Poetic Ponderings of Being at Home/Not at Home: (Em)bodiment in the Spaces In-Between

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Abstract:
This poetic inquiry grapples with the notion of home—what it means to be at home in all of its de/generative possibilities of dis/placement, be/longing, and be/coming. Home, as a place that one is from, is explored by way of the tensions in-between place and self, highlighted through a series of personal vignettes. In working through what it means to inhabit the space in-between, the author calls attention to the limits of language for representing the in-between within a text, detailing the constraints of the dash and ampersand and offering the slash as a possible means of representation.

Keywords: home, place, in-between, self, representation

> There are almost too many pieces to a story of a life, if it can be called a story. The pieces are not unconnected but neither do they easily interlock. They lie there on the screen facing me, passively defying me to see their pattern. It is the connection between the pieces—not the pieces themselves—that is the real story, the story that needs to be voiced. But it is the story that remains defiantly silent. (Chambers, 1994, p. 30)

This story begins and ends, as well as all stories can ever begin and end, with a place and a self. We arrive, as we often do, in the middle, mid-story, amidst a dialogue, the de/construction of identities—mine, others—formations of self that ebb and flow. My brother's recent phone call—a conversation pieced together with the fragments of certainty, belonging, and dis/order that accompany children of divorce. He, much like my younger brother and me, never remains in one place for long, preferring the safety afforded by unmooring static states—places, people, occupations—before they unsettle themselves. Re/turning from stints in Calgary, Seoul, and most recently, Hong Kong, my brother was offered a new job, nonplussed to discover his office window overlooks the hospital in which he was born. "What does it mean," he asked, "to be forced to face your place of origin, both figuratively and literally? Why am I returning here?" Return—from Old French, *re* meaning *back*; *turn*—to turn back around. Turning toward but then away. Longing to escape the very longing from which you can never flee.

Like. Similar to; in the manner of; to find agreeable.

Unlike. Dissimilar to; different from.

Dislike. To feel distaste or hostility toward; a thing to which one feels aversion.

Like home. Similar to many so-called Torontonians, in citing my place of origin, borders ebb and flow, north transported further south, childhood homes imaginatively neighbouring city sites. We were suburban kids, my brothers and I, birthed in the city but taken away from the din of urban life to frolic through the placid, safe, and chimerically idyllic suburban streets of Unionville—a village 33 km northeast of the city. And yet despite this provincial pilgrimage, I often name Toronto as the place I am from.

Unlike home. Unlike my brothers, I left Toronto only briefly, heading east to Ottawa, Ontario to complete a teaching degree, to Kingston, Ontario for my master's work, and to New York to do field research for my dissertation. Instead of turning from the city itself, I leave homes, never inhabiting one for more than two years at a time. In many instances, this leaving is not intentional; graduate student and early career positions do not offer salaries that lend themselves to purchasing real estate in one of Canada's most expensive cities. Rather, one is subject to the whims of landlords and ladies, whose regal monikers afford them the privilege of eviction on the grounds of their possession of grounds. The power of possession—dispossession.

Dislike home. Similar to other urbanites, when at home in the city I rarely leave its physical borders, travelling only as far north as the subway's bounds when required to be physically present at the university, which straddles the line between urban and suburban, Toronto and its neighbouring regions. And yet my family home is but a stone's throw away, easily accessible through a number of transportive means. Why the failure to visit, see, spend time with? To stay temporarily at home? What is the significance of being not at home while at home? And how do I get *back into place* (Casey, 1993)? While my brother's struggle with home has been reduced to irony, my own space at home has become a cliché, my former bedroom now predictably a home gym.

Taking seriously the idea that "a person's being is constituted through the tasks that he or she conducts as he or she dwells in a particular place" (Chambers, 2008, p. 116), this article engages with *home* by way of the *in-between.* I begin with a discussion of place, focusing specifically on Edward Casey's discussion of the in-between of place and self. I then examine complexities and multiplicities in the in-between, detailing how the signs of the dash and ampersand can be used to mis/represent tensions in the in-between. Finally, I take up the sign of the slash as a powerful means of navigating while at the same time getting lost in the space between contradictions. Personal photos and narrative writings interrupt the text in the form of three strands that themselves serve as a sort of in-between, exploring tensioned spaces. The first strand centres on the un/certainty of im/memorial space and family dreams as they butt up against living realities. The second strand sits in the unsettling space between colonialism and historicity in a picturesque tourist town in Ontario. And in the final strand, I explore intergenerational naming, the meaning of monikers to im/migration.

