Lives On*, 2023, multiple exposure digital image

Art: the intuitive potential to activate the future in the spacious present, to make the middling of experience felt where futurity and presentness coincide, to invoke the memory not of what was, but of what will be. Art, the memory of the future.<sup>1</sup>

The collective memory of the Holocaust began with a deafening silence from survivors. My personal maternal family history is one of a magnitude of silences. This research aims to bring a sense of safety, care and dignity where there were once whispers. The project is borne out of a sense of inherited shame that echoes through generations, time, and collective Holocaust memory. I have spent my life bearing the weight of being Jewish concerning a lineage of direct secondary witnessing of Holocaust survival. Now that I am a mother, I have lived experience of mothering while carrying a burden of

---

<sup>1</sup> Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (Duke University Press: Georgia. 2016), 87.

unresolved and unconscious intergenerational Holocaust trauma that seeps into the fabric of my domestic life and has, until now, underpinned how I mother.

This project meets me at the overlapping intersections of my art practice and my mothering, and informs my central question: How might a lens-based practice focused on wit(h)nessing, facilitate an active repositioning of intergenerational Holocaust trauma's impact on mothering to enable future-orientated narratives of safety, hope and aliveness?<sup>2</sup>

This project explores the tendrils of silences and whispers from the mothers of my maternal lineage while tending to my subjective maternal becoming.<sup>3</sup> This research defines 'subjective maternal becoming' as a continuous emergent field where I, as a mother am ever evolving through the relational encounter with my children, whereby my children are part of my becoming as I am part of their becoming. This project follows my trauma threads, sets a place at the dining table for them, and reasserts agency while being met with the unbearably innocent ears of wondering children. I grew up understanding that I am Jewish, and part of this project explores what that means concerning my own experience of being mothered and mothering. I intend to do what was impossible for my grandmother in her lifetime; use my voice to tell the story of my matrilineal Jewish family to transmute trauma rather than continue to transmit it.

This research acknowledges that there was little known, immediately after WW II, about the therapeutic nature of storytelling in a safe environment to work through traumatic historical events. Many Holocaust survivors experienced survivor's guilt, a psychological term associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which involves feeling ashamed of living while many perished due to extreme life-taking events. Survivor's guilt was a prominent experience for my late maternal grandmother, Will Ephraim, born in 1928, who survived the Holocaust with her immediate family. At that time she had no safe means to work through her traumatic experience of living

---

<sup>2</sup> The term wit(h)nessing is defined on page 9.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of 'becoming' was brought to light by Deleuze and Guattari whereby they termed the recognition and meaning of it in connection with subjectivity suggesting that there is no essential self and that we are always and already becoming.

through the Holocaust. I am interested in how the experience of survivor's guilt manifests in our lineage of mothers.

Auto-ethnography is my primary research methodology, which focuses on methods of storytelling and reparative witnessing concerning Jewish trauma histories, mothering, and contemporary art practice. The methods of this project explore artmaking that can interrupt a genealogy of inherited trauma to create reparative aesthetics<sup>4</sup> that move away from trauma representation in contemporary art as a mere aesthetic concern.<sup>5</sup> Author and art historian Susan Best's conception of reparative aesthetics—from *Reparative Aesthetics: Witnessing in Contemporary Art Photography* (2016)—involves assimilating the consequences of trauma histories within art rather than outwardly representing it. Best argues that art has the capacity to heal in regard to shameful histories. This research expands on Best's arguments to encompass the idea that art also has the ability to heal shame that resides in the victims of shameful histories.

My research methods involve recording my own voice narration which is edited with filmed self-portraits of Jewish ritual gestures that aim to facilitate a sense of wholeness in the empty spaces that have yearned to be filled since the rupture of trauma occurred. In this project the camera is positioned as the non-judgmental documenter of the subjective maternal subject's becoming, and an outward representation of the developing inner witness.<sup>6</sup> As a reclamation of lost familiar rituals through Holocaust trauma, I consciously turn to Jewish ritualised gestures to meet unconscious trauma patterning and habit. I record these gestures within my active mothering landscape, offering new ways of connecting with our Jewishness in the family, while unravelling my own feminine voice and truth. These recorded gestures become akin to acts of care that are future-orientated and function as counter-narratives to the well-entrenched narratives of survivor's guilt within my family bloodline and collective Holocaust memory, not only of survivorship but of aliveness.

---

<sup>4</sup> Susan Best, *Reparative Aesthetics: Witnessing in Contemporary Art Photography* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art; Cultural Memory in the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> In this research 'the camera' is used for any of the devices (including audio recording devices) that describe the mechanism to document and record myself.

Although not an obvious focus of the research, a rich feminist standpoint has emerged. A seminal essay that informs my practise is Israeli professor and feminist theorist Hadara Scheflan-Katzav's "Thou Shalt Tell Thy Daughters: Mothers Tell Daughters Their Holocaust Story — Three Case Studies of Contemporary Israeli Women Artists" (2022). Scheflan-Katzav states, "The reconstruction of history through stories that pass from mother to daughter contrasts sharply with Jewish tradition in which the historical story passes from father to son."<sup>7</sup> The art examined in this text reassesses the past and discourse of Holocaust memory from a female perspective "that reflects a personal moral stance"<sup>8</sup> rather than speaking for an entire generation. Dvora Morag, one of the artists discussed, involved her daughter in creating films about her mother's experience of the Holocaust and the silence she grew up in. Scheflan-Katzav writes, "[Her] work sets forth a narrative of personal memory as a subversive alternative to the narrative of national-collective memory, adding an important moral dimension."<sup>9</sup> Morag states that giving her mother a voice, gave her a voice. Paramount to my project is a moral and ethical framework that is first and foremost about safety and agency. One cannot heal from trauma without a container of safety and agency. In my practice I share my personal voice which gives my mother and the grandmothers of my lineage a voice.

I draw on scholarship from Bracha Ettinger, Israeli artist and psychoanalyst, specifically her Matrixial theory relating to the trans-subjective space of the mother-child experience. In her book, *The Matrixial Borderspace* (2006)<sup>10</sup> Ettinger suggests within the Matrixial space is an ethics of witnessing that includes wondering, responsibility, respect and compassion. Wit(h)nessing, with-ness, being with, are word concepts Ettinger uses to describe the inter-relationality of the nature of bodily encounter exchanges with others. I borrow the term wit(h)nessing in my practice to describe what I am asking of the camera and, in turn, have termed the camera 'the wit(h)nessing camera'. This research defines wit(h)nessing as attending deeply to a moment, compassionately connecting, listening and noticing, akin to a loving maternal gaze. The

---

<sup>7</sup> Hadara Scheflan-Katzav, "Thou Shalt Tell Thy Daughters: Mothers Tell Daughters Their Holocaust Story– Three Case Studies of Contemporary Israel Women Artists" *Arts* 11: 94 (2022), 1

<sup>8</sup> Scheflan-Katzav, "Thou Shalt Tell..." 1

<sup>9</sup> Scheflan-Katzav, "Thou Shalt Tell..." 1

<sup>10</sup> Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

wit(h)nessing camera allows me a slight distance from my pain as a mother associated with Holocaust intergenerational trauma, giving me a new perspective and a material space outside of my body to consciously connect, listen and witness the trauma differently.

During this project, I joined a reading group mostly made up of Aotearoa Visual Arts PhD candidates. In weekly Zoom calls, we studied political philosopher and artist Erin Manning's book *The Minor Gesture* (2016). Manning describes the minor gesture as "...the gestural force that opens experience to its potential variation... activating a shift in tone...a force that courses through the [grand narrative]... it is out of time...and rhythmically... invents new modes of life-living."<sup>11</sup> In this exegesis, I adopt several of Manning's terms to bridge the psychic space I inhabit in the non-linear realm of my artmaking processes, the act of mothering and the transmutation of trauma into the linear format of writing. For example, Manning's "I reach sideways in time" and "stepping out slightly differently" contribute to how I perceive my art practice's facilitation to break the patterns of trauma. I am interested in connecting Manning's minor gesture with acts of camera wit(h)nessing so as to give space for the transmutation of shame.

