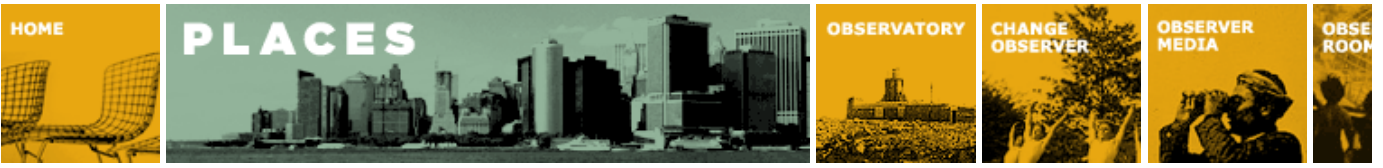


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ESSAY: DEBORAH GANS

# Hospitality Begins at Home



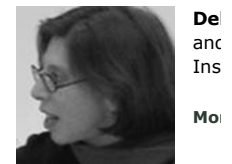
Maya Zack: Living Room, 3D computer generated anaglyph. [Courtesy of the artist and Alon Segev Gallery, Tel Aviv]

The permeability of so many national borders across Europe, and the exceptional impenetrability of a few so-called rogue states, have heightened concerns about security and identity, and also about the stranger, whether alien, immigrant or guest. In our era of terrorist threat and economic stress, we struggle to find new ways to cope with the rights and places of people who are not citizens. So it is useful to recall the most fully developed legal framework that addresses the status of the stranger: the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which dealt with Europe in the aftermath of World War II, and the 1967 Protocol, which expanded the law to make it universal and unending.

The internationally defined rights of the refugee derive from the universal rights of all persons as outlined in the U.N.'s 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Predicated on Enlightenment principles, the Declaration grants each person — regardless of his or her status as citizen or stranger and irrespective of nationality — the freedoms of thought, religion, work, leisure, congregation and movement, and the rights to health, welfare and education. It then, however, entreats and empowers the state to protect those freedoms and rights — which means that an individual outside the protective custody of a state cannot be truly, or at least assuredly, free.

The one exception is the refugee, defined as someone who has been persecuted and thus unlawfully deprived of the protection of a sovereign nation; the refugee is protected by

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words, while a particular nation might restrict the public movement of women, international law cannot restrict the movement of a female refugee. This is precisely why that the German-born political theorist Hannah Arendt resisted giving up her refugee status after she and her family fled war-torn Europe for the United States in the early 1940s; and why the contemporary Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben considers the figure of the refugee to be in the heroic vanguard of global citizenship. [1]

Passage across a border wrenches us from a space of citizenship — where our individual being is cloaked in layers of legal protection — to a space where we experience at once freedom and nothingness. As architects and planners, we lack the language for describing this shift in the perception and socio-political dimension of place; for distinguishing between the place of the citizen and the place of the stranger within the space of the state. We have the impoverished terms “private” and “public,” but these are inadequate even to distinguish between commercial and civic property. To refer to the market of a refugee camp as *public*, or the hideout of an alien as *private*, is perhaps to misrepresent the status of these places. Only the abstract though evocative language of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, in *Nomadology*, distinguishes the experience of territory in terms of its relation to the state. Deleuze and Guattari describe an unbounded “smooth” space of nomadic wandering, organized by events, affects and forces, that is distinct from the experience of the “striated” space of sovereign power, which is partitioned, stratified and fixed in its organization. [2]

Two events have inspired these thoughts on the layers missing from our contemporary spatial discourse: The In-House Festival, held in Jerusalem in June 2011, and the recent installation at the Jewish Museum in New York City of *Living Room*, a 2009 work by the artist Maya Zack.



Maya Zack, *Living Room*, 3D computer generated anaglyphs. [Courtesy of the artist and Alon Segev Gallery, Tel Aviv]

*Living Room* consists of four three-dimensional, gray-scale digital photographic prints, each 4-feet-high by 10-feet-wide, hung on the four walls of a gallery to simulate the living room of the apartment in Berlin where Yair Noam, born Manfred Noburg — now an 88-year-old Israeli residing in Tel Aviv — had lived before fleeing Germany in 1938. Israeli artist Maya Zack

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the culture and café society of Berlin — a result of the Nazis' increasingly restrictive anti-Semitic laws from 1933 on — into the confines of the living room, where the furnishings came to function as a fragmented reconstitution of their public life.

The books, the art, the piano and phonograph thus become interior analogues of the libraries, museums, symphony halls and cabarets from which they were legally excluded. In the context of Yair's explanation of this political reality, the image of the radio (for music broadcasts from Berlin's then new and celebrated Vox-Haus, one suspects) and the open window appear as poignant attempts to sustain some real connection to the wider world beyond. Long before Yair emigrated to Palestine and his parents perished in the war, the Noburg family had become strangers in their own city, where the restaurants and stores and concert halls they continued to pass by daily were positioned on the other side of an impassible border, and where the possibility of public space became an ever-constricted and finally forbidden part of their experience.