Strand One: Cottaging

Michelle Morin (1981). *Cheerful Cottagers*. Photograph.

1983: *Summer Dreams, Make Them Feel Fine*

My parents, married for three years, were in their early 30s when they decided to buy the cottage. Twenty-thousand dollars was the price tag for a piece of waterfront land on the pristine Big Gull lake, to be shared with another couple. Escape to a summer home was the suburban dream, of soon-to-be stay-at-home mothers and working fathers, the latter of whom would visit on the weekends. Safeguarded by their ability to swim, the kids were granted permission to roam freely across the island's properties indulging in the fantasies of their youth. Our mothers would be on the dock, Danielle Steele and Stephen King novels in hand, skin slathered in baby oil.

Yes, these wild summers were ours, marked and measured by contrast—dirt and cleanliness, heat and cold, sun and rain, solitude and togetherness. We were marred with muck as we built small villages in the bank of sand by the dock, trampled through the woods in a game of tag, or waded through the swamp in pursuit of frogs hiding amidst lily pads. After weeks of treading forest floors outdoors, the luminescence of suburbia upon our return was always most shocking—white countertops, ceramic toilet bowls. When the heat from the sun was too much on those summer days or we tired from the continual exertion required to outrun mosquitoes and black flies, we would plunge into the lake, tumbling through the water, eyes open wide to explore what was hidden in the depths, clear but for the dots of green algae floating about. But we would long for the sun's embrace after a torrential downpour would set in, banishing us indoors for days of restless reading, puzzles, and board games, listening to the rain patter on the shingles as we itched for our freedom. Together, we crafted stories, performed made-up plays, bore witness to one another's fantastic feats—each a bit further, faster, and more formidable. When craving solitude, one could sit alone, drawing pictures in the sand while ruminating on life's complexities or getting lost in a novel on the steps of another cottage, its inhabitants not fortunate to have made the trip up for the weekend. The privilege that was afforded to us those summers was always explained by our families in relation to togetherness. The cottage: a space for kinship formed and melded together by time and memories.

1991: *It's Time to Go Again to Your White Room*

Two royal blue bunkbeds lined the walls of the tiny room off the kitchen where we slept—Bentley, Sean, Lija, and I. The ceilings sloped drastically so that over the years, those of us on the top bunk were close enough to learn the patterns on the plywood within eyeshot. Fingers would trace the ridges and valleys, the slopes up to the summit along the contours of the poorly painted panels. Where the ceiling met the wall, the glue that held the white wallpaper with leafy greens gave a glimpse of the house's past: inhabitants who preferred pointed patterns to our viridescent hues. Like the aging garter snakes we would catch amidst the underbrush of the forest that surrounded the place, so too was the house slowly shedding her skin. Perhaps she was trying to outgrow us in anticipation of the time when she, simple, unadorned, austere, would no longer be enough, could no longer contain us—bodies, spirits, interests. I was scolded when my parents noticed paper had been peeled back in small fragments that I kept stored under my pillow; for my parents, this place—an emblem of reveries, the manifestation of what their own childhoods did and could not hold—this space *had to be* enough. Later, when the salesman—my father—became a head-hunter and the co-owner was promoted to partner, walls were knocked down and extensions built to make rooms; then, elated, but a little confused, we kids were granted permission to tear off the strips of paper affixed to the wall in our little nook that would soon cease to exist. We made room together that day, the kids and the cottage, growing in unison, one strip of wallpaper at a time.