In my research I follow what is ambient, a hunch, a breadcrumb, to navigate the next inevitable movement forward.<sup>12</sup> It is a tender surrender. I lean into the process of my maternal subjective becoming. The backdrop is Mothering, what I reach for is artful. The personal becomes public. My practice investigates what affect relations this mother/art intersection can contribute to a broader conversation on creating trauma-informed societies and returning a maternal gaze on maternal wellbeing through a contemporary art practice.

---

<sup>11</sup> Manning, *The Minor Gesture*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> An overarching method of this project involves following a hunch, or breadcrumb navigation as I have termed it. My experience since beginning this research has been that there are forces at play that are much bigger than my individual story. These forces that I like to believe are my ancestors are what/who leave a breadcrumb trail for me to follow often in the form of what I initially think is a mistake. I imagine breathing with my ancestors, who whisper my next movements, which encourages me forward.

I align my research with world-renowned trauma specialist and Holocaust survivor Gabor Maté, who has created a therapeutic system to connect with trauma compassionately, informing how I use a camera when connecting with my trauma.

In Chapter One, 'The Entangled Maternal', I share the stories of my maternal grandmother and my mother that relate to Holocaust trauma and mothering. I discuss how I translate these stories into the artworks of this project through recording myself storytelling with and for my children. The subsequent artworks involve historic trauma stories told through the voice of a mother. I use my voice to mother the trauma, my children, myself and the viewers of my artworks.

Chapter Two, 'The Sound of Silence and the Art of Listening', explores further how elements of silence and sound are utilised in my research. I foreground the methodological basis to how my practice experiments with methods of making that have the potential to interrupt patterns of survivor silence. I explore how sonic aspects are embedded in my mothering lineage, and how they may contribute to a wider conversation of transformation through art practice.

In Chapter Three, 'Pintele Yid, A Little Spark of Jewishness', I discuss the role of Jewish ritual gestures within the project and how I position the wit(h)nessing camera to facilitate a new relationship to being Jewish for the family. I describe the use of water and its sounds within a Jewish ritual bath to assist in purification of trauma's resonance in my body. Finally I introduce a Dutch painting belonging to my family that also survived the Holocaust and its significance in my project as a witnesser of the Jewish mothers and Jewish children of my maternal lineage.

# CHAPTER 1 - THE ENTAGLED MATERNAL

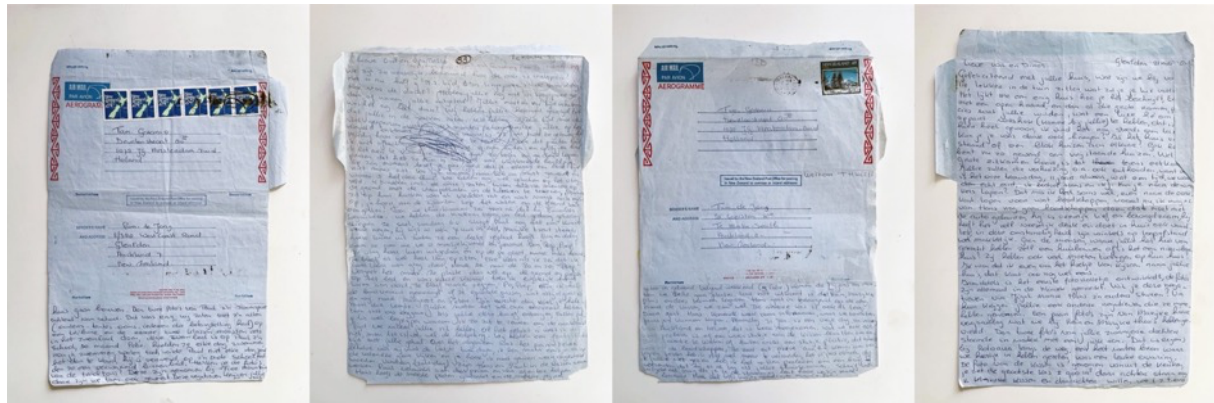


Figure 3. Aerogrammes–Mothering Documents, 2021, four digital images

“...the trauma of the mother reverberates in the soul of the daughter, born in her mother’s womb, living with her and her ongoing bleeding, internal and external, from the trauma.”<sup>13</sup>

## 1.1 ANCESTRAL CONVERSATIONS

My mother receives a benefit from the Dutch state assistance scheme, The Benefit Act for Victims of Persecution 1940-1945 (WUV) which distributes funds from the German government in honour of first and second-generation Holocaust survivors. As I undertook this research, my mother offered to use part of her WUV benefit to pay for my therapy which I have engaged with as an ethical mode of self-care during the project. This act of recognition and generosity from my mother continues to drive my practice and support my place in it.

In this chapter I share the stories of the seminal women in my life and how these stories inform my project. This chapter discusses shame, memory and trauma and the oral tension that lives in my body. It is clear that I have always been searching for a way to make meaning from my inherited trauma from the Holocaust.

---

<sup>13</sup> Scheflan-Katzav, Hadara “Thou Shalt Tell Thy Daughters: Mothers Tell Daughters Their Holocaust Story- Three Case Studies of Contemporary Israel Women Artists” *Arts* 11: 94 (2022), 3.

We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what then matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential as its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into triumph. (Frankl, 1963)<sup>14</sup>

I interviewed my grandmother in 2006 about her Holocaust experience of hiding in an attic with her family in The Netherlands, much like the revelatory story of Anne Frank but in worse conditions. What I noted when listening to the interview again at the beginning of this research project was the fact that she was able to speak about her experiences before the war, leading up to going into confinement and then her experience after the war, but very little about what it was like to live in hiding during her teenage years with her mother, father and older brother all fearing for their lives.

I was struck by the survivor's guilt she experienced. She described how her parents would tell her and her brother every morning and evening not to complain as they were living, and the other Jews were in the concentration camps. She said she could never talk about what was in her heart and described it as a turning point in her life. The shame of being alive amongst so much tragedy with no safe place to work through the suffering is what I believe caused her the most psychological disturbance, which manifested most predominantly through her mothering experience. Shame relating to mothering is also entangled with my mother's experience of mothering and my experience of being mothered by her. In the present, I am interested in transmuting this inherited shame rather than transmitting it. This project's central function is to explore how I might transcend the survivor's guilt I inherited.

I experience survivor's guilt and shame related to intergenerational Holocaust trauma as an over-expressed weight of responsibility. If my children experience emotional pain, I blame myself for not being a 'better mother' to prevent their pain. I also encounter this trauma as hypervigilance in life amplified in motherhood for possible future threats.

---

<sup>14</sup> Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

Again, I experience the gravity of the overburden of responsibility to do more or be 'better' to prevent the perceived impending danger.

The little I know about my grandmother and her immediate family's experience during the Holocaust comes from my mother and what she has pieced together. My grandmother met my grandfather Edward Meyer (Eddie) after the war in the Netherlands. Eddie was one of the sole survivors of his family from Polish concentration camps such as Auschwitz and Birkenau. My grandparents then moved to Israel after the 1948 establishment of the state of Israel. In 1956 my grandmother fled Israel and her marriage with her two young children. They returned to the Netherlands, where my grandmother placed her children into a Jewish children's home for orphaned Jewish children. My family and I will never know the reason for this drastic action, but we do know the immense traumatic impact it had on everyone involved, particularly my mother. My grandmother never fully turned the children over to the state, continuing to promise them that one day they could come home. That day never came. My grandmother prevented the children from having contact with their father, who remained in Israel, remarried and had two more children. I have often wondered how one reconciles growing up in an orphanage surrounded by orphans but having two living parents that did not predominantly raise you. My mother's memory of this time is scarce. In a conversation with my mother, she shared that the most painful thing regarding her childhood is that she cannot remember. I believe my grandmother also could not remember much of her time in hiding during her adolescence. This loss of memory is trauma. I understand it as it takes hold of my body too. In *The Body Keeps the Score : Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (2014) trauma specialist Bessel Van Der Kolk describes trauma as a "...tragic adaptation in an effort to shut off terrifying sensations deadening ones capacity to feel fully alive."<sup>15</sup>

I grew up absorbing the fragmented painful stories and emotions of my mother as a secondary witness of Holocaust trauma. "...the memory of the survivor mother is neither linear nor presented as a whole to the daughter, but in fragments of atrocity

---

<sup>15</sup> Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The body keeps the score: brain, mind and body in the healing of trauma* (New York, Viking Books, 2014).

mixed in with daily life.”<sup>16</sup> My whole life I wanted to alleviate my mother’s burden but had no means to do so other than to internalise her burden as my own. This internalised burden grew to an unbearable volume once I became a mother myself.