Another Berliner of Jewish origin, the sociologist George Simmel, pointed out that *to be estranged* is a condition of modern life; and that to be a stranger is to be the agent of progress. In his 1903 essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life," Simmel analyzes the struggle that is required to maintain personal independence and individuality in the context of the sovereign powers of society; and he argues that this struggle is intrinsic to industrial capitalism, which is based on the abstraction of money, and to the modern city that capitalism produces, both of which make us all strangers to ourselves. Simmel defines *the stranger* as the person who is not quite part of this society, but nonetheless recognizable and knowable and thus an agent of innovation — somebody capable of introducing something new. [3] And so one can imagine that Noam's parents might have considered their feelings of alienation from their own modern city as perhaps a normal, if not positive, aspect of their identity as 20th-century Berliners, and hence failed to flee.



Maya Zack, Living Room, 3D computer generated anaglyphs. [Courtesy of the artist and Alon Segev Gallery, Tel Aviv]

Ultimately the Jews of Berlin were transformed from Simmel's modern strangers to enemies

incubator for the city's intellectual life, and after 1948 for the newly minted nation of Israel. In the summer of 2011 this hybrid private-public salon-café culture was the subject of the first annual In-House Festival of Jerusalem. Its young and local artistic director Dafna Kron, who focuses on performance art, and producer Itay Mautner, who is also an art critic, self-consciously sought to revive the current Jerusalem scene by reaching back to its prewar German cultural roots. As Mautner puts it:

When I was growing up in the city there was a flourishing intellectual scene partly located in café Ta'amon but also prevalent in private homes. I remember everybody meeting, drinking and arguing deep into the night ... something like the salon tradition in Europe meets the Jerusalem neighborhoods of Talbiya, Talpiot and the German Colony. [4]

The In-House Festival was part of a larger event, the Jerusalem Season of Culture, for which Mautner serves as Artistic Director. It ran from May through July 2011 and hosted a variety of world-class events in compelling locations: for instance, a performance by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, then on its farewell tour, at the Jerusalem Museum, and the Swedish director Pia Fosgren's staging of Steve Reich's string quartet *Different Trains*, in the former Ottoman prison, the Kishle. Yet my host and a festival sponsor, the Schusterman Foundation, specifically asked me to be a part of a salon audience rather than to attend the staging of contemporary culture in the public forum of the city.



Shaul Eshet, In-House Festival, Jerusalem Season of Culture, 2011. [Photo via Jerusalem Season of Culture]

Six of the nine In-House performances, held in private homes, recalled the salon settings of Mautner's youth; some of the houses were grander than others but all were redolent with culture. An elegant living room in a renovated home from the 1920s was the scene of an informal biographical storytelling evening; a concert by pianist Shaul Eshet and his band took place in the less grand but soulful setting of Eshet's childhood home; a performance piece detailing the ambivalence of a young man to his military training was staged in the backyard garden of a brand-new villa in a 19th-century neighborhood; and a duet by modern dancers Kaiser-Antonio was set in a modest condo so compact that you could touch the performers.

Spatial serendipities unfolded as front gardens became foyers and tiled floor patterns defined center stage; though the curatorial aim was not installation art (nor deliciously voyeuristic

colleagues, including some who could reminisce about past evenings spent in similar houses.

For me, the autobiographical stories were the most satisfying performances (despite the extreme limitations of my Hebrew), because they created the aura of a dinner party where the divide between storytellers and listeners — performers and guests — was blurred and the events seemed to almost spontaneously unfold. The intent was to reformulate the informality, immediacy and intimacy of Itay Mautner's childhood Jerusalem for a yet more complex time and place during which Israeli society faces intense challenges from within (as its historically secularized European refugee culture confronts rising orthodoxy), from across the way (as its Palestinian neighbors claim their statehood), and from without (as the world scrutinizes its behavior ever more warily).



In-House Festival, Jerusalem Season of Culture, 2011. [Photo via Jerusalem Season of Culture]

Any discussion of Jerusalem refugees must reference more than the German Jews who arrived in the 1930s and whose descendents were by and large the hosts and audiences of In-House.

The soldier's tale was staged in the German Colony, established in 1873 by German Christian Templars, whose descendants would be deported as enemy citizens by the British during World War II and replaced by Christian and Muslim Arabs, who would in turn flee during the 1948 war.

Only Shaul Eshet's family home stands in a neighborhood that has remained historically Jewish, Mahane Yisrael, established in 1868 by North African Jews. In short, if the Berlin living room of Manfred Noburg/Noam Yair can be seen clearly and simply as a refuge, the same is not true of the homes of Jerusalem. In an artist's statement, Eshet suggests that the culture of the salon should address the politics of the living room — or rather transcend it. He points out that his family home originally housed an independent printing press dedicated to Esperanto publications, and continues: "It is maybe not all that surprising that this collective musical effort should be situated in a building that tried to promote the world's first and only all-inclusive language." Esperanto, we recall, was a language invented specifically to foster peace. Itay Mautner also sets aside his nostalgia for the salon and obliquely acknowledges the questionable politics of the home, when he asks:

The concept of a "home" in Jerusalem opens the door to weighty national considerations that reach back to the First Temple, the Second Temple. And to questions such as: Who does this house belong to? And who has the key? [5]