1996: *These Foolish Games Are Tearing Us Apart*

Stories—divided, dividing. Parents—wielding the power to shatter images of each other, themselves, under the watch of children's eyes. Children—lacking the power to do more than simply look, listen, and feel as their idols break; pieces of selves too weighted and complex for their young hands to carry, to piece back together. His and hers—containers clearly marked, to be filled, items identified for division—his and hers—"is this mine or yours?" Hers—custody. His—the site of shattered summer dreams, the lawyer and his wife, my father's friends from high school. Finger pointing and blame, vitriolic anger to

conceal heart-wrenching pain. And yet stay-at-home mothers are in better positions than climbers of corporate ladders to take children on extended summer retreats. So schedules were crafted—days allotted—splitting, fracturing, tearing up time—summer—life—carved into chunks. Two weeks here, one week there.

"Don't tell your father," she said one day, as Dave—a man whose smile, she said, could light up a room—packed up his car alongside ours—the story hers, and now mine, but not to be my father's. Curt conversations concealed—"Thanks, Dad. I'll have a nice time." A window breaks, the pane shatters the glass too fragile for the boisterousness of four young boys, hers and Dave's, for the strength of secrets aching to be told. My parents' airs of civility fall away with the glass, her welcome revoked, alongside it, our vessel—access to the port of entry. "He never liked it there," she said. "I'll take you," he said. And yet, she lingered there—amidst the ghosts of familial bliss, whose whispers he heard each time the boat reached the shore. "Let's sell it," he says at some points, and at others, "maybe you can take it some day." He continues to live too in this tensioned space of in-between—of remembering and forgetting, longing to relinquish and retain. What happens to a place when it ceases to exist, remaining only in your mind's eye?

"Do you need a flashlight?" my partner asked me last summer as we stood under the slanted ceiling in the room that used to be white. Heading out the door that slams if you fail to engage it in tactile talk—gentle pull, push back and jiggle, I decline. I know the path. I am part of it as it is a part of me—the slight incline that holds a boulder at its peak, a patch of soft moss on the right hand side, the birch tree just after the rock on whose protruding roots you will trip if you don't veer slightly to the right. It has been hard to teach him these things—these bits of knowledge that I did not know I possessed, fragments of time embodied in these four walls, amidst the trees, and along the shoreline of the lake. What will become of them, of me without them?

Cristyne Hébert (August 26, 2013). *Traipsing Trails.* Digital photograph.

The "Space In-Between" Place and Self

More than a mere geographical location, a plotted point or particular position, place is a physical space transformed, a locale infused with imaginings and entangled with experiences. A space becomes a place when it serves as a "locus of desire" (Lippard, 1997, p. 4), the site for "the folded mix of our emotions…and intuitions" (Dewsbury, 2003, p. 1907). Yet far from a unidirectional genesis, subjects are also constituted through their experiences with place; located, situated, positioned bodies come to know themselves and the world from particular locations. There are no disembodied thinking minds, nor is there a real world that exists beyond understandings of it. Rather, "the human world is a profoundly spatial, or indeed *platial* one, with identity both influencing and being influenced by its inhabited material places" (Anderson, 2004, p. 255). In other words, "there is no place without self and no self without place" (Casey, 2001, p. 684).

What mediates this relationship between person and space such that space becomes place? Edward S. Casey (2001) introduces a third space or *figure of the between* to join the self and place, ensuring that they "are genuinely co-constitutive and not forever dichotomous" (p. 686). Building on Bourdieu's notion of *habitus,* Casey (2011) offers a tripartite model of the relationship between place and space. To begin, Casey describes habitus as an "immanent law laid down by each agent in his early upbringing" as a consequence of social processes that settle into a set of "dispositions" (p. 685). Habitus is conceptualized as a mode in-between to the extent that it represents a liminal space: "between nature and culture…consciousness and body, self and other, mechanism and teleology, determinism and freedom, even memory and imagination" (p. 686). Casey uses the term to trouble Western conceptions of self that focus primarily on consciousness, ignoring (or explicitly refuting) the extent to which a subject is constructed by the lived environment. In employing the term, Casey aims to highlight how "habitudinal schemes" in particular come to influence and motivate individual actions (p. 687).