To turn down this volume, I began experimenting with sharing the burdens of my experience as a mother and daughter carrying internalised shame with my wit(h)nessing camera. I privilege the wit(h)nessing camera’s ability to frame what was previously unseen and unheard into a co-composition between artist, camera and viewer that can be seen, heard, and therefore connected with.

In the early part of this research I talked to my mother extensively about her experience as a second-generation Holocaust survivor. I discovered that having a third consciousness by way of a camera to record and witness these encounters created a new orientation to my own burdens of her pain. Rather than further absorbing her pain, I found a new position as artist, not just as a daughter. It was as if I was listening and connecting to her stories for the first time but without the transference of trauma — instead, a deep empathy and respect grew for my mother’s experience and a new sense of safety emerged between us. Thus a new method of working with the camera as a third witness was born. As I reconstruct my grandmother's and mother's stories into a story of resilience through the wit(h)nessing camera, I am reminded that I have also inherited a legacy of courage, language, adventure and an aptitude for life's difficulties.

---

<sup>16</sup> Schefflan-Katzav, “Thou Shalt Tell...” 3.

## 1.2 THE PRESENT IS PRESENCE

“If you see yourself as the source, that is powerful...[and] liberating. The energy of trauma can be transformed into the energy of life.”<sup>17</sup>

The location for my film and audio recordings is my home, and also my mother’s home (which I predominantly grew up in). My aim is to shift these domestic mundane environments that are imbued with expressions of trauma, into something miraculous.

I often daydream about my great-grandmother Maria Ephraim who died just before I was born. I wonder what it would have been like to mother, particularly feed her family during the Holocaust in the confines of an attic in someone else’s house with two teenage children. She would have had to stay hypervigilant for any signs of danger while also providing a sense of home for the sake of the family. I think about my home that I now mother in (and the home I grew up in that my mother mothered in) and the home of my life, my body where trauma resides. Erin Manning refers to the body beginning and ending in a “skin envelope we can readily perceived.”<sup>18</sup> I relate Manning’s term ‘skin envelope’ of the body to the envelopes containing the letters my mother and grandmother wrote each other across the oceans to stay connected throughout my childhood. I am interested in what unspoken words these skin envelopes hold and what words and sounds are contained within the home.

When I was born in the Netherlands, my parents had already decided to immigrate to New Zealand. I had seven months with my extended family and their loving gaze before we moved to the other side of the world. My mother finally had the opportunity to create physical distance from her painful past and continued the legacy of the Jewish diaspora.<sup>19</sup> In what is an intriguing psychological act, my mother found a way to stay

---

<sup>17</sup> Gabor Maté, “The Wisdom of Trauma: Can our deepest pain be a doorway to healing?” *Directed by Zaya and Maurizio Benazzo*. Accessed June 8, 2021. <https://wisdomoftrauma.com/movie/>

<sup>18</sup> Manning, *Minor Gesture*, 114.

<sup>19</sup> The Jewish diaspora is the dispersion of Jews throughout history from their ancestral homeland (the land of Israel) and their subsequent immigration to other parts of the world. A diaspora is usually an involuntary act. For my mother, that was

safely connected to her mother by sending letters to her. Throughout my childhood my mother sent weekly, by way of aerogrammes, updates about her mothering. When my grandmother passed away in 2009, my mother was given back all the letters she and my grandmother had written each other during this period. (Figure 3)

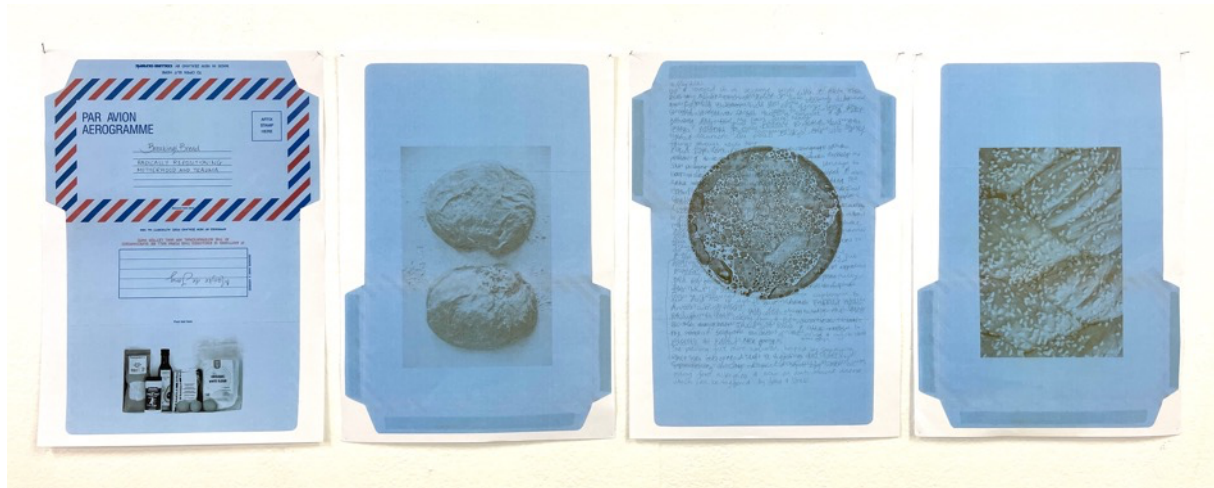


Figure 4. *Feeding the ancestors; Challah in the Aerogramme*, 2021, displayed in studio, digital print overlaid with Risograph print

These aerogrammes provide a record of my mother's experience of mothering and her perception of my childhood. I have been working with this ephemera throughout my research. My urge at the beginning of this project was to insert nourishing visual material into the blank unwritten aerogrammes that were also returned with the written letters. I imprinted images of challah bread<sup>20</sup> as a means to feed the ancestor's souls with my love and attention and give trauma a place at the dining table to be seen, heard and connected with, an act not previously possible. I displayed the aerogramme prints with images of challah which I hung like t-shirts to symbolise a body torso (Figure 4). I also filmed the process of making challah which was my first time making Jewish bread. It was in this act of recording myself performing a Jewish act, which I had never done (nor seen done), that I discovered how my wit(h)nessing camera is able to

---

obvious in the case of being taken from her birthplace of Israel to the Netherlands at the age of six. Still, I argue she also had to move out of the Netherlands, where the trauma occurred for her wellbeing, and this motivation occurred once she was a mother.

<sup>20</sup> Challah is a special Jewish bread usually braided with three strands. Challah is typically eaten on the Jewish Sabbath ritual called Shabbat. Known as the Jewish day of rest, Shabbat is celebrated weekly on a Friday evening. I connect the weekly ritual of Shabbat to the aerogramme writing my mother performed, which became a weekly ritual for her also.

facilitate a repositioning and a reorientation to the shame and vulnerability that resides in my body.