The importance of Mautner's biblical allusion to *home* and *stranger* extends beyond his reference to the temples of antiquity. Palestinians and Jews have common roots in ancient nomadic peoples who depended so deeply upon mutual hospitality for survival that it became an expected and cultural norm. In this context, "stranger" is not a permanent characteristic but rather a conferred status understood in relation to a similarly unstable idea of "host." In the largest social framework, we all originate in a condition of belonging, to home, family or tribe; and we all become strangers when we sojourn and then enter the home of another, whom we expect to welcome us according to seemingly absolute, ritualized obligations of guest-friendship. These rules of hospitality assert that the stranger is a guest (unless proven to be an enemy), who is to be sustained with food and shelter for the length of stay, which is understood to be temporary unless the stranger becomes part of the family. In return, the stranger acknowledges dependence on the goodwill of the host, who is master of the house. [6]

The audiences at the In-House events held the conventional position of guests, though with varying degrees of privilege. Our common status as stranger was clearest in our relation to the bathrooms. In some houses, we had access to only the "public space" of living and dining rooms, while in more affluent homes with multiple facilities, we were offered, and used, the semi-public "powder room." And yet, from my just slightly more distanced perspective, the audience in its entirety appeared to be all-of-a-family, bound in some cases by real kinship in addition to language and social association. They would not disband at the end of the evening in the same definitive way that I would end my sojourn and return to New York.



In-House Festival, Jerusalem Season of Culture, 2011. [Photo via Jerusalem Season of Culture]

And so as the stranger at the In-House Festival, I felt the complexity of hospitality offered in a city that has been claimed as home by so many cultures and yet remains so divided. None of the events overtly engaged this larger social and political geography of a divided Jerusalem; but it was difficult not to go there.

It was difficult not to remember that, as narrated in *Genesis*, before Abraham became a sojourner himself, he welcomed three travelers in front of his tent and offered them food and water; only later was it revealed that the strangers were God and two angels. The hospitality of Muhammad was renowned: the prophet welcomed polytheists and Jews into his home and kept the As'hab suffah as a permanent guest. As wanderers, Jesus and Paul were often self-invited guests whose reception transformed their hosts, including Zacchaeus, the Jewish tax collector who, offering hospitality, is relieved of his negative social status. In *The Iliad*, when they meet on the battlefield, Glaucus cannot fight Diomedes because the grandfather of one had offered hospitality to the grandfather of the other. In Roman culture, the claims of *hospes* — of being connected by ties of hospitality — were more sacred than were connections of blood or friendship.

Hospitality begins at home — but it also describes our relation to each other as peoples, territories and nations. In his 1795 essay "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," which is the basis for the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights, Kant argues that the stranger's right to hospitality is a universal right, and that it is derived both from the right to self preservation, which emerges from the law of nature (*gesellschaft*), and from the right of association, which is part of the law of society (*gemeinshaft*). For Kant, society might not be natural, pleasant or desirable; but it is a real condition of a populated world. Humans by nature are strangers who travel from an original solitary or familial place and are confronted by association. The only alternative to hospitality or exchange is aggression or war. [7]

This right of hospitality exists only between equals; for the stranger must be capable of returning to his own house, where he would then preside as host. How then does the rule of hospitality extend to those who cannot claim their reciprocal right, such as the refugee, who is not a guest because he is not also a host? Without the wherewithal to reciprocate as a citizen of a nation, the refugee must present himself as merely human, or rely on a third party, such as the United Nations, to demand the rights of hospitality for him. How does the rule of hospitality extend to a stranger who is not a guest because he harbors aggression in relation to his lacking the status of host? It is tempting to recast Jerusalem as a new, singular space of hospitality, where inhabitants are simultaneously strangers and hosts in a continual state of reciprocity. Giorgio Agamben similarly describes a variation on the two-state solution whereby Jerusalem is an extra-national and simultaneous capital of both Arab and Jew — a new topological space, like a Mobius strip singular and dual at once. [8] And beyond the intractable divisions of Jerusalem, perhaps *hospitality* offers us language with which to

### Editors' Note

Maya Zack: Living Room was on exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York from July 31 to October 23, 2011.

The In House Festival was held from June 22 - 24, 2011, as part of the Jerusalem Season of Culture; artistic director, Dafna Kron; head of production, Yair Milanov; Itay Mautner, director, Season of Culture.

### Notes

1. See Giorgio Agamben, trans. Kevin Attell, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
2. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, trans. Brian Massumi, *Nomadology: The War Machine* (Cambridge: MIT Press) 1986.
3. See Georg Simmel, trans. Kurt Wolff, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press, 1950).
4. Author interview with Itay Mautner and Dafna Kron.
5. Author interview with Itay Mautner and Dafna Kron.
6. See Gregg Lambert, "Universal Hospitality," in *Cities without Citizens*, Eduardo Cadava and Aaron Levy, editors (Philadelphia: Slought Foundation, 2003).
7. Lambert, 22-24.
8. See Giorgio Agamben, "Beyond Human Rights," in *Cities without Citizens*.

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