Building from habitus, Casey introduces *habitation* to explain the manner in which the self relates to a particular place. First, the self, informed and constituted by habitus, uses the body to *go out to meet* the world in a relational manner, initiating the aforementioned immanent laws that constitute the self in order to engage with and experience particular places (Casey, 2001, pp. 686-687). This process refers to the spatial meeting of a body and a place. Beyond inhabiting, having and holding place by being in relation to it, place also comes *into* the body, being internalized as "traces [of the world that] are continually laid down…sedimenting themselves...and thus becoming formative of [the body's] specific somatography" (p. 689). Here, the body takes in place, incorporating it into itself and allowing it to shape and configure its very formation.

Whether the embodied experience of self meeting place registers as a shout or a whisper, place reverberates within the self, "read[y] to appear at the flash of a mere impression" (p. 689). The melody of a tune, waft of a subtle scent, or bite of a bitter comestible can transport us—

> to a car, windows down, the soft summer breeze wafting over your face. Your grandfather, at the wheel, beer on his breath, masked, in part by the minty gum he chews and pops. Chews and pops. Perry Como, popping out through the tinny speakers. Papa (as we called him) whistles through closed teeth, a soporific sound frequently interrupted by horns and shouts;
>
> to a kitchen, grease searing your mother's skin as it splatters from the pan. A family haunted by apparitions. A devilish man with belt in hand, whose dreams are

dampened by death. Pride punctured, he leaves the ivory halls for classroom walls and a bottle, tucked into the breast of a jacket, un/seen by everyone;

to a bustling city block, a bus downtown, young love, gripping, dangerous, drunk, drinking the days away. Middle-class moroseness. Me, shunning scholastic scenes. History repeated, repeating.

While place impacts the self, places too are transformed by our being in relation to them. Place "absorb[s] subjective meanings and social identities" (Casemore, 2007, p. 6) and is subsequently "energized and transformed by the bodies that belong to it" (Casey, 2001, p. 688). Place, then, might be conceptualized as constituted by all of the interactions of persons in place, as well as its history with others who live outside of the human form. The image represents place as a whole and each dot, a moment of place coming to meet and interact with a self. In other words, the dots are visual markers of place being shaped and transformed by the act of selves meeting place. (See Figure 1).

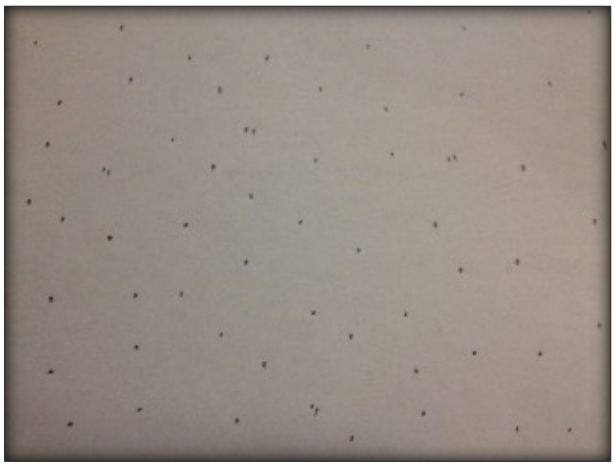

Figure 1. *Interactive Topography of Place*.

Similarly, a self is comprised of various moments between the self and its engagement with place and others. The image here represents self as a whole and each dot, a moment of self coming to meet and interact with a place. Here, the dots mark a self being molded and transformed by the act of places meeting self. (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Interactive Topography of Self.*

In this respect, employing Casey's sense of the term, we might interpret the *space in between* place and self as the point of connection between a particular place and specific self that recognises the very potential for *constitutive co-ingredience* between self and place (Anderson, 2004, p. 254). Recognising the relational act as the focal point of this interactive model, neither place nor self is given primacy as the acting agent. Rather, as each enters into an interaction with the other, it is shaped by said point of interaction. Hence, the in between becomes a sort of visual metaphor for the relational space that exists between place and self. In this image, a particular place and a specific self are each represented by a piece of paper that is then layered atop the other. (See Figure 3). While the layering offers a visual representation of the interaction of place and self and their constitutive moments of place-self and self-place interaction, layering also suggests primacy as one takes its position above the other. Significant then for the space in between is not our bird's eye view but this point at which these two pages meet and create a new fecund ground for place-self/self-place/self-place interaction.