As discussed, the invisible forces of trauma have shaped my life. In the documentary film *The Wisdom of Trauma: Can our deepest pain be a doorway to healing?* (2021), Dr Gabor Maté, states, “Working through trauma can teach us so much wisdom and can reveal the beauty of our existence”.<sup>21</sup> Maté developed a method of therapeutic exploration called ‘Compassionate Inquiry’; a system to connect to trauma compassionately to “... unveil the level of consciousness, mental climate, hidden assumptions, implicit memories and body states that form the real message that words both express and conceal.”<sup>22</sup> Maté believes that all humans hold an inner truth; it just requires compassionately connecting with trauma to shift its position, trauma involves responding to the present moment with the past. Through this kind of reframing, there is potential to discover new knowledge, so as to mediate the past within the present, allowing for new potential to arise for the future.

In looking and listening to the past by sharing the stories of my grandmother and mother and, in turn, my history with my children and viewers, with the wit(h)nessing camera between us, I bridge the past and the present, stepping outside linear time. The home of my family, and the home of my body where the trauma has resided, is emotionally witnessed in and connected with this act. My research argues that there is power in using the camera’s innate function to frame something to chunk down the stories within the body.<sup>23</sup> By isolating small fragments of a story, it is easier to be with, look at, listen to, and connect with.

---

<sup>21</sup> Maté, “The Wisdom of Trauma...” *dir.* Zaya and Maurizio Benazzo.

<sup>22</sup> Gabor Maté, <https://compassionateinquiry.com/the-approach/> accessed 26.04.23

<sup>23</sup> Erin Manning refers to “chunking” in the way a neurodivergent person perceives the world, describing it as entering into an environment which slowly edges into form, tending first to light, shadow and colour, just as I do with the camera (*Minor Gesture*, 112).

## CHAPTER 2 – THE SOUND OF SILENCE AND THE ART OF LISTENING



Figure 5. Two screen shots from *Becoming a Jewish Mother*, 2023, one-channel HD video

### 2.1 LISTENING

“One cannot wonder, when one does not feel safe.”<sup>24</sup>

I imagine that listening was the main sense that my grandmother and her family would have been attuned to as a means to inform them of safety or threat while in hiding. Silence would have signalled safety and sound would have signalled an alert. I am interested in how to safely un-silence silence through my own maternal voice. This chapter investigates whether silence has a weight or gravity—if it is alive—just a placeholder between sound or a living breathing thing. Alongside the notion of silence, this chapter explores whether trauma has sound, and if there are variants in tonality. This chapter discusses my exploration of what sonic registers are embedded in trauma and their imprint on mothering and being mothered. I explore what inherited pattern of sound is within my maternal lineage and how to translate it into the project’s artworks.

---

<sup>24</sup> Jill Bennet. *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2005).

In the opening voiceover of my video artwork *Did they have to be quiet? Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens*, I quietly say to my child, “you need to be quiet.” This line came after a former experiment when I asked my child not to make any noise with their toys while I was filming (Fig 6). In reviewing the experiment, it became clear that the request was a powerful way to open this artwork as it provided a connection to painful histories where being quiet was paramount to survival and which has become a trauma response that has spanned generations. More specifically, at some point in the experiment my child, in response to hearing about my grandmother and her family being in hiding, asked if *they* had to be quiet. This innocent question holds many of the key concepts of the research, thus becoming the project title.



Figure 6. Video still from, *Becoming a Jewish Mother*, 2023

My project’s methods have been influenced by my three-hour drive to campus. I live in a small town and have organised my mothering life so that once a fortnight I am able to make the journey to campus. Moving—but while being stagnant in the driver’s seat—has become a powerful time for me to daydream, meditate and wonder, while making connections within my research. I listen to audio books concerning trauma scholarship which sparks new ideas and thinking. I then record my thoughts on the voice memo

application on my phone. This process has created a new habit and rhythm of recording myself talking; a deep catharsis takes place as I pour out buried emotions and make connections about my own life as a mother in relation to my Jewish heritage, along with how to visually and sonically embed this new knowledge within my project. These voice memos both document and witness a moment of realisation and mimic what I have always done with my camera—memorialise and witness moments to remember.

A development of voice-memo recordings involved recording car-ride conversations with my children. A critical point in my project was during one such car ride where I recorded a conversation with one of my children while spontaneously sharing with them part of our family Holocaust story for the first time. I had to negotiate how to share such horrifying family history with an innocent child. This sharing forces me to heighten my mothering intuition as I allow my child to lead the way. I discovered that one of my deeply thinking children, would contribute to the conversation with inquisitive and provocative questions, creating an expanded view point that led to new imaging and imagining for the project. I started to wonder how the methods of this project could create a sense of a child's natural innocence and imagination by including a sense of their voice. This new method of making created new ethical considerations. Within the project's ethical framework for safety and care I adhere to a protocol that my children's visual and audio identity is kept private. I retain my children's privacy so as to retain their agency and innocence. Within a lineage that has lost so much in childhood to transgenerational Holocaust trauma, this act of care is imperative to the reparative nature of the project.

## 2.2 SPEECH ACTS



Figure 7. Clare Fleming, *The momentary triumph of aggression over tenderness*, 2019, Installation view

Clare Fleming, who facilitated our Erin Manning reading group, is an interdisciplinary artist based in Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa. I draw from her extensive research and artworks on the subject of the ‘messy maternal’ through her sound, photographic, installation and social practice. With a particular focus on the sonic and visual culture of motherhood, Fleming interrogates the boundaries between an art practice and mothering. In *The momentary triumph of aggression over tenderness* (2019), a single-channel soundtrack accompanied by photographic prints, Fleming recalls the interior world of motherhood in what she calls speech acts; re-enacted maternal speech (Figure 7). The soundscape work is multi-layered with speech acts, some frantic voice narration and some soothing, containing the continuous inner chatter of a mother. In re-enacting moments of self-reflection of everyday encounters with her children, there is pause to obscure the personal to translate it to the public, therefore attending to ethical necessities when artmaking and motherhood collide.

It was experiencing Fleming’s work that enabled me to think of modes of art-making that connect my children’s input in my artworks via their audio/visual absence. This experience contributed to experimenting with re-enacted speech acts to bring to light

the sonic culture of mothering and the trauma which is embedded in my voice, without revealing my children's voices.

In my three-channel artwork *Did they have to be quiet? Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens*, I merge re-enacted maternal speech; a conversation with my children, a whispered late-night letter for my children's future selves and submerged water noises from the bath. In the re-enacted voice narration discussion with my children, I have had to negotiate how to preserve the quality of innocence, wondering and deep reflective contributions from them as they are sonically and visually absent in the work. I experiment with layering captions of my children's speech in the films, and repeating their questions or statements within my responses. I negotiate the ethical parameter to retain my children's audio/visual identity with their presence in the work still embedded.<sup>25</sup>

Through conversations with my children, who are hearing some of the details of my family history for the first time, we imagine together what it may have been like for my grandmother in hiding. In the subsequent re-enacted voice narrations of the project's artworks, generational timelines intermingle through my layered voice; there are changes in tonality, volume and texture all with the resonance of my voice, my mothering voice.

Chris Marker, French artist and documentary filmmaker, is a pioneer of voice narration in film. In *Sans Soleil* (1983) Marker navigates ideas of history, memory, place, and belonging. The voice-over of the film functions as an external expression of what seems an internalised reflective space. The narrator states, "I will have spent my life trying to understand the function of remembering, which is not the opposite of forgetting, but rather its lining. We do not remember; we rewrite memory much as history is rewritten. How can one remember thirst?"<sup>26</sup> Through my experimental layered voice narrations I have discovered the power of voice narration to facilitate a rewriting of history as it

---

<sup>25</sup> Another artist who has worked with children and film is Kerry Tribe in her artwork *Here & Elsewhere*, 2002. In this work, a child is pictured, but her father, who is asking her questions, is off-camera. In my artwork, I am imaged, but my children's audio/visual identity is kept private.

<sup>26</sup> Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil* (Argos Films, 1983).

connects with the image of history. By bringing it forward in the context of a mother's love therefore in some way rewriting the history of my family, it now lives in the present through the context of home.

