Déjà vu, Watch Out Jew!

Confronting Prejudice through the Performative Persona

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Abstract

This exegesis documents the research I have carried out as a political performance artist, including my studio practice and its accompanying theoretical component. My work is informed by my family history, being the child of Holocaust survivors, and the impact of my parents' repeated stories of their war time experiences. My research focuses on two primary, interconnected elements. The first is the inheritance of my parents' trauma; the second is my perception of, and concern about the continuing presence of anti-Semitism in the world.

My practice involves dressing up and performing as a variety of characters. My works include *Miss World Peace, Missed World Peace, Lady Gaza, Just an Ordinary Peasant, Those Scary Ones, Whistle While You Work, Dad and Primo Levi* and *Dance Before the Storm.* Some of these pieces have been created as a response to the stories my parents have told me, others as an interruption of political ideologies that I perceive as displaying dangerous racial biases, and all of them are interconnected. Together, they remind the viewer of what my parents went through, and serve as a visual caution on the dangers of prejudice.

I contextualise my practice by examining the tradition of political performance through the historical works of Charlie Chaplin and Bertolt Brecht, and the contemporary works of the performance artists Boaz Arad and Tamy Ben-Tor. This research is informed by philosophers including Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin and Slavoj Žižek. Adorno's analysis of the concept 'working-through' provides a justification for a strong aesthetic response to historical trauma. Zizek's explication of Lacan's concepts of the Symbolic Order and big Other provides a framework through which to understand, and ultimately to inform an effective intervention in the social-unconscious mechanisms of anti-Semitism. Benjamin's reading of the 'Alienation Effect' in Brecht's epic theatre provides practical insight into the interaction of affect and ideas in performance.

Declaration of Originality

This documentation contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and, to the best of my knowledge, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the documentation.

Jane Korman
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And most importantly, my deep gratitude and admiration go to my parents, Marysia and Adolek Kohn. Your positive spirit and unconditional love has filled me up and spurred me on to make this project happen.

I dedicate this body of work to both of you.

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I cannot tolerate the fact that a man should be judged, not for what he is, but because of the group to which he happens to belong.

—Primo Levi

Introduction

Imagine a cold winter afternoon in the city of Melbourne. A middle-aged, petite woman is oddly dressed in a floor-length, sky-blue chiffon dress, white gloves, tiara, and a sash across her chest upon which is written 'Miss World Peace, Shalom, Salaam.' She steps tentatively into a hostile crowd of protestors. They are angrily chanting, in increasing volume and intensity: 'Israel, USA, how many kids did you murder today?' and 'Max Brenner, you can't hide, you're committing genocide!'
Above her she raises a banner emblazoned with the words: 'Palestinians and Israelis. We love You.' The Israeli flag is ripped from her hands as she is booed and hissed at, a suspect Jew, offering an alternate opinion and refusing to demonise the State of Israel.

I am a performance artist who uses her physical embodiment as a vehicle for interventionist art practice. I dress up as diverse personas representing different themes and aspects of the Palestinian/ Israeli conflict and the historical implications of racial vilification in general. My works include *Miss World Peace, Crying Dying Missed World Peace, Lady Gaza, Just an Ordinary Peasant, Those Scary Ones, Whistle While you Work, Dad and Primo Levi* and *Dance Before the Storm.*

My work is influenced by my parents and their experiences as Holocaust survivors. Inevitably, I carry their legacy and have been affected by its profound resonance. I hold within my unconscious the layers of a perverse ideology that interrupted and almost destroyed my parents' lives. I have been exposed to my parents' narratives all my life. Their accounts of perished family and survival in Auschwitz-Birkenau form the basis of my practice from which I explore various themes. Some of my performances are based on my own interpretations of family stories and are a working through of the past, making sure that history's lessons remain profound, relevant and understood.

In spite of, and perhaps in reaction to their experiences, my parents have always had an open and positive attitude to life and an almost compulsive need to enjoy and celebrate it. Dancing was a way for them to transcend their tragic history, and they consistently did so by throwing dress-up parties where everyone in attendance had to arrive in costume and dance. Growing up, I was always involved in these celebrations: helping out, dressing up and dancing. These are the memories of my past, but they are intertwined with the shadow of their unspoken stories that would be revealed to me much later on. Given my family history, it feels like a natural and necessary progression for me to continue to dress up and perform, to exorcise my own demons and caution others against theirs.

While acknowledging the horror of my parents' experiences under the Third Reich, I have attempted to bring those memories to life in a potent and absurd way that both honours their past and also allows for much needed intergenerational healing to occur. I carry the hope that this redemptive effect will filter down from my generation to all subsequent generations.

The rhyme *Déjà vu, Watch Out Jew!* in the title of this dissertation serves as a pre-emptive warning that current forms of racism or aggressive intolerance are reminiscent of past anti-Semitism and its deadly outcome. The French expression 'déjà vu' means 'already seen.' Those experiencing a 'déjà vu' are immersed in a feeling that a present situation has already been experienced in the past. I personally experienced a 'déjà vu' while attending the anti-Israel rallies in Melbourne. The antagonistic atmosphere in which I found myself reminded me of my parents' stories of the degrading and humiliating way they were treated as Jews in Poland before and during Hitler's rise to power. Every time I attended one of the Melbourne rallies, I had a premonition that history was repeating itself. The second part of the rhyme, *Watch Out Jew!* can be read as a cautionary warning but can also refer to the threats made against Jewish communities today.

My work is also influenced by the eighteen years I spent in Israel. Half of that time I lived in a Yemenite village whose people had fled Yemen in the 1950s. The other half, I lived in a community bordering a Palestinian village just outside Jerusalem. Living in Israel exposed me to the ethnic and political complexities that are everyday realities there. Israel spans a tight geographic space of different cultures with an ever-present tension of exploding, unresolvable conflict on the one hand, and gracious co-operation on the other. I came to realise that there is no right or wrong; one's views are

based on one's own perspective. This is the backdrop that motivated my artwork.

I have regularly placed my personas in real life settings and taken part in public events. Often, I am challenged by people whose opinions differ from mine, and I have found myself confronted by fanatical ideas, abuse, and uncompromising hatred. Given these experiences, I use performance as a tool to examine bigotry and stereotyping that I see around me, including my own. These prejudices are often fuelled by the inheritance of unexamined fears that lurk in individual and collective consciousness.

As a performance artist, I am part of a robust tradition of artists who use humour, satire and absurdity to comment on serious issues - war, genocide, bigotry and complacency. This tradition of political performance gathers together a wide spectrum of historical and contemporary practitioners whose work has informed and impacted on my practice. In this exegesis, I examine the works of several of these practitioners and analyse the relationship between my work and their practices. By referencing a multidisciplinary group of practitioners including Charlie Chaplin, Bertolt Brecht, Tamy Ben-Tor and Boaz Arad, I have a rich bank of material that provides a context for my practice and from which I can draw inspiration. Through the works of these artists, I examine the impact that performance has in challenging racial vilification.

In Chapter 1, 'Omens from the Past', I discuss two artists from the historical tradition: Charlie Chaplin and Bertolt Brecht, whose works, created during the first half of the twentieth century, strived to shatter the menacing ideologies spreading throughout Europe in the 1930s. I discuss Chaplin's film *The Great Dictator,* produced in 1940, and Brecht's play *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui,* written in 1941, as examples of work that expressed its concern with rising Fascism and the unfolding events in Europe at that time.

In Chapter 2, 'Playfully Serious, Seriously Playful', I contextualize my practice within contemporary performance art, concentrating on the work of Israeli artists, Boaz Arad and Tamy Ben Tor. I have chosen these artists because we are linked by our similarities. Both artists use themes that probe into issues relating to 'Jewishness', the Holocaust, Holocaust deniers, Israeli politics and terrorism— themes with which I am also engaging. Using satire and comedy with a captious edge, Arad and Ben-Tor's often absurd, exaggerated character-studies comment on various stereotypes

and the intolerance these generate. As with my own work, they use their art as a form of 'working-through' the past and as a way of expressing concern for the future.

In Chapter 3, 'The Costume Party', I discuss my own practice as a performance artist. I document how I dress up and perform in the guise of a variety of characters who each evolve and respond to changing circumstances. I dress up to 'wear' the experience of the person and use my body as a placard to incite a response to particular themes. The initial spontaneity of my dress-ups is critical to the process, as many of the characters are incubated in my unconscious, emerging with layers of make-up and clothing that are often 'found' objects I have had lying around the house. I use these performative personas as a way to come to terms with my family history, my parents' trauma, my own trauma and consequent recovery. Dress-ups and play-acting are activities that I have relished since childhood and which have always been a pragmatic way for me to inhabit the 'other.' This body of work has given me the opportunity to again dress up and 'play' with different characters. As frivolous as they may seem, they are created with serious intention.

To provide a theoretical framework to my research, I draw on the insights of a selection of philosophers and critical theorists. The contemporary Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek, is particularly important. His adaption of Lacanian psychoanalysis —in particular the concepts of the 'Symbolic Order' and the 'big Other'—illuminates the nature and unconscious mechanisms of 'fanaticism.'

The twentieth century German philosophers Walter Benjamin and Theodore Adorno are also crucial to my exegesis: Benjamin, for his perceptive and poetic commentaries on the political status of performative theatre; Adorno, through his critique on the psychoanalytical term 'working through' of genocidal history, through art, as a means of bringing past traumas to consciousness, enabling a process of catharsis to occur.

A significant concept throughout this research has been that of 'Interruption.' Each artist I discuss in this paper, whether they know it or not, uses 'Interruption' in some sense as part of their range of strategies. The term also informs my own practice and I discuss it in greater detail in Chapters 1 and 3.

Through the course of this research I bring together two elements that have profoundly affected my experience of life. The first is the inheritance of my parents' trauma, a condition which has been

referred to as ‘postmemory’ by Marianne Hirsch. I discuss this further in Chapter 3, in relation to my work entitled *Just an Ordinary Peasant.* The second element is my perception of, and concern about the continuing presence of anti-Semitism in the world. My need as an artist to confront and push boundaries is informed by these elements.

Working on this research project has developed my practice by connecting me with artists and theorists whose views challenge my personal assumptions, stimulate my ideas, and remind me of my motivations behind creating these works. By confronting my family’s past experiences of prejudice as well as my own, I offer my audience an insight into the impact of prejudice and subsequent trauma, and a tool to rise above it.

Chapter 1: Omens from the Past

This chapter will contextualize my practice as an artist within the history of performative traditions, concentrating on the works of Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977) and Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956). Both were well-regarded for their innovative and humanitarian content, Chaplin through his silent movies and Brecht through theatre. They both used their art as a voice of resistance and protest– aiming to shatter the dangerous ideologies spreading throughout Europe in the 1930s. Their work is a mix of optimism and despair, a reflection upon the dangers of apathy and distrust of 'the people', whether the individual man or the masses.

In this chapter, I will consider the overlapping themes and ideas in both Brecht and Chaplin's works as 'voices of resistance' through an analysis of Chaplin's film *The Great Dictator* (1940)[1] and Brecht's play *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1941).[2] These pieces illustrate the artists' intuitive response to the impending dangers of the times, particularly in regard to prejudices towards the Jewish people.

This chapter will engage with the philosophy of Slavoj Žižek (born 1949), and Walter Benjamin (1892-1940). Their insights offer a theoretical framework through which to understand the power of performance and consider it as a means of instigating social change; Žižek from a psychoanalytical perspective, Benjamin through his enthusiasm for the transformative political potential of epic theatre. As a performance artist, I see myself following in the tradition of artists whose messages res-

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[1] *The Great Dictator* directed by Charlie Chaplin (1940), DVD (Australia: Paramount Home Entertainment Australasia 2010).

[2] Bertolt Brecht, *Bertolt Brecht: The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, Methuen's Modern Plays (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981).

onate with those of Chaplin and Brecht, both of whom used performance as a platform through which to mediate their views and concerns at that time. In Chapter 3, I will further discuss my own performance work, which is contextually reliant on this particular canon of work.

Charlie Chaplin

> May I not be excused in pleading for a better world?
>
> — Charlie Chaplin, *The Great Dictator*

In Weimar Berlin (1918–1933), the working class and its political parties—the Social Democrats (SPD) and Communists (KPD)—used theatre and music as a way of stirring up the people's political consciousness.[3] With the National Socialist Party's rise to power in 1933, theatre became a vehicle through which the German government propagated their beliefs amongst the public. In 1940, while living in the USA, Charlie Chaplin starred in the film *The Great Dictator,* which he wrote, scored, produced and directed. This film was made as a response to spreading propaganda across Europe. It is a condemnation and biting satire of Hitler, Fascism, anti-Semitism and the existential threat posed by Germany's Nazi regime. While historically specific in content, *The Great Dictator* is timeless in its message, and brings to light the senselessness of all malevolent dictatorships.

The film is set in 1940 in Tomainia, and a nameless Jewish barber, suffering from amnesia for twenty years after being wounded in World War I, has just returned to his home town. At the same time, Adenoid Hynkel is the ruthless dictator of Tomainia and leader of the 'Double Cross Party', and, ironically, a doppelganger of the Jewish barber.[4] He is given to making inflammatory speeches in gibberish and has undertaken to persecute Jews throughout the land (fig. 1.1).

Chaplin plays dual leads—the victimised Jewish barber and Hynkel, the satirical Hitler. The names of the characters in the film are parodies of the real players of the Third Reich; Hitler's right hand

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[3] Kerstin Gaddy, 'Proletarian Performance in Weimar Berlin: Agitprop, Chorus, and Brecht by Richard Bodėk,' *Modern Drama,* 42, no. 2 (1999), 293.

[4] John McCabe, *Charlie Chaplin* (New York: Doubleday, 1978),190. It was commonly said that Hitler grew a pencil moustache inspired by Chaplin's, believing a resemblance to the comedian would increase his popularity as a politician.

Figure 1.1. Charlie Chaplin*, The Great Dictator*, film still, 1940

Figure 1.2. Charlie Chaplin*, The Great Dictator*, film still, 1940

man, Joseph Goebbels, becomes 'Garbitsch,' (pronounced 'garbage'), 'Herring' is a parody of Hermann Goring. Mussolini, the Italian Fascist, becomes 'Napaloni' and Germany is renamed 'Tomainia.'

The barber returns to his abandoned shop in the ghetto, unaware that his lookalike Hynkel has seized power, and finds that the Jews are now suffering from the persecution of Hynkel's storm troopers (fig. 1.2). These robotic henchmen are carrying out pogroms, beatings, sabotaging Jewish

stores and rounding up people to send to the concentration camps. Meanwhile, Garbitsch reports to Hynkel: 'We've just discovered the most wonderful poisonous gas – it will kill everyone!'[5] The barber is arrested and put into a concentration camp, but escapes wearing a Tomainian army uniform, while Hynkel is arrested by his own soldiers, who mistake him for the barber.

The film concludes with the Jewish barber, assuming Hynkel's identity in this plot twist, being called by Garbitsch to deliver his victory speech to the captivated throngs in conquered Austerlich, as well as over the airwaves, to the entire world. It is this speech and its duality that I wish to elaborate upon.

Garbitsch, before calling on Hynkel to address the masses, concludes his own speech, where he condemns free speech and argues for the subjugation of the Jewish people who are 'inferior' and 'enemies of the State.'[6] He introduces the barber as the Fuhrer, future leader of the world. After moments of terrified and pensive thought, the barber, assuming Hynkel's symbolic position, begins to speak:

> I'm sorry, but I don't want to be an emperor. That's not my business.I don't want to rule or conquer anyone. I should like to help every one, if possible; Jew, Gentile, black man, white. We all want to help one another. Human beings are like that.[7]

His rousing speech reverses Hynkel's anti-Semitic policies and placates millions of listeners to not despair; that hatred passes, dictators die and practicing compassion will bring only good to the world (fig. 1.3): 'Greed has poisoned men's souls, has barricaded the world with hate, has goose-stepped us into misery and bloodshed ...We need humanity, kindness and gentleness.'[8] Even though the speech could be regarded as an overbearing and sanctimonious message, Chaplin's defence of his performance is best articulated when he says, 'May I not be excused in pleading for a better

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[5] *The Great Dictator,* Chaplin.

[6] *The Great Dictator,* Chaplin.

[7] *The Great Dictator,* Chaplin.