Figure 3. *Interactive Topography of Place-Self/Self-Place.*

And yet, I long to complicate this relationship: shake the image, squish the dots together, and swirl the lines around—extend them beyond the four corners of the page. *Complicate:* from *complicare*—to fold together. Folding, adding lines to the page with creases and crinkles. Layers and complexities. (See Figure 4).

Figure 4. *Slashing Place-Self/Self-Place.*

Strand Two: The Home That I'm From

Cristyne Hébert (March 29, 2016).
Street Banners, Main Street Unionville. Digital photograph.

There is a free bus that sits outside of the colonnades of Toronto's transit hub that will take you to where I'm *from*, but only if you intend to tour. Gallivanting in pursuit of pleasure, you—with camera in hand and funds in pocket—can descend the motorcoach to revel in the village's picturesque charm. In the summer, when the sun beats down on the erubescent bricks that line the street side, you can walk, stroll, saunter, mosey, and meander—

> amidst the impatiens, geraniums, and bougainvillea, the sweet alyssum, violas, and nasturtium that burst from city-funded baskets affixed to lampposts and cedar barrels, wafting gingerly into your nasal passages, caressing your cilia in a gentle embrace;
>
> amidst the gleeful children, cookies and cream, mint chocolate chip, and rocky-road encrusted on their sunburned faces. Others scurry along the promenade to join the cue outside of the confectionary that used to be a fire hall, waiting im/patiently to get their hands into some of the handcrafted chocolate, cupcakes, or caramel corn;
>
> amidst the patios overflowing with patrons, condensation trickling down the sides of nonic glasses filled to the brim with hoppy heaven or the slushy stuff in clear plastic cups adorned with a smiling emerald companion;

amidst brides who flow with smartly-garbed flocks in tow, pausing to pose by an antique rail station marker, on the steps of a rustic barn, or seated by the pond, the protruding bulrushes blowing ever so slightly in the southern Ontarian breeze. "Geena Davis shot a movie here," you might hear a resident casually comment, gesturing at the street. "I had my photo taken with cast members of the TV show *Suits* here," my own teenage sister often boasts, pointing to the spot; "Gabriel Mott, is like, so hot." The pilot for *Gilmore Girls* was shot here too—the setting, serene, streets safe, standards secure. There is a history here, the signs all say, in this place that I'm from.

From. The point at which a journey starts. Location: a historic village. *Historic,* from English—relating to or in accordance with history. "Settled in 1794," the sign announces, welcoming words, whitewashed wishes. *History,* with a capital h; the narrative, unitary, univocal, unified—this is our story—presented, protected, preserved. Propagation to ensure conservation—*preservation,* a society that bears this name. *Village*—a dwelling or settlement. Ceremonious artifacts assure, settling the story, anchoring the allure. Banners line the street displaying founding fathers, ancestry featured in their Germanic features; plaques on facades proudly pronounce parentage, durably etched in bronze; signs signalling, offering pre-fabricated templates for tales to be told.

I walked to school along these privileged paths, past the single-family homes, double-car garages, and manicured lawns. Streets were named for this history of residents to be remembered, a particular story artfully crafted for the purposes of memorialization. Much of my pilgrimage to school took place on Fred Varley Boulevard, though sometimes I meandered as far as Kreighoff Avenue or took a detour along Emily Carr Street to pick up a friend. During art classes in the spring, when the stifled energies of winter could not be dispelled in the short periods afforded to us for recess, Mrs. Porter or Mr. Pike or Mr. Allen would lead us—Kates, Jennifers, Kims, Erics, Peters, and Tims—with paper and pencils in hand, by Lennox Way to marvel in the architectural wonders of the church located on the eponymous street. There is a history here, the signs stressed.