French filmmaker Marine Hugonnier describes her work as an anthropology of images that are a vehicle to cultural framing. Although the content of Hugonnier's films is very different to my own, I align her thinking about the in-frame and the out-of-frame always being in relation. She says, "What I am really looking for...[is] to invent a positive regime of images... where an image is not only built through and for the information it carries but it also absorbs everything that is out of frame."<sup>27</sup> Although my three-channel film is about the durational nature of time, whereby I use my voice to share stories of my grandmother and mother through the layered voice narrations, it also steps out of a continuum of time by merging my family's generational timelines. This strategy also alludes to the vortex of trauma that defies time, swaying from the past to the present and in-between.

Reflecting on the nature of sound through the voice, theorist, writer and artist Brandon Labelle's ideas on the roles of listening and being heard have assisted my research, particularly into ways of thinking about the agentive and ethical nature of my own voice's role. This occurs via re-enacted layered voice narration. In *Sound and Emergent Forms of Resistance*, 2018, Labelle asks, "What particularly ethical and agentive positions or tactics may be adopted from the experience we have of listening and being heard."<sup>28</sup> As in the case of the shift in agency the wit(h)nessing camera facilitated when interviewing my mother, the wit(h)nessing camera also allows me pause when reviewing the recording to listen to myself in a new agentive mode. The space created by the pause allows my own moral witnesser to emerge through my own subjectivity and further assists in the unfurling of my maternal becoming.

In *Chapter and Verse* (2005), Aotearoa video artist Alex Monteith employs experimental film methods involving material recorded in her birth country of Northern Ireland, in a

---

<sup>27</sup> Marine Hugonnier, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43xmKIKbQE8> accessed 20.04.23

<sup>28</sup> Brandon Labelle, *Sound and Emergent Forms of Resistance* (London: Goldsmith Press, 2018) 1.

haunting address of the country's history of conflict known as 'The Troubles'. (Fig 8) The film includes a voice over narration that catalogues a list of the dead as the camera appears to inspect a contemporary landscape for signs of violence, akin to French documentary film maker Alain Resnais' footage of Auschwitz in *Night and Fog* (1956 [Figure 9]). Both films use present day footage (relative to the era that the films were created in) of sites of atrocities connected with traumatic histories that are then edited with voice-over narration. In *Night and Fog*, one of the first filmic documentaries to be made about the Holocaust, Resnais does not censor footage of war-time horror, oscillating between haunting wartime footage and present-day imaging, shot ten years after the war had ended. Although this research acknowledges that the use of war-time footage was appropriate at the time *Night and Fog* was created, only a decade after World War II ended, I argue that in our contemporary post trauma period that a reparative aesthetic approach is more aligned with care and healing.

In Monteith's *Chapter and Verse*, part of the voice narration is by Monteith's mother, a maternal voice and one that has a personal relationship with the artist, which bridges the formal to the personal. For example, as Monteith's mother names the dead, she recognises one of the names and tells a personal story about them, changing the tone of her voice. The list of the dead is suddenly humanised, awakening the viewer to their own humanity. Storytelling has become a way for me to humanise intergenerational Holocaust trauma. As I experiment with different tonalities in my voice and witness myself through the camera, I recognise how different my maternal voice is from my nonmaternal voice.



Figure 8. Alex Monteith, still image from *Chapter and Verse*, 2005



Figure 9. Grasslands and barbed wire. Still image from *Night and Fog*, directed by Alain Resnais (Argos Films, 1956).

The act of recording myself with the wit(h)nessing camera has had a multiplicity of reverberations: in the interruption of the act of recording myself, in being witnessed while speaking, in listening to myself when editing the recordings of my voice and the reconstruction of narratives when layering my voices on top of one another. I listen for what could not be heard before, and for the silences in between, as a reclamation of agency and safety. I listen anew for an enhanced relationship to becoming a Jewish mother.

## CHAPTER 3 – PINTELE YID – A LITTLE SPARK OF JEWISHNESS



Figure 10. *Our first Shabbat*, 2023, multiple exposure digital image

### 3.1 RITUAL

...ritual, performs a shift in register that opens the way for new modes of becoming...The ritual object, both actively and passively, performs a passage that activates that collectively, making felt time's spiral: despite their adherence to the inheritance of the past, rituals are ever-changing, altered by the conditions of futurities in the making.<sup>29</sup>

*Pintele Yid* is a Yiddish saying that embodies the idea that no matter how distanced one becomes from their Jewish heritage, there is always a Jewish trigger point within that can be sparked when the time is right. In my life there have been many such moments. In this chapter I share one of those moments of ignition; a synchronistic meeting and subsequent verbal cultural gesture that led to finding the courage to perform a Jewish

---

<sup>29</sup> Erin Manning, *Minor Gesture*, 2012, 67-68.

ritual for the first time. I memorialised this moment of ceremony with my children through the wit(h)nessing camera, which in turn provides a new space for Jewish ritual gestures for our family.

During this study, I was fortunate enough to have a fellow Jewish woman, artist and mother in our student cohort. As we crossed the threshold from colleague to friend with our shared identities, she started wishing me *shabbat shalom* every Friday.<sup>30</sup> Our exchange functioned as a type of relational gesture. I began looking forward to Fridays and being able to add my voice to the chorus around the world, and to voice the ancient and holy words of *shabbat shalom* with a new sense of belonging. This simple gesture was a bridge and new spark to claiming my Jewishness and the rituals associated with Judaism in an unfamiliar yet profoundly new way. This relational gesture was the beginning of ordering the residue of my trauma through residing in habitual Jewish ritual. I was part of a collective, not just with shared ancestral wounds, but of traditions that reverberated through time and place.

The absence of Jewish culture in my childhood has meant that I can engage and experiment with different Jewish rituals from a playful and innocent perspective alongside my children. I get to decide how these ritual events sit within our family's rhythms—this choice establishes a sense of agency and viridity. Dr Edith Eger, Holocaust survivor and psychologist, suggests in *The Choice: Embrace the Impossible* (2017) that “The only place where we can exercise our freedom of choice is in the present.”<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> *Shabbat shalom* is a Jewish greeting to commemorate the weekly Sabbath. Shabbat means “rest” and shalom means “peace” (or the absence of war) and “wholeness”.

<sup>31</sup> Edith E. Eger, *The Choice: Embrace the Impossible* (New York: Scribner, 2017).



Figure 11. *Braiding Challah for the first time*. four digital images, 2022

The spark ignited by the ritual of wishing my new Jewish friend *shabbat shalom* every Friday allowed me to look further into the rituals of Shabbat. Eventually, I planned my first Friday night Shabbat dinner with my children (Figure 10). In preparation for this ritual, the children and I made challah bread together. I filmed our hands kneading the dough and plaiting the three braids of the bread (Figure 11).<sup>32</sup> I asked one of my children to photograph me performing some of the rituals associated with Shabbat (Figure 12). Passing the camera to my child, became a way to actively visualise the inheritance of Jewish ritual. I was clunky in my performance of Shabbat rituals; the children and I laughed at my misspoken Hebrew words for the ritual blessings. I had to look at my notes to know what to do next. We tore at the challah and were heartily impressed that it tasted delicious. These moments of laughter, innocence and connection between me and my children signify a new relationship for our family with being Jewish in the present. The presence of the camera and the act of doing something

---

<sup>32</sup> In Judaism the number 3 signifies the unity between two opposing views, 3 is known as the number of truth.

experimental knowing it will be recorded, enables a sense of safety and playfulness. The camera is alongside me witnessing as I shift from a place of inner judgment (stemming from shame) to a new relationship with being Jewish.



Figure 12. *Our first Shabbat II*, four digital images, 2022

I developed the performance of Shabbat rituals by filming myself re-enacting the lighting of the Shabbat candles and braiding the dough for the challah.<sup>33</sup> These rituals are less about ritual accuracy and more to do with embodiment, infused forever with the joy my children and I experienced when we first celebrated Shabbat together. “A ritual object...carries the force of the differential of all the past rituals and all future rituals.”<sup>34</sup> Performing these ceremonial ritual moments with Shabbat candles and the wit(h)nessing camera, I am reminded of all the illumination created by Jewish people worldwide and throughout time. (Figure 13). Knowing that these rituals carried many

---

<sup>33</sup> Traditionally the woman of a Jewish household lights two candles just before the sun sets to usher in the Sabbath.