[8] *The Great Dictator,* Chaplin.

world?'[9]

Chaplin, influenced by the political upheavals of the 1930s, argued that it was an artist's right, if not responsibility, to reflect the problems of the world and to 'plead' for a better one. My performances as a naive 'Miss World Peace', which I discuss in Chapter 3, reflect this sentiment in a contemporary and unfortunately recurrent reality.

Fig 1.3. Charlie Chaplin*, The Great Dictator*, film still, 1940

The film concludes with the barber's speech reaching a crescendo of animated and passionate fervour in response to the cheering crowds, indicating that a message of hope has replaced one of hatred and despair. However, the expression on Chaplin's face at the moment that the cheering erupts, is a look of desperate fear. The Jewish barber, and indeed, Chaplin himself, recognises that in calling for peace, he is really calling for the defense of honor and humanity.

[9] Charles J. Maland, *Chaplin and American Culture: The Evolution of a Star Image* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 182.

Despite its cliché's, the barber's speech is poignantly honest and honourable: a necessary antidote to the intended evil being conjured.[10] The sympathetic character of Chaplin, as the barber, makes this heartfelt speech work. His words recall those of India's political and ideological leader, Mahatma Gandhi[11] and the actions of the Aboriginal leader, William Cooper,[12] both of whom tried to prevent Hitler from setting up his killing machines at Auschwitz-Birkenau and throughout Europe.

Throughout the movie, Chaplin portrays Hitler twice, firstly as Hynkel and secondly, as the barber who ends up impersonating Hynkel in the grand finale speech. Chaplin, speaks in two voices; in meek monosyllabic murmurs as the little barber, and with bellowing shouts in 'double talk', mimicking Hitler's mannerisms, poses, gestures and rantings. In the speech, Chaplin employs both styles of speaking; he begins as the barber, but appears to abandon his acting role as the essence of Chaplin, himself, emerges. Chaplin now speaks with total sincerity, taking on Hitler's fervent mannerisms and gestures, but espousing a very different sentiment. This character transformation can be looked at optimistically, where the evil Hynkel, embodied by the persecuted Jewish barber, has been replaced by an enlightened and evolved new consciousness, filling the world with goodness.

Slavoj Žižek sees *The Great Dictator* as not only a political film commenting on the evils of totalitarianism, but as a film scattered with ambiguities and a rich psychoanalytic content. He views Chaplin's speech as not just a plea for peace and love, but as a formalised attempt to take ownership of the terrifying magnitude of 'the voice' of Hitler: a détournement in which the voice of hate expresses humanity. Chaplin, inserting the barber into the symbolic position of Hynkel who orates to the people in a kind and beseeching voice, reverses the horror that is Hitler.[13]

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[10] Gerhard Richter, *Benjamin's Ghosts: Interventions in Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory* (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 79

[11] Koenraad Elst, 'Mahatma Gandhi's Letters to Hitler,' (January 2004), http://koenraadelst.bharatvani.org/articles/fascism/gandhihitler.html, (accessed October 5, 2011). In 1938, Gandhi wrote to Hitler with a view to persuading Germany's dictator of the value of non-violence. Here is an excerpt from Gandhi's letter to Hitler: 'But your own writings and pronouncements and those of your friends and admirers leave no room for doubt that many of your acts are monstrous and unbecoming of human dignity, especially in the estimation of men like me who believe in human friendliness…'

[12] Gary Foley, 'Australia and the Holocaust: A Koori Perspective,' http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/essays/essay_8.html (accessed 10 October, 2011). In 1938, William Cooper, Aboriginal leader and political activist, led a deputation of Kooris from the Australian Aborigines League, in an attempt to present the German Consulate in Melbourne a resolution condemning *Kristallnacht* pogrom and the persecution of Jews and Christians in prewar Nazi Germany.

[13] *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema, Parts 1,2,3*., directed by Sophie Fiennes, (London: A Lone Star), 2006, DVD.

The throng's reaction to the speech also touches on the phenomenon of mass psychology and human vulnerability. Even though the content of the barber's oration is ambiguous, and diametrically opposite to what Hynkel would have normally said, the people still applaud him as they would have applauded Hitler himself. Chaplin is conveying a concerning message in regard to the manipulation of the masses; either the crowd's thinking has suddenly shifted, or this scene exemplifies how 'the little people' are influenced by anyone who is charismatic.[14]

Chaplin's irreverent reduction of Hitler to a comic figure, made to be mocked, evokes both laughter and tears and communicates his own fascination with Hitler as a political figure. Chaplin's bawling, screeching Hynkel perfectly emulates the essence of Hitler, whose people appear as mindless and subjugated beings caught up in the only reality they know. This recalls the 'Symbolic Order', a theory originating with the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan (1901–1981).[15]

The Symbolic Order is the system of communication—language, discourse, semiotics. For Lacan, the Symbolic Order is a transcendental condition of subjectivity—it is impossible to be a speaking subject without submitting to the mediation of the Symbolic Order, in which the sense of signification is determined. In this discussion, where Hynkel is modelled on Hitler, the Symbolic Order might be confused with Fascism (a political system violently imposed externally onto a group of people, strictly policing appropriate signification). However, the Symbolic Order does not operate at the level of a political system; it is a deeply integrated mechanism, the condition of possibility for us to enter the social field. We are socialised into which ever Symbolic Order we are born into, and this determines our desires. The Symbolic Order is programmed into who we are, given that, from the moment of birth, we are immersed in a field of beliefs, values and significations where our subjectivity is irrevocably encoded and determined externally.

As example, throughout the film Chaplin humorously highlights the ridiculousness of prejudice, exemplified in this conversation between Hynkel and Garbitsch:

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[14] Robert Fine, 'On Doing the Sociology of anti-Semitism,' *The European Sociological Association*, no. 33 (Winter, 2012). http://engageonline.wordpress.com/2012/12/21/robert-fine-on-doing-the-sociology-of-antisemitism/ (accessed November 1, 2014).

[15] Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do,* 263-264. It was recalled that when Chaplin played the Jewish barber, he was his usual friendly self, but when he wore the severe Nazi uniform his personality altered.

Garbitsch: Brunettes are trouble makers. They're worse than the Jews.
Adenoid Hynkel: Then wipe them out.
Garbitsch: Start small. Not so fast. We get rid of the Jews first,
then concentrate on the brunettes.
Adenoid Hynkel: We shall never have peace 'til we have a pure Aryan race.
How wonderful.Tomania, a nation of blue-eyed blondes.
Garbitsch: Why not a blonde Europe, a blonde Asia, and blonde America.
Adenoid Hynkel: A blonde world.
Garbitsch: And a brunette dictator.
Adenoid Hynkel: Dictator of the world![16]

The above conversation is reminiscent of Žižek's analysis of society's depiction of the 'Jew.' He argues that the 'anti-Semitic idea of a Jew has nothing to do with Jews' as such, but is contrived as a cover for 'the inconsistency of our own ideological system.'[17] Žižek sees the figure of the Jew as a displacement of social antagonism into an internally contradictory ideological figure.[18] He points out that the Jew is regarded as an outsider who brings 'disorder, decomposition and corruption to the social edifice' and 'whose elimination would enable us to restore order, stability and identity.'[19] Žižek, however, informs us that whatever blame is attributed to the 'Jew' is society's own 'paranoid construction' within the Symbolic Order.[20]

Chaplin incorporates the music of Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin Prelude* (1850) twice in the film. Once, near the conclusion of the Jewish barber's speech celebrating democracy and freedom, and then later in a scene where dictator Hynkel lovingly dances with the global balloon, fantasizing over his conquest of the world (fig. 1.4). Chaplin has carefully chosen Wagner's *Lohengrin Prelude* as a détournement of the German composer's anti-Semitism.[21] By intervening with the music, Chaplin is changing its association forever: from expressing anti-Semitic prejudices to exposing anti-Semitism. Chaplin retrospectively prevents Wagner from 'perverting his own music' to serve his ideolo-

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[16] *The Great Dictator,* Chaplin.

[17] Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology,* (London: Verso, 1989), 47

[18] Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology,* 140-144.

[19] Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology,* 144.

[20] Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. 143.

[21] Lawrence Kramer, 'Contesting Wagner: The Lohengrin Prelude and anti-Semitism,' *19th Century Music* 25, no. 2-3 (Fall/Spring 2001). http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/ncm.2001.25.2-3,190 . (accessed September 14, 2011). Wagner was known as an anti-semite, and wrote his infamous article 'Judaism in music' to support his anti-Semitic views.

gies, resulting in an ironic, redemptive rebirth of the music. Thus, the same music that served evil purposes can be redeemed to do good. *Lohengrin Prelude* is aesthetically re-inscribed in a role opposing social injustice, in particular anti-Semitism.[22]

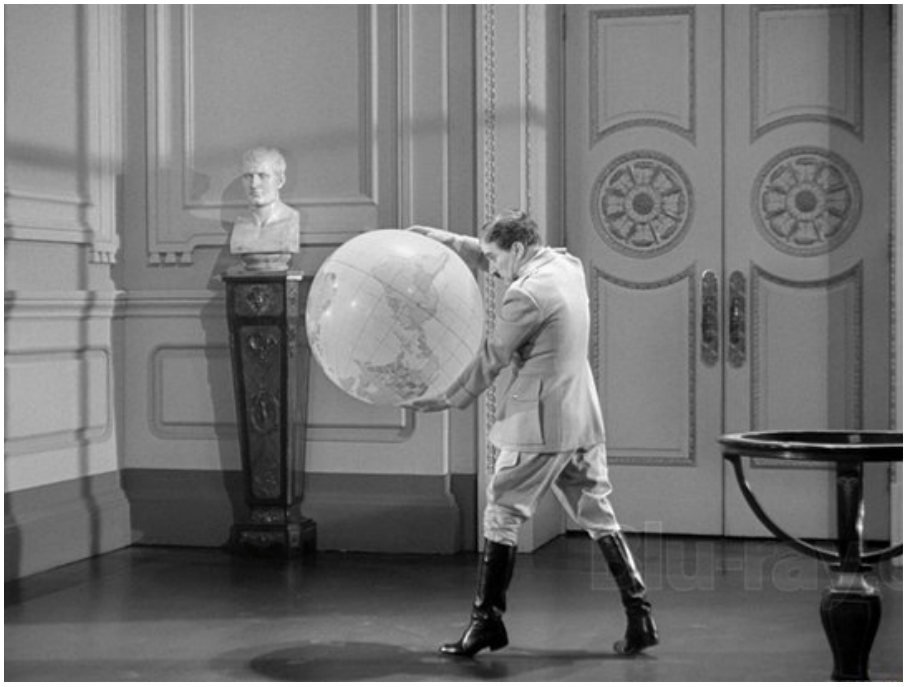

Figure 1.4. Charlie Chaplin*, The Great Dictator*, film still, 1940

The Great Dictator, banned in Germany by Hitler, was finally re-released in West Germany in 1973. By that time, there was a new generation born after the war, and in no way complicit with the Nazi regime and its crimes. Their willingness to confront Germany's Nazi past, as well as their own loaded inheritance, made them open to Chaplin's comic approach to the evils of Nazism.[23] Chaplin's cathartic use of the comical to highlight great concerns has influenced my own works, such as *Lady Gaza*, *Miss World Peace* and *Just an Ordinary Peasant.* I discuss these works in Chapter 3. Inspired by Chaplin, I imbue the protagonists of these works with a comedic resonance, exaggerating their mannerisms and juxtaposing the humorous with the absurd to present my own message of concern.

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[22] Kramer, *Contesting Wagner,* 211.

[23] Peter Krämer, 'The (Un)Timeliness of Satire: The Reception of the the Great Dictator in West Germany, 1952-1973,' http://chaplin.bfi.org.uk/programme/conference/pdf/peter-kramer.pdf (accessed September 4, 2011).

Bertolt Brecht

> Therefore learn how to see and not to gape.
> To act instead of talking all day long.
> The world was almost won by such an ape!
> The nations put him where his kind belong
> The womb he crawled from, still is going strong.
>
> —Bertolt Brecht, *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui*

Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) belongs to a tradition of artists whose work focuses on raising the political awareness of the audience. This reflects my own desires as an artist. Brecht was a German poet, theatre director and playwright, a contemporary of Charlie Chaplin and personal friend of Walter Benjamin. Even though Brecht was not a performer himself, he has had a crucial influence over the way performance and theatre is approached. He was affiliated with the Agitprop theatre of the 1920s: the Communist street theatre of agitation and propaganda, originating in the Soviet Union.[24] This was the context that instigated and influenced Brecht's modernist theatre, his works attempting to mobilise audiences against the rise of Nazism. Struggling with German Fascism himself, Brecht fled Nazi Germany in 1933, the same year that Adolf Hitler rose to power.

Epic theatre was a theatrical movement devised by Brecht in the early to mid twentieth century. The 'epic play' follows a story that is familiar to the audience, and consists of a series of lone standing, loosely connected scenes that often begin and end with musical interludes, captions or gestures. These interludes rupture the illusion of reality, suppress feelings of empathy and disrupt identification, allowing the audience, to reflect critically on what they have just witnessed. The idea is that the spectator, with a now activated and questioning mind and unswayed by distracting emotions, recognises injustice and corruption and leaves the theatre desiring to bring about a change in the outside world.

Perhaps the best known technique of epic theatre is the *Verfremdungseffekt* ('Alienation Effect': 'to

[24] Gaddy, *Proletarian Performance in Weimar Berlin,* 293.

make the familiar strange').[25] Brecht employed this technique to create a sense of astonishment and curiosity amongst his audience, an audience that he referred to as 'the masses' with a 'limited practice of thinking.'[26] He wanted to wake them up and remind them that the play is only a representation of reality, and not reality itself. Brecht's intention was to create an 'interruption' by shattering his audience's passivity and compelling them to adopt a critical view of the play. In this way, he empowers his audience to be pro-active agents in the world outside the theatre.[27] Techniques of Brecht's Alienation Effect include actors changing costume on stage, discussing themes midway through a performance, and directly addressing the audience. Walter Benjamin was drawn to Brecht's epic theatre and, in particular, his technique of Alienation, because he saw it as capturing the very essence of theatre where the audience is in a critically conscious and fully present state.[28]

In addition to the Alienation Effect, Brecht also incorporated a style of acting that utilised what he called the 'gestus' or 'gesture', whereby the focus is on the representation, rather than the psychological make-up of the character.[29] Benjamin notes that the representation of gestus signifies an 'interruption,' where the actor takes up a gesture or 'socially encoded expression' at crucial parts in the play. This gesture aims at briefly 'interrupting' the action so as to jolt the audience out of its mind-numbing complacency.[30]

Benjamin argues that the efficacy of 'Interruption' in Brecht's plays is also attributed to his use of 'montage/collage,' a technique he adopted from the Surrealists: linking together ideas from two incompatible worlds which then 'interrupts' the original context.[31] Brecht applies this technique to the story of *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui*, bringing together two apparently opposite worlds, that of Nazi Germany with that of downtown Chicago, and creating an allegory that draws parallels be-

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[25] Wendy Koenig, *The Phenomenon of Interruption in the Visual Arts. A Comparison of Works by Daniel Libeskind, Gerhard Richter, and Ilya Kabakov* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd., 2009), 15.

[26] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections,* ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

[27] Terry Eagleton, 'Brecht and Rhetoric,' *New Literary History* 16, no. 3 (April, 1985). http://www.jstor.org/stable/468845 (accessed August 12, 2011). 634.

[28] Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 150.

[29] Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 151.

[30] Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht* (London: Verso, 1973), 18.

[31] Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht,* 99-100.

tween Nazi power and the vegetable-market underworld.[32] This juxtaposition creates an 'Interruption.' By comparing the main character, Ui, with that of Hitler, Brecht exposes Hitler's manipulation of the German people. This awareness suddenly impels the audience to feel disturbed or uncomfortable and is forced to reconsider that what they perceive as 'truth' might be a conditioned perception (as part of the Symbolic Order). The audience are then motivated to take action against the Nazi dictatorship.

The idea of 'Interruption' recalls the earlier discussion on the Symbolic Order. 'Interruption' is always the interruption of the Symbolic Order itself, bypassing the supposedly 'natural' set of meanings that a given Symbolic Order generates. 'Interruption' makes visible the way that our ideological operations and fantasies work, if only in a strange parallax, and just for a moment.