My own history too is etched into this landscape. I read the physical signs and yet see the signs of a different story. Tension, tensed, tensing. Privileged contradictions, contradicting privilege. Home. Temporary residences, permanent residue. If place is space infused with subjectivity, who am I as a result of this space? To what was I subject? "To dwell in a place," Cynthia Chambers (2008) says, "to come to know a place and to call that place home so I know what is appropriate to do there, requires that I learn to watch" (p. 120). When the tales told of a place do not align with how things actually unfold, where do we look? What do we choose to see? Pay attention to? Which signs do we read?

"What are your memories of there," I ask her; Sam: whose skin was never light enough, hair straight enough, clothes fashionable enough. I was there when they called her names and hurled their stones, stuck gum in her locks so that she would be forced to cut it, thrust feces in her face to let her know. There is a history here: ours, not yours. I was there, standing idly by, reading the signs.

Companions, we commiserated about our common albeit confidential circumstances: houses, rented. Mothers, single and struggling with issues that we, at the time, could not name. Our friendship later blossomed but remained always in the spaces in-between, in the tensions between who we could and could never be in this place. While I did not move alongside the Kates, Jennifers, and Kims—choosing my own divergent path as I exited the front doors of the high school at sixteen, never to return—those halls always welcomed me, as did the signs that told me I had a place here. While I visit on occasion, my parents and younger (half) siblings still living amidst, my friend does not return, does not sit with her

sisters in the shadows of the old fire hall, ice cream cones in hand. My sisters embody that space, their comfort, snug like a pair of (expensive) boots that have taken the shape of your feet. Community members communing, they greet passers-by, the children of executives—like the only version of my father they have ever known.

"That place was not a home," she eventually replied, outrage, anguish, anxiety surfacing in her voice. "The fact that you identify the concept of home with such a place is uncomfortable and reflects poorly on you. I can't pretend that that's OK." There is a history here, her response suggests, in this place that I am from. A history that is in me, that is me, a comfortable discomfort that reflects me.

From. But journeying out, outward away. From. The distance between here and there, expanding with the passing of years.

Cristyne Hébert (March 29, 2016). *Planning Mill, Main Street Unionville.* Digital photograph.

Bracketing Dashing Signifiers: The In-between as a Textual Un/Mark

As sites of desire, places become tensioned stages upon which our psychic dramas are enacted and reenacted. Experiences are evoked that we at once embrace and evade. Memories re/surface as rememberings are buried; traumas are re/lived, joys re/imagined. Affect bubbles, is expressed, repressed. A tale is told while another "remains defiantly silent" (Chambers, 1994, p. 30). Ghosts visit and haunt as we trace our "messy threads of relatedness and belonging" (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009, p. 1). As such, the relationship between people and places has blurred borders, if any such borders exist at all. We see through opaque veils that conceal as much as they reveal. What of *this* space in-

between, the one/multiple/many, that escapes and evades, this space that is difficult to pin down, point to, pinpoint?

As words escape me—and yet escape anyway, through my hands and onto the page—I am drawn to textual mis/representations of in-betweenness: the cradling curves of the parentheses—bracketing letters while at the same time pushing ( ), inflating ( ), bumping ( ) into what follows—and the hyphen—pulling characters toward others, lengthening-, stretching--, reaching---. What is re-presented (or not) through these marks and strokes? In some instances, words are divided; *be-coming*, for example, draws the reader's attention to two terms: *be* (or *being*) and *come* (or *coming*). In other cases, prefixes or suffixes are separated from root words: *un-watch-able*. Here, the separated bits of text are not terms on their own, but rather, syllabic fragments that suggest an altered meaning. Is one able to watch? Not able? Not watching? And in a third use of the bracket or hyphen, monosyllabic words are separated to call attention to a second word contained in the first, such as the *us* in *b-us*, the *aid* in *r-aid,* and the *me* in *ho-me*. In all of these instances, the dash serves as a textual sort of "third space of ambivalent construction" (Sorenson, 2003, p. 277). In this respect, the dash here functions to open up possibilities both for being and meaning making. The ampersand may come to mind here as we add possibilities into this figurative space, recalling Ted Aoki's (1993) words about doubling, of "both this *and* that" (p. 295).

A fecund space. (Ho)me. Ho-me. Both a physical dwelling *and* self, a place where one is raised *and* a self-referent: hand that to *me*, come with *me*, see *me*, love *me*.