<sup>34</sup> Manning, *Minor Gesture*, 67.

Jewish communities through the devastation of the Holocaust, my participation in these ritual gestures evokes the link between my family and the lived history of the Jewish culture.



Figure 13. *Lighting the Shabbat Candles*, four video stills, 2023

The generation of children born to Holocaust survivors are known as the second-generation. Israeli psychologist Dina Wardi coined the term ‘memorial candles’ in reference to them. Wardi suggests "that survivor parents tend to select daughters more often than sons as ‘memorial candles’. As Judaism is carried through the mother, the ‘memorial candle’ daughter would be able to preserve the family’s Judaism; furthermore, in Jewish families it is often daughters who are expected to deal with the emotional problems."<sup>35</sup> There are numerous studies into the impact of intergenerational Holocaust trauma. For example, Holocaust survivors unconsciously transmitted their own trauma to their offspring, the second-generation, and in doing so, invested in them all the unlived hopes and dreams of their own lives and of their loved ones who did not

---

<sup>35</sup> Dina Wardi, *Memorial candles: Children of the Holocaust* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) 36.

survive but were lost through Holocaust trauma and casualty. The second-generation become the living memorial candles to what was lost and un-lived by survivor parents. As stated, my research aligns with Sheflan-Katzav who positions second-generationers not just as 'memorial candles' but as carriers of the torch that are able to illuminate a way forward in search of meaning which sits outside of only a history of Holocaust trauma."<sup>36</sup> In one of my filmic artworks, I record myself lighting the Shabbat candles in honour of my mother as a torch carrier. My mother absorbed the trauma of her mother and yet has been able to mother despite being under-mothered herself. Performing these ceremonial ritual moments with Shabbat candles and the camera, creates, for me, a sense of reparative connection to other Jewish people worldwide and throughout time, even during the darkest moments in our history. (Figure 13). Therapist and theorist Kahane Nissenbaum says,

The third generation appears to be reconstructing their grandparents' history, resurfacing their legacy, and in doing so they are realising the strength and heroic battles their grandparents fought in order to get to the place they are today. ...Rather than ruminating on the pain of their ancestors, focusing attention on their strength may result in the ability to move past the pathological symptoms.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Sheflan-Katzav, 2

<sup>37</sup> Melissa C. Kahane Nissenbaum, "Exploring Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma in Third Generational Holocaust Survivors", 2011.

### 3.2 THE BATH



Figure 14. *Mikvah Bathing*, video still, 2022

The bath has always been a place for me to return to when I need to feel cocooned in the warm waters of a womb-like vessel. I can feel my body's borders, the 'skin envelope' I inhabit that carries the partialities of the generations of mothers before me. As the waters of the bath cleanse the day's experiences and my often weary maternal body, I am reminded of a Jewish female purification rite performed in a *mikvah* bath.<sup>38</sup> In this project, water symbolises the unconscious, where until now, much of my shame relating to mothering has lived. Through the reclamation of Jewish rituals and water's ability to purify, I link the idea of a *mikvah* ritual to purify what lives in the unconscious and bring it to light in the conscious, to be bathed in a mother's love (Figure 14). By bringing the camera to my bathing rituals, I have discovered the regulating impact not only of warm waters but of being able to sit with what lives unconsciously in my body, allowing it to surface and become conscious.

---

<sup>38</sup> The *mikvah* is a Jewish ritual bath that derives from ancient blood taboos of impurity and purity regarding a woman's menstrual cycle or post childbirth, to ritually purify and resume sexual activity. Although rejected by many in modern times for its patriarchal leanings and oppression, some Jewish women are reclaiming the *mikvah* bath as a ceremony for spiritual purification and for some it reaches beyond gender binaries.



Figure 15. *Circling the Drain*, i-phone image underwater, 2021

In contrast to the comfort I feel in the bath, the term 'circling the drain' describes life leaving the body or someone in a compulsive, downward spiral. In Anthony Doerr's novel *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014), a Nazi officer salaciously uses this term to describe a captured Jewish body near death. In my first photographic experiments, to lean into the trauma, I created images underwater in the bath to symbolise the energy of circling the drain (Figure 15).

At the end of this project, I have circled back to the bath, specifically for its ability to mimic sounds from the womb, akin to those of a uterine ultrasound.<sup>39</sup> I record the underwater sounds of my bathing. I connect these ideas to the unconscious transmission that occurs in pregnancy between a mother and a growing foetus. Bracha Ettinger refers to this unconscious transference in pregnancy as “carrience”,

---

<sup>39</sup> In Hebrew, the root of the word “womb” and “compassion” are the same.

Carrying is knowledge. *Carrience* is the symbolic relief...of carrying and being-carried, and for its sublimation...carrience absorbs the effects of depth-working of subreal strings and threads. While the one carries and the other is being carried, come conscious of carrience, a conscience that includes encounters and resonance of elements on the subreal level, is formed at the unconscious level.<sup>40</sup>

Mothering is the ultimate and unique form of transference/carrience that begins from conception. Many aspects of transmission occur unconsciously within the walls of the womb during pregnancy. In my project, I navigate how to visualise what occurs, out of sight in the intimate waters, between mother and child. Through my sonic and visual recordings, I am attempting to bring to light what has until now lived in the unconscious.

---

<sup>40</sup> As quoted by Scheflan-Katzav, "Thou Shalt Tell..." 14.

### 3.3 THE PAINTING



Figure 16. *A Witnesser and Bridge*, 2023, composite digital image

When my grandmother's youngest brother, Rudy Ephraim, born after WW II, last visited Aotearoa New Zealand from the Netherlands, he presented me with a painting and asked if I would be the family guardian of this heirloom. (Fig 16) The painting was one of the few familial possessions that survived the Holocaust and was in hiding with my family. Just as for my grandmother to survive the Holocaust with her immediate family, it was rare for any artwork belonging to a Jewish family to survive and remain in their possession. This small yet weighty painting sits on my wall looking over my young family. Of late, I have been listening to its echoes of things seen and absorbed; a memory, a truth that longs to be heard. This painting has witnessed generations of Jewish mothers who mothered, and Jewish children who were mothered. I am interested in how the painting has, as German Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin describes, the ability to look back, to return one's gaze, an aura of perception that has

not been altered by the impact of trauma on the human psyche.<sup>41</sup> In this project, this painting represents the unconscious maternal bodies compelled to silence as a way to survive. I give this painting agency by featuring it in all of my films, its omnipresence signifies a witnesser and is akin to the maternal bodies of my matrilineal lineage that it witnessed. Within my films, the painting bridges time and place, paralleled in the actual depiction of a canal bridge in the Netherlands.

My filmic/sonic artworks function as a form of radical intergenerational self-portraiture, which psychically binds my family together. The artworks enable our family “...the emergence in our time of a new relation to the past.” (Baer, 2002)<sup>42</sup> What I have come to know now by reconstructing my family stories through the lens of my wit(h)nessing camera as a third generation Holocaust survivor is that my trauma needed to be given a seat at the table and be fed with presence, acknowledgement and connection. In doing so it can become part of the family but no longer rule the family.

---

<sup>41</sup> Arianne County, “They have eyes that they might not see: Walter Benjamin’s aura and the optical unconscious” *Literature & Theology* 27:4 (2013), 1.

<sup>42</sup> Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 88.