'Interruption' is an important concept in my own work, and a recurring theme throughout this paper. The meaning of the term differs slightly, depending on who defines it. The *Verfremdungseffekt* or 'Alienation Effect' and 'gestus' are Brecht and Benjamin's versions of 'Interruption,' while Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) used the term *Erschütterung* to imply a shudder or shaking, and is the moment when the viewers 'forget themselves and disappear into the work.'[33] Contemporary art historian, Wendy Koenig's definition of 'Interruption' is similar to those of these Marxist theorists, in that she sees it as a strategy that jolts and disquiets the viewer, creating a space for critical, non-habitual reflection. However, her definition also differs from theirs. Koenig mostly applies her understanding of 'Interruption' to post-Holocaust artwork and connects it to 'memory, loss and mourning,' responses that might previously have gone unrecognised by the viewer.[34] To Koenig, 'Interruption' is not medium specific and applies to all forms of Art, whereby Brecht and Benjamin's concept of the *Verfremdungseffekt* applies only to theatre practice.[35] Koenig notes that, no matter how it is defined, the true experience of 'Interruption' is in the viewer's critical participation in the work. In this way, the very power of the work is enhanced.[36] I, like Tamy Ben-Tor and Boaz Arad, use 'Interruption' as

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[32] Claire Bishop, *Participation* (London: Whitechapel; Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press 2006), 84-85.

[33] Theodor Adorno, 'Aesthetic Theory,' ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Pres, 1997). https://istifhane.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/aesthetictheory.pdf (accessed January4, 2015), 244.

[34] Koenig, *The Phenomenon of Interruption in the Visual Arts,* iii.

[35] Koenig, *The Phenomenon of Interruption in the Visual Arts*, 15.

[36] Koenig, *The Phenomenon of Interruption in the Visual Arts*, ii.

a strategy in my own work, discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

In characteristic Brechtian style, *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui* begins with the announcer addressing the audience. He reads a placard outlining the major characters and explaining the basis of the upcoming plot: 'In the autumn of 1932, Adolf Hitler's party and private army are threatened with bankruptcy and disintegration.'[37] The placard includes information about Hitler's own rise to power, thus reminding the audience of the parallels between the play's story and the real world of 1932. This simple method of presenting an historical framework not only reflects history, it redoubles it, intermingling the real situation and its aesthetically mediated parallel.[38]

Figure 1.5. Bertolt Brecht, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui,*
Photograph, Mireva Theatre production, Chichester, 2012

The play continues. It is the Great Depression and the peasant members of The Cauliflower Trust are facing financial ruin. Meanwhile, Ui, himself, is obsessed that he is losing power over his gang. In an attempt to regain control, he and his gang (fig. 1.5) set out to take over the produce trade by exploiting the peasants and seducing them with promises of financial protection. Ui, at first weak

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[37] Arthur Horowitz, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui,* Theatre Journal 52, no. 1 (2000). http://www.jstor.org/stable/25068750 (accessed August 20, 2011).

[38] Jan Needle and Peter Thompson, *Brecht,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 117.

and weedy, slowly becomes despotic as he rises to power (fig. 1.6). His hand gestures of flailing Nazi salutes, become gradually less subtle as lunacy takes over.

Figure 1.6. Bertolt Brecht, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui,* Photograph, Liverpool Playhouse production, 2011.

Brecht, like Chaplin, in *The Great Dictator*, gives his characters names which parody the real players of the Third Reich; Ui represents Hitler, his henchman Ernesto Rom represents Ernst Röhm, Dogsborough is Paul Von Hindenburg, Emanuele Giri is Göring, the Cauliflower Trust represents the Prussian Junkers and the fate of the town of Cicero stands for the Anschluss in Austria. In addition, every scene in the play is based on a real event, for example, the warehouse fire represents the fire at the Reichstag, and the Dock Aid Scandal represents the Osthilfe scandal.[39]

Arturo Ui was filmed by the BBC in the early 1970s in black and white. Scene four of this recording shows Ui demanding from Dogsborough that he support the Cauliflower Trust and vouch for him to the police.[40] Dogsborough's initial refusal prompts Ui to break out into a frenzied torrent, where he blames his miseries on 'bicycles and Jews' (fig. 1.7).

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[39] *Bertolt Brecht's 'The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui,* "The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, Part 1,'" directed by Marion Nancarrow, aired August 12, 2006, on BBC, accessed June 12, 2011, http://www.demonoid.ooo/files/details/1995408/008056599120/.

[40] 'Scenes from the Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui.' (youtube video), 2009, published 2009, https://youtu.be/1L3Leg4LaYo (accessed October 10, 2011).

> Sir, Mr Dogsborough, I am aware you don't know me from nothing, or maybe by hearsay, which is worse.
> You see before you sir, a man misunderstood and almost done to death by slanderous tongues, his name besmirched by envy and his dreams misrepresented by the meanness of a world replete with Jews and bicycles.[41]

Figure 1.7. Bertolt Brecht, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui,* film still, 1970

That Ui's miseries are attributed to both 'bicycles *and* Jews' reveals the absurdity and irrationality of prejudice. Both Brecht, through Arturo Ui's speech, above, and Chaplin, through Adenoid Hynkel's conversation with Garbitsch, highlight the contradictory blaming of all miseries on the (ideological figure of) the Jews. Žižek clarifies this prejudice by explaining that Hitler was aware of the power of manipulation and the necessity to 'hystericise the crowd and to lie and simplify problems.'[42] Hitler saw the Jews as the enemy, but he also saw anti-Semitism as a tool to unite the people, keep them obedient, and solidify his power over them. He knew he could divert the aggressive energy of the masses onto the Jews, and persuade his people that all mankind's miseries are caused

[41] Brecht, 'Scenes from the Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui'.

[42] Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, 244.

by the 'Evil Jews' and their 'Jewish Plot.' The people's antagonism, Žižek notes, is transferred into this excessive figure of the Jew that 'explains everything.'[43]

In a final short poem, Brecht sums up his concerns for the world with a prophetic message to us, his audience:

> Therefore learn how to see and not to gape.
> To act instead of talking all day long.
> The world was almost won by such an ape!
> The nations put him where his kind belong
> The womb he crawled from, still is going strong.[44]

Arturo Ui is not only an attack on Hitler, but also an attack on the complacency of the equally unworthy 'ordinary' people, and their ethical failure to resist him. It critically looks at the cruelty of people's apathy and fear which allowed a political thug to reach a point where he could threaten the world. The play also highlights the dangerous respect often felt for great killers, evident with the people's blind admiration of their corrupt leader.[45] Boaz Arad, whose work I discuss in Chapter 2, also deals with this theme of 'admiration of authority' in his work, *Immense Inner Peace,* where he shows footage of German maidens licking their lips, enraptured by the sight of their 'great leader.'

Žižek explains this concept of obsessive admiration of authority through the concept of the 'big Other' inscribed within the Symbolic Order. The 'big Other' is an imagined entity, the figure supposed to regulate signification—the authority or arbitrator 'in charge.' While it is non-existent, virtual, a distortion or 'lie' generated by the Symbolic, its efficacy is real. Žižek claims that while people empirically know that 'the big Other does not exist', they nonetheless act as if it did, because it sustains the apparent harmony of the social edifice.[46] He clarifies this through the analogy of the

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[43] Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, 18.

[44] Eyre Methuen, *Bertolt Brecht: The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (London: Whitstable Litho, Straker Brothers Ltd, 1976), 96.

[45] Needle, *Brecht,* 115.

[46] Tony Myers, *Slavoj Žižek*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 50.

story of the Emperor's new clothes, wherein the villagers know that the Emperor is naked, but nonetheless tacitly agree to the deception that he is wearing new clothes (in the Symbolic).[47] Žižek understands that in order for society to exist at all, we have to have these untruths in daily reality. His argument is that if we revealed the Emperor's nakedness in every situation, we would literally destroy society. The essential point is that we need to be aware of the way 'reality' is constituted on these fictions, so that prejudices, like anti-Semitism, that find their way into the apparently 'natural' constitution of reality (as happened in the Nazi regime) can be avoided.

It is not surprising that there are many similarities in both Chaplin and Brecht's work, given that they were contemporaries who shared an aversion to Fascism. Both artists aspired to awake the world to the ills and ferocity of Nazism, and the mechanisms by which it takes hold of the people's apathy. As the authors Kleber and Visser argue, Brecht and Chaplin 'stood as twin symbols of the possible unity between practice and theory during an historical moment of opposition and rupture.'[48] Their art was a voice of resistance that aesthetically exposed Hitler and his regime, even though they did not yet know the disastrous scope of his dictatorship.[49] Benjamin, himself a Jew, caught up in this terror, believing himself unable to escape to freedom, took his own life in desperation.

Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* is easily identifiable as a satire on Hitler's Nazi regime, whereas Brecht's *Arturo Ui* is a more obscure representation given that he locates the Third Reich in downtown Chicago. Brecht, like Chaplin, undertook an enormous theme which some believe trivialised these events, given the monstrosities which they were supposed to reflect. They were both satirising Hitler in relative safety, at a time when half of Europe was fighting for its life. On the other hand, the absurdity of their themes successfully conveys the ignorance and barbarity of Fascism, as well as the stupidity, shallowness and cowardliness of its political supporters who failed to resist corruption. Both artists expose the great evil of tyrannical leaders and the appalling dangers inherent in the people's creeping admiration for such men. Chaplin and Brecht also redeploy and undermine the ranting and raving caricature of Hitler. Similarly, Boaz Arad and Tamy Ben-Tor, whom I discuss in

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[47] Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, 11.

[48] Pia Kleber and Colin Visser, *Re-Interpreting Brecht: His Influence on Contemporary Drama and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).173.

[49] Needle, *Brecht,* 109.

Chapter 2, dress up as comical renditions of Hitler. They poke fun, mimic and exaggerate his idiosyncratic mannerisms and rhetoric to expose his frenzied and malicious fanaticism.

This chapter has introduced the concept of Interruption, specifically looking at Brecht's 'alienation affect' in epic theatre. My reading of Brecht and Chaplin's work has been informed by Slavoj Žižek's insight into the concept of the Symbolic Order. Both concepts relate to a form of violent perceptive jolt, where 'Interruption' is always the intervention of the Symbolic Order. I appropriate these two techniques in my own work, *Whistle While You Work* and *Just an Ordinary Peasant*, which I discuss in Chapter 3. Chaplin and Brecht's works remain an ominous reminder of how vigilant we must be in protecting ourselves against ideological surrender and subconscious manipulation.

Chapter 2: Playfully Serious, Seriously Playful[50]

In this chapter, I discuss the work of the Israeli performance artists, Boaz Arad (born 1956) and Tammy Ben-Tor (born 1975), focusing on Arad's *Hitler Series*[51] and Ben-Tor's *Gewald*[52]*, Memri TV*[53] and *Yid*[54]. By contrasting and comparing their art practice with my own, I create a contextual environment in which to further discuss my work.

In Chapter 1, I discussed both Charlie Chaplin and Bertolt Brecht's work as voices of resistance and protest used to shatter the dangerous ideologies spreading throughout Europe. Arad and Ben-Tor also attempt to wake up their audience to dangerous racial undercurrents. I have chosen these artists because we explore similar themes and because we are culturally and ideologically informed by similar influences. Given the current global struggles we are all facing—over-population, ethnic and racial tensions, collapse of the current economic system, global warming— it is the disturbing bias against Israel that encourages a certain urgency in my work and, similarly, is visible in their work.

As performance artists, both Ben-Tor and Arad deal with identity, trauma, collective memory, and reconciliation: I grapple with these same issues. Arad and Ben-Tor's often absurd, exaggerated

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[50] The title, '*Playfully Serious, Seriously Playful'* is borrowed from the chapter 'Working Out and Playing Through: Boaz Arad's Hitler Videos*,'* in Gene Ray, *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory; from Auschwitz to Hiroshima to September 11* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 121.

[51] Arad's *Hitler Videos* include *Safam* (1999)*, Marcel Marceau* (1999), *Hebrew Lesson* (2000), *I Hitler* (2001), *Immense Inner Peace* (2001), and *100 Beats* (2002).

[52] Tamy Ben-Tor, 'Gewald.' (youtube video), 2007, http://youtu.be/JaatwHmqPv4 (accessed January 4, 2014).

[53] Tamy Ben-Tor, 'Memri TV.' (youtube video), 2006, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ki1F_j6m5b0 (accessed January 4, 2014).

[54] Tamy Ben-Tor, 'Yid.' (youTube video), 2012, http://youtu.be/tcJUqonXRyQ (accessed June 4, 2014).

character-studies provoke questioning of various accepted stereotypes and the intolerance they generate. Arad achieves this through his impersonations of Hitler; Ben-Tor, through her humorous performances of outlandish caricatures. A common theme in their respective practices is bringing situations and incidental anecdotes from the Holocaust back into aesthetic actuality through the use of satire and comedy with a carping undercurrent. This is demonstrated in Ben Tor's performance videos, *Gewald* (2007) and *Memri TV* (2006), and Arad's series *The Hitler Videos* (1999–2002). These works are an investigation of the archetypal 'monster,' an examination of the complacency of 'innocent' bystanders, and the insanity of genocide itself.

In both Arad and Ben Tor's work, there is a juxtaposition of the playfulness of improvisation and the more serious theme of the work. At first the production may appear slapdash, but their rehearsed, repeated actions demonstrate the arduous process of experimentation needed to 'get under their characters' skin' and aesthetically produce them.

Even though both Arad and Ben Tor's performances present studied observations of their characters in an apparently informal, spontaneous way, often within intimate settings, they differ significantly as performers. Ben-Tor mostly performs as personae where the 'real' Ben-Tor is almost unrecognisable. Her works include recorded performances in her own studio as well as live performances before an audience. Arad, on the other hand, performs mostly in his own studio, where he incorporates his real physicality with his caricatures' mannerisms, and only uses minimal disguises (such as masks). His work, unlike Ben-Tor's, is also interspersed with snippets of film-footage of events from Nazi Germany.

Boaz Arad

Greetings, Jerusalem, I ask for pardon

—Boaz Arad, *Hebrew Lesson*

To demonstrate Arad's complexity as a performer, I discuss his *Hitler videos*, which are a series of short but powerful works constructed around recognisable images of Hitler. These include *Safam* (1999),[55]*Marcel Marceau* (1999),[56] *Hebrew Lesson* (2000),[57] *I Hitler* (2001),[58] *Immense Inner Peace* (2001),[59] and *100 Beats* (2002)[60].

These videos reveal Arad's fascination with exhuming, examining, and repeatedly investigating the character of Hitler as the 'icon of evil.'[61] Arad takes Hitler's two most distinguishing and defining signifiers—his moustache and his voice—and manipulates, abuses and teases them to ridicule the man and his extreme racial and social beliefs. Arad embodies Hitler through performance as well as manipulating him visually in archival footage; by aesthetically neutralising Hitler, Arad corrupts his real symbolic power. He mortifies Hitler, making him perform humiliating tasks: showing him masturbating in *100 beats* (fig. 2.1), and apologising to 'Jerusalem' in Hebrew in *Hebrew Lesson,* (figs. 2.12 and 2.13) which I discuss later in this this chapter.

The first works from the *Hitler Videos*, *Safam* (fig. 2.2) and *Marcel Marceau* (figs. 2.3 and 2.4), both play with Hitler in this chapter, and have both been edited from the same archival material of

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[55] Boaz Arad, 'Safam.' (youtube video), 2000, www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOUKcUPUKgE (accessed Jan 12, 2014).

[56] Boaz Arad, 'Marcel Marceau.' (youtube video), 2000, www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9pusgUhBvI (accessed November 2, 2014).

[57] Boaz Arad, 'Hebrew Lesson.' (youtube video), 2000, www.youtube.com/watch?v=_76BbM3oqMM (accessed March 13, 2014).

[58] Boaz Arad, 'I, Hitler.' (youtube video), 2001, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UR30s5EGxM8 (accessed December 20, 2013).

[59] Boaz Arad, 'Immense Inner Peace.' (youtube video,) 2001, www.youtube.com/watch?v=KI39M7d9mjY (accessed November 2, 2014).

[60] Boaz Arad, '100 Beats.' (youtube video), 1999, 2002, www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3Vg-B8MrSw (accessed January 2, 2014).