The textual move of the dash and the ampersand also gesture toward complexity, suggesting multiple meanings and possibilities. This in-between does not signal for one to identify singular origins or posit unitary interpretations. Rather, it is in the *intertext* (Hurren & Hasebe-Ludt, 2003)—these in-between spaces of text—that multiplicity be/comes un/grounded. The rhizome is a useful tool for visualizing the type of conceptual work that might take place here. According to a Deleuzeguattarian conception, rhizomes are *directions in motion* growing and *overspilling* from a sort of middle space that operates as a substantive multiplicity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 8). As multiplicities, within the rhizome there is

> no unity to serve as a pivot in the object, or to divide in the subject. There is not even the unity to abort in the object or *return* in the subject. A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions…. There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 8)

A textual in-between space does in fact have an ordering mechanism in the words themselves. The in-between space of *be-come*, for example, is conceptually connected to *become*, *be* and *come*. Yet, the space and what occurs within it is not grounded and tethered to said text. Hence, while *be-come* may conjure up images of being and flight, of comings and goings, growth and settlement, it need not. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) remind us, "a rhizome or multiplicity never allows itself to be overcoded [by a unitary signifier], never has available a supplementary dimension over and above its number of lines" (p. 9). And as Jason Wallin (2010) cautions, the rhizome should not be conceptualized as "the opposite of stratification…a dichotomy that…pit[s] rhizomatics against the image of homogeneity and totality" (p. 84). To do so would be to reinforce the binary, containing it within a set of rhizome and other. *Ho-me*, in all its multiple variations, may call attention to the self, but its meanings will vary depending on the individual. It may evoke numerous varied locations, pathways, and persons. A step. A bicycle. My grandmother's hands.

Strand Three: Accenting Names

Ella Hébert (May 1961).
Father and Son Shopping Trip. Photograph.

Aurèle Hébert (March 1962).
A Mother and her Children. Photograph.

Aurèle Joseph Hébert. L'accent grave; l'accent aigu. Ambulance driver in the war, lumberjack, milkman—labourer at a barrel company, the post office, and a Corningware factory. Ella Josephine Leblanc knew him for four months before he whisked her away, engagement an impetus for escape from the tiny town—its notorious landmark, a 50 tonne steel lobster. (It is, after all, the lobster capital of the world.) Shediac, Nouveau Brunswick; initially the Mi'kmaq encampment "Ed-ed-ei-ik"—running far in, in from the ocean. Tide tracking traded to traverse trails under tall towers. To Toronto—Mohawk—where the trees are in water. A lake instead of life by the sea, according to the sea. Here one moniker is exchanged for the next, Leblanc—the white, blond, pale—for Hébert—illustrious army. She marches here—soldiering—as a waitress, clerk, nurse's aid, and later, as a translator in this predominantly Anglophone community. Here, accents mark her apart as she struggles to purse her lips in such a way that *those*, that *these*, that *the* would drift, dance, and drip off her tongue. "Don't do dat!" she hurriedly chides, noticing finally that the passing cars are beeping, not in salutation, but because her grandchildren wave her husband's drawers out the back window. She will take pause later to remind herself that Torontonians do not greet one another and that the accent flees her, flinging itself out from her lips when excitement prevails over longing to assimilate. Accents escaping but then, in other spaces and at other times, are nowhere to be found. Oral He-bert? Mr. He-bert?

The children were named Robert and John—anglicised. First born Robert—meaning bright with glory—would be a successful CEO who would earn his PhD. John—the grace of God—was six years younger, granted after babies who were carried well but missed this mark. Marc—third child of Robert—was named in the light of legacy. Marc Daniel Aurèle Hébert—l'accent grave, l'accent aigu. Returning, *rentrer*, *retourner*. Aurèle Joseph Hébert, who loved his Toronto Maple Leafs, crossword puzzles, and Frank Sinatra. Who smelled of juicy fruit gum, peppermint candies, Irish cream soap, and, depending on the time of day, beer or scotch. Who lived only weeks after my grandmother's stroke; my grandmother Ella—who was never much of a cook, who spoiled us so long as we never told my grandfather, who took me on countless walks through the neighbourhood as we learned