## CONCLUSION - TIKKUN OLAM - REPAIRING THE WORLD



Figure 17. *Lighting the Shabbat Candles*, 2023, video still

Let [children] be sure that every little deed counts, that every word has power, and that we do, everyone, our share to redeem the world, inspite of all absurdities, and all the frustration, and all the disappointment. And above all, remember that the meaning of life is to live life as if it were a work of art.<sup>43</sup>

A mother giving birth benefits from being in a safe environment, so do people in the process of healing from transgenerational trauma. In this project, I have had to carefully and safely position myself in the artwork in order for the trauma to transmute into a sense of aliveness.

As the habit of utilising the wit(h)nessing camera and its ability to non-judgmentally document parts of my subjective becoming as a Jewish mother, the volume of my

---

<sup>43</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, quoted by Marjorie Ingall,

<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/teaching-kids-about-tikkun-olam>

Accessed 04.04.23

internal shame has become less audible. Instead, I am able to reorientate myself to my own inner, loving, mothering voice.

I have connected with and listened deeply to the voices of trauma within my family; I thought if I could look at the trauma hard enough, it might make me a 'better mother'. I needed to bathe in the discomfort of shame and feel the weight of silence. In my research, the wit(h)nessing camera has enabled me to mother this trauma. My project has developed methods to give the trauma a place to live outside my body while I connect to my Jewishness in new forms. By performing Jewish ritual gestures recorded by the camera, I can consciously transmit stories and histories to my children about being Jewish, not only as a weight to bear but as a buoyancy that enlivens us.

I combine a multiplicity of minor gestures through the act of utilizing the wit(h)nessing camera that runs through the grand narrative of my life to bridge what was known as survivor's guilt, experienced as shame in mothering and being mothered, to a new composition of meaning and relationship in becoming a Jewish mother. In our conversations, the Erin Manning reading group decided that shame cannot live in a minor gesture but requires being present in the moment and therefore not preoccupied with the burdens of the past or future.

The wit(h)nessing camera has facilitated an ethical witnessing that engendered safety and agency through a compassionate inquiring model of listening, seeing, imagining, wondering and connecting with the stories of my matrilineal lineage through my own voice. The method of exposing my voice through recorded re-enacted voice narration, means that the voice of trauma is no longer the dominant voice within my home or body. The camera created a container of safety by positioning it as a mediatory compassionate witness. Through feeling safe, it melted the edges of shame relating to Holocaust trauma to reveal what was hiding all along, a mother that, despite it all, survived, a mother that holds the torch to pass forward for the future lineage.

Mothering is not only the subject matter of this project. It has become the method and methodology. I have come to understand that my body is part of an ecosystem of ancestors who I hope can exhale a long breath of repose alongside me. I am part of a

Jewish bloodline that does not hold a single thread but is part of a web of relations that ripples outward into the intimate waters of deep time.

## INSTALLATION AND EXHIBITION

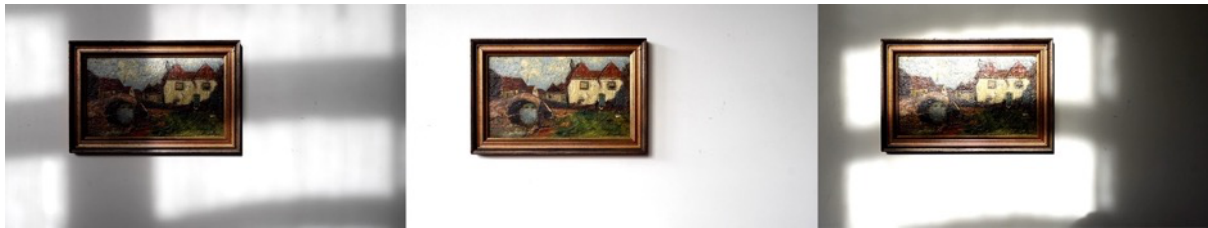


Figure 18. *The Dutch Painting in Changing Light*, 2023, three video stills

The exhibition was held at St Paul ST gallery one from 15-18 June 2023.

The installation comprised a three-channel HD video with a dual soundtrack. The videos were positioned on three different walls, which formed a triangle shape, creating a room-like configuration within the larger gallery space. The triangle was created by suspending a screen from the ceiling (akin to a hanging wall) adjacent to two projectors on the wall corners of the gallery. The projected video on the suspended screen was a fixed-camera video recording of the Dutch painting described in Chapter 3.3. The recording was filmed during dusk (the regular time of day that Shabbat rituals are performed). The painting, which was recorded hanging on a wall in my living room, at a certain point almost fades to just the textural qualities of the brush strokes of the painting with the changing light (Fig 18). The bridge depicted in the painting literally bridges not only time and place but acts also as a surrogate wit(h)ness to the two films it faces of me performing Jewish ritual. It is also positioned in a way that the viewers of the artwork stand in front of the film of the painting to view the ritual films, the painting wit(h)nesses the viewer witnessing the ritual films. In this way the artwork has become a relational community wit(h)nessing exchange.

The two films of me performing Jewish ritual gestures were also recorded in my family home and reconstituted in the space to create a humble dining room setting. The camera is positioned in a way that invites everyone a seat at the table to be nourished by a mother's love and care.

One film is of me kneading and braiding dough to make Challah bread, and the other is of me lighting two candles to usher in Shabbat. The candles are left burning, with only flickers now and then to indicate the moving image and passing time, and then blown out at the film's end. Both films are sensorial and nourishing in terms of their aesthetic;

viewers can almost smell the dough and burning candles. This sensory experience was further enhanced by opening the exhibition with a Jewish blessing called *Shalom Aleichem*, often sung during Shabbat. The essence of the prayer is about peace: to be peace, arrive in peace, and depart in peace. I then transported the table, tablecloth, and breadboard I used in the ritual films into the gallery, offering Challah bread and hummus. (Fig. 19)



Figure 19. Challah bread and hummus, exhibition opening, St Paul ST Gallery, Auckland, 2023, digital image

The three films fade into image from white. Throughout each film at different moments, they fade in and out from white. White in Judaism signifies mercy, purity, and joy. In Kabbalism, the esoteric sect of Judaism, white is referred to as infinite light. Utilizing white within the three films is indicative that one cannot hide in the light, as well as being the antithesis of the Nazi regime.

Two speakers were suspended from the ceiling beside each of the ritual films. The twin soundtracks were of my voice, one a conversational voice and the other a whispering voice, both spoken for my children—a mothering voice. The two voices work in counterpoint and at periods crescendo as they overlap. The content of the sound involved telling my grandmother and mother's stories, which interweave and conjoin in moments thereby recontextualizing the stories: a duet of voices transmutes into a chorale of voices, stories, and timelines. This conversational soundtrack was positioned

by the film of kneading and braiding dough, a more active scene (as if viewers are listening to the inner chatter of a mother as she tends to domestic duties), whereas the whispering soundtrack was placed by the quieter film of the candles creating feelings of intimacy and durational time drawing the viewer in closer. There is tension throughout the installation of exposure and concealing that is indicative of trauma and healing from trauma.

Storytelling centered in an autoethnographic voice, and domestic reparative gestures of mothering are continuous ways to resist hetero-patriarchy and extremist fascism. It is a radical endeavor to innovate an original therapeutic modality within a master's art project. It is radical to make artworks that focus on enormous intergenerational traumas, which are inherently tender. By enabling trauma, a seat at the table, I radically and safely repositioned the trauma relating to mothering so as to activate hope and aliveness for our family system.