[61] David Dalin and John Rothmann, *Icon of Evil : Hitler's Mufti and the Rise of Radical Islam,* (USA: New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009).

Hitler addressing a crowd. Guy Ben-Ner in his essay 'Synchronisation of a Moustache,' observes that 'Arad deprives Hitler of the one thing you cannot erase without destroying him as an image, his moustache, and, later on will treat his identifiable voice with the same mock and ridicule, by making him recite in Hebrew.'[62]

Fig 2.1. Boaz Arad, *100 Beats, v*ideo still, 2002

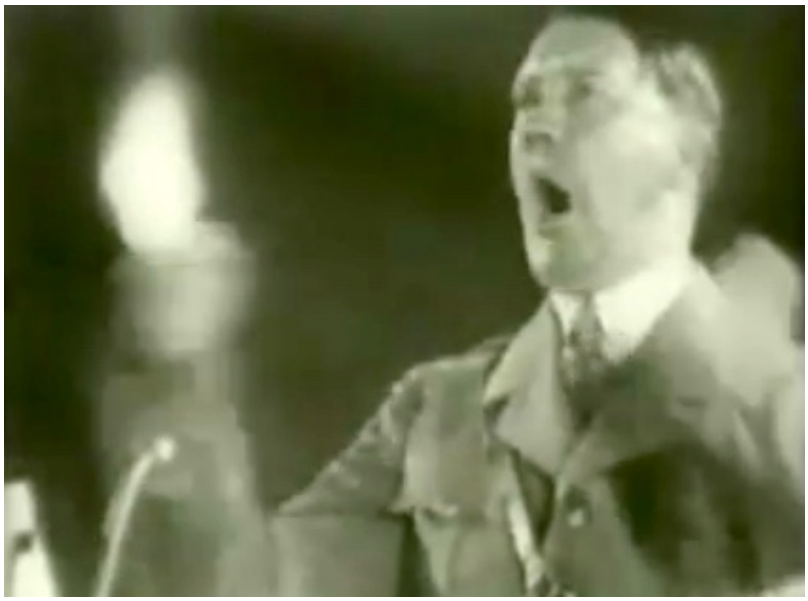

Fig 2.2. Boaz Arad, *Safam, v*ideo still, 2000

[62] Guy Ben-Ner, 'Synchronization of a Moustache. Boaz Arad: Vozvoz,' (2007) (accessed February 12, 2014).

Safam shows Hitler without his signature moustache, orating vigorously to a frenzied crowd. In place of his moustache there is a photoshopped tag of skin, which pulsates, as he gesticulates furiously. It is mesmerising to watch such recognisable footage of the dictator minus his defining feature, its absence renders him an echo of his former self—more impotent than powerful.

Arad grew up in Israel during the sixties and seventies after the televised trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961, when discussion of Nazi atrocities became more public. Footage of Hitler was part of Arad's life, repeated on TV year after year during days of mourning or remembrance, and most likely imprinted indelibly upon his psyche. He has taken these Hitler clips of collective visual memory and transfigured their signification, intervening in their efficacy both as signs and historical documents. If Arad can render this figure ridiculous, it makes it more palatable for him to deal with the enormity of the crimes that Hitler's policies committed against his family, his people and, ultimately, most of humanity.

Arad's continuous investigations into the history of how his relatives did or didn't survive can be considered as 'working-through.' The concept of 'working-through' was originally developed by Freud in 1914,[63] and then adopted by Theodor Adorno in the wake of the Holocaust.[64] Gene Ray, in *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory*, defines the concept as a means of bringing the past to consciousness by the process of playing with, and working through blockages caused by past traumas, and processing them in a cathartic way.[65] Performing memoirs from my family's past has helped me process my own confusion and inherited burden, and has been a positive and therapeutic process.

Ray emphasizes that it is crucial to 'work-through' past traumas in order to avoid a 'globalised inability to mourn.'[66] This process of 'working through' their past is apparent in both Arad and Ben-

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[63] Sigmund Freud, 'Further Recommendations in the Technique of Psycho-Analysis: Recollection, Repetition, and Working-Through.' (1924). http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/classes/201/articles/1914FreudRemembering.pdf [accessed February 9, 2015].

[64] Theodore W. Adorno, *The Meaning of Working through the Past*, Critical Models. Interventions and Catchwords (1998). http://www.english.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Adorno_MeaningOfWorkingThrough.pdf (accessed February 8, 2015).

[65] Gene Ray, *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory; from Auschwitz to Hiroshima to September 11* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 133.

[66] Ray, *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory*, 132.

Fig 2.3. Boaz Arad, *Marcel Marceau, v*ideo still, 2010

Fig 2.4. Boaz Arad, *Marcel Marceau, v*ideo still, 2010

Tor's performances, even though their work is still detached from the embodied and the primary experienced trauma.

In *Marcel Marcel*, the lost moustache now performs gymnastic tricks on Hitler's face while he continues his serious oration to his adoring crowds, his words distorted but still identifiable (fig. 2.3). The cheeky moustache shrinks into nothingness and then grows into a full beard, reminiscent of the Grand Mufti with whom he was once friends (fig. 2.4).[67] It twirls and dances, stretches and shrinks, mocking and diminishing him right in the place of what should be the neat physical signifier of his power.

Once again Arad dresses up as Hitler himself in *Immense Inner Peace* (2001)[68]. The video begins with a segment from Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda film, *Triumph of the Will,*[69] released in 1935, where Arad's voiceover introduces it as 'something about women's desire for their great leader.' Edited footage captures the German maidens licking their lips, mesmerised at the sight of their 'great leader' (fig.2.5). Suddenly and unexpectedly, Arad then contrasts the footage with a photo he holds in front of the camera of the toilet block at Auschwitz-Birkenau. He announces to the viewer, 'pay attention to the symmetry' (figs. 2.6 and 2.7). This piece takes the viewer on a virtual journey from hero worship to human excrement, as well as drawing attention to the German

[67] Rothmann, *Icon of Evil*. I have not referenced a specific page as the entire book deals with this subject.

[68] Arad, 'Immense Inner Peace.'

[69] Leni Riefestahl, 'Triumph of the Will.' (youtube video), 1935, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0kwnLzFMls (accessed 12.12.14).

Fig 2.5. Boaz Arad, *Immense Inner Peace, v*ideo stills, 2007 (images taken from *Triumph of the Will,* by Leni Riefenstahl, 1935)

predisposition towards precision and particularity. Arad presents the image of a cultural quirk turned to serve administered mass death and neat, efficient disposal.

This piece is conceptually similar to Ben-Tor's work, in particular, her piece entitled *Gewald,* which I will discuss later in this chapter. In Arad's *Immense Inner Peace* the characters are filmed dressed in traditional Bavarian folk costume, epitomising the purity and cultural particularity of the German nation. They present as a stark contrast to the 'unspoken other side' of this narrative, and function as an 'Interruption', implying an unexpected surprise that 'illuminates the horror and creates a tension and disruption amongst its viewers.'[70] The concept of 'Interruption' is an important strategy I employ in my own works, *Whistle While You Work* and *Just an Ordinary Peasant,* and a recurring theme throughout this paper. In Chapter 1, I discussed Bertolt Brecht's and Wendy Koenig's definition of 'Interruption.' Despite the slight differences of interpretation, they both see 'Interruption' as a technique that creates an alienation or disorientation between the audience and the work, with the intention of enhancing the viewer's critical engagement. This interruption also occurs while observ-

[70] Andrea Goldsmith, 'Homer and the Holocaust.' *Australian Book Review*, Summer 2002, 31-37

ing the Auschwitz-Birkenau stills with Arad's provocative commentary on the symmetry of the toilets, juxtaposed with the 'cottage images' of fair maidens viewed earlier on.

Fig 2.6. Boaz Arad, *Immense Inner Peace,* video stills, 2007

Fig 2.7. Boaz Arad, *Immense Inner Peace,* video stills, 2007

I Hitler (2002-2008) is divided into two parts, with the first showing Arad as Hitler in front of the video camera, bare chested and wearing a Hitler mask with gruesomely exaggerated features (fig. 2.8, 2.9). The second part shows Arad, without his mask, reciting Hitler's oration to the German people (figs. 2.10 2.11). In part one, the video draws us into Arad's world of playfulness and dress-ups, but with a sinister and malicious undertone. Arad seems to be trying to grasp the nature of this man, Hitler, part caricature, part criminal. He tries to 'get into' his psyche by turning him inside out, which he literally does by pulling the Hitler mask off and on, revealing its rubber underside. Arad, with his hairy chest, plays around in his study, timing himself, flexing his muscles, acquiring a tough stance, and again flexing his muscles, all the while filming a 'selfie.'

Fig 2.8. Boaz Arad, *I Hitler,* video still, 2001

Fig 2.9. Boaz Arad, *I Hitler,* video still, 2001

He stands in front of the camera as himself, mask-less. He turns the movie camera on, turning his back to the audience and then, like 'superman', turns again and 'voila' … he is once again 'Hitler the Ominous and the Omnipotent.' He tries to look fearsome when he peers into the camera with one eye, and then the other, exaggerating the mask's disturbing features.

Fig 2.10. Boaz Arad, *I Hitler,* video stills, 2002-2008

Fig 2.11. Boaz Arad, *I Hitler,* video stills, 2002-2008

It appears that Arad has intentionally edited this piece without deleting the many practice sessions and 'mistakes' in front of the camera. Consequently the viewer has a glimpse of the labored and repetitive exercise necessary for Arad to 'get under Hitler's skin.' His persistence in digging out the essence of Hitler reveals a process that is both poignant and insightful. Arad confronts the viewers and forces them, in the intimacy of his studio, to get as close as possible to Hitler, even if 'Hitler' is just a rubber mask. It is uncertain what drives Arad to perform these repetitive acts but it appears to

be a crucial process in understanding and revealing aspects of his own psyche and a working-through of historical traumas.

Fig 2.12. Boaz Arad, *Hebrew Lesson,* video still, 2000

Fig 2.13. Boaz Arad, *Hebrew Lesson,* video still, 2000

However, as much as it is crucial to 'work-through' the past, Adorno maintains that the past is still alive and 'will have been worked through only when the causes of what happened "then"' have been eliminated.'[71] In the second part of *I Hitler,* midway through the clip, there is, once again, historic film footage of Hitler addressing the masses (figs. 2.10 and 2.11). The video becomes a double screen, on the right side of which Hitler is orating and gesticulating (in black and white) before the cheering nation (reminiscent of Chaplin's oration in *The Great Dictator*). On the left side, Arad mouths Hitler's words as he reads them from a separate computer screen. This clip is interspersed with glimpses of Hitler's right hand men and the cheering crowd.

I was initially impressed with Arad's fluency and enunciation of the German language, until I had this work translated by a native German speaker who explained that the speech was mainly gibberish peppered with occasional political sentiment. For me, as a viewer, it is ultimately inconsequential to understand what is being said, as I am already familiar with footage of Hitler orating before the German masses. Footage of Hitler is a clear signifier of the Holocaust to most Western audiences, metonymically related to an understanding of what happened in Europe during the Second World War.

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[71] Adorno, 'The Meaning of Working through the Past.'

Arad again parodies Hitler in *I Hitler,* by mimicking and mouthing Hitler's oration next to the voiceless Hitler, again rendering him limp and insipid. Like Chaplin, in *The Great Dictator*, Arad intervenes between Hitler's terrifying ' voice' and the content of its speech.[72] It is a defiant attempt by Arad, who is the son of Holocaust survivors and a 'second generation' Jew, to insult Hitler by performing as him, alongside footage of the real dictator. Arad's voice is mild in comparison to Hitler's bellowing, and one gets the feeling that, by replacing Hitler's screeching, with all the insanity that it holds, Arad succeeds in weakening and castrating Hitler's power, distorting and changing its reception.

In *Hebrew lesson*, the last of the *Hitler videos*, Arad manipulates the footage of Hitler's voice so that he now speaks in Hebrew: *Shalom Yerushalayim - ani mitnatsel* ('Greetings, Jerusalem, I ask for pardon') (figs. 2.12 and 2.13). Arad humiliates Hitler as he makes the 'villain' speak in the forbidden language of the Jewish 'vermin.' Once again, Arad mocks the memory of Hitler by making him apologise in Hebrew to the Israeli nation in front of the German nation. This haunting piece has made Hitler remorseful and apologetic, with Arad creating an artistic environment through which he receives the ultimate redemption for the Jewish people…an apology from Hitler himself.

Tamy Ben-Tor

> My friends, there is a way in which photos deceive us. This way is called 'Photoshop.' This too, is a Jewish invention. Only the Jewish mind could come up with this way of manipulating our perception of truth… God damn the Jews.
>
> —Tamy Ben-Tor, *Memri TV*

Tamy Ben-Tor is a Jerusalem born artist who currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Her performances are explorative and edgy examinations of the relations between Arabs, Jews, Israelis and the rest of the world. She addresses xenophobia and issues relating to the contemporary Jewish experience and often brings incidents and anecdotes from Jewish history back into actuality through an astute use of both satire and comedy. Her skill in using small gestures, body stance, facial ex-

[72] *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema.*

pressions and accents, generate personalities that inhabit 'the other.' These include, amongst others, a Jewish academic who specialises in xenophobia and praises Hitler (fig. 2.14), a baby Eichmann (fig. 2.15), a self-aggrandising contemporary artist (fig. 2.16), and farcical renditions of Hitler in female form (fig. 2.17). Here I discuss her character studies in the pieces *Gewald* (2007)*, Yid* (2010)*, and Memri TV* (2006).

Fig 2.14. Tamy Ben-Tor, *Ruth Katz,* video still, 2013

Fig 2.15. Tamy Ben-Tor, *Baby Eichmann,* video still, 2008

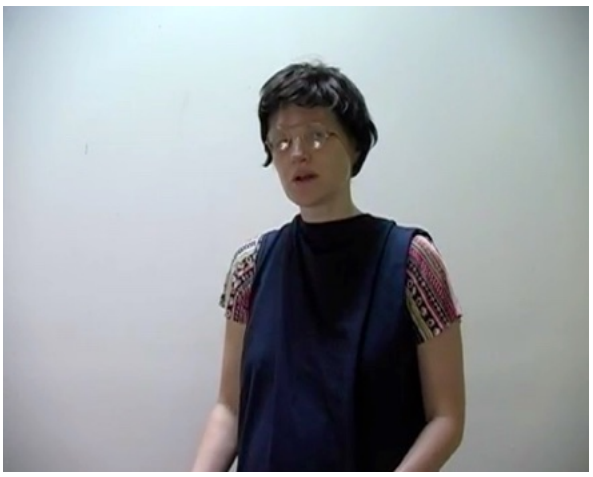

Fig 2.16. Tamy Ben-Tor, *Time and Space,* video still, 2011

Fig 2.17. Tamy-Ben Tor, *Women Talk about Hitler,* video still, 2004

Gewald

Ben-Tor's studies mock and exaggerate stereotypes in order to alert the viewer to his or her own prejudices. This technique is exemplified perfectly in her work entitled *Gewald* [73]. In this piece we see Ben-Tor dressed in traditional Ukrainian garb, naively dancing and singing the words of Primo

[73] Tamy Ben-Tor, 2007. 'Gewald.' (youtube video), 2007, http://youtu.be/JaatwHmqPv4 (accessed January 4, 2014).

Levi's poem, *If This Is a Man*[74] (fig. 2.18). She is accompanied by an instrumental soundtrack of cutesy keyboard sounds, a bizarre clanging tambourine, a choir of girls' voices and the sound of pigs snorting. She sings over this, partly in Ukrainian and partly in gibberish. The backdrop shows anthropomorphic, cartoon pigs from the children's story, *The Three Little Pigs*. The wolf and pigs can be read as analogous to the perpetrators and the victims of the Holocaust, with the last page of the backdrop showing an illustration of the wolf being pushed into an oven (fig. 2.19).