together, who fabricated details when answers were not available. "A bird died there," she told me of the spot the construction workers marked for repair. Years later, "I didn't know what it was….And you asked *so many questions*." Questions seeking solutions, scepticism squashed. Madeleine Ella—seventh child of Robert—would be gifted with her name. Names, tracing ancestral roots, placing us in the pages of a story already begun. "Why did he do dat?" she asks each time I visit, steadily holding my gaze. Dismissing it as something else she doesn't quite understand, "Marc Maverick Mason" is a stage name but his legal name now, Aurèle nowhere to be found. But my grandmother's eyes give her away, and her accent, which punctuates her pain.

Michelle Morin (1987). *Family Vacation, Québec City.* Photograph.

Slashing Tensions in the Indwelling

While *both and* expands and opens up spaces for multiplicity, *either or* narrows and constrains. Either or: oppose or support; home or away; love or hate; here or gone; yours or mine. And yet, what *both and* and *either or* share in common is their structure as binaries, being pairs of things or two or more parts. The *both and*, as detailed above, joins terms with a conjunction, while the *either or* disjoins with a disjunction. Moving beyond these binaries of *both and* and *either or*, both able to be incorporated into the multiple space of the in-between (Aoki, 1993/2005), I arrive at the contradiction. Itself a binary in being structured as a pairing, the contradiction introduces a unique tension of logical incompatibility into the space in-between. Upsetting this linear logic may involve another form of repudiation: of laws, of identities and excluded middles that stress truth over being, dictating that *p* cannot at once be *p* and not *p*, that I cannot at once be me and not me. What might it mean to have a home and at once not have a home? To be in place and at once placeless?

While I grapple to find my place, I acknowledge that we live in an era of placelessness. David Smith (2003) reminds us that we "[yearn] for a place that we might secure forever and call home," a place that seems always to appear "just out of reach, just around the corner" (p. xvii). Globalization and the "fetishization of mobility" (MacDonald, 2010, p. 26) work to detach us from our relationship to places, privileging our identities as

citizens of the world over inhabitants of particular geographic spaces. Of course, the notion of a global citizen is rife with privilege; global citizens have financial means, certain passports, and certain names and particular racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Welcome is not universally offered. Yet, I wonder, what does this contradiction of being at one with a place and placeless mean for me, for finding my place here?

> I have a home and I do not have a home. I am at home and I am not at home.
> Home and not home. At home and not at home.
> Home & ~home. At home & ~at home.
>
> I am in place and I am not in place. I have a place and I do not have a place.
> In place and not in place. Have a place and do not have a place.
> In place & ~in place. Have a place & ~have a place.

Beyond mere ambiguity, by escaping and evading representation, the contradiction defies, offering a piercing that is almost violent in nature. I am alive. I am not alive. I am safe. I am not safe. I am loved. I am not loved. For this type of textual mis/representation, I am drawn to the slash. The slash cuts, severs, *cracks* (Aoki, 2000/2005, p. 322). A string to pluck, pull taught again. For me, the slash represents the very tension of the middle space of contradiction. As Aoki (1991/2005) notes, evoking an auditory metaphor,

> to be alive is to live in tension….[It] is the tensionality that allows good thoughts and actions to arise when properly tensioned chords are stuck, and that tensionless strings are not only unable to give voice to songs, but also unable to allow a song to be sung. (p. 162)

Alive/not alive

Safe/not safe

Loved/not loved

It is in this space that I want to find myself/not myself. Into the crack where the light gets in and yet escapes, the slash provides an illuminated ray of darkness. I want to crawl into the slash, pry it open in all of its messy and strained complexities. To sit there, think there, and sleep there. To dance and sing; to crawl up and take comfort in this place of home/not home, at home/not at home, in place/not in place, having a place/not having a place. For me, the slash is an ontological dwelling, where im/possibilities are limited and yet exist *ad infinitum*. I want to spill out its sides and "erupt somewhere with new meaning" (Aoki, 1993/2005, p. 299), knowing and feeling at the same time that I can never escape.

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