The artwork can be viewed here:

[https://youtu.be/5PQ\\_rxbpQ5Y](https://youtu.be/5PQ_rxbpQ5Y)

[www.marijkedejong.co.nz](http://www.marijkedejong.co.nz)



Figure 20. Installation view #1 of, *Did they have to be quiet? Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens*, St Paul ST Gallery, Auckland, 2023, digital image



Figure 21. Installation view #2 of, *Did they have to be quiet? Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens*, St Paul ST Gallery, Auckland, 2023, digital image



Figure 22. Installation view #3 of, *Did they have to be quiet? Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens*, St Paul ST Gallery, Auckland, 2023, digital image

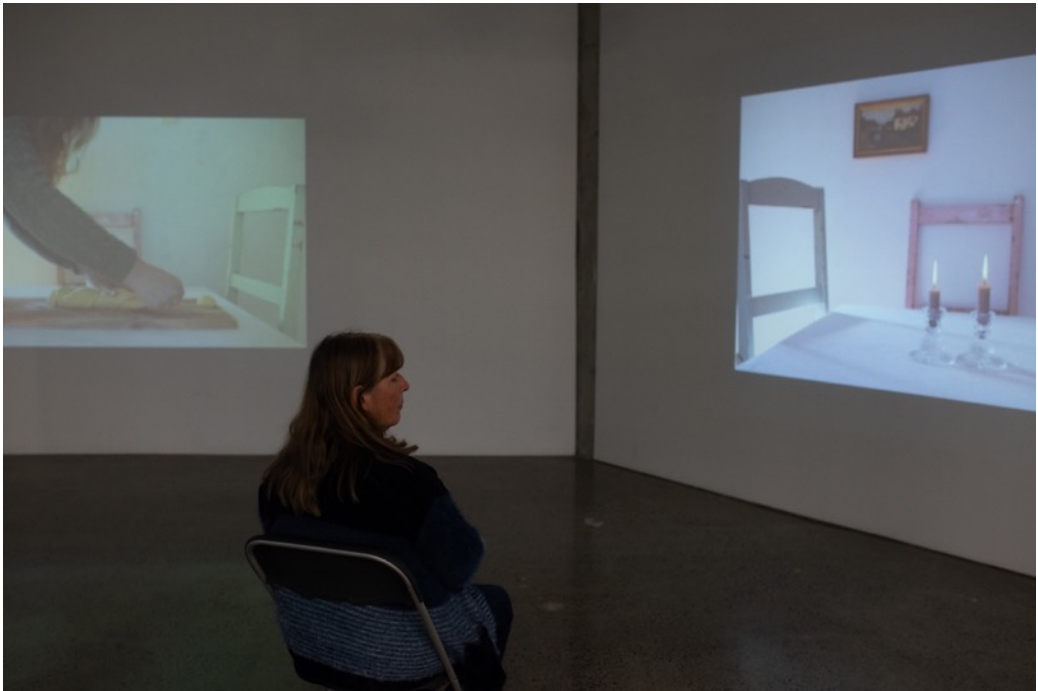


Figure 23. Installation view #4 of, *Did they have to be quiet? Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens*, St Paul ST Gallery, Auckland, 2023, digital image



Figure 24. Installation view #5 of, *Did they have to be quiet? Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens*, St Paul ST Gallery, Auckland, 2023, digital image



Figure 25. Installation view #6 of, *Did they have to be quiet? Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens*, St Paul ST Gallery, Auckland, 2023, digital image



Figure 26. Exhibition information, *Abstract Aerogramme*, 2023, St Paul ST Gallery, Auckland, digital image

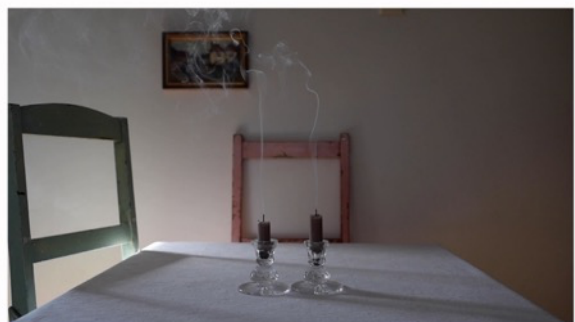
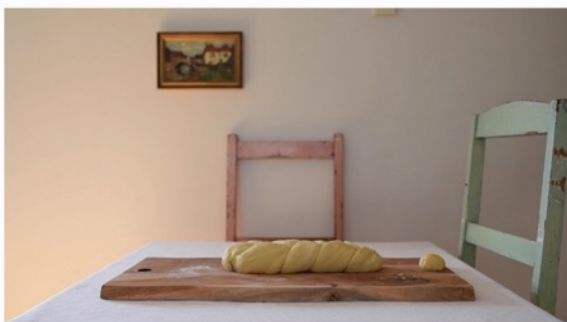


Figure 27. Six video stills from, *Did they have to be quiet? Radically Repositioning Trauma and Mothering Through a Wit(h)nessing Lens*, 2023, digital images, 9min 13secs

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Azoulay, Ariella A. *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*. London: Verso, 2012.
- Baer, Ulrich. *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.
- . "To Give Memory a Place: Holocaust Photography and the Landscape Tradition." *Representations*, no. 69 (2000): 38–62. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2902900>.
- Barclay, Barry. *Our Own Image. A Story of a Māori Filmmaker*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.
- . "The Camera On the Shore." Directed by Graeme Tuckett. Accessed 15/05/21. <https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/barry-barclay-the-camera-on-the-shore-2>.
- Bennett, Jill. *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art; Cultural Memory in the Present*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- Best, Sue. *Reparative Aesthetics: Witnessing in Contemporary Art Photography*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016.
- Brown, Elspeth H. and Thy Thu, Eds. *Feeling Photography*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014.
- County, Arianne. "They have eyes that they might not see: Walter Benjamin's aura and the optical unconscious." *Literature & Theology* 27:4, 2013
- Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Images in Spite of All : Four Photographs from Auschwitz*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.
- Doerr, Anthony. *All the Light We Cannot See*. London: Fourth Estate, 2014.
- Eger, Edith E. *The Choice: Embrace the Impossible*. New York: Scribner, 2017.
- Ettinger, Bracha L. *The Matrixial Borderspace*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.
- Fleming, Clare: <https://www.clarefleming.co.nz/work/peaks-7ktbh-cnpys>, accessed 02/06/22
- Frankl, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1963.
- Guerin, Frances, ed. *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*. London: Wallflower Press, 2007.

- Harris, Judith. "An Inheritance of Terror: Postmemory and Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma in Second Generation Jews After the Holocaust." *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 80, 2020.
- Hugonnier, Marine, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43xmKIKbQE8>, accessed 20/04/2023
- Iversen, Margaret. *Photography, Trace, and Trauma*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- Jarvis, Pam. "Ancestral Selfies and Historical Traumas: Who Do You Feel You Are?" *Genealogy* 6:1, 2022.
- Jun, Nathan, and Daniel W. Smith. "*Deleuze and Ethics*." Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011.
- Kahane Nissenbaum, Melissa, C. "Exploring Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma in Third Generational Holocaust Survivors." *Literature & Theology* 27:4, 2011.
- Labelle, Brandon. *Sound and Emergent Forms of Resistance*. London: Goldsmith Press, 2018.
- Lupton, Catherine. *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future*. London: Reaktion Books, 2005.
- Manning, Erin. *The Minor Gesture*. Georgia: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Maté, Gabor. "The Wisdom of Trauma: Can our deepest pain be a doorway to healing?" Directed by Zaya and Maurizio Benazzo. Accessed 08/06/21. <https://wisdomoftrauma.com/movie/>
- Mintz, Jacqueline A. "The Myth of the Jewish Mother in Three Jewish American, Female Writers." *The Centennial Review* 22, no. 3: 346–55, 1978.
- Monteith, Alex. [http://www.alexmonteith.com/work\\_detail.php?id=33#](http://www.alexmonteith.com/work_detail.php?id=33#), accessed 07/07/22
- Rascaroli, Laura. *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film*. London: Wallflower Press, 2009.
- Scheflan-Katzav, Hadara. "Thou Shalt Tell Thy Daughters: Mothers Tell Daughters Their Holocaust Story- Three Case Studies of Contemporary Israel Women Artists" *Arts* 11: 94, 2022.
- Shneer, David. *Grief: The Biography of a Holocaust Photograph*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Tribe, Kerry. <https://www.kerrytribe.com/work/here-elsewhere/>, accessed 27/04/23

Van der Kolk, Bessel A. "The body keeps the score: brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma." New York: Viking, 2014.

Wardi, Dina. *Memorial candles: Children of the Holocaust*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.