Coincidentally, when I first viewed the piece, I was reading Primo Levi's book *If This is a Man*, (within which the poem appears), and was moved by the synchronicity of the experience as well as unnerved by the macabre atmosphere Ben-Tor created in *Gewald*. Primo Levi (1919-1987) was an Italian author and poet who spent a year in Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944, returning to his home town in Turin, Italy in 1945. He committed suicide in 1987 at the age of 67. His poem, *If This is a Man,* comments on 'man's inhumanity to man' and reminds later generations to remember and reflect on the events he experienced at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

> You who live safe
> In your warm houses,
> You who find, returning in the evening,
> Hot food and friendly faces:
> Consider if this is a man
> Who works in the mud,
> Who does not know peace,
> Who fights for a scrap of bread,
> Who dies because of a yes or a no…
> …Meditate that this came about:
> I commend these words to you.
> Carve them in your hearts
> At home, in the street,
> Going to bed, rising;
> Repeat them to your children.
> Or may your house fall apart,
> May illness impede you,
> May your children turn their faces from you.[75]

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[74] Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man* (London: Abacus, 1987), 17. The poem, *If This Is a Man,* holds the same name as the title of the book.

[75] Levi, *If This Is a Man,*17

Fig 2.18. Tamy-Ben Tor, *Gewald, v*ideo still, 2007

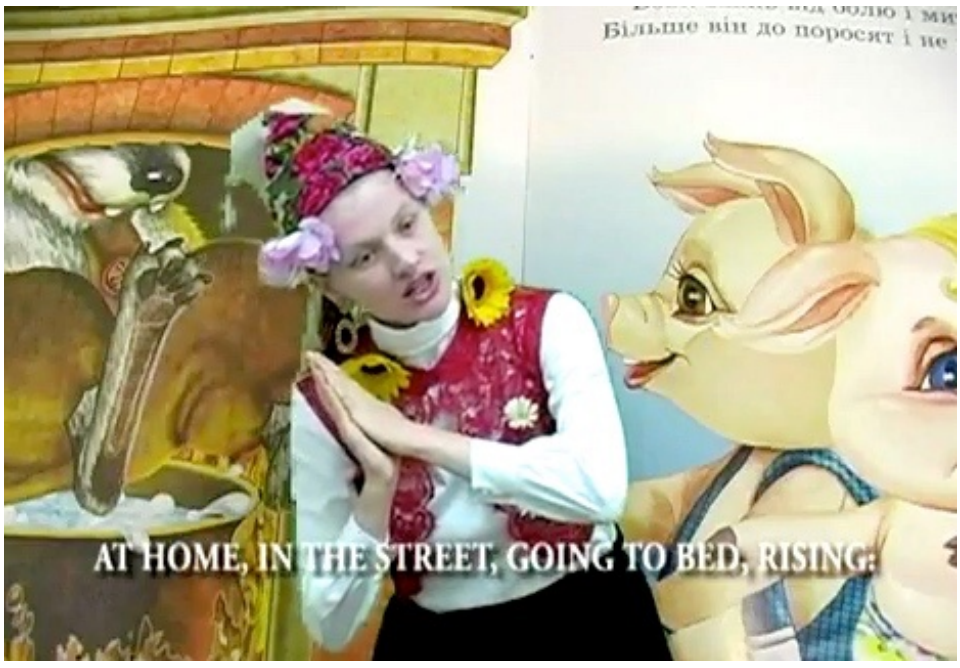

Fig 2.19. Tamy-Ben Tor, *Gewald, v*ideo still, 2007

In reference to the title of the piece, I originally thought the word 'Gewald' referred to the scientific 'Gewald reaction.'[76] I thought this was a direct reference to Zyklon B, the chemical they used in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau and other concentration camps. However, when I wrote to Ben-Tor, herself, she explained that the title was a reference to the common Yiddish term 'Oy

[76] Hans-Peter Buchstaller, et al., *Synthesis of Novel 2-Aminothiophene-3-Carboxylates by Variations of the Gewald Reaction*, Chemical Monthly, no. 132 (2001).

Gevalt.'[77] This is a term used in Yiddish vernacular to mean something blasphemous or shocking. The term Oy Gevalt originated with 'Gewald' which means violence in German.

Ben-Tor recites Levi's poetry while she parodies a carefree, pretty and innocent Ukrainian maiden in front of a backdrop of nursery-rhyme anthropomorphic characters. At first the combination of the elements seems unrelated. However, on second viewing, the incongruity of all the elements appears interconnected, creating a powerful indictment on humanity's ability to trivialise the macabre and horrific. This incongruity, created by using the strategy of 'Interruption', is similar to what I am attempting to achieve in my own piece *Just an Ordinary Peasant,* which I discuss in Chapter 3.

Gewald both unsettled and intrigued me due to its sinister complexity which Ben-Tor manages to convey in a simple yet imposing way. I found it disquieting to watch because of Ben-Tor's particular choice of a maiden of Ukrainian descent. I wondered whether her choice was specifically to remind her audience of the Ukrainians' reputation for being brutal camp guards who perpetrated vicious acts of violence upon their prisoners.

Even though Ben-Tor is blithely dancing and singing in *Gewald*, this piece doesn't make light of genocide. In fact, it is all the more powerful due to its delicacy, grace and eclectic madness. The pretty peasant appears innocent enough, but as the video moves along, we slowly absorb the malevolence of the piece and realise, with a shudder, that behind her cheerful exterior this delightful maiden is a complicit 'innocent' in genocide. Ben-Tor uses her practice to confront Holocaust protagonists and pawns alike. Like an annoying reoccurring nightmare, she haunts the complicit, refusing to allow this subject matter to rest in peace. As in my own work, *Just an Ordinary Peasant,* one is also thrown back into the harsh reality of what Auschwitz-Birkenau and the Nazi regime represented, and how it warped social perceptions of right and wrong. After one of Ben-Tor's performances, someone in the audience commented: 'Can't we all just get over the Holocaust?'[78] She agreed that 'Nazism has been made into a fetish', but explained that she is more fascinated by the

[77] Tamy Ben-Tor, e-mail message to author, December 29, 2014.

[78] Julie Brener, 'Not a Pretty Sight: The Transformative Art of Tamy Ben-Tor,' *Tablet* (2008). http://tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/734/not-a-pretty-sight (accessed April 2008).

'relationship of the powerful and the weak, the detested and the admired, whoever that is.' More importantly, she adds: 'The Holocaust is not for Jews, or about Jews. It's a humanity thing.'[79]

Memri TV

Not only does Ben-Tor confront historical acts of anti-Semitism, she also confronts contemporary anti-Semitism by employing characters ranging from non-Jews to 'self-hating' Jews. *Memri TV (2006)*[80] shows Ben-Tor, with most of her face covered with fake facial hair, playing a bigoted Arab TV host who is described as a 'Middle Eastern expert and civil rights activist' (fig 2.20). He speaks in what sounds like Arabic, but is in fact mostly nonsense with a smattering of Arabic and Hebrew. He is accompanied by the soft, melodic sounds of a piano and flute played by someone in the room, and a kefiah is loosely draped behind him. He expounds on 'Jewish lies' which include the myth that adults started as babies, and paper (including the holy Koran) is made from trees.[81] Among other examples of intolerance towards the Jewish people, the host blames the Jews for the creation of the software 'Photoshop.' He convinces his audience by arguing:

> My friends, there is a way in which photos deceive us. This way is called 'Photoshop. This too, is a Jewish invention. Only the Jewish mind could come up with this way of manipulating our perception of truth. All the photos of Jewish history are photoshopped. The Holocaust, what they call Shoa. It is also photoshoped.…God damn the Jews.[82]

This is both hilarious and disconcerting as it is obvious that Ben-Tor, as the host, is exaggerating the facts, yet, at the same time, people like this character do make such ludicrous assertions in exactly this sort of rhetoric on the internet and TV.[83] The most absurd part of this piece is when Ben-Tor, as the TV host, announces that he is about to meet a professor at Yale to discuss lectures that he will be

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[79] Brener, 'Not a Pretty Sight.'

[80] Tamy Ben-Tor, 'Memri TV' (youtube video), 2006, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ki1F_j6m5b0 (accessed January 4, 2014).

[81] Ben-Tor, 'Memri TV.'

[82] Ben-Tor, 'Memri TV.'

[83] Memri TV, 'Saudi Imam Incites Islamic Terror against Jews and Christians,' (youtube video), 2015, http://worldisraelnews.com/watch-saudi-imam-incites-islamic-terror-against-jews-and-christians/ (accessed January 27, 2015).

giving there and also later, at Harvard. With this character, Ben-Tor is expressing to her audience the idea that 'civilised' and 'respected' leaders and their lunacy, have somehow found a platform within the structures of the modern academic process.[84] By giving the host the title of 'civil rights activist' she is making her audience alert to the fact that people like him actually do call themselves by similar titles, even if they espouse rabid, genocidal rancour.

Fig 2.20. Tamy Ben Tor, Memri TV, video still, 2006

This piece is influenced by videos seen on the actual Memri TV site (Middle East Media Research Institute), which is a channel that translates Arab media outlets and often exposes what 'respected' Muftis and Imams are saying about the horrors of the 'Jew.'[85] Often these 'special talk-show guests' call for the slaughter of the Jews and describe them as the 'descendants of apes and pigs.'[86] Ben-Tor's exaggerated character highlights how anti-Semitism has seeped into the realm of acceptability within the media and she uses this extreme example of bigotry to illustrate this point.

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[84] For example, 'Copenhagen Imam on Eve of Terror Attack: "The Prophet Engaged in War, Not Dialogue with the Jews"', The Middle East Media Research Institute TV monitor project http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/4783.htm (accessed February 28, 2015).

[85] Fox News, 'Controversial Imam to Speak at University of Central Florida Sparks Protests,' 2011, http://www.-foxnews.com/us/2011/02/25/controversial-imam-speak-university-central-florida/ (accessed April 14, 2014).

[86] Palestinian Authority TV, 'Pa Mufti of Jerusalem Muhammad Hussein: The Muslims Will Kill the Jews before Judgment Day,' MEMRI TV, 2012, http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/3275.htm (accessed October 6, 2014).

Throughout her work, including *Memri TV*, Ben-Tor often breaks down language with her characters as she returns them back to an almost primitive stage of development. Given this, language, as a communicative tool becomes unnecessary as a form of articulation. It is the gibberish itself, with intonations and select key words in various languages that can be understood, which define the characters, their actions and the cultures from which they have emerged.

Ben-Tor's performances not only target anti-Semites, they also target the Jews themselves, in particular the 'self-hating' ones. All her bizarre characters poke fun at Jews and Nazis, as well as Israelis and Arabs. By implicating all active participants in the drama, she succeeds in getting all of her viewpoints across, thus universalising offence.

Yid

This technique is also apparent in Ben-Tor's next piece entitled *Yid* (2010)[87]. With this character, Ben-Tor has created a repellant, stereotypical representation of 'The Jew', who personifies all the negative traits attributed to this ethnicity (fig. 2.21). His nose is bulbous, his smile is sebaceous and his self-hatred is both unfortunate and distasteful in equal measure. Saliva dangles from his mouth as he espouses his rhetoric, peppered with inarticulate ramblings. Together, all of these elements create a most unappealing portrait of the 'Jewish intellectual.'

Our character, Mervin, rambles on about how proud he is to be welcomed throughout the main cities of Europe, such as Berlin, on speaking tours which vilify Israel. On these speaking tours, he admits, that 'all the goyim love him.' Every sentence of the Yid's speech is loaded with mock hatred towards the Jews and Israel. He refers to the term 'Jew' repeatedly and then says …. 'I meant Israel', in the way that many with an anti-Israel bias may espouse their views. He mouths the sort of rhetoric that is commonly used in the Israel/Palestine debate, such as 'Israel is corrupt, more than the goyim' and 'the Jews should be slaughtered, haha. I mean the Israelis.' He then discusses his book called 'Jew: Keep a Low Profile' and states 'The problem with the Jew… they're just evil, like

87 Tamy Ben-Tor, 'Yid.' (youtube video), 2012, http://youtu.be/tcJUqonXRyQ (accessed june 4, 2014).

all of the Jews. They're not fighting to exist. It's not anti-Jewish propaganda, by the way, it's anti-Israel propaganda.'

Yid also touches upon the perceptions around the Holocaust and Holocaust denial with dialogue such as:

> All the problem started that the Jews have a state. Why should the Jews have a state? Because of the Holocaust? They're bringing up the Holocaust again? Come on so they got a little murdered, again with the Holocaust and again with the Holocaust. Come on, it happened so long ago. My wife, she says, Mervin, I dont even know when it happened, did it happen?[88]

Fig 2.21. Tamy Ben Tor, *Yid, v*ideo still, 2010

This casting of doubt upon the facticity of the Holocaust, coupled with the argument that the Jews should have stayed in Europe, is often articulated by a variety of political and social environments.[89] 'Mervin' also comments on latent anti-Semitism by saying 'My wife, she says, Mervin, I wish the Israelis stayed in Europe. They're such a complex people, you know. We enjoyed it, every few years we could massacre a little bit,' This comment explicitly refers to the abuse of

[88] Ben-Tor, 'Yid.'

[89] Yitzhak Benhorin, 'Helen Thomas: Jews, Go Back to Poland. Veteran White House Correspondent Helen Thomas Makes Shocking Anti-Jewish Remarks,' Yediot Ahronot http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3899361,00.html (accessed March 4th, 2015).

Europe's Jewish community by their European neighbours. Ben-Tor's performance reminds her audience that there are those that are attempting to change history and 'deny that the Holocaust happened, or that it didn't happen so badly, or that people weren't so brutal and murderous.'[90] 'Mervin' explicates more reasons for understanding anti-Semitism by discussing the idea of Jewish arrogance and the need for Jews to remain ashamed and in a constant state of self-deprecation. When the character of Mervin announces that:

> All the goyim love me. They say, Mervin, what we love about you, you're a Yidden, but you're not proud about it. This is what the Israelis don't understand. The goyim don't like the Yidden succeeding. They should be just a little bit ashamed…[91]

Ben Tor is clearly addressing this belief system and the complex psychology that creates this state of being. The irony is that the character himself is an anti-Semitic caricature, personifying every anti-Semite's checklist, whilst discussing anti-Semitism itself. Ben-Tor has created a character who exemplifies the contradictory nature of Žižek's fantasy figure of the Jew.

Ben-Tor has adorned Yid with exaggerated mannerisms that make him not only a laughable character, but also a pathetic representation of the actual stereotype itself. Ironically, given that his book is called *Jew Keep a Low Profile,* he, himself, is exploiting and publishing his Jewishness through his literature and lectures. Through Yid's absurd character, Ben-Tor is conveying and highlighting, not only her mistrust of so called anti-Israel intellectualism, but also her understanding of self-hatred. This type of behaviour is referred to, in contemporary terms, as being 'a self-hating Jew,' of which there are myriad varieties.[92]

Ben-Tor has an astringent wit and a perceptive ability to mimic the idiosyncrasies and human frailties of the personas she conveys. These personas have no capacity for self-reflection or self-criticism and this is precisely what renders them susceptible to espousing generalised propaganda. They embody the 'creepiness of prejudice'[93] and often articulate thoughts that we, ourselves, have

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[90] Ruth Wajnryb, *The Silence: How Tragedy Shapes Talk* (N.S.W. Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2001), 83.

[91] Ben-Tor, 'Yid*'.*

[92] Marilyn Friedman, *Jewish Self-Hatred, Moral Criticism, and Autonomy.* In Personal Autonomy and Social Oppression: Philosophical Perspectives, edited by Marina A. Oshana, 215. New York: Routledge, 2015.

[93] Tamy Ben-Tor, *Lillith Performance Studio,* Nordic Culture Point (2009). http://www.kulturkontaktnord.org/lang-en/about-us (accessed February 10, 2015).

furtively toyed with. By performing and exaggerating their attributes, without any indication of self-censorship, she exposes and then reflects back at us traits we may all be guilty of. Her caricatures resonate with my own need to create identities that stir, challenge and mirror our own levels of unwitting programming and disposition towards generalisations. This, ultimately, highlights the extensive potential towards racism and fanaticism inside all of us.

This chapter has discussed the works of two contemporary Israeli performance artists, Tamy Ben-Tor and Boaz Arad who both use their often absurd, exaggerated performances to investigate the mindset of their characters. These characters are often tyrants, drawn from both the past and the present, with their idiosyncrasies exaggerated and manipulated to make them appear larger than life. Ben-Tor and Arad obsess over their characters in order to affect the viewer on a subconscious level. They do this to remind us of the vulnerability of the human psyche, and as a warning against repeating the mistakes of our recent past. Through aestheticising the unconscious formations of racism, they are attempting to prevent these events from occurring again.

Both Arad and Ben-Tor's work has shown me that it is possible to make powerful, provocative art on sensitive and often taboo topics. Their work is so playful and quirky, yet so very serious, and the combination of these two elements in the one artwork is what I try to achieve in my own practice. I admire Arad for his political commitment and psychological denigration of Nazi ideology, as well as his inventive and idiosyncratic ideas in smearing the memory of Hitler. His persistent determination to investigate 'the tyrant's world' has given me both the courage and the inspiration to pursue and diversify my own artistic ideas.

Similarly, Ben Tor's dexterity as a performance artist prompts me to strive to achieve the qualities she demonstrates in her practice. These include a boldness of spirit, an audacity and, above all, humour. My own work is emboldened by the raw and unapologetic fashion in which she presents her personae – as stereotypes with extreme biases. Her critical eye enables her to transfer her observations of humanity into her characters, through whom she exposes a truth that is often uncomfortable and offensive.

Chapter 3: The Costume Party

Throughout history, artistic practice has played an active voice in movements of social upheaval and political change. I endeavour, through my art practice, to push people's unconscious biases to the surface, my own included, and challenge people's acceptance of unexamined 'group mentality.' In this chapter, I discuss my own practice as a performance artist and my creation of various costumed characters. These personas are individual manifestations of my concerns over the current political crises in the Middle East and how it affects me, as a diasporic Jew. I also acknowledge the emphasis of family input within my work, through my parents' war-time experiences and the psychological weight of their repeated stories. These stories are deeply embedded in who I am as an artist and are central to my work. This chapter also demonstrates how these experiences are impelled into aestheticised actuality through performance.

My characters (who share their names with the titles of the works) include Miss World Peace (2011-2014), Missed World Peace (2013-2014), Lady Gaza (2013-2014), Just an Ordinary Peasant (2014), and a collective I refer to as *Those Scary Ones* (2013). I will briefly introduce them all, and then expand on two of my video pieces, *Miss World Peace* and *Just an Ordinary Peasant*. I will also include a brief discussion of my remaining works, *Dance Before the Storm* (2013), *Whistle While you Work* (2014) and *Dad and Primo Levi* (2014).

The first and most prolific of my works is *Miss World Peace* (fig. 3.1). An activist in an evening gown, Miss World Peace regularly attends rallies concerning the Israel/Palestine conflict, run by political and student bodies that are pro-Palestinian. She stands as an anomaly amongst the certainty displayed at these events, and as a reminder to both protesters and bystanders that conflict is never

black or white. Her eventual disillusionment and discouragement, born out of genuine experiences of violence and threats at these rallies, sees her deteriorate into Missed World Peace, whose name articulates how she feels after her attempts to moderate these crowds (fig. 3.2).

Fig 3.1. Jane Korman, *Miss World Peace (Melbourne Rally 1)*, photograph, 2014

Lady Gaza, a character inspired by a mixture of Lady Gaga (born 1986) and the French artist, Claude Cahun (1894-1954), (figs. 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5). She emerges like a proverbial phoenix rising from the ashes. She is a hybrid of both sides of the conflict, personifying both Israel and Palestine, identities that are very similar yet in great conflict with each other. She is going through a crisis of self-actualisation, much like the real Lady Gaga, trying to break out of a world dominated by oppressive sexual politics and civil unrest. Who is she? Where does she belong? Is she the two-state solution or a conflicted dichotomy? Is it possible for both parts of her to live together as one self-contained cross-breed or will she fight herself to the death?

Following Lady Gaza is a body of work called *Those Scary Ones* (figs. 3.6 to 3.11) where I perform as various characters wearing the recognisable clothing of racists, bigots and fundamentalists, and

Fig 3.2. Jane Korman, *Missed World Peace* ,photograph, 2014

reciting oratory spoken by their antitheses. For example, a Ku Klux Klan member utters the words of Martin Luther King or a terrorist speaks the words of Eckhart Tolle. I have done this in order to take control of these disturbingly ghoulish figures and imbue them with some much needed positivity and benevolence. This body of work also includes myself carrying my head in *Beheaded* (fig. 3.10) as well as a group of several other dark characters that espouse disquieting messages, in the

Fig 3.3. Jane Korman, *Lady Gaza*, photograph, 2014

piece, *Foreboding* (fig. 3.11). *Just An Ordinary Peasant* (fig. 3.12) is based on my uncle's memoirs while an inmate of Treblinka. This piece explores the role of the willing accomplice as well as the complicit bystander to the atrocities of Hitler's regime.

The video performances, including *Just an Ordinary Peasant, Whistle While You Work, The Dance Before the Storm* and *Missed World Peace* were all recorded only once with a video camera set on a tripod. *Just an Ordinary Peasant, Whistle While You Work,* and *Missed World* were all set and recorded in the countryside of Warburton. *Dad and Primo Levi* was filmed with my iphone 5 in his 'office.' Arranging documentation for the *Miss World Peace* project was more challenging as I had to find a friend or family member who was prepared to accompany me each time I attended a rally. I decided to use a hand-held camera for not only pragmatic reasons but because it also created an intimacy with the subject matter and exemplified my close personal connection to political activism. The documentation of Miss World Peace in Israel and the West Bank was similarly undertaken by friends or family. All the characters except Miss World Peace were photographed by my son or with a self-timer.

Fig 3.4. Jane Korman, *Lady Gaza*, photograph, 2014

Fig 3.5. Jane Korman, *Lady Gaza*, photograph, 2014

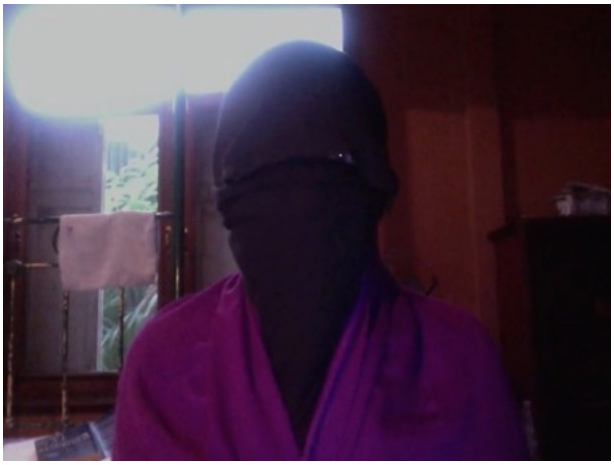

Fig 3.6. Jane Korman, *Those Scary Ones,*
(*Terrorist Performs Eckhart Tolle),*
video still, 2014

Fig 3.7. Jane Korman, *Those Scary Ones,*
(Ku Klux Klan Performs Martin Luther King),
video still, 2014

Fig 3.8. Jane Korman, *Those Scary Ones,*
(Adolf Performs Jew),
video still, 2014

Fig 3.9. Jane Korman, *Those Scary Ones,*
(BDS'er Performs Q & A),
video still, 2014

Fig 3.10. Jane Korman, *Those Scary Ones,* (*Beheaded)*, photograph, 2013

Fig 3.11. Jane Korman, *Those Scary Ones,* (*Foreboding)*, photograph, 2013

Fig 3.12. Jane Korman, *Just an Ordinary Peasant,* photograph, 2013-2014

Miss World Peace

> Thou shalt not be a victim, thou shalt not be a perpetrator, but, above all, thou shalt not be a by-stander.
>
> —Yehuda Bauer

The character of Miss World Peace has been an important part of my practice and, as she has been my most performed persona, I will discuss her at length in this section. In the Introduction I mentioned that she is an aged parody of a Miss World beauty contestant who braves angry crowds with

her naive desire for peace and harmony. Miss World Peace wears a shabby, pastel-blue evening gown, with a sash across her chest emblazoned with the slogan *Miss World Peace* and *Salaam/ Shalom* in English, Hebrew and Arabic (figs. 3.13 and 3.14). She wears a tiara, long white gloves, silver high heels and a subtle touch of make-up. Her slogan is a parody of the usual response a beauty contestant will give to the question of what she most desires; it is usually, and predictably

Fig 3.13. Linda Wachtel, *Miss World Peace (Melbourne Rally 2)*, photograph, 2014

Fig 3.14. Linda Wachtel, *Miss World Peace (Melbourne Rally 3)*, photograph, 2014

Fig 3.15. Jane Korman, *Miss World Peace (Melbourne Rally)*, video still, 2014

'world peace.' Her physical appearance is quite vulnerable, and she is way too old to be a beauty pageant contestant. She is, however, determined to bring her message of conciliation and hope to the hostile masses. Her first appearance was in Melbourne during anti-Israel rallies in 2011, which she continued attending for the next four years. The video piece *Miss World Peace (Melbourne Rally)* is documentation of my experiences at these rallies (fig. 3.15). Her other visits have included Thailand, Berlin, Israel and The West Bank, as well as former concentration camps throughout Europe.

Fig. 3.16. Jane Korman, *Israel, Face Behind World Misery, (Melbourne)*, photograph, 2013

I had initially resorted to performance as a means of engaging with others on equal terms. I had hoped that difficult issues could be debated during an exchange, mediated respectfully and discussed in a calm and interested fashion. As the embodiment of Miss World Peace, I was curious to experience these rallies incognito, as a neutral physical 'Switzerland,' who is not really on either or any side.

I had previously attended the rallies in normal everyday attire before I decided to dress up as Miss World Peace. I had been disturbed by the demonstrators' fixed and one-sided viewpoints and their placards with statements such as: 'Israel is the Cause of World Misery' (fig. 3.16) as well as their troubling chanting, such as 'From the Valley to the Sea, Palestine will be Free' or 'Max Brenner you can't hide, you're committing genocide.'

Fig 3.17. Linda Wachtel, *Miss World Peace (Melbourne Rally 4)*, photograph, 2014

I had no idea how to address their behaviour because, unless I appeared to be 'on their side,' the demonstrators would make it almost impossible for me to present an alternative message without being harassed or abused. I realised I needed to do something bold and visually grabbing in order to get my message across. Dressing up as Miss World Peace seemed the perfect option as she was both non-confrontational and comical, yet able to present a clear and definitive message. I hoped that Miss World Peace could challenge the moral and ethical values of the pro-Palestinian marchers

whose target was the boycotting of stores owned by Israeli Jews. An added motive was that Miss World Peace's absurd costume served as an artistic 'interruption' by creating a stark contrast to the real-life political demonstrations. 'Interruption' is a strategy that I employ throughout my work as it peaks the bystanders' curiosity and thus their critical engagement. I further discuss this strategy later on in this chapter.

Fig. 3.18. Ella Maor Meletz, *Miss World Peace (Jerusalem Rally),* photograph, Jerusalem, 2012

My creation of Miss World Peace was also based on a perceived need for self-protection that matched my need for self expression. However, even dressed as Miss World Peace, I was concerned and fearful due to the vitriolic and pathological hatred that was directed towards me. It was palpably frightening and unexpected, and mostly incited by my waving of an Israeli flag alongside a Palestinian one, triggering strong abusive reactions from people at these charged events. The Israeli flag aggravated the crowd and prompted the demonstrators to expose their prejudices, spouting comments such as 'Fuck off you racist Zionist!' or 'Are you a *Jew*?' At each rally I attended, the flag was snatched from my hand and destroyed (fig. 3.17). I have been practicing Vipassana meditation for nearly fifteen years, and fortunately was able to use the techniques I have acquired to help me stay equanimous amongst the turbulence. My experiences as Miss World Peace also included the

police privately telling me that they 'liked my outfit', but were still unable to keep me safe.[94] After attending a number of rallies over the years, Miss World Peace is now barred by the police from getting anywhere close to the protestors because she 'incites violence.'

The pieces in my current body of work are an analysis of my innermost demons and fragility. The idea of feeling threatened as a 'diasporic Jew' is important in this context; I have attended many demonstrations in Israel by both Palestinians and Israelis against the government (fig. 3.18), but none were as vicious and unsettling as those I attended in my own home city. Over and over again I was intrigued and concerned by how difficult and frustrating it was to engage in any balanced discussion with the demonstrators I encountered at these rallies. Even though I am aware that rallies, in general, usually hold a particular and rigid viewpoint, I was not prepared for the hatred and aggression I was confronted with. Those I encountered were uncompromisingly self-righteous, believing that their way was the only way, and carrying within themselves unresolved and misdirected hatred and espoused unexamined certainties. After attending numerous rallies and some nasty confrontations, I realised that a key element of the demonstrators' campaign is the rejection of any activity which promotes dialogue, co-existence or joint Israeli-Palestinian projects.

In a way, Miss World Peace is an antidote to fanaticism, as, according to the Israeli writer, Amos Oz, humor is the greatest cure.[95] Similarly, in Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, Chaplin dresses up as Hitler and bellows to the masses.[96] Chaplin's act is comical as he has taken the traditional rhetoric and physical style of Hitler and inverted it into a tool to display the ridiculousness of the fascist's hypnotic hatred.

There is a sense of hollowness amongst some of my generation – the 'second generation' survivors – as we are referred to. We often ask ourselves: 'If we feel threatened, would we cower or would we rise to the challenge? Would we march forward and meet the threat head on, or run from it?'[97] As

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[94] Police officer, conversation with the author, Melbourne, 2013.'Yeah, if you get in too close and they turn on you, I'm not going to be able to rescue you.'

[95] Amos Oz, *How to Cure a Fanatic,* (London: Random House, 2004), 74.

[96] *The Great Dictator,* Chaplin.

[97] Magda Kron, interview by author, Melbourne, 2012.

Miss World Peace, I, as a lone voice, felt I could march head on without needing an army accompanying me. Confronting 'the mob' is my way of being brave in the face of adversity, and is how I know how to best handle confrontation.

Also, perhaps, 'the apple doesn't fall far from the tree.' My ninety year old mother still raises her fist and defiantly claims 'never again!' She still goes to University campuses and rallies, and does her bit towards combatting propaganda, in particular anti-Israel propaganda. She attends lectures in the Islamic department at Melbourne University so she can better understand the world of Islam. She listens, learns and makes friends, and though she might look like an odd 'little old lady', she succeeds in bringing together those who are willing and open to talk about their differences. Her defiance and conciliatory desire has impacted on my life and influenced my practice.

As my performance of *Miss World Peace* is a social experience, it needs the collective for it to exist at all. In *The Poetics of the Open Work*, Umberto Eco expands on this idea in his 'Reader Response Theory' in which the reader is recognised as an active agent who imparts 'real existence' to the work, and completes its meaning through interpretation.[98] The 'Open Work' relates to various forms of art involving elements of random choice during the art's composition, production, or performance, and is ultimately an organic process created by the artist's own improvisation. 'The Open Work' has been referred to as ambiguous, whereby 'ambiguity' does not represent an imperfection but is its very definition. Brecht's plays, for example, can be viewed as 'open' in the sense that their ambiguous endings demand that the viewer works out his/her own outcome.[99] Umberto's 'Reader Response Theory' is relevant to my own performance work, in that Miss World Peace's performances are always improvised and unpredictable. The demonstrators, as well as the bystanders, become the performers and are a necessary organic element of the work. The outcome is determined by the bystanders' own culture, prejudices and the geographical location of where the event is held, be it Israel, The West Bank or Melbourne.

In Melbourne, Miss World Peace's impact is varied. She has a negative impact on the protestors, who are enraged by her presence and regard her as an interference and a nuisance. Her performance

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[98] Umberto Eco, "The Poetics of the Open Work", (1962), in *Participation,* ed. Claire Bishop, (London; Cambridge; MIT Press, 2006), 22.

[99] Eco, "The Poetics of the Open Work", 29

has a more positive impact on the bystanders, as her odd and wacky way diffuses the power of the demonstration and captures people's curiosity and interest. A middle aged woman dressed as Miss World Peace is not threatening, and people feel safe to approach her, ask questions, and open up dialogue.

Predictably, after several years of attending rallies, Miss World Peace slowly becomes disheartened and despondent. Her voice isn't heard; no-one wants peace, and she is banned from attending future rallies. In her early days, even though she was past middle aged, she was still fresh-faced and enthusiastic, standing straight and strong amongst the combative crowd. Today, after immersing herself in all the hostility, she is worn out, and her blood is anaemic and drained. Also, around this time I am diagnosed with a chronic illness and am warned, by concerned family and friends, that my obsessive need to examine these issues is making me sick and 'poisoning my blood.'

In an interview on ABC Radio National, Oz confesses that he is resigned to the fact that the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is not going to be resolved.[100] What might happen, he acknowledges, is a syndrome of fatigue which may finally lead to exhaustion. Similarly, Miss World Peace is exhausted. She falls into a depression and disintegrates into Missed World Peace, an unhappy and bloated remnant of Miss World Peace, coinciding with my actual physical decline. She is now haggard, overweight, unwell and medicated. Her face is white with the artificial and exaggerated smile of a clown. She knows she has lost the battle, even though she valiantly tried hard to fight. As a sad, swollen and despondent clown she sings in a whisper *If I had a Hammer,*[101] a once hopeful but now melancholic tune (figs. 3.19 and 3.20).

She wanders the land of Israel and Palestine, forlorn and disheartened, the hope of peace a fading memory. Theodor Adorno, in conveying the insidiousness of the Third Reich's rise to power, seems to sum up Missed World Peace's ongoing struggle and ultimately tragic end: 'Pitted against the deadly seriousness of total society, which has absorbed the opposing voice, the impotent objection earlier quashed by irony, there is now only the deadly seriousness of comprehended truth.'[102]

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[100] Amos Oz, 'Amos Oz on Fanaticism,' in Background Briefing, ed. Kirsten Garrett (Australia: ABC Radio National, 2011).

[101] Seeger, Pete and Lee Hays. 'The Hammer Song.' 1949. *If I Had a Hammer* was adopted as a Freedom Song of the American Civil Rights movement, and recorded by the group 'Peter, Paul and Mary' in 1962.

[102] Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life.* London: Verso, 2005.

Fig 3.19. Jane Korman, *Missed World Peace*, video still, 2014

Fig. 3.20. Jane Korman, *Missed World Peace*, video still, 2014

I will now briefly touch on a series of works that incorporate my parents in both the acting of the pieces and the stories behind them. They include: *Dance Before the Storm* (2013), *Whistle While You Work* (2014), and *Dad and Primo Levi* (2014).

Dance Before the Storm opens with my parents dancing in their lounge room (figs. 3.21 and 3.22). As they dance, I replace my mother with myself, and continue dancing with my father. I then morph from being my father's dance partner into the character of Miss World Peace. We dance to the song

Mack the Knife,[103] a piece with lyrics by Bertolt Brecht and music by the composer, Kurt Weil, written during the Weimar period of the 1920s in Berlin. As Weil was a Jew, the Nazis banned his music, calling it 'degenerate.' This video is the prelude to my video *Miss World Peace (Melbourne*

Fig. 3.21. Jane Korman, *Dance Before the Storm*, video still, 2013

Fig. 3.22. Jane Korman, *Dance Before the Storm*, video still, 2013

[103] Composed by Kurt Weill and lyrics by Bertolt Brecht for their performance of *The Threepenny Opera (Die Dreigroschenoper),* 1928.

Rally) and contextualises the motivation for my performances at the rallies. I use the footage of my parents' dancing as a metaphor for the innocence they briefly enjoyed prior to the rise of Nazism. As such, it is also a visual entrée into the aggression I experience at the rallies, which reminds me of the vicious atmosphere my parents struggled to survive in. The song, *Mack the Knife* is about a murderer who stabs people with a knife. An appropriate soundtrack to the piece, it is from a time just before Nazism, and expresses the creeping criminality about to explode in Europe.

Fig. 3.23. Jane Korman, *Whistle While You Work*, video still, 2014

Fig. 3.24. Jane Korman, *Whistle While You Work*, video still, 2014

Fig. 3.25. Jane Korman, *Whistle While You Work*, video still, 2014

Fig. 3.26. Jane Korman, *Whistle While You Work*, video still, 2014

Whistle While You Work[104] is based on one of my mother's stories from when she was an inmate of the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp (figs. 3.23 to 3.26). She was eighteen when she first arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau in the middle of winter, where she was stripped, shaven, deloused and then thrown something to wear from a pile of rags. She received an inappropriate sheer evening dress with buttons all the way down the back. She recalls: 'If I would get a sack, will be more prac-

[104] The title *Whistle While You Work* was taken from the 1937 animated Walt Disney film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. I chose it because of the sinister overtones that fairy-tales often have. In addition*Whistle* refers to the sound of the camp guard's whistle in my video, and the word 'Work' refers to the slogan that greets you at the entrance to Auschwitz-Birkenau, *Arbeit Macht Frei.*('Work Makes You Free').

tical, because the dress was cold and I was shivering.' In this piece I try to convey the unimaginable impracticality and inconceivable absurdity of these sort of events in Auschwitz-Birkenau

Fig 3.27. Jane Korman, *Dad and Primo Levi*, video still, 2014

The final work in this series, *Dad and Primo Levi,* shows my ageing father, an Auschwitz-Birkenau survivor, dozing off while listening to a 'talking book' playing on his desk (fig 3.27). The reader is reciting the introduction to Primo Levi's book *The Drowned and the Saved*, and refers to Levi's desire 'to try to understand the Germans, a cultured nation in order to judge them.'[105] The piece concludes with Levi, also a survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau, warning us, the listeners, that there is a 'would-be tyrant waiting in the wings with beautiful words on his lips.'[106] Primo Levi's words seem to be saturated into my father's consciousness and echo his own thoughts as he nods off; thoughts that take him back to his own war and post-war experiences and the big questions he still asks seventy years later. However, not only are Levi's words saturated into my father's mind and echo his thoughts, but they also echo my own concerns and agenda, as the title of this project, *Déjà vu, Watch Out Jew* warns us. Like Levi, I am also concerned that the next 'would-be tyrant waiting in

[105] Levi, Primo. *The Drowned and the Saved*. London: Simon & Schuster, Inc, 1988, x

[106] Levi. *The Drowned and the Saved,* xiv

the wings with beautiful words on his lips' is just around the corner. This more subtle, reserved piece, connects me to my father and his past, and captures the essence of my work. I sit next to him and watch and listen, while trying to hold this moment with my iPhone for all to remember.

These three pieces, presented as projections or on TV monitors, are the manifestations of memories passed down to me, as well as vignette snapshots of family experiences of genocide They also serve as visual cautions to the viewer about the absurdity and destruction of hatred and fear.

Looking back over the four years of performing Miss World Peace, I see how my experiences were dependent upon the responses of the demonstrators, the police, the bystanders, the journalists and anyone else around at the time. I stepped into Miss World Peace's outfit and situated myself amongst the demonstrators and police, initially out of curiosity, but later fully aware that my presence was provocative. Half way through this project, my mother happened to show me a photo she had taken of similar anti-Israel gatherings she had attended in Melbourne over thirty years ago. It was clear how similar our motivations were, and how powerful my upbringing has been on informing my practice today.

Just an Ordinary Peasant

> Our moral problem with the Holocaust is not that the perpetrators were inhuman, but that they were human just like ourselves.
>
> —Yehuda Bauer

I will now discuss at greater length the last of my works made during this time of research, *Just an Ordinary Peasant*. This particular project is one of my most personal and also most problematic works, as it confronts my own biases. *Just an Ordinary Peasant* is a video-clip based on my uncle's memoirs as an inmate at Treblinka extermination camp in Poland in 1944, where he worked in the *Sonderkommando* or slave-labour unit. This piece is my interpretation of one particular story from his memoirs written after the Holocaust, on crumbling, yellowing foolscap. My uncle, Shalom Cohen[107], was my father's older brother and was amongst the few that survived Treblinka.[108] He died in Israel in 1998. His story recounts that while being forced to carry corpses from the gas chambers to the 'Lazarett,' a massive open-air pyre, he was handed a sack which held little children who were still alive. He writes in his memoirs: 'The people working at the pyre took the sack with the live children and threw it into the fire.'[109]

In *Just an Ordinary Peasant* I dress up as a woman who lives in the village of Treblinka, close to the death camp. She dances and sings to a Polish children's song: *Koci Koci Wapci,* which means 'Clap clap little hands' (fig 3.28). On completing her song she picks up a hessian bag lying on the ground and throws it into the fire behind her, as the muffled sounds of crying babies can be heard (fig.3.29). She walks off nonchalantly, without flinching. The visual part of the clip ends with this scene, and the screen fades to black. There follows a voice-over of my mother and father arguing in strong accents, as the screen remains in subtitled blackness. My mother declares to my father: 'We are the last ones to say the truth. If we don't know exactly, we shouldn't talk.' My father replies:

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[107] Shalom Cohen is also known as 'Stashek Kon', 'Stanislaw Kon', and 'Stashek Kohn'

[108] Yuri Suhl, ed., *They Fought Back: The Story of the Jewish Resistance in Nazi Europe,*(London: MacGibbon & Kee Ltd, 1975),155.

[109] Shalom Cohen, *Flames Upon Treblinka*, 1946, Israel, 33. The following is an extract from Cohen's memoirs where he describes this scene: 'I don't know how many children were in the sack, but I did feel something moving while I was running. In the entrance to 'Lazarett' stood a German who asked me what is inside the sack and I answered 'live children' to which the German replied 'throw this garbage into the fire.' And the people who worked in Lazarett took the sack with the live children and threw it into the fire.'

'No, alright, so what? So you tell!' My mother continues in a quiet, solemn voice, recounting the story from my Uncle's memoirs: 'Nobody could listen to him. It was so gruesome. He was so full of it, that he needed to talk about it, and nobody did like to listen to him, because it was terrible. They didn't believe it. They *tried* not to believe it! He was given a *sack* of moving things inside. What happened? They have been new born babies.'[110]

Fig. 3.28. Jane Korman, *Just an Ordinary Peasant, v*ideo still, 2014

Just an Ordinary Peasant tackles an unnerving topic about something grotesque, barbaric and incomprehensible that captures this dark time in history. Heinous atrocities were committed by Germans and their accomplices, acting under the influence of an insane ideology and the fear it generated. Given that the vast majority of the Nazi regime and their supporters were 'ordinary people', I wanted to make work that explored the role of these people.

The woman I play in *Just an Ordinary Peasant* is a hybrid character created from the memoirs of my uncle, my parents and my own research. This piece explores the willingness of those who were accomplices to the atrocities of the Third Reich and brings to light the inevitability of our own vulnerability to evil and human frailty given the right circumstances.

[110] Marysia Kohn, interview by author, Melbourne, March 11, 2014.

Fig. 3.29. Jane Korman, *Just an Ordinary Peasant, v*ideo still, 2014

The light-heartedness of the jolly 'peasant' in traditional costume, singing a children's rhyme, juxtaposes sharply with the horrific conclusion of the piece. The work shows that even the humble peasant, singing a childhood tune, is not innocent of violence and destruction. The smirk on her face as she walks off the screen shows her smug and detached attitude towards the crime she has just committed. In this video, the 'peasant' exemplifies all those in Nazi Europe who worked on the periphery of the Holocaust in support of the Third Reich.

As much as *Just an Ordinary Peasant* might be provocative and confronting for the viewer, it's no more shocking then reality itself. I was motivated to create the piece for several reasons, the first being empathy with my mother's story. After the Holocaust, my mother felt deeply betrayed by her Polish neighbours and 'friends' who had informed on her and her family to the Nazis.[111] I am aware that centuries of propagated hatred directed against the Jews by the Church, coupled with years of German indoctrination may have influenced the Peasant's actions; she was 'merely acting according to the norms that were then in place.'[112] However, even knowing this, some of my mother's feelings of betrayal and incomprehension have seeped into my psyche, and have influenced me to make this piece.

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[111] Cohen, *Flames Upon Treblinka,* In his memoirs, Cohen recalls: 'Jews who sought refugee in forests or in Polish villages were robbed of their meagre possessions and were handed over to the Germans for a sizeable prize: a kilo of sugar for every Jew.'

[112] Jan Tomasz Gross and Irena Grudzinska, *Golden Harvest* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2012),121.

My second motivation for making *Just an Ordinary Peasant* was to honour my uncle and acknowledge his life as a prisoner at Treblinka. Besides confiding in my mother, my uncle kept his experiences of the camp to himself, as no-one was interested in hearing about them or reading his memoirs because of their harrowing and unfathomable content. He was part of the underground Jewish resistance and a participant in the Treblinka uprising. In 1943, the *Sonderkommandos,* my uncle amongst them, staged a revolt and partly destroyed the camp. The Nazis then razed it to the ground so as to eliminate any evidence of its existence.[113] My uncle, as one of the few survivors of Treblinka, was witness to the reality of the camp they attempted to delete from the pages of history.

A third motivation was that I hoped, by role-playing the character of the 'peasant', I would gain some insight into how the average person might become complicit in such acts. Embodying the character enabled me to act her out as a cathartic form of psycho-drama. The psychotherapist, Lewis Yablonsky reports that after a group psychodrama session, where he played the role of Adolf Eichmann, he had acquired a greater understanding of the man's perverted mind.[114] Similarly, by dressing up as the 'peasant', my intention was not to convey an attachment to the perpetrator, but rather, to uncover some clues into the working of my character's mind as well as creating a methodology for dealing with my struggles with stories of this sort.[115]

My final motivation stemmed from my desire to create artwork that conveys a fresh interpretation of historical memory and a 'new response' to Holocaust subject matter. I employ the concept of 'Interruption' by juxtaposing two different ideas to create a 'shudder' that jerks the viewers out of their passivity. In this way, I hope to create a feeling of intrusion or 'shock' between the viewers and my work, prodding the viewers to open up a deeper conversation about the work. I lean towards Wendy Koenig's interpretation of 'Interruption' (discussed in Chapter 1), where the viewers are confronted by a new approach to Holocaust narrative, and are left to reflect on the work's weighted experience. I attempt to lull my unsuspecting audience into a sense of security and safe familiarity by letting them assume that all I am doing is reciting a child's ditty. I then proceed to surprise my

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[113] Gross, *Golden Harvest,* 155.

[114] Lewis Yablonsky, *Psychodrama: Resolving Emotional Problems through Role-Playing* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976), 201.

[115] Ray, *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory,* 4, 133.

audience and create discomfort by using an unexpected ending or 'Interruption' to remind the viewer of horrific acts committed by 'ordinary' people.

'Interruption' is a strategy that is also found in the work of Anselm Kiefer, the German contemporary artist born in 1945. Through his art, he explores his own postwar German identity, and therapeutically works through his own traumatic feelings of guilt and disdain, grappling with the collective silence of a nation still hiding its dark past.[116] In his series, *Besetzungen* (*Occupations,* 1969), Kiefer shocks his nation when he wears his father's Nazi uniform and performs Heil Hitler salutes at various sites conquered by the Nazis across Italy and France.[117] These postures mimicked Hitler in a highly exaggerated way and created a hostile reaction amongst the post-war German public who, in the 1960s, had still not confronted their national trauma.[118]

I chose to set this piece in a bucolic spot near Warburton[119], due to the historical implication of clandestine acts being committed in 'the woods.' Nazi death camps were often located in the Polish countryside. The very location of these camps necessitated the assistance of surrounding villagers in order to ensure that the process of industrialized murder was successfully and efficiently achieved.[120] The woods, themselves, become an allegorical backdrop to the violence and death they housed. The forest in Warburton also has a disturbingly dark history as it was the setting for atrocities committed against the indigenous Australian population and, as such, is permeated with a certain ominous vibe.[121]

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[116] John Gilmour, *Fire on the Earth: Anselm Kiefer and the Post-modern World,* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Temple University Press, 1990), 3, 7.

[117] Dora Apel, *Memory Effects: The Holocaust and the Art of Secondary Witnessing*. Rutgers (University Press, London, 2002), 132

[118] Apel, *Memory Effects,* 132.

[119] Warburton is a small township in the countryside, an hour and a half's drive north-east of Melbourne city.

[120] *Golden Harvest,* 84.

[121] After much investigation, I still haven't managed to find out what became of the indigenous people of the Upper Yarra Valley. Possibly they were massacred or carried off to a mission, where they were 'absorbed' or 'assimilated.' I spoke to 'Tom' who runs the Yarra Junction local History Museum. He reported that information on indigenous history in the area is still very scant and silenced. The museum is now in the process of interviewing elders who live at Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve, near Healesville, who might remember stories handed down to them by their ancestors even though a lot of their oral tradition has died away due to a century of abuse.Conservative estimates suggest that in Victoria up to 60% of the Aboriginal peoples of Victoria died between 1835 and 1850.(Fergus Robinson and Barry York, *The Black Resistance*, Melbourne: Widescope, 1977, p.90).

Simon Schama, in his book *Landscape and Memory*, explains this 'vibe' as being the cultural psychology of the landscape.[122] He retraces the history of his Jewish ancestors in Bialowieza, the great forest of Poland. It was once a forest that provided sustenance and shelter to all its inhabitants and wildlife, before becoming a hunting ground for Nazis and their accomplices. Schama recalls Treblinka extermination camp, with its 'grey of smoke, of ash, of pulverised bones, of quicklime' He conveys how shocking it is upon realising that Treblinka, too, 'belongs to a brilliantly vivid countryside; the riverland of the Bug and Vistula; rolling gentle land, lined by avenues of poplar and aspen.'[123] So it is that the layers of history are embodied in the woods of Europe as well as the Warburton countryside.

I am aware that *Just an Ordinary Peasant* is a problematic piece in that I have interpreted my Uncle's story and have replaced the Jewish concentration camp inmate (who is forced to throw a sack of babies into a fire) with my own story of a Polish peasant who lived in the village of Treblinka. This piece is an artistic response and a metaphor for the complicit behaviour of many of 'the Poles' and their support of the Nazis.[124]

Just an Ordinary Peasant is a story interpreted from my own perspective. I saw my Uncle's story as an opportunity to express my resentment and confusion towards those who just looked on, or worse, were complicit in the genocide of the Jews. One of my main intentions in this paper was to examine my own biases and perceptions and to find a wider framework from which to discuss the ideas that have influenced my practice. I have achieved this through portraying the 'peasant' and having her undertake a horrendous act on film. I am aware that most peasants did not do these things and that many lost their lives while opposing Fascism or helping Jewish people. Still, I created a character who is stereotypical in many ways of the Polish peasant who helped the Nazis, oblivious to the consequences. Through the process of making this work, I question if *Just an Ordinary Peasant* is a loaded accusation or a realistic portrayal, or maybe both.

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[122] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 9.

[123] Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 26.

[124] Mac Sławomir and Stanisław Janecki, *Our Fault (Nasza Wina)*, Wprost, no. 12 (2001). http://www.wprost.pl/ar/9556/Nasza-wina/ (accessed February 3rd, 2015). Czeslaw Bielecki, head of the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee is quoted in the article saying: 'Jews, (we) apologise and ask for forgiveness. Poles are not co-responsible for the Holocaust, but they are co-responsible for the fate of Polish Jews during the Holocaust.There is a collective responsibility, a responsibility for the community. We - the state, society, each one of us - regret the fate of the Jews.'

The background of fear, coupled with the power of propaganda and brainwashing, makes it easier to understand how susceptible this character is beneath her ignorant and arrogant attitude, and questions the concept of whether one can exercise individual choice. Recalling the Lacanian model of the Symbolic Order (which I referred to in Chapter 1), the protagonist in *Just an Ordinary Peasant* does not perceive her act as a choice, she unconsciously accepts 'the system', abnegating ethical responsibility.

Žižek explains the bind of the Symbolic Order: as much as one may strive to be an independent and conscious thinker, one is still always caught within 'the system.' Similarly, the 'peasant' was trapped within 'the system' of the the Nazi Regime and its attitude towards the Jews. This regime became her language, both verbal and cultural, and so she obeyed its rules and played her part within the governing Nazi scheme.[125] However, even though the 'peasant' was trapped within the system, and thus may have 'no choice' in the unspeakable acts she has committed, Žižek maintains that she is still responsible for her crime and cannot be forgiven for being ignorant of the implications of her actions.[126]

Just an Ordinary Peasant raises the question as to the appropriateness of second and third generation artists making provocative work based on traumatic, historical memory. Given that the Holocaust is regarded as a sacred concept, interference with the solemnity of its representation has resulted in hurt and anger from both non-Jews and Jews alike. It is understandable that descendants of both the victims and the perpetrators can be offended by contemporary artistic interpretations of the Holocaust, which they see as disrespectful or infringing the taboo. I am aware that the character of the 'peasant' could indeed be offensive and disrespectful to the descendants of the Polish population. My motive, however, was to remind the viewer, through confrontation, of how crucial it is to remember and reflect critically upon the noxious past of the Holocaust in order to avoid forgetting its lessons.

In the years after the Holocaust (or 'catastrophe' as he termed it), Adorno argued that art, in any form, is incapable of expressing the barbarity of the Third Reich. He was disillusioned with everything that high culture represented, and saw it as a lie. The fact that Germany, a 'cultured nation'

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[125] Christopher Kul-Want and Piero, *Slavoj Zizek, a Graphic Guide,* (London: Icon Books Ltd, 2011), 60, 61.

[126] Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, 17.

created ‘Auschwitz,’ signified to Adorno the failure of culture. In addition, he regarded artwork on the Holocaust canon as not only diverting attention from the horrors that had occurred, but also insensitive and offensive to the memory of those that had perished. Later in life Adorno realised that art did not have to fit into conventional modes of thinking. He saw another possibility that was more obscure, where art ‘would rupture the context of prevailing conventions.’[127] This ‘rupture’ is what Adorno refers to as *Erschütterung* or ‘Interruption’, where the artwork is capable of producing in the viewer the 'shudder' response which I discussed earlier. Adorno was concerned that society viewed art as just a passive enjoyment. His desire to create a new way of ‘looking’ and to inspire people to react recalls Brecht’s similar intentions in his Alienation effect . For Adorno, this fresh approach of looking at art could be then channelled into a critical tool to interrogate, reflect upon and ‘work through’ past trauma – an approach that I, as well as Arad and Ben-Tor employ in own practice.

The video also encompasses the theme of continuity, and is a link between the growing disjointedness of survivors’ actual memory, where their memory is fading or they are dying, and collective memory, created out of shared experience. ‘Postmemory’, a term originated by Marianne Hirsch, is memory that has been constructed by the ‘next generation(s)’ or secondary/tertiary witnesses, rather than by a primary witness or survivor.’[128] Postmemory addresses the relationship children of survivors have to significant traumatic events that occurred before their birth which are transmitted through stories, actions and symptoms across generations, and are still being worked through.[129] Often trauma is recognisable only through its after-effects, and thus, notes Hirsch, ‘it is not surprising that it is transmitted across generations’ in the form of postmemory.[130]

My piece, *Just an Ordinary Peasant* is a postmemory response to my family’s memories from their past. I too, as a ‘secondary witness’, am detached physically from the primary witnesses, in this case, my uncle and mother, and therefore am more able to develop diverse and creative ways of

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[127] Ray, *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory*, 132.

[128] Marianne Hirsch, ‘Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory,’ 2004, The Department of History, University of Melbourne, Semester 1, 209, 210.

[129] Joan Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance*, (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 74.

[130] Hirsch, ‘Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory,’ p.26.

working with the past.[131] Anselm Kiefer's series, *Occupations* (1969), mentioned earlier, also addresses postmemory, and is his way of processing an experience that wasn't his own. The act of performing at previously occupied sites while wearing his father's Nazi uniform helped Kiefer explore his own relationship to the events he staged. It also helped him process his own dismay on realising his father was a Wehrmacht soldier, and therefore part of the Nazi regime.A postmemory response is also conveyed in the works of both Boaz Arad (*Immense Inner Peace)* and Tamy Ben-Tor (*Gewald*), which I discussed in Chapter 2. As second and third generation artists, they are also examining and working through their own inherited traumatic history.

Even though I have interpreted this story artistically, I have tried to keep it authentic by including my parents' voices - the voices of the witnesses. In the second part of the video, my mother and father are heard arguing about 'telling the facts correctly.' This is a common occurrence between my parents when they discuss 'the war.' In the video, my mother declares to my father: 'We are the last ones to say the truth. If we don't know exactly, we shouldn't talk.' My mother often becomes distressed when my father or others recount stories from the past that, according to her, are not factual. It is crucial for her that people's stories and events be documented correctly, for she is aware of how much the truth is becoming distorted.

Those who executed the Final Solution hid or destroyed as much evidence as was possible.[132] Jan Gross maintains that gathering information on the 'extremities of human behaviour' during the Holocaust in order to 'establish historical truth' is extremely problematic. 'Official documentation is scant and is produced with an eye to misdirect and often to deceive.'[133] My mother is aware of the responsibility she has of being amongst the last of the witnesses who are approaching the end of their lives. She knows that the stories from the Holocaust, as absurd as they sound, are precious records 'reported by the faint and fragmented voices of a few survivors.'[134] My mother, in the voice-over, expresses her distress that people didn't want to believe the horrific events that were occurring at the time. She recalls: 'It was so terrible. They didn't believe it, they *tried* not to believe it.'

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[131] Apel, *Memory Effects*, 188.

[132] Gross, *Golden Harvest,* 18.

[133] Gross, *Golden Harvest,* 19.

[134] Gross, *Golden Harvest,* 19.

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Adorno raises this concern by describing how the National Socialists, when torturing and terrorising people, 'were more secure from exposure the more wildly the horror increased.' They knew that no-one, 'for the sake of precious peace' would want to believe their inconceivable actions.[136] Adorno deduces that 'only the absolute lie now has any freedom to speak the truth.'[137]

Delving into the family past with its store of trauma, and listening to the repeated stories of those who survived, has been both a simultaneously challenging and rewarding journey. Re-enacting the past may assist in trying to comprehend the complex role that traumatic experience and memory play in the life of the 'survivor' and more so, in the lives of the generations that follow.[138]

Just an Ordinary Peasant is a reminder and a warning that because 'it happened once, it can happen again.'[139] When we are swayed by a leader's charisma, a majority position or fear of the mob, we may leave ourselves vulnerable to surrendering our consciences and ethical choice. This, as was evident during Hitler's reign, can bring about disastrous consequences.

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[135] Kohn, interview by author.

[136] Theodore W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, (London: Verso, 2005), 108.

[137] Adorno, *Minima Moralia,* 109.

[138] Apel, *Memory Effects,* 5.

[139] Yehuda Bauer, 'Rethinking the Holocaust,' (2001). https://www.nytimes.com/books/first/b/bauer-rethinking.html (accessed February 23, 2015).

Conclusion

'Déjà vu, Watch Out Jew' explores three parallel but interconnected themes. The first theme is an exploration of my experiences at anti-Israel rallies in Melbourne's city centre, dressed up as Miss World Peace. The second theme looks at the legacy I inherited as the daughter of survivors of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The third theme is my concern over the recent rise of global anti-Semitic attacks. All three of these themes are integrated into my work as a performance artist.

My art practice involves my dressing up as various performative personas to bring about awareness of racial vilification and its potential to misdirect the furies caused by real social problems onto the fictitious image of the racial other. My work is both an intervention into social processes as well as an analysis of my own psyche. It is an expression of both my own upbringing and latent fears, and is a reminder of what can go wrong when prejudice is allowed to fill the gaps and inconsistencies of a society.

Over the four years of this research, I have dressed up as the character of Miss World Peace (2011-2014) and attended anti-Israel rallies (run by various university student groups), to challenge and disrupt the hatred I experienced there. My attempt at interacting positively with the demonstrators was met with fanatical accusations and abuse, leaving me drained and pessimistic. These experiences showed me how difficult it is to confront racial hatred, irrespective of the minority group the hatred is directed at. In addition, encounters I have endured on various university campuses over the past few years, both as 'Jane' and as Miss World Peace, have alerted me to the fact that there is a bias against Israel that is, at times, irrational. These encounters have unsettled me. In spite of this, the aim of my work has been to acknowledge my fear of confrontation, and stand up to it using performance as my tool. All my character studies and performances are documented through photography and video, and are presented via a series of projections and/or TV monitors.

Given that my parents are survivors of the Holocaust, a large focus of my work consists of videos based on them and their memoirs, with them often acting in the works themselves. The incessant story telling of their experiences in the camps and of perished family has left its indelible mark upon me**.** I have been both humbled and disturbed by these stories, and their effect upon my practice is palpable. To the best of my ability, I am committed to helping prevent these sorts of atrocities

from happening again. I realise the Holocaust has been examined and re-examined, but it has been soldered so profoundly into my being that ignoring it as an influence would be dishonest**.**

This document has contextualised my practice by analysing the works of the artists, Charlie Chaplin, in his film, *The Great Dictator*, and Bertolt Brecht, in his play, *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui.* Their work aims to alert the public to the dangerous ideologies spreading throughout Europe in the 1930s. Their motives reflect my own concerns today. This document also contextualises my own work within contemporary performative art practice by examining the works of Israeli artists, Boaz Arad and Tammy Ben Tor. Their recorded performances of exaggerated character-studies of stereotypes look at issues similar to those I am engaging with, and include themes on the Holocaust, attitudes to Israel, and terrorism.

On completion of this exegesis, I see commonalities that link my own work and the artists I have discussed. The first commonality is that each artist depicts ranting and raving caricatures of Hitler. Chaplin does this through the character of Hynkel, Brecht, through the character of Ui, Arad, through his comic take on Hitler's voice, moustache and oratory, and Ben-Tor, through her dress ups as farcical female renditions of Hitler. Hitler's presence and influence as the leader of Nazi Germany is implied in much of my work: in the tales told of the camps in *Whistle While You Work* and *Just an Ordinary Peasant,* of Primo Levi's memoirs in *Dad and Primo Levi,* and of my parents dancing to Kurt Weil's music in *Dance Before the Storm,* recalling the rise of the Nazi Regime.

The second commonality is that each artist also attempts, through the absurd treatment of his or her themes, to expose the great evil of tyrannical leaders, the dangers inherent in peoples' creeping admiration for such people*,* and the mechanisms through which this admiration arises.

A third commonality is the depiction of the 'ordinary people,' which is a theme that appears throughout this paper. Chaplin reveals the mindlessness of the 'ordinary people' in the repeated scenes of crowds cheering for Hitler, and Brecht attacks the 'ordinary people' for their compliancy and failure to resist their corrupted, despotic leader. Arad manipulates recordings of Hitler's cheering masses in his video work, and Ben-Tor creates a seemingly frivolous but disturbing persona who is an 'ordinary woman' in her piece entitled *Gewald*. Inspired by Ben-Tor, I address this same

theme in my own work, *Just an Ordinary Peasant,* where a commonplace peasant is an unwitting accomplice to the atrocities of the Third Reich.

When I began this research four years ago, I viewed the world in a positive and hopeful light, but now realise I was protected by my own naivety. I now see that my previous optimism is somewhat irresponsible. But rather than having a negative outlook, I am more compelled to work towards pro-active, creative solutions to these issues, in the same way as the artists discussed in this paper do.

Throughout this research project I have gained a deeper understanding of contemporary performative processes and their relations to my practice. I have also learned that there is a diverse and robust group of artists who share my views and concerns, and who creatively endeavour to alleviate them. I was drawn to the artists discussed in this research because of a certain felt kinship—a common 'bravery in the face of adversity'—that resonated deeply within me. They have inspired and encouraged my own practice and my choice of characters, especially the pro-active Miss World Peace.

When I commenced this research, I didn't realise how important the theoretical concepts of 'Interruption', 'Working Through' and the 'Symbolic Order' were for my work. However, I now recognise that they have given me an invaluable insight into my own practice as a political performer. Although each concept stands strong in its own right, I have discovered that Adorno, Brecht, Benjamin and Zizek's ideas are overlapping and interconnected.The synthesis of their concepts is significant in shedding light on why, as the character of old, quirky Miss World Peace, I stand alone, time after time, amidst a hostile crowd. I now connect the term that defines my actions as 'Interruption'. Miss World Peace performs as an 'Interruption;' her presence creates a rupture in the hope of impelling the crowd around her, just for a fleeting moment, to reflect on their actions, on their perceptions. She performs to intervene in the Symbolic Order, in a creative way; to 'force' her uncompromising audience to consider how people are unconsciously predisposed to seeing things in a certain way. And she performs to invite her audience to question how this predisposition can cloud their view, which may have been, until now, unexamined. 'Interruption' is not only the mode of operation in *Miss World Peace*, but applies to all my works.

Through this research, my work has developed and contributed to the genre of video and performance that is politically motivated and addresses ideas of persecution, intolerance and adversity.

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